

EDITED BY

PAUL M.

**BLOWERS**

PETER W.

**MARTENS**



The Oxford Handbook of  
**EARLY CHRISTIAN**  
**BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF  
EARLY  
CHRISTIAN  
BIBLICAL  
INTERPRETATION



THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

---

EARLY CHRISTIAN  
BIBLICAL  
INTERPRETATION

---

*Edited by*  
PAUL M. BLOWERS  
*and*  
PETER W. MARTENS

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,  
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.  
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,  
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of  
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© Oxford University Press 2019

The moral rights of the authors have been asserted

First Edition published in 2019

Impression: 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in  
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the  
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted  
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics  
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the  
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the  
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form  
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018963934

ISBN 978-0-19-871839-0

Printed and bound by

CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CRO 4YY

Links to third party websites are provided by Oxford in good faith and  
for information only. Oxford disclaims any responsibility for the materials  
contained in any third party website referenced in this work.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

We wish to express our profound appreciation to Tracy Russell at Saint Louis University for her extraordinarily good work as editorial assistant for this *Handbook*. Her copy editing and stylistic conformation of the essays, as well as her organizational work, were indispensable to the production of this volume. We also wish to thank Karen Raith of the Oxford University Press for her outstanding work with the editors in the whole process of preparing this book for publication, and Tom Perridge, also of the Press, for the invitation to include this work in the excellent series of *Oxford Handbooks*. Thanks as well to our copy editor, Edwin Pritchard, for his careful work on all the chapters herein and his assistance in conforming this volume to the series standards.

Paul M. Blowers  
Emmanuel Christian Seminary at Milligan College

Peter W. Martens  
Saint Louis University



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<i>List of Figures</i>	xiii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xv
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xxi

Introduction	1
PAUL M. BLOWERS AND PETER W. MARTENS	

## PART I. SCRIPTURE

1. Scripture as Artefact	7
LINCOLN H. BLUMELL	
2. The Septuagint and Other Translations	33
REINHART CEULEMANS	
3. Canons and Rules of Faith	55
JOSEPH T. LIENHARD, SJ	
4. Divine Discourse: Scripture in the Economy of Revelation	71
FRANCES YOUNG	

## PART II. INTERPRETERS AND INTERPRETATION

5. Graeco-Roman Literary Criticism	93
PETER STRUCK	
6. Early Christian Handbooks on Interpretation	109
TARMO TOOM	
7. From Letter to Spirit: The Multiple Senses of Scripture	126
JOHN C. CAVADINI	

8. Ideal Interpreters 149  
PETER W. MARTENS

### PART III. SETTINGS AND GENRES OF SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION

#### I. Exegetical Genres

9. Commentaries 171  
JOSEF LÖSSL
10. Scholia 187  
ERIC SCHERBENSKE
11. Questions and Responses 198  
LORENZO PERRONE
12. Paraphrase and Metaphrase 210  
ANDREW FAULKNER
13. Catenae 221  
RICHARD A. LAYTON
14. Sentences 230  
LUKE DYSINGER, OSB

#### II. Liturgical Interpretation

15. Catecheses and Homilies 243  
WENDY MAYER
16. Poetry and Hymnody 255  
JEFFREY WICKES
17. Liturgy as Performative Interpretation 271  
L. EDWARD PHILLIPS

#### III. Narrative and Visual Interpretation

18. Christian Apocrypha 285  
STEPHEN J. SHOEMAKER
19. Novels 295  
F. STANLEY JONES

---

20. Hagiography	303
BRONWEN NEIL	
21. Early Christian Visual Art as Biblical Interpretation	315
ROBIN M. JENSEN	

#### PART IV. COMMUNITIES AND CRITERIA

22. Christianity and Judaism	331
JAMES CARLETON PAGET	
23. Christians and Pagans	349
JOHN GRANGER COOK	
24. Marcion and his Critics	366
H. CLIFTON WARD	
25. Gnostics and their Critics	383
DAVID BRAKKE	
26. Manichaean Biblical Interpretation	399
JASON BEDUHN	

#### PART V. SCRIPTURE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

27. Scripture and Martyrdom	417
JOHAN LEEMANS AND ANTHONY DUPONT	
28. Scripture in the Trinitarian Controversies	439
LEWIS AYRES	
29. Scripture in the Christological Controversies	455
ANDREW HOFER, OP	
30. Scripture and a Christian Empire	473
MICHAEL HOLLERICH	
31. Scripture and Asceticism	492
ELIZABETH A. CLARK	

## PART VI. SCRIPTURAL FIGURES AND MOTIFS

32. Creation	513
PAUL M. BLOWERS	
33. Adam and Eve	525
PETER C. BOUTENEFF	
34. Covenants	535
EVERETT FERGUSON	
35. Exodus	547
MICHAEL GRAVES	
36. Law	561
B. LEE BLACKBURN, JR	
37. Psalms	572
MICHAEL CAMERON	
38. Sermon on the Mount	588
MARK ELLIOTT	
39. The Gospel of John	602
C. E. HILL	
40. Paul the Apostle	614
JUDITH L. KOVACS	
41. The Cross	626
JOHN BEHR	
42. Heaven and Hell	637
JEFFREY A. TRUMBOWER	

## PART VII. RETRIEVALS AND CRITICISMS

43. Medieval Latin Reception	651
FRANKLIN T. HARKINS	
44. Byzantine Reception	667
MARY B. CUNNINGHAM	

---

45. Reception in the Renaissance and Reformation	686
ESTHER CHUNG-KIM	
46. Modern Biblical Criticism and the Legacy of Pre-Modern Interpretation	704
MICHAEL C. LEGASPI	
47. Retrievals in Contemporary Christian Theology	723
MATTHEW LEVERING	
<i>Author Index</i>	741
<i>General Subject Index</i>	748



## LIST OF FIGURES

---

Map 1.1	Roman Egypt. Cartographer: Darin Jenson.	12
1.1	Page from P46, end of Romans and start of Hebrews Image digitally reproduced with the permission of the Papyrology Collection, University of Michigan Library.	15
1.2	P.Oxy. III 209 (Ms GR SM 2218), beginning of Rom. 1, high concentration of <i>nomina sacra</i> Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University.	19
1.3	Colophon by Pamphilus as preserved by Codex Sinaiticus (2 Esdras: Quire 36 fol. 5r col. 3) Courtesy of Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, Cod. gr. 1.	23
1.4	P.Oxy. LXIII 4365 Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society and the University of Oxford Imaging Papyri Project.	26
21.1	The sacrifice of Isaac and Jesus healing, early Christian sarcophagus, Rome, c.325–50. Now in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Vatican) Photo credit: Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY.	319
21.2	The sacrifice of Isaac, Via Latina Catacomb, Rome, mid-fourth century Photo credit: Scala/Art Resource NY.	320
21.3	Sacrifice of Isaac, ivory pyxis, late fourth or early fifth century. Now in the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin Photo credit: Art Resource, NY.	320
21.4	Sacrifice of Isaac, terracotta tile relief, from Hajeb el Aiou Region (Tunisia), fifth century. Now in the Bardo Museum, Tunis Photo credit: Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.	321
21.5	Early Christian sarcophagus with biblical scenes, Rome, c.320–5. Now in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Vatican) Photo credit: Wikimedia Creative Commons: < <a href="http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f9/Fronte_di_sarcofago_con_scene_bibliche,_300-325_dc_ca.JPG">http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f9/Fronte_di_sarcofago_con_scene_bibliche,_300-325_dc_ca.JPG</a> > (accessed 4 June 2015).	322

- 21.6 Two Brothers Sarcophagus, Rome, 320–5. Now in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Vatican) 323  
Photo credit: Wikimedia Creative Commons: <[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Museo\\_Pio-Cristiano\\_sarcófago.\\_01.JPG](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Museo_Pio-Cristiano_sarcófago._01.JPG)> (accessed 4 June 2015).
- 21.7 Hospitality of Abraham and Abraham offering Isaac, lunette mosaic, Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, c.540–50 323  
Photo credit: Author.

## ABBREVIATIONS

---

NOTE: Abbreviations of Greek patristic writings in this volume are drawn from G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961–8). Abbreviations of Latin patristic writings are drawn from Albert Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954). Additional abbreviations are listed below.

2 Esd                      2 Esdras  
*m. Sanh.*                *Mishnah Sanhedrin*

### Series/Reference Works

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
ANF	Ante Nicene Fathers
apaw	Abhandlungen der kaiserlichen preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
BA	Bibliothèque Augustinienne
cca	Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum
CCG	Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca
CCL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca
CCsl	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CPG	Clavis Patrum Graecorum
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CWS	Classics of Western Spirituality
FC	Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GNO	Gregorii Nysseni Opera
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
Lampe	G. W. H. Lampe, <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961–8)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LDAB	Leuven Database of Ancient Books
LSJ	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , ed. H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968)
LXX	Septuagint
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
NT	New Testament
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts

OT	Old Testament
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
pts	Patristische Texte und Studien
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SC	Sources Chr�tiennes
ST	Studi et Testi
TSt	Texts and Studies
WSA	Works of Saint Augustine

**Gnostic Texts**

<i>Ap. John</i>	<i>Apocryphon of John (Secret Book according to John)</i>
<i>Apoc. Adam</i>	<i>Revelation of Adam</i>
<i>Gos. Judas</i>	<i>Gospel of Judas</i>
<i>Gos. Thomas</i>	<i>Gospel of Thomas</i>
<i>Gos. Truth</i>	<i>Gospel of Truth</i>
<i>hyp. Arch.</i>	<i>Reality of the Rulers (Hypostasis of the Archons)</i>

**Manichaean Texts**

<i>2 Ps</i>	<i>Psalm-book</i>
<i>1 Ke</i>	<i>Kephalaion 1</i>
<i>2 Ke</i>	<i>Kephalaion 2</i>

**Anonymous Texts**

<i>act. Archel.</i>	<i>Archelai episcopi liber disputationis aduersus Manichaeum</i>
<i>Acta conc. oec.</i>	<i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i>
<i>Ascens. Is.</i>	<i>Ascensio Isaiae</i>
<i>cast.</i>	<i>De castitate</i>
<i>didas.</i>	<i>Didascalia</i>
<i>hypomn.</i>	<i>Hypomnesticon</i>
<i>met. Ps.</i>	<i>Metaphrasis Psalmorum</i>
<i>narr.</i>	<i>Narrationes de exilio sancti papae Martini</i>
<i>Odes</i>	<i>Odes of Solomon</i>
<i>op. imp.</i>	<i>Opus Imperfectum</i>

**Albert the Great**

<i>comm. in I sent.</i>	<i>Commentarium in I Sententiarum (dist. XXVI–XLVIII)</i>
-------------------------	---

**Alcinous**

<i>didask.</i>	<i>Didaskalikos</i>
----------------	---------------------

**Ambrosiaster**

<i>comm. in 1 Cor.</i>	<i>Commentarius in xiii epistulas Paulinas: ad Corinthios</i>
<i>comm. in Gal.</i>	<i>Commentarius in xiii epistulas Paulinas: ad Galatos</i>
<i>comm. in Rom.</i>	<i>Commentarius in xiii epistulas Paulinas: ad Romanos</i>

**Aphrahat**

<i>dem.</i>	<i>Demonstrationes</i>
-------------	------------------------

**Apollinaris of Laodicea**

*frag. Ps.*                      *Fragmenta in Psalmos*

**Athanasius**

*ep. ad virg.*                      *Epistulae 1–2 ad virgines*

**Bonaventure of Bagnoregio**

*comm. in I sent.*                *Commentaria in I Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*

**Cicero**

*opt. gen.*                         *De optimo genere oratorum*

**Clement of Alexandria**

*hyp.*                                *Hypotyposes*

**Ephrem**

*Azym.*                              *Hymns on the Unleavened Bread*

*c.Jul.*                                *Contra Julianum*

*comm. in Ex.*                      *Commentarius in Exodum*

*comm. in Gen.*                      *Commentarius in Genesim*

*eccl.*                                 *Hymni de ecclesia*

*fid.*                                 *Hymni de fide*

*haer.*                                *Hymns Against Heresies*

*Nis.*                                 *Carmina Nisibena*

*nat.*                                 *Hymni de nativitate*

*par.*                                 *Hymni de paradiso*

*ref.*                                 *Refutationes*

*virg.*                                *Hymni de virginitate*

**Eusebius of Caesarea**

*chron.*                              *Chronicon*

**Evagrius Ponticus**

*antirrh.*                              *Antirrheticus*

*cap. pract.*                         *Capita practica ad Anatolium (Praktikos)*

*Gnost.*                                *Fragmentum ex libro 'Gnosticus' inscripto*

*keph. Gnost.*                        *Kephalaia Gnostica*

**Gregory of Nyssa**

*M. Seb. Ib*                         *First Homily on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (Ia and Ib)*

**Gregory Palamas**

*hom.*                                 *Homiliae*

**Heraclitus**

*quaest. Hom.*                        *Quaestiones Homericae*

**Horsiesius**

*ep.*                                 *Epistulae*

**Hugh of St. Victor**

*de script.*            *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris*  
*Did.*                 *Didascalicon de studio legendi*

**Irenaeus**

*dem.*                 *Demonstratio*

**Jacob of Sarug**

*hom. in hex.*        *Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The First Day*  
*Iud.*                 *Homilia contra Iudaeos*

**Jerome**

*praef. Orig.*         *Praefatio ad Homilias in Ezechielem*  
*Ez. hom.*

**John Duns Scotus**

*rep. I–A*             *Reportatio I–A*

**Julian of Aeclanum**

*tr. proph.*           *Commentarius in prophetas minores*

**Lucian of Samosata**

*De mort. Peregr.*   *De morte Peregrini*  
*Philops.*            *Philopseudes*

**Narsai**

*hom. in creat.*      *Homiliae in creationem*

**Optatus**

*c. Donat.*            *Contra Parmenianum Donatistam*

**Origen**

*fr. hom. 39 in Jer.*   *Fragmenta ex homiliis in Jeremiam*  
*fr. in Jo.*            *Fragmenta in Johannem*

**Peter Lombard**

*sent.*                 *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*

**Philo**

*Her.*                 *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit*  
*leg. all.*             *Legum allegoriarum*  
*Mig.*                *De Migratione Abrahami*  
*Mos.*                *De vita Moisis*  
*opif. mundi*        *De opificio mundi*

**Plutarch**

*De aud. po.*         *De audiendis poetis*

**Possidius**

*Indic.*               *Indiculus*

**Procopius of Gaza**

*Gen.*                      *Catena in Genesim*

**Ps-Archelaus**

*Acta disp. cum Manete*      *Acta disputationis cum Manete*

**Ps-Clement**

*Clem. contest.*              *Lampe as contestatio pro iis qui librum accipiunt*  
*Clem. Ep. Petr.*              *Lampe as epistula Petri ad Jacobum*  
*ep. 1 virg.*                      *Epistulae de virginitate*  
*Hom. Clem.*                      *homilae Clementinae*  
*Rec.*                              *Recognitio Clementis*

**Sextus**

*sent.*                      *Sententiae*

**Tertullian**

*exh. cast.*                      *De exhortatione castitatis*

**Theodore of Mopsuestia**

*catech.*                      *Catecheses*

**Theodoret of Cyrus**

*qu. Oct.*                      *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*

**Thomas Aquinas**

*script. I sent.*              *Scriptum super I Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*

**Tyconius**

*Apoc.*                      *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*  
*reg.*                              *Liber regularum*

**Victorinus**

*Apoc.*                      *Commentarii in Apocalypsim Ioannem*

**Vincent of Lérins**

*comm.*                      *Commonitorium*

**Zeno of Verona**

*tract.*                      *Tractatus*



## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

---

**Lewis Ayres** is Professor of Catholic and Historical Theology at the University of Durham in the UK. He is also Visiting Professorial Fellow at the Australian Catholic University, in Melbourne. He is the author of a number of books, including *Nicaea and its Legacy* (OUP, 2006) and *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). He is currently working on a monograph on the development of scriptural exegesis in the second century CE.

**Jason BeDuhn** (Ph.D., Indiana University) is Professor of the Comparative Study of Religions at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, and author of *The Manichaean Body: In Discipline and Ritual* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) and the multi-volume *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010–13).

**John Behr** is former Dean of St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York. He has published an edition and translation of the fragments of Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia and a monograph on Irenaeus (both from OUP), and a more poetic and meditative work entitled *Becoming Human: Theological Anthropology in Word and Image* (SVS Press, 2013). Most recently he has completed a new critical edition and translation of Origen's *On First Principles* (OUP), and a monograph *John the Theologian and His Paschal Gospel: A Prologue to Theology* (OUP).

**B. Lee Blackburn Jr** is Director of Humanities and Associate Professor of History and Humanities at Milligan College. He completed his master's and doctoral work at the University of Notre Dame, where he wrote a dissertation examining the anti-Jewish elements of Cyril of Alexandria's interpretation of the Mosaic law. He has published articles in *Studia Patristica* and the *Stone–Campbell Journal*, and has ongoing research interests in the intersection between patristic biblical exegesis and anti-Jewish polemics.

**Paul M. Blowers** (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame) is the Dean E. Walker Professor of Church History at Emmanuel Christian Seminary at Milligan College (Tennessee). A 2017–18 Henry Luce III Fellow and former President of the North American Patristics Society, he has extensive publications in the history of early Christian biblical interpretation, authoring *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1991) and editing *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). His more recent monographs are *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (OUP, 2012) and *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (OUP, 2016).

**Lincoln H. Blumell** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University. He holds graduate degrees from the University of Calgary, University of Oxford, and University of Toronto. He specializes in Early Christianity and Greek and Coptic papyrology and epigraphy. In addition to publishing a number of articles in his field, he has published two books, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (Brill, 2012), *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Baylor University Press, 2015; with Thomas A. Wayment), and has a third book in press, *Didymus the Blind's Commentary on the Psalms 26:10–29:2 and 36:1–3* (Brepols).

**Peter C. Bouteneff** is Professor of Systematic Theology at St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, where he has taught since 2000. His writing and research span patristic and modern theology, ecumenical relations, and the sacred arts, his most recent monograph being *Arvo Pärt: Out of Silence* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2015). He also authored *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Baker Academic, 2008).

**David Brakke** is Joe R. Engle Chair in the History of Christianity and Professor of History at the Ohio State University. His research interests include 'Gnosticism', early monasticism, and the formation of the New Testament and other scriptural practices. Among his books are *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Harvard University Press, 2010) and, with Andrew Crislip, *Selected Discourses of Shenoute the Great: Community, Theology, and Social Conflict in Late Antique Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). From 2005 to 2015 he edited the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*.

**Michael Cameron** is Professor of Historical Theology at the University of Portland in Oregon. He is author of *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* (OUP, 2012), and *The Essential Expositions of the Psalms of Saint Augustine* (New City Press, 2015). He serves on the editorial boards of the *Augustinus-Lexikon*, the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, and *Augustinian Studies*, and was the inaugural Thomas F. Martin Saint Augustine Fellow at Villanova University in 2010.

**James Carleton Paget** is Reader in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity at the University of Cambridge. He has published on a range of issues to do with ancient biblical interpretation, ancient Jewish-Christian relations, and the history of biblical interpretation. He has authored *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Antiquity* (Mohr Siebeck, 2010) and, with Joachim Schaper, edited *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to 600* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

**John C. Cavadini** is Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, where he also serves as McGrath-Cavadini Director of the McGrath Institute for Church Life. He teaches, studies, and publishes in the area of patristic theology and in its early medieval reception. He has served a five-year term on the International Theological Commission (appointed by Pope Benedict XVI) and recently received the

Monika K. Hellwig Award from the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities for Outstanding Contributions to Catholic Intellectual Life.

**Reinhart Ceulemans** is assistant professor of Greek literature at KU Leuven. Earlier, he worked at the Septuaginta-Unternehmen of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities (2011–2014). His main research interests include the transmission of the Greek Bible and biblical exegesis in Byzantium.

**Esther Chung-Kim** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California. Her research focuses on problems of authority, ancient tradition in early modern biblical interpretation, and poor relief reform. She has published *Inventing Authority: Use of the Church Fathers in Reformation Debates over the Eucharist* (Baylor University Press, 2011), *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Acts* (IVP Academic, 2014), and several articles related to poverty, wealth, and social change, including most recently, 'Aid for Refugees: Religion, Migration and Poor Relief in Sixteenth-Century Geneva' (2018) in *Reformation and Renaissance Review*. She is a 2018–19 recipient of the Sabbatical Grant for Researchers at The Louisville Institute.

**Elizabeth A. Clark** is the John Carlisle Kilgo Professor of Religion, Emerita, at Duke University. She specializes in the history of late ancient Christianity, with particular attention to issues of women and gender, the development of early Christian asceticism, biblical interpretation in early Christianity, heresy and orthodoxy, and historiographical issues. She has authored or edited thirteen books, the latest of which is *The Fathers Refounded: Protestant Liberalism, Roman Catholic Modernism, and the Teaching of Ancient Christianity in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019). She is the founding editor of the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She has served as the President of the American Academy of Religion, the American Society of Church History, and the North American Patristics Society.

**John Granger Cook** graduated from Davidson College (philosophy), Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, and Emory University. After six years in a Presbyterian parish in the Asheville, NC area, he did a three-year post-doctoral project in earliest Christianity at Emory University, and since 1994 has taught at LaGrange College in LaGrange, Georgia. He has published monographs on the Gospel of Mark, the interpretation of the Old Testament and the New Testament in Graeco-Roman paganism, the Roman response to the Christians from the reigns of Claudius to Hadrian, and one on crucifixion in Mediterranean antiquity. His latest book is entitled *Empty Tomb, Resurrection, and Apotheosis*.

**Mary B. Cunningham** is Honorary Associate Professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Nottingham. Having retired from her teaching post there, she took up a Fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library in Washington, DC, during the academic year 2015–16. Cunningham has since moved to

Oxfordshire where she continues to carry out research and writing. Publications that relate to her contribution in this volume include (with Pauline Allen), *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Christian and Byzantine Homiletics* (Brill, 1998), *Wider Than Heaven: Eighth-Century Homilies on the Mother of God* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), and 'The Interpretation of the New Testament in Byzantine Preaching: Mediating an Encounter with the Word', in D. Krueger and R. Nelson (eds), *The New Testament in Byzantium* (Dumbarton Oaks, 2016).

**Anthony Dupont** is Research Professor in Christian Antiquity and member of the Research Unit History of Church and Theology at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, the Catholic University of Leuven. He has published two monographs, including *Gratia in Augustine's Sermones ad Populum during the Pelagian Controversy* (Brill, 2012), as well as several articles about the interrelated topics of divine grace and human freedom in the writings of Augustine of Hippo. He also co-edited *Preaching in the Patristic Era* (Brill, 2018).

**Luke Dysinger, OSB** is a Benedictine monk and priest of St Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, California. He received his MD from the University of Southern California Medical School in 1978 and his D.Phil. in patristics from Oxford University in 2000. He serves as professor of church history and moral theology at St John's Seminary in Camarillo, California. His publications include *The Rule of St. Benedict, Latin and English* (Source Books, 1997); *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus* (OUP, 2005).

**Mark Elliott** is Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow Scotland, and Professorial Fellow at Wycliffe College, Toronto, having done his Ph.D. at Cambridge University in Patristics. Recent publications include *Engaging Leviticus* (Cascade, 2012) and *Providence Perceived* (De Gruyter, 2015). He is currently engaged in writing a constructive biblical theology of Providence and in co-editing the *History of Scottish Theology* (with David Fergusson) for OUP.

**Andrew Faulkner** (D.Phil. Oxford) is Professor of Classics at the University of Waterloo in Canada. He has worked on the tradition of Greek hymnography, especially the Homeric Hymns and their reception, Hellenistic poetry, and early Christian poetry. His publications include *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (OUP, 2008), three edited volumes, and numerous journal articles.

**Everett Ferguson** (Ph.D., Harvard University) taught Bible, Greek, and Church History at Abilene Christian University from 1962 to 1998, and is a past president of the North American Patristics Society (1990–2). Ferguson has served as editor of the journal *The Second Century* (1981–92), co-editor of *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (1993–9), and general editor of the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (2nd edition, 1997). His publications include *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Eerdmans, 3rd edn, 2003), *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Eerdmans, 2009), and *The Rule of Faith: A Guide* (Wipf & Stock, 2015).

**Michael Graves** (Ph.D., Hebrew Union College) is Armerding Professor of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill. He is the author of *The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2014), *Jerome's Hebrew Philology* (Brill, 2007), and an annotated translation of Jerome's *Commentary on Jeremiah* (IVP, 2012). His essays on early Christian and Jewish biblical interpretation have appeared in journals such as *Vigiliae Christianae*, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, *Tyndale Bulletin*, and the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*.

**Franklin T. Harkins** is Associate Professor of the History of Christianity at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, where he specializes in scholastic theology and exegesis. He is the author of *Reading and the Work of Restoration: History and Scripture in the Theology of Hugh of St Victor* (PIMS, 2009), and editor of four books, including *A Companion to Job in the Middle Ages* (Brill, 2017). He has also published numerous articles and essays on Augustine, the Victorines, Peter Lombard and the *Sentences* commentary tradition, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and John Duns Scotus.

**C. E. Hill** is John R. Richardson Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando and is a Henry Luce III Fellow in Theology. He is the author of *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity* (2nd edn, Eerdmans, 2001), *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford University Press, 2004), and *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great 'Gospel Conspiracy'* (OUP, 2010). He is also co-editor with M. J. Kruger of *The Early Text of the New Testament* (OUP, 2012).

**Andrew Hofer, OP** (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame) serves as Director of the Doctoral Program and Associate Professor of Patristics and Ancient Languages at the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception, Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC. He is the author of *Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus* (OUP, 2013) and of articles in journals such as *Augustinianum*, *Vigiliae Christianae*, *The Thomist*, *Pro Ecclesia*, *Nova et Vetera*, and the *International Journal of Systematic Theology*. Most recently he co-edited, and contributed to, *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers* (Sapientia Press, 2019).

**Michael Hollerich** is Professor of Theology at the University of St Thomas in St Paul, Minnesota, where he teaches the history of Christianity. He has research interests in early Christian biblical interpretation, modern German church history, political theology, and the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea. He published *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the Age of Constantine* (OUP, 1999), and is currently working on a book on the reception of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and its shaping of Christian historiography, and is co-editor of the forthcoming new edition of the textbook *The Christian Theological Tradition*.

**Robin M. Jensen** is the Patrick O'Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, and a former President of the North American Patristics Society. Jensen's books include *Understanding Early Christian Art* (Routledge, 2000); *Face to Face: Portraits of*

*the Divine in Early Christianity* (Fortress, 2005); *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith and the Christian Community* (Eerdmans, 2004); *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism* (Brill, 2011); and *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity* (Baker Academic, 2012). Most recently she co-authored *Christianity in Roman Africa* with her husband, J. Patout Burns, Jr (Eerdmans, 2014).

**F. Stanley Jones** is Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies and former Director of the Institute for the Study of Judaeo-Christian Origins at California State University, Long Beach. He holds academic degrees from Yale, Oxford, and Göttingen and specializes in New Testament and ancient Christianity. Among his recent publications are *Pseudoclementina Elchasaiticaque inter Judaeochristiana: Collected Studies* (Peeters, 2012) and an English translation of *The Syriac 'Pseudo-Clementines': An Early Version of the First Christian Novel* (Brepols, 2014).

**Judith L. Kovacs**, Associate Professor Emerita of the University of Virginia, works in both patristics and biblical studies. Her publications include *The Church's Bible: 1 Corinthians*, a book on the reception history of the Revelation to John (co-authored with Christopher Rowland), and articles on patristic exegesis, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, the Gospel of John, 1 Corinthians, and Revelation. She is an editor of the Blackwell Bible Commentaries and the SBL Writings of the Greco-Roman World sub-series on John Chrysostom's works on the New Testament.

**Richard A. Layton** (Ph.D., University of Virginia) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Religion at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and is the author of *Didymus the Blind and his Circle in Late Antique Alexandria* (University of Illinois Press, 2004) and co-author with Walter Feinberg of *For the Civic Good: The Liberal Case for Teaching Religion in the Public Schools* (University of Michigan Press, 2014). Layton has also published a number of essays in patristic studies and patristic biblical exegesis.

**Johan Leemans** is Professor in Late Antique Christianity and a member of the Research Unit History of Church and Theology at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of Leuven. His research mainly focuses on the Greek East of the fourth and fifth centuries CE, with special attention to the phenomenon of martyrdom, patristic exegesis, and sermons. He has co-edited a number of studies, including *More Than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity* (Peeters, 2006) and *Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity (300–450 ad)* (De Gruyter, 2017).

**Michael C. Legaspi** is Associate Professor of Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies and Jewish Studies at the Pennsylvania State University (University Park). Trained in biblical studies (Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible, Harvard University), Legaspi's research interests include various topics within the historical and philosophical backgrounds of modern biblical criticism. He is the author of *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (OUP, 2010) and *Wisdom in Classical and Biblical Tradition* (OUP, 2018).

**Matthew Levering** holds the James N. and Mary D. Perry Jr. Chair of Theology at Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois. He has authored twenty-five books, including *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2008) and *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the Gospel through Church and Scripture* (Baker Academic, 2014). He co-edited the *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (OUP, 2011) and most recently the *Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology* (OUP, 2015).

**Joseph T. Lienhard, SJ** (Dr theol. habil., University of Freiburg), is Professor of Theology at Fordham University, editor of the journal *Traditio*, and a former President of the North American Patristics Society. He is the author of monographs on Paulinus of Nola and on Marcellus of Ancyra, as well as a book on the biblical canon and another on St Joseph in Early Christianity. He translated Origen's *Homilies on Luke* for the Fathers of the Church series (Catholic University of America Press, 1996). He is also the editor of a volume *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* in the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture series (IVP). His translation *St Augustine, Writings on the Old Testament*, was published in 2016 (New City Press).

**Josef Lössl** is Professor of Historical Theology and Intellectual History at the Cardiff University School of History, Archaeology and Religion. He is Director of the Centre for Late Antique Religion and Culture and author of *The Early Church: History and Memory* (T & T Clark, 2010). Together with John W. Watt he co-edited *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition from Rome to Baghdad* (Ashgate, 2011). He is executive editor of *Vigiliae Christianae: A Review of Early Christian Life and Language* and is currently working on a commentary on Tatian's *Oratio ad Graecos*.

**Peter W. Martens** (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame) is Associate Professor of Early Christianity at Saint Louis University. He specializes in the exegetical cultures that emerged around the Christian Bible in Late Antiquity. In addition to numerous essays, he has published two monographs, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford University Press, 2012) and *Adrian's Introduction to the Divine Scriptures: An Antiochene Handbook for Scriptural Interpretation* (OUP, 2017).

**Wendy Mayer** is Professor and Associate Dean for Research at Australian Lutheran College, University of Divinity, and Research Fellow, Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, University of South Africa. In addition to extensive publications on the patristic author and preacher John Chrysostom, she is recognized for her work on the setting and audience of early Christian preaching. Her publications include (with Pauline Allen) *The Churches of Syrian Antioch (300–638 CE)* (Peeters, 2012) and *The Homilies of St John Chrysostom—Provenance. Reshaping the Foundations* (Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2005).

**Bronwen Neil** is Professor of Ancient History at Macquarie University, Sydney, and an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of South Africa. She is also an elected Fellow and Council member of the Australian Academy of Humanities. Her current

research project is *Dreams, Prophecy and Violence from Early Christianity to Early Islam* (ARC Future Fellowship). Neil has published widely on Maximus the Confessor, Pope Martin I, Anastasius Bibliothecarius, and Pope Leo I, as well as on poverty and welfare in Late Antiquity. She is co-editor of the *Brill Companion to Pope Gregory the Great* (Leiden, 2013) and the *Oxford Handbook on Maximus the Confessor* (OUP, 2017).

**Lorenzo Perrone**, until 2015 Professor of Early Christian Literature in the Department of Classics and Italian Studies at the University of Bologna, founded in Pisa the Italian Research Group on Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition (1994) and created the journal *Adamantius* (1995). His research interests are the study of Origen, the history of the Holy Land in Late Antiquity, the history of ancient monasticism, and eastern Christianity. Recently he has directed the critical edition of the newly discovered *Homilies on the Psalms* by Origen in the series *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* (De Gruyter, 2015).

**L. Edward Phillips** is Associate Professor of Worship and Liturgical Theology at Candler School of Theology and a faculty member of the Graduate Division of Religion, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. His publications include *The Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship* (Gorgias, 1996); *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Fortress Press, 2002), *Studia Liturgica Diversa: Studies in Honor of Paul Bradshaw* (Pastoral Press, 2004), and *Courage to Bear Witness: Essays in Honor of Gene Davenport* (Wipf & Stock, 2009). He is the former editor-in-chief of *Liturgy*, the journal of the Liturgical Conference (2008–16).

**Eric Scherbenske** is an independent scholar currently writing a monograph on the late-ancient archetype of the tenth-century New Testament manuscript 1739. His first monograph, *Canonizing Paul: Ancient Editorial Practice and the Corpus Paulinum* (OUP, 2013), received the North American Patristics Society Best First Book Award for 2014.

**Stephen J. Shoemaker** is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Oregon. His main interests lie in the ancient and early medieval Christian traditions, and more specifically in early Byzantine and Near Eastern Christianity. He is a specialist on early devotion to the Virgin Mary, Christian apocryphal literature, and Islamic origins. Among his many publications are *The Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (OUP, 2002) and *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

**Peter Struck** is Professor and chair of Classical Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He has written *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton University Press, 2004) and *Divination and Human Nature: A Cognitive History of Divination in Antiquity* (Princeton University Press, 2016). He is editor of *Mantikê* (Brill, 2005), the *Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), and general editor of a multi-volume series on the *Cultural History of Ideas* (forthcoming from Bloomsbury).

**Tarmo Toom** is originally from Estonia, but he studied theology in Switzerland and the USA. He has taught patristics at the Catholic University of America and is

currently a Professorial Lecturer at Georgetown University. His research foci are patristic hermeneutics, Augustine, early Christian Trinitarian controversies, and the history of creeds. He is the author of *Thought Clothed with Sound: Augustine's Christological Hermeneutics in De doctrina christiana* (Peter Lang, 2002), and the editor of *Patristic Theories of Biblical Interpretation: The Latin Fathers* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

**Jeffrey A. Trumbower** is Professor of Religious Studies and Dean of the College at St Michael's College, Colchester, Vermont. He is the author of *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (OUP, 2001) and *Born from Above: The Anthropology of the Gospel of John* (Mohr Siebeck, 1992). He has also published articles and book chapters on various aspects of the afterlife in early Christianity.

**H. Clifton Ward** (Ph.D., University of Durham) is Instructor of Religion at Tusculum University in Greeneville, Tennessee. His most recent publications have examined the scriptural interpretation of Clement of Alexandria, including "Symbolic Interpretation is Most Useful": Clement of Alexandria's Scriptural Imagination, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (2017). His research focuses on the intersection of ancient literary criticism, the formation of Christian Scripture, and the reading practices of Christian exegetes in the first three centuries CE.

**Jeffrey Wickes** (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame) is Assistant Professor of Early Christianity at Saint Louis University. He works on the literature and theology of the Late Ancient Christian East, especially as manifest in the works of Ephrem the Syrian. He has published articles on Ephrem's exegesis, his theology of divine names, as well as a translation of his *Hymns on Faith* (Fathers of the Church series, Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

**Frances Young** taught Theology at the University of Birmingham from 1971. From 1986 to 2005 she held the Edward Cadbury Chair, serving as Head of Department, Head of School, Dean of the Faculty, and Pro-Vice-Chancellor. She was made OBE for services to Theology in 1998, and was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2004. Now Emeritus Professor of Theology, she is still engaged in research and writing. New Testament and early Christian studies are her main fields of interest. Her academic publications include *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background* (SCM press, 1983, 2nd edn 2010) and *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); she co-edited *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* and *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Origins to Constantine*. Her principal published papers are collected in *Exegesis and Theology in Early Christianity* (Ashgate, 2012).



---

# INTRODUCTION

---

PAUL M. BLOWERS AND PETER W. MARTENS

THE study of early Christian biblical interpretation is crucial to the general study of ancient Christianity as a whole. Sacred writings left an indelible mark upon early Christian communities. These writings were energetically copied by scribes, translated into several languages, and widely disseminated throughout Christian networks. They were read and expounded upon in the setting of the liturgy, studied privately, and increasingly examined with a keen scholarly eye. Despite their fluid boundaries, these Scriptures were woven into the oral and written discourses of early Christianity. Early Christians committed parts of these writings to memory, and the surviving literature from this period abounds in allusions, paraphrases, quotations, retellings, and explicit interpretations of Scripture, such as we find in commentaries and homilies. This vigorous interest in the Scriptures flowed from an overarching conviction: that these writings were thought to express the Christian message of salvation and guide those who read and heard them well along the journey of salvation. The earnestness with which these writings permeated the Church's mission of catechesis, moral exhortation, and advanced instruction, the zeal with which they were marshalled into the area of competing interpretations and religious debate, and the precision with which they were targeted by imperial persecution, all point to the divine or holy status Christians ascribed to these writings. Indeed, early Christians broadly assumed that God was continuously speaking anew through these sacred texts. In short, they were the lifeblood of virtually every aspect of Christian communities.

There is at present a thriving scholarship on Scripture and its interpretation in early Christianity. Critical editions of patristic exegetical writings in various ancient languages have become abundant. Major series of translated early Christian writings have turned more and more attention to publishing patristic exegetical works (especially but not exclusively commentaries and homilies). Numerous monographs on the overall character of patristic exegesis have appeared in English and other languages, as well as monographs on individual early Christian exegetes and specific themes in early Christian biblical commentary. The overall history of biblical interpretation has itself now become the subject of a growing scholarship, with new dictionaries and encyclopedias

of historic interpreters and trajectories of interpretation. Academic societies regularly host units on the history of interpretation. Journals soliciting articles on Christian antiquity are thriving and producing numerous studies in early Christian exegesis. Far more than before, biblical scholars are taking new interest in the history of interpretation, and especially interpretation in the early Church.

We believe, then, that this is an opportune time for our handbook on early Christian biblical interpretation. It will serve as a guide to the many dimensions of this subject and aid students and scholars from a wide spectrum of academic fields, including classics, biblical studies, the general history of interpretation, the social and cultural history of late ancient and early medieval Christianity, historical theology, and systematic and contextual theology. Readers will find in this volume the principal issues of hermeneutical theory, exegetical method, and the like, but they will also be oriented to features beyond early Christian exegetical practice itself, including the cultural and ecclesial locations of interpreters, the communal dynamics of interpretation, the different contexts and trajectories of interpretation in and beyond the Church, and the non-literary media of interpretation, such as liturgical performance and visual art.

As with other Oxford handbooks, this volume does more than survey the historical developments themselves. It also serves the reader as a guide to the scholarship and perspectives that shape the current study of early Christian interpretation of the Bible.

The dominant scholarly modes of reading Scripture today do not, in fact, conform much to the contours of patristic exegesis. Nevertheless, there has been a profound renaissance of interest in the topic in recent years, and it is this renaissance that we will narrate in the last section of this volume. In so doing, we do not suggest that all, or even most, biblical scholars are sympathetic to this recovery. Nevertheless, such a recovery is under way in many different circles. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, for instance, the respect for patristic biblical exegesis never really wavered. In the Roman Catholic tradition, theologians of the *nouvelle théologie* movement like Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar responded in the mid-twentieth century to the sustained negative impacts of rationalism, scientism, and secularism, encouraging a more deliberate *ressourcement*, a return to the historic sources of the Catholic faith, including the rich traditions of patristic biblical interpretation. In most Protestant theology and biblical scholarship, so deeply impacted by the growth of biblical higher criticism, there was an enduring tendency throughout the twentieth century to ignore or even dismiss most patristic interpretation as a relic of a 'pre-modern' and thus 'pre-critical' past (notwithstanding a certain abiding interest in the philological and text-critical significance of ancient exegesis).

In more recent decades, however, the 'postmodern turn' in philosophical and theological hermeneutics has stimulated a rethinking of the character of early Christian biblical interpretation. Hans-Georg Gadamer's emphasis on the inevitable role of tradition in the understanding of texts and on the importance of fusing interpretative 'horizons' provided a philosophical impetus for historical theologians to consider the legacies of patristic exegesis in their own right, and to view the early Christian exegetes as 'conversation partners' in the ongoing task of scriptural interpretation. New developments in

cultural, literary, and textual theories have also renewed interest in the cultural location of early Christian biblical interpretation. They have turned attention to ancient assumptions about the nature of biblical language, textuality, and the strategies and politics of interpreting sacred texts within and among ancient religious communities.

More specifically in ecclesial contexts, the strong renewal of concern for the theological interpretation of Scripture, shared by many biblical scholars and theologians alike, has inaugurated a new wave of interest in the appropriation of insights from patristic exegesis, which was inherently theological in scope. The sense of early Christian authors that theology *is* the interpretation of Scripture, a sustained engagement with 'living' texts, is a model that was attractive to medieval theologians and Protestant Reformers alike, and it is now increasingly seen as a corrective to the propensity of modern higher criticism to segregate biblical interpretation from the Church.



PART I

---

SCRIPTURE

---



## CHAPTER 1

---

# SCRIPTURE AS ARTEFACT

---

LINCOLN H. BLUMELL

OUR engagement with ancient Christianity is principally a textual one. Early Christians wrote texts (sermons, letters, Gospels, apocalypses, etc.), which were circulated, read, and copied. But while early Christians were in some sense ‘a people of the book’, the extant textual remains are rather small and fragmentary for the first few centuries. Consequently, many of the documents we read today are based on copies, with the result that the earliest textual witnesses we possess for some Christian writings were produced hundreds, or even over one thousand years, after the original was composed. For example, the *Didache*, an early Christian handbook that was most likely written in the first century or early second century CE, is preserved principally from an eleventh-century manuscript (Holmes 2007:339–40). As texts were copied (and recopied) over the centuries it is clear that changes occurred in the materials, format, and textual features. The materials upon which texts were transmitted developed and evolved as new media and technologies became available. The format and layout of a text changed, reflecting contemporary trends. Likewise, a number of other features changed and emerged: script, breaks, divisions, versification, capitulation, spellings, marginalia, and sometimes even the text itself (Wilson 1983:65–8). This is not to imply that a completely different text ultimately resulted in this process, but that the *mise-en-page* of our modern editions can be quite different from the originals they purport to reproduce. This preliminary chapter seeks to cut through this long process of transmission to examine the earliest extant Christian manuscripts—specifically those that came to be a part of the OT and NT. Accordingly, it seeks to consider them primarily as ‘artefacts’ in their own right, in some ways apart from the textual content they bear. Focusing on the *medium* of early Christian writings, this chapter will address issues of format, production, reading, and circulation to shed some contextual light on early Christian interpretation of Scripture. While the texts these early artefacts transmit have been abundantly studied, by comparison, there has been relatively little attention given to what the physical artefacts that convey these texts can reveal (Gamble 1995; Hurtado 2006).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For editions of papyri I have followed the abbreviations given in J. F. Oates et al. (eds), *Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets* (5th edn: BASP Suppl. 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2001).

## EARLY CHRISTIAN BIBLICAL REMAINS

As one begins to consider the literary remains of early Christians, it is worthwhile to do so within the broader category of early Christian artefacts in general. At present, the earliest archaeological remains with an undisputed Christian origin date to the third century (White 1997:123–31; Tepper and Di Segni 2006). The earliest Christian inscriptions come from either the latter part of the second century or more probably the first part of the third century (Snyder 2003:210–66; Tabbernee 2008). Likewise, distinctly Christian art can only be identified beginning in the third century (Jensen 2000:9; Spier 2007:4–8, 51; cf. Clement, *paed.* 3.59–60). But with the extant scriptural fragments, we are able to securely penetrate the second-century world of the early Christians. While there have been sensational claims for the discovery of first-century Christian texts (O’Callaghan 1972; Kim 1988; Jaroš 2006), such claims have been largely rejected in mainstream scholarship (Nongbri 2005; Bagnall 2009; Orsini and Clarysse 2012). The earliest textual artefacts consist of fragments from early Christian writings, both canonical and non-canonical; though none of these preserves an entire text, and they usually contain no more than a handful of verses, they are important witnesses. Due to the fact that these fragments—and indeed most early Christian textual remains—are dated palaeographically, it is difficult to assign a date any more precise than a century or half-century (Cavallo 2009). It has become common to designate the NT fragments written on papyrus with a ‘Gregory number’ preceded by a Gothic  $\mathfrak{P}$  (Gregory 1908); NT fragments written on parchment along with notable uncial manuscripts by numerals with an initial  $\omicron$ —although uncials through  $\omicron 45$  are also written with a capital letter (Aland and Aland 1995:72–184); and copies of the Septuagint (LXX) with a ‘Rahlfs number’ (Fraenkel 2004).

The earliest extant Christian fragments, whether OT or NT, are all written in Greek (Table 1.1). Of the LXX fragments Psalms and Isaiah are especially well attested, while from the NT Matthew and John are the most common. Determining whether an early LXX fragment is of Jewish or Christian scribal origin is difficult; however, it appears that Jewish copyists had a tendency to substitute the Hebrew tetragrammaton (YHWH) for  $\kappa\rho\upsilon\iota\omicron\varsigma$  (Blumell and Wayment 2015:13–14; e.g. Rahlfs  $\omicron 848$  and  $\omicron 857$ ). While the earliest remains are just fragments, as one moves into the third and fourth centuries the extant remains begin to grow, not just in terms of numbers but also in terms of size. The third-century remains include copies of almost entire books from the NT ( $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$  [John]) as well as manuscripts that included multiple scriptural texts ( $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  [Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, Acts],  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  [Pauline Epistles],  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  [Luke and John]); the fourth-century remains culminate with the preservation of the famous parchment codices: Codex Vaticanus (B) and Codex Sinaiticus ( $\aleph$ ) preserve large sections of both the OT (LXX) and NT.

The online version that is updated regularly is available at <<http://papyri.info/docs/checklist>>. For abbreviations of ancient authors I have followed *The SBL Handbook of Style (Second Edition): For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). For abbreviations of ancient authors not found in the *SBL Handbook* I have followed S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd rev. edn; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

**Table 1.1** Earliest extant Christian biblical fragments\*

Papyrus	Date	Format	Text	Provenance
Rahlfs 0970/P.Bad. IV 56 (LDAB 3086)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	LXX Exod 8.3, 5–9, 12–20, Deut 28.36–30.7	Egypt, Herakleopolite Nome
Rahlfs 2082 (LDAB 3083)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	LXX Ps 48.20–49.3, 49.17–21	Egypt, Antinoopolis
Rahlfs 2122/PSI Congr. XX 1 (LDAB 3085)	II CE	Papyrus Sheet (or roll)	LXX Ps 1.2–3	Egypt
Rahlfs 2077/P.Ant. I 7 (LDAB 3087)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	LXX Ps 81.1–4, 82.4–9, 16, 17	Egypt, Antinoopolis
ⲡ <sup>104</sup> /P.Oxy. LXIV 4404 (LDAB 2935)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	Matt 21.34–7, 43, 45	Egypt, Oxyrhynchus
ⲡ <sup>90</sup> /P.Oxy. L 3523 (LDAB 2775)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	John 18.36–19.7	Egypt, Oxyrhynchus
ⲡ <sup>52</sup> /P.Ryl. III 457 (LDAB 2774)	II CE	Papyrus Codex	John 18.31–3, 37–8	Egypt

\* In canonical order. LDAB = Leuven Database of Ancient Books: <<http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/>>. For papyrological abbreviations see <<http://papyri.info/docs/checklist>>.

While Greek fragments/manuscripts dominate the earliest remains, other languages are attested. From the middle or end of the third century a Coptic gloss of LXX Isaiah is extant (Chester Beatty Papyrus VII; Bagnall 2009:66–9), and from the fourth century there are a few NT fragments (Metzger 1977:99–152; Choat 2012). While the earliest dated reference to Latin Scriptures is from the later part of the second century in the *Acts of Scillitan Martyrs* sect. 12 (17 July 180 CE), the earliest extant Latin fragments and manuscripts of Scriptures date to the fourth century, predating Jerome's Vulgate (Houghton 2016:22–31). Syriac biblical manuscripts (both OT and NT) with dated colophons are extant from the latter half of the fifth century (Brock 2012; cf. Blumell and Wayment 2015:337–40), and from the sixth century there is one Ethiopic NT manuscript of the Gospels (McKenzie and Watson 2016). There are also a handful of extant Armenian and Georgian NT manuscripts from the seventh and eighth centuries (Metzger 1977:153–214) (Table 1.2).

## GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

For about the first five centuries, the extant manuscript evidence is overwhelmingly biased towards Egypt. Its arid sands have yielded tens of thousands of ancient texts from the Pharaonic to the Arabic period, and have preserved Christian fragments from as early as the second century CE. To give some idea of the importance of Egypt for the

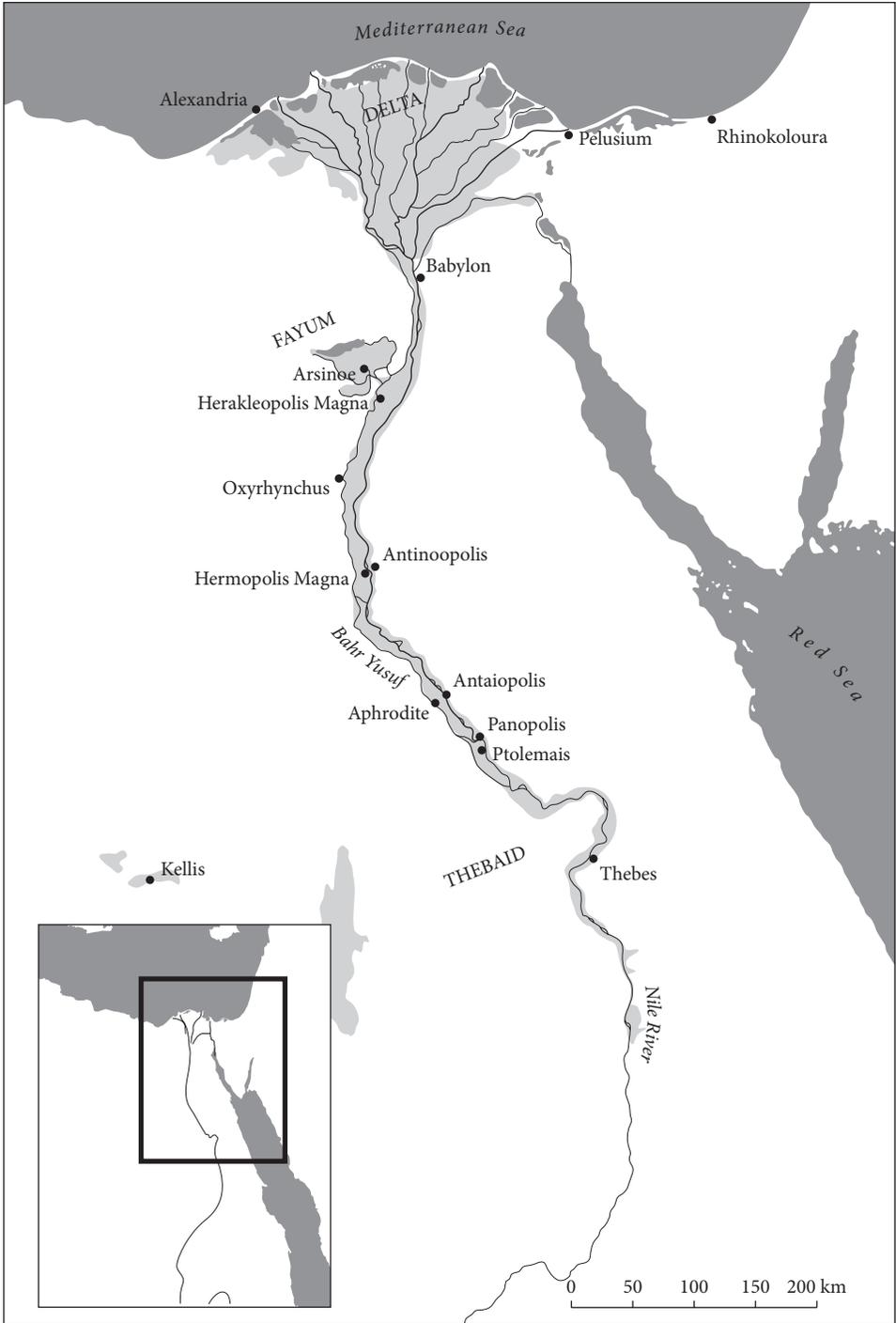
**Table 1.2 Significant early Christian biblical witnesses: third to fourth century CE**

Papyrus/Codex	Date	Format	Script	Text	Provenance
ⲡ <sup>45</sup> (LDAB 2980)	First Half III CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	Matt 20–6, John 4–11, Luke 6–14, Mark 4–12, Acts 4–17	Egypt, Aphroditopolis (?)
ⲡ <sup>46</sup> (LDAB 3011)	First Half III CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	Rom, Heb, 1 & 2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col, 1 Thess	Egypt, Aphroditopolis (?)
ⲡ <sup>66</sup> (LDAB 2777)	First Half III CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	John 1.1–6, 11, 6.35–14.30, 15.3–21.9	Egypt, Panopolis (?)
ⲡ <sup>47</sup> (LDAB 2778)	III CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	Rev 9.10–17.2	Egypt, Aphroditopolis (?)
ⲡ <sup>75</sup> (LDAB 2895)	III CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	Luke 3.18–22.53, John 1.1–15.10	Egypt, Upper Egypt (?)
ⲡ <sup>72</sup> (LDAB 2565)	III/Early IV CE	Papyrus Codex	Greek	1–2 Pet, Jude	Egypt, Panopolis (?)
Codex Vaticanus (LDAB 3479)	IV CE	Parchment Codex	Greek	LXX Gen 46.28–Dan 12, Matt 1.1–Heb 9.14	Palestine (?)
Codex Sinaiticus (LDAB 3478)	IV CE	Parchment Codex	Greek	LXX Gen 21.26–Job 42.17, Matt 1.1–Rev 22.21 (and <i>Shepherd of Hermas</i> )	Palestine (?)
Codex Bobiensis (LDAB 7820)	IV CE	Parchment Codex	Latin	Long portions of Mark and Matt	North Africa
Codex Vercellensis (LDAB 7822)	Second Half IV CE	Parchment Codex	Latin	Long portions of Matt, John, Luke, Mark	Italy
Codex Sarravianus- Colbertinus (LDAB 3202)	IV/V CE	Parchment Codex	Greek	Gen 21.43–Judg 21.12	Europe (?)
Codex Washingtonianus (LDAB 2985)	IV/V CE	Parchment Codex	Greek	Matt, John, Luke, Mark	Egypt
Codex Bezae (LDAB 2929)	c.400 CE	Parchment Codex	Greek/ Latin	Long portions of Matt, John, Luke, Mark, 3 John, and Acts	Syria (?)

study of early Christian manuscripts, of the current 139 NT papyri that range in date from the second to the eighth century, there are only three that do not come from Egypt (ⲡ<sup>59</sup>, <sup>60</sup>, <sup>61</sup> [Palestine]). Furthermore, prior to the fourth century there is only one extant scriptural text of Christian origin that does not come from Egypt: a parchment fragment from Dura-Europos (Syria) dating to the first half of the third century that attests Tatian's *Diatesseron* or *Harmony of the Gospels* (P.Dura 10; LDAB 3071). While this gives a skewed view of early Christian manuscripts, and there is a danger of overgeneralizing from one locale, the textual evidence from Egypt is probably indicative—or at the very least instructive—of scribal practices and conventions from other parts of the Mediterranean world (Hurtado 2011:68).

While Alexandria became a centre of Christian scholarship by the latter part of the second century, none of the early biblical fragments come from Alexandria; every piece for which a provenance can be ascertained comes from Middle or Upper Egypt. In general, few texts (Christian or otherwise) have been found in the Nile Delta because it is considerably more moist and humid, which significantly diminishes the afterlife of a text. While it may be possible that some, or even many, of the earliest extant Christian texts originally came from Alexandria, this cannot be proven, and the evidence itself suggests that many of the extant fragments we possess were probably produced in centres outside of Alexandria (Roberts 1979). Far and away the most important Christian centre within Egypt, in terms of the number of texts it has produced, is the provincial metropolis of Oxyrhynchus (modern el-Bahnasa), located some 180 km south of Cairo. Excavated at the turn of the twentieth century by Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, two Oxford dons in search of ancient Greek manuscripts, the rubbish heaps of Oxyrhynchus have yielded tens of thousands of papyri (Parsons 2007). Among these are hundreds of fragments of early Christian texts that all date before the seventh century CE. In addition to biblical fragments, other Christian texts like those from the apostolic fathers (e.g. *Shepherd of Hermas*) or certain patristic writers (e.g. Melito, Irenaeus) as well as miscellaneous texts like homilies, commentaries, dialogues, and hymns have been found (Blumell and Wayment 2015). The importance of Oxyrhynchus for the study of NT manuscripts is illustrated by the fact that 56 (or 40 per cent) of the 139 known NT papyri come from this city (Map 1.1).

The earliest Christian artefacts from Oxyrhynchus are a couple of second-century fragments:  $\mathfrak{P}^{104}$ /P.Oxy. LXIV 4404 (Matt) and  $\mathfrak{P}^{90}$ /P.Oxy. L 3523 (John). In third-century remains there is a marked jump in the number of Christian texts; at the same time, individual Christians begin to appear in the papyrological record in letters, orders, and official correspondence (Luijendijk 2008; Blumell 2012). Thus far, the most notable third-century Christian to appear in the documentary papyri is a man by the name of Sotas who issues, and receives, a number of ecclesiastical letters of recommendation (P.Alex. 29, PSI III 208, PSI IX 1041, P.Oxy. XXXVI 2785; see also P.Oxy. XII 1492). What is most significant about Sotas for the present purposes is that two of his letters are written on scraps of parchment (PSI III 208, PSI IX 1041), and not papyrus, which is highly unusual. Of the nearly 7,500 published letters from Egypt written in Greek between the third century BCE and seventh century CE, there are only two others written in Greek that are also written on parchment. Given these statistics, it is more than just coincidence that the same person would write two letters on parchment and strongly suggests something more is occurring. It seems, therefore, that the material evidence provided by these two letters suggests that the parchments on which they were written were leftover scraps from the production of texts and that Sotas was involved in the production of Christian manuscripts at Oxyrhynchus. At the same time these letters were written, the manuscript evidence from Oxyrhynchus attests parchment manuscripts of biblical texts: P.Oxy. VI 847 (John 2.11–22); PSI I 5 (Jas 1.25–7); P.Oxy. VIII 1080 (Rev 3.19–4:3); P.Oxy. LXVI 4500 (Rev 11.15–18). Thus, as one perceptive scholar has pointed out, ‘Behind a material detail—these two seemingly insignificant parchment scraps—I behold the contours of a Christian scriptorium at Oxyrhynchus’ (Luijendijk 2008:150–1; cf. Roberts 1979:24).



MAP 1.1 Roman Egypt

## EARLY CHRISTIAN MANUSCRIPTS

The ‘books’ (*libri*; βιβλία) of the first centuries CE were primarily scrolls (*rotuli*/κύλινδροι). Manuscript remains from Egypt, Herculaneum, Palestine, and a few other locations and ancient artistic depictions of readers and writers reveal that Graeco-Roman culture had a strong preference for the roll as the standard format for producing texts (Johnson 2004). At the same time, the most common material used for scrolls was papyrus (*charta*/χάρτης), which was made from the papyrus plant (*papyrus*/πάπυρος) that was indigenous to Egypt. Though papyrus was effectively the ‘paper’ of the ancient world (Pliny, *HN* 13.74–82; Lewis 1974:34–69), parchment (*pergamena*; μεμβράνα, δέρμα, διφθέρα), made from animal skin (normally calves, goats, and sheep), was also used as a writing medium (Pliny, *HN* 13.21f.). To manufacture a roll, several sheets of papyrus were glued together to form a long strip (*κόλλημα*), or stitched together if it was made of parchment; though size could vary, it appears that rolls were usually anywhere from 22 to 38 cm in height and could be up to 15 m in length (Johnson 2004:143–52). Texts on rolls made from papyrus were typically written along the recto where the orientation of the plant fibre runs horizontally (instead of the verso where the orientation was vertical) because it was easier to write. Only very rarely was a text written on both sides of the roll (*opistograph*; Rev 5.1; Lucian, *vit. auct.* 9; Pliny, *ep.* 3.5.17; Martial, *Spect.* 8.62; Juvenal, *Sat.* 1.6). Text was written in columns (*paginae*/σελίδες) which ranged from 5 to 10 cm in width and was broken up by inter-columnar margins which tended to be quite thin. In deluxe editions, scrolls might have been fastened and tightly rolled around a wooden roller (*umbilicus*/ὀμφαλός; Horace, *epist.* 14.8; Martial, *Spect.* 4.89) and might contain a visible tag (*titulus*/σίλλυβος) attached to the exterior that contained the title of the work (Cicero, *Att.* 4.8.2: P.Ant. I 21: a tag that contains Πίνδαρος ὅλος ‘The complete Pindar’).

Despite the overwhelming preference in Graeco-Roman society for the roll, which was also shared among Jewish scriptural texts as evinced by the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), early Christian Scriptures were overwhelmingly written in a codex, or book, format (Hurtado 2006:44–53). In fact, it was not until the fourth century in general that the Graeco-Roman world at large began to prefer the codex to the scroll (Roberts and Skeat 1983:35–7). In contrast to the roll, the codex was made of leaves of papyrus (or parchment) fastened together like a modern book and had a precursor in Roman *tabula* where two (*diptych*), or more (*triptych*, *polytych*), wooden plates were fastened together for notebooks (Livy 6.1.2; Quintilian, *inst.* 10.3.31; Martial, *Spect.* 14.184–92; Pliny, *HN* 35.7; Bagnall 2009:70–90). The earliest codices seem to have been single-quire and could hold a maximum of around 250 pages (about 125 leaves) before the spine became strained and a bulge in the centre of the book was created (Skeat 1969:65–7). The earliest single-quire codices that preserve scriptural texts are  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  (Pauline Epistles),  $\mathfrak{P}^{47}$  (Revelation), and  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$  (Luke and John); however, there are also a few early codices that were made of multiple quires like  $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$  (John) and  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  (Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, Acts). Before the fourth century, pandect bibles—which could have contained both the OT and NT

between two covers—were probably non-existent as the codicological technology required to facilitate such a massive tome had not yet been refined and developed.

Many utilitarian reasons have been put forth to explain the early Christian preference for the codex over the roll as the preferred format for scriptural transmission (Hurtado 2006:63–9): it had a practical advantage in terms of cost (Roberts and Skeat 1983:45–53); it was easier to carry and was ideal for evangelization (cf. Martial, *Spect.* 1.2); it more readily facilitated locating scriptural passages (Metzger and Ehrman 2005:12–13); and it was easier to use because it only required one hand and not two. While such reasons may have been contributing factors, none can readily account for the very early, and seemingly widespread, use of the codex by Christians—only a handful of NT papyri were not written in codex format (¶<sup>12, 13, 18, 22, 134</sup>). A fairly recent hypothesis has suggested that because a single codex (multi-quire) could contain far more text than one roll—which could typically contain up to about 1,500 lines—it could accommodate multiple treatises between two covers; thus, the formation of the canon may have been a factor in the choice of the codex (Trobisch 2000; Hurtado 2006:59; Kruger 2013:20–2). As a result, an inherent relationship may have existed between the form and the content and the choice by early Christians to prefer this technology (Table 1.3).

This does not imply, of course, that all early Christian scriptural codices were uniform, since there was variation in size, layout, format, make, and material. The earliest evidence shows that papyrus was the most common material for early Christian Scriptures, although as one moves into the late third, fourth, and subsequent centuries, there is a growing use of parchment (Turner 1977:37–9). While the use of parchment may have expanded because it was more durable than papyrus and was deemed more valuable, it was also considerably more expensive (Kotsifou 2007:61–3; Bagnall 2009:50–69). When Constantine ordered fifty de luxe copies of the ‘sacred Scriptures’ for the churches of Constantinople he specifically instructed that they be made of ‘parchment’ (διφθέρα; Eusebius, *v.C.* 4.36). As the use of parchment evolved, not only were de luxe editions of the Bible written on parchment, but in a few rare cases the parchment was even dyed purple to give it an added aesthetic appeal (Booker 1997). In fact, because parchment was so

**Table 1.3** Extant early Christian literary texts by format

Text	II CE		II/III CE		III CE		III/IV CE	
	Roll	Codex	Roll	Codex	Roll	Codex	Roll	Codex
Septuagint (LXX)	1	3	1	7	4	24	3	15
New Testament	–	3	–	4	4	33	1	8
<i>Shepherd of Hermas</i>	–	–	1	1	2	4	1	1
Patristic Text	–	–	2	–	1	1	1	5
Apocrypha (OT and NT)	1	1	–	3	5	3	1	2
Unidentified Homilies, Commentaries, etc.	1	–	2	2	6	6	6	4

valuable it was periodically reused with the previous underlying text scraped or washed away to prepare for a new text (palimpsest); Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C), a fifth-century biblical manuscript (OT [LXX] and NT), was later erased and reused in the twelfth century for the sermons of St Ephrem.

In terms of size, early Christian scriptural codices varied greatly and ranged from 41 cm in height down to less than 10 cm, and also varied in width. To the end of the third century it appears that on average they tended to be above 20 cm in height (Hurtado 2006:162–3).  $\mathfrak{P}^{45}$  and  $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$ , which sometimes preserve entire pages (with margins), measure about 20 × 25 cm (W × H) and 13.0 × 26.0 cm (W × H) respectively. Likewise,  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  from the first half of the third century measures about 16 × 27 cm (W × H) (Figure 1.1). However, since many of the earliest fragments of Christian Scriptures are quite small, only occupying a portion of a page, reconstructing the contours and dimensions of the codex from which they came can be difficult. A notable feature of some early Christian codices is their tendency to be quite small and so they have been given the designation of ‘miniature’ (Turner 1977:51, defined as less than 10 cm in width). Such codices are mostly made of parchment and contain a high number of texts that came to be deemed ‘non-canonical’ (Kruger 2013:26–7). It has accordingly been suggested that a codex’s size reflected how the manuscript was used; smaller copies were primarily intended for

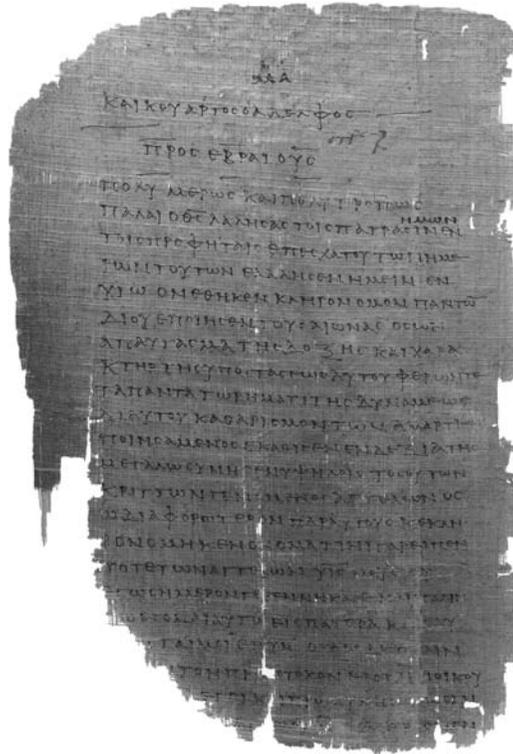


FIGURE 1.1 Page from  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ , end of Romans and start of Hebrews

personal use while larger copies were probably used in communal and liturgical settings (Gamble 1995:236; Hurtado 2011:75).

In terms of page layout, early Christian manuscripts tend to have been written in one column per page with straight margins, giving the text a distinct rectangular or square shape. While there are a few notable exceptions that are written with two columns per page (P<sup>4</sup>, <sup>64</sup>, <sup>67</sup> [late second/early third century CE], 0171 [late second/early third century CE]; probably P<sup>113</sup> [third century CE]), it is not generally until the fourth and subsequent centuries that two-, three-, and even four-column formats become more common in Christian manuscripts: Codex Vaticanus has three columns; Codex Sinaiticus has four columns, and Codex Alexandrinus (A) has two columns as do P<sup>34</sup> (seventh century CE) and P<sup>41</sup> (eighth century CE). The early Coptic and Latin manuscripts likewise employ the single-column format, and in early non-Christian codices of the Roman and Byzantine periods there is also a clear preference for the single-column format (Turner 1977:101–85).

Like other ancient prose texts, a feature of early Christian Scriptures, as well as early Christian texts in general, was that they were written with no word division (*scriptio continua*), at least until the eighth century CE. While some ancient Latin texts initially contained word division, it was not universal, and eventually this habit was given up in order to conform to Greek custom. As a result, the earliest extant Latin biblical texts were written without separation, as were all of the earliest Greek and Coptic manuscripts. Even for a skilled lector, picking up and reading a text smoothly and proficiently at first sight would have been extremely difficult (Criboire 2001:189–90), and persons who could read fluently ‘at sight’ without any previous preparation were deemed exceptional (Petronius, *Sat.* 75.4: *librum ab oculo legit*). Therefore, it is probably best to imagine that lectors of early Christian manuscripts analysed and studied the text before public reading in order to interpret its proper division, prosody, and delivery (Lucian, *De mort. Peregr.* 11; Justin, *1 apol.* 67.1; Tertullian, *praescr.* 41; Hippolytus, *trad.* 11; Cyprian, *ep.* 38.2, 39.1; *Const. App.* 2.47, 8.22; Jerome, *ep.* 147.6). For example, even a familiar passage in English might suddenly become somewhat cryptic when written in this way:

*godsolovedtheworldthathegavehisonlybegottensonthatwhoeverbelievesinhi  
mshouldnotperishbuthaveeternallifeindeedgoddidnotsendthesonintothew  
orldtocondemntheworldbutinorderthattheworldmightbesavedthroughhim*

While *scriptio continua* would have made reading more difficult, as word division facilitates comprehension and interpretation, this generally did not pose significant interpretative difficulties, even if there are places where there is some ambiguity over how to divide words (Metzger and Ehrman 2005:22–3; Mark 10.40, ἀλλ’οἷς ἠτοίμασται or ἄλλοις ἠτοίμασται; Rom 7.14, οἶδαμεν οἱ οἶδα μὲν; 1 Tim 3.16, καὶ ὁμολογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶν οἱ καὶ ὁμολογοῦμεν ὡς μέγα ἐστὶν). Nonetheless, there are some claims that this led to problems: Irenaeus reports how faulty stops, mispronunciations, and the erroneous use of *hyperbaton* led certain readers of the scriptures to heretical interpretations

(*haer.* 3.7.1–2); Augustine likewise recorded how various NT phrases could be erroneously read aloud, leading to unorthodox interpretations if they were not punctuated properly (*doctr. chr.* 3.1–6). By contrast, the Hebrew texts of the DSS were generally written with slight word division as were the LXX texts from Qumran and Naḥal Ḥever (Tov 1990:9–12).

## Other Inscriptional Features

In comparison to modern editions, early Christian biblical manuscripts are quite bare, although in some there are a few extra-textual features that appear to shed light on how these texts were employed and read. Among the earliest Christian manuscripts of the third century is a system of pagination that was placed in the upper margin, either in the centre or outer margin. As Greek employed a system of alphanumerics where every letter had a corresponding numeric value (i.e.  $\alpha = 1, \beta = 2, \gamma = 3$ , etc.), page numbers were simple letter combinations written with a supralinear stroke to indicate that they should be taken as a number (e.g.  $\overline{\kappa\beta} = 23, \overline{\chi\iota\zeta} = 617$ ). While pagination was not very common, as less than 20 per cent of Christian scriptural manuscripts contain it (including the deluxe editions like Codex Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Sarravianus-Colbertinus), its mere presence may suggest that referencing or locating a passage was important in that text (Mugridge 2016:72–5). In a day before versification and chapter division as we have them today, pagination could have greatly facilitated locating passages. As one moves into the fourth and fifth centuries, an early system of chapter division or capitulation (*κεφάλια*) emerges in certain manuscripts, of which the oldest extant system can be found in Codex Vaticanus (not to be confused with modern chapter division in the Bible that was added in the thirteenth century by the Archbishop of Canterbury). Most *κεφάλια* were accompanied by a title (*τίτλος*) that described the chapter (von Soden 1902:405f.). So too, the Eusebian Canons (*κανόνες*), a system designed to identify and locate passages in the four Gospels with either the same or similar content, are attested at this time (Edwards 2010; for details of this system see Eusebius, *ep. Carp.*); it may even be possible that a precursor to the Eusebian system, perhaps based on the parallels and divisions supposedly developed by Ammonius Saccas (c.175–242 CE), can be detected in some third-century papyri (Wayment and Trotter 2016). Finally, prologues (*argumenta/ὑποθέσεις*) began to appear in a few manuscripts, Greek and Latin, beginning in the fifth century.

Within the scriptural text itself, there are also some extra-textual features that served as early reading and/or interpretative aids. In general, there is very little punctuation of any kind in early Christian manuscripts, or Graeco-Roman literature as a whole, before the seventh century CE. Among the earliest forms of punctuation in Christian manuscripts is the use of diaeresis (or *trema*) where two dots were frequently placed above vowels, typically iota and upsilon (e.g.  $\ddot{\iota}$  and  $\ddot{\upsilon}$ ), to make a distinction (*διαίρεσις*) between a single vowel and a diphthong. An apostrophe (') was used to mark elision (typically

gutturals) or the end of a noun that could not be declined (i.e. certain Hebrew names), and rough breathings (‘) sometimes appear to differentiate pronouns from homonyms. In general, accents (acute [ˊ], grave [ˋ], and circumflex [˘]) are absent in early manuscripts until the introduction of ninth-century minuscule (Aland and Aland 1995:128–58). High, medial, and low points (e.g. ˙, ˘, ˙) were used to mark sense breaks, although what exactly the rationale is for the different heights is unclear. Other early ways to signal sense divisions include *ekthesis* (ἐκθεσις) (letters in the line extend into the left margin) or *eisthesis* (εἰσθεσις) (letters in the line are indented), and letters were sometimes written in markedly different sizes (allographs) to indicate breaks in the text (e.g. Α and α, Β and β, etc.). Likewise, there is also the use of *paragraphoi* (παράγραφος) (—) or a forked *paragraphoi* (⚡) to mark division in the text. When such features are present in a manuscript it is best to understand them as lectional aids and that the manuscript in question was used primarily for public reading (Charlesworth 2011; Kloppenborg 2016). Thus, despite the fact that ancient manuscripts generally did not make many concessions to the reader, such markers in select Christian manuscripts, beyond benefiting the liturgical lectors who were reading them, may have also enfranchised a wider group of people into Christian public reading beyond just literary elites (Hurtado 2012).

The most notable, and indeed distinct, of these extra-textual features in Christian manuscripts is the use of the so-called *nomina sacra* in Greek, Latin, and Coptic manuscripts (Traube 1907). Certain ‘sacred names’ like *θεος*, *κύριος*, *ἰησους*, *χριστος*, and *πνευμα* were abbreviated in Christian manuscripts either through suspension or more typically by contraction along with the use of a supralinear stroke (e.g., *θεος* >  $\overline{\theta\varsigma}$ , *ἰησους* >  $\overline{\iota\varsigma}$  or *ιης*, *πνευμα* >  $\overline{\pi\nu\alpha}$ ). Over time other words were added to this compendium: *ανθρωπος*, *πατηρ*, *υιος*, *ισραηλ*, *ουρανος*, *σωτηρ*, and *δαυιδ* (Aland 1976:420–8). In  $\mathfrak{P}^{10}$ , which preserves Romans 1.1–7, there is a very high concentration of *nomina sacra*; in eleven lines of text eighteen *nomina sacra* are employed attesting seven different words: *χριστος*, *ἰησους*, *θεος*, *υιος*, *πνευμα*, *κύριος*, and *πατηρ* (Figure 1.2). The origin of this practice, which is already attested in second-century fragments, is unclear, but may have had its roots in Jewish scribal practice where there was reverence in the textual handling of the tetragrammaton (Tuckett 2003; Hurtado 2006:95–134). The widespread use of *nomina sacra* across Christian manuscripts most likely attests to some degree of organization or even standardization in manuscript production (Charlesworth 2016; Roberts 1979:26–48). A related, though not identical, feature of some early Christian manuscripts ( $\mathfrak{P}^{45, 66, 75}$ ) is the use of the ‘staurogram’ (Ⲟ) in the words ‘cross’ (*σταυρός*) and the verb ‘to crucify’ (*σταυρώω*). Here it is used in place of the letter combination *-ταυρ-* and appears as  $\sigma\overline{\rho}\omicron\varsigma$  or  $\sigma\overline{\rho}\omicron\omega$  (Mugridge 2016:131). While it is not a genuine abbreviation like the *nomina sacra*, since it is not accompanied by a supralinear stroke, it is certainly signalling some kind of attention to the ‘cross/crucifixion’. It may even function as a pictorial representation of the crucifixion, and if so, it is the earliest known depiction (Hurtado 2006:139–52). Christian manuscripts are otherwise devoid of illumination of any kind before the sixth century (i.e. Codex Sinopensis and Codex Rossanensis).

Other features of early Christian manuscripts that deserve brief mention are the presence of titles, colophons, and *hermeneiai*. While it appears that titles of certain

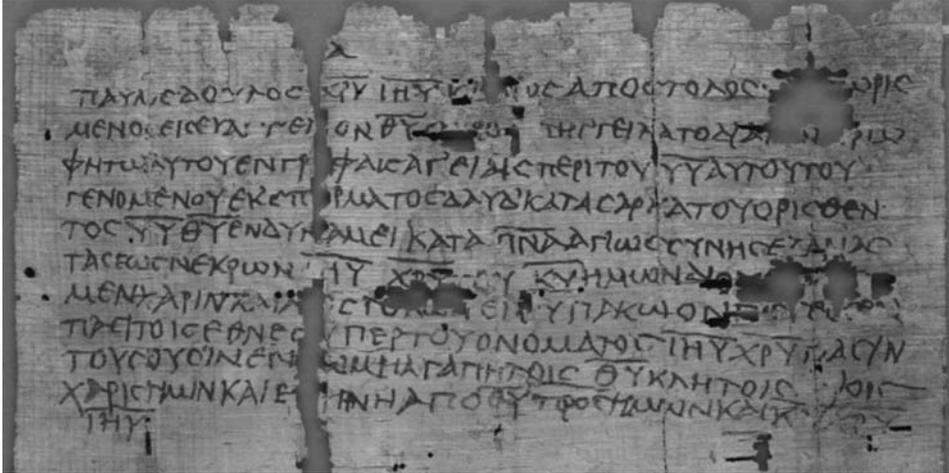


FIGURE 1.2 P.Oxy. III 209 (Ms GR SM 2218), beginning of Rom. 1, high concentration of *nomina sacra*

NT books as we have them today, namely the Gospels, were not originally included (Justin, *1 apol.* 67.1), and books were principally known by their incipits (i.e. first line of text: *αρχη του ευαγγελιου ιησου χριστου* [Mark 1.1]), by the later part of the second century titles are attested (Muratorian Fragment Irenaeus, *haer.* 3.11.8). While many of the early fragments do not contain the beginning or end of a book so that it is not possible to determine whether there is a superscription or a subscription, in some early third-century texts they are present:  $\Psi^{46}$  (*προς εβραιους; προς κορινθους; ἁ προς φιλιππησιους;* etc.);  $\Psi^{66}$  and  $\Psi^{75}$  (*ευαγγελιον κατα ιωαννην*);  $\Psi^{72}$  (*ιουδα επιστολη*). Over time they become greatly expanded and more elaborate as various epithets or other details are attached to the names of biblical authors appearing in the title (Metzger and Ehrman 2005:270–1). Associated with the employment of titles is the adoption of colophons written by the copyist who prepared the manuscript. Before the fourth century there is only one extant colophon that appears in  $\Psi^{72}$  at the end of 1 and 2 Peter, where the copyist wrote: *ειρηνη τω γραψαντι και τω αναγινωσκοντι* ('peace to the one who has written and to him who is reading'). From the fourth century onward colophons began to be more common, lengthy, and descriptive as copyists would include their names, date, divine warnings, descriptions about the production of the text, or in some instances self-deprecating epithets (Wendel 1950; Metzger 1981:20–1; Irenaeus *apud* Eusebius, *h.e.* 5.20.2). Finally, a few of the earliest manuscripts contain *hermeneiai* (*ἐρμηνεῖαι*) or 'interpretations', the earliest of which may occur in  $\Psi^{80}$ , a small fragment once dated to the later part of the third century CE but now believed to be later (Orsini and Clarysse 2012:459–60) and which contains John 3.34. After the scriptural passage there is a pithy statement that reads: *ερμηνια αληθη εστιν τα λ[ελαλημενα] παρ αυτου εαν σ[υ εν αυτοις] ωφεληθηση*  $\ddagger$  ('Interpretation: the things that have been spoken by him are true if you will be benefited in them  $\ddagger$ '). Thus, one can detect in such *hermeneiai* a rudimentary reflection on the passage in question (Jones 2014).

## SCRIBES AND SCRIPTORIA

While it is common to talk about the copyists and transmitters of early Christian Scriptures and other literature as ‘scribes’, this designation is quite generic, as there was a wide range of terms (both Greek and Latin) used in antiquity for persons involved in scribal activities (Haines-Eitzen 2000:21–40). Though the most common word used for ‘scribes’ (*scribae*; γραμματεῖς) can imply literary activity, one of the principal meanings of those so identified in Graeco-Roman society had to do with administration and clerking (see Acts 19.35, where the title is principally used for a city administrator). Thus, many different persons such as local administrators, clerks, secretaries, accountants, and in some circumstances even slaves (Cicero, *Att.* 13.3), performed scribal activities. On the other hand, there were terms used for what may be regarded as ‘professional scribes’ (*librarii*; βιβλιογράφοι; καλλιγράφοι), whose primary task was to copy and prepare manuscripts for a wealthy patron, a library, or a book dealer (*bibliopola*; βιβλιοκάπηλος). The difference between ‘scribes’ and the scribal products of others is illustrated in the price edict of Diocletian from 301 CE, where the Emperor stipulates how much ‘scribes’ can charge: ‘To a scribe (*scriptor*): 25 denarii for 100 lines of first-rate bookhand; 20 denarii for 110 lines in second rate bookhand; to a notary writing petitions or deeds, 10 denarii for 100 lines’ (*Edictum de pretiis rerum venalium* 7.39–41). Bearing this in mind, and coupled with a general reticence in Christian sources for the first couple of centuries regarding who was actually copying and producing texts, it begs the question of what kind of ‘scribes’ were copying and producing early Christian manuscripts.

In the NT itself there are indirect references to the employment of ‘scribes’ in the production of various books (Rom 16.22; Gal 6.11; Richards 2004:81–93), but the references provide little information regarding who they actually were and in what capacity they functioned with respect to the production of the book in question. At the start of the second century Lucian of Samosata makes a passing remark about Christian ‘scribes’ (γραμματεῖς), but it is not directly associated with the production of manuscripts (*De mort. Peregr.* 11). The only Christian reference to the copying of a text in the second century is found in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, where Hermas reports that he copied a book ‘letter by letter, for I could not distinguish the syllables’ (*Vis.* 2.1.4). Hermas, who is nowhere in the text described as a trained scribe, acted as his own copyist; when he was finished, he began circulating copies among the Church in Rome (*vis.* 2.4.3). The picture that emerges from the *Shepherd of Hermas* is one of private copying (and circulation). Likewise, as one moves into the early third century, a similar scenario is presented; during the episcopate of Zephyrinus (bishop of Rome c.198–217 CE) a story is alleged of two laymen (one of whom was a banker) who made various copies of the Scriptures, albeit corrupt, and circulated them (Eusebius, *h.e.* 5.28).

Turning to the earliest extant manuscript evidence from the second and early third century, all signs point to the fact that these were not ‘professional’ productions akin to some of the noteworthy specimens of classical literature. The scripts of the earliest

manuscript are not written with a professional ‘bookhand’ but rather in what has been described as a ‘reformed documentary’ hand (Roberts 1979:12–17), implying that the producers of such manuscripts were not trained calligraphers or well accustomed to producing books. This does not imply that such manuscripts were necessarily of low quality, or that those who produced them were unskilled, but it does indicate something about the status of the first Christian copyists and the context in which these manuscripts were most likely produced. For the first few centuries it is probably best to imagine that Christian scribes who copied Scriptures were not professional copyists involved in the commercial book trade but rather ‘multifunctional scribes’ who worked in a number of different literary spheres (clerks, secretaries, registrars, low-level administration, etc.) and could copy scriptural texts (Haines-Eitzen 2000:68). Thus, it seems likely that many early Christians self-produced their texts individually, in small private ‘scribal’ networks, or in local communities and congregations. Based on the available evidence, this model appears to have been in operation at Oxyrhynchus even into the latter part of the third century (Luijendijk 2008:144–51). Though it has been argued that early Christian manuscripts must have been created in a somewhat controlled context because they share certain conventions (Charlesworth 2011), it needs to be remembered that all the early evidence comes from Egypt so that we are not privy to any widespread geographical diversity.

Where the earliest Christians copied their texts is also a matter of some speculation and debate. While it was once supposed that early copies of the Scriptures were produced in ‘scriptoria’ akin to the early medieval model, where a reader (*lector*, ἀναγνώστης) would read (or cantillate) the Scriptures and monks would simultaneously copy manuscripts under close supervision of a monastic superior (*praepositus*; ἡγούμενος), such a view is anachronistic for the first four or five centuries. By the sixth century there is evidence for Christian scriptoria closer to this model (Cassiodorus, *inst.* 1.15, 30; Mugridge 2004), but the early evidence is piecemeal and even the term ‘scriptoria’ poses a problem of definition (Gamble 1995:191). Derived from the Latin term *scriptorius*, this term is not used in the context of a ‘scriptoria’ or ‘writing room’ until the tenth or eleventh century (Niermeyer and Van de Kieft 2002:1236). Likewise, there is no corresponding Greek term that is used in early Christian sources; the closest term could perhaps be γραφεῖον, which served as a registry or record office, but there is no early evidence that it was ever used by Christians for a scriptorium. Furthermore, while it is often taken for granted that Alexandria, Caesarea, Jerusalem, or Rome had Christian scriptoria from at least the second century (Zuntz 1953), the actual evidence is elusive. All the same, as some early manuscripts show signs of correction, it should be assumed that there were some early controls over the production process (Charlesworth 2016), but this need not be anything more than a fellow copyist or proof reader (*anagnosta*; διορθωτής) checking the text and need not imply that a large editorial apparatus was in place.

By the later part of the fourth century things would change significantly, and the manuscript evidence provided by Codex Vaticanus and especially Codex Sinaiticus reveals a formal process of revision and correction that was carried out during and after the manuscript was completed (Jongkind 2007). In fact, over time a whole system of

scribal sigla and notations were developed and added to manuscripts marking errors, omissions, additions, or general questions about the manuscript (Mugridge 2016:101–6). So too, a notation system was even developed marking passages of contested authenticity beginning in the third century. Origen, for example, noted that an obelus (ὀβελός; e.g. —, —̄, ⁂) or an asterisk (ἀστειρίσκος; e.g. ✱) marked passages in the LXX (and Hebrew) whose origin was in dispute (Origen, *comm. in Matt.* 15.14); some of these notations can be found in early Christian manuscripts of the LXX (Schironi 2015). On the other hand, in Codex Sinaiticus one of the correctors of the manuscript placed a series of dots around Luke 22.43–44 (fol. 244b col. 3), which was originally included in the manuscript, to mark the passage as spurious or perhaps even remove it altogether. This is interesting since about this time there was much debate over whether or not Luke 22.43–4 was authentic (Epiphanius, *anc.* 31.4–5; Hilary, *trin.* 10.41.1; Jerome, *Pelag.* 2.16; Blumell 2014). All of this suggests some textual controls were in force during and after manuscripts were produced; but this did not stop persons from making their own copies of Scriptures much to the chagrin of certain ecclesiastical leaders (Augustine, *doctr. chr.* 2.11.16). Likewise, ancient Christian literature is replete with warnings, complaints, and allegations of faulty transmission and scriptural corruption (Rev 22.18; Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.8.1; Eusebius, *h.e.* 4.23.12, 5.28.13–17; Tertullian, *praescr.* 38, *Marc.* 4.2; Origen, *comm. in Matt.* 15.14, *Cels.* 2.27; Lactantius, *div. inst.* 4.30; Julian, *Galil.* 327A; Cyril, *catech.* 1.7; Ambrose, *fid.* 5.16; Chrysostom, *hom. in Phil.* 11; Jerome, *praef. in libro Iob* 41–8; Augustine, *Conf.* 5.11, 21; Socrates, *h.e.* 7.32). Of course, the manuscripts themselves also attest to a wide range of variants. But this does not imply that they were recklessly produced; while corruptions do occur, both intentional and unintentional, and scribes could have a bad reputation (LXX Jer 8.8), the extant manuscript remains do usually show great care in their production. It has been noted that if there is any tendency by early Christian scribes copying scriptural texts it is that they tended to shorten the text rather than add to it (Royse 2007:705–36).

In terms of how early Christians copied their manuscripts there is little direct evidence. To be sure, a copyist would have required the essential tools of the scribal trade like a reed pen (κάλαμος or δόναξ), a sharpening knife (σμίλη), a sponge (σπογγιά) for erasures and wiping the pen, ink (*atramentum/μέλαν*), which was typically dark brown or black, and an ink well (*atramentarium/μελανοδοχεῖον*) for storage. But the exact method by which the early copyists carried out their work is a matter of some conjecture since there is virtually no evidence for the use of tables, desks, or chairs aside from much later anachronistic depictions of how early Christians supposedly produced their texts. Based on much earlier pre-Christian evidence it appears that copyists would sit on the ground or on a stool and rest the section of the codex or roll upon their knee (Skeat 2004:1–10). The extant evidence suggests that production was done primarily by copying from an exemplar instead of having a text read aloud and writing down what one heard; in fact, some of the variants that appear in early manuscripts can be easily attributed to transcriptional errors (i.e. haplography, dittography, homoioteleuton, etc.; cf. Origen, *comm. in Matt.* 15.14). Hermas reports copying his text ‘letter by letter’ (*vis.* 2.1.4), showing he was working from an exemplar. In a colophon of one of the works of Irenaeus preserved

by Eusebius (*h.e.* 5.20.2), the copyist is warned carefully and faithfully to reproduce the text and ‘collate’ (*ἀντιβάλλειν*) it against the exemplar: the colophon presupposes the transcription will be the work of a single scribe copying from an exemplar. Likewise, the recording of *stichoi* (*versus*; *στίχοι*)—a line that usually measured between fifteen or sixteen syllables and was roughly the same length as a hexameter verse—at the end of certain early copies of NT manuscripts suggests they were copied visually from an exemplar (Ψ<sup>46</sup>; Houghton 2016:21). But this does not imply that dictation was never used in the copying process. In the detached portion of Codex Sinaiticus (i.e. Codex Frederico-Augustanus) there are two scribal notes, one at the end of 2 Esdras and the other at the end of Esther. These claim that certain portions were collated against a much earlier autograph manuscript made by Pamphilus of Caesarea (d. 16 Feb. 309 CE), and at the end of that manuscript the notes record the following colophon purportedly given by Pamphilus himself: ‘This volume has been transcribed from, and corrected by the Hexapla of Origen, as corrected by his own hand. Antoninus, the confessor, collated (*ἀντέβαλεν*), and I, Pamphilus, corrected (*διόρθωσα*) the volume in prison, by the favour and enlargement of God’ (Skeat 2004:18; Grafton and Williams 2006:186) (Figure 1.3).

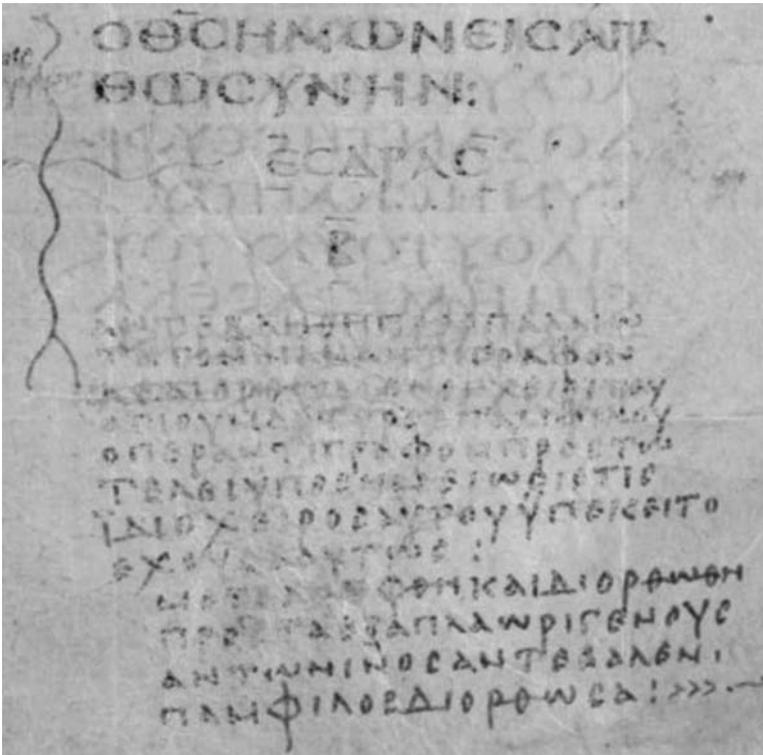


FIGURE 1.3 Colophon by Pamphilus as preserved by Codex Sinaiticus (2 Esdras: Quire 36 fol. 5r col. 3)

Taking the colophon at face value, Antoninus appears to have read the text while Pamphilus made corrections and copied. Thus, while the early use of dictation does not seem to have been especially prevalent, when multiple scribes were involved in the production of a text some dictation may have been involved in various stages. Furthermore, as dictation of certain kinds of texts (namely letters) was common in the ancient world (Cicero, *Att.* 2.23; 3.15.8; 7.13; 8.15; 12.32.1; 13.32; Pliny, *HN* 7.91; Plutarch, *Caes.* 17.7; Fronto, *Ep. Ad Marcum Caesarem.* 4.7), and it is evident from various sources that Christian sermons, lectures, homilies, dialogues, and commentaries could be transcribed *viva voce* (Rufinus, *hist.* 11.7; Jerome, *Ephes.* 2; Socrates, *h.e.* 6.4; Augustine, *ep.* 174 and *retract.* 2.41), dictation may well have been used at times in the production of some early biblical manuscripts (Skeat 2004:15–24).

With the onset of the third century the evidence begins to suggest a more ‘professional’ publication process of Christian Scripture in Christian centres. The rise of ecclesiastical libraries in the third century would have naturally facilitated the production of manuscripts (Jerusalem: *h.e.* 6.20.1; Caesarea: *h.e.* 7.32.25; Grafton and Williams 2006:56–69; Williams 2006:136–66). The most often cited passage attesting this comes from Eusebius, when describing the literary resources available to Origen at the library of Caesarea c.232 CE: ‘For as he dictated there were ready at hand more than seven shorthand-writers (*ταχυγράφοι*), who relieved each other at fixed times, and as many copyists (*βιβλιογράφοι*), as well as girls trained for beautiful writing (*καλλιγράφοι*)...’ (*h.e.* 6.23; cf. Epiphanius, *haer.* 64.3.5). While this scenario is unique, and Origen is not dictating verbatim the Scriptures for copying purposes, but rather lecturing, it certainly highlights that by the third century Christian texts could be produced in a more ‘professional’ manner. As Christian libraries developed and grew in the third and especially fourth centuries there would naturally be an association with the production of Christian Scripture and books in general (Jerome, *ep.* 49.3). It is clear that some notable libraries possessed a staff who not only maintained the collection but also copied and recopied the texts; in c.350 CE the library at Caesarea was recopied *en masse* by Euzoius and his staff because the books were becoming worn out (Jerome, *vir. ill.* 113.1). On this final point, while little is known with certainty about the average shelf life of a manuscript in the ancient world, there is some indication that in exceptional cases they could remain in use for upwards of two centuries (Houston 2009:248–51; Evans 2015).

As with ecclesiastical libraries, churches were often places where Scriptures were read and may even have been produced (Markschies 2015:266–80). Churches possessed collections of books, and in fact, the first edict of the ‘Great Persecution’ issued by Diocletian in February of 303 CE presumed that churches were places where books could be found (Eusebius, *h.e.* 8.2.4; *Gesta apud Zenophilum* 186.20–4; cf. P.Oxy. XXXIII 2673 and Choat and Yuen-Collingridge 2009). A unique papyrus from the seventh or eighth century provides a fragmentary inventory of a church’s collection of books from somewhere in Egypt (P.Lugd.Bat. XXV 13); while the inventory is dominated by NT books, it also lists a number of patristic texts by authors such as Serapion (of Thmuis), Basil, Chrysostom, and Gregory (of Nazianzus), and the books are divided

between parchment and papyrus manuscripts. By the later fourth century, monks, and by extension monasteries, were the principal vehicles for the production of Christian Scriptures (Kotsifou 2007; Maravela-Solbakk 2008; Robinson 2011:130–43); there are various references to monks copying scriptural texts from the fourth century onward (Rufinus, *apol.* 2.11; Palladius, *h. Laus.* 32, 38; Athanasius, *apol. Const.* 4). Some monasteries even had ‘professional scribes’ (καλλιγράφοι) in connection to their libraries (V. Pach. 40; Palladius, *h. Laus.* 32.12). Monks copied texts for themselves, friends, their monastic library, and might even carry out this work on a commercial basis (Palladius, *h. Laus.* 7.4; Rapp 1991:134–6). At present the best manuscript evidence for the actual production of biblical texts at a monastery comes from Naqlun just south of the Fayum (Egypt) that has yielded a number of texts from the sixth century (Derda 1995). Finally, bookshops became a place where scriptural manuscripts could be purchased and made to order (Trobisch 2000; Casson 2001:78; Augustine, *serm.* 114B.15, 198.20; *Psal.* 36.1).

## CIRCULATION OF MANUSCRIPTS

Paul’s letters give the impression that texts were primarily circulated by co-workers and associates and were then publicly read in groups or congregations (Rom 16.1, 2 Cor 2.9; Eph 6.21, Col 4.7, 16, 1 Thess 5.27, 2 Pet 3.15–16). Ignatius’ letters from the start of the second century seem to have circulated following a similar pattern (*Philad.* 13.1–2), and Hermas gives his revelation to two associates who in turn circulate it to other congregations by having it read aloud (*vis.* 2.4.3). In certain respects, the picture that emerges of the early circulation of Christian texts, where they were initially exchanged in smaller networks among immediate associates, appears to mirror the early scribal networks in which manuscripts were produced. Nonetheless, there is some evidence that texts could still circulate far and wide in a relatively short period of time after production. For example, a second- or early third-century fragment of Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. III 405) might suggest the rapid dissemination and circulation of this text from Gaul to Egypt shortly after it was written (Roberts 1979:53; Blumell and Wayment 2015:287–90). Likewise, the account of the ‘Martyrs of Lugdunum’ (Lyons) preserved in Book Five of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* from the latter part of the second century reveals that communities as far apart as Gaul and Asia Minor were exchanging texts (Eusebius, *h.e.* 5.1.1–3).

Moving into the third and fourth centuries one can detect greater circulation and dissemination of Christian manuscripts corresponding with the emergence of large-scale ecclesiastical networks. The evidence provided by the third-century episcopal correspondence of Dionysius of Alexandria, Fabian of Antioch, Sixtus of Rome, and Cyprian of Carthage reveals that letters and texts were moving all over the empire (Eusebius, *h.e.* 6.40.1; 6.46.1–5; 7.3.1; Cyprian, *ep.* 44–5, 47–50, 57, 59, 60). Major centres (i.e. Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, etc.) served as hubs of communication and correspondence from which

texts of all kinds were disseminated and relayed to surrounding regions. Here it may be noted that for the first few centuries, Christian expansion, and by extension the circulation of texts, appears to have moved along pre-existing lines of communication and commerce in the larger Roman Empire where major cities were vital nodes in that process (Stark 2006:8–13, 63–83).

In the first part of the fourth century the epistolary and pamphleteering war carried out between Arius and Alexander demonstrates not only the extent of Christian networks but also how quickly and widely texts could circulate. Furthermore, Constantine's request (c.335 CE) for fifty complete bibles (OT and NT) to be prepared in Caesarea and sent to Constantinople not only attests to how, under special circumstances, copies of the Scriptures could circulate, but it also highlights an innovation that had potential implications for how Christian texts in the future could be rapidly transported via the *cursus publicus* ('imperial post') (Eusebius, *v.C.* 4.36; cf. Eusebius, *v.C.* 3.6; cf. Ammianus Marcellinus 21.16.18). Similarly, just a few years later (c.341) Athanasius was given orders by Constans to prepare copies of the Scriptures and to send them (*apol. Const.* 4.2). Notwithstanding these examples of long-distance textual dissemination and circulation, many manuscripts probably circulated primarily on a more regional level among local congregations or networks of friends and associates. For example, P.Oxy. LXIII 4365 (Figure 1.4), an early fourth-century letter, preserves a note exchanged between two women (?) from Oxyrhynchus or its environs that details the circulation of scriptural texts locally: 'To my dearest lady sister, greetings in the Lord. Lend the Ezra, since I lent you the little Genesis (i.e. book of Jubilees). Farewell in God from us.' Likewise, there is evidence that monasteries in close geographical proximity exchanged and lent copies of the Scriptures (Kotsifou 2007; Maravela-Solbakk 2008).

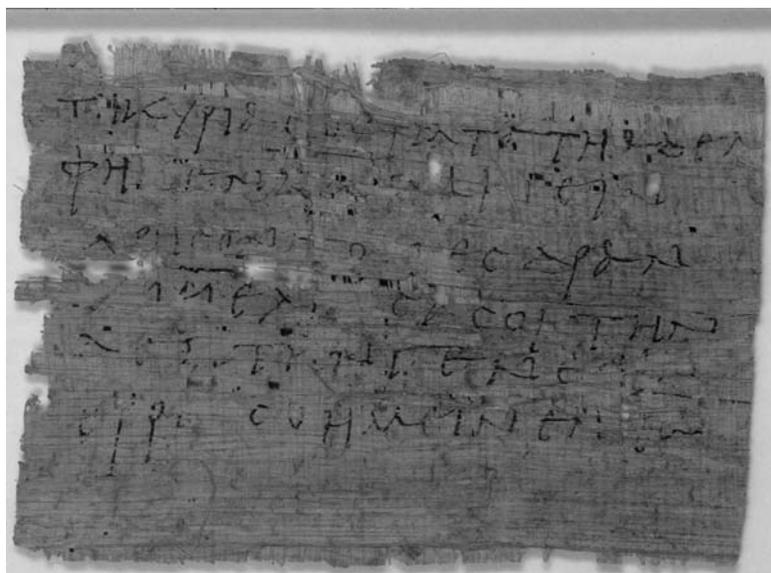


FIGURE 1.4 P.Oxy. LXIII 4365

## CONCLUSION

---

Even apart from the texts they transmit, early Christian scriptural remains can reveal something about those who produced, read, and interpreted them. In overwhelming numbers early Christians opted to transmit their sacred texts in codex form at a time when scrolls were still the dominant medium for literary works of all kinds; whatever the exact reason(s) for preferring this choice of technology, the extant evidence suggests that Christians adapted and perhaps even contributed to the advancement of this technology. The culmination of this process was the great multi-quire pandect Bibles of the fourth century that could fit the entire Christian scriptural canon between two covers. Related to this codicological innovation was the development of various tools and an emerging apparatus and textual presentation that enhanced scriptural searching, cross-referencing, comparison, analysis, and paved the way for more advanced interpretative approaches. At the same time, the presence of lectional and interpretative aids and markers of various kinds not only shed light on how Christians were actually reading the text, but suggests that such texts were intended to be read publicly before an audience or congregation. The presence of *nomina sacra* probably reflects early Christian veneration, or at least reverence, for the realities they abbreviated; and the use of the stauogram, apart from being perhaps the earliest pictorial depiction of the crucifixion, might also reveal an early devotion to the cross in Christian texts. These features readily demonstrate that even apart from the text that these early fragments and manuscripts preserve and transmit, which is of no little significance, the medium is indeed an artefact, worthy of study in its own right and capable of shedding additional light on the larger interpretative and hermeneutical context of early Christianity. Through these early fragments and manuscripts not only do we get an idea of the *mise-en-page* of the scriptural texts that the likes of Justin, Origen, Eusebius, Athanasius, Jerome, and others may have read, but they may also provide some indications and insights into how early Christians interpreted them.

## REFERENCES

---

- Aland, K. (1976). *Repertorium der griechischen christlichen Papyri*, vol. 1, *Biblische Papyri* (Berlin: de Gruyter).
- Aland, K., and Aland, B. (1995). *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. E. F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing).
- Bagnall, R. S. (2009). *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Blumell, L. H. (2012). *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (Leiden: Brill).
- Blumell, L. H. (2014). 'Luke 22:43–44: An Anti-Docetic Interpolation or an Apologetic Omission?', *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 19: 1–35.
- Blumell, L. H., and Wayment, T. A. (2015). *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press).

- Booker, C. M. (1997). 'The "Codex Purpureus" and its Role as "Imago Regis" in Late Antiquity', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 8 (Brussels: Peeters), 441–77.
- Brock, S. (2012). 'A Tentative Checklist of Dated Syriac Manuscripts to 1300', *Hugoye* 15: 21–48.
- Casson, L. (2001). *Libraries in the Ancient World* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Cavallo, G. (2009). 'Greek and Latin Writing in the Papyri', in R. S. Bagnall (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 101–48.
- Charlesworth, S. C. (2011). 'Public and Private—Second- and Third-Century Gospel Manuscripts', in H. D. Zakarias and C. A. Evans (eds), *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (London and New York: T&T Clark), 148–75.
- Charlesworth, S. C. (2016). *Early Christian Gospels: Their Production and Transmission* (Florence: Edizioni Gonnelli).
- Choat, M. (2012). 'Coptic', in C. Riggs (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 581–93.
- Choat, M., and Yuen-Collingridge, P. (2009). 'A Church with No Books and a Reader Who Cannot Write: The Strange Case of P.Oxy. 33.2673', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 46: 109–38.
- Criamore, R. (2001). *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Derda, T. (1995). *Deir El-Naqlun: The Greek Papyri* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego).
- Edwards, J. R. (2010). 'The Hermeneutical Significance of Chapter Divisions in Ancient Gospel Manuscripts', *NTS* 56: 413–26.
- Evans, C. A. (2015). 'How Long were Late Antique Books in Use? Possible Implications for New Testament Textual Criticism', *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 25 (2): 23–37.
- Fraenkel, D. (2004) (ed.). *Verzeichnis der griechischen Handschriften des Alten Testaments, Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum, Supplementum vol. I, 1 Die Überlieferung bis zum VIII Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Gamble, H. Y. (1995). *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Grafton, A., and Williams, M. (2006). *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Gregory, C. R. (1908). *Die griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments* (Leipzig: J. C. Heinrich).
- Haines-Eitzen, K. (2000). *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Holmes, M. W. (2007). *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*. 3rd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic).
- Houghton, H. A. G. (2016). *The Latin New Testament: A Guide to its Early History, Texts, and Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Houston, G. W. (2009). 'Papyrological Evidence for Book Collections and Libraries in the Roman Empire', in W. Johnson and H. N. Parker (eds), *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 233–67.
- Hurtado, L. W. (2006). *The Earliest Christian Artefacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing).
- Hurtado, L. W. (2011). 'Early Christian Manuscripts as Artifacts', in H. D. Zakarias and C. A. Evans (eds), *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (London and New York: T&T Clark), 66–81.

- Hurtado, L. W. (2012). 'Manuscripts and the Sociology of Early Christian Reading,' in C. E. Hill and M. J. Kruger (eds), *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 49–62.
- Jaroš, K. (2006) (ed.). *Das Neue Testament nach den ältesten griechischen Handschriften: Die handschriftliche Überlieferung des Neuen Testaments vor Codex Sinaiticus und Codex Vaticanus* (Ruhpolding and Mainz: Franz Philipp. Rutzen).
- Jensen, R. M. (2000). *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge).
- Johnson, W. (2004). *Bookrolls and Scribes in Oxyrhynchus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).
- Jones, B. C. (2014). 'A Coptic Fragment of the Gospel of John with Hermeneiai (P.CtYBR inv. 4641)', *NTS* 60: 202–14.
- Jongkind, D. (2007). *Scribal Habits of Codex Sinaiticus* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press).
- Kim, Y. K. (1988). 'Palaeographical Dating of  $\Psi^{46}$  to the Later First Century', *Biblica* 69: 248–57.
- Kloppenborg, J. S. (2016). 'Greco-Roman Egypt and Related Fields: New Testament Studies,' in K. Katelijn Vandorpe (ed.), *A Companion to Greco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell).
- Kotsifou, C. (2007). 'Books and Book Production in the Monastic Communities of Byzantine Egypt,' in W. E. Klingshirn and L. Safran (eds), *The Early Christian Book* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press), 54–66.
- Kruger, M. J. (2013). 'Manuscripts, Scribes and Book Production within Early Christianity,' in S. E. Porter and A. W. Pitts (eds), *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill), 15–40.
- Lewis, N. (1974). *Papyrus in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Luijendijk, A. M. (2008). *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- McKenzie, J. S., and Watson, F. (2016). *The Garima Gospels: Early Illuminated Gospel Books from Ethiopia* (Oxford: Manar al-Athar, University of Oxford).
- Maravela-Solbakk, A. (2008). 'Monastic Book Production in Christian Egypt,' in H. Froschauer and C. Römer (eds), *Spätantike Bibliotheken: Leben und Lesen in den frühen Klöstern Ägyptens* (Vienna: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek), 25–38.
- Markschies, C. (2015). *Christian Theology and its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire: Prolegomena to a History of Early Christian Theology*, trans. W. Coppins (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press).
- Metzger, B. M. (1977). *The Earliest Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Metzger, B. M. (1981). *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Paleography* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Metzger, B. M., and Ehrman, B. D. (2005). *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Mugridge, A. (2004). 'What is a Scriptorium?', in J. Frösén, T. Purola, and E. Salmenkivi (eds), *Proceedings of the 24th Congress of Papyrology, Helsinki, 1–7 August, 2004* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica), 781–92.
- Mugridge, A. (2016). *Copying Early Christian Texts: A Study of Scribal Practice* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Niermeyer, J. F., and Van de Kieft, C. (2002). *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*. rev. edn by J. W. J. Burgers (Leiden: Brill).

- Nongbri, B. (2005). 'The Use and Abuse of P<sup>52</sup>: Papyrological Pitfalls in the Dating of the Fourth Gospel', *HTR* 98: 23–48.
- O'Callaghan, J. (1972). '¿Papiros neotestamentarios en la Cueva 7 de Qumran?', *Biblica* 53: 93–100.
- Orsini, P., and Clarysse, W. (2012). 'Early New Testament Manuscripts and their Dates: A Critique of Theological Paleography', *ETL* 88.4: 443–74.
- Parsons, P. (2007). *City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish: Greek Lives in Roman Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson).
- Rapp, C. (1991). 'Christians and their Manuscripts in the Greek East in the Fourth Century', in G. Cavallo et al. (eds), *Scritture, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo), 127–48.
- Richards, E. R. (2004). *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).
- Roberts, C. H. (1979). *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press).
- Roberts, C. H., and Skeat, T. C. (1983). *The Birth of the Codex* (London: Oxford University Press).
- Robinson, J. A. (2011). *The Story of the Bodmer Papyri: From the First Monastery's Library in Upper Egypt to Geneva and Dublin* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books).
- Royse, J. R. (2007). *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (Leiden: Brill).
- Schironi, F. (2015). 'P.Grenf. 1.5, Origen, and the Scriptorium of Caesarea', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 52: 181–223.
- Skeat, T. C. (1969). 'Early Christian Book-Production: Papyri and Manuscripts', in G. W. H. Lampe (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 54–79.
- Skeat, T. C. (2004). 'The Use of Dictation in Ancient Book-Production', in J. K. Elliott (ed.), *The Collected Biblical Writings of T. C. Skeat* (Leiden: Brill), 1–32.
- Snyder, G. F. (2003). *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press).
- Soden, H. von (1902). *Die Schriften des Testaments in ihrer ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt* (Berlin: Alexander Duncker).
- Spier, J. (2007) (ed.). *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Stark, R. (2006). *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco).
- Tabbernee, W. (2008). 'Epigraphy', in S. A. Harvey and D. G. Hunter (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Tepper, Y., and Di Segni, L. (2006). *A Christian Prayer Hall of the Third Century CE at Kefar Othnay (Legio)* (Jerusalem: The Israel Antiquities Authority).
- Tov, E. (1990). *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Nahal Hever: 8 Hev XII gr.* Discoveries in the Judean Desert 8 (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Traube, L. (1907). *Nomina sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der Christlichen Kürzung* (Munich: Beck).
- Trobisch, D. (2000). *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Tuckett, C. M. (2003). '"Nomina Sacra": Yes or No?', in J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge, *The Biblical Canons* (Leuven: Leuven University Press).
- Turner, E. G. (1977). *The Typology of the Early Codex* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).

- Wayment, T. A., and Trotter, M. R. (2016). 'P.Oxy. LXIV 4405: An Early Witness to a System of Textual Division at Oxyrhynchus', in T. Derda et al. (eds), *Proceedings of the 27th International Congress of Papyrology, Warsaw, 29 July–3 August 2013*, vol. 3, *Studying Papyri* (Warsaw: The Raphael Taubenschlag Foundation), 1231–43.
- Wendel, C. (1950). 'Die *ταπεινότης* des griechischen Schreibermonches', *ByzZ* 43: 259–66.
- White, L. M. (1997). *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, vol. 2, *Texts and Monuments for the Christian Domus Ecclesiae in its Environment* (Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press International).
- Williams, M. H. (2006). *The Monk and the Book: Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press).
- Wilson, N. (1983). *Scholars of Byzantium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).
- Zuntz, G. (1953). *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum* (London: Oxford University Press).

### Suggested Reading

Metzger (1981) provides a concise study of biblical manuscripts along with noteworthy scribal features. Comfort and Barrett (2001) present editions of many NT papyri but their palaeographic assessments and conclusions cannot always be taken at face value; Orsini and Clarysse (2012) are more reliable. Skeat (1969) is still very useful regarding the production of early Christian manuscripts. On the economics behind ancient Christian book production Bagnall (2009) makes a number of important contributions. The classic study for early Christian textual remains in Egypt is still Roberts (1979); more recently see Hurtado (2006). For an overview and analysis with text and translation of the Oxyrhynchus Christian remains to the fourth century see Blumell and Wayment (2015); for the larger Christian contexts of the Oxyrhynchus finds see Luijendijk (2008) and Blumell (2012). Charlesworth (2016) and Murgridge (2016) provide thorough treatments of early Christian scribal habits and manuscript features. On the scribal context(s) in which early Christians produced their manuscripts Haines-Eitzen (2000) is useful; for textual habits of early Christian scribes Royse (2007) is essential. Though dated in certain areas, Van Haelst (1976) is still helpful regarding the range and types of early Christian textual artefacts. Gamble's (1995) study of the early literary culture of Christianity is both wide ranging and insightful; more recently see Grafton and Williams (2006). The textual remains of early Christian apocrypha are succinctly treated by Wayment (2013); Jones (2016) concisely presents amulets from late antiquity containing NT passages.

- Barker, D. (2006). 'Codex, Roll, and Libraries in Oxyrhynchus', *Tyndale Bulletin* 57: 131–48.
- Bausi, A., and Camplani, A. (2013). 'New Ethiopic Documents for the History of Christian Egypt', *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 17 (2): 215–47.
- Blank, H. (1992). *Das Buch in der Antike* (Munich: Beck).
- Bucking, S. (1997). 'Christian Educational Texts from Egypt: A Preliminary Inventory', in B. Kramer (ed.), *Akten Des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin 1995* (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner), 132–8.
- Comfort, P. W., and Barrett, D. P. (2001). *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts: New and Complete Transcriptions with Photographs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers).

- Haelst, J. van. (1976). *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne).
- Harris, W. (1989). *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Houston, G. W. (2014). *Inside Roman Libraries: Book Collection and their Management in Antiquity* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press).
- Jones, B. C. (2016). *New Testament Texts on Greek Amulets from Late Antiquity* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark).
- Kenyon, F. G. (1932). *Books and Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome*. 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Luijendijk, A. M. (2010). 'Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus,' *VC* 64: 217–54.
- McGurk, P. (1961). *Latin Gospel Books from AD 400 to AD 800* (Paris: Aux Éditions 'Érasme').
- Mclay, R. T. (2003). *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing).
- Maehler, H. (1997). 'Byzantine Egypt: Urban Elites and Book Production,' *Dialogos* 4: 118–36.
- Martinez, D. (2009). 'The Papyri and Early Christianity,' in R. S. Bagnall (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 590–622.
- Paap, A. H. R. E. (1959). *Nomina Sacra in the Greek Papyri of the First Five Centuries* (Leiden: E. J. Brill).
- Parsons, P. (2011). 'A People of the Book?,' in G. Bastianini and A. Casanova (eds), *I papiri letterari Cristiani* (Florence: Istituto Papirologico G. 'Vitelli').
- Schubart, W. (1962). *Das Buch bei den Griechen und Römern*. 2nd edn (Heidelberg: Schneider).
- Wayment, T. A. (2013). *The Text of the New Testament Apocrypha (100–400 CE)* (New York and London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark).

## Websites

- 'The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts,' D. B. Wallace, Plano, TX: <<http://www.csntm.org>>.
- 'Codex Sinaiticus,' British Library and Partners: <<http://www.codex-sinaiticus.net/en/>>.
- 'The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library,' Israel Antiquities Authority, Israel: <<http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/home>>.
- 'Leuven Database of Ancient Books,' W. Clarysse, Belgium: <<http://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/>>.
- 'New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room,' Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung: <<http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/home>>.
- 'Papyri.info,' The Duke Collaboratory for Classics Computing & the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World: <<http://papyri.info>>.
- 'POxy: Oxyrhynchus Online,' Oxford University, the Oxyrhynchus Papyri: <<http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/>>.

## CHAPTER 2

---

# THE SEPTUAGINT AND OTHER TRANSLATIONS

---

REINHART CEULEMANS

## INTRODUCTION

---

EARLY Christians were surrounded by many different versions of their Bible. Some of these were translations—into Latin, Syriac, and an array of other languages—that were composed by Christians who, in producing new versions of their Bible, deliberately introduced elements of Christian interpretation into these translations. Other versions—I have now in mind the Greek Bible—were claimed as authoritative Christian Scripture only after their composition. Their form was, for the most part, already predetermined and needed to be accounted for in Christian interpretation. They were, moreover, produced by people who were either Jewish or very much steeped in Judaism. But here too translation played a key role: most of the texts in this Greek corpus were either translations or deliberately assumed the form of a translated text (‘pseudo-translations’ in the LXX, such as Judith: Joosten 2007). Even the Greek NT was written in a language that was defined by earlier translational behaviour: from a linguistic point of view, much of the NT is indebted to the Semitic-coloured Greek of the LXX. Although these texts—the LXX, in particular—had an established textual form when they were accepted as Christian Scripture, early Christians nonetheless managed to include elements of interpretation in them, primarily by inserting changes in the handwritten copies through which they transmitted these texts.

The preceding observations highlight the fluidity of Christian Bibles. Whether we attend to the production and transmission of new Bibles in vernacular languages, or the manuscript transmission of the Church’s authoritative Greek Bible, over and over again we discover deliberate modifications that expressed Christian biblical interpretation, as valid as other forms of exegesis treated elsewhere in this volume. In fact, this form of scribal interpretation often exerted an influence that was markedly stronger than that

of any commentary or homily. For example, very early in the transmission history of Psalm 13.3 a Christian copyist purposely included in his handwritten Greek Psalter an addition from Romans 3.13–18, which Paul had assembled from a handful of other scriptural passages to strengthen his claim that Jews and Gentiles were subject to sin. This intentional insertion of an NT passage as a genuine part of Psalm 13.3 found its way into several important Greek manuscripts (such as the famous codex Vaticanus), as well as into Syriac, Bohairic, Sahidic, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions, and even into the Latin Vulgate (where it is marked with diacritical signs) (Rahlfs 1907:42 and 1931:30–1). Needless to say, for early Christian readers and commentators of the Psalms in any of these languages, this passage invited interpretation in the same way as any authentic, originally Jewish section of the Psalter text did.

This example illustrates both the vital importance of the transmission history of the Bible for our present purpose and the potential of the various versions of the biblical text that circulated in the early Christian world, including the LXX, to carry Christian interpretative elements within. Even in cases where they were not translated, they were all, at the very least, transmitted by Christians, and transmission gave liberty for interpretative alteration. This leaves us with a situation that is nothing less than remarkable: the literary corpus that was Scripture and generated biblical interpretation, was itself to a certain extent a product of interpretation. Today it takes the use of a modern edition with a critical apparatus, or in Late Antiquity, exceptional text-critical ability (such as Jerome's) to appreciate this phenomenon. And because neither critical texts nor heightened philological abilities were available to most early Christian commentators, their biblical exegesis rarely articulated any awareness of the extent to which their argumentation proceeded from earlier interpretation. Arguably the most famous example of this lack of awareness is Justin Martyr's erroneous accusation that the Jews had removed an expression from Psalm 95.10a (LXX) which in fact was an inauthentic addition introduced by an earlier Christian copyist (*dial.* 73).

In what follows, I introduce some of the biblical versions used as Scripture by Christians from Late Antiquity and argue how those versions, which were the starting point for Christian exegesis, were themselves shaped by Christian interpretation. The presentation is governed by chronology. I do not look beyond the eighth century (and in fact only seldom beyond the fifth). Christians translated their Greek OT and NT into a wide array of different languages, both in the West and the East. Of those many translations, I only include in the discussion below those in Latin and Syriac. They receive less attention than the Greek versions, on which nearly all of those in other languages depend. Among those Greek versions, I focus almost exclusively on the Greek OT (a choice inspired by the chapter's requested focus on translated Scripture). When illustrating my statements, I deliberately select examples from books in the margins of the biblical corpus (notably deuterocanonical ones). The reader is invited to conclude that when even those books are very clearly shaped by Christian interpretation, those that were of much more importance to Christianity (such as the Psalms, the Prophets, or the NT) bear that mark even more prominently.

## GREEK BIBLICAL VERSIONS

---

From its beginnings Christianity had as its Bible a collection of Greek texts, the largest part of which was produced by and for Jews.

### Old Testament

The Greek OT is the Christian adoption of the collection of Jewish Greek texts that is conventionally labelled ‘Septuagint’ (or LXX). In essence, this term only applies to the first five books, as only they are reported by legend to have been translated by 72 (or, alternatively, 70) translators (see Fernández Marcos 2000:44–51). But the term has often been extended to denote the entire collection and is used in that sense in most of this chapter (see ed. Rahlfs and Hanhart 2006:XIX).

The text of the LXX would be almost completely unknown if not for its Christian reception. For the period under consideration, not a single non-Christian document preserves the entire LXX. The vast majority of the evidence used by scholars to reconstruct the oldest reachable text of the LXX and document its subsequent history is Christian. Even the scholar who deals with the Jewish origins and the earliest, pre-Christian, history of the LXX cannot escape the Christian evidence: the Jewish *Letter of Aristeas*, for example, has been handed down only in Christian manuscripts. Moreover, our current knowledge of many aspects relating to the LXX translation depends on early Christian views (see below).

Today, the LXX is believed to be a collection of translations that were produced between the third century BCE and the early second century CE. These translations were not restricted to Alexandria, as some were also produced in the Holy Land. This major, unprecedented translation project would turn out to be of paramount importance to Christianity. Within the process, we can distinguish two main stages.

#### *The Greek Pentateuch (or: the Septuagint in the Strict Sense)*

For reasons that are still unclear, Jews in the Alexandrian diaspora started to translate the Hebrew Torah into Greek, probably in the third century BCE (presumably during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus). This translation is described as a product of 72 translators by a legend recorded in the Jewish work known as the *Letter of Aristeas* (Haelewyck 1998, no. 273; see now Wright 2015).

Despite intensive scholarly study, several uncertainties still haunt this translation which resulted in the Greek Pentateuch: the incentive eludes us, as well as the precise cultural context in which the process of translation took place. Although it is certain that the translation of the Torah was one concerted action (a fact reflected in the very existence of the Aristeas legend) and that all five books are the product of more or less uniform translation techniques and underlying views on the desired relation between

the Hebrew source text and the Greek target text, there is no ready explanation for why precisely those techniques were chosen and why those particular views were decisive. While the different theories on the origins of the LXX that have been developed in secondary literature (none of which is unanimously accepted today) may not be directly relevant to the student of early Christian biblical interpretation, the two principal facts that those theories try to account for certainly are.

The first and most obvious fact is that the *content* of the Greek version necessarily differs from that of the presumed Hebrew original, simply because every translation inescapably carries an interpretative dimension within. In addition to mistakes and elements of unconscious interference, deliberate alterations shaped the LXX version. For example, according to the Hebrew Bible, the Lord finished his work of creation on the seventh day, but in the Jewish Greek interpretative translation, he did so on the sixth (Genesis 2.2). The prescription of Deuteronomy 16.7 to cook and roast the Passover sacrifice (LXX), instead of just cooking it (Hebrew), reflects a desire from the Jewish Greek translators to harmonize the text with Exodus 12.8. Of course, it is the Greek version that in both these cases was accepted by Christianity.

The *language* of the LXX approximates documentary rather than literary texts from the same period (cf. the fundamental study by Deissmann 1895). Furthermore, it demonstrably bears the stamp of the Hebrew parent text. The first feature reflects the vernacular *koine* of Hellenism (which elsewhere is recorded in documentary papyri, inscriptions, etc.). The second of those two character-defining elements of the LXX is the translators' decision to keep their Greek translation very close to the Hebrew parent text. This literalism is expressed in the lexicon but especially in Semitic elements of syntax: the abundance of Graecized versions of Hebrew expressions, parataxis with *καί*, verb-subject-object sequence, etc., can be explained by close adherence to the Hebrew text, even to the point of violating the syntax of the *koine* language. The Jewish translators were governed by the (possibly religiously inspired) conception that every element of the Hebrew text needed to be mirrored by a Greek one. Both features suggest that the LXX translation was designed to be a non-literary text and to be so dependent on the Hebrew source that it might not even function as a free-standing text. The Greek language of the LXX can therefore be characterized as 'translational Greek' (but does not reflect any idiolect of Hellenized Jews, infamously termed 'biblical Greek', 'Jewish Greek', or 'Judaean-Greek').

### *The Other Books of the 'Septuagint' (in the Broad Sense)*

After the completion of the translation of the Torah in the third century BCE, diasporic Jews of the Second Temple period (and later on, those in the Holy Land) continued to translate a wide range of Hebrew and some Aramaic writings into Greek, while also composing other works directly in Greek (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon, 2 Maccabees). Included among the works that were translated were all of the Hebrew *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim*, but also many other ones. A selection of those Greek Jewish works was admitted soon after in the so-called Alexandrian canon of Scripture, while others were not (Enoch, Jubilees, etc.).

In the first century CE—when most but not yet all of the books of the Hebrew Bible had been translated (Ecclesiastes, for one, was still to follow)—Philo of Alexandria extended the term ‘Septuagint’ to Greek books beyond the Pentateuch (*Mos.* 2.25–44). In so doing, he significantly modified the legend of the seventy (two) translators: the original legend does not in any way relate to non-Pentateuchal books. Philo had particularly important reasons for doing so: it was one of the ways in which he could now argue for the divine inspiration and authority of the Greek version, which he used instead of the Hebrew original. Philo’s approach would soon be adopted and developed further by early Christian authors.

While the translation of the Torah was a concerted action, carried out in a short time span, at one location, and according to reasonably uniform principles, the process by which all of the subsequent LXX books were translated and composed was very heterogeneous. They were the products of ad hoc initiatives and were not governed by an overall design. The process covered several centuries: a book such as Ecclesiastes was presumably translated as late as the early second century CE. That centuries-long enterprise, moreover, accommodated a geographical transition: whereas presumably most of the post-Pentateuchal books were Alexandrian products, books like Ruth and Lamentations were in all likelihood translated in the Holy Land.

This vast translational and compositional project was subject to evolution. Goals, contexts, and methods changed all throughout the process. Even conceptual views on translational activity in general, and on the desired relation between the Hebrew source text and the Greek target text in particular, evolved in the minds of the Jewish translators and authors. To a certain extent, those changes were linked to the religious beliefs of the various Jewish groups involved. At one end of the spectrum, books such as Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Ruth virtually mirrored the Hebrew (even to the point of conflicting with Greek linguistics). At the other end, the Greek versions of Job and Proverbs differed significantly and deliberately from the Hebrew original, and in the text of Proverbs scholars have even found echoes of classical Greek culture and philosophy.

The lack of uniformity in the large corpus that became the LXX is beyond doubt. Nonetheless, many of the linguistic characteristics of the LXX *stricto sensu* (i.e. the Pentateuch) found their way into most of the LXX *sensu lato*. On a broader scale, books like Job and Proverbs can be qualified as rather exceptional: most of the LXX follows in the footsteps of the Pentateuch and answers to an increasing tendency to keep the Greek target text as close as possible to the Hebrew parent. General opinion simply dictated that a Greek biblical text needed to exhibit a certain degree of Hebraicity—even when it was originally composed in Greek, hence the phenomenon of ‘pseudo-translations’ mentioned above.

## The New Testament

The style and language of the books in the LXX that had been translated from Hebrew developed into a model that was followed in writings originally written in Greek. This

observation is not restricted to books included in the Alexandrian canon: other Greek Jewish works from the late Second Temple period and beyond also followed this model (Siegert 2016:230–3). In this light, it is not surprising that after the birth of Christianity and the parting of the ways, the earliest Christian and Jewish-Christian writings, including the NT, adopted the same linguistic approach. Like the NT, much early Christian apocryphal literature displays a language similar to that of the LXX, in the sense that it is close to the spoken *koine* of the Hellenistic period and contains Semitisms, especially as far as syntax is concerned.

## The Greek Christian Bible

Early Christianity accepted the LXX (in its broad sense) and the NT as its Bible. These Greek works, notably the LXX, could reach canonical status only with the support of arguments that successfully proved the inspiration and authority of the LXX translation. Building on the works of Philo, early Christian authors delivered those arguments to the point that it became a fact that did not require any further motivation.

### *Canon*

The establishment of the canon of their Greek Bible generated more discussion among Christians, with regard to both the OT and the NT. Several of the issues relating to the canonization and the canon debate are remarkably paradoxical; two of them are singled out here (cf. Verheyden 2013:389–90 and 403–4).

(1) While general agreement on the canon proved to lie within the reach of early Christians, consensus on the criteria that defined that canon was not. Different criteria, which by and large led to the same results, were put forward all through the period under consideration. For example: to define the OT canon, Greek (and Latin) Christian authors adduced different criteria (some of which were mutually exclusive), relating respectively to the existence of a Hebrew original, to a book's belonging to the canon of the Hebrew Bible, and to its Christian usage (the 'Hebrew', the 'synagogical', and the 'ecclesiastical' criteria in the terminology of Gallagher 2012:13–104).

(2) The canon debate never divided the Church as did other disputes (notably those relating to Christology). Nonetheless, it had the potential to do so, precisely for a reason that relates to the focal point of the present volume, namely that canonization could be an interpretative act: books that entered the canon achieved normative status.

A corpus of Christian literature that links the canon debate to biblical exegesis is the so-called synopses of the Greek Bible, some of which circulated under the names of John Chrysostom (CPG 4559) and Athanasius of Alexandria (CPG 2249). Such works summarize the contents of each biblical book, sometimes including an explanation of its title and authorship, a list of its chapters, and/or the number of its verses. That information can be accompanied by comments on the canonicity of the book in question and on the structure of the biblical canon as a whole (Dorival et al. 2005:53–93 and 95–108).

These synopses were later utilized as introductions to biblical commentaries and catenae, thereby illustrating their role in subsequent exegetical literature.

### *Language*

The canon debate was important only because Christianity let it be so: it was fuelled by stimuli coming from within, not from the outside world. In this way, it differs from another matter that received significant attention from Christian commentators and had a substantial impact on biblical interpretation: the Greek language of the Bible. Early Christians discussed this issue in response to factors over which they had little control. They obviously had to accept the particular language of both the OT and the NT, which for reasons expounded above was idiosyncratic due to its closeness to the spoken *koine* and its Semitic colour. But they also had to come to terms with the increasing diglossia of Late Antiquity which inevitably associated the low register of the Greek Bible with a correspondingly low social status and intellectual profile of its readers and the Christian religion as such. The challenges created by the language of the Bible had a deep impact on Greek Christian literature as well as on the interpretation and transmission of the Greek Bible.

In view of their missionary aim to spread the faith among educated unbelievers, Christians abandoned in their own writings and discourse the linguistic model of their Scripture for a higher register. While the apostolic fathers and the earliest Christian authors as a matter of course adopted a lower register similar to that of the Bible, the increasing diglossia problematized such an approach, as the biblical language was considered not only inelegant but also unfit to convert the Greek-speaking elites. As a consequence, early Christian authors from the early third century onwards (the turning point tends to be identified with Clement of Alexandria) replaced the language of the Bible with a higher linguistic register for their own writings and preaching.

That decision, which defined the linguistic identity of virtually all subsequent Greek Christian literature, was a constructive one taken to achieve a missionary goal. Around the same time and in a parallel gesture, Christians also addressed the 'language issue' in their biblical interpretation. Here the primary motive was a negative or defensive one: biblical commentators and other authors felt obliged to react to adversaries who repeatedly lashed out at the 'vulgar, ordinary and in every aspect trite' language of the Greek Bible (my translation of the accusation cited by Cyril of Alexandria, *Juln.* 7.20, as only one of many such examples: [ἀ]λλ' ἴσως ἐρεῖ τις, ὡς ἡ μὲν θεία γραφή κοινήν τε καὶ ἀγελαίαν καὶ ἅπασι κατημαξευμένην ἔχει τὴν λέξιν). In reaction, Christian authors defended, as a *topos*, the language of Greek Scripture (although still using a different and loftier register themselves). They developed a remarkably wide array of arguments, ranging from interpreting the Bible's linguistic plainness as a vehicle to reach the masses, to detaching the form from the message, even to linking the obscurity of the language to the importance of the biblical teachings (Léonas 2005 and 2001:396–7). Even further went the opinion that the (at first sight) 'barbarian' language of the Bible was in fact a product of the application of particular rhetorical and literary rules and methods. Accordingly, Greek-speaking Christians managed to observe, in the biblical text once mocked for its

poor language, a plethora of literary riches (see e.g. Martens 2013 and 2017 on Adrian's *Introduction to the Divine Scriptures* and Bady 2014 on Greek rhetorical manuals).

Despite such defence of the language of the Greek Bible, Christian scribes repeatedly adapted—to a certain extent—the biblical text to classical grammar and spelling, which was being promoted by Atticism as the linguistic model to follow. Such 'corrections' and 'improvements' of the biblical language according to the conventions of a higher register can be observed throughout the transmission history of both the OT and the NT in the form of grammatically inspired changes of consonants and vowels, modifications to the conjugation of verbs and the declination of nouns, through the alteration of verbal modes, etc. (see Kilpatrick 1990 and Elliott 1992 for the NT). Such linguistic changes could be accompanied by a stylistic upgrade of the biblical text. We detect these phenomena in individual manuscripts of the Bible that reflect ad hoc decisions. But they are also introduced in some Christian recensions of the biblical text that would come to be expressed in all the manuscripts of those recensions (e.g. the recensions *a*—or *q*, for the books of Maccabees—and *b* of several historical deuterocanonical books of the LXX: see Hanhart 1983:81–7). While this Atticizing tendency is not the most significant or even consistent feature of the recensions in question, it had a huge impact in at least one case: the standard text of the Greek Psalter in Late Antiquity and Byzantium is a further development of the so-called Antiochene (alternatively termed 'Lucianic') text, which represents a recension known to have Atticized numerous *koine* features of the biblical text (see the analysis of Ruth in Quast 2006:63–8).

But while for every biblical book of both the NT and the OT manuscripts can be found that retouch the language in a way described in the previous paragraph, no book was ever aimed to be replaced through such a process. Some Christian metaphrases of individual books of the LXX and NT are known (e.g. CPG 3700 and 5641; see Faulkner 2014 on both works), including one that conspicuously alters the Semitic idiom of Ecclesiastes (CPG 1766), but those only have an exegetical, belletristic or apologetic character, and were never meant to replace the biblical text (which does not mean that they were not received as being very welcome and copied frequently).

### *Transmission: Christian Recensions*

The above paragraphs only hint at the extent to which the manuscript transmission of the Greek Bible was a tool that could be—and indeed was—used for interpretative purposes. Transmission was a form of interpretation that no biblical book escaped. The standard exegetical genres (especially commentary, homily, and catena), other forms of exegesis (such as *testimonia* or questions-and-answers), treatment in liturgy, interpretation through art, comments on biblical passages integrated in works of other literary genres: these are many well-known forms that early Christian biblical interpretation assumed. But some biblical books managed to escape some if not all of them. For example, for the period under consideration, no full-fledged Greek commentaries were written on books such as 1–4 Maccabees, Judith, Tobit, Wisdom, and Ben Sira. In contrast, all of those books were handed down in Christian manuscripts. In the course of that transmission, Christian scholars and copyists modified the text in a way that is not

coincidental but expresses their views on the language *and contents* of the biblical books in question. In that sense, one can find in the major editions of the LXX glimpses of Christian interpretation for all of the books—not in the text as reconstructed by the editors, but in some of the variants documented in the critical apparatus and in the sections on grammar and orthography at the back of those editions.

The expression par excellence of this interpretative transmission is the development, by Christians, of recensions of the biblical text which distinguish themselves from manuscript groups or families by their reasonably consistent application of identifiable criteria to change the text. Both for the LXX and the NT, a number of Christian recensions are known or thought to have existed. More recent scholarship has called the ‘recensional’ character and/or the geographical provenance of some of these well-known ‘recensions’ into question. Today, doubts in this respect have been raised with regard to the Alexandrian, Byzantine, and Western text of the NT, and the existence of the Hesychian (or: Egyptian) recension of the LXX is almost certainly beyond factual proof. Nevertheless, a careful analysis of the recensions that do stand the test of criticism proves revealing. For example: the above-mentioned Antiochene text of the LXX (traditionally associated with the Christian martyr Lucian, who died 312) is known for its insertion of interpretative additions or replacements that result from a desire to clarify, explain, or update the text without being prompted by any (attempted) direct recourse to a Hebrew text of some kind. This leads to alternative readings in the manuscripts of the LXX, such as the following: the Antiochene recension of 2 Esdras transmits the Christian interpretation that the daughters of poor Jews are not simply oppressed (*καταδυναστεύομεναι*) but in fact raped (*βία ἀφαιροῦνται*), and brings the text historically up to date by identifying the Persian governors (*ἔπαρχοι*) with Roman *στρατηγοί* (see Hanhart 2003:136–7 and 128–31 on 2 Esdras 15,5 and 5,3 and *passim*). In both cases the Antiochene interpretation was taken up in the Latin translation. Many such examples can be found.

### *Transmission: Dealing with the Hebrew Text and Other Jewish Greek Versions*

Recensions of the LXX were characterized by an additional but decisive factor that determined their form and had a substantial impact on their subsequent translation into Latin and Syriac: awareness of the existence of a Hebrew text known to be at the root of the Greek. While that Hebrew text itself was beyond the reach of Greek-speaking Christians, who as a rule lacked knowledge of the Hebrew language, some did try in an indirect manner to use it as a touchstone.

In accordance with the picture sketched above, the process by which the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek by Jews was a dynamic one that transpired over roughly five centuries. In the course of that process, Jewish views on translation, and on the aspired relationship between the Hebrew source text and the Greek target text, changed. At least toward the end of that process (i.e. in the first and early second centuries CE when translational activities were extended to the Holy Land) but probably earlier, the opinion gathered weight that the Greek translation needed to follow the Hebrew text very closely. This led to very literal translations, as in the cases of Ruth and Lamentations

(see above). Although we do not know exactly *how*, it is generally agreed *that* the production of these translations was in some way linked to the early Rabbinic movement that started to emerge in Palestine towards the end of the Second Temple period. This movement stressed the importance and supremacy of the Hebrew (Smelik 2013). Sometime later, this perspective would lead to Rabbinic statements that rejected the Greek Bible, such as *Sôferim* 1.7 and *m. Ta'anit* 13, both from the Ga'onic period.

Early Rabbinic Judaism, however, approved the making of very literal translations and sanctioned the revision of LXX books that had already been translated into Greek. It seems that this process developed organically for some time, perhaps prompted by the translation of the Psalms which had been carried out in the second (?) century BCE (Munnich 1987:200–5). The translations and revisions that were created in accordance with this desire for literalness can be linked to the notorious *καίγε* movement or tradition—‘notorious’ because ever since Barthélemy 1963 first pointed out the existence of *καίγε*, scholarship has been struggling with the correct appreciation of this multiform process which has been named after a characteristic translation equivalent: *καίγε* or *καί γε* (‘and indeed’) for Hebrew (*w<sup>e</sup>*)*gam*. This tradition developed gradually from the translation of the Psalms and culminated in the version of Aquila (c.140 CE). Toward its final stages, it was certainly ‘sheltered under the Rabbinic umbrella’ (in the words of Salvesen 2012). As it developed, this tradition gradually implemented with growing force and rigidity the view that the Greek text was explicitly meant to lead to the Hebrew, that every Hebrew element had to be paralleled by a Greek one (even when this conflicted with Greek linguistics), and that a particular set of translational equivalences needed to be adapted consistently, even mechanistically. The implementation of these views took different shapes. Among the products of the *καίγε* movement we can count revisions of books translated earlier (e.g. the Twelve Prophets, revised around the turn of the era), the translation of Hebrew books that were not yet available in Greek (e.g. Ecclesiastes), and the production of a revision of the complete Bible intended to rival the LXX (Aquila’s version). That revision was probably not only inspired by these emerging Jewish views on translation, but also born from discontent with Greek Christianity’s takeover of the Jewish LXX as its OT.

This discontent might also have inspired the creation of the version by Symmachus (c.200 CE), which encompassed all the books of the Hebrew Bible. Although it also aimed to bring the Greek close to the Hebrew and was approved by the Rabbinate, it did not belong to the *καίγε* movement. Aquila and Symmachus can be seen as Jewish revisers of the LXX, but to a certain extent they may also be perceived as translators in their own right. They are the most famous but certainly not the only such revisers: by c.200 CE, several Jewish Greek versions of the Hebrew Bible existed side by side with the LXX. Most of them, however, are anonymous and may not have covered the complete Bible. The most enigmatic among them is arguably the ‘Theodotion version’, which was once perceived as a major impetus for the *καίγε* movement (and therefore generated the term *καίγε*-Theodotion, which should be eradicated) but in fact probably only records what that movement looked like at a given stage of its development.

None of these translation developments would have been of great importance to early Christian biblical interpretation had it not been for Origen. For one or more reasons still debated today, Origen created a massive edition of the OT. According to the standard view (which relies on patristic testimonies but is hardly confirmed by manuscript evidence), this edition consisted of six columns: a Hebrew text in Hebrew characters, a Hebrew text in Greek characters (the so-called *secunda*), the version of Aquila, the version of Symmachus, Origen's edition of the LXX text, and the version of Theodotion. From that sixfold setup, this edition derived its name: the Hexapla. Nonetheless, for some books (notably the Psalms) Origen appears to have included beyond these six versions some additional ones, which derive their name from their assumed position in the Hexapla, as the fifth, sixth, and seventh *Greek* columns (*quinta*, *sexta*, and *septima*; at least the first of them probably belonged to the *καίγ* tradition, Venetz 1974).

Because of its setup—at least six columns with each of them containing only one or two words per line (see Norton 1998:115–23 and Jenkins 1998)—the Hexapla must have been a massive work, comprising many volumes. One moreover needed particular skills and knowledge to read, let alone copy it. For these reasons, many scholars believe that it was never copied in its entirety, and as a complete work went astray when the original exemplar went missing in 638, when the library in Caesarea Maritima was destroyed in the Arab conquest. Only very limited portions have reached us, mainly through scarce manuscript evidence, the Syriac translation by Paul of Tella, and citations in LXX codices and patristic literature in several languages (see Gentry 2016 for recent literature).

The Hexapla was a watershed, and its impact on the way in which later Christians, both Greek-speakers and those who spoke other languages, dealt with the Bible cannot be overestimated. Origen presented to Greek Christianity the different Jewish versions as tangible works by isolating them from the continuous tradition from which they came. Throughout the entire period under consideration here, Christian exegetes would to varying degrees of frequency cite readings of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion in their commentaries. This was done most often by commentators with a strong philological interest, such as Theodoret of Cyrus, who must have had privileged access to manuscripts or editions that were very close to the original Hexapla (see Guinot 1995 and 2012). But the practice was quite widespread, and occasional readings of 'the Three' were cited in many Christian works of exegesis (and in other writings, such as *adversus Iudaeos* literature), as it answered to a predilection for *διαφωνία* in their biblical interpretation (Bossina 2015:158–9). We find not only in commentaries, but also in several biblical and catena manuscripts, isolated readings of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion (= Hexaplaric readings) cited side by side with the biblical texts. All of those citations, both by scribes in manuscripts and by patristic authors in their writings, can indirectly be traced back to the Hexapla (Ceulemans 2012). Cases where the Christian transmission of the Bible is informed by the contemporary, living Jewish tradition are very rare and lie almost completely beyond the period under consideration here.

The precise nature of the LXX text that Origen included in the fifth (= third Greek) column of the Hexapla is not entirely certain. According to the most widespread view, it was his own edition of the Greek Bible, whose most distinctive criterion was a quantitative

one: having observed that the Greek text had many pluses and minuses in comparison to the Hebrew, Origen used diacritical signs to identify those and filled the minuses by borrowing material from the other Hexaplaric columns (notably Theodotion). Unexplained is the fact that the few manuscript remains of the Hexapla in a columnar order all lack these diacritical signs; furthermore, Origen did not always cite his own recension when quoting the LXX in his writings (Munnich 2011). But whichever form the LXX in the fifth column of the Hexapla had, it is beyond doubt that Origen produced a recension of the LXX text and that a desire to bring the Greek text into agreement with the Hebrew was its main feature. This Origenian/Hexaplaric recension was therefore a Hebraizing one. It had a huge influence. Many of its readings were adopted in the Antiochene text, and in Caesarea LXX manuscripts were produced which offered Origen's recension as the main biblical text, with a choice of Hexaplaric readings in the margins. Later copies of such editions still survive (e.g. the famous codex Marchalianus of the Prophets in its corrected form) as well as a faithful translation into Syriac (see below).

The Hexapla's impact went much further than its influence on the Greek, Latin, and Syriac transmission of the Bible and even on the exegetical attitude of Christians. To an extent that is not yet adequately realized, it has shaped modern scholarly conceptions of the LXX's textual history. The fact that—like Christians from Late Antiquity—much modern scholarship until recently has looked upon Aquila and Theodotion as Greek Bible versions that can be clearly identified and isolated from the continuous tradition of which they were an inseparable part, can be traced back to the Hexapla. Only in the last few years has intensified research into the *καλύγε* tradition and the role of Greek Bible versions in Late Antique and Byzantine Judaism (see Fincati 2016 and de Lange 2015) shown that the Hexaplaric versions were snapshots, links in a chain that continued unbroken from the second century BCE. That we have taken so long to appreciate this is a direct result of Origen's interpretation of the textual tradition of the Greek Bible.

## THE LATIN AND SYRIAC BIBLE

---

The Latin and Syriac versions of the Bible were continuously modified, just like the Greek Bible, in the course of being handed down. Some of these modifications were ad hoc, while others were more systematic and led to distinct Christian revisions and recensions. For these, the same two aims can be detected as in the Greek recensions discussed above: the need to explain or change specific passages (e.g. those particularly relevant to contemporary theological debates), as well as the desire to bring the version closer to an original text in another language.

The Latin and Syriac Bibles were, therefore, in essence not very different from the Greek one, in the sense that their transmission carried many interpretative elements within. In addition, the fact that most of the Latin and Syriac versions were, from the start, Christian translations meant that this interpretative dimension already characterized the original translation.

## The Latin Bible

While the Christian Greek Bible started out as a Jewish enterprise, the versions of the Latin Bible were almost certainly from the start produced by Christians.

### *The Old Latin Versions*

Before Origen made his famous edition of the Greek OT, Christians had already started to translate the complete Greek Bible (OT and NT) into Latin. Although there is no sure proof against it, the hypothesis that the first translations were produced by Jews is generally rejected (Mellerin 2017:74 n. 4). Citations in the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian show that by 200 CE—or at least in the first decades of the third century—most if not all of the Bible was available in Latin.

The reasons for translating the Greek Bible into Latin were undoubtedly related to the diminishing knowledge of Greek in the Western half of the Roman Empire from the end of the second century. Many Christians did not gain much from hearing the Bible read, explained, and preached in Greek. It therefore is not surprising that the oldest Latin version was produced in North Africa. Presumably by the mid-third century, it found its way onto the Italian peninsula. This ‘Italian’ (or ‘European’) text is a second major text type of the Old Latin, next to the ‘African’ one. To complicate the textual history, the European text soon returned to Africa, where it was cited by Augustine at the end of the fourth century.

It is beyond doubt that Christian interpretative changes and renderings were introduced into all of these Latin versions. The example of Sirach 43.23(25) illustrates this aptly. In the most widespread (= Vulgate) Latin version of the verse, it reads: ‘When he speaks, the wind will be still, and the Lord Jesus planted it.’ Yet when we compare this text to the Greek one from which it was translated, we notice striking differences: ‘By his reasoning he abated the abyss, and he planted islands in it.’ Ziegler identified a number of factors that account for this Latin version: (1) the translation of the Greek text was to a certain extent determined by translation equivalences observed in the Christian Latin version of books occupying an important exegetical position (in this case: the use of *silēre* ‘to be still’, as in Psalm 106.29–30, for Greek *κοπάζειν* ‘abate’); (2) particular NT passages (in this case, Mark 4.39, and to a lesser extent Matthew 14.32 and Mark 6.41) influenced choices of vocabulary, syntax, and word order (such as the replacement of ‘abyss’ or accusative *ἄβυσσον* with ‘wind’ or nominative *ventus*, a word supplied by the said Gospel passages); (3) the particular version of the Greek text from which the Latin translation was made was already markedly Christianized (the *dominus Hiesus* ‘Lord Jesus’ can be retraced to variant readings in the Greek tradition; the original text has *νήσους* ‘islands’); and (4) one interpretative change generated another (Ziegler 1983:70–3).

Within each of the major text types mentioned above, several Christian recensions existed. Most of them either gradually aligned the Latin text with the accepted Greek one, or, on the contrary, tried to preserve the characteristic nature of the Old Latin translation by stressing readings that differed from the Greek. Complications naturally arose with the changing nature of the Greek text as discussed above: in the process of revision,

the Old Latin versions were compared with Greek texts that were different from those on the basis of which the initial translation had been made. While the initial Latin translation of the LXX and the NT must have been carried out on the basis of a Greek version that preceded the major Christian recensions (and is therefore closer to the 'original' Greek Bible than many of its Greek witnesses), the Old Latin in the course of its transmission was deliberately aligned with those later Christian recensions of the Greek text (Hexaplaric, Antiochene, etc.). (From a text-historical point of view, the Old Latin versions thus have an interesting status: some of them are important witnesses for reconstructing the hypothetical original text of the LXX or the Greek NT, while others help us to identify a particular Christian redaction of the Greek text.)

Because of the existence of multiple recensions and the variety observed in biblical citations by Latin authors from the third and fourth centuries, it is more correct to speak of Old Latin versions (*veteres Latinae*) instead of the established term *Vetus Latina*. Learned Christian theologians from the fourth century were well aware of, and bothered by, this variety. Both Augustine and Jerome lamented the *vitiissima varietas* ('exceedingly faulty variety') of recensions of the Latin Bible, but ultimately reacted to this situation—as is well known—in very different ways.

### *Jerome's Revisions and Translation iuxta Hebraeos*

Among Latin-speaking Christian authors using an Old Latin version of the Bible, the indebtedness of these versions to the Greek Bible was an item that surfaced regularly. Augustine, for one, was well aware of differences between the Latin version he was quoting and the LXX or Greek NT, both of which were considered to be the inspired original. Against this background, it is not surprising that in their correspondence, Augustine and Jerome frequently mentioned the Greek Bible. Neither is it surprising that Jerome, when revising the Old Latin Gospels in 382–4 in response to a request from Pope Damasus, used manuscripts of the Greek NT as a touchstone.

Soon after that revision, however, Jerome's views on the biblical versions started to change. He gradually came to appreciate the importance of the Hebrew text and of the need to take recourse to the *Hebraica veritas*. This changed view on the Hebrew text influenced, of course, his position on the LXX, from which he would gradually distance himself. This made him an exception in the world of early Christianity, which maintained the divine inspiration of the LXX. Jerome's elevation of the Hebrew text would generate disagreement between him and Augustine, who refused to give up his acceptance of the LXX's inspired character (see Augustine, *ciu.* 18 and *ep.* 28 and 71; further discussion in Kamesar 1993:49–72).

A key role in Jerome's gradual acceptance of the necessity of returning to the Hebrew text was played by Origen's Hexapla. More than once, Jerome claimed to have consulted the authentic Hexapla and to have copied parts of it in the library of Caesarea (see *Tit.* 3.9 and *In Psal.* 1.4). Elsewhere he claimed possession of the versions known as *quinta*, *sexta*, and *septima* (*vir. ill.* 54.6–7). The level of truth that lies behind these statements is debated, but it is beyond doubt that Jerome was well acquainted with

Origen's edition—if not with the actual Hexapla, then at least with glossed manuscripts of the Hexaplaric recension, Origen's commentaries, and perhaps partial copies of the original edition.

His exposure to Origen's philological work had made Jerome aware of the many differences between the LXX and the Hebrew text. Acting on that awareness, he started to revise the Old Latin version of certain OT books towards the Hexaplaric recension of the LXX (c.385–9). It is not entirely clear which books Jerome revised according to this process, but presumably he produced a Latin Hexaplaric recension of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, 1–2 Chronicles, Job, and Psalms. While that version has not been preserved for all of these books, Jerome's revision of the Old Latin Psalter according to Origen's Hexapla (now called 'Gallican Psalter') was accepted into the Vulgate Bible.

Jerome's own views continued to evolve. Reflective of this development was the fact that he abandoned his project of revising the Old Latin according to the Hexaplaric recension in favour of starting his *iuxta Hebraeos* translation. His work on the Hexapla would have convinced Jerome of the importance of the Hebrew original. His intense study of the Hebraizing versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion gathered by Origen and his interaction with Jewish teachers gave him the skills to translate the Hebrew Bible. Between 390 and 405, Jerome translated most of the OT canon from Hebrew into Latin. As a rule he passed over deuterocanonical books (including those available in Hebrew, such as Ben Sira), although he did include Judith and Tobit. His translations are far from even. It is impossible to deny the fact that he wove his own interpretation into his version. This can be observed on the level of individual words. Well known is his translation of Hebrew *yš'* ('salvation') as *Jesus* in the Psalms: 51.14, 79.9, 85.5, 95.1, 149.4. But we also observe Jerome's transformations, which he did not try to hide, on a broader level. For example, in his prologue to Judith, he stated that he did not translate the text *ad verbum* but *ad sensum*. Scholars agree that when composing his version of Judith Jerome omitted some elements from his Semitic source text which he found to be superfluous, and that he instead aimed to highlight some key concepts and to adapt the text to his theological concerns. For instance, he increased the role of God as an actor in the narrative, reduced the agency of the heroine, and restored the hierarchy of the high priest and the religious authorities (Skemp 2011:263, 267–71). The consequences of the fact that this version of Judith was a translation with strong interpretative elements are similar to those observed for the Greek Bible above: the subsequent tradition was not aware of the interpretative dimension of the biblical text and simply built further exegesis on it (e.g. Rhabanus Maurus in his commentary from 834). Furthermore, some readings of Jerome's version intruded the textual tradition of the more neutral Old Latin text (Bogaert 2001).

By 600, Jerome's *iuxta Hebraeos* translation had already achieved a certain status, and in the early Carolingian period it would constitute the largest part of the widespread Latin Bible, the *editio vulgata* (with only the Psalter and some deuterocanonical material not being *iuxta Hebraeos*).

## The Syriac Bible

A Syriac version of the Hebrew Bible began to emerge in the middle or latter half of the second century and was completed in the early fifth century. Several questions still surround the origins of this enterprise, most notably the religion of the translators. Because most of the translation was made from a Hebrew text (although showing influence from the LXX), it was made by Christians of Jewish origin or still very much in touch with a Jewish milieu, or perhaps even by Jews themselves. The Syriac version of some books is indeed shown to contain traces of Jewish biblical interpretation, as they are expressed in Rabbinic exegesis and the Targumim (which does not mean that the Syriac version depends on those; see Weitzman 1996 and 1999:234–40). These elements were part and parcel of the Syriac biblical text that was adopted by Syrian Christians, just as the Jewish interpretative hints included in the original LXX translation had been unavoidably accepted by Greek Christians. At the same time, some scholars have argued that Christian (or even Christological) traces can be discovered in some lexical choices made by the Syriac translators, such as the introduction (against the Hebrew parent text) of references to ‘the son’ (Isa 16.1, Ps 2.12, and Ps 110.3), to the crucifixion (Isa 25.7, Zech 12.10, and Dan 9.26), to the virgin Mary (Isa 7.14), or to the NT (Hos 13.14 changed according to 1 Cor 15.55). None of these cases, however, is beyond dispute or unquestionably Christian, and some of them might result from the influence of the LXX (see Weitzman 1996 and 1999:240–4 for the passages mentioned here).

While this Syriac version of the Hebrew Bible might not have been produced by Christians, all of the other Syriac versions of the Bible exhibit clear traces of Christian interpretation, as in the case of the harmony of the four Gospels produced by the Christian Tatian in the second half of the second century. Even if it was composed in Greek, which some scholars suggest, this *Diatessaron* was widespread in its Syriac version by the end of the second century. Tatian did not hold back in modifying the Gospel accounts at his discretion: for example, he removed the reference to locusts in John the Baptist’s otherwise vegetarian diet (cf. Matt 4.4, Mark 1.6) in favour of a typological allusion to Deuteronomy 6.3; he introduced the appearance of a great light (an important symbol in Tatian’s theology) at Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan (against Matt 3.16, Mark 1.10, and Luke 3.22); and he aligned the text of Matthew 16.18 with Psalm 107.16 and Isaiah 45.2 to advance a specific Christological interpretation (Brock 2006:31–2).

Soon after the *Diatessaron*, probably in the third century, the Syriac versions of the Gospels were produced that are now called the *Old Syriac Gospels*. Undoubtedly older and more pristine than the most widespread Syriac version of the Gospels, they too exhibit some revisional tendencies (Brock 2006:33–4). From c.400 CE onwards, this Old Syriac text (which might also have existed for NT books other than the Gospels) was revised in a process that reached its conclusion in the sixth century. The revisions were based upon the Greek and supplemented with translations of books that had not been available in Syriac earlier (2 Peter, 2–3 John, Jude, and Revelation). This complete Syriac NT soon became very successful and widespread. We observe the same situation for the older Syriac translation of the Hebrew Bible mentioned

above, which became the Peshitta OT (*Peshitta* is a word which means more or less the same as Latin *vulgata*). Just as was the case for the Greek and Latin Bible versions discussed above, the manuscript tradition of the Peshitta gives evidence of interpretative changes inserted by Christians in the course of handing down the Bible. For example: the more original Peshitta version appears to have stated in Hebrews 2.9 that ‘by grace, God tasted death for everyone’, a claim which was replaced in the fifth century due to the influence of the exegesis of Theodore of Mopsuestia with the reading ‘he [= Jesus], apart from God, tasted death for everyone’ (see Brock 2006:35).

Not only was the Peshitta revised several times, some entirely new translations from the Greek were produced. This process affected both the OT and the NT, and in both cases the new versions strove to bring the Syriac closer to the Greek, even when this conflicted with Syriac linguistics. Some of these new versions reflected a strong text-critical interest, such as those produced near Alexandria in 616–7: Thomas of Harkel revised the Syriac NT through a meticulous collation of several Greek manuscripts, and Paul of Tella translated an edition of Origen’s recension of the LXX, including readings from the other Hexaplaric columns in the margins. Other versions expressed more explicitly an exegetical motive: in the early sixth century Philoxenus of Mabbug had a revision of the Syriac NT made because he was unhappy with the theological bearing of some readings in the Peshitta, which might have unwittingly prompted a Nestorian reading. As a consequence, he made sure that passages were altered that had a bearing on the understanding of the nature of the incarnation, such as Matthew 1.1 and 1.18, Hebrews 5.7 and 10.5 (see Brock 2006:36). Paul of Tella also consulted, next to his Hexaplaric source, other biblical manuscripts as well as patristic exegetical writings and included citations from both in his Syro-Hexapla.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Julianum*. Greek text: W. Kinzig, T. Brüggemann, et al. (eds), *Kyrrill von Alexandrien, Werke: Erster Band. ‘Gegen Julian’, Teil 2: Buch 6–10 und Fragmente*, GCS nF 21 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017).
- Esther*. Greek text: R. Hanhart (ed.), *Esther*, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Göttingensis editum 8.3 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983).
- Prologue on Judith*. Latin text: *Biblia Sacra iuxta Latinam vulgatam versionem ad codicum fidem* iussu Pii PP. XII cura et studio monachorum Abbatiae pontificiae Sancti Hieronymi in Urbe Ordinis Sancti Benedicti edita, vol. 8, *Libri Ezrae, Tobiae, Iudith* ex interpretatione Sancti Hieronymi cum praefationibus et variis capitulorum seriebus (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950).
- Psalmi*. Greek text: A. Rahlfs (ed.), *Psalmi cum Odis*, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Göttingensis editum 10 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931) [repr. 1979].
- Ruth*. Greek text: U. Quast (ed.), *Ruth*, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Göttingensis editum 4.3 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

- Sapientia Iesu filii Sirach*. Greek text: J. Ziegler (ed.), *Sapientia Iesu filii Sirach*, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Societatis Litterarum Göttingensis editum 12.2 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983).
- Septuaginta*. Greek text: A. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, rev. edn R. Hanhart (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

## Scholarship

- Bady, G. (2014). 'La Bible dans les manuels chrétiens de rhétorique', *Eruditio Antiqua* 6:13–38.
- Barthélemy, D. (1963). *Les Devanciers d'Aquila. Première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du Dodécapropheton trouvés dans le désert de Juda, précédée d'une étude sur les traductions et recensions grecques de la Bible réalisées au premier siècle de notre ère sous l'influence du rabinat palestinien*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 10 (Leiden: Brill).
- Bogaert, P.-M. (2001). *Judith. Fascicule 1: Introduction*, Vetus Latina 7/2 (Freiburg: Herder).
- Bossina, L. (2015). 'Autorschaft und Autorität in der Katenenliteratur', in R. Ceulemans and P. De Leemans (eds), *On Good Authority: Tradition, Compilation and the Construction of Authority in Literature from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, LECTIO Studies on the Transmission of Texts and Ideas 3 (Turnhout: Brepols), 157–80.
- Brock, S. P. (2006). *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 2nd rev. edn, Gorgias Handbooks 7 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press).
- Ceulemans, R. (2012). 'Greek Christian Access to "the Three", 250–600 CE', in T. M. Law and A. Salvesen (eds), *Greek Scripture and the Rabbis*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 66 (Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA: Peeters), 165–91.
- de Lange, N. (2015). *Japhet in the Tents of Shem*, Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism 30 (Tübingen: Mohr).
- Deissmann, G. A. (1895). *Bibelstudien: Beiträge, zumeist aus den Papyri und Inschriften, zur Geschichte der Sprache, des Schrifttums und der Religion des hellenistischen Judentums und des Urchristentums* (Marburg: Elwert; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977). Eng. trans.: A. Grieve, *Bible Studies: Contributions Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1901; repr. 1909).
- Dorival, G. et al. (2005) (eds). *Qu'est-ce qu'un corpus littéraire? Recherches sur le corpus biblique et les corpus patristiques*, Collection de la Revue des études juives 35 (Paris/Louvain/Dudley, MA: Peeters).
- Elliott, J. K. (1992). *Essays and Studies in New Testament Textual Criticism*, Estudios de Filología Neotestamentaria 3 (Cordoba: Ediciones El Almendro).
- Faulkner, A. (2014). 'Faith and Fidelity in Biblical Epic: The *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*, Nonnus and the Theory of Translation', in K. Spanoudakis (ed.), *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context: Poetry and Cultural Milieu in Late Antiquity with a Section on Nonnus and the Modern World*, Trends in Classics Supplements 24 (Berlin: De Gruyter), 195–210.
- Fernández Marcos, N. (2000). *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible*, trans. W. G. E. Watson (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill).
- Fincati, M. (2016). *The Medieval Revision of the Ambrosian Hexateuch: Critical Editing between Septuaginta and Hebraica Veritas in MS Ambrosianus A 147 inf.*, De Septuaginta Investigationes 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Gallagher, E. L. (2012). *Hebrew Scripture in Patristic Biblical Theory: Canon, Language, Text*, Supplements to VC 114 (Leiden/Boston: Brill).

- Gentry, P. J. (2016). 'Did Origen Use the Aristarchian Signs in the Hexapla?', in W. Kraus, M. Meiser, and M. N. van der Meer (eds), *XV Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Munich, 2013*, SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies 64 (Atlanta: SBL Press), 133–48.
- Guinot, J.-N. (1995). *L'Exégèse de Théodoret de Cyr*, Théologie historique 100 (Paris: Beauchesne).
- Guinot, J.-N. (2012). *Théodoret de Cyr exégète et théologien*, vol. 1: *Le Dernier Grand Exégète de l'école d'Antioche au V<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Patrimoines christianisme (Paris: Cerf).
- Haelewyck, J.-C. (1998). *Clavis Apocryphorum Veteris Testamenti*, Corpus Christianorum (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Hanhart, R. (2003). *Text und Textgeschichte des 2. Esrabuches*, Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens 25 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Jenkins, R. G. (1998). 'The First Column of the Hexapla: The Evidence of the Milan Codex (Rahlfs 1098) and the Cairo Genizah Fragment (Rahlfs 2005)', in A. Salvesen (ed.), *Origen's Hexapla and Fragments: Papers presented at the Rich Seminar on the Hexapla, Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, 25th–3rd August 1994*, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 58 (Tübingen: Mohr), 88–102.
- Joosten, J. (2007). *The Original Language and Historical Milieu of the Book of Judith*, in M. Bar-Asher and E. Tov (eds), *Meghillot: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls V–VI. A Festschrift for Devorah Dimant* (Haifa: The Publication Project of the Qumran Scrolls; Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2007), \*159–\*176. [Repr. in J. Joosten, *Collected Studies on the Septuagint. From Language to Interpretation and Beyond*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 83 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2012), 195–209.]
- Kamesar, A. (1993). *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of the Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon).
- Kilpatrick, G. D. (1990). *The Principles and Practice of New Testament Textual Criticism: Collected Essays*, ed. J. K. Elliott, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 96 (Leuven: Peeters).
- Léonas, A. (2001). 'Patristic Evidence of Difficulties in Understanding the LXX: Hadrian's Philological Remarks in *Isagoge*', in B. A. Taylor (ed.), *X Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Oslo, 1998*, SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies 51 (Atlanta: SBL Press), 393–414.
- Léonas, A. (2005). *Recherches sur le langage de la Septante*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 211 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Martens, P. W. (2013). 'Adrian's Introduction to the Divine Scriptures and Greco-Roman Rhetorical Theory on Style', *JR* 93: 197–217.
- Martens, P. W. (2017). *Adrian's Introduction to the Divine Scriptures: An Antiochene Handbook for Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Munnich, O. (1987). 'Contribution à l'étude de la première révision de la Septante', *ANRW* II.20.1: 190–220.
- Munnich, O. (2011). 'Le Rôle de la citation dans l'écriture d'Origène: Étude des *Homélies sur Jérémie*', in S. Kaczmarek and H. Pietras (eds), *Origeniana Decima. Origen as Writer: Papers of the 10th International Origen Congress, University School of Philosophy and Education 'Ignatianum', Kraków, Poland, 31 August–4 September 2009*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 244 (Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA: Peeters), 507–38.
- Norton, G. J. (1998). 'Observations on the First Two Columns of the Hexapla', in A. Salvesen (ed.), *Origen's Hexapla and Fragments: Papers presented at the Rich Seminar on the Hexapla*,

- Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, 25th July–3rd August 1994*, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 58 (Tübingen: Mohr), 103–24.
- Rahlf's, A. (1907). *Septuaginta-Studien. 2. Heft. Der Text des Septuaginta-Psalter, Nebst einem Anhang: Griechische Psalterfragmente aus Oberägypten nach Abschriften von W. E. Crum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) [repr. 1965].
- Salvesen, A. (2012). 'Did Aquila and Symmachus Shelter under the Rabbinic Umbrella?', in T. M. Law and A. Salvesen (eds), *Greek Scripture and the Rabbis*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 66 (Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA: Peeters), 107–25.
- Siebert, F. (2016). *Einleitung in die hellenistisch-jüdische Literatur: Apokrypha, Pseudepigrapha und Fragmente verlorener Autorenwerke* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter).
- Skemp, V. T. M. (2011). 'Learning by Example: *Exempla* in Jerome's Translations and Revisions of Biblical Books', *VC* 65: 257–84.
- Smelik, W. F. (2013). *Rabbis, Language and Translation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Venez, H.-J. (1974). *Die Quinta des Psalteriums: Ein Beitrag zur Septuaginta- und Hexaplaforchung*, Publications de l'Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes. Section biblique et massorétique. Collection Massorah. Série I: Études classiques et textes 2 (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg).
- Verheyden, J. (2013). 'The New Testament Canon', in J. Carleton Paget and J. Schaper (eds), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume I: From the Beginnings to 600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 389–411.
- Weitzman, M. (1996). 'The Interpretative Character of the Syriac Old Testament', in M. Saebo et al. (eds), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300)*, part 2: *The Middle Ages* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 587–611.
- Weitzman, M. (1999). *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 56 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Wright, Benjamin G. III (2015). *The Letter of Aristeas. 'Aristeas to Philocrates' or 'On the Translation of the Law of the Jews'* (Berlin: De Gruyter).

## Suggested Reading

Among the scholarly introductions to the LXX, Fernández Marcos 2000 pays most attention to the role it has played among Christians and is therefore most relevant to the reader of this chapter. In that regard, it is not replaced by more recent handbooks such as Aitken 2015 and Kreuzer 2016, which will bring the reader up to date on the vast bibliography on the topic. Salvesen (forthcoming) is expected to act as a new point of reference. For Greek Christianity's way of dealing with LXX origins, see now Vianès 2017.

Studies that interpret the differences between the LXX and the Hebrew Bible are only indirectly relevant to the present focus; they can be tracked down through numerous articles in Lange and Tov 2016. More pertinent is the research on the language of the LXX and on how it was attacked by non-Christian Greek authors and received (and defended) in Christian literature; relevant primary and secondary literature can be tracked down via Ceulemans (forthcoming), on which the corresponding section of this chapter relies. Scholarship on the language of the NT (and Christian apocrypha, the apostolic fathers, and early Christian apologetic literature) is vast; Joosten (2013:36–44) offers a recent introduction to this topic. An older but still very clear presentation of Early Christianity's response to the biblical language in the context of Late Antique Greek diglossia is Browning 1983:49–50 (to be updated with relevant articles in Giannakis et al. 2014 and Bakker 2014).

A convenient presentation of the Antiochene text ('Lucianic recension') of the LXX and its most salient features is offered by Fernández Marcos 1990. More recent bibliography can be retrieved through the opening pages (14–23) of Kauhanen 2012, a study which pays less attention to the position of this version of the Bible among Greek-speaking Christians but adequately shows that several questions surround its origins. (A recent theory that turns accepted opinion on this matter upside down is being promoted with much vigour, but still awaits convincing proof; it is certainly *not* as accepted as Kreuzer 2017:86–94 misleadingly suggests; cf. Ceulemans 2015). The most fruitful (and too often neglected) sources of information on the recensional features of the Antiochene text and the Hexaplaric text (or any Christian recension of the LXX, for that matter) are still the introductions to the Göttingen editions (*Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Göttingensis editum*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1931–), and the accompanying studies/text histories published by the editors. (For the Pentateuch and Ruth, see now Schäfer 2012 and 2013.)

To some extent, the evolution that scholarship has gone through since Barthélemy 1963 in coming to grips with *καίγες*, can be understood from Aejmelaeus and Kauhanen 2017. But that volume has a restricted focus on the historical books (which are quite specific and not representative of the entire *καίγες* issue) and still starts from traditional views. The reader is therefore advised to also turn to De Crom 2019.

Recent introductions to the Latin Bible are offered by Bogaert 2013 and Mellerin 2017 (my above presentation relies on them). Useful studies on Jerome's biblical philology, focusing on his work on the OT, are Kamesar 1993 and Graves 2007. Houghton 2016 brings the reader up to speed on the entire Latin biblical tradition (from the perspective of the NT in particular). References to standard literature on Syriac Bible versions can be retrieved from Williams 2013 and Gonnet 2017 (from which I made good use for my presentation in this chapter).

Readers who wish to study the reception of the Greek Bible beyond the eighth century can start their research with Magdalino and Nelson 2010 and Krueger and Nelson 2016, but much of that area is still unexplored.

- Aejmelaeus, A., and Kauhanen, T. (2017) (eds). *The Legacy of Barthélemy: 50 Years after Les Devanciers d'Aquila*, De Septuaginta Investigationes 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Aitken, J. K. (2015) (ed.). *The T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark).
- Bakker, E. J. (2014) (ed.). *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Chichester: Wiley).
- Bogaert, P.-M. (2013). 'The Latin Bible', in J. Carleton Paget and J. Schaper (eds), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume I: From the Beginnings to 600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 505–26.
- Browning, R. (1983). *Medieval and Modern Greek*, rev. edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Ceulemans, R. (2015). Review of S. Kreuzer and M. Sigismund (eds), *Der Antiochenische Text der Septuaginta in seiner Bezeugung und seiner Bedeutung*, De Septuaginta Investigationes 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), in *Biblische Notizen* 164: 135–7.
- Ceulemans, R. (forthcoming). 'The Greek Bible Text: Constitution and Early Reception', in T. Denecker et al. (eds), *Language and Culture in Early Christianity: A Companion*, Orbis supplementa (Leuven: Peeters).

- De Crom, D. (2019). *LXX Song of Songs and Descriptive Translation Studies*, De Septuaginta Investigationes 11 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Fernández Marcos, N. (1990). 'Some Reflections on the Antiochian Text of the Septuagint', in D. Fraenkel, U. Quast, and J. W. Wevers (eds), *Studien zur Septuaginta—Robert Hanhart zu Ehren: Aus Anlaß seines 65. Geburtstages*, Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens 20 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 219–29.
- Giannakis, G. K. et al. (2014) (eds). *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, 3 vols (Leiden/Boston: Brill).
- Gonnet, D. (2017). 'La Peshitta, Bible syriaque', in L. Mellerin (ed.), *Lectures de la Bible* (Paris: Cerf), 91–5.
- Graves, M. (2007). *Jerome's Hebrew Philology: A Study Based on his Commentary on Jeremiah*, Supplements to VC 90 (Leiden: Brill).
- Houghton, H. A. G. (2016). *The Latin New Testament: A Guide to its Early History, Texts, and Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Joosten, J. (2013). 'Varieties of Greek in the Septuagint and the New Testament', in J. Carleton Paget and J. Schaper (eds), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to 600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 22–45.
- Kauhanen, T. (2012). *The Proto-Lucianic Problem in 1 Samuel*, De Septuaginta Investigationes 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Kreuzer, S. (2016) (ed.). *Einleitung in die Septuaginta*, Handbuch zur Septuaginta 1 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus).
- Kreuzer, S. (2017). 'Septuagint and Septuagint Research in Germany', *Journal for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* 50: 71–104.
- Krueger, D., and Nelson, R. S. (2016) (eds). *The New Testament in Byzantium*, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia 8 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection).
- Lange, A., and Tov, E. (2016) (eds). *The Hebrew Bible*, Textual History of the Bible 1 (Leiden: Brill), 3 vols.
- Magdalino, P., and Nelson, R. (2010) (eds). *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia 2 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection).
- Mellerin, L. (2017). 'Les Versions latines', in L. Mellerin (ed.), *Lectures de la Bible* (Paris: Cerf), 73–90.
- Salvesen, A. (forthcoming) (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Schäfer, C. (2012). *Benutzerhandbuch zur Göttingen Septuaginta*, vol. 1: *Die Edition des Pentateuch von John William Wevers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Schäfer, C. (2013). *Benutzerhandbuch zur Göttingen Septuaginta*, vol. 2: *Die Edition des Buches Ruth von Udo Quast* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Vianès, L. (2017). *Naissance de la Bible grecque*, La roue à livres 80 (Paris, Les Belles Lettres).
- Williams, P. J. (2013). 'The Syriac Versions of the Bible', in J. Carleton Paget and J. Schaper (eds), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to 600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 527–35.

## CHAPTER 3

---

# CANONS AND RULES OF FAITH

---

JOSEPH T. LIENHARD, SJ

## TERMS

---

### Canon

A canon is a collection of writings that a community accepts as authoritative. If the community is religious, the writings are accepted as sacred. The sacred character of the writings can be explained in different ways: as the product of divine dictation, as the record of inspired prophecy, or as works ratified by divine authority.

The Greek word *kanōn* is a loan-word from the Semitic *qaneh*. The latter means ‘cane’, ‘reed’, or ‘stalk of wheat’, and then, by extension, ‘measuring rod’ or ‘beam of a balance’. The Greek word can mean ‘straight edge’ or ‘ruler’, and then ‘rule’ or ‘standard’. The word is rare in the Septuagint and is not connected with ‘rule’. In the NT it is found only at Galatians 6.16 (‘rule [of life]’). In the apostolic fathers it is found only three times, all in *1 Clement*. In the pre-Nicene Church *kanōn*, in its general uses, meant ‘norm for distinguishing right from wrong’, ‘norm for behaviour’, or ‘ethical rules’. Beginning around 150, the word could also mean ‘the Christian confession of faith expressed in a formula’, as we shall see in this chapter.

Starting in the fourth century, the word designated things that were normative for the Church, especially the collection of Holy Scriptures. Athanasius is the first to use it in this sense, when he writes (*decr.* 5.18) that the *Shepherd of Hermas* is ‘not of the canon’. Athanasius’ Easter letter of 367 (*ep. fest.* 39.3) lists writings that are *kanonizomena*, ‘to be included in the canon’. In the Western Church *canon*, in Latin, came to mean simply ‘the Bible’ as a catalogue of ecclesiastically recognized sacred books (and later other authorities, like the canon of the Mass or the list of canonized saints).

## Rule of Faith

The rule of faith was a compact account of the teaching and preaching of the Church, contemporary with those who mentioned or quoted it. The phrase and its synonyms are found throughout early Christian literature but are particularly important in the writings of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian. This account of teaching is given various names: ‘rule of truth,’ ‘rule of faith,’ ‘canon of the truth,’ ‘ecclesiastical rule,’ and ‘rule of the Church.’ In Latin, Tertullian, Augustine, and others use ‘rule of faith.’ Rules of faith functioned as guides to right teaching and to the right interpretation of Scripture; the rule could also be extended to liturgical practices. The rule, Irenaeus wrote, is the same throughout the whole Church; written in hearts without paper or ink, it suffices for true believers to recognize heresy, even without Scripture (*haer.* 3.4.2).

## Creed

Although they were sometimes similar in structure, rules of faith and creeds are clearly distinct. Rules of faith, while often tripartite—that is, Trinitarian—in structure, had no fixed form. They were generally invoked by educated Christian writers as the norm against which teaching or biblical interpretation could be tested for orthodoxy. Creeds, which were always Trinitarian in structure, were verbally fixed and intended as the basic confession of faith for candidates for baptism. They were simple and straightforward enough that even the uneducated could memorize and understand them. Beginning with the Council of Nicaea (325), baptismal creeds were also adapted as conciliar creeds, by which the bishops of the Church in council professed their own faith.

## CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

---

The classical divisions of the Hebrew canon are the Law (Torah), the Prophets, and the Writings. This threefold division is attested in the preface to Sirach (c.130 BCE) and suggested in Luke 24.44 (‘the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms’).

The first part of the canon to be shaped was the Law, or the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). In 621 BCE, the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah, the Book of the Law was discovered in the temple (2 Kgs 22–3; cf. 2 Chr 34). This book was probably part of the later book of Deuteronomy. The key point is that, for the first time, precisely a book became the norm for the community’s life. As such, it was the beginning of the canon. (But this law was open to revision, e.g. on local priests’ officiating in Jerusalem.)

The collected five books of Moses, the Torah or Pentateuch, were accepted as authoritative around the time of Ezra, perhaps in 444 BCE (see Neh 8.1–9.37). In any case, the canon of the five books of the Law was closed by about 400 BCE.

The corpus of the Prophets was closed later, probably around 200 BCE. The Hebrew canon includes eight books under ‘Prophets’. Four are historical: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (the latter two counted as one book each), and four are prophetic: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve. Daniel, composed after 200 BCE, is not among the prophets. As long as prophecy was a living tradition, the canon remained open; but prophecy fell from practice by the end of the third century.

The third part of the Hebrew canon, the Writings, was the last to be closed. It comprised eleven books: Psalms, Job, and Proverbs; and the five *Megilloth*, that is, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther; and Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. This third part of the canon was probably closed soon after 100 CE. The reasons for its closing were complex. The destruction of the temple in 70 CE made Judaism even more a religion of the book. More and more pseudonymous writings were in circulation, and boundaries needed to be drawn. And the rise of Christianity, which appealed to the Jewish Scriptures as its own, may have moved the Jews to define their canon more clearly.

The so-called Synod of Jamnia, c.90 or 100 CE, is often pointed to as a decisive moment in the final closing of the canon; but that may be an overstatement. (Almost every point about Jamnia is controverted; see Lewis 2002:146–62.) Jamnia, or Javneh, near Joppa, was an informal assembly of religious teachers that, to some extent, replaced the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem. A famous text in the Mishnah (6th division, *Tohoroth*, ‘Cleannesses’, tractate *Yadayim*, ‘Hands’, 3.5) records a dispute about the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, whether these books ‘render the hands unclean’—that is, count as sacred or canonical. The rabbis disagreed on both. The incident is often taken as signalling the time at which the canon of Writings was closed. The definitive Hebrew canon comprises twenty-four books.

## SEPTUAGINT

---

### Origin of the Septuagint

The word *septuaginta* is Latin for ‘seventy’. The name derives from the legend that seventy (or seventy-two) elders translated the Pentateuch into Greek. The translation is generally dated to the third or second century BCE. By the second century CE the name was extended by Christians to all the books of the Jewish Scriptures that were extant in Greek, including some that were not in the Hebrew canon, such as books translated from Hebrew (e.g. 1 Maccabees) and books originally composed in Greek (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon). It can be said with some confidence that, despite a few exceptions and variations, the Septuagint became the OT canon of the Christian Church.

The origins of the Septuagint are in the Greek-speaking Jewish community in Alexandria. The translation of the Pentateuch was probably made to be used in their synagogues. The other books of the Septuagint are later (the Prophets and the Writings quote the Greek Torah). The Septuagint was assembled and finalized over the course of

about 400 years. It was one of the great translation projects of antiquity: a translation from a Semitic language into an Indo-European one, done without dictionaries or word-lists, by men for whom Hebrew was no longer a spoken language. But the Septuagint often retains some characteristics of the original, especially the frequent use of parataxis (series of main clauses joined by 'and') and often lacks some typical features of literary Greek like particles, participial constructions, and subordinate clauses.

The Septuagint is a strictly Jewish translation, and it was used by Jewish historians, poets, and philosophers, as well as in the synagogue. But around the end of the first century, the Septuagint fell out of favour among Jews, perhaps because Christians began to use it as their own Bible. A famous statement in the Babylonian Talmud (*Massekhet Soferim* 1.7) comments: 'It happened that five elders translated the Pentateuch into Greek for King Ptolemy. That day was as hard for Israel as the day the calf was made, because the Pentateuch could not be translated properly' (trans. Tov 1988:163). In reaction, three Jews or Jewish converts (Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion) made more literal translations from Hebrew. In one case, the prophet Daniel, Theodotion's translation was considered by Christians better than the earlier version and is included in standard editions of the Septuagint.

## Legends about the Origin of the Septuagint

A legend about the origin of the Septuagint grew up among Jews and was developed by Christians. According to the *Letter of Aristeas*, the elders translated the Law in seventy-two days and achieved consensus by consultation. Philo (*Mos.* 2.25–44; 2.57) has the translators working independently of each other and producing seventy-two identical versions. Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.100) copied out more than half of the *Letter of Aristeas* and mentioned the document by name. Among Christians, Justin Martyr (1 *apol.* 31) repeats the basic narrative: King Ptolemy wanted the Jews' 'prophetic writings'. Seventy elders made the translations (*dial.* 68.7). Justin's dispute with Trypho the Jew concerned Isaiah 7.14 ('a virgin shall conceive'), so that, for Justin, the Septuagint was the whole of the OT.

Irenaeus (cited in Eusebius, *h.e.* 5.8.11–15) also has seventy elders producing the same translation independently. He too was concerned with Isaiah 7.14 and asserted the superiority of the Septuagint over the translations of Aquila and Theodotion. Eusebius (*p.e.* 9.38) and Epiphanius of Salamis (*mens.* 9) also mention the *Letter of Aristeas*.

## Canon Lists: Old Testament

Canon lists of OT books are, in general, not common for the early Church (see Bruce 1988:68–82). Virtually all of the fathers agreed on the central books of the OT, but they showed little consensus on the 'fringe' books.

Three codices of the Bible survive from the fourth and fifth centuries: Sinaiticus (fourth century), Vaticanus (fourth century), and Alexandrinus (fifth century). They are called ‘uncials’ from the script employed: all capital letters, without spaces between words. None of the three claims any canonical authority, and all three are a mix of proto-canonical and other books. Alexandrinus, for example, includes Tobit, Judith, 1 and 4 Maccabees, and others; Vaticanus lacks Maccabees but has other books of the Apocrypha; Alexandrinus includes the Psalms of Solomon in its table of contents.

Writings of the fathers that contain lists of OT books are a better guide to the state of the canon. Melito of Sardis, in a letter preserved by Eusebius (*h.e.* 4.26.12–14), has a canon list that is very close to the standard Hebrew canon, although Esther is lacking. Melito also described the collection as ‘the books of the old covenant’, among the first to do so. Eusebius (*h.e.* 6.25.1–2) also preserved Origen’s list of OT books, from a commentary on Psalm 1, where Origen listed the books as twenty-two in number, corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Origen’s canon is the Hebrew canon. He includes Ruth with Judges, and Lamentations (along with the apocryphal Letter of Jeremiah) with Jeremiah. He explicitly excludes Maccabees. Origen had also prepared the Hexapla, which was the text of the OT copied out six times in parallel columns (Hebrew, transliterated Hebrew, and four Greek translations).

Athanasius of Alexandria, in his well-known Easter letter of 367 (*ep. fest.* 39.4), also provides a list of canonical books. His motive is to affirm a normative canon: others have included apocryphal works among the books of inspired Scripture while Athanasius, with an appeal to tradition, will list the books of the authentic canon. He, too, writes that the OT has twenty-two books. He lists Ruth separately and includes Baruch, Lamentations, and the Letter of Jeremiah with Jeremiah. He omits Esther and does not mention Maccabees.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) represents an outlier among Greek fathers. Using historical and doctrinal criteria, he denied the higher inspiration of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and may have excluded Job and Chronicles from the canon (Bruce 1988:81).

Earlier Latin fathers, like their Eastern counterparts, usually listed the shorter, Hebrew canon. The great biblical scholar Jerome (d. c.420) was famous for his knowledge of Hebrew and his insistence on the ‘Hebrew truth’, the authority of the Hebrew books alone. In the preface to his translation of Samuel and Kings (called the ‘helmeted preface’), he counts the OT books as twenty-four, the number of the elders of Revelation, but prefers twenty-two (Ruth with Judges and Lamentations with Jeremiah). He knew 1 Maccabees in Hebrew, but did not include it in the canon. Other books are to be excluded from the OT as apocryphal, including, oddly enough, the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Rufinus of Aquileia (*ymb.* 37), meanwhile, lists the standard twenty-two books of the OT, counting Ruth with Judges. He groups Daniel with the major prophets.

Hilary of Poitiers (*Psal.* pref. 15) writes that the OT has either twenty-two or twenty-four books. Twenty-two would correspond to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. He combines Ruth with Judges, and Lamentations and the Letter of Jeremiah with Jeremiah. Some, however, he writes, have added Tobit and Judith to make twenty-four, the number of letters in the Greek alphabet. He adds that Latin, with twenty-three letters, stands

between Hebrew and Greek and together they are the three languages used on Jesus' cross (John 19.20).

A change came around the time of Augustine, who, in contrast with Eastern and earlier Western writers, accepted the larger, Septuagintal canon. Jerome and Augustine engaged in a famous dispute over whether the standard Latin Bible should be translated from Hebrew, as Jerome insisted, or from the Septuagint, which was Augustine's preference. (Augustine writes to Jerome of his preference for translating the Septuagint in his *ep.* 28.2; 71.4–5. Jerome defends his translation from Hebrew in *ep.* 112, *ep.* 75.19–20 among Augustine's letters.) Augustine (*doct. chr.* 2.8.13) clearly enumerated the larger, Septuagintal canon. He counted the books of the OT as forty-four. If Lamentations is separated from Jeremiah, Augustine has precisely the forty-five books of the larger OT canon.

The first (local) councils to promulgate a list of canonical books were three councils in North Africa in Augustine's time. These councils endorsed the larger, Septuagintal canon. Despite these lists, however, in practice the fathers cited rather freely from a wider range of books than the Hebrew canon.

## Canon of the Septuagint and Later Controversies

There is no agreed-upon, authoritative canon of the Septuagint. The commonly used scholarly edition, edited by Alfred Rahlfs, has no ecclesiastical authority. The Roman Catholic Church has a canon of forty-five books: the books extant in Hebrew (Jewish and Protestant canons), and Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Baruch (with the letter of Jeremiah), and 1 and 2 Maccabees, along with additions in Greek to Esther and Daniel. The Eastern Orthodox Church accepts the Septuagint, often with great reverence, affirming its divine inspiration. The Orthodox version of the Septuagint, which comprises a few more books than the Roman Catholic OT, was confirmed at synods in Jassy (1642) and Jerusalem (1672).

At the time of the Reformation the extent of the OT canon became a hotly disputed theological issue. Martin Luther claimed that only the books of the Hebrew canon were authoritative and, in his Bible of 1534, printed the books outside the Hebrew canon after the books of Hebrew origin and designated them 'Apocrypha'.

The Catholic Church had not fixed the limits of its canon before the sixteenth century. The larger, Septuagintal canon defined by Augustine generally prevailed, but Jerome (who favoured the shorter Hebrew canon) had his defenders. The Council of Trent defined the longer, Septuagint canon as authoritative, perhaps under Augustine's influence. The Apocrypha, in Catholic usage, are generally designated 'deutero-canonical'.

Modern Protestant Bibles vary in their treatment of the Apocrypha. More confessional or conservative Bibles (e.g. New International Version) omit them entirely. Others include them in a separate section. Recent versions of the Revised Standard Version are attempts to transcend confessional limits and present not only the Apocrypha (with the additions to Daniel and Esther) but also texts accepted by some Eastern Orthodox communions, like 1 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh.

## CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

---

### Earliest Writings and Collections

Jesus' commission to his disciples was to teach and baptize (Matt 28.18–19), not to write. The earliest Christian writings, which eventually constituted the NT, arose out of various subsequent circumstances. The Apostle Paul wrote his letters to churches between c.50 and 64. They were meant to encourage and admonish Christians in local communities. At the same time, oral narratives about Jesus of Nazareth's teachings and miracles were composed and repeated; they were soon attached to the largest narrative, the account of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. From these oral traditions the written Gospels emerged. The Gospel according to Mark may have been finally edited c.70, followed by Matthew and Luke; John is most likely the latest, as late as 90 or 100. Eventually Luke added the Acts of the Apostles to his Gospel, and John the Presbyter recorded his visions in the book of Revelation. Still other writings, in particular 1 Peter and 1 John, are also attested in this period.

The next step was the collection of these writings and their further circulation. The first corpus to be gathered was probably Paul's letters. The exchange and collection of letters must have been natural in the nascent Church. 1 *Clement*, written in Rome before the end of the first century, knows of 1 Corinthians (1 *Clem.* 47.1). Ignatius of Antioch knows of a collection of Paul's letters (*Eph.* 12.2). Polycarp of Smyrna reveres Paul's teaching and knows of his letters (*ep.* 11.2–3). Polycarp (*ep.* 13.1–2) also attests to the collection of Ignatius of Antioch's letters.

Writings from the late first and early second centuries also give hints of disputes about the right interpretation of texts, a sign that these texts were beginning to be revered as authoritative or sacred: the text had to be respected, and hence false interpretations had to be excluded. The author of 2 Peter knows of Paul's letters and writes that they are difficult to understand and open to misinterpretation (2 Pet 3.15–16). Polycarp (*ep.* 7.1) also knows that the Lord's sayings can be perverted, that is, misinterpreted. This is the first instance of a dispute about the interpretation of Jesus' sayings. A different phenomenon is found in the *Didache*, which applies Matthew 7.6 ('Do not give what is sacred to dogs') to the Eucharist, one of the first instances of the spiritual interpretation of a NT text and another sign of the Gospel's growing authority.

### Emergence of a New Testament

An NT exists when a collection of Christian writings is acknowledged as equal in authority to the Scriptures the Church had from its beginning—that is, its OT, generally read in the Septuagint translation. The impulse towards the canonization of the earliest Christian writings arose from the need to have the Lord's authority available in a fixed

form. The death of the Apostles, the spread of the Church, and the proliferation of writings later called the 'apocryphal New Testament' fostered this development.

The only unconditioned authority the earliest Church had was Jesus Christ its Lord: Jesus of Nazareth crucified, raised, and exalted. The Jewish Scriptures were authoritative as the Church's OT on the condition that they were interpreted Christologically. The Apostles, as witnesses to the Lord's words and deeds, were also authorities for Christian truth, on the condition of their fidelity; the NT already knew 'false apostles' (2 Cor 11.13).

The Lord's authority attached first to his words, remembered and transmitted orally. Hence, for a few decades, these oral traditions were authoritative for Christians. Gradually, Jesus' authority attached also to narratives of his deeds and to the Passion Narrative, and soon to unified narratives comprising all these elements—that is, written Gospels. Later tradition reinforced the authority of the written Gospels with apostolic authority, affirming that Matthew and John were among the twelve Apostles, while Mark was Peter's disciple and Luke was Paul's disciple. The Apostles' personal authority soon attached to writings attributed to them, first to the letters of Paul and then to letters attributed to other disciples (James, John, Peter, and Jude). By around the year 150, two collections of authoritative writings had been made. One was of Pauline letters, probably thirteen in number, without Hebrews. The other was a collection of Gospels, certainly three (the Synoptics) and perhaps four (with John included). The process of canonization was carried out not by any central authority but by local churches.

The collections of the Gospels and of Paul's letters each posed distinctive problems. Each of the Gospels presented itself as authoritative in itself; none of them presupposed the existence of another Gospel. Hence, the problem was the move from the general to the particular—to acknowledging four Gospels, which were not always in agreement, as equally authoritative. Paul's letters, by contrast, were addressed to individual churches, and the problem was making the particular general, to see his letters as speaking to all Christians.

A few solutions of the four-Gospel problem failed. Marcion accepted only one Gospel, Luke, in a version that he edited down. Tatian combined the four Gospels into one harmony, the *Diatessaron*, which the Syriac church read in worship for a century or so. Justin Martyr assumed the authority of the three synoptic Gospels. Irenaeus, in a classic passage (Irenaeus, *haer.* 3.11.8), defended a canon of four Gospels, and four Gospels only. Ultimately, the Church chose to deal with disharmony among the four Gospels rather than reducing their number or combining them.

The case of Paul's letters was less acute. But a passage in the Muratorian Fragment shows that the particularity of the letters could be a problem. Putting aside letters to individuals (Timothy and Titus), the Fragment counted Paul's letters as addressed to seven churches and saw a parallel in the seven letters to churches in the Revelation of John. But seven was the number of perfection; thus to write to seven churches was to write to the entire Church, and the particularity of Paul's letters was transcended.

## Witnesses to the New Testament in the Second Century

The term ‘apostolic fathers’ designates seven or eight documents from the first half of the second century, the work of the first Christian writers after the NT documents. These documents do not presuppose a closed NT canon; however, the words of Jesus are quoted as authoritative. *1 Clement* quotes concatenations of dominical sayings that are close to Matthew and Luke. Ignatius of Antioch never quotes Jesus’ words. The *Didache* quotes the Lord’s Prayer in a form close to Matthew’s, and, verbatim, a saying also found in Matthew. Polycarp of Smyrna quotes two sayings, Matthean in form. The *Epistle of Barnabas* quotes two sayings, both foreign to the synoptic tradition. *2 Clement* quotes nine sayings: one from Luke, five close to sayings in Matthew or Luke, and three foreign to the synoptic tradition. Thus, in that era, Matthean and Lukan traditions were prominent, but a few NT apocrypha were also quoted.

Papias of Hierapolis, a contemporary of Polycarp, wrote *Exegeses of the Dominical Sayings* in five books, which survives only in small fragments. Papias knew the written Gospels of Matthew and Luke. He also knew the Gospel of John. But he writes that he prefers oral traditions to written books (*fr.* 1; Grant 2003:24).

Among the apologists of the second century (intellectuals converted to Christianity who tried to explain the Christian faith to unbelievers), Justin Martyr (d. 165) is the most important. Justin shows a real advance towards acknowledging an authoritative NT. For example, he introduces Christian texts three times with the formula ‘it is written’, implying divine authority (*dial.* 49 = Matt 17.3; *dial.* 100, cf. Matt 11.27; *dial.* 105 = Matt 5.20). Further, he uses the word ‘gospel’ three times to refer to written works, and one of these (*1 apol.* 66) is in the plural (the first time that usage is found), thus acknowledging a collection of written Gospels. His more common expression for the word ‘gospel’, however, is ‘memoirs of the apostles’, and he attests that they are read in the liturgy (*1 apol.* 1.67). In all, Justin cites about sixty sayings of Jesus, which show some variation from the texts of the synoptics. Thus it can be said with certainty that Justin acknowledged a canon of three synoptic Gospels.

With Irenaeus of Lyons (d. c.200), the existence and acceptance of a canonical NT is firmly established. Irenaeus cites the NT documents twice as often as the OT. He quotes over 1,000 passages from the NT, citing almost every book. The Gospels dominate, followed by the Pauline letters. He acknowledges a closed canon of four Gospels and puts the Pauline letters on the same level of authority as the Gospels.

In a well-known passage, Irenaeus provides a curious argument for why there have to be four Gospels, and only four. The passage begins:

It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the ‘pillar and ground’ (1 Tim 3.15) of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that

she should have four pillars... He who was manifested to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit.

(Irenaeus, *haer.* 3.11.8; trans. ANF 1:428)

Irenaeus goes on to write of the four-faced cherubim and four principal covenants (Adam, Noah, Moses, and the Gospel). Writing of the cherubim (Rev 4.7), he associates, in this order, John with the lion, Luke with the calf, Matthew with the man, and Mark with the eagle. With these curious arguments, we have seen the great change from the very occasional quoting of a few of Jesus' words to a closed, sacred canon of four Gospels.

By the year 200, the Church had an NT canon consisting of twenty books: the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen letters attributed to Paul, 1 Peter, and 1 John. The Eastern Church was moving towards accepting Hebrews (understood as Pauline), and the Western Church was doing the same for the Revelation of John. The five shorter catholic epistles were accepted by the fourth century, on the basis of their attribution to Apostles, and mostly under the influence of Origen.

## Canon Lists: New Testament

The most celebrated canon list (and perhaps the earliest) of NT books is the so-called Muratorian Fragment, discovered by Ludovico Muratori in 1740 in the Ambrosian library in Milan. (There is controversy about almost every detail of the *Murtorian Fragment*; see Hahneman 2002:405–15.) The date of this short (85 lines) fragment is hotly disputed, although some of its content points to the late second century.

The *Fragment* attests to a canon of four Gospels. It is defensive about the Fourth Gospel, which may have been under attack by the *Alogi*, the 'Wordless Ones' (see Epiphanius, *haer.* 51.3; 54.1), in the late second century—that is, those who reject the Gospel of John, thus rejecting the 'Word'. The fragment knows of thirteen Pauline letters, 1 John, Acts, Jude, 2 (and perhaps 3) John, and the Wisdom of Solomon (as part of the NT). It also receives the Revelation of John, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, although with the note that some do not want that book read in church. The *Shepherd of Hermas* is excluded because of its recent date. Two letters with Paul's name on them, to the Laodiceans and to the Alexandrians, are rejected because of their unorthodox content. The *Fragment* thus proposes four criteria for canonicity: early date, liturgical use, apostolic authorship, and orthodoxy. But only the last criterion is fully adequate, and the author proposes a primitive form of the rule of faith as a criterion for orthodoxy: 'by one sovereign Spirit all things are declared in all of them [i.e. the Gospels] concerning the Nativity, the Passion, the Resurrection, the conversation with his disciples and his two comings' (trans. Stevenson 1957:145).

The closest Origen comes to a list of canonical NT books is in his *Homilies on Joshua* 7: four Gospels, two letters by Peter, letters of James and Jude, John's epistles, Luke's Acts of the Apostles, and fourteen letters of Paul (including Hebrews). Revelation is not mentioned. If he thinks of John as having three letters, then the list is nearly identical with

the later NT, except for Revelation. Origen's first criterion for canonicity is the acceptance of a book by all the churches.

Eusebius of Caesarea, a careful scholar, still did not report any 'official' list of canonical books, that is, a list prepared by a synod, making it clear that there was not yet a biblical canon fixed by any ecclesiastical authority. Athanasius of Alexandria (*ep. fest.* 39.5, for Easter in 367) presents the first exact list of the twenty-seven books of the later NT canon, including Revelation. Cyril of Jerusalem (*catech.* 4.36), in his list of books drawn up for catechumens, lists twenty-six NT books, without Revelation.

But the list continued to be flexible. Gregory Nazianzen (*carm.* 1.1.12) presents the list of twenty-seven books in one of his poems. Epiphanius of Salamis (*haer.* 76.22.5) has the same list as Athanasius, but adds the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach to the NT. Amphilochius of Iconium (*Seleuc.* lines 289–319) reports an earlier debate about Hebrews, the catholic epistles, and Revelation. He appears to reject 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and almost certainly Revelation. Thus, at the end of the fourth century, the NT canon was still in flux.

In the West, Rufinus of Aquileia (*ymb.* 37) lists the twenty-seven books of the standard NT canon. So does Jerome in a letter to Paulinus of Nola (*ep.* 53.9). In letter 129 (414) he specifically defends the canonicity of Hebrews and Revelation. Augustine too (*doct. chr.* 2.8.13) has the list of the twenty-seven books of the NT.

The first local councils to concern themselves with the list of NT books were North African councils in the time of Augustine, whose influence on these councils would hardly be surprising. The Council of Hippo in 393 listed the standard twenty-seven books. Its *acta* are lost, but they are cited by the Council of Carthage in 397 (see canon 24). The Council of Carthage in 419 repeated the list from Carthage, 397 (see Munier 1974).

Thus, from the fifth century on, almost all Christians accepted twenty-seven books as an authoritative NT; exceptions (usually in the form of one or two additional books, e.g. 3 *Corinthians* in Armenia) are rare.

## THE RULE OF FAITH

---

Before the NT canon existed, tradition was normative in the Church. Paul already attests to the process of 'receiving' and 'delivering' (1 Cor 11.23; 15.3). But true traditions had to be distinguished from false traditions. From its earliest stages Christians knew 'false apostles' (2 Cor 11.13), 'false prophets' (e.g. 1 John 4.1), and 'false teachers' (2 Pet 2.1).

Robert Grant wrote that, from its very beginning, the Church had an implicit rule of faith, or proto-doctrines that permitted the Church to reject some teachings as false or untrue. Grant proposed three such teachings (Grant 1970:286).

- Jesus of Nazareth truly took flesh, was truly born, died, and rose. Hence the Church could reject Docetism (the view that Christ only 'appeared in' the flesh without genuinely assuming it).

- The OT was truly God's Word and pointed towards Jesus the Christ. The God of the OT—the God who created the world, called Abraham, and spoke to Moses—was also the Father of Jesus Christ. Hence the Church could reject Marcion.
- God offered salvation to all human beings without distinction. The Church had a universal mission, and no one was by nature excluded. Hence the Church could reject 'Gnosticism'.

Thus the thesis that orthodoxy is simply the views of the winners in struggles cannot be rightly maintained. From its beginnings, Christianity had the person, words, and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, as its norm for truth (Völker 2006:399–405).

The first formulations of a proto-rule of faith were the earliest confession: 'Jesus is Lord' (Rom 10.9; 1 Cor 12.3; cf. Phil 2.11); the kerygma: 'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...' (1 Cor 15.3–5); and the prayer '*Marana tha*' (1 Cor 16.22; *Didache* 11.6; cf. Rev 22.20). Early formulations were often dyadic: one God, and Jesus the Lord. Under the influence of Matthew 28.19, they would soon become triadic: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This account of teaching is given various names: 'rule of truth' (Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.9.4; 2.27.1; 3.11.1; 3.12.6; 3.15.1; 4.35.4); 'rule of faith' (Polycrates of Ephesus to Victor of Rome, in Eusebius, *h.e.* 3.4.2; Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 4.15.98.3); 'canon of the truth' (Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 6.15.124.5); 'ecclesiastical rule' (Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 6.15.125.3); and 'rule of the Church' (Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 7.7.41.3). In Latin, Tertullian used 'rule of faith' (*praescr.* 13; *virg.* 1; *Prax.* 2).

Rules of faith functioned as guides to right teaching (e.g. God as the creator of all things, against the 'Gnostics'), and to the right interpretation of Scripture (again, against the 'Gnostics' distortions). Both points are common in Irenaeus. The rule can be extended to liturgical practices, like keeping Easter on the fourteenth of Nisan (Polycrates of Ephesus, *Letter* to Victor of Rome; Eusebius, *h.e.* 3.4.2). The rule is the same throughout the whole Church (Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.10.1–2). The rule, written in hearts without paper or ink, suffices for true believers to recognize heresy, even without Scripture (Irenaeus, *haer.* 3.4.2). The rule of faith is not identical with Scripture, but it cannot contradict Scripture. With the rise of heresies, appeal to the Scriptures no longer sufficed. The 'Gnostics' read the same Scriptures as the orthodox did but interpreted them differently. What was needed was a norm for interpretation, which is the rule of faith.

Scholarly study of the rule of faith flourished, beginning in the nineteenth century, after the rise of historical studies (see the survey in Ferguson 2015:48–65). Older researchers (i.e. in the late nineteenth century) supposed that the rule had a verbally fixed form, like a baptismal creed. But such a theory is no longer maintained. The rule was more elusive. In their writings, Irenaeus and Tertullian formulate the rule at least a dozen times, but never in the same words. The rule is usually tripartite (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), which suggests a parallel to baptism, but sometimes bipartite (Father and Son).

But unlike baptismal creeds (the earliest one of which may be attested c.220 or shortly thereafter), the rule was used by Christian writers and theologians rather than by candidates for baptism. Yet later writers (e.g. Augustine) simply identify the rule of faith with the creed (*symb.* 1.1).

Some formulations of the rule of faith from the second and third centuries will best illustrate its nature. Irenaeus wrote that the Church, scattered throughout the world, preserves its unity by adherence to the rule received from the Apostles. The main articles are God the Creator and the incarnate Son:

The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father 'to gather all things in one' [Eph 1.10]... As I have already observed, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. (Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.10.1–2; trans. ANF 1:330–1)

Tertullian writes in a similar vein:

The rule of faith, indeed, is altogether one, alone immoveable and irreformable; the rule, to wit, of believing in one only God omnipotent, the Creator of the universe, and his Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised again the third day from the dead, received in the heavens, sitting now at the right (hand) of the Father, destined to come to judge quick and dead through the resurrection of the flesh as well (as of the spirit).

(Tertullian, *virg.* 1; trans. ANF 4:27)

The rule of faith protects believers against the errors of the 'Gnostics,' as Irenaeus asserts forcefully:

The rule of truth which we hold is, that there is one God Almighty, who made all things by his Word, and fashioned and formed, out of that which had no existence, all things which exist... There is no exception or deduction stated; but the Father made all things by him... Holding, therefore, this rule, we shall easily show, notwithstanding the great variety and multitude of their opinions, that these men have deviated from the truth... (Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.22.1; trans. ANF 1:347)

Tertullian writes that the rule contains the unchanging truth; and, whatever is not in the rule is open to speculation:

This Rule, taught (as will be proved) by Christ, allows no questions among us, except those which heresies introduce and which make heretics. Provided the essence of the Rule is not disturbed, you may seek and discuss as much as you like... Faith is established in the Rule. There it has its law, and it wins salvation by keeping the law... To know nothing against the Rule is to know everything.

(Tertullian, *praescr.* 13–14; trans. Greenslade 1956:40).

In another place, Tertullian includes the Trinitarian name, the unity of the OT and NT, baptism, chrismation, the Eucharist, and martyrdom in one compact formulation:

She [that is, the Church of Rome] knows one Lord God, Creator of the universe, and Christ Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, Son of God the Creator, and the resurrection of the flesh; she unites the Law and the Prophets with the writings of the evangelists and the apostles; from that source she drinks her faith, and that faith she seals with water, clothes with the Holy Spirit, feeds with the eucharist, encourages to martyrdom; and against that teaching she receives no one.

(Tertullian, *praescr.* 36; trans. Greenslade 1956:57)

As already noted, later authors simply identified the rule of faith with the creed. For example, Augustine writes, 'Receive, my sons, the rule of faith which is called the creed. When you have received it, write it on your hearts; recite it daily to yourselves' (*ymb.* 1.1; trans. Liguori 1955:289). Or, 'You have handed back what you believe; listen. Thus, you first learned the Creed, where you find the rule of your faith, short and profound: short, in the number of words; profound, in its depth' (*serm.* 59.1). Or, 'The creed is the rule of faith expressed compactly, to instruct the mind and not burden the memory; it is expressed in a few words' (*serm.* 213.1).

## CANONS, RULES OF FAITH, AND THEOLOGY

---

To speak of 'canons' is to admit of differences and disagreements. In regard to the OT, the greatest difference is between the shorter, Hebrew canon and the longer, Septuagintal canon. There is less disagreement about the canon of the NT, apart from some fringe books.

'Rules of faith', in the plural, can refer to the many formulations of the rule, found particularly in Christian writers of the second and third centuries. The formulations differ, one from another, but the content is remarkably unified.

The rule of faith both preceded the canon and guided its formation and its interpretation. The rule of faith was never officially established or defined; it was rather the 'sense of the faith' of Christian teachers. The rule is grounded, ultimately, in the Church's experience of Jesus Christ her Saviour. Once the churches formulated and fixed their baptismal creeds, the creeds functioned as the rule of faith had done earlier.

Both the canon and the rule of faith can be considered privileged moments within tradition, the receiving and handing on of revelation. The rule of faith, as a test of orthodoxy, guided the gradual formation of the canon, particularly the canon of the NT. And the canon of the NT is a privileged moment within the Church's tradition. The formation and acceptance of the basic or essential NT canon of twenty books at the end of the second century marked a certain moment of maturity in the early Church: with a firm NT, she was equipped for expansion, development, and self-confidence. The canon of twenty-seven books rounded out the process.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Justin Martyr, *Apologiae*. Eng. trans.: L. W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies*, ACW 56 (New York: Paulist, 1997).
- Papias, *Fragmenta*. Eng. trans.: R. M. Grant (ed.), *Second-Century Christianity: A Collection of Fragments*, 2nd edn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 24–6.
- Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*. Eng. trans.: S. L. Greenslade, *The Prescriptions against the Heretics*, in *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose and Jerome*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 31–64.
- Augustine, *De symbolo ad catechumenos*. Eng. trans.: M. Liguori, *Saint Augustine: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, FC 27 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955), 289–301.
- Concilia Africae a. 345–525*. Latin text: C. Munier, CCL 149 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1974).
- Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*. Eng. trans.: A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ANF 1 (repr.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 315–567.
- [Anonymous], *Muratorian Fragment*. Eng. trans.: J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius* (London: SPCK, 1957), 144–7.
- Athanasius, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi*. Eng. trans.: A. Robertson, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, NPNF 4, 150–72.
- Athanasius, *Epistula festivalis trecesima nona*. Eng. trans.: A. Robertson, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, NPNF 4, 551–2.
- Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica*. Eng. trans.: G. A. Williamson, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965).
- Hilary of Poitiers, *Tractatus super psalmos*. Latin text: PL 9, 231–890.
- Tertullian, *De uirginibus uelandis*. Eng. trans.: S. Thelwall, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, in P. Schaff (ed.), *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ANF 4 (repr.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 27–37.

### Scholarship

- Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity).
- Ferguson, E. (2015). *The Rule of Faith: A Guide*. Cascade Companions (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books).

- Grant, R. M. (1970). 'The New Testament Canon', in P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (eds), *Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to Jerome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Hahneman, G. M. (2002). 'The Muratorian Fragment and the Origins of the New Testament Canon', in L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders (eds), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 405–15.
- Lewis, J. P. (2002). 'Jamnia Revisited', in L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders (eds), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 146–62.
- Tov, E. (1988). 'The Septuagint', in M. J. Mulder and H. Sysling (eds), *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Assen: Van Gorcum), 161–88.
- Völker, W. (2006). 'Walter Bauer's *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*', trans. T. P. Scheck, *JECS* 14: 399–405.

### Suggested Reading

- Blowers, P. M. (1997). 'The *Regula Fidei* and the Narrative Character of Early Christian Faith', *Pro Ecclesia* 6: 199–228.
- Campanhausen, H. von (1972). *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Fortress).
- Childs, B. S. (1984). *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress).
- Dawidowski, W. (2004). "'Regula Fidei" in Augustine: Its Use and Function', *AugSt* 35: 253–99.
- Gamble, H. Y. (1985). *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress).
- Grant, R. M. (1965). *The Formation of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row).
- Jellicoe, S. (1968). *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford: Clarendon).
- Jobes, K. H., and Silva, M. (2015). *Invitation to the Septuagint*. 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic).
- Kinzig, W. (2017) (eds). *Faith in Formulae: A Collection of Early Christian Creeds and Creed-Related Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Lienhard, J. T. (1995). *The Bible, the Church, and Authority: The Canon of the Christian Bible in History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press).
- McDonald, L. M. (1988). *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Nashville: Abingdon).
- Metzger, B. M. (1987). *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon).
- Rombs, R. J., and Hwang, A. Y. (2010) (eds) *Tradition and the Rule of Faith in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph T. Lienhard, S.J.* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America).

## CHAPTER 4

---

# DIVINE DISCOURSE

### *Scripture in the Economy of Revelation*

---

FRANCES YOUNG

THREE theses may be proposed concerning God's Word in patristic theology:

- (1) The Word Incarnate and Word Inscribed are mutually dependent, reinforcing one another.
- (2) This Word is both veiled and revealed, transparent and obscure, immediate and transcendent.
- (3) God's Word is constitutive of—indeed the founding principle of—every aspect of the divine *oikonomia* ('economy').<sup>1</sup>

The validity of these propositions should emerge in the course of the following explorations. If they hold, it is clear that for the church fathers:

- the Word or Logos of God encapsulates rather more than the divine discourse addressed to humankind in Scripture, which is indispensable yet only intelligible in the light of Christ;
- the very notion of God's Word transcended what could be said, let alone written or recorded, in human language; both Scripture and incarnation bespeak divine condescension;
- scriptural hermeneutics shaped theology but only insofar as the sacred texts were read as pointing beyond themselves.

<sup>1</sup> The meaning of *oikonomia* in patristic usage is not easily rendered into English; it is derived from words meaning 'household management' and covers God's overall plan or strategy (Blowers 2012), including the initiation of, gracious outreach towards, and providential oversight of everything from beginning to end, thus encompassing creation, revelation, and redemption, though sometimes specifying the incarnation in particular.

The fathers' theology of Scripture, then, could not stand alone; it was one paradigm, alongside the incarnation, of God's self-accommodation to human limitations, God's direct yet indirect Word, whose intent is veiled yet discernible through Christ by those inspired by the Spirit of wisdom.

## FROM THE WRITTEN WORD TO SCRIPTURE

---

In his classic of 1888, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*, Edwin Hatch commented on the respect accorded to the written word in Antiquity, and attributed this to the way in which it seemed to defy mortality; even though no longer present, the absent authors of the past could, miraculously, still speak and their wisdom was available for subsequent generations.<sup>2</sup> This point becomes all the more powerful when you realize that books were like audio-recordings: they were always read or recited aloud, so the authorial voice was literally replayed. Add to that the distrust of novelty in the Roman world, and the importance of the ancient classics passed down over generations and conserved in written form becomes evident.

Books lay at the heart of ancient education, and the rhetors delivering it were anxious to show that, contrary to Plato's critique, they did offer moral teaching—indeed, distilled it from the ancient texts which they studied with their pupils. From the Hellenistic age on, philosophers also traced their doctrines in Homer or developed their ideas through exegesis of Plato. Plato himself had, of course, famously expressed the anxiety that writing undermined the power of memory; but for the educated elites and cultural leaders of the world in which Christianity grew up, tradition enshrined in books had a certain 'aura', and so authority.

Another feature of that world was its interest in oracles and prophecies (cf. Plutarch, *Pythian Dialogues*). In his 'Claudius' novels, known best in a remarkable TV adaptation (*I, Claudius*), Robert Graves (1934, 1935) captured well the way in which the imperial government, before engaging in battle or other serious matters, would not just consult the auspices (i.e. get expert priests to inspect the entrails of sacrificial animals and predict on that basis the future outcome), but would also consult books of Sibylline oracles—compilations recording oracular riddles delivered in ecstasy by prophetesses known as Sibyls. Like the famous oracle at Delphi, Sibyls based at shrines across the Mediterranean world had long been sought out by pilgrims wanting answers about the future. So culturally significant were the written collections of their sayings that there eventually emerged Jewish and Christian collections designed to show that even the Sibyl made predictions favourable to their claims (Charlesworth 1983).

<sup>2</sup> For the points made in this section see Young 2004 and Gamble 1995.

The sanctity accorded by Jews to their books of Torah even exceeded that ascribed above to ancient cultures in general. Whereas recitation was often practised in non-Jewish contexts, Jews carefully read from the sacred texts, pointing to each word as they did so with a stylus. Whereas generally books were reproduced by dictation, Jews painstakingly copied their texts letter by letter. The written word was taking on the characteristics we associate with the word ‘scripture’ (though all that the Latin *scriptura* originally meant was ‘something written’). The Rabbis would speak of these holy books ‘defiling the hands’—in other words, they were so holy it was dangerous to touch them. The sacred scrolls were (and still are) processed around the synagogue before being opened and read; that this paralleled the processing of an idol at pagan festivals was an observation made in my hearing by a Jewish scholar in a seminar. This implies that the Word of God in Torah was, consciously or unconsciously, judged the equivalent in Judaism to the representation of the divine in images in other traditions, and so given the same ritual honour.

But the Word of God in Torah was, above all, to be obeyed. The role of the scribes and Pharisees was to interpret that Word and spell out how it applied in everyday life. The Rabbis would soon not simply take over that role, but would record traditional rulings in the Mishnah and later the Talmud. Meanwhile someone like Philo of Alexandria would, like his pagan contemporaries, find philosophy in those ancient sacred texts of his own Jewish community.

Some Hellenistic Jewish material, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, indicates that the Jewish prophets, including Moses and David, were treated as offering predictive oracles akin to those of the Sibyls. Interpretation of sacred texts as riddling oracles pointing to the future in a veiled way provided material for tracing what had already happened and would happen as events moved towards their denouement. Thus apocalypses revealed God’s providential plan being worked out in history.

Early Christianity emerged in a Jewish environment, and initially Christian treatment of the Law and the Prophets must be seen as belonging to internal Jewish debate. The two most obvious characteristics evident in the NT would seem to go back to Jesus himself. They are:

- critique of the scribes and Pharisees or the ‘tradition of the elders’ for their understanding of what obedience to the Law meant in daily life;
- expectation that prophecies would be fulfilled, and indeed were being fulfilled, through Jesus and his followers.

The tension between accepting the authority and sanctity of the holy books and rejecting Jewish practices lives on in Paul and through the second century.

The power of prophecy is particularly evident in the work of Justin Martyr. Here is where the first of those initial theses becomes blatantly obvious. In *1 Apology* 30 he explains how prophecy constitutes the knock-down argument for believing Christ is the Son of God. Miracles could be explained by magic, so they offer no proof that he was more than a human of human descent. The ‘strongest and truest evidence’ is that ‘we

have seen with our eyes' things happening which were predicted before they came to pass. Justin proceeds to explain about the prophets of God among the Jews whose words were preserved in the Hebrew language, then translated at the command of Ptolemy for his library in Egypt, and then how key elements in the Gospel story are found in those books. Indeed, much of *1 Apology* tells the story of Jesus Christ, as well as events such as the fall of Jerusalem, in testimonies from the Law and the Prophets. Thus the validity of the prophecies is confirmed by their fulfilment, and the proof of the Gospel lies in the way the fulfilment of prophecy is evident in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

According to Justin's account in the *Dialogue with Trypho* 2–8 it was this argument which had originally convinced him that Christianity was the true philosophy. He had tried out a Stoic teacher, then a Peripatetic, then a Pythagorean, finally the Platonists. But an apparently chance meeting with an old man led to a discussion in which he was led from Plato to the prophets. Whether this account is fictional or not is debated, but what it does provide an introduction to Justin's long dialogue with a Jew about the interpretation of the prophecies. Justin had to deal with the fact that Jews did not read their Scriptures as fulfilled in Christ, for this was the counter-argument which threatened to undercut his fundamental claims. The Word Incarnate and the Word Inscribed were in his eyes mutually dependent, reinforcing one another.

Contemporary with Justin, however, was Marcion, who apparently suggested that the Jewish Scriptures should be abandoned and replaced with the Pauline Epistles and an abbreviated version of Luke's Gospel. It was possibly Paul's apparent rejection of the Law which shaped Marcion's view that the Gospel was opposed to Jewish traditions rather than rooted in them. There are other indications that in the earliest Christianity the Scriptures were demoted. Papias' famous remark (Eusebius, *h.e.* 3.39.4) may be pertinent: he preferred the 'living voice' to things out of books. True, this is not about writings already treated as Scripture, but it may reflect a general attitude whereby written testimony was only valued as confirming oral testimony. In one of the letters of Ignatius of Antioch we find this statement:

Certain people declared in my hearing, 'Unless I can find a thing in our ancient records, I refuse to believe it in the Gospel'; and when I assured them that it is indeed in the ancient scriptures, they retorted, 'That has got to be proved.' But for my part, my records are Jesus Christ; for me the sacrosanct records are his cross and death and resurrection, and the faith that comes through Him. And it is by these, and by the help of your prayers, that I am hoping to be justified. (*Philad.* 8)

A remarkable echo of the rabbinic definition of sacred books as those which 'defile the hands' is found in the phrase translated 'sacrosanct records' (*ta athikta* [= untouched] *archeia*). All this suggests that Christ could trump the Scriptures.

There are also material indications that the sanctity attributed to Jewish books was reduced. Christians were the first by a century or so to switch from scrolls to codices for their writings—the reasons for this switch are not entirely clear (Roberts 1954; Roberts and Skeat 1983). Codices were sheets of papyrus folded to make the pages of a primitive

book of the kind still in use; they developed from notebooks used for convenience in everyday life. Scrolls were used for ‘real books’—to this day for their sacred texts Jews use scrolls. Christians, however, abstracted testimonies to Christ and collected them in notebooks with their Christian fulfilment implicit or explicit. Furthermore, manuscripts of the Gospels have apparently always been in the form of codices.

Particularly pertinent here is research which has uncovered two distinct text-forms in Justin’s quotations from the prophecies (Skarsaune 1987). Generally speaking the same proof-texts are used in *1 Apology* and the *Dialogue with Trypho*, but in the latter work they are quoted at greater length and, unlike in the former, in the LXX version. Whichever version Justin quotes, he assumes fulfilment in Christ, and ‘often neglects discrepancies between his inherited exegesis and the LXX text he quotes. But sometimes he tries to adjust his interpretation to the LXX text’ (Skarsaune 1987:90). It is suggested that the prophecies came to him first in Christian notebooks, but his longer quotations came from checking scrolls obtained from a synagogue—for sometimes he suspects ‘Hebraizing’ recensions. It would seem, then, that in the second century, Christian access to the full text of the Jewish Scriptures may have been somewhat patchy.

Certainly there was debate about the status and interpretation of written texts recognized as Jewish in origin, and any ‘aura’ attributed to those books was accorded only insofar as they pointed to Christ. As reaction against Marcion and others (e.g. both Gnostics and Montanists) ensured that the concept of ‘scripture’ would be reclaimed and its contents defined, the tension between demoting the Law in relation to the Gospel and hallowing the prophecies as offering valid testimony to Christ was bound to put a premium on interpretative strategies. A Christian reading of the emerging scriptural canon was facilitated by placing the approved books in relation to the divine ‘economy’.

## IRENAEUS: TOWARDS A HOLISTIC READING OF SCRIPTURE

---

It is in the work of Irenaeus that we can observe not only an initial determination of the contents of Scripture but also the establishment of a framework for reading it holistically and Christianly. Nor is this simply about Scripture. For here we find a theological position which exemplifies our third opening thesis. We cannot be absolutely sure how he may have used the word *oikonomia* since the original Greek texts of his works are largely lost. Latin and Armenian translations, however, allow us access to his great compilation, *Against Heresies*, as well as to what he describes as a ‘summary memorandum’ of the truth (generally known as the *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*), and these writings surely demonstrate that questions about his use of that particular word hardly matter compared with the way he reads what has been described as the ‘seamless plot’ (*hypothesis*) discernible in Scripture as a whole (Blowers 2012:87, 245, 263–4, 309, 375). Besides, here it is a matter of the way Irenaeus represents what was becoming the core position of what we may call the

mainstream Christian tradition. After all, not only is it his own claim that he is articulating apostolic tradition in the face of false interpretations, but also—whether or not he had substantial direct influence on subsequent theology (a matter of some debate)—it is remarkable how his comprehensive theological vision anticipates in many respects what we find developed later in both East and West. Writing at the end of the second century, then, Irenaeus presents the ‘rule of faith’ handed down from the apostles, setting it out sequentially in the *Demonstration*, having previously drawn from it, and perhaps elaborated it, in confronting the twisted teaching of the heretics in his larger work.

With respect to Scripture two questions were in contention: which books were to be accorded authority as Scripture and how were they to be interpreted? Not only did the heretics challenge texts which Irenaeus regarded as scriptural while utilizing texts he refused to recognize, such as the *Gospel of Truth* (*haer.* 3.11.9), but they also disregarded the order and connection of the various books to be treated as scriptural, thus dismantling and destroying the truth. Irenaeus used the analogy of a mosaic: it is as if a skilful artist had used gems to produce a beautiful portrait of a king and then the heretics had taken it to pieces and rearranged them so as to compose a dog or a fox (*haer.* 1.8.1). Later he compared the way they operated to the practice of composing a *cento*, that is, abstracting lines from Homer and reordering them so effectively to tell a different story that people might think they were reading Homer if they were not acquainted with the original (*haer.* 1.9.4). To determine both the appropriate collection of books and their proper reading as a unity was clearly fundamental. Yet the underlying issue concerned the oneness of God as both Creator and Saviour. Irenaeus’ opponents were, in one way or another, inclined to set salvation at loggerheads with creation—many denigrated material existence and offered escape to a superior spiritual world. In the face of this challenge the oneness of Scripture and the oneness of God were teachings that cohered, and the remedy lay in two fundamental moves: (1) seeing Christ as the Word of God which provided the key to the whole of Scripture, and (2) discerning the overarching narrative of the Scriptures as the key to the nature and purpose of the one God.

In his ‘summary memorandum’ Irenaeus’ starting point is the faith handed down through the disciples of the apostles and received in baptism for the remission of sins. Three articles provide the foundation:

- God the Father, uncreated, uncontainable, invisible, one God, the Creator of all . . .
- The Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was revealed by the prophets according to the character of their prophecy and according to the nature of the economies of the Father, by whom all things were made, and who, in the last times, to recapitulate all things, became a man among men, visible and palpable, in order to abolish death, to demonstrate life and to effect communion between God and man . . .
- The Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied and the patriarchs learnt the things of God and the righteous were led in the paths of righteousness, and who in the last times was poured out in a new fashion upon the human race renewing man, throughout the world, to God. (*dem.* 6)

In order to tease out what this means, Irenaeus then outlines creation, paradise, and fall, summarizes further narratives of wickedness and restoration (Cain and Abel, Noah, Babel), tells of Abraham's election, of Moses and the Exodus, speaks of the prophets, and then focuses on the incarnation, showing in particular how it fulfils the promises to Abraham and David. The rest of the work demonstrates the truth of all this, in Justin-like fashion, from the fact that all was foreseen by Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, including the new covenant whereby the Law was written on the heart and the Gentiles called to inherit the promises. This sketch of a sketch hardly does justice to the breadth of Irenaeus' theological vision, but it does indicate how an overview of Scripture provided the narrative by which God's identity was spelt out, and how the 'rule of faith' provided the clue to discerning the highlights and disclosing their significance in relation to the whole story. To probe further we need to grasp how Irenaeus' understanding of the Word of God is integrated into his conceptions of God's being, of God's act of creation, of humanity's creation in God's image, and of the incarnation.

Irenaeus' most urgent task was to affirm that God was Creator even of the material world, and that being Creator did not imply some inferior being. God's transcendent 'otherness' and the 'creatureliness' of everything else was a principle that had to be affirmed, but might imply that God could not, as it were, get the divine hands dirty messing about with matter. Irenaeus understood God's creation as fundamentally good, and the Word and the Spirit of God as God's hands crafting what God purposes. We find favourite biblical texts strung together to signify this message in each of his works: *haer.* 1.22.1 links the first and second passages below; *haer.* 3.8.3 links the first, third, and fourth passages; *dem.* 5 links the first and the fifth.

- 'By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established and all the might of them by the Spirit' (Ps 33.6).
- 'All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made' (John 1.3).
- 'For he commanded and they were created; he spake and they were made' (Ps 33.9).
- 'But our God is in the heavens above, and in the earth; He hath made all things whatsoever he pleased' (Ps 115.3).
- 'One God, the Father, who is above all and through all and in us all' (Eph 4.6).

As Irenaeus explains in the *Demonstration*, 'above all' is the Father, 'through all' is the Word, since through him everything was made by the Father, while 'in us all' is the Spirit who cries, 'Abba, Father' (Rom 8.15), and forms humankind in God's likeness. In this way the Spirit demonstrates the Word—for the prophets announced the Son of God, while the Word articulates the Spirit—for it is the Word of God who interprets the prophets, bringing humankind to the Father. Thus Irenaeus' overall conception takes up the tradition enshrined in our first thesis that the Word Incarnate and Word Inscribed are mutually dependent, reinforcing one another, while his deeply Trinitarian exposition of the 'economy' is an exegesis of the claim that what has come into being must have a cause and that cause is the one God who contains all and alone is uncontainable.

Humankind in particular was formed after the likeness of God and moulded by God's hands—that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whom God said, 'Let us make man' (Gen 1.26) (*haer.* 4.Praef.4). Irenaeus is clear that not just a part but the whole of a human being, made in God's likeness by the hands of the Father, namely the Son and the Holy Spirit, is to be conformable to and modelled on the Son (*haer.* 5.6.1). That means body as well as soul and spirit, he affirms, referring to 1 Thessalonians 5.23: 'Now the God of peace sanctify you perfect; and may your spirit, soul and body be preserved whole without complaint to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.' In other words, the human creation is only fully realized eschatologically through the incarnation and the gift of the Spirit; though this did exist proleptically from the beginning as God's hands shaped what was to be. For it is the Incarnate Word after whose image humankind was created:

For <I made> man <in> the image of God, and the image of God is the Son, according to whose image man was made; and for this reason, he appeared in the last times, to render the image like himself. (*dem.* 22)

This somewhat cryptic statement is made plainer by reference to a passage in *Against Heresies*:

This Word was manifested when the Word of God was made man, assimilating Himself to man, and man to Himself, so that by means of resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times long past it was *said* that man was created after the image of God, but it was not *shown*; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created. Wherefore also he lost the similitude easily. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed both these: for he both showed forth the image truly, since He became what was His image; and he re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father by means of the visible Word. (*haer.* 5.16.2, trans. ANF; italics mine)

'He lost the similitude easily'. At the heart of Irenaeus' understanding is the notion of 'recapitulation'—the Word summing up in himself all things which are in heaven and on the earth (Eph 1.10). In particular it was Adam, the one made from the virgin soil by the hand/Word of God, whom the same Word of God recapitulated in himself, being born of a virgin (*haer.* 3.21.10; *dem.* 31–2). The saving recapitulation involved the obedience of Mary reversing the disobedience of Eve (*haer.* 3.22.4; *dem.* 33) and Christ's obedience unto death hanging on a tree undoing Adam's disobedience occasioned by a tree (*haer.* 5.16.3, 17.3, 9.1; *dem.* 33–4). Such correlations represent something far more profound than might appear at first sight. Irenaeus affirms that Christ died on the very day Adam died from disobedience (*haer.* 5.23.2)—indeed the cross was imprinted on the whole of creation: for since the Word of God invisibly pervades the whole of creation—its length, breadth, and height and depth—so the Son of God was visibly crucified on a cross with those fourfold dimensions, inviting the dispersed from all sides, heights, depths, length, and breadth, to knowledge of the Father (*dem.* 34). In other words, from the very beginning God's plan (*oikonomia*) was that the human race, though summed up in

Adam's lost innocence, should be summed up fully in the Incarnate Word, in whose image Adam was made, and so receive both wisdom and life through Christ and the Spirit.

The Greek of Ephesians 1.10 contains both the word *oikonomia* and the word for 'recapitulation'. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that it is quoted frequently by Irenaeus. Because Christ sums up everything and embodies God's plan for all creation and humankind in particular, he is the key to the Scriptures:

If anyone, therefore, reads the Scriptures with attention, he will find in them an account of Christ, and a foreshadowing of a new calling. For Christ is the treasure which was hid in the field (Matt 13.44), that is, in this world (for 'the field is the world' [Matt 13.38]); but the treasure hid in the Scriptures is Christ, since he was pointed out by means of types and parables. Hence his human nature could not be understood, prior to the consummation of those things which had been predicted, that is, the advent of Christ... For every prophecy, before its fulfilment, is to men enigmas and ambiguities. But when the time has arrived, and the prediction has come to pass, then the prophecies have a clear and certain exposition.

(*haer.* 4.26.1)

For Jews this meaning is hidden; for Christians it is treasure brought to light by the cross of Christ. Thus Irenaeus' reading is grounded in a Justin-like claim to fulfilment, though the overall picture is more holistically conceived. His all-encompassing vision is supported by scriptural proof-texts, as we have repeatedly noticed, but it is also grounded in an overarching sense of Scripture's 'plot', at least as illuminated by the apostolic 'rule of faith'. Only read this way does Scripture become revelatory of the truth. Irenaeus thus confirms our first and third thesis: Christ and Scripture are mutually dependent, reinforcing one another, and the Word of God revealed in both Christ and the Scripture is actually constitutive of God's *oikonomia* from beginning to end.

## THE ALEXANDRIANS AND THE ENIGMATIC QUALITY OF DIVINE DISCOURSE

---

Before its fulfilment, said Irenaeus, and Justin would agree, every prophecy is enigmatic and ambiguous. Clement of Alexandria would go further, arguing that all divine discourse is necessarily symbolic, hidden in mysteries; for the transcendent God is in principle 'without form or name', and we understand the Unknown God (Acts 27.22-3) 'by divine grace, and by the Word alone that proceeds from him' (*str.* 5.12). Indeed, Clement had generalized the point that none can speak directly of the divine mysteries:

All then, in a word, who have spoken of divine things, both Barbarians and Greeks, have veiled the first principles of things, and delivered the truth in enigmas, and symbols, and allegories, and metaphors, and such like tropes. (*str.* 5.4)

A quotation from Sophocles sits alongside one from the Psalms which is applied to ‘all our Scriptures’: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter my problems from the beginning’ (Ps 78.1–2).

To demonstrate the motif of concealment Clement not only adduces the oracles of the Greeks, but the symbols of Pythagoras (*str.* 5.5) and the myths of Plato (*str.* 5.9), as well as Egyptian hieroglyphs (*str.* 5.7), placing in the midst of these a disquisition on the hidden meanings of the Temple, its veiled Holy of Holies, the unutterable four-letter name of God, the lamps and candlesticks, the altar of incense, the sacred ark, the cherubim and seraphim, the robe of the High Priest, etc. (*str.* 5.6). Poets and philosophers speak of hidden mysteries, so ‘it is proper that the Barbarian philosophy’, by which Clement refers to the Jewish Scriptures, ‘should prophesy also obscurely and by symbols’ (*str.* 5.8). The law and the prophets which were until John (Matt 11.13/Luke 16.16) have this obscure character; John spoke more clearly, not prophesying but pointing out as now present the one who was proclaimed symbolically from the beginning. Thus John ‘loosed the latchet of the oracles of the [old] economy by unveiling the meaning of the symbols’ (*str.* 5.8). As well as prophecies of revelation, Clement adduces a string of NT passages to indicate that the mystery has been unveiled: Ephesians 3.3–5; Colossians 1.9–11, 25–7; 2.2–3; 4.3, 4 (*str.* 5.10). His long wandering discussion, with its appeals to Plato and Moses, ultimately reaches that point with which we began: God cannot be known, and yet Paul says:

We speak wisdom among those who are perfect... We speak the wisdom of God hidden in a mystery. (1 Cor 2.6–7)

To the acknowledgement of the mystery of God in Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col 2.2–3)

The language of Scripture can only be an expression of the inexpressible God in an indirect way; so the truth of Scripture comes through a veil and we need an interpreter and guide. For Clement, then, becoming worthy to receive through faith the revelation that comes through the Scriptures interpreted by the Incarnate Word is the only way to know what is unknowable.

Origen may be described as the first scholarly exegete of Scripture (Young 1997). He learned some Hebrew, compared different translations, and wrote commentaries. He applied to the Scripture the techniques of textual and linguistic analysis learned in contemporary rhetorical schools, and in setting out his ‘first principles’ (*Peri archōn*) produced a handbook which both explains the basic principles of scriptural interpretation and engages with classic topics of philosophy, such as the *archai* of everything that exists, rooting his ‘single body of doctrine’ in the authority of Scripture and its inspiration by the Holy Spirit (*princ.* 1.Praef.10; 1.2.5; 1.3.1). His starting point in this work is the teaching of Christ, but that includes Moses and the prophets; he notes, however, that believers have conflicting opinions about substantial matters, so a canon or rule is needed, and is provided by the tradition handed down from the apostles. The outline of that tradition, recognizably the same basic ‘rule of faith’ found in

Irenaeus, leaves much to be investigated, Origen suggests; and this is especially the case given that Church teaching includes

the doctrine that the scriptures were composed through the Spirit of God and that they have not only that meaning which is obvious, but also another which is hidden from the majority of readers. For the contents of scripture are the outward forms of certain mysteries and images of divine things. (*princ.* 1.Praef.8)

Origen asserts that ‘on this point the entire Church is unanimous, that while the whole law is spiritual, the inspired meaning is not recognized by all, but only those who are gifted with grace of the Holy Spirit in the word of wisdom and knowledge.’ Of course, behind this lies the legacy articulated by those already considered above—prophecies and riddles whose meaning only became apparent by their fulfilment in Christ. Indeed, for Origen the divine inspiration of the prophecies came to light with the advent of Jesus; before that there were no ‘clear proofs of the divine inspiration of the old Scriptures’ (*princ.* 4.1.6). But Origen takes the notion of spiritual meanings substantially further.

The whole of Scripture, according to Origen, carries a ‘spiritual sense’, and the ‘key of knowledge’ is necessary not for the prophecies only—for the law, the Gospels, and the epistles contain their own obscurities (*princ.* 4.2.3). On the basis of Proverbs 22.20–1 Origen suggests that one should portray the meaning of the sacred writings in a three-fold way: the obvious interpretation may be called the flesh of Scripture, while, with a bit of progress, a person may be edified by its soul; and the one who is perfect may be edified by the spiritual law—for the perfect are like those mentioned by the apostle when he writes, ‘We speak wisdom among the perfect . . . God’s wisdom is a mystery, even the wisdom that has been hidden . . .’ (1 Cor 2.6–7) (*princ.* 4.2.4). The books of OT and NT he regarded as alike inspired by the Holy Spirit, and to discern the aim or intent of the divine author was fundamental to their interpretation (*princ.* 4.2.7–8). False interpretation arose from focusing on the bare letter and failing to understand holy Scripture in its spiritual sense (*princ.* 4.2.2). Indeed, some passages, Origen affirms, have no bodily sense at all (*princ.* 4.2.5). Later he provides examples of impossibilities arising from taking Scripture literally (*princ.* 4.3 *passim*): how could the days of creation be reckoned before the sun, moon, and stars were created? How could God plant a garden like a farmer, or walk in it in the cool of the day? How could the devil show Jesus *all* the kingdoms of the world from a high mountain? The absurdities in the laws, like commands to sacrifice non-existent animals, are followed by difficulties in the Gospels—a normal right-handed person would strike the left cheek, not the right. These examples are mentioned, Origen says, ‘with the object of showing that the aim of the divine power which bestowed on us the holy Scriptures is not that we should accept only what is in the letter’ (*princ.* 4.3.4). He rapidly defends himself from the charge of suggesting that biblical history and the incarnation never happened—the passages that are true are more numerous than those composed with purely spiritual meaning; and again, many moral commands are meant to be kept. But earlier he had already outlined the purpose of the *aporiai*—the stumbling-blocks, hindrances, and impossibilities:

they were to ensure that readers not just enjoy the surface-meaning, but learn to probe deeper for the underlying spiritual sense (*princ.* 4.2.9).

Origen justified the resultant allegorical approach to discerning meaning on the basis of certain key proof-texts (*princ.* 4.2.6; cf. *Cels.* 4.49):

- 1 Corinthians 9.9–10 quotes Deuteronomy 25.4 and suggests that the rule not to muzzle a treading ox does not signify God's care for oxen but was written 'for our sake';
- 1 Corinthians 10.11 states with regard to certain narratives from Exodus and Numbers that these things happened figuratively, and were written for our sake;
- 1 Corinthians 10.4 provides hints to show what they were figures of: 'For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ';
- Hebrews 8.5 quotes Exodus 25.40, 'Thou shalt make all things according to the figure shown thee on the mount';
- Galatians 4.21–4 explicitly turns Abraham's two sons into an 'allegory';
- Colossians 2.16–17 speaks of feast-days, sabbaths, etc. as 'a shadow of things to come';
- Hebrews 8.5 describes Jews as 'they who serve that which is a copy and shadow of heavenly things'.

Thus Scripture itself justified Origen's reading.

Particularly in his extended debate with the pagan Celsus, but also elsewhere, Origen shows awareness of the 'crudity' of the Bible and its anthropomorphisms. He uses the analogy of a person correcting children and using appropriate language:

So also the Logos of God seems to have arranged the scriptures, using the method of address which fitted the ability and benefit of the hearers... The Logos speaks like this because he assumes, as it were, human characteristics for the advantage of man... However, anyone interested in the exposition of the divine scripture, by comparing spiritual things with spiritual, as it is said (1 Cor 1.13), will discover from them the meaning of the sayings addressed to the weak and of those spoken to the intelligent, while often both meanings lie in the same text for him who knows how to understand it. When we speak of God's wrath, we do not hold that it is an emotional reaction on His part, but something which He uses in order to correct by stern methods those who have committed many terrible sins. (*Cels.* 4.71–2)

This last observation he confirms by citing suitable proof-texts. The point is that for Origen the surface meaning of Scripture is the outcome of God's gracious accommodation to the limitations of the creaturely human mind, just as the coming of the Logos in flesh was for our sake and our salvation. The weakness of our creaturely nature means that our discernment of the spiritual sense will only ever be partial. For

however far one may advance in the search and make progress through an increasingly earnest study, even when aided and enlightened in mind by God's grace, he will never be able to reach the final goal of his inquiry. (*princ.* 4.3.14)

The entire biblical corpus is meant to represent the truth of God's providential and saving purposes in Christ, the Word, but this spiritual meaning is constantly hidden, veiled in the 'bodily' text, discerned only partially by the reader inspired by the very author of the text, the Holy Spirit.

Yet God's Word is fundamentally one, as Origen makes clear in the *Commentary on John* (fr. in Jo. 5; ANF 9:364ff.). There may be a multiplicity of words and many books, but they all have the aim or intent which accords with the one Word. Holy Scripture is one book, written about Christ, for Christ is written of in the Pentateuch, the prophets, the Psalms, indeed in all the Scriptures. Elsewhere Origen insists that every single word, every letter, counts, and one should never give up hope that each stumbling block will yield up its significance (fr. hom. 39 in Jer.; Tollinton 1929:49ff.). The exegete's task is to uncover the harmony and consistency of Scripture, resolving what appears discordant, as he suggests in the *Commentary on Matthew* (Tollinton 1929:46ff.). The truth to be sought is the one Logos of God producing like a lyre the single sound of salvation from the various strings plucked.

Origen's pioneering scholarship and vast output would be enormously influential. However, within a century or so there would be a profound reaction against his allegorical method, as well as against certain controversial doctrines, some of which he may never actually have taught. Later orthodoxy would also have difficulties with his Christological and Trinitarian formulations. Yet, by developing aspects of his hermeneutical legacy in changed circumstances, later theologians were able to embrace the paradoxical mystery of one hidden yet revealed, unveiled through the Word yet beyond comprehension.

## SCRIPTURAL LANGUAGE AND THE DIVINE 'ECONOMY'

---

Debate about correct creedal formulations was increasingly brought to the bar of Scripture—indeed, some would regard scriptural interpretation as a fundamental issue in the Arian controversy, especially given the way in which key texts kept recurring in the literature. The attempt to settle the controversy at Nicaea was contested for half a century, and one tricky issue was how to reply to the charge that the key term, *homoousios* (of one substance), was not to be found in the Scriptures. Athanasius' reply appealed to the *dianoia* or 'mind' of Scripture: the council of bishops was forced to collect the 'mind' of Scripture and restate it in such non-scriptural formulas precisely because the heretics would accept anything from Scripture, interpreting it in their own blasphemous way (*decr.* 19.4). His detailed exegetical moves lie beyond the scope of this chapter (cf. Young 1997:chap. 2): suffice it to say that scriptural usage, demonstrated from collections of key texts, allowed him to make a sharp distinction between what is created and what is generated. He then also distinguished between the meaning of 'son' and 'father' with respect to Abraham and Isaac, for example, and the meaning of those same terms

used analogically of the divine—they could no longer have material or sexual implications. This involved a deductive process whereby distinctions were made between the meaning of words applied to human creatures and the meaning of those very same words when used of the divine, and so the development of a reading that is neither literal nor allegorical, but respectful of the normal ‘earthly’ meaning of words, as long as appropriately modified, or perhaps we should say ‘elevated’, for their theological significance. This procedure undoubtedly owed much to the classic rhetorical distinction between the wording and the intent of the speaker/writer. But it also certainly drew on the notion of the aim or intent of the one author of the whole of Scripture, namely the Holy Spirit, as Origen had, as well as on the kind of overarching, providential story-line, or *hypothesis* of Scripture, identified by Irenaeus as the apostolic tradition and perhaps best described as the ‘mind of the Church’. Thus Scripture’s witness to the divine ‘economy’ undergirded the apparently non-scriptural terminology of Nicaea.

The Eunomian controversy would radicalize the notion that the divine nature was beyond the compass of the creaturely mind by provoking the recognition that it was so *in principle*. Yet at the same time it would make way for a greater appreciation of the sheer grace and condescension of the divine ‘economy’. This would be facilitated by developing Origen’s sense of divine pedagogy and his notion of God’s accommodation to the limitations of creaturely existence.

The claim to define God was the catalyst. The utter difference between Creator and creature meant the end of any mediatorial hierarchy easily enabling connection between God and creation. This sharpened up the Christological question and necessitated the mind-blowing claim that the Word incarnate in Jesus was itself the transcendent divine. But it also raised again the issues concerning language used of God, and indeed language used by God—divine discourse itself. Gregory of Nyssa grounded all religious speech in God’s will to make the divine self known, establishing on this basis a symbolic theology through which some degree of theological understanding was made possible. For him ‘reason supplied us with but a dim and imperfect comprehension of the divine nature; but nevertheless the knowledge that we can gather from the names which piety allows us to apply to it is sufficient for our limited capacity’ (*Eun.* 2.130 [Jaeger 1.263]). Gregory notes that all language depends on created human speech and the existence of different languages is a clear indication that God allowed freedom to invent and develop linguistic expression—so no language is God-given, not even Hebrew (*Eun.* 2.200off.; 246–50; 260–1; 284; 406 [Jaeger 1.283; 298–9; 302; 310; 344]). Because no one suitable word can express the divine nature, God is addressed by many names, each by some distinctive touch adding something fresh to our notions of God (*Eun.* 2.145 [Jaeger 1.267]).

But human invention of language does not mean that the names are arbitrary—they depend on the prior existence and activity of God, and appropriate names come from contemplation of God’s works (for these and the following points see e.g. *Eun.* 2.149–54; 283; 325; 417–21 [Jaeger 1.268–70; 310; 321; 348–9]). Creation and Scripture guarantee that the names of God are more than a figment of the human imagination; for creation and Scripture are expressions of God’s will and God is truth. They provide an adequate though limited means of communication, like the gestures and signs used in communicating

with the deaf. Though having to accommodate the divine self to the limitations of human perception, God cannot be party to deception. So when Scripture honours the only-begotten with the same names as the Father, it must imply that he shares the dignity and honour of the Godhead. Furthermore, if the Word of God names God the Father, he must eternally and unchangeably have been Father, and therefore must have had a Son (e.g. *Eun.* 2.15 [Jaeger 1.231]). The names have sufficient grounding in reality to form a basis for theological argument. Yet, like Athanasius, Gregory argues that the gulf between Creator and creature, finite and infinite, means both sameness and difference. On the one hand, this necessitates multiplying the names so that they correct one another; on the other, even though 'the infinity of God exceeds all the significance and comprehension that names can furnish' (*Eun.* 3.110 [Jaeger 2.41]), if such names are truly predicable of God, they should be understood in their most natural and obvious sense, though with a heightened and more glorious meaning (*Eun.* 3.110 [Jaeger 2.41]; 3.87ff., 135ff. [Jaeger 2.33f.; 48ff.]).

Thus the Eunomian debate forced Gregory, and indeed his fellow Cappadocians, to face the question of how anyone can speak about an unutterable being or know an incomprehensible God, and the result was to provide a basis on which the biblical narratives, treated imaginatively rather than literally, could become luminous of a divine reality beyond human expression. The complete incarnation of one who was totally transcendent was the crown of God's loving accommodation to humankind and the triumph of sheer grace which made possible human assimilation to God.

The impact of fourth-century doctrinal debates on the reception of Scripture in the life of the Church can be observed by turning to the poetry of Ephrem Syrus and the homilies of John Chrysostom. The resurgence of Syriac studies in the latter half of the twentieth century has enabled appreciation of the biblical genesis of Ephrem's poetic symbolism and of his profound sense of God's gracious adoption of necessarily inadequate means to communicate with humankind: it is as if someone were trying to teach a parrot to talk, and hid behind a mirror so that the parrot imagined it was speaking with one of its own kind (*fid.* 31; cf. Brock 1992:60–2). Creation, Scripture, and the incarnation are all aspects of this condescension. Types and symbols are everywhere: a bird cannot fly without stretching out its wings in a sign of the cross (*fid.* 18.6; Brock 1992:59). But types and symbols are also double-edged: they seem to us to reveal a glimpse of the divine reality, but from God's point of view 'some aspect of the divine reality lies hidden in the type or symbol' (Brock 1992:26–7). The Syriac word Ephrem uses for symbol carries the meanings 'secret' and 'mystery', a mystery which bears the hidden power lying behind it. Scripture is full of such types and symbols, but also in Scripture are the names and metaphors, use of which God permits so as to reveal the divine self. God clothes the divine self in names drawn from human experience: reference to God's ears or eyes does not justify anthropomorphism, but shows that God sees and hears us. Without putting on these names, it would not have been possible for God to speak with us humans.

The divine being that in all things is exalted above all things

in his love bent down from on high and acquired from us our own habits.

(*fid.* 31; trans. Brock 1992:60–2)

There is an ‘incarnation’ of God’s Word in Scripture as well as in Jesus Christ, both involving a kind of *kenōsis* which conceals as well as reveals.

God has made small His majesty  
by means of these borrowed names . . .  
what we perceive as His majesty is but a tiny part,  
for He has shown us a single spark from it . . . (*haer.* 34; trans. Brock 1992:65)

John, nicknamed the ‘Golden-mouth’ (*Chrysostomos*), has not been seen primarily as a great theologian but as an expositor of Scripture with certain favourite themes, particularly ethical. Yet throughout his huge extant literary output there appears a consistent and characteristic theological perspective, namely that the whole purpose of God’s economy is pedagogical (Rylaarsdam 2014). As noted earlier, education in the ancient world was based on texts and their interpretation, and for Chrysostom the texts of Scripture constitute the Word of God by which God teaches humankind the true way of life. Good teaching requires ‘adaptability’ to the diverse needs of pupils at different stages and the incomprehensible God ‘adapts’ revelation to various creaturely levels of understanding out of sheer *philanthropia*. This adaptation implies both condescension to human limitations and persuasion, not compulsion. Differences between biblical texts are accounted for by this concept of divine *synkatabasis* (adaptability or condescension). Good teaching also involves the provision of exemplars, of which there are many in Scripture but, in particular, studies of Chrysostom’s approach to expounding the Pauline material have brought out the way in which Paul’s epistles exemplify his own injunction: ‘Be imitators of me as I am of Christ’ (1 Cor 11.1) (Mitchell 2000). Indeed, in Christ God emptied the divine self so as to provide the exemplar par excellence: while humility is evident in God’s speech in the ‘Old Testament’, humility beyond conception is demonstrated in God’s willingness to take on flesh. No wonder humility is Chrysostom’s prime ethical value, the obverse of the *kenodoxia* (‘empty glory’) against which he repeatedly inveighs! Once more Scripture and the incarnation are seen to cohere as the prime instances of God’s outreach in grace and love to the limited capacities of God’s own human creatures.

## CONCLUSION

---

Through the debates of the second century and the emergence of a canon of authoritative texts, the notion of holy writings/Scriptures which constituted God’s Word was firmly re-established. In significant ways, however, this was not quite a reinstatement of the veneration accorded the Torah scrolls in Jewish tradition. Translation into vernaculars undermined the attention to the jots and tittles of the pristine original. And, in spite of Origen’s affirmation of the importance of every little word, every letter indeed, hermeneutical imperatives shifted attention from the wording to the ‘intent’—what the

Holy Spirit meant, which was increasingly seen to be far more than the text, written in limited human terms, could possibly convey. Tantalizing hints encouraged readers to search Scripture and be open to inspired insight (*theōria*) into its deeper senses. Scripture was read and expounded, however, in the context of worship, and the Gospel book would eventually be liturgically processed like the Torah scrolls in the synagogue. The written Word of God was thus placed alongside the eucharistic elements, both together embodying the presence of God's Word in the midst of the congregation. It was through Christ that God's entire purpose and strategy ('economy') was brought to light, and the hidden intent of the Holy Spirit unveiled for those with eyes to see, ears to hear, and spirits attuned to the Spirit's inspiration. Only in this liturgical context can the place and theology of Scripture in early Christianity be fully appreciated.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Athanasius, *De decretis Nicaenae synodi*. Greek text: H.-G. Opitz (ed.), *Athanasius Werke* (Berlin/Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1935). Eng. trans.: A. Robertson, NPNF 4, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters* (repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).
- Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*. Greek text: O. Stählin (ed.), *Stromata, Buch I–VI*, GCS 52 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985). Eng. trans.: A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), ANF 2, *Fathers of the Second Century* (1885–1887, repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).
- Ephrem, *Hymni de fide*. Eng. trans.: S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (repr. Collegeville, MN: Cistercian, 1992).
- Ephrem, *Hymns against Heresies*. Eng. trans.: S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (repr. Collegeville, MN: Cistercian, 1992).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*. Greek text: W. Jaeger (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, vols 1 and 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1960). Eng. trans.: W. A. Moore and H. A. Wilson, NPNF 5, *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises* (repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).
- Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistula ad Philadelphios*. Greek text: K. Lake (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers*, LCL 24 (London: W. Heinemann, 1924). Eng. trans.: M. Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings* (London: Penguin, 1987).
- Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses*. Greek and Latin text: A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau et al. (eds), *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les hérésies*, SC 100, 151, 152, 210, 211, 263, 264, 293, 294 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965–82). Eng. trans.: Books 1–3: D. J. Unger, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, ACW 55, 64, 65 (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992–2012); Books 4–5: A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), ANF vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (1885–7, repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).
- Irenaeus, *Demonstratio*. Eng. trans.: J. Behr, *On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).
- Justin Martyr, *Apologiae*. Greek text: M. Marcovich (ed.), *Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis*, Patristiche Texte und Studien 38 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1994). Eng. trans.: L. W. Barnard, *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies*, ACW 56 (New York: Paulist Press, 1997).
- Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo*. Greek text: M. Marcovich (ed.), *Iustini Martyris dialogus cum Tryphone*, Patristiche Texte und Studien 47 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter,

- 1997). Eng. trans.: Thomas B. Falls, *St. Justin Martyr: Dialogue with Trypho*, FC Selections 3 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).
- Origen, *Contra Celsum*. Greek text: P. Koetschau (ed.), *Origenes Werke 1: Die Schrift von Martyrium, Buch I–IV Gegen Celsus*, GCS 2 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899). Eng. trans.: H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Latin text: P. Koetschau (ed.), *De principiis = Peri archon*, GCS 22 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913). Eng. trans.: G. W. Butterworth, *On First Principles* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).
- Origen, *Fragmenta ex homiliis in Jeremiam*. Greek text: P. Koetschau, *Origenes Werke 2: Gegen Celsus, Buch V–VIII, Die Schrift vom Gebet*, GCS 3 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899). Eng. trans.: R. B. Tollinton, *Selections from the Commentaries and Homilies of Origen* (London: SPCK, 1929).
- Origen, *Fragmenta in Johannem*. Greek text: E. Preuschen (ed.), GCS 4 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1901). Eng. trans.: A. Menzies, ANF 9 (repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

## Scholarship

- Blowers, P. M. (2012). *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Brock, S. (1992). *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (repr. Collegeville, MN: Cistercian).
- Charlesworth, J. H. (1983) (ed.). *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (London: Doubleday).
- Gamble, H. Y. (1995). *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press).
- Graves, R. (1934). *I, Claudius: From the Autobiography of Tiberius Claudius, born bc 10, Murdered and Deified ad 54* (New York: H. Smith and R. Haas).
- Graves, R. (1935). *Claudius the God: And his Wife Messalina* (New York: H. Smith and R. Haas).
- Hatch, E. (1888). *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (London: Williams and Norgate; repr. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957).
- Mitchell, M. M. (2000). *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Roberts, C. H. (1954). 'The Codex', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 40: 169–204.
- Roberts, C. H., and Skeat, T. C. (1983). *The Birth of the Codex* (London: Oxford University Press).
- Rylaarsdam, D. (2014). *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy: The Coherence of his Theology and Preaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Skarsaune, O. (1987). *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition. Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (Leiden: Brill).
- Young, F. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Young, F. (2004). 'Books and their "Aura": The Functions of Written Texts in Judaism, Paganism and Christianity during the First Centuries CE', in J. Frishman, W. Otten, and G. Rouwhorst (eds), *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation: The Foundational Character of Authoritative Sources in the History of Christianity and Judaism* (Leiden: Brill), 535–52.

**Suggested Reading**

- Behr, J. (2001). *The Way to Nicaea*, vol. 1 of *Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Behr, J. (2004). *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 2. of *Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Paget, J. C., and Schaper, J. (2013) (eds). *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to 600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Torjesen, K.-J. (1985). *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter).
- Young, F. (2012). *Exegesis and Theology in Early Christianity* (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum).



PART II

---

INTERPRETERS  
AND  
INTERPRETATION

---



## CHAPTER 5

---

# GRAECO-ROMAN LITERARY CRITICISM

---

PETER STRUCK

## INTRODUCTION

---

IN the classical world, evidence for the interpretation and analysis of poetry is as old as any prose writing we have. Pherecydes of Syros, a shadowy figure of the sixth century before the Common Era, passes down our first attested prose work. It is a narrative on the origins of the universe, of which only fragments survive in later writers that quote him. One testifies that Pherecydes found hidden messages about the nature of the universe in Homer's poetry:

The words of Zeus to Hera are the words of god to matter, and the words of god to matter indicate in an enigmatic way that god grasped hold of matter, which right from the beginning was in a confused state, and bound it by certain proportions and ordered it; and that the *daimones* that were present in it, as many as were evil doers, he tossed them out and punished them by a journey to this world.

(Diels and Kranz 1951–2:7 B5)

Pherecydes is talking about startling statements at the opening of *Iliad* 15, echoing *Iliad* 1, in which Zeus harshly threatens Hera to hew to his commands, and invokes a past rebellion in which he had punished her by attaching anvils to her feet, and tossing out of Olympus any deities that dared to intervene. Homer's readers have wondered since Antiquity what on earth to make of such things, but many agreed that it had something to do with very large questions about how the universe works. The immense authority of Homer and the other poets secures their positions for later generations as the primary teachers on the nature of things. This authority, along with difficulties apparent in passages like the one at hand, secured the terrain of poetry as a site of critical evaluation throughout Antiquity.

Of further interest for the present purposes, we learn of these ideas of Pherecydes, via a circuitous route, due to their ongoing usefulness and pertinence to a debate at the other end of the ancient era, when an interpretative contest between two great traditions reaches full flower in the high Roman Imperial period. Pherecydes is summarized by Celsus, a pagan thinker of the second century CE, whose work in turn only survives in quotations of yet another, later figure, the church father Origen, who quotes them extensively in order to rebut them in the *Contra Celsum* (6.42). In the monumental debates of the early centuries of the Common Era, the texts of the past are the arenas, and the struggles are conducted through the implements of literary interpretation. Classical and emerging Christian culture each have their central narratives from long ago, and each is engaged in unfolding the full richness and complexity of the meanings within them. While their techniques vary, there are just as surely linkages in the tools they use. The early Christian practices of biblical interpretation take shape in conversation with the preceding traditions of learning built up in the long history of literary criticism in the classical world.

What we see in Pherecydes, known since Roman times as allegory, is distinctive among classical approaches to poetry for its pronounced hermeneutic orientation, and it carries a particular relevance for the history of biblical interpretation. A half-century ago, classicists working on the history of criticism commonly thought of such reading as late and non-standard, preferring instead to place determinative weight on other Greek and Roman modes of reading, particularly stylistic criticism embedded in traditions of classical rhetoric. But this picture has changed substantially in recent years, due to additions to the evidence base as well as changes in evaluation of evidence we have long known, factors that will be considered below. Allegory has since been set alongside rhetorical criticism, and the canonical thinking of Plato and Aristotle, as the most enduring main avenues of Graeco-Roman critical practice. These modes will be the main anchors of the treatment that follows. After some consideration of the early allegorical commentators, we will turn to Plato and then Aristotle, who advance ideas on literature and criticism of extraordinary subtlety and influence, setting out many parameters within which subsequent traditions develop. During the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, new developments in textual criticism are visible, and the rhetorical way of reading becomes more fully developed. In Late Antiquity, the Neoplatonic school gives prominence to lemmatic commentary on literary and philosophical texts and at the same time allegory takes a critical turn. Moving beyond the status of interpretative tool, it emerges into a new prominence as a soteriological practice, that itself promises spiritual ascent.

## EARLY ALLEGORY

---

Allegorical reading is our earliest attested form of literary commentary. It is not a unified practice over the millennium to be discussed here, though it is informed by consistent habits of mind. In contrast with rhetorical critics, allegorists imagine the dense

extended narratives in which they are interested (nearly always epic poetry, mainly Homer's) to be coursing with hidden meaning. To be sure, Homer's stories have to do with the figures of Achilles and Odysseus, homecoming and armed conflict; but they are also continuously conveying further underlying messages to those who know how to find them. These may have to do with generalizable ethical observations, the physical structure of the cosmos, or the nature of gods and humans.

What we now know as allegory was not known by that term until the early Roman period (the Greek is *ἀλληγορία*; see Plutarch, *De aud. po.* 19e–f). Other technical terms are used before then. The most important of these is the verb *αἰνίττομαι* (and its cognate noun, adjective, and adverb) which already appears in the Pherecydes testimony above. Poets are understood to indicate additional meanings enigmatically, beneath the surface of their poems. The noun *ὑπόνοια*, or 'undermeaning', is better known because of Plato's use of it, though it plays very little role in the tradition. Of more importance for the later period, especially the Neoplatonists, is the term *σύμβολον*, or 'symbol', which, in a literary context, is almost never used outside of allegorical commentary. In its deep history, in other words, symbol does not sit opposed to allegory, as Paul De Man (1983) famously finds it does among the Romantics. Mostly, these terms do not designate different forms of figuration, as though they occupied distinct places in a chart of tropes. Rather, they are used collectively, with some difference in preference among particular schools and critics, to mark a general sense of extra meaning, waiting to be extracted by interpretative work. In fact, in general, allegorical readers do not consider even allegory itself to be one trope among others, as the rhetorical critics will, but rather a top-level orientation toward poetry that understands it as conveying enigmatic messages.

From the same early period as Pherecydes, we know that Theagenes of Rhegium (sixth century BCE) also interpreted conflict among the gods allegorically (Diels and Kranz 1951–2:8 A2), understanding it to represent the conflict of rudimentary elements, like hot and cold, wet and dry. Metrodorus of Lampsacus (fifth century BCE), preserved in a bit more detail, interprets the gods as carrying hidden meanings about parts of the human body; and the heroes standing as riddles for features of nature. (Diels and Kranz 1951–2:61 A4) He aligns Agamemnon with air and Achilles the sun; and Dionysus with the spleen and Demeter the liver. What further he made of these links we do not know, but setting the gods in connection with human anatomy and the humans with cosmological structures hints at an intriguing microcosm–macrocosm logic. The Metrodorus text introduces a further layer of interest. It had been common among past scholars to understand allegory as fitting into one of two types. On the one hand, 'defensive' allegory was seen as a tool to exonerate Homer from charges of impiety; and on the other hand, 'positive' allegory was understood to be an imposition, or the using of Homer's text to justify one's own philosophical views. Both categories carry a somewhat censorious tone, and neither entertains for very long the possibility that any of the deeper meanings found in the epic texts might have been sincerely thought to be there. And while examples of defensiveness and over-reading are plain to discern in the tradition, to be sure, such qualities are present in infelicitous readings of all kinds. The contexts in which the fragments of Pherecydes and Theagenes are preserved are possibly

defensive. With Metrodorus' text we have no defensive context, and one might want to know a bit more than the very compressed statements we have before rendering a judgement that it is an example of positive imposition, or of defensiveness for that matter.

A papyrus that survives from Derveni enriches our understanding considerably. As opposed to the second and third removes of the fragmentary early evidence, it is an extended commentary, contained in a unique example of a surviving papyrus from mainland classical Greece, excavated in 1962. Preserved as a charred hunk, set in a funeral pyre some time before 300 BCE, it is written in a script from 340 to 320 BCE, and contains ideas not likely to have been current after 400 BCE. It is a lemmatic commentary on an Orphic poem in epic verse. Since Orphic poetry, as best we know, is purposefully esoteric and invites interpretative engagement, questions of defensiveness and dogmatic imposition prove to be quite orthogonal. 'Enigma' terms are the author's main conceptual tools, with cognates appearing six times in the 200 surviving lines. The commentator understands the poet to have produced riddles systematically; and further, because Orpheus speaks this way, a certain kind of critical approach is necessitated: 'Since he riddles concerning his subject matter throughout the whole of his poem, it is necessary to discuss it word by word' (Laks and Most 1997:col. XIII). It requires interpretative work down to the granular level. For example, the commentator spends ten lines on a reading of *πανομφεύουσαν*, a still unfathomed epithet of Zeus meaning something like 'all-proclaiming'. He argues that since 'proclaiming' is like 'claiming', and 'claiming' is like 'teaching', the epithet makes out Zeus to be the source of all knowledge (col. X). And the commentator understands the famous Orphic/Hesiodic discussion of the swallowing of the genitals of an ancestor as an internalizing of generative power (col. XIII). He uses his interpretative method not just on poetry, but also on the meanings of ritual actions (col. VI) and prophetic oracles (col. V). That he reveals himself to be a temple priest furthers the cultic context, as does the deposition of the papyrus in a pyre; the text itself may well have played some role in the funeral rites, since it is difficult to understand otherwise why such an expensive item would be incinerated. The commentary makes plain that just as poetry has deeper meanings beneath its surface, so do ritual actions. In column XX, the commentator bemoans that some participants in rituals he witnesses merely go through the motions of ritual without full understanding of what they do. We see here in a nascent form a long and enduring current of thinking that uses allegoresis to situate true piety in text and its interpretation, specifically as opposed to mere ritual praxis (the Pauline texts provide a later analogue here).

## PLATO

---

Plato was well aware of such interpretative approaches to poetry during the time he was writing, and sceptical of their results. When he considers the education of the guardians in the *Republic*, he says that poetic tales of divine strife from Homer and Hesiod ought not to be allowed into the perfect city, 'whether they have been composed with

allegorical undermeanings or not' (*resp.* 378d). 'For a young man is not able to judge what is an undermeaning and what isn't.' Without sophisticated interpretative skill, they are liable to go off in the wrong direction. Plato's interest in poetry consistently reflects this kind of caution. Across his array of views on the poets, some in deep tension with others, he consistently scrutinizes their supposedly grand epistemological reach. In other words, he questions the basis of their cultural authority on just the grounds that allegorical interpreters were prone to aggrandize it.

In the *Gorgias* Plato is mostly interested in poetry as a form of performance, and he treats poets like other public speakers who persuade by appeals to emotion and pleasure. This puts them in line with the Sophists and sets them all on dangerous terrain. The problem is that, for Plato, emotions disrupt our acquisition of knowledge, and mistakes in knowledge lead inevitably away from the Good and toward injustice. The emotions lead us astray by presenting distractions, but much worse, they corrupt the very apparatus of knowing, our souls. The emotions pertain to, and also make stronger, the lowest, irrational part of the soul. They have to do with the material world. This presents a profound problem since the whole point of a human life is to strengthen the upper, rational part of the soul, and as much as possible turn it toward the immaterial world in which true knowledge and real reality reside. If indulged in and not resisted, any emotion, pleasure as much as pain, pulls the soul back down to the material world and away from the real and the true. Like sophistry, poetry is a form of pandering that has its effect by playing to an audience's pleasures.

Plato considers an opposing possibility in the *Ion* where he presents the poet as an inspired figure. Such a view has a deep Greek history, surely even pre-dating Homer's claim that his words are inspired by his divine muse. In the *Ion*, Plato compares the line of transmission from the muse, to the poet, to the rhapsodic performer, to the audience, with the connection between a magnet and a sequence of iron rings attached to it, which transfers the original power to the subsequent links in the chain. Lyrical and moving, the image is also seriously undercut by the figure through which it is expressed. The rhapsode, Ion, is portrayed as a trifling figure, led by Socrates to admit that he actually has *no* knowledge of *any* of the matters Homer sings about—though Ion strangely clings to the claim that he would make an excellent army general—and that the only way he could have the knowledge he claims is by divine intervention. More sincerely, in the *Symposium*, Plato opens a related set of ideas that would allow a place, and even a valuable place, for poetry in the approach to the divine. The dialogue assembles a series of speeches on love, which centre on a speech from Socrates. He discusses a monumental figure, the savant Diotima, who taught him as a youth that beauty in this world leads to a higher-order appreciation of beauty in the realm of the forms, and even of the Good itself. A spiritual climb is here propelled by erotic desire for what is beautiful. In the successful ascent, the lower world is quickly surmounted, but Diotima claims a place for poets in provoking the movement upward. While they do not feature prominently, they, along with lawgivers, are producers of beauties of the soul, above the beauties of the body, which spur the lover up to higher intellectual truths.

Plato takes up an entirely different line of thinking in books 2 and 3 of the *Republic*, where he begins considering the education of the guardians. He is cautious not to allow

cultural forms into his perfect city that might have a deleterious effect on the guardians. In books 2 and 3 the argument proceeds by two distinct sets of criteria, around content and form. Taking form first, Plato is mainly concerned in books 2 and 3 with a distinction between narrative poetry and imitative poetry. The first is a summary of events in an author's own voice and second is direct quotation, in which the author speaks in the voices of his characters. The latter appears to him particularly dangerous, since it forces the performer to ape words and actions that may deviate from the right kinds of behaviour; according to Plato, they risk corrupting the soul by conforming it to deleterious action. Second, with respect to content, he deplores poetry that displays excesses of emotion, with particular disparagement directed toward exaggerated mourning at the death of a loved one. Toying with such passions in the audience will corrupt the soul, along the lines outlined above, and in this case instil a fear of death. Neither should poetry show wicked men prospering nor the good suffering. Such strictures are not meant to whitewash lived experience; in Plato's view, such tales just operate from mistaken impressions. Death is in fact not to be feared since it is a release of the soul into the immaterial; nor do good men ever actually suffer, provided they are oriented correctly toward the utter meaninglessness of the material world. His concerns are especially raised by the famously pungent tales from Homer and Hesiod, presenting divinities castrating one another, shape-shifting, engaging in surreptitious sex, lying, and myriad other forms of licentious behaviour. If humans are led mistakenly to think that the gods behave this way, they will tend to exonerate themselves from any form of bad behaviour.

In *Republic* 10, the concerns deepen. In the arguments that intervene between book 10 and the earlier books, Plato has articulated the theory of the forms. Now the whole physical world is positioned as being itself an imitation, or a set of shadows, of the unchanging forms. This raises the stakes for imitation tremendously. To discern the truth of things observers must see through a layer of imitation, and see behind the phantom reality that is the physical world. This is a daunting task. In book 10 Plato does not voice the distinction between imitative and narrative poetry from the earlier books, and instead seems to characterize all of poetry as a form of imitation; and, even worse, since the subject matter of poetry is drawn from the material manifestations of the physical world, this makes poetry an imitation of an imitation, and third from the truth. This poses grave challenges for any claim that poets convey any knowledge at all, let alone the deeper truths about the cosmos that tradition had granted.

## ARISTOTLE

---

Aristotle departs from Plato at most of the critical points above. Though he does not directly reference him, given that Aristotle was Plato's student, it is reasonable enough to see his *Poetics* in part as an answer to his teacher. On questions of mimesis, epistemology, and the emotions he works through dramatically different ideas, and he leaves to the side the notion of inspiration, which Plato at least considers. Further, while his views

critique Plato's, neither do they align with almost any of what Plato was criticizing. His work marks a distinct break from all earlier literary commentators. As differently as they valued the poet's products, the pre-Aristotelians (Plato included) mostly evaluated the poet as an aspiring savant and master riddler. They judged success or failure to consist in how well the poet conveyed knowledge about the world and its deep structure. Aristotle takes a wholly different approach. In his view the great poet is not a master enigmatiser, but a master craftsman, who moves an audience through intense emotional experiences, now considered salutary, by skilled engagement with the craft of poetry. The corruption of the soul is never at stake. He simply stipulates that poetry is a form of mimesis, and further that to imitate is perfectly natural for humans. We engage in mimesis from childhood by instinct; and, in fact, imitation makes us distinctive. Humans are the most mimetic of all living things. We take pleasure when we recognize the things being imitated, even in the case of imitations of abhorrent things. It is a form of understanding, and we enjoy understanding. And, in Aristotle's reckoning, enjoyment is not something against which we must be constantly on guard. The pursuit of what is pleasurable or delightful, and avoidance of its opposite, plays a central role in Aristotle's understanding of how life in general works.

Aristotle proceeds not by focusing on interpretation, or evaluating claims to knowledge, or by considering the morality of the tales told, but by analysis of the poetic form, and how it produces effects in its audience. He works to discern poetry's constituent parts, beginning at the top level by dividing his study into questions of media, or the 'in what' poetry conveys its meaning; of subject, or the 'what' a poem imitates; and of mode, or the 'how' the imitation happens. Each of these categories furnishes useful distinctions across the genres he considers. The first category makes Aristotle attentive to the mechanics of verse, its language, rhythm, and music. Under this heading, he considers particular kinds of diction, proper uses of tropes, and detailed discussion of word and sentence forms, even down to the inflections of nouns and verbs. And in the third category, of mode, Aristotle carries forward Plato's distinction between imitations that narrate what happened and those that act it out through direct speech. His esteem for tragedy in the treatise aligns with him valuing the latter highly, in sharp contrast to Plato. But Aristotle mostly dwells on questions from the second category, those pertaining to poetry's subject. He contrasts poetry with history, telling us that poetry operates by producing a mimesis of what might or could happen, while history, of what did happen. This makes poetry weightier and more philosophical than history, and inclined to the universal over the particular. Poetry's distinctive subject is human *action* (*praxis*) which is a technical term in Aristotle for goal-directed purposive behaviour of which only mature humans are capable. Other creatures behave, but adult humans engage in *praxis*.

The treatise examines tragedy and epic, and he references another part devoted to comedy, which is lost. In what survives, tragedy occupies most of his attention. He includes consideration of its historical origin, proposing that it developed organically out of group song performance in choral dithyrambs. At some point the leader of the group separated off and took on a speaking role, which evolved into dialogue as further single figures came out as actors. Aristotle sees these as a natural development, describing

the evolution of the form as if it were a living creature reaching its apex. Tragedy has six parts, which are, in order of importance: plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle. Of most interest to him by far are questions about plot. The power of music and spectacle, against which Plato was so guarded, are of little consequence for him. Good plots are not haphazard but proceed by a sequence unified by probability or necessity. They track a reversal from good fortune to bad of distinguished men, who are not the most virtuous nor of the basest. These men fall because of some error. The mistake they make is understandable, and provokes disproportionate consequences. In the very best plots the reversal will coincide with a recognition, or a change from ignorance to knowledge. It will provoke pity and fear in the audience; and through this, it will produce a catharsis, the particular goal of tragedy. The precise sense of the term remains debated. It may centre on medicine or ethics. The sometimes suggested sense of purgation carries difficulties, since it is not an Aristotelian idea that emotions come in quanta that dissipate as they are experienced. More appealing is the idea of refinement, which sees catharsis as an experiential training, sharpening the capacity to feel pity and fear toward just the kinds of things one ought to feel pity and fear toward.

## HELLENISTIC POETICS

---

The library at Alexandria facilitated a new method of work on literary texts. Built on wealth from Alexander's conquest of the Mediterranean and Near East, it served as a node for an accompanying Greek cultural dominance in the Hellenistic period. The vast array of books available nurtured a poetics centred on learnedness, and heads of the library there took on the role of stewards of a tradition. Scholars like Zenodotus of Ephesus (c.325–260 BCE) developed textual criticism to secure authoritative versions of Greek texts, already centuries old. They scrutinized them with a keen eye for mistakes in transmission. This scrupulousness to the letter was accompanied by a narrowing of the hermeneutical horizon. By use of reference works on geography, mythology, and history, they made glosses to illuminate arcane allusions by the poets, but refrained from the exuberant interpretative leaps customary among allegorical critics. Consonant with this is a vision of the poet, carried forward from Aristotle, not as a savant but as a craftsman that produces delight in an audience. Eratosthenes (c.276–195) claimed the main purpose of the poets was not to educate, but to produce enjoyment. Aristarchus' rule to interpret texts from internal parallels, 'Homer from Homer', carries forward a similar impulse of interpretative restraint. These scholars also show interest in judging the range of texts worth handing down, assembling standard lists, *kanones*, that include only the texts most worthy of preservation. At the same time, across the Mediterranean to the north, a different model of the literary critic is carried forward at the Pergamon library. While scholars at Alexandria were accustomed to calling themselves *grammatikoi* or *philologoi*, using this language to distinguish their particular approach, Crates of Mallos (fl. early 2nd c. B.C.E.) at Pergamon preferred the term *kritikos*, which he said embraced

a whole science of *logos* and a wider sweep of judgement than the *grammatikoi*. We do not know precisely what he meant by this, but we do know that he was learned in Stoic philosophy, and handed down a very rich allegorical interpretation of the shield of Achilles, which he claimed represented the whole cosmos.

Simultaneously during the Hellenistic period, the traditions of allegorical reading continued to evolve. The Stoic philosophers who influenced Crates found in the poetry of Homer and Hesiod a useful evidence base to argue for their distinctive views of the soul, the cosmos, and the divine. None of the works of the formative figures of Stoicism survive, and their fragments often come down to us set inside a polemical frame. But according to the testimony that survives their habit of turning to the poets was pronounced. Galen chides Chrysippus, the great systematizer of the school, for relying on the poets rather than experiments to gain his evidence—‘you should not have filled your book with lines from the poets, which you quote one after another’ (*De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 3.2.1)—and others (Plutarch, Cicero, Seneca) characterize them as imposing their own views on these earlier texts. The Stoics clearly see it differently. More likely they understand these authoritative poems, already having the status of ancient texts for them, as carrying great wisdom, even seeing through to truths about the world that they themselves were coming to see in their radically new philosophy. In a precursor to the later Neoplatonists, allegorical reading allows the Stoics to see these old texts in a new way, and to synthesize authoritative cultural materials across spans of many centuries.

## LATE ROMAN REPUBLIC

---

The formal delivery of speeches was a central feature of social and political life during most periods of Antiquity, and it shaped the way literary criticism developed. Aristotle’s attentiveness to craft, language, and audience had already set up a terrain for the study of poetry that later critics populate with a wide variety of nuanced tools originally developed to study rhetoric. Aristotle’s successor Theophrastus authorizes the affiliation between the domains in his most general analysis of *logos*. *Logos* directed toward things belongs to the philosophers, while that pertaining to an audience belongs to both poets and orators (frag. 64). Since Roman education was centred on training in rhetoric, along with poetry, it made the link between the two appear natural in the curriculum, and a distinctive kind of criticism flourishes in this context.

The rhetorical critics focus on questions of genre and style, with a pronounced attentiveness to audience, and poetry as a communicative act. They are interested in questions of composition, in a way that the allegorists almost never are. Questions of style are calibrated in hierarchies, usually in three parts (Demetrius has four) with some variants in emphasis across different critics. Cicero, in the *Orator* (75–100), sets down what becomes an authoritative treatment, elements of which had probably been in place by Theophrastus’ time. He divides the styles into three: high (flowery), medium

(most fluid), and low (plain). Success in any mode is the result of meticulous craft, even in the low style, which operates by a ‘careful negligence’. Many critics, including especially Cicero, resist a formulaic application of one style or another to this or that class of situation, and are attentive to the nuances that individuals bring to individual cases. But the guide of broad stylistic types is very well established. Writing of any kind could be classified by such schemes, including that of poets, as well as orators, historians, and even philosophers. Further, detailed and subtle attention to figures of language and thought results in a criticism that measures the mechanics of expression, through attention to word choice and arrangement, rhythms of speech, and the use of tropes. The rhetorical critics work to evaluate the aesthetic virtuosity of individual writers, often in comparison with one another, relying on criteria of taste, erudition, and technical mastery. This leads to a furthering of the impulse to develop canons, as some poets are seen to rise above others in these skills. Poetry will educate, mainly in the sense of providing models for understanding how language works and setting out exemplary characters to be imitated, but almost never, in marked contrast to the allegorists, about the deep structure of the cosmos. The rhetorical critics see poets as writers, not so unlike other writers, engaged in the crafting of language to move an audience.

The late Republican period sees several important works in this vein. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, of unknown authorship, sets out a synthetic treatment of rhetoric early in the first century BCE. In books 1–3 the author considers modes of argument and the specifics of rhetoric’s main branches: epideictic, forensic, and deliberative. Book 4 works serially through dozens of figures of speech (antithesis, metonymy, and metaphor, for example) and figures of thought (understatement, vivid description, exemplification, and so on), and it treats the three levels of style, in grand, middle, and simple modes, now each accompanied by its faulty version, the swollen, the slack, and the meagre, respectively. In introducing book 4 the author departs from a typical practice regarding the poets in such studies, and in so doing attests to the standard treatment (4.1–10). While he will compose his own examples for each of the many stylistic topics he discusses, most other rhetorical texts adduce examples from well-known past orators and poets. In other words, poetry provided illustrative material to educate the orator on the nuances of language use.

Some decades later, Cicero explores further intersections of poetry and rhetoric. In his *De oratore* and the later *Orator*, he is concerned not just to set out a serviceable handbook, but to defend rhetoric from detractors appealing to moral and epistemological grounds—prominently Plato—that characterize it as at best decorative. Cicero’s strategy is to press the case that form and content are not separate but are embedded in one another. This makes substance of style, and sets rhetoric in the larger concerns of literary culture, creativity, and learning. Great orators are only great based on the breadth of their *humanitas*. Cicero considers rhetoric a literary form, one with a generic range that includes philosophy, history, and, in particular, poetry. He makes the poets the ‘closest kin’ to the orators (*de or.* 3.27). Of slightly different importance is Cicero’s earlier *Pro Archia*. He took as a client a Greek poet whose citizenship was called into doubt in a suit brought against him. Cicero opted to defend his client by defending poetry in general.

He embeds the value of poetry in larger questions of nobility, morality, and learning. He makes the case that poetry is useful to society. Mainly, it provides exempla of great past deeds and figures that will ennoble and inspire those that read them. It trains good orators, and provides needed respite after the hard work of professional life. Cicero also carries forward an older Greek idea of the poet as divinely inspired (*Arch.* 18).

## EARLY IMPERIAL PERIOD

---

During the onset of the Roman Empire the rhetorical approach to poetry deepens a bit, with the shifting fortunes of rhetoric. In his *Dialogue on Oratory* of the later first century CE, Tacitus makes apparent that the changing political situation during the century prior—from a republic based on deliberation and persuasion to an empire working by fiat—left a cadre of men deeply learned in the rhetorical arts without a political arena in which to practise them. Some of this excess talent shifted over to thinking about poetry. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek historian and teacher of rhetoric in Rome who flourished during the time of Augustus, left behind analyses of the styles of poetry—including lyric, epic, and tragedy—embedded in his treatments of orators and historians in his critical essays. His *On Literary Composition* works through the different effects produced by arrangements of words. His most prominent interest throughout is in testing the question of the appropriateness of a certain style to the material presented in it (*Comp.* 20). His interest in language is granular, down to the rhythms of speech, accentuation of words, and the individual sounds of letters, making him invaluable in the linguistic study of ancient Greek pronunciation. Poets, historians, philosophers, and orators, all provide abundant proof-texts to illustrate this or that use of language under scrutiny.

As a poet himself, Horace provides some contrasts and similarities with the rhetorical critics, and thickens the context for Augustan poetics. In *Epistles* 1.2 he coaxes a young student of rhetoric to read Homer as a better source of moral philosophy than the philosophers. He also carries forward the rhetorician's impulse to group poetry in among other forms of writing. He invites us to understand his *Satires* as something between poetry and prose, a 'muse on foot' (*Sat.* 2.6.17). In *Satires* 1.10 he advises avoidance of pretence (such as using Greek words), dexterity, fine craftsmanship, brevity, clarity, and wit as the hallmarks of all great writing. His famous *Ars poetica* (*Epistles* 2.3), which draws from the Hellenistic critic Neoptolemus, is the first extant poem on poetics. Horace opens with a focus on unity via the memorable image of its failure in a monster pieced together from parts of different creatures. Combining two traditional positions, he says poetry should both educate *and* give pleasure. Though, as a poet, he writes in lyric modes, in the *Ars poetica*, Horace follows Aristotle in a focus on tragedy, though character, and not plot, is of most interest to him. This is in keeping with an enduring rhetorical interest in moral exempla. He speaks of the importance of the actors inhabiting the characters they represent. His interests in style centre on propriety, making a match with content.

In the early Roman Empire, a diversity of literary critical modes is apparent. Quintilian provides a culminating statement of a rhetorical approach. He had a thriving school for orators of his own and was the first rhetorician paid by the state *fiscus* under Vespasian. His *Institutio oratoria* is an extensive manual for training in rhetoric, throughout the whole life course of the orator. It includes extended references to poetry and prose examples of figures of speech and thought and kinds of style. Book 10 contains a lengthy list of brief appraisals of Greek and Roman writers—orators, historians, philosophers, and more often poets—as paradigms for training in various modes of composition. Plutarch’s ‘How the Young Man Should Study Poetry’ returns to the idea of poetry as a training ground, but this time for philosophy. One needs to be able to weed out the immoral aspects of poetry, particularly its fantastic elements, and to counterbalance their effect by focusing on moral passages, in the same author or another. He points to a keen understanding of the mechanics of language as a necessary but not sufficient condition for understanding a poem. *On the Sublime*, handed down under the name of Longinus, is in many ways a fascinating outlier. His focus on the category of the sublime is not matched elsewhere, though his catholicity in appeal to different modes of writing, including oratory, history, philosophy, poetry, and here also the Hebrew Bible, shares some affiliation with the rhetorical approaches. The sublime produces an ascent of the soul through wonder, and requires both careful skill with language and style, and an innate quality of soul that can conceive of what is most grand.

Also in the early Roman Imperial period, the traditions of allegory advance. Cornutus (first century CE) calls his *Compendium of Greek Theology* an unoriginal survey of earlier traditions, presenting it as a handbook for students. To the extent this is to be trusted, it positions the text as an invaluable overview of Stoic reading practices. His topic is the nature of the gods, and he divides his work into compact chapters on each of the main Greek divinities, interspersing statements of allegorical theory in between. In his commentary on Kronos, he interprets the dynastic struggle in Hesiod, from Ouranos to Kronos to Zeus, as an early adumbration of the Stoic account of the creation of the cosmos. The elements are in creative tension with one another. At first, the outer heavens (Ouranos) push on the Earth (Gaia), compressing it into a dense ball. At some point the Earth pushes back (Gaia enlists Kronos to castrate Ouranos), the compression halts, and equilibrium is achieved. When later Kronos swallows a stone as a substitute for Zeus, Cornutus reads it as a riddle for the earth becoming fixed in the centre of the universe, while the more perfect order that will govern it (Zeus) grows into maturity. Just as we saw with the Derveni commentator, Cornutus’ focus is poetry, but he interprets cultic practice as well.

Other allegorical works of the period show the diffusion of this mode of reading among critics of a different ilk. A figure known as Heraclitus the Allegorist (c.100 CE), and the unknown author of the *Life of Homer*, a work traditionally attributed to Plutarch and written probably in the second century CE, both hand down extended surviving allegorical readings of Homer, many details of which are in agreement with each other and with Cornutus, most likely testifying that they drew on a (by that time) common stock of established readings. These two later works show clear affiliations with rhetorical schools of

reading. Unlike earlier critics, Heraclitus defines allegory as a trope, and tells that Homer uses this trope everywhere in his work. He uses a definition of allegory as extended metaphor, which mirrors definitions that are sometimes given in rhetorical texts (see Quintilian, *inst.* 8) and is not found in other allegorists. The *Life of Homer* author shows even more affiliation with rhetorical modes of reading. He makes a detailed inventory of Homer's uses of metre, dialects, tropes, and figures of speech and thought, along with a careful analysis of his use of levels of style (chaps 7–72). He later turns to an extensive allegorical commentary (92–160). These two kinds of commentary are in distinct parts of the treatise, testifying to different traditions, which can be made simultaneous use of, depending on the critic.

## NEOPLATONIC POETICS

---

The most consequential developments in literary criticism during Late Antiquity take place within Neoplatonic philosophy. Plotinus presents a new synthesis of the master's corpus, which held sway through the Italian Renaissance; and in his wake the fortunes of the imitative arts, including literature, take a distinctive turn. First, Plotinus adapted Plato's metaphysics based on imitation to a new metaphysics based on emanation. The material world is now not just an image of what is above (though that language will still be used); it is also an ontological trace of it. His highest principle, the One, radiates out the lower orders of being from itself, in a continuous flow. This sets down a new way to imagine representation, via an ontological connection, which later Neoplatonists will apply to poetic images. Further, Plotinus sees the imitative artist no longer sitting at three removes from the truth, parasitic on the material world, but as being capable of production via direct contemplation of the higher orders (*Enn.* 5.8.1). Thinking more from the *Symposium* than the *Republic*, Plotinus allows that beautiful things shaped by human hands may well provide an impetus toward the real, unalloyed beauty that exists in the immaterial world.

Plotinus' interests in literary questions are not well developed, but two of his successors pursue them with particular vigour, both adding new dimensions to the traditions of allegory. Porphyry wrote our most extensive surviving allegorical tract from Antiquity, interpreting a scene of enduring interest to commentators: Homer's strange episode at the opening of *Odyssey*, book 13. Homer has the Phaeacians drop off Odysseus on Ithaca in the Cave of the Nymphs, in which, he tells us, there are nymphs weaving purple cloth on stone looms and storing honey in stone jars, there is an everlasting spring, and there are two entrances, one for mortals and one for immortals. This was, and still is, a difficult image to understand. Porphyry interprets it using the typical tools of the allegorical critic, including the terms *ainittomai* and *allêgoria* to describe Homer's hidden meanings, but he has a special fondness here for calling Homer's allegories 'symbols', *symbola*, a term which becomes a more prominent synonym for allegory during this period. Porphyry reads the cave as a crystallization of the cosmos as a whole. Its mix of materiality (dank atmosphere and rocky structure) and immateriality (divine nymphs and godly

access) combines with its round shape to suggest to Porphyry that Homer meant the scene as Odysseus' return back to the world as we know it, after his peregrinations at the edges of reality in books 9–12.

Of additional interest, Porphyry applies his hermeneutical method to another group of texts, with a different kind of divine lineage. He authors a text *On Philosophy from Oracles* in which he interprets philosophical messages in the cryptic *symbola* conveyed in oracular utterances he collected from the likes of Hecate, Hermes, Serapis, and Apollo at Didyma. And further, we know from later testimony that he also authored a now-lost allegorical commentary on a collection of texts, taken to be sacred by the later Neoplatonists, called the *Chaldean Oracles* (Marinus, *Life of Proclus* 26). In his commentaries on oracles, Porphyry uses a set of interpretive tools, originally developed to investigate Homer's literary text, as a means of doing direct theological and philosophical work on what he thought to be divine utterances.

In the late fifth century, the Neoplatonist Proclus makes further innovations. His extensive surviving corpus shows him keen at work on an interpretative project, taken up by earlier Neoplatonists, to make the legacy of classical culture add up to a coherent whole. Proclus and his predecessors do this mainly through extensive commentary in a lemmatic form. Allegorical interpretation provided a productive way to imagine a synthesis of texts as different as those of Plato, Homer, Hesiod, Pythagoras, and Orpheus, as well as the Chaldean Oracles, and others. In Proclus' commentary on Plato's *Republic*, he puts allegory to use, and of further interest, when he reaches Plato's arguments against Homer, the context invited him to set out his most detailed statements of allegorical theory. Proclus understands Plato's most stringent objections to Homer to be directed only at a particular kind of poetry, the mimetic type. Proclus defines this as indiscriminately imitative, dealing only in superficial appearances. But there are also higher types, which he thinks Plato understood as well. There is a didactic type that conveys knowledge about the basic facts of living as a human, including distinctions within ethical or civic life or in nature. But there is a further, highest type, which Proclus calls the 'symbolic'.

Symbolic poetry does not run afoul of Plato's objections to mimesis, because it does not work by imitation at all. Proclus takes up Plotinus' metaphysical scheme of emanation, which had by his time reached the status of common wisdom, and claims that just as the world works by emanating flows of being from the higher orders to the lower ones, so also a poet can sometimes tap into this mechanism and use associations based on it, instead of resemblance, to anchor his poetic imagery. So, in the hands of a poet as skilled as Homer, a certain poetic image may appear on its surface to be infelicitous, but may actually transcend the mere representational level and invoke a direct ontological connection to a higher-order truth. Proclus thinks Homer is the master of this type. Decoding these scenes properly will reveal the deep, hidden structure of the cosmos. Further, reading images that operate by such a powerful symbolic mode can produce more than knowledge. Proclus talks about it providing spiritual ascent as well. Here he relies on an idea, traditional among the later Neoplatonists, based on the *Chaldean Oracles*. One oracle told that the divine father sowed 'symbols' throughout the universe (*Chaldean Oracles* 108). Neoplatonists had, since at least a century before Proclus,

understood these 'symbols' as special material objects that most strongly preserved the residual traces of divine presence from the ultimate source of the emanation, the One: certain gems, plants, stones, herbs, etc. Their power was harnessed through special Neoplatonic ritual actions, called theurgy, which produced spiritual ascent. Proclus says that the greatest poets make their symbolic poetry in *precisely* the same way as the theurgists celebrate these rituals. They harness such material in their writing, as a vehicle to raise the soul to see the highest orders of the universe.

Exotic as this particular theory is, it turns out to be widely influential, after a Christian Neoplatonist adopts it for biblical interpretation. A fascinating set of writings appears in the sixth century CE, under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian who is so moved upon hearing Paul preach there that he converts on the spot (Acts 17.34). The corpus becomes a cornerstone of the Western mystical tradition. Pseudo-Dionysius transposes most of the core positions of pagan Neoplatonic thinking into a Christian context. Of particular interest to literary studies, he sets out interpretations of the Bible by using whole hunks of Proclus' literary theory. As with Proclus, he is particularly acute in explaining certain troublesome biblical passages, in which the divinity appears in overly corporeal form. These are said not to be imitations of the divine, but rather symbols (*symbola*), which work not by similarity, but by dissimilarity, and rely on ontological connection instead of resemblance. Through thinking in line with this, the corpus becomes foundational to the *via negativa*.

The long span of classical literary criticism, in its many forms, provides early Christian hermeneuts with a variety of tools with which to wrestle with their own ancient texts. Homer's powers to provoke creative literary thought, Plato's objections to the claims of narrative poetry to truth, and Aristotle's scrupulous attention to the craft of shaping a poetic work in the medium of language, all of these produce a unique legacy of rich thinking in the centuries that follow. The rhetorical critics had sharpened ideas regarding questions of style and audience, figures of speech and thought. And from allegory a wide array of tools provide resources for uncovering deeper levels of meaning in sometimes thoroughly opaque texts. Questions of how properly to understand the divine through poetic texts is of interest across the whole of the classical millennium, revealing the persistent puzzle in the paradox that mere human words might somehow capture the divine.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Eng. trans.: H. Caplan, LCL 403 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- Cicero, *De oratore*. Eng. trans.: H. Rackham, LCL 349 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948).
- Cicero, *Pro Archia*. Eng. trans.: N. H. Watts, *Pro Archia poeta; Post reditum in senatu; Post reditum ad quirites; De domo sua; De haruspicum responsis; Pro Plancio*, LCL 158 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923).

- Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De compositione verborum*. Eng. trans.: S. Usher, *The Critical Essays*, LCL 465–6 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974–85).
- Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*. Greek text: P. H. De Lacy (ed.), *Corpus medicorum Graecorum* vol. 5.4.1.2, pts 1–2 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1978).
- Horace, *Satirae*. Eng. trans.: H. Rushton Fairclough, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars poetica*, LCL 194 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).
- Plato, *Respublica*. Greek text: J. Burnet (ed.), *Platonis opera*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902).
- Plotinus, *Enneads*. Eng. trans.: A. H. Armstrong, *Enneads*, LCL 440–45 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966–89).
- Porphyry, *De antro nympharum*. Eng. trans.: R. Lamberton, *On the Cave of the Nymphs* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1983).
- Theophrastus, *Fragmenta*. Greek text: F. Wimmer (ed.), *Theophrasti Eresii opera, quae supersunt, omnia* (Paris: Didot, 1866).

### Scholarship

- De Man, P. (1983). ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).
- Diels, H., and Kranz, W. (1951–2). *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, griechisch und deutsch*, 6th edn (Berlin: Weidmann).
- Laks, A., and Most, G. (1997) (eds). *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus* (New York: Oxford University Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Farrell, J. (2003). ‘Classical Genre in Theory and Practice’, *New Literary History* 34: 383–408.
- Ford, A. (2004). *The Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Graf, F., and Johnston, S. I. (2013). *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*. 2nd edn (New York: Routledge).
- Grube, G. M. A. (1965). *The Greek and Roman Critics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).
- Halliwell, S. (1998). *Aristotle’s Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Kennedy, G. A. (1989) (ed.). *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Laird, A. (2006) (ed.). *Oxford Readings in Ancient Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Pfeiffer, R. (1965). *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Russell, D. A. (1981). *Criticism in Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Russell, D. A., and Winterbottom, M. (1972) (eds). *Ancient Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Struck, P. (2014). *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Walker, J. (2000). *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

## CHAPTER 6

---

# EARLY CHRISTIAN HANDBOOKS ON INTERPRETATION

---

TARMO TOOM

It is hard to know what exactly counts as a handbook, for it is not a fixed genre. A handbook can be a detailed academic manual, a shorter and lighter guide, or everything in between. A handbook is usually intended to be used as a reference work on a particular subject matter and it presents its material in an introductory yet systematic way.

Rather than attempting to provide an exhaustive list of all possible patristic handbooks on interpretation, this article has a twofold goal. First, it identifies the types of handbooks on biblical interpretation that are extant. Second, it takes a closer look at some key handbooks which explicitly address interpretative matters. Since the genre of the works considered in this chapter varies significantly, 'It is for you to see whether or not you should call it a handbook (*enchiridion*)' (Augustine, *enchir.* 32.122; trans. Harbert 1999:135).

## TYPES OF HANDBOOKS ON BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

---

To begin with, there are handbooks which itemize the books of the Bible and summarize their content. Cassiodorus said that Jerome's *Epistle* 53, which was often placed at the head of medieval Bibles, was 'explaining how we should carefully and thoroughly read divine Scripture' (*inst.* 1.21.2; trans. Halporn 2004:153). It offers a very short overview of biblical books in their canonical order, to which the author adds an exhortation, 'I beg of you . . . to live among these books, to meditate upon them, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else' (Jerome, *ep.* 53.10; trans. Fremantle 1994:102a). Gregory of Nazianzus'

poem *Concerning the Genuine Books of Divinely Inspired Scripture* (PG 37.472–4), too, lists rhythmically the twenty-two canonical books of the OT and the books of the NT, except the Apocalypse.

Many other poems of Gregory of Nazianzus communicate the content of biblical books in a rather memorable way (PG 37.398–552). However, these poems should be distinguished from poetic paraphrases, such as the one on the genealogies in Matthew and Luke (PG 37.480–7). A longer overview of the content of Scripture, *Synopsis Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, is spuriously attributed to Chrysostom. It is incomplete and covers only the OT books (additional fragments can be found in Klostermann 1895:92–100). Cassiodorus' *Complexiones apostolorum* (PL 70.1321–418), in turn, provides short summaries of NT books besides the Gospels. An abridgement of the content of both the OT and NT books, *Synopsis scripturae sacrae*, is also attributed to Athanasius (PG 28.283–438). It ends with a caveat about apocrypha and a comment on various translations of Scripture from Hebrew. Its relation to the above-mentioned work by pseudo-Chrysostom is not entirely clear.

Various prologues, as sort of miniature handbooks, communicate the content of biblical books as well. Jerome's prologues were attached to several OT books, whether he had translated them or not. At times, prologues were also prefixed to the Gospels and the letters of Paul (Dahl 1978:233–77; also Canellis 2017). The prologues of the extant commentaries on Paul by Marius Victorinus provide the *hypothesis*, the main argument, as well as identify the rhetorical situation, which tends to determine the author's response (CSEL 83/2). Likewise, Euthalius' tracts on the Acts of Apostles, the Catholic letters, and the letters of Paul (PG 85.627–790) have introductions with brief digests of the content of these writings, as well as the corresponding *hypotheses*. In Isidore of Seville's *Prooemia*, one finds prologues to every canonical book, although some of them are grouped together (e.g. the letters of Paul).

Two sixth-century authors, Junillus and Cassiodorus, authored handbooks, or, more precisely, *introductores*, to the matters that one has to be familiar with before starting to exegete Scripture. Both authors gave occasional advice on interpretation as well. Junillus' *Instituta regularia divinae legis* (see Maas 2003) was composed on the basis of a book called *Regulae*, which was written by Paul the Persian. Cassiodorus' *Institutiones divinarum et humanarum litterarum* (Mynors 1937) is an introduction to both the study of Scripture (book 1) and 'secular' liberal arts (book 2).

Next, there is a type of interpretative handbook which compares the translations of actual texts. Origen worked on his six-column synopsis of the OT, the *Hexapla*, for about thirty years. This fascinating work included a text with Hebrew characters (vocalization marks were arguably added on the basis of the transliteration found in the second column), a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew, and the translations of Aquila, Symmachus, the Septuagint (cf. Epiphanius, *mens.* 19), and Theodotion. Origen consulted up to three further Greek translations for the Psalms (Eusebius, *h.e.* 6.16.1–4; Jerome, *Tit.* 3.9; cf. Dorival 2013:609–11). Origen attempted to demonstrate that the Septuagint, which Christians preferred for congregational use, was indeed a legitimate and authoritative text, although it needed the critical removal of mistakes and discrepancies

in various manuscripts (*comm. in Mt.* 15.14; *ep.* 1.5; *hom. in Jer.* 15.5.2). This process was known as *diorthōsis* and it concerned the establishment of a correct text (Heine 2010:75). Working with Origen's *Hexapla*, Jerome studied the text of the first book of the Bible in his *Hebraicae Quaestiones in libro Geneseos*. A sixth-century Syrian Mikā'el, in turn, is said to have authored a three-volume *Questions Regarding the Text of the Bible* (Vööbus 1965:278).

Some handbooks focused on the harmony of scriptural accounts, because there had been attacks on the trustworthiness and coherence of Scripture. For example, an early fourth-century *praefectus*, Sossianus Hierocles, wrote a two-volume treatise *Philalēthēs*, which derided the inconsistencies in the Christian Scripture (Lactantius, *inst.* 5.2.12–17; *mort.* 16.4). Therefore Christian authors composed texts, such as Julian of Toledo's *Antikeimenon*, which suggested the ways to reconcile 138 OT and 83 NT texts (O'Loughlin 1993:80–98), and Theodulus' more theological *De consonantia Novi et Veteris Testamenti* (Gennadius, *vir.* 91; fragments in Diekamp 1981:315). Especially because the Church acknowledged four Gospels, the unity of their witness was a major concern.

A particular kind of gospel-harmony was Tatian's *Diatessaron*, which was translated into several ancient languages and was also, for a while, the official Gospel of the church in Edessa. The full text of the *Diatessaron* has to be reconstructed from several ancient versions (for Syriac, see Marmardji 1935). It eliminated possible contradictions by combining the material found in the four Gospels into a single coherent narrative, yet at the expense of the alternative accounts. Arguably, Tatian's gospel-harmony was not the earliest one of its kind (Petersen 1994:27–34). One should also mention here Theophilus of Antioch, who composed a single eclectic Gospel (Jerome, *ep.* 121.6). Victor of Capua, in turn, published a revision of Tatian's *Diatessaron* so that it matched with the text of the Vulgate (PL 68.255–358).

Another kind of gospel-harmony is represented by the Greek and Syriac fragments of Eusebius' *Quaestiones evangelicae*, which assesses the apparent contradictions in Jesus' birth and resurrection narratives. Augustine's *De consensu evangelistarum* is likewise a thorough attempt to reconcile the major Gospel accounts. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that it postulated the theoretical principles of harmonizing the Gospels, as these were believed to be entirely consistent. Likewise, Hesychius of Jerusalem attempts to make a number of Gospel passages conform to each other in his *Collectio difficultatum et solutionum*.

An altogether different kind of gospel-harmony—being an exegetical tool rather than an apologetic tract—was composed by Eusebius of Caesarea. His *Kanones* was allegedly based on Ammonius of Alexandria's previous attempt to create a useful apparatus of cross-references (Eusebius, *ep. Carp.*). Eusebius' *Kanones* consists of ten tables, which list four-, three-, and twofold pericopes or numbered sections, as well as the unique material of every Gospel. Among other patristic texts, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* 6.15 and Ailerán's *In X Canones Eusebii* explain what the tables are and how they are supposed to be used.

There are also interpretative handbooks which focus on the exegesis of difficult passages, such as the two and later three recensions of Ambrosiaster's *Quaestiones*

*Veteris et Novi Testamenti CXXVII*, Augustine's *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, Theodoret of Cyrus' *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, much of Maximus Confessor's *Quaestiones et dubia*, and Theodore bar Koni's manual *The Book of Scholia*, treatises 1–5 and 7–8.

Yet another type of handbook explains the names of people and places. Augustine admitted that 'various experts . . . have rendered no small service to posterity' by providing explanations of various Hebrew names (*doct. chr.* 2.16.23; trans. Green 1995:83; Cassiodorus, *inst.* 1.25.1). An anonymous work, *Interpretatio Hebraicorum Nominum*, was attributed to Philo (Eusebius, *h.e.* 2.18.7). (For the extant fragments on biblical names in various ancient languages, one should consult Wutz 1915.) Origen admitted using this handbook (*hom. in Num.* 20.3.4). Next, Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, which focused on the place-names, geography, and history of the Holy Land, was organized alphabetically and according to the order of canonical books. Jerome made a Latin rendition of Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, with various additions in his *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*. Being available both in Greek and Latin, Eusebius' *Onomasticon* became a major reference work for exegetes of the later centuries. It was a model for Adomnán's *De locis sanctis*, which also added the place-names of Alexandria and Constantinople to those in Palestine, and Bede's *De nomibus locorum*, which considered the place-names in the Book of Acts. Marcellinus Comes' four-book description of Jerusalem and Constantinople is lost (Cassiodorus, *inst.* 1.17.1; 1.25.1). Investigation of personal names perhaps culminated in Isidore of Seville's *Allegoriae quaedam sacrae scripturae*, in which nearly 250 names of biblical figures are assessed, as well as his *De ortu et obitu patriarcharum*.

A subtype of handbooks on names concerns etymologies, which were deemed extremely important in antiquity. Plato had investigated names in his *Cratylus*, the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus wrote a work entitled *Etymologikon*, and Cicero mediated much of it in his *De natura deorum*. Etymologies were important because the naturalist (vis-à-vis conventionalist) understanding of language contended that the root of a word captured the essence of a thing that it nominated. The best known among the handbooks on etymologies is arguably Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (ed. Lindsay 1911) in twenty books. In addition, a seventh-century Irish monk Ailerán authored an *Interpretatio mystica progenitorum Christi* which discussed the etymology of the names of Jesus' ancestors.

Additionally, one should mention the more theological handbooks of interpretation, such as Priscillian's *Canones in Pauli apostoli epistulas*, and Fortunatus of Aquileia's 'brief commentaries' (Jerome, *vir. ill.* 97). The first includes the fourteen letters of Paul in their canonical order (Hebrews included) and is organized under topical questions (the Trinity, Christology, morality, discipline, etc.) together with corresponding verses from Scripture. However, Priscillian's *Canones* were heavily edited by an unknown bishop Peregrinus, because their original author was believed (by some) to be a heretic. Praef. 8 says that the *Canones* were 'restored to the right doctrine' (Conti 2010:162–3). The second, Fortunatus of Aquileia's 'brief commentaries', is a reference work in which the teaching of the Gospels is organized under *tituli*.

Finally, there are several handbooks communicating knowledge on various subjects which might prove beneficial for interpreting Scripture. In addition to the topics mentioned in the title of Epiphanius' *De mensuris et ponderibus*, the treatise includes discussions of place-names and other introductory matters of Scripture. His *De XII gemmis* explains the figurative meaning of the jewels in the breastplate of the high priest (Exod 28.17–20 par. 39.10–13). Gregory of Nyssa's *Tituli psalmodum* assesses the cryptic titles of the Psalms. Quodvultdeus' *Liber promissionum et praedictorum* is a collection of God's promises found in Scripture and their fulfilment. Pseudo-Melito's *Clavis Scripturae*, allegedly from the seventh century, is an encyclopedic work on all kind of items, including number symbolism. One may also add here Pseudo-Epiphanius' *Tractatus de numerorum mysteriis*.

## HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES IN IMPORTANT HANDBOOKS

---

### Origen's *De principiis*

Among the various types of handbooks on biblical interpretation, some focus more specifically on hermeneutical issues. Below, five of these are looked at more closely.

Origen, 'an interpreter of the divine utterances for humankind' (Gregory of Thaumaturgos, *pan. Or.* 15.181; cf. Eusebius, *h.e.* 6.18.2, 4; 6.23.1), implicitly taught exegesis to most of the church fathers, even the Latin ones. Following the tradition of philosophical handbooks, in the late 220s he composed a treatise on the 'first principles' of the Christian faith: *De principiis*. Although being part of the larger polemical work, or a collection of semi-independent treatises (Kübel 1971:31–9), *De principiis* 4.1–3 is a unique 'handbook' on theological hermeneutics with tremendous after-effects. The 'first principles' may relate less to the rules of interpretation, strictly speaking, than to the overarching salvific economy of Scripture itself (Daley 1998). As Henri De Lubac further assesses, 'Origen's doctrine of the meaning of Scripture is a theology more than an exegesis in the modern sense' (2007:279).

To begin with, Origen insists that a correct theological preunderstanding is absolutely necessary for the adequate interpretation of Scripture: interpreters must assent to the Church's rule of faith (Martens 2012:127–31, 209–12). A failure to hold to the rule leads to an inadequate interpretation of Scripture (Origen, *princ.* 4.2.1; cf. 4.2.2 and 7; *hom. in Ps.* 36.4.1 [94–114]). Thus, in the opening paragraphs of *De principiis* Origen identifies the main tenets of the Church's rule, sourcing them ultimately in the apostolic preaching: 'The holy apostles, in preaching the faith of Christ, delivered with utmost clarity to all believers, even to those who seemed somewhat dull in the investigation of divine knowledge, certain points that they believed to be necessary' (*princ.* praef. 3; trans. Behr 2017:13). At the same time, Origen continues, the Apostles left much unexpressed

so that ‘the more diligent of their successors... might display the fruit of their ability’ (*princ. praef. 3*). Ultimately, Origen postulates a hermeneutical circle—the doctrines that Scripture clearly teaches (the rule of faith) become the norm which, in turn, guides the interpretation of the less clearly expressed matters. ‘It is only when one has constructed a system... from [the] basic apostolic kerygma, that one grasps revelation well enough to see the spiritual, saving meaning in every text of Scripture’ (Daley 1998:12).

Origen’s discussion of scriptural exegesis takes its lead from certain basic convictions. First of all, one has to understand that Scripture is the Word of God; that is, Scripture is composed ‘by the Spirit of God’ (Origen, *princ. praef. 8*; cf. 4.1.7). Origen certainly does not deny human involvement in the writing of Scripture, but he does highlight the priority of the divine communicative intention. Thus, the citation above is not a mere pious, casual statement, but the very starting point of Origen’s approach.

Second, the basic scriptural message must be firmly grasped by the reader. Origen is adamant that a spiritual metanarrative of the divine economy (i.e. salvation history) underlies all the scriptural narratives and ceremonial prescriptions. ‘Scripture... has been granted by the divine bounty for human salvation’ (4.2.4). Since the culmination of the salvific metanarrative is in Jesus Christ, all of Scripture must be, in one way or another, about him (4.1.6). For comparison, ‘pagan’ allegories—spiritualizing explanations of ancient myths or moralizing comments on shameful stories—are fundamentally different from Christian figurative reading, because the latter is about finding Christ and his saving activity in a special collection of texts (Vogt 2004:546). Origen maintains that Christ the Logos is present in the words of the Gospels as well as in the words of Moses and the prophets (*praef. 1*; Lienhard 2000:362). As such, Scripture is a single book, a single Word (*Jo. 5.4–8*; Simonetti 2004:14–17).

Third, all Scripture is meant to be spiritually ‘useful’ (2 Tim 3:16); it has to benefit one’s soul, not merely the readers’ knowledge of history, geography, and ancient customs. Did not the Apostle Paul say, ‘Now these things... were written down to instruct us’ (1 Cor 10.6–11) (cited in Origen, *princ. 4.2.6*; cf. *hom. in Gen. 10.4*; *hom. in Ex. 1.5*)? Since the whole Scripture is, in fact, written *pro nobis*, Origen wants an exegete to ask, ‘For what profit is there in having learned this [from a particular passage]?’ (*hom. in Num. 1.1.2*; trans. Scheck 2009:2b). ‘Arguably the cornerstone of Origen’s elaborate account of Scripture was that this collection of writings was “useful” or “beneficial”, serving as an instrument in the divine plan of salvation for those who read and heard it’ (Martens 2012:193; cf. Heine 2010:134–5). To reiterate, if one believes that everything matters in the text of Scripture—just as Origen did (‘I do not think that anything from the Scriptures is extraneous’ [*philoc. 10.2 (hom. in Jer. 39)*])—then all details, including prepositions, plural and singular forms of verbs, tenses, and even grammatical errors, prove to be important and suggestive of meaning.

How then should Scripture be perceived? The key here is to understand that, according to Origen, the Spirit of God composed Scripture in a special way. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 7.14 that ‘the [whole] law is spiritual’ (cited in Origen, *princ. praef. 8* and 4.2.4) and this validates his quest for higher meanings. He believes that the biblical books were composed so that they ‘concealed’ mysteries in simple

narratives (Origen, *princ.* 4.2.8–9; 4.3.11), which means that Scripture consists of a double (or triple) level discourse. The first level is literal and historical/legal/ceremonial; the second level is figurative and moral/spiritual (Dorival 2013:617–18). The first level, on which one can encounter various problems, is textual and concerns the realm of sensible realities. The second level, on which everything beautifully coheres, is metatextual and concerns the realm of intelligible realities (Origen, *princ.* 4.2.9). Stefaniw has labelled Origen's approach as 'noetic exegesis'. Noetic exegesis is interpretation which is concerned with perceiving the noetic content of an authoritative text by means of comprehension of the higher significance of the text (2010:28–30, 365–74). These two levels are interrelated as the first level provides figures and types for the second level (Origen, *princ.* 4.2.2 and 6).

Only after setting up the theological parameters for exegesis and investigating the compositional features of the biblical text does Origen wonder about how Scripture should be interpreted and what the proper exegetical methodology would be. Since Scripture has 'not only that meaning which is obvious, but also another which escapes the notice of most' (praef. 8; 4.1.7; 4.2.3; 4.3.4.), Origen turns decisively to figurative interpretation (Edwards 2013:714–33). He advises: 'Applying yourself to the divine reading with the intention to believe and please God, knock at what is closed in it' (Origen, *ep.* 2.4; trans. Trigg 1998:212). Again, figurative interpretation is grounded on the Platonic understanding that the intelligible should be sought behind the sensible. In his *Respublica* (378d), Plato suggested that underneath the author's intended meaning there was a hidden meaning (*hyponoia*). Plutarch, in turn, explained that what was earlier known as the hidden meaning, was known in his time (i.e. the first century AD) as allegory (*mor.* 19e–f). Accordingly, an interpreter's ultimate task is to decipher the hidden meaning beneath the surface meaning—and precisely this conviction defined the hermeneutical program for Origen (Heine 2010:207–9; Simonetti 2004:19, 65–70). Accordingly, the true interpreter of Scripture should transform the Word of God 'at the level of the senses into the spiritual Gospel' (Origen, *Jo.* 1.45; trans. Heine 1989:43).

The problem is, again, that the spiritual sense is not equally apparent to every exegete—Scripture is 'tightly shut and sealed' (Origen, *sel. in Ps.* [PG 12.1076C]; cf. Jerome, *ep.* 53.5)—and thus, the danger of over-literalism lurks behind every corner (Origen, *princ.* 4.1.7, 4.2.1). It truly worried Origen that 'Scripture is not understood according to its spiritual sense, but according to the sound of the letter' (4.2.2). For Origen, the clear precedent and authorization for turning to the spiritual sense was given by Jesus and Paul (4.2.6; cf. Crouzel 1989:64–9).

Consequently, in *De principiis* 4.2.4, Origen proposes the way 'we ought to deal with the Scriptures and gather their sense'. Unlike Ptolemy, who distinguished between three different origins of the law, between three different lawgivers (*Epistula ad Floram* in Epiphanius, *haer.* 33.3–8), Origen distinguishes between three different but interrelated levels of meaning and designates these as the 'body', 'soul', and 'spirit' of Scripture (De Lubac 2007:159–71). The somatic sense is a literal reading of the text that provides either historical information about God's interaction with humankind or some morally relevant instructions; the psychic sense (Lauro 2005:67–70) is a

non-literal, figurative reading of the text that benefits one's progress in virtues and aids the edification of the soul; and the pneumatic sense (for alternative terms, see Martens 2012:64 n. 138; Simonetti 2004:25–7, 51–65) is also a non-literal, figurative reading of the text that concerns theological matters, such as Christ's first and second coming (Origen, *princ.* 4.2.4–6; cf. *hom. in Lev.* 5.2). Accordingly, an interpreter has to connect the different levels and put together 'the order and sequence of things with spiritual understanding' (*Cant. Prol.* 4; trans. Lawson 1957:50; cf. Dawson 1998:34–8).

Origen's proposed exegetical methodology also led to some controversial assertions. For example, in *De principiis* 4.2.5 and 4.3.5, he famously asserts that not every biblical passage has a 'bodily' sense. What he arguably means is that while texts always have a literal sense, sometimes this literal sense is 'absurd and impossible' and therefore unworthy of God and futile as an interpretation of God's word (Origen, *princ.* 4.3.4). Only a useful literal sense—useful morally or in some other ways—is called the 'bodily' sense of Scripture (4.2.5–6; Lauro 2005:51–8). Another way to grasp what Origen is saying is to consider his conviction that the Holy Spirit put 'stumbling-blocks' in the biblical texts—factual mistakes and statements which were historically or factually impossible and made absolutely no sense (Origen, *princ.* 4.2.9–3.4). The 'stumbling-blocks', however, are not the 'bodily' sense of Scripture; they are the problematic literal sense, which are not useful in themselves, but which provoke an exegete to look for the deeper meanings.

## Tyconius' *Liber regularum*

Tyconius was a fourth-century North African lay theologian and exegete (Gennadius, *vir.* 18) whom neither Donatists nor Catholics considered entirely their own. Somewhere near the end of the fourth century, he authored a manual for scriptural interpretation, *Liber regularum* (Babcock 1989), which is the first extant Latin treatise exclusively on biblical interpretation. Augustine's early recommendation announced that 'Consideration of these rules, as expounded by [Tyconius], is quite helpful in penetrating the obscure parts of the divine writings' (*doct. chr.* 3.30.42; trans. Green 1995:173; cf. Augustine, *ep.* 249). Later Latin authors inevitably saw Tyconius' *Rules* through the eyes of Augustine, because he restated these in his *De doctrina Christiana* 3.30.43–3.47.56 (Cazier 1973:241–61). Augustine considered Tyconius' rules under 'ambiguous figurative signs' and explained that 'all these rules [except the third rule] result in one thing being understood from another' (Augustine, *doct. chr.* 3.37.56), which was his short definition of figurative discourse (cf. Tyconius, *reg.* rule 6). In fact, there are only two late patristic texts which make reference to Tyconius' treatise independently from Augustine's summary: an African text, *De promissionibus*, and a Cassiodorian comment on 2 Thessalonians 2.4–5 (Souter 1910:562–3). A ninth-century manuscript in the cathedral Library at Monza shows the later popularity of Tyconius' *Liber regularum*. In this manuscript Tyconius' work is bound together with Ambrosiaster's commentary on the thirteen letters of Paul, evidently for the benefit of interpreters (Bright 1988:16).

For Tyconius, Scripture was a living oracle of God (Kannengiesser 2004:1140). As such, it was incomprehensible only when exegetes were not able to discern the inbuilt logic of its discourse (Kugler 1986:129). Tyconius contended that there were ‘certain mystic rules which obtain in the inner recesses of the entire law and keep the rich treasures of the truth hidden from some people’ (*reg. praef.*). The rules are “mystical” because they are pneumatological principles. The same Spirit is at once Author of the Scriptures and the one who opens what has been shut in the Scriptures’ (Bright 1988:133). Tyconius distinguished these in-built ‘rules’ of Scripture from his own ‘keys and lamps’, which helped to identify the ‘rules’ and to show how they operated. While ‘keys and lamps’ were brought to the holy text by an exegete, the ‘rules’ were already organically part of the holy text. Accordingly, the ‘rules’ were not so much recommended interpretative steps as they were composition-rules. Some of these ‘rules’ were theological (1–3, 7), others grammatical (4–6). Tyconius contended that Scripture spoke clearly and directly to the situation of readers in their contexts, provided only that readers could see how the text was composed by the Spirit in the first place. With significant exegetical optimism, he promised that knowledge of the seven ‘rules’ would open whatever was closed and illumine whatever was dark (*reg. praef.*).

The main interpretative difficulty that Tyconius discerned was that the reference of a word or an utterance could change within a given text (Vercruyssen 2016:28–32). Thus, to notice such change (i.e. the subtle transition between the dual references) was to ‘be kept from straying into error’ (Tyconius, *reg. praef.*). For example, sometimes the reference was to the Lord, other times to the Lord’s ‘body’ (i.e. the Church), sometimes to the ‘left’ and other times to the ‘right’ side of Christ’s allegedly bipartite body (Leoni and Leoni 1997:15). Tyconius believed that by knowing the composition-rules of the Spirit, an exegete was ready to ascertain the reference of Scripture correctly and interpret several seemingly contradictory assertions adequately (Young 1997:137).

## Augustine’s *De doctrina Christiana*

Augustine’s *De doctrina Christiana* is a treatise which attempts to communicate ‘certain rules for interpreting the scriptures’ (*doct. chr. prol. 1*). Like Origen’s *De principiis*, it first introduces the *regula fidei* (book 1) and then proposes a hermeneutical theory (books two and three). In *De doctrina Christiana* 1.2.2, Augustine states that ‘All teaching is concerned with either things or signs’. *Res* are considered in book one and *signa* (i.e. the word-signs signifying the *res*) in books 2 and 3. These first three books (up to 3.24.35) were written in 396 CE. Book 4, which was written in 426 or 427 CE, is about how the exegetical results should be ‘eloquently’ communicated. *De doctrina Christiana* is ultimately a multifaceted work that assesses theology, moral prerequisites for exegetes, hermeneutical theory, the use of ‘secular’ learning, Tyconius’ *regulae*, and rhetoric.

In book 1 Augustine answers two interrelated and important hermeneutical questions: What is the overall reference of Scripture? and What is the correct theological preunderstanding for interpreting Scripture? In response to the first question, Augustine

expresses his deep conviction that, ultimately, Scripture is about ‘a double love of God and one’s neighbour’ (Matt 22.37–40) (*doct. chr.* 1.26.27; 3.10.14–15; 3.12.20–3.15.23; cf. Pollmann 1996:121–47). Consequently, any interpretation of Scripture, if it wants to be adequate, has to promote this ‘double love’ (Augustine, *doct. chr.* 1.35.39; 1.36.40–37.41; 3.12.20). In his response to the second question, Augustine emphasizes that exegesis requires an interpretative tradition. For a Christian exegete, the suitable hermeneutical tradition, or the proper theological preunderstanding, is the creed and/or the *regula fidei* (3.2.2; cf. *ciu.* 15.26; *Psal.* 74.12; Ayres 2005:33–49).

Books 2 and 3 discuss signification, that is, the various ways the sensible word-signs of Scripture point to intelligible realities. The word-signs can be unknown or ambiguous, literal or figurative, or combine these characteristics. The at times heavy *scientia signorum* (Toom 2016:77–108) is introduced in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.1.1–2.5.6 and thereafter, every subgroup of signs is identified and some exegetical advice is provided for interpreting them.

Augustine begins with ‘unknown literal signs’ (2.11.6–2.15.22), that is, biblical words or expressions that are unknown to the reader. The remedy here is a knowledge of biblical languages: should the signs in question come from Hebrew or Greek (2.11.16; 3.1.1), or a better knowledge of Latin; should the problem lie with readers’ knowledge of their native language (2.14.21)? The existence of various translations, in turn, necessitates a comparison of these translations, as well as an investigation of manuscripts in the original languages (2.12.17).

For understanding the ‘unknown figurative signs’ (2.16.23–6), the knowledge of various things is particularly beneficial. By ‘things’ Augustine here means the sensible entities which are used for the signification of intelligible realities in the biblical discourse (2.10.15; 3.1.1). For example: if people are ignorant of the ways hyssop is used to clean the lungs, they can hardly understand the comparison, ‘You will sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall become clean’ (Ps 51.7) (Augustine, *doct. chr.* 2.16.24; 2.41.62). He mentions animals, stones, plants, numbers, history, rhetoric, figures of speech, and other such ‘things’ which one can learn at school (2.16.24–3.29.41). This constitutes a lengthy digression about how precisely Christians should regard ‘secular’ learning (2.17.27–2.42.63; 4.2.3).

‘Ambiguous literal signs’ (3.1.1–3.4.8) need to be disambiguated by correct punctuation (‘Many Latin and especially Greek codices divide the verse differently’ [Augustine, *Psal.* 67.41; trans. Boulding 2001:360]), consulting the *regula fidei*, and considering the words’ immediate literary context, which can be a ‘pointer to the writer’s intention’ (3.4.8; cf. 3.2.2; 3.3.6–3.4.7; Toom 2008:419–33).

The toughest hermeneutical case is ‘ambiguous figurative signs’ (*doct. chr.* 3.5.9–3.37.56). It is the toughest, because making an adequate distinction between the literal and figurative uses of words and/or statements is notoriously difficult, and thus many exegetes fail to make it properly (3.5.9; 3.7.1–3.10.14; 3.24.34). (Already Plato bemoaned that ‘the young can’t distinguish what is allegorical from what isn’t’ [*resp.* 378d; trans. Grube 1997:1017].) For help Augustine postulates two carefully qualified rules. The first says, ‘Anything in the divine discourse that cannot be related either to good morals or to

the true faith should be taken as figurative' (3.10.14; cf. *Gal.* 19; Mayer 1974:326–8). The principle *scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpret* is of great help in determining the meaning of ambiguous figurative signs. Augustine suggests that if something is controversial, 'let the matter be settled from the same Scripture by finding and applying testimonies from anywhere else in the sacred books' (Augustine, *doct. chr.* 3.28.39). So is rational analysis: 'But where a possible meaning emerges which cannot be made entirely clear... it remains to elucidate it with arguments from reason' (3.28.39). The second rule, which Augustine added when he finished *De doctrina Christiana* some thirty years later, says, 'When a meaning based on the literal interpretation of a word is absurd we must investigate whether the passage that we cannot understand is perhaps being expressed by means of one or other of the tropes [i.e. figuratively]' (3.29.41; Teske 1995:111–14; cf. Bede, *De schematibus et tropis sacrae scripturae*).

Book 4, which ended up longer than Augustine wanted it to be (Augustine, *doct. chr.* 4.31.64), is about Christian eloquence. It was used as the basis for medieval manuals of preaching and later even printed separately under the title *De arte predicandi* (Van Fleteren 2013:287a–b; Roer 2013:1651a–1653a).

## Eucherius' Compendia

Eucherius, a fifth-century ascetic-aristocrat at Lérins and a later bishop of Lyons (Gennadius, *vir.* 64), is the author of two biblical compendia, titled respectively as *Formulae spiritalis intellegentiae* and *Instructionum libri duo*. (Eucherius' *Instructionum* was probably composed before *Formulae* [Dulaey 2005:69–70].) With these compositions Eucherius inaugurated 'the list of lexicons and miscellanies that belong to the first part of the Middle Ages' (de Lubac 1998:141).

*Formulae* is organized into ten rubrics and provides, almost like a dictionary, the figurative meaning of all kind of items mentioned in Scripture. In *De doctrina Christiana* 2.39.59, Augustine had called for works which would systematically explain 'all the places, animals, plants, and trees, or the stones or metals, and all the other unfamiliar kinds of objects mentioned in scripture' (cf. 2.29.45). Eucherius may have responded to this call since he methodically explains biblical anthropomorphisms, heavenly and earthly realities, and states the symbolic meanings of animals, titles, and even activities and numbers with the help of scriptural references (Dulaey 2004:121–46). He is convinced of the necessity of all this, because 'the heavenly talk' of Scripture was not written 'by the usual way that human beings write' (*form.* praef. 17–18; trans. Keck 1966). Instead, the references to hidden spiritual realities were clothed in a more familiar discourse.

Although Eucherius emphasizes the necessity of distinguishing between the 'body, soul, and spirit' of the biblical text in his preface to *Formulae*, his topical catalogue focuses on a simplified 'binominal' of 'letter' and 'spirit' (2 Cor 3.6) (*form.* praef. 38–9; see Curti 1979:108–22). By often providing a single figurative correspondence to a given biblical word (e.g. 'The clouds are the prophets and the saints, which rain the word of the

Lord; in Isaiah: “I shall order the clouds above to rain” (Is. 5.6) [*form.* 2.141–4]), Eucherius appears to limit the range of possible meanings of texts, thereby reducing hermeneutics to a simplified task of learning the fixed meanings of words and phrases (O’Loughlin 1995:243–4). In *Formulae* 7.813–14, however, Eucherius suddenly disrupts his word-list and grants the possibility that ‘many meanings may come out in diversity of person, time, and place’. Thus, the often simplified correspondences in *Formulae* should not necessarily be taken as sure evidence for Eucherius’ lack of sophistication. Note as well the similarities between his *Formulae* and the seventh-century papyrus (University of Michigan, inventory number 3718; Henrichs and Husselman 1968:180–4), which likewise offers one-to-one figurative correspondences for scriptural words.

Something similar is undertaken in book two of Eucherius’ *Instructionum* where he lists the etymological meanings of Hebrew and Greek words, the names of Gentile tribes, holy places, and times, as well as describes the character of flying and crawling creatures, and explains the ancient weights and measures (Mandolfo 1989:217–33). In putting together this ‘handbook’, Eucherius explicitly draws upon knowledge *ex illustrium doctorum*, who included Philo, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, and Epiphanius (Eucherius, *instr.* praef.).

### Adrian’s *Introductio in sacras scripturas*

Adrian was a fifth-century Greek-speaking author who wrote an introductory handbook on biblical interpretation entitled *Introductio in sacras scripturas*. This treatise was known to Cassiodorus (*inst.* 1.10.1) as well as Photius, who considered it very useful for the study of Scripture (*Bibl.* 2). Although Adrian’s approach is quite original among exegetes, he takes his lead from the classical rhetorical tradition and works within the Antiochene exegetical tradition. Bate contends that ‘every line of Adrian can be illustrated from Theodore of Mopsuestia or Theodoret’ (1923:66). While this claim is exaggerated, substantial evidence of Adrian’s similarities to Theodore (and less Theodoret) is provided in Martens’s edition and translation of the treatise (2017).

Adrian focuses on the ‘peculiarities’ of the message, diction, and syntax of the Hebrew literary style (*introd.* 1). This tripartite distinction of style is ubiquitous in late antique rhetorical manuals (Martens 2013:197–217). Under ‘message’ Adrian catalogues scriptural anthropomorphisms and explains how they should be interpreted; in the next section on ‘diction’, he considers a wide range of peculiar word usages together with corresponding scriptural examples; and under ‘word arrangement’ he lists and illustrates various figures of speech. The threefold main body of the treatise is followed by shorter appendices which include a catalogue of twenty-two tropes defined and illustrated from Scripture (*introd.* 73), a distinction between prophetic and narrational texts, detailed advice for how to interpret Scripture, and a distinction between prosaic and poetic texts. Adrian’s explanation of tropes is particularly interesting because it includes a lemma on ‘allegory’. It should be noted here that, for patristic exegetes, allegory and other figurative tropes often concerned the usage of a single word rather than a proposition—thus, being

a denomination ('calling things that have one name with a different name') (Adrian, *introd.* 73.13 [recension 2]) rather than predication. In any case, recension one of the *Introductio* does not define 'allegory' and provides four very brief scriptural examples. Recension two, however, defines 'allegory', elaborates on the same examples, and adds a few others. Sharing the Antiochene wariness of allegory, Adrian suggests that in Galatians the Apostle Paul was actually talking about a different trope, 'correspondence', and that he called it, erroneously, 'allegory' (*introd.* 73.13 [recension 2]).

Lastly, in offering hermeneutical advice for exegetes, Adrian insists that students first need to familiarize themselves with the general purpose or content of a passage before they turn to detailed word-for-word exegesis. He also underscores the importance of attending to literary peculiarities (the subject of his treatise) and the importance of tracing out the narrative sequence of longer passages. In all these ways, the 'fitting sense' will be grasped by Scripture's readers (*introd.* 75–8).

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Adrian, *Introductio in sacras scripturas*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: P. W. Martens, *Adrian's Introduction to the Divine Scriptures: An Antiochene Handbook for Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*. Latin text and Eng. trans.: R. P. H. Green, *Augustine: De doctrina Christiana*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
- Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos*. Latin text: E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont (eds), *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (3 vols), CCL 38–40 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956). Eng. trans.: M. Boulding, *Saint Augustine: Expositions of the Psalms*, 6 vols, The Works of Saint Augustine III/15–20 (New York: New City, 2000–4).
- Augustine, *Enchiridion*. Latin text: M. Evans (ed.), *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide et spe et caritate*, CCL 46 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969). Eng. trans.: B. Harbert, *The Augustine Catechism: The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, The Augustine Series 1 (New York: New City, 1999).
- Cassiodorus, *Institutiones*. Latin text: R. A. B. Mynors (ed.), *Cassiodori Senatoris Institutiones* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1937). Eng. trans.: J. W. Halporn, *Cassiodorus: Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning, On the Soul*, Translated Texts for Historians 42 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004).
- Eucherius, *Formulae spiritalis intellegentiae*. Latin text: C. Mandolfo (ed.), *Formulae spiritalis intellegentiae*, CCL 66 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004). Eng. trans.: K. R. Keck, *The Formulae of St. Eucherius of Lyons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1966), available from <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/eucherius/formulae.html>> [30 March 2016].
- Eusebius, *Onomasticon*. Greek text: E. Klostermann (ed.), *Eusebius Werke* 3/1, GCS 8, 2nd edn (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904).
- Gregory of Thaumaturgos, *In Origenem oratio panegyrica*. Greek text: H. Crouzel, *Remerciements à Origène et Lettre d'Origène à Grégoire*, SC 148 (Paris: Cerf, 1969).
- Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*. Latin text: W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Etymologiarvm sive Originvm libri XX* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911). Eng. trans.: S. A. Barney, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

- Jerome, *Epistulae*. Latin text: I. Hilberg (ed.), *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, CSEL 54–5 (Vienna: Verlag, 1996). Eng. trans.: W. H. Fremantle, *Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, NPNF 6 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994).
- Jerome, *De uiris illustribus*. Latin text: *Hieronymus liber De uiris inlustribus*, TU 14, Heft 1a (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1896).
- Jerome, *Commentarius in Canticum Cantorum*. Latin text: I. L. Brésard, H. Crouzel, and M. Borret (eds), *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, 2nd edn, SC 375 (Paris: Cerf, 2006). Eng. trans.: R. P. Lawson, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, ACW 26 (New York: Newman, 1957).
- Jerome, *De principiis*. Greek and Latin texts: P. Koetschau (ed.), *Origenes Werke* 5, GCS 22 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1913). Eng. trans.: G. W. Butterworth, *Origen: On First Principles* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973).
- Jerome, *Epistula ad Gregorium Thaumaturgum (Ep. 2)*. Greek text: H. Crouzel (ed.), *Remerciements à Origène et Lettre d'Origène à Grégoire*, SC 148 (Paris: Cerf, 1969). Eng. trans.: J. W. Trigg, *Origen, The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- Jerome, *Homiliae in Numeros*. Latin text: I. L. Doutreleau (ed.), *Homélies sur les Nombres I–X*, SC 415 (Paris: Cerf, 1996). Eng. trans.: T. P. Scheck, *Homilies on Numbers*, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).
- Jerome, *Philocalia*. Greek text: J. A. Robinson, *The Philocalia of Origen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893).
- Origen, *Commentarii in Johannem*. Greek text: E. Preuschen (ed.), *Origenes Werke* 4, GCS 10 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903). Eng. trans: R. E. Heine, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 1–10*, FC 80 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Greek/Latin texts and Eng. trans. J. Behr, *Origen: On First Principles*, 2 vols. Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- Plato, *Respublica*. Eng. trans.: G. M. A. Grube, *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. J. M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).
- Priscillian, *Canones in Pauli apostoli epistulas*. Latin text and Eng. trans.: M. Conti, *Priscillian of Avila: The Complete Works*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010).
- Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Synopsis Veteris et Novi Testamenti*. Greek text: E. Klostermann (ed.), *Analecta zur Septuaginta, Hexapla und Patristisk* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1895).
- Tatian, *Diatessaron*. Syriac text: A.-S. Marmardji (ed.), *Diatessaron de Tatien* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie catholique, 1935).
- Tyconius, *Liber regularum*. Latin text and Eng. trans.: W. S. Babcock, *Liber regularum*, Texts and Translations 31 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

## Scholarship

- Ayres, L. (2005). 'Augustine on the Rule of Faith: Rhetoric, Christology, and the Foundation of Christian Thinking', *AugSt* 36: 33–49.
- Bate, H. N. (1923). 'Some Technical Terms of Greek Exegesis', *JTS* 24: 59–66.
- Bright, P. (1988). *The Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic*. Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 2 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Canellis, A. et al. (2017) (eds.), *Préfaces aux livres de la Bible*, SC 592 (Paris: du Cerf).
- Cazier, P. (1973). 'Le Livre des règles de Tyconius: Sa transmission du *De doctrina Christiana* aux *Sentences* d'Isidore de Séville', *REAug* 19: 241–61.

- Crouzel, H. (1989). *Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian*, trans. A. S. Worrall (San Francisco: Harper & Row).
- Curti, C. (1979). ‘“Spiritualis intelligentiae”: Nota sulla dottrina esegetica de Eucherio de Lione’, in A. M. Ritter (ed.), *Kerygma und Logos: Beiträge zu den geistesgeschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Antike und Christentum: Festschrift für Carl Andresen zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 108–22.
- Dahl, N. (1978). ‘The Origins of the Earliest Prologues to the Pauline Letters’, *Semeia* 12: 233–77.
- Daley, B. E. (1998). ‘Origen’s *De principiis*: A Guide to the Principles of Christian Scriptural Interpretation’, in J. Petruccione (ed.), *Nove et Vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press), 3–21.
- Dawson, D. (1998). ‘Allegorical Reading and the Embodiment of the Soul in Origen’, in L. Ayres and G. Jones (eds), *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community* (London: Routledge), 26–43.
- De Lubac, H. (1998). *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. M. Seban (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- De Lubac, H. (2007). *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. A. E. Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius).
- Diekamp, F. (1981). *Doctrina patrum de incarnatione Verbi: Ein griechisches Florilegium aus der Wende des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*. 2nd edn (Münster: Aschendorff).
- Dorival, G. (2013). ‘Origen’, in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume I: From the Beginnings to 600*, ed. J. C. Paget and J. Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 605–28.
- Dulaey, M. (2004). ‘Augustin en Provence dans les premières décennies du V<sup>e</sup> siècle: Le témoignage des *Formulae d’Eucher*’, *Studia Ephemerides Augustinianum* 90: 121–46.
- Dulaey, M. (2005). ‘Eucher exégète: L’interprétation de la Bible en Gaule du Sud dans la première moitié du V<sup>e</sup> siècle’, in O. Wermelinger et al. (eds), *Mauritius und die Thebäische Legion. Akten des internationalen Kolloquiums: Freiburg, Saint-Maurice, Martigny, 17.–20. September 2003* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg), 66–93.
- Edwards, M. (2013). ‘Figurative Readings: Their Scope and Justification’, in J. C. Paget and J. Schaper (eds), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume I: From the Beginnings to 600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 714–33.
- Heine, R. E. (2010). *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*. Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Henrichs, A., and Husselman, E. M. (1968). ‘Christian Allegorizations (P. Mich. Inv. 3718)’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 3: 175–89.
- Kannengiesser, C. (2004). ‘Tyconius’, in C. Kannengiesser (ed.), *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis, The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill), 2: 1139–48.
- Kugler, R. A. (1986). ‘Tyconius’ *Mystic Rules* and the Rules of Augustine’, in P. Bright (ed.), *Augustine and the Bible, The Bible through the Ages 2* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 129–48.
- Kübel, P. (1971). ‘Zum Aufbau von Origenes’ *De Principiis*’, *VC* 25: 31–9.
- Lauro, E. A. (2005). *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen’s Exegesis*. The Bible in Ancient Christianity 3 (Leiden: Brill).
- Leoni, L., and Leoni, D. (1997) (eds). *Ticonio: Sette regole per la Scrittura*, Epifania della Parola 4 (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane).
- Lienhard, J. T. (2000). ‘Origen and the Crisis of the Old Testament in the Early Church’, *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (3): 355–66.

- Maas, M. (2003). *Exegesis and Empire in the Early Byzantine Mediterranean: Junillus Africanus and the Instituta Regularia Divinae Legis* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Mandolfo, C. (1989). 'Osservazioni sull' esegesi di Eucherio di Lione', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 6: 217–33.
- Mandolfo, C. (2004). 'Introduzione', in *Eucherii Lugdunensis Formulae spiritalis intelligentiae*, CCL 66 (Turnhout: Brepols), xi–xiv.
- Martens, P. W. (2012). *Origen and Scripture: Contours of the Exegetical Life*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Martens, P. W. (2013). 'Adrian's Introduction to the Divine Scriptures and Greco-Roman Rhetorical Theory on Style', *JR* 93 (2): 197–217.
- Mayer, C. P. (1974). *Die Zeichen in der geistigen Entwicklung und in der Theologie Augustins, II. Teil: Die antimanchäische Epoche* (Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag).
- O'Loughlin, T. (1993). 'Julian of Toledo's *Antikeimenon* and the Development of Latin Exegesis', *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 16: 80–98.
- O'Loughlin, T. (1995). 'The Symbol Gives Life: Eucherius of Lyon's Formula for Exegesis', in T. Finan and V. Twomey (eds), *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers: Letter and Spirit* (Dublin: Blackrock), 221–52.
- Petersen, W. L. (1994). *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship*, Supplements to VC 25 (Leiden: Brill).
- Pollmann, K. (1996). *Doctrina Christiana: Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der christlichen Hermeneutik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustinus, 'De doctrina Christiana'*. Paradosis: Beiträge zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur und Theologie 41 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag).
- Roer, H. (2013). 'Rhetoric', in K. Pollmann and W. Otten (eds), *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 3:1650a–1657a.
- Simonetti, M. (2004). *Origene esegeta e la sua tradizione*. Letteratura cristiana antica 2 (Brescia: Morcelliana).
- Souter, A. (1910). 'An Unrecorded Reference to the Rules of Tyconius', *JTS* 11: 562–3.
- Stefaniw, B. (2010). *Mind, Text, and Commentary: Noetic Exegesis in Origen of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, and Evagrius Ponticus*. Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang).
- Teske, R. J. (1995). 'Criteria for Figurative Interpretation in St. Augustine', in D. W. H. Arnold and P. Bright (eds), 'De doctrina Christiana': *A Classic of Western Culture*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 9 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 109–22.
- Toom, T. (2008). 'Augustine on Ambiguity', *AugSt* 38 (2): 407–33.
- Toom, T. (2016). 'Augustine's Hermeneutics: The Science of the Divinely Given Signs', in T. Toom (ed.), *Patristic Theories of Biblical Interpretation: The Latin Fathers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 77–108.
- Van Fleteren, F. (2013). 'De doctrina Christiana', in K. Pollmann and W. Otten (eds), *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1:285a–291b.
- Vercruysse, J.-M. (2016). 'Tyconius' Hermeneutics: The Way the Holy Spirit Expresses Itself through Scripture', in T. Toom (ed.), *Patristic Theories of Biblical Interpretation: The Latin Fathers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 20–48.
- Vogt, H. J. (2004). 'Origen of Alexandria', in C. Kannengiesser (ed.), *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill), 1: 536–74.
- Vööbus, A. (1965). *History of the School of Nisibis*. CSCO 266 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus CSCO).

- Wutz, F. (1915). *Onomastica sacra*. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 41/2 (Leipzig: Hinrichs).
- Young, F. M. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Arnold, D. W. H., and Bright P. (1995) (eds). 'De doctrina Christiana': *A Classic of Western Culture*. Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 9 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Kannengiesser, C. (2004) (ed.). *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 2 vols. The Bible in Ancient Christianity (Leiden: Brill).
- Lauro, E. A. (2005). *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis*. The Bible in Ancient Christianity 3 (Leiden: Brill).
- L'ègesesi dei padri latini: Dalle origini a Gregorio Magno, XXVIII Incontro di studiosi dell'antichità cristiana, Roma, 6-8 maggio 1999* (2000). 2 vols. *Studia ephemeridis Augustinianum* 68 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum).
- Martens, P. W. (2017). *Adrian's 'Introductions to the Divine Scriptures': An Antiochene Handbook for Scriptural Interpretation*. Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Paget J. C., and J. Schaper (2013) (eds). *The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume I: From the Beginnings to 600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Sæbø, M. et al. (1996) (eds). *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation. Volume 1: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Toom, T. (2016) (ed.). *Patristic Theories of Biblical Interpretation: The Latin Fathers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Young, F. M. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

## CHAPTER 7

---

# FROM LETTER TO SPIRIT

## *The Multiple Senses of Scripture*

---

JOHN C. CAVADINI

### INTRODUCTION

---

FIGURATIVE exegesis of the Bible, in its broadest terms, is simply the sense of ‘the Bible’ itself as a coherent literary and theological whole. More fundamentally, one could say it is the sense of the Christian Scriptures, OT and NT, as a revealed canon and a self-consistent whole. From this point of view, Scripture and figurative exegesis are only formally distinct, as, on the one hand, that which is interpreted, and, on the other, a method of interpretation. But this is only a formal distinction, because, I argue, without figurative exegesis, there is no Bible. For one thing, the biblical books themselves, both OT and NT, employ it liberally; but also the idea that there *is* revealed Scripture, and that it is a coherent, authoritative whole, both implies and depends upon the intertextual cohesion which figurative exegesis constitutes. Thus to the extent that figurative exegesis is dismissed, on whatever grounds, as ‘fanciful’, as ‘eisegesis’, as ‘anachronistic’, as ‘pre-critical’, as merely ‘cultural revision’, and not a true claim on meaning, the canon of Scripture itself is dismissed both as a concept and as a concrete reality. To study figurative exegesis as the fathers practised it is to study the Bible as God’s revealed word, without remainder. It is to discover in its depth the claim that there is a ‘biblical’ view of God and of everything that is not God. Of course, there are diverse voices, genres, and perspectives within the canon, but figurative exegesis is the formal way of enacting the claim that antecedent to this diversity is a unity of perspective that resists fragmentation and makes of Scripture more than the sum of its parts.

This chapter will present ‘figurative exegesis’ not by defining it and then watching the definition applied, but rather as something that is best characterized as the claims it makes are described and analysed. ‘Figurative exegesis’ was thus not a pre-existing literary strategy, learned in schools and then applied to the biblical text, even though many patristic writers were in fact educated in techniques of literary analysis and did press

these techniques into exegetical service. At its heart, patristic figurative exegesis represented a conviction antecedent to theories of literary analysis, namely, that in the light of the Church's proclamation of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, all that had been revealed to Israel was seen in a new, definitive light and was unified by and in that proclamation. Yet it did not follow that the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus—even though it revealed a 'newness' that was irreducible to what could have been humanly expected on the grounds of previous revelation—could be proclaimed apart from that earlier revelation, for the very reason that it was the fulfilment of what had been revealed. To separate the new from the revelation it fulfilled would evacuate the very 'newness' of its significance. Figurative exegesis was the expression of this conviction not only in the interpretation of Israel's Scripture, but also in the creation of new Scriptures (Hayes 2016) indissolubly bound to what their 'newness' cast as 'old' (but not 'obsolete') and in the continuing interpretation of both. Lest this claim seem to readers to slight the letter of Scripture and its literal sense, I hasten to add that the fathers believed the letter of Scripture to be indispensable. But we must add that for the fathers, the literal sense of Scripture was *ordered towards* the spiritual sense(s). The literal sense was not a self-sufficient independent sense to which the other senses were optional enhancements based essentially in the mind of the reading subject. To better present its indispensability and its ordering towards the spiritual senses of Scripture, I have chosen to treat the literal sense at the end of the chapter, rather than to start with it.

## FIGURATIVE EXEGESIS AND TRADITION

---

To avoid the connotation that figurative exegesis is reducible to a literary strategy that pre-exists the Bible and is then applied to it, I am avoiding the word 'figural', a word that comes from contemporary literary criticism. A 'classic' definition of figural exegesis is given by Erich Auerbach:

Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first. The two poles of a figure are separated in time, but both, being real events or persons, are within temporality. They are both contained in the flowing stream which is historical life, and only the comprehension, the *intellectus spiritualis*, of their interdependence is a spiritual act. (Auerbach 1968:73)

As useful as this definition can be, it does not fully capture patristic practice. For one thing, it does not include allegory, and the fathers made only loose distinctions between figure, type, allegory, etc. (Martens 2012). None of these words was used in a technical sense, even by an exegete as late and as educated as Augustine. Though he identifies 'allegory' as a specific literary trope (*Trin.* 15.15), 'allegory' nevertheless functions for him simply as the rough equivalent of 'non-literal'. Also, some of what the fathers called

'literal' exegesis might fit Auerbach's description of 'figural'. For the fathers, the 'literal' was not always the 'obvious' meaning. Augustine, in his *De Genesi ad litteram*, presumes that the literal sense is itself hard to find, as in the case, both for him (*Tract. Io. 1*) and for Origen (*Jo. 1.9off.*), of the opening of the prologue (1.1–5) of John's Gospel. Further, Auerbach's definition takes for granted that 'events' or 'persons' involved in a figure are 'within temporality'; both are 'contained in the flowing stream which is historical life' (1968:73). But is this true for patristic exegesis? Augustine's famous interpretation of the Psalmist's 'heaven of heavens' as a figure for the unfallen angelic community, specifically exempted from time, is a case in point (*Conf. 12.9.9*), as is Origen's treatment of the 'right hand' of the Bridegroom in the Song of Songs, a figure for everything eternal in the Word of God (*Cant. 3.9*). Neither time, nor especially the 'flow' of historical life, can be taken for granted. The Incarnation, for which are claimed many figures in the OT, is within history, but originates outside of it, while many of the figures the fathers find in Scripture point beyond history to its eschatological fulfilment. Thus figurative exegesis as the fathers practise it tends to upend Auerbach's definition rather than provide an example of its application. One could add that figurative exegesis is essentially *retrospective*, since it interprets the meaning of Israel's Scriptures by looking backwards from faith in the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus (Hays 2016:4). Yet, since the NT itself can be interpreted figurally, this is only a partial account. The very perspective which retrospectively allows one to find in the Old figures of the New is itself eschatological. It requires, ultimately, an ongoing interpretation of the whole Bible ordered towards the fulfilment yet to come.

Thus, the figurative character of revelation is intrinsic to revelation, not something added by the application of a literary method created for analysis of non-scriptural texts. Figurative exegesis, we could even say, is nothing less than what the Church calls 'Tradition', where Tradition is 'the *hypothesis* itself of the sacred books, their fundamental coherence due to the living breath passing through them, transforming their letter into "a unique body of truth"' (Ouspensky and Lossky 1982:11). Tradition, in this view, is not only the *hypothesis* (i.e. integrative 'plot' or rhetorical 'argument'), but even more fundamentally, the Church's ability to recognize this *hypothesis* both as it exists in Scripture and in other productions of the Church which transmit revelation, such as dogma or icons—and both of these depend on elaborations of the intrinsic figural character of revelation. The '*intellectus spiritualis*' of the interdependence of figure and that of which it is a figure is therefore not simply the intellectual act of the interpreter who applies a learned method, but is rather a kind of seeing in the Holy Spirit, a seeing granted by the Holy Spirit: 'The pure notion of Tradition can . . . be defined by saying that it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church, communicating to each member of the Body of Christ the faculty of hearing, of receiving, of knowing the Truth in the Light which belongs to it, and not according to the light of human reason' (Ouspensky and Lossky 1982:15). Again, 'it is only in the Church that one will be able to recognize in full consciousness the unity of inspiration of the sacred books, because the Church alone possesses the Tradition—the knowledge in the Holy Spirit of the Word Incarnate' (Ouspensky and Lossky 1982:17). For the purposes of our subject here, this means that the Incarnation is the source, not

the result, of the figural character of Scripture and of dogma, liturgy, and icon as well: ‘Christ is the treasure hidden in the Scriptures’ (Irenaeus, *haer.* 4.26.1) and in any production of the Church that transmits revelation. Figurative exegesis as the fathers practise it is seeing Scripture in the light that is Tradition, that is, in the light of the Holy Spirit: ‘Tradition in its primary notion is not the revealed content, but the unique mode of receiving the Revelation, a faculty owed to the Holy Spirit, which renders the Church apt to know the Incarnate Word in its relationship with the Father’ (Ouspensky and Lossky 1982:16). The figures, on their own, do not have the logical or rational force to wrest from the reader assent to the figuration, and certainly not to produce it.

A good example of this, drawing from hundreds that could be adduced, is the nakedness of Noah (Gen 9.20–7). Augustine claims that Noah’s nakedness is a figure of the nakedness of the Crucified. In a sense, nothing could be more preposterous. Noah, the story goes, got drunk and passed out naked in his tent, and was embarrassingly discovered by his son Ham. There seems to be little resemblance even once the bare parallel in imagery is granted, and yet Augustine’s use of the figure is generative of deep insight into the nakedness of Christ. It was not a special dignified nakedness, but rather just as embarrassing as Noah’s and just as ‘foolish’, since the Incarnation itself was the ‘foolishness of preaching’, an acceptance of the degraded nakedness to which Adam and Eve had reduced themselves. Noah’s nakedness and Christ’s are an echo of this primordial condition. The figuration reminds the reader that the episode of Noah’s nakedness is not simply a folk tale included because it just could not be sacrificed by the ‘compiler’ of Genesis, but is itself an echo of the human condition as exhibited by Adam and Eve’s attempt to hide their nakedness in Genesis 3.7–11. Further, it seems to be part of Augustine’s point that, like the figure in the text, reason itself could never merit the Incarnation or an awareness of it, but is dependent upon the power and the love of the God who reveals Himself, paradoxically, in foolishness (see Cavadini 2012). Note too that the establishment of the figurative correspondence does not ‘prove’ anything, but rather serves to foster a richer proclamation of the truth of the Incarnation, and at the same time serves as an invitation to consider the claim that the Incarnation is not alien to the text of Genesis but in some way fulfils a dynamic truly already present, if not fully evident (‘hidden’).

## TERTULLIAN AND GOD

---

If then it is to do damage to the idea of patristic figurative exegesis to reduce it to the application of a pre-existing literary strategy learned from secular schools (though these strategies are in fact applied), then the only way to discover and to analyse its character in depth is to observe it as it is practised, along with what is said about it. I will start in the mid-second century, for at that time a challenge was issued to the very idea that Israel’s Scriptures should continue to be received as Scripture by Christians, or that there was any credible coherence between what was revealed to Israel and what was revealed

in Jesus. This challenge was presented by Marcion, a wealthy shipbuilder from the Black Sea area, who endowed the Roman Church with a huge gift upon joining but was excommunicated soon thereafter in 144. Marcion not only rejected the revelation to Israel, but also rejected most proto-NT documents because their presentation of Jesus seemed to owe too much to Israel's Scriptures. Marcion accepted a form of the Gospel of Luke, expurgated of as much dependence on Israel's Scriptures as he could credibly manage, together with ten letters of St Paul, similarly expurgated (see Marksches 2015, as well as the chapter by H. Clifton Ward in this volume). He prefaced his edition of Luke with a series of *Antitheses* designed, as Tertullian saw it, 'so that by such means he might also promote belief in the Gospel according to the Antitheses', that is, as a kind of hermeneutical guide to the Gospel and Pauline letters he edited (*Marc.* 4.1, modified trans.).<sup>1</sup> The contrasts drawn were taken from Israel's Scriptures, on the one hand, and the Gospel, on the other, 'compiled', Tertullian tells us, 'with a view to such a severance of the Law from the Gospel as should divide the Deity into two diverse gods' (*Marc.* 4.1; cf. 1.19). This meant an all-out assault on figurative exegesis of Israel's Scriptures. According to Antithesis 7, reconstructed by Adolf von Harnack, the contrast between Moses' hands outstretched to kill, and Jesus' hands outstretched to save, was meant precisely to block typological connection (see Meeks 1972:189). Thus it is interesting for our purposes to offer a glimpse of figurative interpretation as Tertullian employed and defended it against Marcion, for his employment amounted to nothing less than a defence of the existence of biblical revelation where that includes both 'instruments' or 'testaments' (*Marc.* 4.1).

In book 2, Tertullian takes up the issue of God's swearing (e.g. Isa 45.23; *Marc.* 2.26), the subject of one of the *Antitheses* (Jesus, by contrast, had forbidden swearing). Marcion's problem with God's swearing is that God uses His oath to back up His promises and (more problematically) His threats. The Father of Jesus, however, does not have to stoop to such tactics. Tertullian defends God's swearing precisely on the grounds that He *was* willing to stoop this low, because 'nothing is unworthy of God which causes people to believe in God', meaning here, to trust in His fidelity over time. But some of God's threats, Marcion seems to reply, are particularly low, so low that some humans seem better than God. For example, after the Golden Calf catastrophe, God 'requests this of his servant, Moses: "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation" (Ex 32.10)'. Moses in turn requests, that if these are the only terms, he be slain along with the people. Tertullian continues, 'Accordingly, you maintain that Moses is better than his God, as the deprecator, nay the averter, of His anger.' Tertullian remarks that what Marcion misses is that Moses is here a figure of Christ who pleads with the Father and offers his own life for the salvation of the people. It's not simply that he does not see the figure, but that he does not 'know Christ', that is, know Him as the Word truly incarnate who offered His true physical life for our salvation, and *therefore* he does not see the figure. Tertullian adds that the Lord's allowing Himself to be persuaded by Moses is actually an instance of self-lowering, of requiring of Himself what Moses his servant asked for. Thus the figure is created not

<sup>1</sup> All English translations for this source are from the ANE.

simply because Moses is offering himself to God, but because God has placed Himself in the position of being truly influenced by what Moses says. God's lowering Himself to dialogue and Interaction is what 'projects' Moses as a figure of God's ultimate identification with our plight in the Incarnation. What Marcion misses is that God is revealed as one who transcends history and yet involves Himself in it truly. 'What in your esteem is the entire disgrace of my God', including the humiliation of the Cross, 'is in fact the mystery (*sacramentum*) of man's salvation. God held converse (*conversabatur*) with humanity, that humanity might learn to act as God' (*Marc. 2.27*). The figure is an instance of God holding actual converse with a man, and thus it serves to reveal the character of God in a way that is preliminary to its fullest revelation on the Cross. It is an adumbration of the Trinity not simply because Moses is pleading with God, but because Moses' pleading with God reveals something about the character of the God who lowered Himself to talk to Moses in the first place.

Tertullian generalizes these points as he goes along. He notes that, to combat Marcion, the battle lines will be drawn around the 'Scriptures of the Creator', i.e. the OT. He offers a characterization of their 'form and, so to speak, [their] nature' (*formam et... naturam; Marc. 3.5*). He treats the whole of the OT as prophetic. Basing himself on a distinction already made by Justin, he notes that there are two cases of prophetic style (*duas... causas prophetici eloquii*) that could be sources of controversy, namely, the proclamation of future events as though they were events in the past (such as the Servant who says, 'I hid not my face from shame and spitting'); and second, 'that very many events are figuratively predicted by means of enigmas and allegories and parables and that they must be understood in a sense different from what was actually written down' (*Marc. 3.5*). He provides four Pauline warrants (among others) for this phenomenon: 1 Corinthians 9.9 (the ox treading out the corn); 1 Corinthians 10.4 (the rock in the desert was Christ); Galatians 4.22, 24 (the allegory of Sarah and Hagar); Ephesians 5.31-2 (that man leave father and mother to become one flesh with his wife, and Christ and the Church). When Tertullian later sets forth the biblical figures of the death of Christ, he comments that this mystery (*sacramentum*) most of all, that is, the true death of the true Word truly made flesh, could not be properly set forth in prediction except in figures (*figurari... oportebat*). The more incredible it is, the more it would scandalize if it were predicted openly (*nude*); the more sublime (*magnificum*) it is, the more the need to enshadow it so that the difficulty of understanding it might prompt one to seek God's grace (*Marc. 18.2*), necessary even without the figure. God's conversation or congress with us human beings, even to the point of sharing our death, is irreducibly 'mystery', one so sublime that it can't be predicted except in figure and can never be understood without God's grace. Even when fully revealed, what is figured in advance remains a mystery.

Commenting on 2 Corinthians 3.6, 'the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life', Tertullian understands it of those who see the figures of the Law but do not see them *as* figures. The veil on Moses' face (2 Cor 3.7, 13) represents the inability to see Moses and all he instituted precisely as figures, veilings of 'mysteries' (*sacramenta*) put in place by the Creator until their full revelation in Christ. But in the 'Spirit of the Lord' one can see that 'the whole Mosaic order (*ordinem*) was a figure (*figuram*) of Christ' (*Marc. 5.11*). Thus

these mysteries are not mysteries simply because they are formally unknown, pertaining to an alien God who had no hand in their veiling, but rather because the veiling is part of the revealing. God's self-emptying is veiled until it is fully revealed; the *figure* is part of the Creator's dispensation, part of His self-emptying 'conversation' with us and *as such* the whole of the Mosaic order is a figure of Christ, the ultimate moment of the conversation which yet does not, by its taking place, become less of a 'mystery'.

This is because as figures of Christ the Word Incarnate, all of the figures are also figures of the Trinity, the ultimate mystery. Tertullian comments on Luke 10.21, 'I confess you [Father] to be Lord of Heaven and thank you, because those things which had been hidden from the wise and prudent, you have revealed unto babes' (*Marc.* 4.25), observing that this God cannot be Marcion's God. He had no previous relationship with creation. He could not be 'the Lord' of a Heaven He did not create and thereby 'hide' Himself (in and by creating). He did not then use creation—His entering into relationship in the first place—in order to figure His coming among us, *as* one of us. The long, 'preparatory' work in 'concealing' in 'prophecies, parables, visions, . . . allegories, figures or cloudy enigmas' is part of the *revealing* of the meaning of everything created. Yet even when fully revealed it is nevertheless to 'faith'. To faith alone are the figures revealed. Faith is what 'babes' have. One never graduates beyond it. The philosophy of the 'wise', or reason without faith, is no avail: the figures remain 'hidden' to it because creation itself is not a background for a relationship but *is* God's involvement and *is* His accepting terms of a relationship imposed by Himself on Himself. The course of parables and figures is one of revealing what this relationship is in its essence, one of self-emptying love. The intentional, preparatory hiddenness is not intended to lead us beyond creation and the Creator but to evoke faith, specifically faith in the Son, by whom the world was created and who by his Incarnation, Passion, and Death fully reveals His Creator Father's character. When Luke's Jesus goes on to say, 'All things are delivered to Me by My Father', Tertullian comments that if His Father is the Lord of Heaven, the Creator has not delivered 'everything' to a Son who is less than Himself, but rather, 'no man knows who the Father is, but the Son; and who the Son is, but the Father, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him' (Luke 10.22). There is nothing 'higher' for the figures to resolve themselves into than the Trinity, irreducibly a mystery, the mystery of the God who remains God and yet creates and thereby establishes true relations with creatures who are not God, at a 'cost' which reflects relations of love and trust that are within the Godhead itself.

## IRENAEUS AND CREATION

---

Creation itself, then, is at one and the same time a revealing and a hiding, a 'figure' of this God. Irenaeus of Lyons, one of Tertullian's sources in *Against Marcion*, helps us to understand this point. God's creation of the world was an act of pure beneficence which corresponded to no 'need' or 'lack' in God: 'In the beginning, therefore, did God form Adam, not as if He stood in need of man, but that He might have someone upon

whom to confer His benefits' (*haer.* 4.14.1).<sup>2</sup> Against the 'Gnostic' mythology that ascribed creation to an error, or lack, in the Godhead (see O'Regan 2001), and against Marcion's claim that the Creator is at best just, not beneficent, Irenaeus argues that God does not need creation to increase His glory because 'antecedent' to His creation of the world He already existed as Trinity with a divine life rich enough to obviate His dependence on anything not-God: 'For not alone antecedently to Adam, but also before all creation the Word glorified His Father, remaining in Him; and was Himself glorified by the Father.' (*haer.* 4.14.1; see John 17.5). Creation itself reveals the glory of God, who creates in order to benefit. Creation is a testimony to the love of God the Trinity: 'For by means of the creation itself, the Word reveals God the Creator; . . . and by means of the formation of man the Artificer who formed him; and by the Son, that Father who begat the Son' (*haer.* 4.6.6).

The revelation in the Law and the Prophets is thus, as Irenaeus establishes, not an 'add-on' to creation, as though creation 'sets the stage' and then God sets about forming relationships constitutive of revelation. Rather the Law and the Prophets continue the relationship and revelation which creation initiated in the first place: 'For Christ is the treasure which was hid in the field (Matt 13.44), that is, in this world for "the field is the world" (Matt 13.38): but the treasure hid in the Scriptures is Christ, since He was pointed out by means of types and parables' (*haer.* 4.26.1). Note that the 'hiddenness' is original to creation, and is *continued*, not begun, in the figuration of the Law.

But by the Law and the Prophets did the Word preach both Himself and the Father alike . . . as also Paul says: 'For they drank of the rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ' (1 Cor 10.4). And again, having first mentioned what is contained in the law, he [Paul] goes on to say: 'Now all these things happened to them in a figure; but they were written for our admonition, upon whom the end of the ages is come' (1 Cor 10.11). For by means of types they learned to fear God, and to continue devoted to His service. (*haer.* 4.14.3)

It is important that the Law, especially insofar as it is figurative, has efficacious salvific intent *for those to whom it is given*, for it means that they do not need to see the far-off referent of the figures for them to be efficacious. Figuration is 'for our admonition, upon whom the end of the ages is come' but not *at the expense of those to whom the Law is given*. 'The Law is spiritual' (Rom 7.14) in the same way that all of creation is spiritual. Just as the original creation *is* an accommodation of God to an economy He does not need but desires for the sake of those accommodated, the Law is an accommodation to the human condition of the Jews, who, in a way, represent all humanity, training us all to see the treasure that has been hidden in Adam, in ourselves, in the field of creation, from the beginning. As in the Apostle Paul, Irenaeus argues, the cultic law is specifically promulgated after the apostasy of the Golden Calf, accommodating the condition of the people (see *haer.* 4.15.1).

<sup>2</sup> All English translations for this source are from the ANF.

'Hence,' Irenaeus further suggests, 'Christ's human nature could not be understood prior to the consummation of those things which had been predicted, that is, the advent of Christ' (*haer.* 4.26.1). We would not have realized that Jesus' human nature was not 'simply a receptacle of Christ, upon whom the Christ, as a dove, descended from above, and that when he had declared the unnameable Father he entered into the Pleroma in an incomprehensible and invisible manner'—as some of the Gnostics taught—but rather that it was the supreme instance of the 'hiddenness' to which revelation had accustomed us. It is the intrinsic hiddenness of 'power made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor 12.9; *haer.* 3.20.1), power which is not 'coercive' but 'long-suffering,' both fully revealed and consummately hidden when 'the Word... according to the Father's pleasure... became flesh, ... the invisible becoming visible, ... the impassible becoming capable of suffering' (*haer.* 3.16.6). Irenaeus is saying that there is no true figuration possible in Gnosticism because in Gnosticism there is no true or essential hiddenness in creation, only illusion and error. We realize the truth of the Incarnation fully when we see how it fulfils the types, how it 'recapitulates' the whole economy of creation and revelation because it shows forth the supreme 'figure,' the 'image and likeness' of God which is the human being. It was the Creator's intention always to show forth this supreme figure (see *haer.* 5.16), in Jesus Christ, who, as the image and likeness perfected and fully revealed, shows us its meaning, or better, its ultimate referent, the long-suffering 'transcendent love' (*haer.* 5, Pref.) in which, through the Word, the Father created us. The Word, revealing this love, 'became what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself'.

Christ, in the light of His Cross, which clarifies all figures, thus enables us to 'read' them all without destroying them or obviating them (*haer.* 4.26.1); but the same light that enables us to read them also shows that in this life we will never get beyond an economy of 'image' and 'likeness'. In this life, God in His 'greatness' must always be 'unknown,' that is, hidden, though 'as regards His love, He is always known through Him by whose means He ordained all things... His Word, our Lord Jesus Christ' (*haer.* 4.20.4, 5). Yet it is knowing this very love that both enables us to read the types, and also enables us to see that this love is not finished with the 'image and likeness' which has been made 'image and likeness' because of this very love. The 'image,' as itself fully revealed, points faith forward, points the whole economy of figures and types as recapitulated in the image forward, until we become even what 'He is in Himself,' 'promoted into God,' made 'incorruptible and immortal' (*haer.* 3.19.1). The Eucharist is a sign of this transformation because the Word transforms the elements of creation into the means of communion in His blood:

And as we are His members, we are also nourished by means of the creation (and He Himself grants the creation to us, for He causes His sun to rise, and sends rain when He wills [Matt 5.45]). He has acknowledged the cup (which is part of creation) as His own blood...; and the bread (also a part of creation) He has established as His own body, and partaking of the Eucharist we 'are members of His body, of His flesh, of His bones' (Eph 5.30). (*haer.* 5.2.2)

The Eucharist itself, and the eucharistic communion it forms, the Church, is a sign of the future consummation and a participation in that of which it is a sign.

## ORIGEN AND THE GOSPEL

---

Figurative interpretation, in turn, is not fully exhausted in the interpretation of the OT, but is operative even in the interpretation of the NT. Perhaps no one represents this aspect of figurative exegesis better than Origen, who, like Tertullian, was one of Irenaeus' most perceptive readers. Famously, at the beginning of his multi-volume and never completed *Commentary on John*, Origen asks what the term 'gospel' means. Among other possible definitions, 'the gospel is either a discourse (λόγος) which contains the presence of a good for the believer, or a discourse which announces that an awaited good is present' (*Jo.* 1.27, trans. Heine 1989:39). Each of the four canonical Gospels fits this definition because each 'teaches about the saving sojourn with human beings of Christ Jesus, "the firstborn of every creature" (Col 1.15), a sojourn which occurred for the sake of human beings' (*Jo.* 1.28, trans. Heine 1989:39), and one that was awaited (*Jo.* 1.29). In fact, not only the four writings designated as such, but the whole NT is gospel (*Jo.* 1.25).

A potential objection is raised that the Law and the Prophets could also fall under the definition of 'gospel', since they too contained 'a report of things which, with good reason, make the hearers glad whenever they accept the things which are reported, because they are beneficial' (*Jo.* 1.32, trans. Heine 1989:40). Origen responds to this objection: strictly speaking, Law and Prophets are not, on their own, gospel, because they do not announce the presence of something awaited, namely the Saviour, who 'explained the mysteries (μυστήρια) they contained', and who belongs to the definition of the divine Gospel. On the other hand, after the coming of the Saviour, because He 'caused the gospel to be incarnated (σωματοποιηθῆναι) in the gospel, He has made all things gospel, as it were' (*Jo.* 1.33, trans. Heine 1989:40). Thus it is only in retrospect that the Law and the Prophets are 'made gospel', because unless there is something new that has actually happened to which they point, there is no 'good news' to report. The gospel, Origen remarks, is a 'new' testament (using the indefinite article to emphasize the newness), and it 'made the newness of the Spirit which never grows old shine forth in the light of knowledge (γνώσεως)', meaning the ability to interpret the 'mysteries' of the OT, which thereby become 'Old' as figures and yet 'New' insofar as they live in the Spirit which never grows old. Thus the Law and the Prophets were always potentially gospel because of the 'mysteries' they actually contain (*Jo.* 1.36, trans. Heine 1989:41). The gospel does not represent a rupture or the imposition of something alien. Yet the 'Gospel' proper can make 'all things gospel' only because, as it was accomplished within this perceptible and time bound world, it too points ahead, to an 'eternal gospel' (*Jo.* 1.40, trans. Heine 1989:42; cf. Rev 14.6) which transcends time and space—without rendering them irrelevant. Otherwise 'all things' would not have been 'made gospel', and there would be a rupture

not only with the OT but with creation itself. Christ's words present 'mysteries' (*μυστήρια*) and His deeds 'images' (*αἰνίγματα*) of the eternal or 'spiritual' (*πνευματικόν*) gospel.

Some examples will help. Commenting on Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan, Origen notes, based on an etymology from Philo, that the word 'Jordan' means 'their descent' (*Jo.* 6.217, trans. Heine 1989:227). This reminds Origen of a related term in the Book of Enoch that seems to refer to the primordial descent of souls to terrestrial bodies (as a result of their turning away from God in sin). But if so, 'what river would be "their descent"', to which one must come to be purified, which has not descended with its own descent, but that of men, if not our Savior?', Origen asks (*Jo.* 6.218, trans. Heine 1989:227). He concludes that 'we must understand the Jordan to be the "Word of God" which "became flesh and dwelt among us", Jesus' (*Jo.* 6.220, trans. Heine 1989:228). In other words, the 'descent' of the Word of God, in becoming flesh, is not His own, not a descent motivated/required by any sin He committed, but His voluntary taking on 'our descent', that is, our sin. His willingness to accept baptism 'although He was in the divinity of the Son of God' and therefore sinless, is as an utterly free act of loving solidarity with sinners imaging the original establishment of this solidarity in the Incarnation. Because the Spirit came upon Him as a human being in that descent, and because it remained on Him, He, Jesus, is 'able to baptize those who come to Him with that very Spirit' (*Jo.* 6.220, trans. Heine 1989:228). He thereby incorporates believers into that solidarity which *His—Jesus'*—descent effects, the solidarity of which He is the *cornerstone* (1 Pet 2.6), the 'blameless Church of God which is built "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus our Lord being the chief cornerstone"' (cf. Eph 5.20). The person who comes to be baptized is thereby incorporated within the scriptural narrative of the baptism of Jesus. He or she comes to the Jordan too (*Jo.* 6.242).

For Origen, baptism also fulfils the type of the healing of Naaman the Syrian. Naaman himself 'did not understand the great mystery of the Jordan' (*Jo.* 6.244, trans. Heine 1989:234), namely, that it was Jesus, not the river itself, that healed his leprosy, just as Jesus later healed lepers in the Gospels. The great mystery of the Jordan recapitulates the mystery of Naaman's healing, and makes of the healings of Jesus, literal enough, signs of the spiritual healing from sin effected by baptism, 'the beginning and source of gifts of divine grace to the one who hands himself over to divinity through the power of the invocation of the adorable Trinity' (*Jo.* 6.166; trans. Heine 1989:216, modified). For in this healing river—that is, with the Word Incarnate, Jesus—dwells God, 'for the Father is in the Son' (*Jo.* 6.249, trans. Heine 1989:236). And, the great mystery of the Jordan not only recapitulates the mysteries of the Law and Prophets in Jesus, but as recapitulated in Him they point farther forward, to the perfection of the Church, when the last enemy, death, is destroyed, for that is the 'mystery of the resurrection of the whole body of Christ' (*Jo.* 10.229, trans. Heine 1989:306). Nor is this a mystery because there is a rupture between the final state of the Church and the bodily economy of creation, Law, Prophets, and the Incarnation, for 'each of the living stones will be a stone of the [eschatological] temple "according to the worth of its life here"' (*Jo.* 10.268, trans. Heine 1989:315, emphasis added). The memory of the passion of the incarnate Word, signified by the blood

sprinkled on the garment of the White Rider (Rev 19.13), is never obliterated from memory, even in the most sublime heights of contemplation (see *Jo.* 2.61).

The recapitulatory dynamic evident in Irenaeus surfaces here in these masterful figurative exegeses. For all of Origen's talk of the task of 'interpretation' (*διήγησις*) as 'translating the gospel perceptible to the senses into the spiritual gospel' (*Jo.* 1.45, trans. Heine 1989:43), he never treats the biblical language as surpassable. Origen is certainly no fundamentalist, but perhaps we could call him a biblical positivist—not in the sense that he was a nominalist, but that he had faith that the biblical language and biblical images carried the Spirit uniquely and unfailingly. The spiritual realities the Bible expresses cannot be apprehended apart from its language. They cannot be named or taught independently of it, as though the scriptural language were the perceptible husk of a kernel of philosophical truth which, once liberated from its husk, could be taught independently, either by the Apostles or their heirs. 'The Apostles are not wiser than the fathers or Moses and the Prophets.' The latter foresaw 'the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God', of His 'descent to accomplish the plan of His suffering', and they 'desired to see it effected' (*Jo.* 6.29, trans. Heine 1989:176). But the Apostles did not only know the figures and types and the 'mysteries' they represented but also their actualization 'through the completed event' (*Jo.* 6.28, trans. Heine 1989:176). The gospel is 'incarnated' in the NT (*Jo.* 1.33, as noted above) because it announces the greatest good for humanity, the Incarnation, as a 'completed event' (*Jo.* 6.28), which yet *as an event* remains a 'mystery', the greatest mystery of all. The Apostles are not wiser than the Prophets because they are not above this mystery, now that it has happened, nor are they above the figures in which it was foreshadowed. And neither are we. Far from it. Origen's exegesis lovingly rivets our attention on the mystery, on Jesus, and not on any teaching or reason into which He or any of the figures announcing Him could be 'translated'.

Could someone 'prove' the seemingly preposterous claim that the Jordan River is a figure for Jesus? No, but the question misses the point. The claim rather is that the Jordan River—not a river in the mind but the literal Jordan River—derives its significance from Jesus' baptism therein. It 'means' Jesus and has meaning because of Jesus. And all the rest of creation is taken into the figure along with it. Not because of a *theory* of the goodness of God or the universe. In its very particularity it is preserved as an indispensable 'figure'.

What is true for the Jordan is true for the whole world and indeed the whole cosmos (*Jo.* 6.296) of which it is a part. Figuration does not work *because* of history, but rather there *is* true history, true meaning in the events of time and space, because they are incorporated as figures of the love out of which they all emerged. The physical, perceptible world is not itself the spiritual, but because the ineffable love of God was revealed within this world, God's love can be described only in its figured story. For the whole world is beloved, and to be 'spiritual' is not to surpass the event of the Incarnation, to abstract from it, but instead to come to know its otherwise 'unspeakable' meaning, namely that *God* is somehow an 'event', a self-emptying, an obedience, a giving, sovereign, self-generating, free, transcendent, and yet not boxed in even by transcendence, for He gave His life in a sacrifice which will be remembered eternally.

For this mystery is Jesus, not a concept ('Incarnation'), not an abstract truth ('God'), but this person. This concrete person came as a concrete servant to wait on tables, not to sit at table (*Jo.* 1.230; cf. Luke 22.27). His 'goodness appeared greater and more divine and truly in accordance with the image of the Father when "He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" than when "He had considered being equal to God robbery" and had not been willing to become a servant for the salvation of the world' (*Jo.* 1.231, trans. Heine 1989:30). His service in this way 'was a great gift from the Father' (*Jo.* 1.232, trans. Heine 1989:30), yet it was utterly free on the part of the God-in-man (see *Jo.* 6.275).

And although the Father says it was great (*Isa* 49.5, 6), the fact that He became a servant was moderate indeed compared to the fact that He became a lamb. For the Lamb of God became as an innocent little lamb led to be slaughtered that He might take away 'the sin of the world' (*John* 1.29, cf. *Isa* 53.7). He who bestowed speech on all is compared to a lamb 'dumb before his shearer' (*Isa* 53.7). (*Jo.* 1.233, trans. Heine 1989:80)

His self-gift, made on behalf of 'the whole world,' reveals the Father's love of humanity and the world (*φιλανθρωπία*, *Jo.* 6.274, 294). The sacrifice of the Lamb will be understood 'in a way worthy of the goodness of the God of the universe' only eschatologically, only when it is understood what it means that "all things are subjected to Christ" once the last enemy, death, is destroyed by Him' (*Jo.* 6.296, trans. Heine 1989:248–9; cf. *1 Cor* 15.26, 28). Everything is defined with reference to the sacrifice of the Lamb. Nor can it be apprehended by abstracting from it to a 'disincarnate' God defined by human conceptualization and reason alone. We need more, rather than less, Incarnation to understand. We need to 'receive Mary from Jesus as our Mother' (*Jo.* 1.23, trans. Heine 1989:38), not abstract from her or from her true Son.

## AUGUSTINE

---

Before moving on to a consideration of the literal sense in itself, let us return to the West to consider one of the longest, most sustained, and most accomplished examples of figurative exegesis bequeathed to us by the fathers, Augustine's exegesis of the Hexaemeron in *Confessions* 13. This is a good example of exegesis which seems, on the face of it, simply implausible to modern eyes. Can the narrative of the creation of the world really be a figure for redemption? Could this in any way be a legitimate account of its meaning?

There is, of course, biblical precedent for Augustine's figurative exegesis here. God's acts of salvation are often described in words drawn from the vocabulary of creation. 'Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. . . Let not the floodwater overflow me, nor let the deep swallow me up!' (*Ps* 69.1, 15). The Psalmist uses the imagery of creation from the watery chaos of the deep to image, or figure, the salvation for which he pleads. It is the same in the NT: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation'

(2 Cor 5.17). ‘For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord’ (Eph 5.8). These examples could be multiplied. Augustine is not only following their lead but *interpreting* their claim that salvation is best figured in the imagery of creation.

We have space to consider only two figures in the allegory. The first is the interpretation of Genesis 1.1–2 as a figure for conversion and baptism. Just as the Spirit hovered over the waters at creation, so the same Creator Spirit hovers over the earth of our being, rendered ‘invisible and unorganized’ (Genesis 1 in Augustine’s text) by sin and plunged in the darkness of ignorance. ‘But your mercy did not forsake us in our misery, for your Spirit hovered over the water; and you said, “Let there be light; repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near, repent, and let there be light”’ (Gen 1.3; Matt 3.2, 4.17) (*Conf.* 13.12.13, trans. Boulding 2012:420). The juxtaposition of the first words of God in the Bible with the first words of Jesus in the first Gospel is an elegant stroke. It makes the claim that these words in Matthew are *intended* to correlate to the first words spoken by God (perhaps the traditional [figural] view of baptism as ‘enlightenment’ is also operative). Mindful of the Incarnation and invoking the Trinity in baptism, ‘we were converted to you; light dawned; . . . we who once were darkness are now “light in the Lord”’ (*Conf.* 13.12.13, trans. Boulding 2012:420; cf. Eph 5.8).

The second figure we will consider is the interpretation of the creation of the human being ‘in the image and likeness’ of God. Augustine notices the difference between ‘Let us make man according to our image and likeness’ (Gen 1.26) and all the other divine commands which begin, ‘Let there be . . .’, or ‘Let the earth/sea . . .’, instead of ‘Let us make’. All the other commands regarding living things refer to each ‘according to its kind’, whereas human beings are to be made ‘according to [God’s] image and likeness’. Based on these clues, Augustine matches Genesis 1.26 as a figuration of Romans 12.2, ‘Shape yourselves no longer to the standards of this world, but allow yourselves to be reformed by the renewal of your minds.’ The mind is that which distinguishes humans from beasts and therefore that in which the ‘image and likeness’ is located. This is, as Augustine already mentioned (13.11.12), specifically an image of the Trinity, announced in Genesis 1.26–7 by the alteration of the plural (‘us’, ‘our’) with the singular (‘God’, ‘he’). The renewal of the image of God through knowledge, in the Spirit, of God as Trinity is a theme with a future in Augustine’s writings (see *Trin.* 14.22–3, with reference to Rom 12.2). Here, though, the Trinitarian dimension is not to the fore. Rather, Augustine’s emphasis is that the ‘image of God’ of Genesis 1.26–7 is perfected or fully seen in its renewal, in the mature Christian, the ‘Spirit-filled person’—like Paul the Apostle, who does not judge things ‘according to his kind’ (that is, by dependence on another human being), but, renewed and perfected through knowledge of God, he is able to discern God’s will for himself (see *Conf.* 13.21.31–13.22.32). Renewal in the knowledge of God who is Triune comes from the love, poured out in our hearts through the Spirit, who is given to us (Rom 5.5; see *Conf.* 13.7.8; 13.31.46), enlightening our memory with the Incarnation, of ‘that mountain which, though lofty as yourself [Father], was brought low for us’ (*Conf.* 13.12.13, trans. Boulding 2012:420)—the place where conversion began.

These two points in the figure are especially interesting because at these points the figure and that which it figures coincide exactly. The human being, created in the image and

likeness of God, *is* the Spirit-filled person, perfected in the human vocation through knowledge of the God who, out of love, ‘was brought low for us’—through knowledge of the Trinity. Knowledge of the Trinity *is* knowledge of the love of God. In this knowledge, filling mind and heart, the human being ‘grows up’ and can truly act as ‘image and likeness’ with dominion over his or her animal passions (‘not conformed to the world’) and thus able to see and love all of creation as God sees and loves it, as altogether ‘good’ (against the Manichaean view). Creation, as Augustine reminded his readers (*Conf.* 13.2.2–3), is always a two-step process of *formation* by the Father in the Word (the ‘Beginning’) and, through the Spirit, *conversion* to the light of the Word. In other words, it was always God’s will that we have a part in our own creation. We refused our part, conversion, choosing instead to lapse back into the darkness of ourselves without God. The economy of redemption is hereby seen as God’s completion of *creation*, of giving us the gift of being able to do our part after all, despite sin, completing our own creation by agreeing, in the ‘supereminent Love’ that is the Holy Spirit (*Conf.* 13.7.8), to remember the Incarnate Word and the price He paid for our redemption. The Spirit-filled person sees creation in the Spirit in which it was created—sees it from God’s perspective. It is as though God is seeing the goodness of creation through us, who are gifted with His vision as our own (*Conf.* 13.30.45–13.31.46). There remains only the seventh day, a figure for the eschatological fulfilment in which God’s seeing in us, His working in us, is so fully perfected that we rest in Him, figured as God’s rest, since creation will then be fully perfected (*Conf.* 13.35.50–13.38.53).

In a sense we have returned to Tertullian’s way of looking at the matter. Figurative exegesis represents the claim that there exists a biblical idiom and that the deployment of this idiom constitutes the Bible as such. Figuration is constitutive of this idiom. Augustine does not arbitrarily invent a system in which creation figures redemption, but rather finds it in the Bible already and, in a sense, interprets *that*. God’s acts of liberation and redemption in the OT are already figured in the images and vocabulary of creation. The NT picks up this idiom and uses it to proclaim its fulfilment in Christ. This fulfilment itself points the whole idiom forward to God’s perfection of the work He began in creation. As Augustine sees it, it is perfection in the sense of completion of creation. The vocabulary of figuration is a vocabulary of the mystery of creation, of creation as a mystery revealed strictly speaking, and only fully illuminated in the mystery of the Cross, which shows fully the ‘price’ God’s love paid in creating.

More generally, we have seen that figurative exegesis, as the fathers practised it, far from erasing this world and history, entails the claim that there *is* such a thing as history, and therefore meaning, in this world, precisely because it is the history of God’s creation, oriented towards a fulfilment, which history ‘figures’. And yet history cannot give this fulfilment to itself. This is why figurative exegesis can never finally be the result of a science drawn from reason alone, because the figures can only be seen as such in light of the revelation of God’s plan and purpose in the Incarnation, Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. All of history, all of time, and all of space is relative to the God who with sovereign and transcendent freedom gives Himself to us so utterly that He ‘figures’ Himself in human freedom and in the cosmos in which that freedom is at home. Filling it

with Himself, He irradiates it with meaning, so that it *is* a self, and not a random flux. From this perspective, denial of the validity of figurative exegesis is not only the denial that there is a Bible at all, but the denial that history has any meaning whatsoever. Meaning would be reserved, instead, for an abstract ‘spiritual’ realm that is ‘spiritual’ precisely because, as Marcion, the Gnostics, and Manichaeans claimed, it was utterly ruptured from the world of matter, time, and space, rather than in some mysterious way incarnate therein. From this perspective, figurative exegesis appears as the vindication of creation as the history of an ineffably precious relationship which had a beginning, and will have an unimaginably beautiful fruition, but no end (see Cavadini 2015).

In other words, far from violating the literal sense of Scripture, which proclaims creation and redemption as literal acts of God, the figural sense of Scripture vindicates it. For according to Scripture God did literally create the world and thus begin the relationship of which the literal history recorded in the biblical text is the fruit and revelation. The literal sense of Scripture is not, as we will see, the brute historical ‘facts’ underlying the scriptural narratives, implicitly discoverable apart from Scripture’s narratives, for the narratives make claims about God’s involvement that are not reducible to historical, empirical verification. The literal sense of Scripture thus naturally opens into the dimensions of depth that attend its message, which we have been calling figurative senses. This brings us, at long last, to a consideration of the patristic view of the literal sense of Scripture.

## THE LITERAL SENSE

---

Warning the reader that the literal sense is not always the obvious, ‘plain’ sense, the Pontifical Biblical Commission nevertheless wrote in 1993: ‘One arrives at this sense by means of a careful analysis of the text, within its literary and historical context’ (II.B.1). The fathers would agree, in part. The literal sense is not always the ‘plain sense.’ John Chrysostom, echoing Irenaeus and Origen, speaks about the treasures buried in Scripture (*hom. in Gen.* 21.18–19), but for Chrysostom these depths are part and parcel of the literal sense itself. When Genesis says, ‘the water was at flood level . . . for 150 days’ (*hom. in Gen.* 25.21; trans. Hill 2001; see Gen 7.24), while literally true, it is not just a weather report. It indicates Noah’s perseverance in hope, despite persisting contrary evidence, through the help of God’s grace (*hom. in Gen.* 25.22 and 21). Chrysostom invokes 1 Corinthians 15.31 to help understand the depth of Noah’s hope (*hom. in Gen.* 25.31). However, the literal sense of Scripture, though not always completely obvious, nevertheless is not established only by finding the ‘literary and historical context.’ The literal sense of Scripture is the literal sense precisely *of Scripture*, Spirit-inspired throughout. To determine and explain this sense it is necessary to engage other Spirit-inspired sources, namely, the NT and Church Tradition (hence Chrysostom’s meditation on God’s grace). Even as adamant a proponent of the literal sense as Basil of Caesarea, who exclaims, ‘I take all in the literal sense,’ nevertheless appeals to John 1.1 and Church Tradition about

God's incorporeal nature to establish what God's reported 'speech' (Gen 1.2) might be, since it is nonsense to believe God spoke a human language (*hex.* 9.1, 2.2; trans. NPNF).

Perhaps the most insistent theorists of the literal sense, Chrysostom's fellow Antiochenes (his teacher, Diodore of Tarsus, and Theodore of Mopsuestia), while not denying there is a 'higher' sense (or *theoria*), nevertheless restrict it radically. These exegetes are often claimed as the closest to contemporary historical-critical readers of the Bible (the Pontifical Biblical Commission, III.B.2, exempts Theodore from patristic interpretative 'excess'). Still, even Diodore appeals to later inspired Scripture to assist in determining the literal sense of a much earlier text. For example, his extreme literalism forces him to insist that there was a talking snake in Paradise, an obvious problem if it is *merely* a talking snake. The full literal meaning is only clarified by reference to John 8.44 and 2 Corinthians 11.3—it was the devil speaking through the serpent.

Elsewhere, a similar impossibility in the literal sense fully applied, often occasioned by hyperbole, indicates we must also seek a higher sense. Psalm 29 was spoken by Hezekiah 'at the occasion of his deliverance from the threat of war with the Assyrians' (*proem. Ps. 118*; trans. Froelich 1980:91). Exclaiming, 'O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Hades', he is speaking hyperbolically. Diodore observes that 'he was not actually rescued from Hades but from circumstances comparable to Hades'. The impossibility of an absolutely strict literal reading tips us off that, without denying the historical reference, we should look to the *theoria*, which refers to Hezekiah's eventual resurrection. But what prompts us to see that the literal sense is hyperbolic in a way that is more than *simply* a literary figure? That the literal sense is such that it can carry a second, higher sense is *not* contained simply in the history recounted, but in the *way that it is recounted*. 'For this is the grace of the Spirit . . . I am speaking of the divine words which are capable of being adapted to every moment in time, down to the final perfection of human beings' (*proem. Ps. 118*; trans. Froelich 1980:92). What is *not* meant by the literal sense here is simply its ostensive reference to a history behind the text that could theoretically be rewritten equally well in non-Scriptural terms. Diodore is certainly interested that the history remains intact, and yet it is also clear that the letter does not simply 'mean' as a report of that history *tout court*. The 'divine words' carry an invitation to realize that, ironically, the plainest sense of Scripture is not the historically past sense, but the eschatological reference, when all human history will come to its fruition and the literal texts of Scripture will be even 'more' literally true.

Speaking of the plain sense of Scripture, Irenaeus had famously commented that ambiguous passages are to be read in the light of those that 'fall [plainly] under our observation, . . . clearly and unambiguously' (*haer.* 2.27.1; trans. ANF). Thereby, 'the entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously and harmoniously understood . . . [to] proclaim that one only God, to the exclusion of all others, formed all things by His word, whether visible or invisible, heavenly or earthly' (*haer.* 2.27.2; trans. ANF). In other words, the plain passages of Scripture correspond to the teaching of the Rule of Faith. That is how they are recognized. Anyone who 'retains in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism' (*haer.* 1.9.4; trans.

ANF) will recognize the myths of heretical teachers as derangements of the fundamental narrative of Scripture, just as a Homeric scholar could recognize a derangement of Homer's narratives by someone who uses verses from Homer taken out of context to construct a new narrative. The Rule provides the fundamental 'hypothesis', the narrative logic or basic plot, of Scripture, including the belief in one God, Creator and Redeemer, and in His Son, 'made flesh' for our salvation. Passages intended allegorically should be interpreted according to the 'hypothesis' or 'general scheme of the faith', laid out in the Rule, which thereby vindicates scriptural teaching precisely as truly scriptural (*haer.* 1.10.3; trans. ANF).

Perhaps (ironically) Origen is the most sophisticated patristic theorist of the literal sense. His famous analogy (that is, comparing the three principal parts of the human being, namely body, soul, and spirit, to the three levels of Scripture, namely, to the letter, and to the moral and spiritual senses: *princ.* 4.2.4) illustrates how the literal sense is precisely a sense of Scripture and not just of any historical text. The analogy organically links the literal sense with the other senses, as body is linked to soul and spirit. Another analogy given for this intrinsic unity is a literary one: '... in his five books Moses acted like a distinguished orator who pays attention to outward form (*schema*) and everywhere keeps carefully the concealed meaning of his words.' The 'outward form' is of such benefit to readers that it can 'instantly transform those who hear' it. The same cannot be said for pagan writings from which philosophical truth may be extracted allegorically, leaving behind the fabulous and often scandalous outward form as essentially superfluous (*Cels.* 1.18; trans. Chadwick 1953). By contrast, the outward form of Scripture is such that it benefits everyone, including the uneducated, while it holds together precisely as the 'form' of higher teachings which are not at the surface. The higher teachings thus cannot be dissociated from that 'form' and taught independently.

Further, the "body" of Scripture is carefully tailored by the Holy Spirit to provide indications that it is in fact an ensouled and inspirited body, like living flesh, not just an irrelevant covering. Origen famously points out in *On First Principles* 4.2.9 that if the Spirit had never inspired an occasional break in the logic or plausibility of the literal sense, we would not understand that the very narratives of history carry a meaning that is not on the surface (*princ.* 4.2.9; cf. 4.3.4). Origen's motivations resemble Irenaeus' in that he is attempting to block interpretations of the Bible which, because they do not recognize implausibilities, such as God's anger, as such, end up dividing God, as with Marcion and the Valentinians (see *princ.* 4.2.1). What ultimately guides Origen to recognize these implausibilities as such, just as it guided Irenaeus, is the Rule of Faith, Apostolic Tradition (see *princ.* 4.3.14 and 1.Pref.2). Determination of the literal sense also requires using the rest of Scripture, obeying the command, 'Search the Scriptures' (John 5.39; *princ.* 4.3.5; trans. Butterworth 2013). Some passages will indeed be found in which the literal meaning is impossible, in which there is no 'bodily meaning'—but *not* no body. The 'body' or 'letter' of Scripture remains intact throughout and as a whole orchestrates a multiple-sense reading of Scripture in which the spiritual sense can shine through, refracted 'as if through a narrow opening' (*princ.* 4.2.3), designed for that very

purpose of refracting spiritual light which would otherwise be inaccessible. Scripture is, in a way, the self-emptied form of spiritual light, stooping down to us, providing for itself a 'body' in which it is 'incarnate' and from which it can shine out.

Yet there is even more to the 'body' of Scripture. Origen compares, as did Irenaeus and Chrysostom and others, the outward form of Scripture to the field in which treasure is hidden (Matt 13.44). 'Full of all kinds of plants, the truths stored away in it . . . are the hidden "treasures of wisdom and knowledge"' (Col 2.3) (*princ.* 4.3.11; trans. Butterworth 2013). The plants in the field are the various teachings and narratives of the literal sense, the meaning borne directly by the 'body' or the letter of Scripture, when it has a direct meaning of its own, recognizable at the 'surface' by their plain agreement with the Rule of Faith. The field is the continuous 'body' of the text, which is such that it sprouts these plants for the benefit of all, and also—the very same field—conceals deeper truths whose discovery requires the 'help of God' (*princ.* 4.3.11). It would not be Scripture, contrived by the same Word who out of '*philanthropia*' took the 'form of a servant', if it did not do both: edify all in an obvious way, and by the very same language conceal deeper truths which cannot be spoken directly and therefore cannot be revealed in any other way except as hidden in the humility of 'the "frail vessel" of the poor letter' (*princ.* 4.3.14; trans. Butterworth 2013). The letter is the form of this *philanthropia*. The truths contained in this vessel are deeper understandings of the very *philanthropia* that formed the text, so deep they are not fully available even to Paul, who resorted to exclaiming, in 'despair of reaching a perfect understanding . . . "How His ways are past finding out!"' (*princ.* 4.3.14; trans. Butterworth 2013). 'No created mind can . . . possess the capacity to understand all' of God's works.

This means the only way we *can* speak about these matters is by using the same words that the Holy Spirit used, the narratives of Scripture. Their words are indeed the 'form' of heavenly things, their 'shadow and pattern' (*princ.* 4.3.12). We have no right or ability to rise above this 'form' into another form *not* constructed by God's *philanthropia*—the mistake of Marcion and the Valentinians, who denature this form in the effort to express spiritual truths independent and indeed subversive of it. Even as Origen himself goes on to attempt a lengthy exposition of the depths hidden in the Scriptures, from *On First Principles* 4.3.6–15, he never steps outside of the vocabulary of the stories of Israel and their narrative logic. Using the Pauline distinction between Israel according to the flesh (1 Cor 10.18; *princ.* 4.3.7) and the 'Israel after the spirit' which is implied, and also the contrast between the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem from Galatians 4.26 (*princ.* 4.3.8), Origen infers that the narrative has to do with 'souls'. But everything he says about them is irreducibly couched in the vocabulary of the biblical narrative. There is no attempt to 'translate' into another language drawn from another 'hypothesis' or 'scheme'. As mentioned above, there is a kind of biblical positivism here, a deep trust in the biblical words, in which the 'poor letter' is *always* the vessel of spiritual truth. In this we have another echo of Irenaeus, for whom the plain sense, the sense supplied by Tradition, is that to which the obscure passages are to be conformed. Origen has given this insight another level of sophistication. What is revealed is that spiritual truth is the kind of thing that can have a historical 'form' or 'image', and *thus is itself a kind of history*, a history of divine

love of human beings, with a beginning and a culmination towards which it tends, irreducibly a narrative of creation and salvation by one and the same God. Thus Origen concludes by saying if we are to reach out to a 'clearer understanding', we do so 'through Jesus Christ *our Saviour*' (*princ.* 4.3.14). There is no spiritual reality 'above' this narrative of salvation but only 'in' it. What is 'in' this 'poor letter' can never be understood apart from the letter, even in eternity, when, rather, in full possession of the reality, the 'understanding' of it will be all the clearer. There are perhaps some interesting convergences with the Antiochenes here.

Turning in conclusion to Augustine, we recognize characteristic themes already discussed. The literal sense of Scripture is not necessarily obvious. It can be difficult even to know if a given passage is to be interpreted literally or figuratively. Origen is not alone in thinking that not every passage of Scripture has a literal sense! A fundamental mistake is to interpret figurative passages literally (*doct. chr.* 3.5.9). Equally problematic is to mistake a literal text for a figurative one (*doct. chr.* 3.10.14, cf. 3.12.20). This would erase important historic prophetic witness perhaps because we find it disturbing (*doct. chr.* 3.12.18). Our own sensibilities, even when educated, are not the best guide in determining what is literal and what is not (see *doct. chr.* 3.18.26–19.28). In fact, Scripture, like the Incarnation itself, is meant to provide remedies for the pathologies of the human will (*doct. chr.* 2.5.6, compare to 1.11.12–14.13). We will not discover the meaning of Scripture if we subject it to those pathologies, rather than, from fear of God and pious docility to the text, allowing it to affront our sensibilities and to wear down our pride (*doct. chr.* 2.7.9–10).

As with Irenaeus, this means using plain passages to interpret obscure passages: 'There is almost nothing, in fact, that can be extracted from the obscurities [of Scripture], which cannot be found very plainly said somewhere else' (*doct.* 2.6.8; trans. Hill 1996). As with Irenaeus, a passage is 'plain' if it conforms to the Rule 'received from the plainer passages of Scripture and the authority of the Church' (*doct. chr.* 3.2.2; trans. Hill 1996). Augustine shows us what he means in *De doctrina Christiana* 1.5.5–1.21.19, where he presents the 'things' (*res*) that Scripture teaches plainly, and presents them basically in the order given in the Creed. Since the whole economy of salvation summarized in the Creed is the work of God's love, "the fulfilment and the end of the law" and of all the divine scriptures is "love" (*doct. chr.* 1.35.39; trans. Hill 1996). The corollary to this is that a scriptural text that does not, in its literal sense, build up charity (or faith or hope as elements of charity), is properly interpreted figuratively (*doct. chr.* 3.10.14).

Nevertheless, the literal sense can indeed be obscure, even in small matters, such as punctuation. Where one possible punctuation is consonant with the Rule of Faith and another not, the Rule of Faith must decide, since both Scripture *as Scripture* and the Rule arise from Apostolic preaching. Augustine cannot imagine determining an *inspired* meaning without reference to other, clearer, inspired sources. One cannot jump from the secular to the spiritual solely on the basis of the use of secular sciences (*doct. chr.* 2.7.9).

One might wonder what difference it makes if the sense of a passage is literal or figurative, if both, correctly interpreted, accord with the Rule. Why search for a literal meaning if it is not obvious? What is the stake in not giving up too easily on the literal

meaning of a text? An example: for Augustine, the six days of creation cannot possibly be days as we know them now, yet he insists the days have a literal interpretation. He opines that they represent the ordered sequence in which the created light of Genesis 1.3, which Augustine interprets as the angelic intelligence, grasps the stages of God's creative work and offers its understanding of each in love and praise to God (see *ciu.* 11.7). This may seem to us a *figurative* interpretation, but for Augustine it is a *literal* interpretation because it preserves a sense in which God literally *acted*, in which God was literally, if analogically, said to have *done* something. God's acting in creation is not to be dissolved into a metaphor for static spiritual truth discoverable by reason alone. For Augustine, to give up the literal sense, even when it is analogical and not immediate, would be to give up the whole Rule of Faith, which proclaims acts of God, including creation and Incarnation, as literally having happened, even if speaking about them must transcend both mere metaphor and the way in which the same language would apply to created agency.

To conclude, the literal sense of Scripture, for the fathers, is irreducibly the literal sense of *Scripture*. It is not discoverable the same way as the literal sense of any other text, even of the same text not considered as Scripture. Nor is the literal sense the same as the history 'behind' the text, in principle discoverable in some other way and capable of narration in other words. Historical and literary methods are useful in determining the literal sense of Scripture, but they can never be sufficient. Otherwise, the letter of Scripture would be 'detachable' from the spiritual senses. The fathers disagree about the relative extent of the literal and non-literal senses, but they all agree that the letter of Scripture is final and unsurpassable. It constitutively conditions how we are able to speak about God at any level. It offers a grammar for speaking the intrinsically unspeakable, namely, that God, though unchangeable, has willed to have a 'history'. And this not in a Valentinian or Hegelian sense, in which God grows in self-awareness and thus benefits from history, but in the sense of the Rule of Faith, in which the sole beneficiary of the story is God's creation. It is the story of a love that is literally efficacious in time and space while still completely and utterly transcending them. The literal sense of Scripture, and the explorations of the dimensions of depth—the spiritual senses—which the literal sense itself is designed to invoke, work together to tell this story as one continuous whole with an 'oldness' that is never obsolescent and a 'newness' that is irreducibly and ever new, because it ever points to its own fulfilment in eternity.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- Augustine, *Confessiones*. Latin text: L. Verheijen (ed.), CCL 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981). Eng. trans.: M. Boulding, OSB, *Saint Augustine of Hippo: The Confessions*, ed. D. V. Meconi, SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012).
- Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*. Latin text: J. Martin, *De doctrina Christiana*, CCL 32 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1962). Eng. trans.: E. Hill, OP, *On Christian Belief* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996).

- Basil of Caesarea, *Hexameron*. Greek Text: S. Giet (ed.), *Basile de Césarée: Homélie sur l'hexaéméron*, 2nd edn, SC 26 bis (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968). Eng. trans.: B. Jackson, *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, ed. P. Schaff and H. Pace, NPNF 8 (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesin*. Greek Text: PG 53.148–54:422. Eng. trans.: R. C. Hill, *Saint John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 18–45* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).
- Diodore of Tarsus, *Proemium in Psalm 118*. Eng. trans.: K. Froehlich, 'Preface to the Commentary on Psalm 118', in *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 87–94.
- Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses*. Greek and Latin text: A. Rousseau, B. Hemmerdinger, C. Mercier, and L. Doutreleau (eds), *Contre les hérésies, Livre 1–5*, SC 100, 151–2, 210–11, 263–4, 293–4 (Paris: Cerf, 1965–82). Eng. trans.: A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin and Irenaeus*, ANF 1 (repr.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 309–567.
- Origen, *Commentarius in Iohannem*. Greek text: E. Preuschen (ed.), *Der Johanneskommentar*, GCS 10 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1902). Eng. trans.: R. Heine, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John: Books 1–10*, FC 80 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989).
- Origen, *Contra Celsum*. Greek text: P. Koetschau (ed.), *Gegen Celsus*, GCS 2 and 3 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1897–9). Eng. trans.: H. Chadwick, *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Greek and Latin text: P. Koetschau (ed.), *De principiis*, GCS 22 (J. C. Hinrich, 1913). Eng. trans.: G. W. Butterworth, *On First Principles* (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, Ave Maria Press, 2013).
- Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*. Latin text: E. Evans (ed.), OECT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). Eng. trans.: A. Menzies, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ANF 3 (repr.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 269–475.

## Scholarship

- Auerbach, E. (1968). *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. W. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Cavadini, J. (2012). 'Spousal Vision: A Study of Text and History in the Theology of St. Augustine', *AugSt* 43: 127–48.
- Cavadini, J. (2015). 'The Church as the Sacrament of Creation: A Reading of Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*', *Communio* 42: 89–118.
- Hays, R. (2016). *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press).
- Markschies, C. (2015). *Christian Theology and its Institutional Contexts in the Early Roman Empire*, trans. W. Coppins (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press).
- Martens, P. (2012). 'Origen Against History? Reconsidering the Critique of Allegory', *Modern Theology* 28: 635–56.
- Meeks, W. (1972). *The Writings of St. Paul* (New York: Norton).
- O'Regan, C. (2001). *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press).
- Ouspensky, L., and Lossky, V. (1982). *The Meaning of Icons*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky, rev. edn (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).

Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993). *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana).

### **Suggested Reading**

- Dawson, D. (1992). *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Lubac, H. de (1998, 2000, 2009). *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, 3 vols, trans. M. Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Lubac, H. de (2007). *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen*, trans. A. Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press).
- Martens, P. (2008). 'Revisiting the Allegory/Typology: The Case of Origen', *J ECS* 16: 283–317.
- O'Keefe, J., and Reno, R. R. (2005). *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).
- Young, F. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

## CHAPTER 8

---

# IDEAL INTERPRETERS

---

PETER W. MARTENS

## TOPIC

---

LATE Antique literary scholars, Christian and non-Christian alike, frequently opened their commentaries by discussing a variety of preliminary issues. While the number and sequence of these issues varied from one author to the next, commentaries on a wide range of literature, whether the epic poems of Homer and Virgil, the Christian Scriptures, or a swathe of technical treatises (grammatical, rhetorical, medical, etc.), reveal a list of frequently recurring, introductory topics: (1) the theme, aim, or purpose of the treatise in question; (2) its place in a larger corpus of writings; (3) its usefulness; (4) the meaning of its title; (5) its authenticity; (6) its division into parts (books or chapters); (7) the section of a particular discipline or genre to which it belonged; (8) the clarity, or lack thereof, of the treatise; (9) the qualities required of the would-be student or teacher of the text; and finally, (10) the first work to be studied in an author's larger corpus (Mansfeld 1994:4–5). These preliminaries provide an important window into Late Antique exegetical cultures, for they indicate the guiding interpretative concerns of generations of grammarians and rhetoricians who taught their pupils how to study authoritative texts.

The topic of this chapter is a frequently overlooked issue on the aforementioned list: early Christian accounts of the ideal interpreter of Scripture (item nine). Portraits of this interpreter certainly varied over time and across region, and even superficially similar portraits could often disguise deeper differences. Rarely is it self-evident to the modern reader when accounts of interpreters functioned as veiled autobiographies. Nor is it always clear when accounts were descriptive of actual interpreters or more expressive of lofty and perhaps unrealized ideals. Nevertheless, there were striking similarities among these portraits, and textual commentators routinely characterized ideal interpreters with the same, or very similar, categories. In broad brushstrokes, these interpreters were usually configured by two spaces in the Late Antique world: the institution of the schoolroom,

and primarily the grammatical and rhetorical training that were directly applicable to the study of Christian Scripture; and the Christian ‘religion,’ with its range of doctrinal, moral, and liturgical associations that informed the student and study of Scripture.

My main sources in this chapter will be Greek- and Latin-speaking early Christian biblical scholars. These authors were not effusive about the topic of the interpreter, at least when compared with the copious amounts of biblical exposition they produced. When comments about this interpreter were made, they usually surfaced in the prologues to biblical commentaries or within larger sections of works devoted specifically to the art of biblical interpretation (such as book 4 of Origen’s *On First Principles* or Augustine’s *On Christian Teaching*). However, even when authors did not openly express positions on what ideal (and not-so-ideal) interpreters looked like, implicit assumptions about these figures were invariably entertained.

## SCHOLARLY TRAJECTORIES

---

The standard histories of biblical interpretation rarely draw attention to the person of the interpreter. The first sweeping English survey of the history of biblical exegesis originated in 1885 as eight Bampton lectures delivered at the University of Oxford. In the book based upon his lectures, *History of Interpretation*, Frederic W. Farrar wrote: ‘I here only profess to deal with the chief epochs in the progress of Biblical science, and my endeavour has been to give some account, however brief, of those who caused the chief moments of fresh impulse to *the methods of interpretation*’ (Farrar 1886:vii–viii [italics mine]). A few lines later: ‘The History of Exegesis leads us to the complete transformation of *a method*, and leaves us with a Bible more precious than of old, because more comprehensible...’ (Farrar 1886:xi [emphasis mine]). Perhaps most indicative of how he framed his project was the appendix to the last chapter, tellingly entitled: ‘Exegetic Rules and Principles’ (Farrar 1886:473–6). Farrar signalled what would become one of the dominant historiographical perspectives on patristic biblical interpretation over the course of the next century: that the phenomenon was adequately captured by its methods and instruments of study. For instance, Robert Grant opened his survey as follows: ‘The story of the Bible in the church is a long and complex one. In the course of Christian history many methods have been employed in order to interpret the record of God’s revelation... Our study will examine the principal methods which Christians have employed in the interpretation of scripture, and the circumstances which led to their employment’ (Grant 1984:3, 4). From the opening paragraphs of Manlio Simonetti’s handbook we read: ‘[T]he study of Holy Scripture was the real foundation of Christian culture in the Church of the earliest centuries. It is the methods and forms in which this study expressed itself that we shall trace here in brief historical outline’ (Simonetti 1994:2). Even Frances Young’s landmark study, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, which introduced important new perspectives on patristic biblical interpretation, was still heavily invested with capturing the methods or strategies by which Scripture was studied by early Christian authors. The bulk of its central chapters take

readers through familiar issues such as grammatical and rhetorical exegesis, and the varieties of literal and non-literal exegesis that we find in our period.

The problem, as this chapter will seek to make clear, is that such representations of patristic biblical exegesis easily lend themselves to a distorted picture of the phenomenon they seek to depict. This is not to deny that techniques of interpretation or bodies of grammatical and rhetorical knowledge mattered, but rather to suggest that such foci collapse patristic exegesis into an overly methodological affair. A partial correction to such a picture has surfaced in the last half-century, which has witnessed a new social contextualization of patristic scriptural exegesis. In this trajectory—representative of the larger shift in patristics studies, especially in the North American scene—the driving questions have been reoriented. They are no longer, simply, how did early Christians interpret or theorize about the Bible, but how did their exegetical projects influence society? Indicative of this shift in the study of patristic exegesis is the title of Frances Young's aforementioned work: *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*. In its final section she argues that the 'Bible's principal function in the patristic period was the generation of a way of life, grounded in the truth about the way things are, as revealed by God's Word' (Young 1997:215). Variants of such an approach have surfaced elsewhere, especially among authors who have worked in a theoretical idiom and who emphasize the constructedness of identity. In *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, for instance, David Dawson argues that Alexandrian allegory was an instrument put into the service of 'cultural revision', where 'readers secure for themselves and their communities social and cultural identity, authority, and power' (Dawson 1992:2). This passage is cited approvingly by Elizabeth A. Clark in *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Clark 1999:77–8). There the focus rests on 'the interpretive devices that were employed to create ascetic meaning', particularly as it pertained to sexual renunciation (Clark 1999:11).

'Way of life' concerns can easily be seen as the ends or consequences of patristic biblical interpretation, and not also as the matrix within which interpretation was performed. By attending closely to how early Christians depicted the phenomenon of scriptural exegesis, we recognize far more than a narrow concern for the interpreter's exegetical methods. There was also discussion, and indeed usually a stronger emphasis, on this person's abilities, education, beliefs, practices, aims, and dispositions—in short, the exegete's own way of life—and an insistence that such a way of life played an important and complex role in shaping exegetical activity. As this chapter will argue, attending to the robust profile of the interpreter has implications for how we characterize the phenomenon of early Christian biblical interpretation. The ways interpreters were routinely depicted indicate that scriptural exegesis was variously implicated in the Christian way of life: it presupposed this life, continually sought to reinforce it, and was often shaped by its leading convictions. Biblical scholarship—including its methods and bodies of knowledge so often narrated by previous generations of scholars—was participatory in the larger Christian drama of salvation.

Some of the most helpful scholarship for setting the stage about the 'religious' character of Christian interpretative practices comes from work focused on 'pagan' Late Antique grammarians and philosophers. Robert Kaster opens his *Guardians of Language* with an inscription that describes a grammarian's privileged role as an instructor of language

and literature, ‘through which souls progress toward excellence.’ Sacral imagery was frequently associated with a literary education that had such lofty aims—one could speak of ‘holy instruction’ or the ‘study of sacred letters.’ ‘Such voices,’ Kaster contends, ‘spoke with the knowledge that they possessed something set apart and enduring, something fundamental to the scheme of right order: the sacred exercised a powerful centripetal pull on a select group of men, to whom it afforded a special, shared, coherent way of life’ (Kaster 1988:15–16).

Particularly helpful is the work of Pierre Hadot, who perhaps more than anyone else has reconfigured how we think about ancient philosophy. He argues that ancient philosophy is fundamentally misconceived if we confine it to the doctrines or theories it generated. Philosophy was not just a discourse, but also a mode of life. Nor was the choice of a way of life an ‘accessory or appendix’ to philosophical activity. Rather, it stood ‘at the beginning, in a complex interrelation with critical reaction to other existential attitudes, with global vision of a certain way of living and of seeing the world, and with voluntary decision itself’ (Hadot 2002:3). This choice of a way of life was made in a community or school that cultivated an array of spiritual exercises ‘intended to effect a modification and a transformation in the subject who practiced them’ (Hadot 2002:6). Thus the philosophical school ‘correspond[ed], above all, to the choice of a certain way of life and existential option which demand[ed] from the individual a total change of lifestyle, a conversion of one’s entire being, and ultimately a certain desire to be and to live in a certain way’ (Hadot 2002:3).

Hadot’s work has wide application for the study of early Christian ‘theology,’ and especially for the study of early Christian biblical exegesis. Late Antique philosophy in the early Christian centuries often took the form of textual commentary on an authority’s writings (such as Plato’s). Exegetical activity, Hadot contends, was precisely one of the aforementioned spiritual exercises cultivated by philosophers, ‘not only because the search for the meaning of a text really demand the moral qualities of modesty and love for the truth, but also because the reading of each philosophical text was supposed to produce a transformation in the person reading or listening to the commentary’ (Hadot 2002:155). ‘To learn philosophy, even by reading and commenting upon texts, meant both to learn a way of life and to practice it’ (Hadot 2002:153). Examples similar to those Hadot provides to illustrate his thesis surface abundantly, and perhaps more fulsomely, in Christian circles. As we will see, early Christian biblical interpretation was invariably pursued with a view to promoting, as well as practising, a Christian way of life.

## IDEAL INTERPRETERS: MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

---

In what follows I will present some of the leading contours in early Christian portraits of ideal scriptural interpreters. It would be misleading to speak of a singular portrait, since distinctive profiles of these interpreters emerged with differing emphases. Yet a wide

swathe of early Christian biblical commentators frequently discussed the following features: the aims of these interpreters, their education and skills, moral and doctrinal commitments, precedents and guidelines for interpretation, reading virtues, and the dynamic of prayer and divine response.

## Interpreter's Aim

Early Christians invariably presented the aim of their scriptural exegesis as the discovery of a message capable of transforming its readers and hearers. Scripture was the 'word of salvation', as Oecumenius concisely put it in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* written sometime in the sixth or early seventh century (first discourse). A rough contemporary, Cassiodorus, wrote that 'Scripture both teaches beneficial knowledge and offers eternal life to those who believe and act on their belief' (*inst.* 1.16.1; trans. Halporn 2004:146). Oecumenius and Cassiodorus stand toward the end of the early Christian period, as it has been customarily circumscribed. But their conviction that Scripture was a profoundly relevant text, advancing the salvation of its readers, had a long history reaching back to the origins of Christianity and the exegetical practices of Second Temple Judaism. This was a fundamental premise of most, if not all, early Christian and Jewish biblical scholarship (cf. Kugel 1997:19–20).

The first major Christian theoretician of scriptural exegesis, Origen, spoke at length about its salvific import. 'For just as the person consists of a body, soul, and spirit, so in the same way does the Scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given for humanity's salvation' (*princ.* 4.2.4 [translation adapted]). Scripture's 'flesh' edified the simpler believer, its 'soul' offered nourishment to the person who has made some progress in the faith, and its 'spirit' edified the perfect person. Origen was not alone in conceptualizing Scripture as an instrument in the divine plan of salvation. One of the major biblical interpreters of the fourth century, Diodore of Tarsus—a critic of Origen, or at least of the style of exegesis he championed—opened his *Commentary on the Psalms* by citing 2 Timothy 3.16–17: "All Scripture is inspired by God", according to blessed Paul, "and useful for teaching, for proving, for correcting, for training in righteousness." Diodore then glossed this biblical text as follows: Scripture 'teaches what is good, reproves sins, corrects omissions, and thus brings a person to perfection' (*proem. Pss.*; trans. Hill 2005:1). Similar beliefs about Scripture surfaced in Theodoret of Cyrus, a fifth-century figure who presented himself as the mediator between the extremes of exuberant allegory (with which Origen was often associated), and a slavish literalism (with which Diodore and Theodore of Mopsuestia were associated). Theodoret opened his *Commentary on the Psalms* by sounding the theme of Scripture's usefulness. The purpose of his commentary was to 'offer to discerning investors the profit lying hidden in its depths, so that they might sing its melodies and at the same time recognize the sense of the words they sing, thus reaping a double dividend' (*Pss. proem.*; trans. Hill 2000:40).

Origen, Diodore, and Theodoret shared the conviction that Scripture was beneficial for its readers, even though these interpreters did not always agree on the precise configuration

of this beneficial message or on how to extract it from the verbal tangle of Scripture. In *On First Principles* Origen itemized this saving message. The Spirit who inspired Scripture ‘was pre-eminently concerned with the unspeakable mysteries connected with human affairs’ so that the reader, by searching the Scripture attentively, might ‘become a partaker of all the doctrines of the Spirit’s counsel’. He continued: ‘And when we speak of the needs of souls, who cannot otherwise reach perfection except through the rich and wise truth about God, we attach of necessity pre-eminent importance to the doctrines concerning God and His only-begotten Son; of what nature the Son is, and in what manner he can be the Son of God, and what are the causes of his descending to the level of human flesh and completely assuming humanity...’ (*princ.* 4.2.7; trans. Butterworth 1936:282–3). The list of scriptural teachings that lead readers to perfection strongly resembled the major themes in the Church’s rule of faith announced earlier in the preface to *On First Principles*.

But early Christian authors usually did not catalogue the details of the saving message as elaborately as Origen had done. Augustine identified the scriptural message with Jesus’ twin commands to love God and neighbour (*doct. chr.* 2.7.10, cf. Mark 12.30–1). Athanasius saw in the Law and Prophets a sketch of Jesus’ perfect life ‘in words’ in order that people ‘of good-will might see the pattern life portrayed, and find therein the healing and correction of their own’ (*ep. Marcell.*; trans. Lawson 1993:106–7). More commonly, authors organized the scriptural message under the twin headings of knowledge and virtue. ‘Scripture affords a teaching that guides those who pay careful heed to it toward knowledge of the mysteries and toward a pure life’ (Gregory of Nyssa, *hom. in Cant.* Pref.; trans. Norris 2012:5). Scripture articulated ‘rules for believing’ and ‘precepts for living’ (Augustine, *doct. chr.* 2.9.14). God’s law was promulgated to lead people ‘to godliness and the knowledge of God’ (Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* Pref.; trans. Maxwell 2013:1). And so on.

This basic posture taken by interpreters toward Scripture—that it was a saving collection of writings—was rooted in the conviction that these writings were fundamentally authored by God. As, then, the pre-eminent textual expression of divine providence, Scripture shared in the same end as all other providential workings of God: the rescue of a human race mired in ignorance and vice. Interpreters’ expectations in approaching Scripture were, thus, formed by the conviction that it was ultimately a divine author (sometimes Father, other times Son, and often Spirit) who was encountered in its pages (e.g. Justin, *dial.* 87; Irenaeus, *haer.* 2.28.2; Origen, *princ.* 4.2.2; 4.2.7 and Martens 2006; Cyril of Alexandria, *Is.* 29:11–12 and Crawford 2014; Augustine, *doct. chr.* 2.5.6).

At the same time, it would be misleading to suggest that this basic posture toward Scripture was only informed by a conviction about its divine authorship. Earthly audiences also played a hand in shaping the interpreter’s project. Interpreters were not simply seeking to extract nourishment (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Is.* 11:7; Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* Pref.) or medicine (Basil, *hom.* 10), to highlight two of the more common metaphors employed to convey Scripture’s excellence. They also sought to apportion this message appropriately to the various needs of differing audiences. For instance, individual passages might be diversely interpreted. The great monastic teacher at the turn of the fifth century, John Cassian, illustrated how a simple command—‘Thou shall not commit adultery’—could be interpreted in four different ways: with reference to actual adultery, idolatry, the

‘superstitions of the law,’ and Christian heresy. Each of these referents reached different audiences, or perhaps the same person at differing moments in his or her life (Cassian, *Coll.* 14.11). So too for a sequence of biblical books that might reach a series of different audiences, or the same person at different points along the soul’s journey to perfection. In Theodore’s preface to his *Commentary on the Songs* he associates each of the Solomonic books (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs) with distinct stages of spiritual growth: ‘the person approaching a religious way of life must first purify the mind with good behavior, then strive to discern the futility of impermanent things and the transitory character of what seems pleasant, and then finally take wings and long for the bridegroom, who promises eternal goods. Hence this book is placed third, so the person treading this path comes to perfection’ (*Cant.*; trans. Hill 2001:32; cf. Origen, *Cant.* Pref.). It is not always easy to press the distinction between exegetical work aimed at everyday Christians in the setting of the liturgy (i.e. homilies) and the work aimed at students, teachers, or those with the leisure to undertake their own examination of Scripture (i.e. commentaries). However, as recent scholars have shown, Scripture was often modulated to support different regimes of holiness, such as martyrdom (Saxer 1986), monasticism (Burton-Christie 1993), and asceticism (Clark 1999). Interpreters sought the ‘word of salvation,’ but it was a malleable word.

The overarching expectation of scriptural interpreters was, then, to discover and communicate the divine message of salvation. This expectation would have numerous implications for how exegetical projects were practised and conceptualized, some of which will be discussed in this chapter. But here a more basic point about the interpreter’s profile should be underscored: scriptural interpreters perceived themselves as agents of religious transformation. The examples provided above illustrate how they fundamentally saw themselves as brokers of salvation, linking audiences to the Christian way of life that was often recalcitrantly communicated in the Scriptures. This transformation was also personal, since studying Scripture was an activity through which interpreters themselves progressed on the journey of salvation. John Cassian framed scriptural interpretation as the means by which the reader experienced ‘renewal,’ and identified this activity with the contemplation of divine things that followed only after the reader had made progress in ascetic living (*Coll.* 14.8–11). Cassian’s contemporary, Augustine, put scriptural interpretation on the third rung of a ladder that provided an itinerary for spiritual growth, beginning with the fear of God and ending with the ascent to Wisdom (*doct. chr.* 2.7.9–11). These and other examples illustrate how the study of Scripture became integrated into the communal and personal quest for holiness (Burton-Christie 1993:4–5).

## Interpreter’s Education

Undoubtedly many early Christian scriptural interpreters were conditioned to see Scripture as a transformational text because of their own education. The prolific commentators on Scripture were highly learned scholars who had enjoyed an extended period of training under grammarians. It was here where the first formal stage of education outside of the home was pursued. This education was intensely literary and oriented to the

‘interpretation of the poets’ (Quintilian, *inst.* 1.4.2), so that among Greek speakers, the grammarian’s education focused mainly upon Homer, and among Latins, Virgil. But this education was also profoundly presentist, rereading the classics with a view to contemporary values, concepts, and customs. For many, Homer became the ‘divine poet’ (Plato, *Phdr.* 95a;) and the surviving exegetical handbooks on his poems convey how he was recast into a supreme cultural authority, a teacher of both true doctrine and patterns of living:

From the very first age of life, the foolishness of infants just beginning to learn is nurtured on the teaching given in his [Homer’s] school. One might almost say that his poems are our baby clothes, and we nourish our minds by draughts of his milk. He stands at our side as we each grow up and shares our youth as we gradually come to manhood; when we are mature, his presence within us is at its prime; and even in old age, we never weary of him. When we stop, we thirst to begin him again. In a word, the only end of Homer for human beings is the end of life.

(Heraclitus, *quaest. Hom.* 1; trans. Russell and Konstan 2005:3)

Christian interpreters were formed in this educational milieu and frequently echoed the above sentiment (e.g. Augustine, *catech.* 6.10; Basil, *leg. lib. gent.*). As the Greek and Latin literary classics were often deemed useful, educational, or edifying, so too, for these interpreters, were the Christian Scriptures to be approached with a similar aim: to extract the word of salvation for audiences at various stages of the spiritual journey.

But the grammarian’s classroom bequeathed more than a goal to the Christian commentator. It also bequeathed an apparatus for the analysis of the Christian classic. Scholars have often divided this apparatus into four component parts, based upon the scholia to *Ars grammatica*, a widely-read grammar attributed to Dionysius Thrax. A passage was first read out loud in the classroom, which presupposed the preparation of the manuscripts with diacritical aids since there were no punctuation marks and words were not spaced. Then followed exegetical analysis, which in the scholia was subdivided into four parts: the clarification of difficult words and phrases; metrical analysis and style criticism; a discussion of grammatical oddities and the rhetorical analysis of various tropes; and an analysis of whatever items—persons, places, and themes—were mentioned by the author. This latter analysis often required familiarity with a wide spectrum of cultural and natural knowledge to help explicate the text (recall Augustine’s ambitious educational program for interpreting Scripture: *doct. chr.* 2.16.24–2.42.63). In addition, grammarians might engage in text-critical analysis by assessing different readings. Finally, there followed the moral evaluation of a text, which in the hands of some grammarians entailed the allegorical reading of the poets to render their message acceptable for contemporary audiences (Marrou 1956:165–70; Bonner 1977:212–49; Cribiore 2001:185–219).

Various iterations of this scholarly repertoire were possessed by the prolific Christian interpreters of Scripture. Origen, himself a grammarian, was the first Christian to put this skill set on full display (Neuschäfer 1987), and a number of other studies have similarly contextualized early Christian exegetes within the grammatical and rhetorical education of the Greco-Roman world (e.g., Schäublin 1974). Throughout early Christian literature we find exhortations to would-be interpreters to learn the skills of the grammarian and acquire whatever ‘secular’ knowledge might prove useful for the study of Scripture

(e.g. Adrian, *introd.* 75; Augustine, *doct. chr.* Pref.; 2.16.24–2.42.63; 3.29.40; Cassiodorus, *inst.* Pref. and 2.7.4; Jerome, *ep.* 53.3; Origen, *ep.* 2 [*ad Gregorium*]). At the same time, it would be misleading to suggest that early Christians were in agreement on this issue. Important voices registered dissent, perhaps none more clearly than the desert fathers, who ‘reflect a generally negative attitude toward the importance of culture and learning in the pursuit of holiness’ (Burton-Christie 1993:57). Were we better able to take the pulse of the whole Christian populace, it is plausible that this suspicion directed toward the Graeco-Roman *paideia* was a majority position among Christians.

This suspicion might also help account for the fact that among the highly educated elite for whom the *paideia* was constitutive of the ideal interpreter, such learning was often justified in explicitly religious terms. The insights of Graeco-Roman learning were frequently presented as derivative in one way or another of the Hebrew Scriptures, or, where literary borrowing was thought to be too fanciful a mechanism to account for the truths of ‘pagan’ learning, these were credited directly to divine revelation (e.g. Augustine, *doct. chr.* 2.40.60; Cassiodorus, *inst.* 1.4.2 and *Psal.* Pref. 15; Droge 1989). Grammar, the very engine of scriptural interpretation, was among the bodies of knowledge whose provenance was asserted to be divine. In his *Homilies on Numbers*, for instance, Origen argued that only knowledge considered indispensable for the practice of arts useful to humans, or which assists them in gaining knowledge of anything, is properly considered wisdom that comes from God (cf. Sir 1.1; *hom. in Num.* 18.3.2). Origen illustrated his point with a passage from Daniel that attributed grammatical skill to God’s beneficence: ‘The Lord gave them [Daniel and his friends] knowledge and understanding and prudence in every grammatical art [*in omni arte grammatica*] [Dan 1.17]’ (*hom. in Num.* 18.3.5; trans. Scheck 2009:113).

By mastering the Graeco-Roman learning relevant to scriptural exegesis, including grammar, Christian interpreters like Origen presented themselves not as acquiring a foreign training, so much as receiving and sharing in a divine body of knowledge. But the religious associations given to the ideal interpreter’s hard-won knowledge went even deeper. By extracting what was true and useful from this schooling and putting it to its proper use—the explanation of Scripture—such interpreters were engaging in an act of worship. Both Origen and Augustine advanced this point, arguing that in repurposing ‘pagan’ learning for scriptural study, interpreters were symbolically re-enacting the plundering of the Egyptians whose finery was properly redirected by the Hebrews for the construction of the tabernacle for the worship of God at Sinai (Origen, *ep.* 2 [*ad Gregorium*]; Augustine, *doct. chr.* 2.40.60–1).

## Interpreter’s Manner

In the opening lines of his *Didaskalikos*, a mid-second-century handbook introducing students to Plato’s thought and writings, Alcinous offered the following profile of the ideal philosopher:

The first necessity is that he [the philosopher] be naturally apt at those branches of learning which have the capacity to fit him for, and lead him towards, the knowledge

of intelligible being, which is not subject to error or change. Next, he must be enamoured of the truth, and in no way tolerate falsehood. Furthermore, he must also be endowed with a temperate nature, and, in relation to the passionate part of the soul, he must be naturally restrained. . . . The prospective philosopher must also be endowed with liberality of mind, for nothing is so inimical as small-mindedness to a soul which is proposing to contemplate things divine and human. He must also possess natural affinity for justice, just as he must towards truth and liberality and temperance; and he should also be endowed with a ready capacity to learn and a good memory, for these too contribute to the formation of the philosopher.

(Alcinous, *didask.* 1.2–3; trans. Dillon 1993:3)

In these lines Alcinous echoed Socrates' account in *Republic* 6 (485b–487a) of the requirements for successful philosophizing, by characterizing the ideal philosopher both in terms of ability and disposition (Dillon 1993:52–3). Alcinous bookends his account of the philosopher with this person's education and aptitude for learning, but between these comments highlights a range of personal characteristics: the philosopher should be temperate, open-minded, and desirous of truth and justice. Successful philosophizing is not just about technical skill, education, or ability. It also requires a commitment to a particular way of life that conditions the activity and results of philosophical enquiry.

As will become clear below, there are noticeable parallels between this portrait of the ideal philosopher and early Christian portraits of ideal scriptural interpreters. While the grammarian's skill and education were certainly requisites, so too was a way of life coloured by a range of Christian commitments that were intended to promote and safeguard proper interpretation. In this section I highlight some key practices, guidelines, loyalties, and precedents that were routinely used to characterize the ideal biblical interpreter. The examples that follow are quick snapshots of a vast terrain, but, taken together, they indicate how biblical scholarship was creatively fashioned into an avenue for expressing, and even practising, the Christian way of life.

### *Moral Credentials, Doctrinal Criteria*

Theodoret of Cyrus opens his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* with language reminiscent of the passage cited above from Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*. The successful interpreter of the Song of Songs, not unlike the student of Plato's dialogues, must possess intellectual abilities as well as moral credentials: 'The explanation of the divine sayings requires, on the one hand, a purified soul that is also rid of every uncleanness; on the other hand, it requires as well a mind that has wings, capable of discerning divine things and prepared to enter the precincts of the Spirit' (*Pss. proem.*; trans. Hill 2001:21). This prerequisite of a purified interpreter surfaces widely throughout early Christian exegetical writing, whether on the Song, or other biblical books (e.g. Origen, *Cant. Pref.*; Cassian, *coll.* 14.8–12; Burton-Christie 1993:153–4; 165–6). Gregory of Nyssa provides a glimpse into the rationale for this prerequisite in the preface to his commentary on the Song where he describes 'how those who hear the mystic words should dispose their souls' (*hom. in Cant.* 1.1; trans. Norris 2012:29):

You who in accordance with the counsel of Paul have ‘taken off’ the old humanity with its deeds and lust like a filthy garment (Col 3.9) and have clothed yourselves by purity of life in the lightsome raiment of the Lord...hear the mysteries of the Song of Songs. Enter the inviolate bridal chamber dressed in the white robes of pure and undefiled thoughts. If any bear a passionate and carnal habit of mind and lack that garment of conscience that is proper dress for the divine wedding feast, let such persons not be imprisoned by their own thoughts and drag the undefiled words of the Bridegroom and Bride down to the level of brutish, irrational passions; let them not because of these passions be constrained by indecent imaginings and get cast out of the bright cheer of the wedding chamber, exchanging gnashing of teeth and tears for the joy within the bridal chamber. (*hom. in Cant.* 1; trans. Norris 2012:15)

Interpreters who are mired in ‘indecent imaginings’ are less inclined and perhaps incapable of discovering the Song’s symbolic message of spiritual love because their fleshly preoccupations gravitate to the book’s erotic language. Such interpreters do violence to the text (‘drag the undefiled words... to the level of brutish, irrational passions’) since they come to the book with a frame of mind that is at odds with the Song’s true message. Conversely, those who lead exemplary lives come to Scripture with expectations about its message that are thought to be commensurate with the lofty ethical stances advocated by Scripture.

A related feature in the profile of Scripture’s ideal interpreter was adherence to regulative teaching. Origen’s discussion of the Church’s rule of faith illustrates this principle well. He opens *On First Principles* by acknowledging rival interpretations of the same Scriptures within the Christian community so that ‘many of those who profess to believe in Christ disagree not only in small and trivial but also in great and important matters’ (*princ.* Pref. 2). Origen has his Alexandrian ‘Gnostic’ opponents in view—in particular, their deterministic anthropology and dualistic conception of God. To solve these conflicting interpretations Origen proposes that interpreters hold fast to ‘a sure line and clear rule’, one ‘handed down in unbroken succession from the apostles’ and ‘still preserved... in the churches up to the present day’ (*princ.* Pref. 2; trans. Butterworth 1936:2). This teaching, enumerated under several headings, serves as an arbitrator between competing interpretations. Other authors join Origen in regulating exegesis with the rule of faith or a creedal statement (e.g. Augustine, *doct. chr.* 3.2.2–3, 6; Cassiodorus, *inst.* 1.11.1).

The principle here is no different from above. Those who came to the text with what were considered to be disfigured moral and doctrinal sensibilities were poorly disposed to uncover Scripture’s salutary message, whereas those deemed to be well formed were capable of discovering this message of salvation and serving as its advocates. Simply put, lives that mirrored the message were best disposed to see that message.

### *Exegetical Precedent*

Another feature of the successful interpreter was adherence to earlier exegetical authorities. The writers of the NT routinely set a precedent for how to interpret individual passages in the Law and Prophets. Paul in particular became the authority par excellence for a symbolic approach to the Hebrew Scriptures. Early Christian apologists for such an exegetical strategy frequently referred to passages such as Romans 7.14 (‘the law is spiritual’),

2 Corinthians 3.6 ('The letter kills but the spirit gives life'), and Galatians 4.24 ('This is an allegory...'), which provided them with apostolic licence to pursue a symbolic exegesis of Scripture (Heine 1984; Martens 2012). Pauline precedent was often called upon to help Christian interpreters draw boundaries between various communities of readers. Sometimes it was invoked to demarcate successful, symbolic ('allegorical', 'figurative') Christian interpreters from unsuccessful, literalist Jewish interpreters (e.g. Origen, *princ.* 4.2.1; Theodoret, *qu. in Ex.* 69; Augustine, *doct. chr.* 3.5.9–10). Other times, Pauline allegory was used in arguments against fellow Christians who were reticent about allegorizing Scripture. Gregory of Nyssa directed his defence of allegory in such a manner against fellow 'church leaders', which likely included critics such as Diodore of Tarsus (*hom. in Cant.* Pref.).

In addition to NT precedent, we also find interpreters drawing upon the increasingly robust body of exegetical literature on Scripture that preceded them. This phenomenon becomes especially clear as we move through the fourth century. For instance, Eusebius of Emesa, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Polychronius, and Adrian often glossed biblical texts very similarly to one another, so that some relationship of dependence must be posited (Haar Romeny 1997; Martens 2017). By the sixth century we find ourselves in an era in which a more pronounced use of sources emerges—where, in the words of Oecumenius, ideal interpreters '[call] on earlier authorities for assistance' (*Apoc.* Pref. 1; trans. Weinrich 2011:2). In the Greek world, the *Catena on the Octateuch* and Procopius of Gaza's *Commentary on the Octateuch* (works closely related to one another) drew upon leading biblical scholars of the third to fifth centuries, especially Origen, Didymus, Cyril of Alexandria, Eusebius of Emesa, Severian of Gabala, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and also Philo of Alexandria (Haar Romeny 1997:184). Cassiodorus' *Institutions* provides an analogue in the Latin world. In book 1 he explains that he will not use his 'own teaching, but the words of earlier writers that we justly praise and gloriously herald to later generations'. 'Therefore', he continues, 'let us ascend without hesitation to Holy Scripture through the excellent commentaries of the fathers, as if on the ladder of Jacob's vision so that, lifted by their thoughts, we are worthy to arrive at full contemplation of the Lord' (*inst.* Pref. 1, 2; trans. Halporn 2004:105, 106). Cassiodorus recommends other introductory manuals to Scripture: Tyconius' *Book of Rules*, Augustine's *On Christian Teaching*, Adrian's *Introduction to the Divine Scriptures*, and the textbooks by Eucherius and Junillus (*inst.* 1.10.1). He also provides his readers with a recommended bibliography of key patristic works in Latin and Greek on individual biblical books, beginning with Genesis and concluding with the Apocalypse (*inst.* 1.1–9).

### *Exegetical Virtues*

As important as the interpreter's moral and doctrinal credentials and reliance on the work of earlier authorities might be, these did not always yield satisfactory help for decoding Scripture. The following paragraph from Origen's *Commentary on Romans* presents a rich description of the virtues interpreters ought to exercise while unlocking the riddles in Scripture:

Therefore, if there is some secret and hidden thing of God we long to know . . . let us faithfully and humbly inquire into the more concealed judgments of God that are sown in the Holy Scriptures. Surely this is also why the Lord was saying, 'Search the Scriptures [John 5:39]!' since he knew that these things are opened not by those who fleetingly listen to or read [the Scriptures] while occupied with other business, but by those who with an upright and sincere heart search more deeply into the Holy Scriptures, by constant effort and uninterrupted nightly vigils. I know well that I myself am not one of these. But if anyone seeks in this way, he will find.

(*comm. in Rom.* 7.17.4; trans. Scheck 2002:119)

Origen highlights the need to examine Scripture 'faithfully and humbly', to search it with an 'upright and sincere heart', and to do so not 'fleetingly', distracted by other affairs, but rather vigilantly and with 'constant effort'. Early Christians employed a large moral lexicon to describe the virtues ideal interpreters ought to espouse while studying Scripture. These tended to cluster around a number of issues, particularly a spirit of inquisitiveness (Origen, *comm. in Mt.* 14.14; Theodoret, *qu. Oct.* Pref.: 'love of learning'), the willingness to exert oneself at study (Origen, *comm. in Mt.* 13.17; *comm. in Rom.* 9.1.12), and perhaps most frequently, the need to examine texts carefully and attentively. Augustine warned his readers that the obscurities of Scripture will 'deceive those who read casually' (*doct. chr.* 2.6.7). Cyril of Alexandria underscored the importance of searching the Scripture 'with painstaking attention and a sharp mind' (Cyril, *Jo.* Pref.; trans. Maxwell 2013:1). Theodoret's prefaces to his commentaries repeatedly circled back to the need to study Scripture 'carefully' (*epp. Paul. proem.*) and with 'attention' (*Ezech.* Pref.). The same motif surfaces in the desert fathers (Burton-Christie 1993:126–9; cf. Martens 2012:168–78).

### *Inspired Interpreter*

Interpreters needed to apply themselves diligently to the challenging passages of Scripture. Even so, there were times when they presented their best efforts as falling short. In these situations, we frequently find interpreters turning their gaze heavenward in prayer, requesting divine help for deciphering Scripture's riddles. Theodoret of Cyrus opens his *Commentary on Ezekiel* by reprimanding readers who might scorn the book for its obscurity. 'Instead, in their longing to understand the sacred words, let them cry aloud with the divinely-inspired David, "Unveil my eyes, and I shall grasp the marvels of your Law" [Ps 119:18] . . . In fact, in our case, too, let us offer this request to the Lord, who according to the divine David gives wisdom to the blind' (*Ezech.* Pref.; trans. Hill 2006: 29). Scores of similar examples exist in which interpreters request or comment on the divine grace needed to bring exegetical work to a satisfactory conclusion (e.g. Athanasius, *ep. Marcell*; trans. Lawson 1993:119; Didymus, *Zech.* Pref.; Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* Pref.; Theodoret, *Jo.* Pref.; *epp. Paul. proem.*; Cassiodorus, *inst.* 1.33; Andrew of Caesarea, *Apoc.* Pref.). The basic logic, expressed clearly in the passage from Theodoret below, is that the God who helped reveal these Scriptures through human authors was also capable of revealing the meaning of these texts to their human interpreters: 'trusting not in myself, of course, but in the one who dictated this manner of composition for the Scriptures, as it

belongs to him to bring to the fore the meaning concealed in the text' (Theodoret, *qu. Oct.* Pref.; trans. Hill 2007:3). Interpretation, then, often became an inspired affair, a conversation between human interpreter and divine author.

## CONCLUSION

---

Over and again, early Christians posited a fundamental symmetry between Scripture and its ideal interpreters. Throughout our period, the basic posture taken toward Scripture was that it was a divinely inspired collection of writings in service of the salvation of its readers. As such, Scripture occupied a lofty perch. But not a solitary one. As we have seen, early Christians routinely fashioned Scripture's interpreters as divinely inspired figures too—scholars, to be sure, but holy men as well. '[W]hat more excellent activity ought there be', Origen rhetorically asked, 'after our physical separation from one another, than the careful examination of the gospel?' (*Jo.* 1.12). Holy texts went hand in hand with holy readers. As we peer more closely into early Christian exegetical cultures, we detect a mimetic relationship between texts and their readers. The goal of interpretation was brought into conformity with what was thought to be the animating goal of Scripture's authors: the communication of a message of salvation. As brokers of salvation, intermediaries who stood between the cryptic words of God and the people of God, interpreters fashioned themselves as agents who extended and clarified the original revelation for the benefit of new communities of faith. Yet interpretation was not only in service of salvation. It was also expressive of it, and thus, indicative of another symmetry between sacred text and sacred interpreter. Exegesis was conditioned by the interpreter's morality, doctrinal credentials, adherence to the precedents set by venerable (often apostolic) authorities, by a range of exegetical virtues, and by the dynamics of prayer and divine response. Scripture communicated the Christian way of life, but this message was only properly extracted when it was approached on terms already set by this way of life.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- Alcinous, *Didaskalikos*. Greek text: J. Whittaker, *Enseignement des doctrines de Platon* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1990). Eng. trans.: J. Dillon, *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).
- Athanasius, *Epistula ad Marcellinum*. Greek text: PG 27.12–46. Eng. trans.: Penelope Lawson, *On the Incarnation*, introd. C. S. Lewis (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 97–119.
- Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*. Latin text: J. Martin (ed.), *De doctrina Christiana*, CCL 32 (Turnhout, Brepols, 1962). Eng. trans.: E. Hill, OP, *Teaching Christianity*, Works of Saint Augustine I/11 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996).

- Cassiodorus, *De institutione diuinarum litterarum*. Latin text: R. A. B. Mynors (ed.), *Institutiones diuinarum et saecularium litterarum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937). Eng. trans.: J. W. Halporn, *Cassiodorus: Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning and On the Soul*, introd. M. Vessey, Translated Texts for Historians 42 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004).
- Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Johannem*. Greek text: P. E. Pusey (ed.), *In d. Joannis Evangelium*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1872). Eng. trans.: D. R. Maxwell, *Cyril of Alexandria: Commentary on John*, vol. 1, ed. T. C. Oden and G. L. Bray, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).
- Diodore of Tarsus, *Proemium in Psalmos*. Greek text: J.-M. Olivier (ed.), *Diodori Tarsensis: Commentarii in Psalmos*, vol. 1: *Commentarii in Psalmos I–L*, CCG 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1980). Eng. trans.: Robert C. Hill, *Diodore of Tarsus: Commentary on Psalms 1–51*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 9 (Atlanta: SBL, 2005).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Homiliae in Canticum Canticorum*. Greek text: H. Langerbeck (ed.), *In Canticum canticorum*, Gregorii Nysseni Opera 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1960). Eng. trans.: R. A. Norris Jr., *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 13 (Atlanta: SBL, 2012).
- Heraclitus, *Quaestiones Homericae*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: D. A. Russell and D. Konstan (eds and trans.), *Heraclitus: Homeric Problems*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 14 (Atlanta: SBL, 2005).
- Oecumenius, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*. Greek text: M. De Groote (ed.), *Oecumenii Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, *Traditio Exegetica Graeca* 8 (Louvain: Peeters, 1999). Eng. trans.: W. C. Weinrich, *Greek Commentaries on Revelation/Oecumenius*, ed. T. C. Oden, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).
- Origen, *Commentarii in Johannem*. Greek text: E. Preuschen (ed.), *Origenes Werke: Der Johanneskommentar* GCS 4 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903). Eng. trans.: R. E. Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1–10*, FC 80 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Greek text: P. Koetschau (ed.), *Origenes Werke: De principiis*, GCS 5 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913). Eng. trans.: G. W. Butterworth, *Origen: On First Principles* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936).
- Origen, *Homiliae in Numeros*. Latin text: W. A. Baehrens (ed.), *Origenes Werke: Homilien zum Hexateuch in Rufins Übersetzung*, GCS 7 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1921). Eng. trans.: T. P. Scheck, *Origen: Homilies on Numbers*, ed. C. A. Hall, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).
- Origen, *Commentarii in Romanos*. Latin text: C. P. Hammond Bammel (ed.), *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes: Kritische Ausgabe der Übersetzung Rufins, Buch 7–10* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1998). Eng. trans.: T. P. Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10*, FC 104 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002).
- Theodoret of Cyrus, *Proemium in Psalmos*. Greek text: PG 80.857–1998. Eng. trans.: R. C. Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Psalms 1–72*, FC 101 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000).
- Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum*. Greek text: PG 81.28–213. Eng. trans.: R. C. Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Early Christian Studies 2 (Brisbane: Centre for Early Christian Studies, Australian Catholic University, 2001).
- Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentarius in Ezechielem*. Greek text: PG 81.808–1256. Eng. trans.: Robert C. Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Prophets*, vol. 2, *Commentary on the Prophet Ezekiel* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006).

Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: J. F. Petruccione (ed.) and R. C. Hill (trans.), *Theodoret of Cyrus: The Questions on the Octateuch*, vol. 1: *On Genesis and Exodus*, Library of Early Christianity 1 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

## Scholarship

- Bonner, S. F. (1977). *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Burton-Christie, D. (1993). *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Clark, E. A. (1999). *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Crawford, M. R. (2014). *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Criboire, R. (2001). *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Dawson, D. (1992). *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Droge, A. J. (1989). *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr).
- Farrar, F. W. (1886). *History of Interpretation: Bampton Lectures 1885* (London: Macmillan).
- Grant, R. M., and Tracy, D. (1984). *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*. 2nd edn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press).
- Haar Romeny, R. B. ter (1997). *A Syrian in Greek Dress: The Use of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac Biblical Texts in Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis* (Louvain: Peeters).
- Hadot, P. (2002). *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Heine, R. E. (1984). 'Gregory of Nyssa's Apology for Allegory', *VC* 38: 360–70.
- Kaster, R. A. (1988). *Guardians of Language: The Grammarians and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Kugel, J. L. (1997). *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press).
- Mansfeld, J. (1994). *Prolegomena: Questions to be Settled before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden: Brill).
- Marrou, H. I. (1956). *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. G. Lamb (New York: Sheed and Ward).
- Martens, P. W. (2006). 'Why Does Origen Introduce the Trinitarian Authorship of Scripture in book 4 of *Peri Archon*?', *VC* 60: 1–8.
- Martens, P. W. (2012). *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Martens, P. W. (2017) (ed., introd., and trans.). *Adrian's Introduction to the Divine Scriptures: An Antiochene Handbook for Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Neuschäfer, B. (1987). *Origenes als Philologe*. 2 vols (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt).
- Saxer, V. (1986). *Bible et hagiographie: Textes et thèmes bibliques dans les actes des martyrs authentiques des premiers siècles* (Bern: Peter Lang).
- Schäublin, C. (1974). *Untersuchungen zu Methode und Herkunft der antiochenischen Exegese* (Cologne: P. Hanstein).

- Simonetti, M. (1994). *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. J. A. Hughes (Edinburgh: T & T Clark).
- Young, F. M. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

### **Suggested Reading**

- Gnilka, C. (1984). *Der Begriff des 'rechten Gebrauchs'* (Basel: Schwabe).
- Lamberton, R. (1986). *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Mitchell, M. (2010). *Paul, the Corinthians, and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).



PART III

---

SETTINGS AND  
GENRES OF  
SCRIPTURAL  
INTERPRETATION

---



---

# I. EXEGETICAL GENRES

---



## CHAPTER 9

---

# COMMENTARIES

---

JOSEF LÖSSL

### BEGINNINGS: HELLENISTIC LITERARY-RHETORICAL EDUCATION AND ITS GENRES

---

IN a well-known satire framed as a letter to his friend Kronios, the second-century sophist Lucian of Samosata introduces the Cynic philosopher Peregrinus, to whom he applies the epithet ‘Proteus’, as a mad charlatan who ended up publicly killing himself by leaping onto a pyre. According to Lucian this was merely the last of many antics Peregrinus performed in his lifetime. An earlier one had been his conversion to Christianity. Lucian saw this as evidence of Peregrinus’ chameleonlike mercuriality. Pretending to be a fervent convert, he writes, Peregrinus made the foolish Christians look like children: he held several church offices simultaneously and ‘expounded and explained the Christians’ [sacred] books and even wrote many himself’ (*De mort. Peregr.* 11: *καὶ τῶν βιβλίων τὰς μὲν ἐξηγεῖτο καὶ διεσάφει, πολλὰς δὲ αὐτὸς καὶ συνέγραψεν*).

We cannot be certain to what extent this passage reflects any actual knowledge of Christian practice on Lucian’s part, but it is interesting that in this rather short account he should have mentioned biblical exegesis as a characteristic Christian activity. We do know that at the time, around the middle of the second century, Christians still did produce prophetic books, and the formation of the NT canon was not yet complete. What is perhaps more surprising is Lucian’s observation that Christians had already begun to subject their emerging new literature to literary-critical, philological, and philosophical scrutiny of some kind, for this is clearly what the words *ἐξηγεῖσθαι* (‘to expound’) and *διασάφειν* (‘to explain’) suggest. These words belong in the context of the scholarly exegesis of mythological and poetic works, which went back at least to the sixth century BCE when the great works of Greek epic poetry were first put in writing (Lössl 2007:2). But this scholarly exegesis began to flourish especially in the second and first centuries BCE in Alexandria, with scholars such as Aristarchus of Samothrace and

Theon of Alexandria, who subjected the works of Homer, the classical dramatists and lyric poets, Attic prose writers, and poets of the Hellenistic period to meticulous, methodical exegesis, thus creating a widely recognized standard for dealing with literary texts (Pfeiffer 1968; Dickey 2007). This culture had also influenced the exegesis of philosophical works and contributed to the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek during the same period (Honigman 2003) and to the emergence of a Hellenistic Jewish exegetical tradition (Niehoff 2011), of which Philo of Alexandria became a towering exponent (Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:300–2).

Early Christian exegesis too originated from this context. Certainly by the middle of the second century CE there is evidence for a Christian interest in and practice of critical methodical study of texts regarding their authenticity, textual correctness, and semantic value (Grant 1993). One of the exponents of this movement was Marcion of Sinope, whose quest for the authentic literary expression of the Christian message was closely linked to the formation of an NT canon (Markschies 2003) and to the editing, if not the outright writing, of individual NT books (Vinzent 2014). If the latter turned out to be true, it would uncannily correspond to Lucian's note. At any rate, the NT attests to the fact that new sacred books were still written when a tradition of commenting on older ones had already started. There are rudimentary forms of biblical commentary already present in the NT (Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:310). Nonetheless, the formation of a biblical canon (OT and NT) was an important condition for the origin and development of an early Christian commentary tradition (Assmann 1995). As long as this process was not completed (that is, until the late second century at the earliest), the output of biblical exegetical literature remained sporadic and the genres of that literature were not very well defined (Markschies 1999:69–72). For example, Eusebius (*h.e.* 3.39.9–14) reports that Papias of Hierapolis wrote five books 'of exegesis on words of the Lord' (*λογίων κυριακῶν ἐξηγήσεις*), and Clement of Alexandria (*str.* 1.101.2) writes that Julius Cassianus and others, such as Tatian, Rhodo, Apelles, Basilides, Valentinus, and Theophilus of Antioch, wrote 'exegetical works' (*ἐξηγητικά*), with similar reports in Origen (*Cels.* 2.65, 4.37 and *Jo.* 20.44). There is no mention of 'commentary' in any of these statements, nor of the biblical books commented upon, whether from the OT or NT. Later, commentaries were identified by the books, or groups of books, with which they dealt (e.g. Genesis [*Hexaemeron*], Pentateuch [Hexa-, Octateuch], Prophets, Wisdom [books of Solomon], the Gospels, John, Matthew, etc., the Pauline epistles, Romans, Galatians, etc.).

Exegesis, of course, whether orally or in writing, is not the same as commentary. There were a number of different ways in which ancient scholars 'commented' on texts. Some of these are treated elsewhere in the present volume, including *scholia*, homilies, 'hypotheses' (Luppe 2002), and a technique known as 'questions and answers' (Greek *Erotapokriseis*; Latin *Quaestiones et responsiones*). Although all of these contribute in some way or other to the development of the commentary, the commentary 'proper' is the genre which, ideally, unites individual discussions of textual points and matters of context and content to a coherent and comprehensive whole. A commentary would endeavour, at least in theory, to subject an entire work (biblical book, or group of books), either divided into lemmata or as an ongoing paraphrase, to such a comprehensive and systematic

treatment. In fact, a commentator might even aim beyond that and attempt to write a commentary for each work in a canon and to interpret each work (or even each sentence, word, or letter in a work) with a view to the whole. Homeric scholars formulated this principle as ‘explaining Homer from Homer’ (‘Ὁμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν; cf. Schäublin 1977:158–61 and his discussion of the use of this expression by Porphyry in his *quaest. Hom.*), while Alexander of Aphrodisias, in his monumental commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (early third century CE), is said to have first applied it to the world of philosophical commentaries (Hadot 2002:186). Anyone setting out to explore this issue in the area of early Christian biblical commentary will have to engage with the work of the greatest theorist and practitioner, Origen of Alexandria (Hanson 2002; Heine 2010; Fürst 2011; Martens 2012).

## ORIGEN AND THE ‘INVENTION’ OF THE BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

---

Origen, who flourished in the first half of the third century CE, was also one of the first early Christian exegetes who extensively and systematically critiqued earlier exegetes. For example, he discusses a work by Heracleon, who probably taught around the middle of the second century in Alexandria, on John’s Gospel, and refers to it as *ὑπομνήματα* (Jo. 6.15.92), a set of notes, ‘points to remember’. It is not entirely clear whether this expression originally meant notes made by a teacher for the delivery of a lecture (Hadot 2002:184), or notes made by a student attending a lecture (Mansfeld 1994:193). Hadot identifies the latter with *σχόλια* and understands *ὑπομνήματα* to be synonymous with Latin *commentarii*.<sup>1</sup> However, in neither case can *ὑπομνήματα* be understood as ‘commentary’ in the sense in which Origen came to define the genre (see also Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:276–8). For this we will have to turn to Origen himself.

But first, there are other examples of what might be called Christian commentaries in Origen’s lifetime, or even slightly earlier, which should be acknowledged, though a closer look reveals their limitations compared with Origen’s achievements. None of them, to begin with, can be said to have greatly influenced Origen, although they do attest to the fact that the commentarial form was beginning to emerge in early Christian literature. Hippolytus’ ‘commentary’ on the *Song of Songs* from c.220 (or slightly earlier),

<sup>1</sup> Originally, of course, Latin *commentarii* were not ‘commentaries’, but instructions (‘memoranda’, and thus, again, *ὑπομνήματα*) issued by high-ranking priests or senior members of sacred colleges in Rome on how to conduct public sacrifices and rituals (Cicero, *Dom.* 136; Livy 4.3.9; Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.6.59). They were prescriptive rather than descriptive. From this emerged the practice of former magistrates to defend their conduct in public office by way of *commentarii*. Probably most famous of these are Caesar’s *commentarii de bello Gallico*. Even in later Latin *commentarius* could still denote a treatise or monograph discussing a problem (e.g. a treatise *De Fato*) rather than a commentary. Latin expressions for commentaries in our present sense include *expositio*, *tractatus*, *enarratio*, *libri volumina*, and *explanatio* (Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:279).

for example, may perhaps more appropriately be classed as a homily (Fürst 2011:13). Hippolytus' *Commentary on Daniel*, widely held to be the earliest Christian biblical commentary, was not primarily meant as a full-scale commentary but motivated by a specific issue. It engages in typological and allegorical exegesis with a strongly anti-millenarian slant. The engagement with chiliast tendencies was widespread in early Christianity. It preoccupied a number of Christian authors in the second and third centuries and to some extent accelerated the development of biblical commentaries, since it forced authors to provide detailed analyses of certain passages referring to Christ's second coming (Lössl 2009). The earliest extant Latin commentary, dating from the late third or early fourth century, Victorinus of Pettau's *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, deals with this issue, as does a no longer extant treatise by Melito of Sardis, dating from the 160s, *On the Devil and the Apocalypse of John* (Eusebius, *h.e.* 4.26.2: *Περὶ τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰωάννου*). But Melito's work still belongs to that group of second-century exegetical writings, mentioned earlier, whose genre is not yet clearly defined. Victorinus' *Apocalypse*, by contrast, is already an early exemplar of a 'lemma-commentary' influenced by Origen and, perhaps also, Eusebius (trans. Dulaey 1997:19–20).

Origen's approach to commentarial activity and the production of commentaries was by far the most ambitious in early Christianity. As a trained grammarian with strong philosophical inclinations (and talent!) he brought to the job an immensely broad range of skills. He began by studying the text and Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible, the outcome of which was the *Hexapla*, a synopsis of the Hebrew Bible in six columns, which provided the textual basis for any further commentarial work (Field 1875; Grafton and Williams 2006:86–132). In this respect alone Origen was far ahead of previous commentators such as Heracleon or Hippolytus. Beyond that he also set out to apply the whole range of grammatical and literary analysis, not only textual criticism or the explanation of individual words (etymology), but also poeology, narratology, criticism of style, and the use and philosophical interpretation of figurative speech, especially metaphor and allegory (Neuschäfer 1987; Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:283–5).

When it came to content, Origen wanted first of all to contextualize his exegesis within what he perceived as the orthodox church tradition (Heine 2010). In this respect he aimed at aligning himself especially with earlier Alexandrian teachers, for example Clement of Alexandria, although it seems difficult to demonstrate precisely the degree to which he made use of Clement's writings (Fürst 2011:15 with reference to van den Hoek 1992). At any rate, it seems he was not content with being merely an ecclesiastical exegete. His aim was to go beyond the Church's tradition and include also the Greek philosophical tradition. In this respect he was influenced by Philo of Alexandria, the Hellenistic Jewish and Middle-Platonist philosopher, who wrote in the 40s CE and combined biblical exegesis with philosophical speculation. Through this approach Philo arrived at an allegorical understanding of the Jewish tradition and developed a tendency to look for a deeper, spiritual or intellectual meaning in every sentence of Scripture (Runia 1993:157–83).

Philo interpreted the Hebrew Bible in its Greek translation with the help of Greek philosophical concepts (Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:300). However, his works

cannot be considered commentaries in the comprehensive sense mentioned earlier. Rather, he selected interesting topics from biblical texts and commented on them: the creation of the world, the sacrifice of Cain and Abel, the Ten Commandments, and others. The earliest attested Greek philosophical commentaries too, such as that by Crantor of Soli on Plato's *Timaeus* (third century BCE), seem to have been selective, not continuous. The first continuous commentary, by Boethus of Sidon on Aristotle's *Categories*, was written in the late first century BCE (Simplicius, *in Cat.* 1), and it seems to have remained an exception for quite some time. In the early third century CE when Alexander of Aphrodisias wrote about his own approach to commentary writing (linear, continuous, comprehensive, and methodical), he presented it as an innovation (Sharples 1987). His kind of commentary, which was to find its biblical equivalent in that of his contemporary Origen, thus seems to have been perceived as a fairly young and innovative genre (Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:290).

## COMMENTARY 'TOPICS'—'SCIENTIFIC' COMMENTING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

---

It is not easy to determine precisely the point in time at which this new type of commentary was invented, both in the case of Alexander of Aphrodisias and of Origen. In order to get a clearer picture, modern scholars have studied the prefaces of commentaries, which place these works (both philosophical and biblical, from Heracleon to Origen) squarely in a school context, that is, the teaching of grammar, rhetoric and philosophy (Hadot 2002:188). In Origen's case scholars have sometimes tried to analyse prefaces from a much later period, some of which provide elaborate lists of matters to be discussed, and then to compare these lists with the items that are actually discussed in earlier commentaries such as Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, which was treated as a model (Schäublin 1974:66–72; Hadot 1987; Neuschäfer 1987:57–84; Mansfeld 1994:7–19; discussed in Fürst 2011:18). This approach has not always yielded entirely satisfactory results, since those later prefaces were not commensurable with the actual content of the earlier commentaries. For example, the late fifth-, early sixth-century commentary on Porphyry's *Eisagoge* by the Alexandrian philosopher Ammonius lists in its preface the main preliminary points to be discussed for every book of the work: scope (ὁ σκόπος), purpose (τὸ χρήσιμον), authenticity (τὸ γνήσιον), place within the order of study (ἡ τάξις τῆς ἀναγνώσεως), meaning of the title (ἡ αἰτία τῆς ἐπιγραφῆς), division into chapters (ἡ εἰς τὰ κεφάλαια διαίρεσις), and the part of philosophy to which the relevant text under discussion belongs (Skeb 2007:76–77; Hadot 1987:101–2).

More recent studies (e.g. Skeb 2007:14–68; Fürst 2011:18–20) have suggested that in the second and third centuries the approach was still much more open and guided by comparatively 'loose' instructions as could be found in rhetorical handbooks (e.g. Aristotle, *Rh.* 4.14.7 1415a34f.; Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.1.62). As a result, the prefaces of the

earliest philosophical and biblical commentaries such as Alexander's *Commentary on the Prior Analytics* or Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* are quite free in their arrangement and, at least in the case of Origen's work, astoundingly original. Origen includes, for example, discussion of the principal purpose of the work (*causa praecipua*), its position (*ordo*) in the wider body of works attributed to Solomon, the meaning of its title (*attitulatio*), and its mode of composition (*dramatis in modum . . . compositum*). In addition, Origen refers to the need of interpreting the dramatic plot prosopologically, that is, with the attention focused on the persons acting in the drama (*dramatis personae*), a technique adopted from Homeric exegesis (Skeb 2007:210–16), and also to the importance of taking into account the exegete's moral, intellectual, and scholarly qualities and qualifications to approach the text appropriately (Martens 2012). Many of these elements are found in Ammonius' preface nearly three centuries later.

Further *topoi*, found in other commentaries, include the call on God to help with the difficult task of the commentator, who is weak by nature (*Jo. prol.*), the question whether the subject matter is at all commensurable with the weakness of the human mind (*comm. in Gen.*), the argument that a commentary is necessary because of the inherent 'obscurity' (*ἀσάφεια*) of the source text (*comm. in Rom.*; compare Lucian's *διασαφείν*), and many others. The latter *topos* is frequent among many early Christian commentators and connects with a later motif stressed by Antiochene exegetes in the fourth century, namely, that the work of the commentator and exegete too, just like that of the prophet (biblical author) himself, is in essence a revelatory, prophetic activity (Lössl 2007:8).

Although, as mentioned earlier, Origen wanted to align himself with the orthodox faith of the Church, he also aimed at penetrating this faith intellectually and grasping the core of the philosophical (or 'scientific') teaching contained in the biblical text, which he believed existed (Fürst 2011:25–8). This endeavour to create a systematic Christian philosophy, or *scientia*, from the commentarial exegesis of the books of the Bible reflects the higher educational context of Origen's work. In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (prol. 3) Origen refers to the three wisdom books ascribed to Solomon, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, and the *Song of Songs*, as works pertaining to the three main philosophical disciplines: ethics, physics, and 'epoptics' (= introspection, leading to knowledge of God and the soul). This division of philosophy could be traced back to the early Academy. In Origen's view Solomon's works preceded that period. Solomon's wisdom, therefore, at least converged with Platonic philosophy, if it was not its outright source. This was not mere apologetics. The biblical texts were older than those of Greek philosophy; they did address fundamental cosmological and anthropological questions; and they therefore could be legitimately scrutinized as to their congruence with 'the book of nature' itself, that is, with empirical science, along the lines of the standard scientific methodology of the time, that of the philosophical commentators (Fürst 2011:29–32; Fowden 2014:127–63).

The full potential of this approach was realized only much later, in the work of the sixth-century Alexandrian philosophical and biblical commentator John Philoponus. In his commentary on the *Hexaemeron*, traditionally known under the title *De opificio mundi*, he follows the scheme of his teacher Ammonius (mentioned above). At the same time he subjects the biblical text to the most detailed philological scrutiny possible,

comparing the Septuagint throughout with the three other main translations by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, a technique which Origen had pioneered in his *Hexapla*. The cosmological account of the Bible, the narrative of God's six-day work (*Hexaemeron*), according to Philoponus, was key to understanding both God and nature. His commentary therefore was a work of both theology and cosmology. For him, no other authority stood between the biblical text and nature itself. Thus, uniquely in Late Antiquity, Philoponus was able to question the Aristotelian scientific paradigm in some significant details—unthinkable for his pagan as well as for most of his Christian contemporaries!—and thus to anticipate Galileo by more than a thousand years (Sorabji 2010; Scholten 1996:6–8; Pollmann 2009:265–7).

Philoponus was of course an exception. No direct lines lead from him to Galileo. Nevertheless, the development of the philosophical and biblical commentary from Origen onwards did contribute to the progress of learning and scholarship across a range of disciplines in Late Antiquity, above all philology, history and chronology, and biblical topography. The oeuvre in which this becomes first manifest is that of Eusebius of Caesarea, indirectly a pupil of Origen, who lived two generations after him, around the turn of the fourth century. Eusebius is best known for his *Ecclesiastical History* and his *Chronicon* (Grafton and Williams 2006) but he also wrote tools for biblical exegesis, for example the *Onomasticon*, a list of biblical names and places, and commentaries, for example on the Psalms and on Isaiah (Hollerich 1999). But while many biblical commentators in the fourth and fifth centuries were influenced by Origen, the high standards set by the Alexandrian in the third century regarding the writing of biblical commentaries were rarely emulated and hardly ever surpassed. While authors such as Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, or Gregory of Nyssa were brilliant exegetes in their own ways, they were not, in the strict sense of the word, 'commentators'.

## AFTER ORIGEN: THE EMERGENCE OF AN ANTIOCHENE TRADITION

---

The fourth century, however, did see the emergence of a new tradition of biblical commentary writing, namely the so-called Antiochene tradition, with commentators such as Diodore of Tarsus, Apollinaris of Laodicea, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrus. The point of departure was the same as for the Alexandrian commentary, namely the study of grammar and rhetoric (Schäublin 1974; Neuschäfer 1987). The movement radiated from the city of Antioch and reached far into the Latin and Syriac worlds (Schor 2011; Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:325–6). Some Antiochenes were extraordinarily well educated. Diodore, for example, studied philosophy and rhetoric in Athens (Julian, *ep.* 55), Theodore was a pupil of Libanius (Sozomen, *h.e.* 8.2), Apollinaris came from a family of grammarians who were equally renowned among pagans and Christians (Kaster 1997:73 with note 174) and able to combine pagan

and Christian learning in a way that was similar to Origen a century earlier. Only the aspect of speculative philosophy, what Origen had called 'epoptics', was viewed with suspicion by Antiochene commentators. Instead they focused on the historical sense of Scripture (*ἱστορία*), coherence of narrative and argument (*ἀκολουθία*, *consequentia*), and on the idea of an inner vision (*θεωρία*), an ultimate intuitive meaning inherent in the biblical texts. This was in line with their emphasis on the principle of interpreting Scripture with Scripture (adopted from Homeric scholarship; cf. Schäublin 1977). More even than Alexandrian commentators they consequently aimed at writing commentaries on all biblical books, something which Diodore seems to have almost achieved (Abramowski 1960). In line with their comparatively conservative philological approach, Antiochene commentators kept to the paraphrase and questions-and-answers format instead of writing lemma commentaries, and they restricted themselves to discussing the Greek text of the OT without attempting to engage in Hebrew biblical scholarship (despite their proximity to an emerging Syriac literary culture). They were cognizant, however, that they were dealing with a translation from a Semitic language.

The Antiochene commentators, as the preface to a fifth-century Latin commentary, Julian of Aeclanum's *Commentary on the Prophets* (Lössl 2007:10–11), attests, were held in high regard for keeping close to the historical sense of Scripture, against Origen, whose allegories, later emulated by Jerome of Stridon, were rejected as long-winded and confusing: '... vel per allegorias Origenis vel per fabulosas Iudaeorum traditiones tota eius defluxit oratio', Julian writes about Jerome's exegesis (ed. De Coninck and D'Hont 1977:116, lines 52–3). In contrast, Theodore of Mopsuestia is praised for his *historiae fides*, *concininitas* and *consequentia*, or coherence (Lössl 2001a:164–6). But not all Antiochenes were as rabidly anti-allegorist as Diodore and Theodore, who lived in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Theodoret, for example, who flourished around the middle of the fifth century, tried to moderate Diodore's and Theodore's 'historicism' and offered some figurative exegesis as well, at least in some of his exegetical works, for example his commentary on the Psalms (O'Keefe 2000). Some modern exegetes were impressed by Diodore's and Theodore's anti-allegorism, which seemed to bear similarities to modern-day historical criticism (Bultmann [1912] 1984). But, as John O'Keefe has suggested, it may have been more a 'backward-looking project that failed' rather than 'a forward-looking project that was suppressed' (O'Keefe 2000:83).

Another Antiochene exegete mentioned in the preface of Julian's commentary is John Chrysostom. But his credentials as a commentator Julian calls in doubt because, as he writes, he chose *exhortatio* over *explanatio* (De Coninck and D'Hont 1977:53), sermon over commentary. This observation has been verified by modern scholarship, which points to Chrysostom's homiletic and 'eclectic' approach, for example in his *Commentary on Job* (Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:315), but also in his massive exegetical work on the Pauline epistles (Mitchell 2000). His technique in this regard is reminiscent of that of Philo, mentioned earlier, and in some respects also of that of his champion Paul of Tarsus himself (Sterling 1997:321–3). But for a fifth-century commentator such

as Julian of Aeclanum, Chrysostom's diatribes seem no longer to have fulfilled the expectations of biblical commentary-writing.

Of course, Julian's own commentary represents a later development of abridged commentaries, summarizing topics from earlier, in part much longer commentaries, like those written by Jerome. In the light of this, Julian's criticism of Jerome may not be entirely justified, because Jerome's purpose, which was similar to Origen's, was to provide as many different interpretations of a lemma as possible, while Julian aimed at drafting only a single, unified, account, which was coherent and compelling. Also, Jerome did not just try to emulate Origen (and other Alexandrians, such as Didymus the Blind); he was also influenced by Antiochene exegesis. For example, he counted Apollinaris among his personal teachers (Jerome, *ep.* 84.3.1; *Ruf.* 1.13) and he could himself be deeply critical of allegorical interpretation, as in his *Commentary on Jeremiah*, his last great biblical commentary, which dates from c.415 (Lössl 2007:11).

## THE EMERGENCE OF A LATIN TRADITION

---

Jerome represents the peak of a more than century-long development of Latin biblical commentary. Just like the Greek commentary, the Latin commentary had originated from the context of the teaching of grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy. It is not entirely correct to say that unlike in the Greek East, 'schools' played no role in its development (against Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:316). The situation is slightly more complex. Obviously, we do not know of any Christian schools of grammar and rhetoric in the Latin world. But the concept of a Christian school is also problematic for the Greek East, as is attested by Origen in a letter cited in Eusebius, *h. e.* 6.19.13–14, in which he justifies himself for his practice of continuing to teach philosophy in the ('Christian') school of Alexandria (Fürst 2007:62–3). And the learning and teaching environment of Antiochenes such as Diodore, Theodore, and Apollinaris was, as we saw earlier, certainly not exclusively Christian. In the Greek East as well as in the Latin West, therefore, the study of pagan grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy played an important role in the development of the biblical commentary.

But there are other aspects to consider for the Latin situation: Latin only emerged as an ecclesiastical language in the late second and early third century. Latin Christian authors such as Tertullian and Cyprian in the early and mid-third century were already aware of developments in Greek biblical scholarship, but there was at that early stage no equivalent Latin development. Translation of the Bible into Latin and formation of a Latin biblical canon lagged behind. Interestingly, the same was true of philosophy. The study of philosophy remained bilingual, Greek and Latin, into the fourth century. It was only then that the first philosophical commentaries in Latin appeared, such as Calcidius' commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, or that of Marius Victorinus on Cicero's *Topics*. Just like the philosophical commentary, therefore, the Latin biblical commentary had two possible sources

at its disposal. It could either adapt Greek (i.e. Alexandrian or, later, Antiochene) models, or it could resort to its own tradition of grammatical and rhetorical scholarship and philosophical enquiry. And there are examples for both possibilities.

The earliest extant Latin biblical commentary, Victorinus of Pettau's *Commentary on Revelation (Apoc.)*, dating from the turn of the fourth century, is the result of its author's engagement with Greek exegetical literature. It is only extant because Jerome re-edited it in the late fourth century. Jerome also attests to other Latin authors from the early fourth century who 'translated' or adapted Greek works (e.g. Hilary of Poitiers and Fortunatianus of Aquileia), and to other 'commentaries', most of them now lost, which these and other authors allegedly wrote (Jerome, *vir. ill.* 74, 96, 97, 100). According to Jerome, Victorinus, wrote commentaries on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Ecclesiastes, and Matthew (for the latter see Jerome, *Orig. Luc.* prol.). Hilary's work is also partially extant, most notably commentaries on Matthew and Psalms. These show influences of earlier Christian exegesis (e.g. Origen and Tertullian), as well as of pagan grammatical and rhetorical education (e.g. Cicero and Seneca). There is also competent analysis of rhetorical features in the text, such as Jesus' speeches in Matthew (Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:318).

Jerome's enthusiastic account of fourth-century Latin biblical exegesis seems in many ways exaggerated and the existence of many of the commentaries mentioned in *vir. ill.*, most of which are now lost, has been doubted. But the recent discovery by Lukas Dorfbauer (2013a; 2013b) of Fortunatianus of Aquileia's commentary on the Gospels from around the middle of the fourth century has prompted a partial revision of this view. While its simple style and commentary technique do not reach the level of Hilary's work, Fortunatianus' Gospel commentary does attest to a sustained and growing effort on the part of Christian exegetes around the middle of the fourth century to turn out a substantial body of biblical commentaries in Latin.

What could perhaps be called a quantum leap in this regard happened in Rome in the second half of the fourth century with the publication mainly of commentaries on the Pauline epistles. The most outstanding commentator in this earlier phase is Marius Victorinus, an eminent grammarian and rhetor in Rome, who became a Christian only very late in his life. His extant commentaries on Ephesians, Galatians, and Philippians draw on their author's outstanding professional skills as well as on his knowledge of Neoplatonic philosophy (Cooper 2011). Jerome, in his commentary on Galatians, written forty years later, heavily criticized Victorinus for not making more use of the Greek tradition (Cain 2011), but this criticism only underlines what was mentioned earlier, namely, that the Latin tradition too was originally heavily reliant on pagan scholarship (Lunn-Rockliffe 2011). As Andrew Cain has noted, it also shows how, in the course of the later fourth century, the Latin tradition could not only build on the earlier Greek biblical commentary tradition, it could now also refer back to itself: 'Between the early or middle 360s and c.409, there appeared no less than 52 Pauline commentaries in Latin by six different authors' (Cain 2011:91).

Before moving on to the conclusion, I turn to two authors of overwhelming importance: Jerome of Stridon and Augustine of Hippo.

## JEROME, AUGUSTINE, AND BEYOND

Jerome began translating works of Origen and writing biblical commentaries in the early 380s; Augustine's first attempts at commentary writing (on Genesis and on the Pauline epistles) fall in the late 380s. For both authors their pagan education was crucial for their formation as commentators. Jerome had studied grammar under Donatus in Rome, a fact to which he may have sometimes alluded (*ep.* 57.12: *ergo frustra tanto tempore studuimus...?*). He was one of few biblical commentators who actually reflected on the literary genre and function of the commentary in biblical exegesis, and he developed the concept of biblical scholarship as a discipline (*ep.* 56.6: *Scripturarum ars*). Heavily dependent on Origen—some modern scholars even seem to suggest plagiarism in this regard (Heine 2002)—he aimed at a commentarial treatment of the whole Bible and included in many of his commentaries the study of earlier Christian biblical scholarship (in Greek and Latin) as well as Hebrew (Jewish) scholarship. His later critics (such as Julian of Aelclanum, the author of the *Commentary on the Prophets*) may have accused him of becoming obscure and incoherent by compiling the allegories of Origen alongside the fables of the Jews. But Julian's work also shows that Jerome's commentaries offered a rich treasure trove of information which could be extracted and summarized into pastorally more useful, abridged commentaries. In fact, already Jerome himself had claimed ulterior usefulness at least for some of his commentaries. His commentary on Galatians, for example, is framed 'as a piece of consolatory exegesis' (Cain 2011:103) dedicated to Marcella.

Augustine's educational background is dominated more than Jerome's by rhetoric and philosophy. Therefore, in his commentaries his 'strength, unlike Jerome's, does not lie in a close philological reading of the text. He often relies on the conclusions of others, and uses scriptural interpretation to prove or illustrate a preoccupying point of interest, be it the refutation of a heresy, the demonstration of a spiritual Christian life, or a historical-philosophical point' (Pollmann 2009:263). Another important aspect in Augustine's life was his temporary adherence to Manichaeism. It was in connection with the latter that Augustine first embarked on the exegesis of Genesis and, a few years later, of the Pauline epistles. Augustine's first exegetical work is a commentary on Genesis against the Manichaeans (*Gen. Man.*). Divided into two books, it was written between 388 and 390. Book 1 is a lemma commentary, whereas in Book 2 he copies out the entire biblical text in a block and follows it with commentary, which consequently displays some characteristics of a paraphrase commentary. *Gen. Man.* also includes a list of Manichaean and orthodox doctrines, and interspersed questions indicate that the work may have been used in a catechetical context (Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:322). Augustine returned to Genesis in Books 11 to 13 of his *Confessions* and in two further commentaries, the first brief and unfinished (*Gen. imp.*), the second a monument of twelve books (*Gen. litt.*), written between 401 and 415. In *Gen. Man.* and *Conf.* 11–13 he emphasizes the allegorical meanings of the biblical creation account, whereas the stress in *Gen. imp.* and *Gen. litt.* is also on the need to read it literally. With this latter concern he anticipated in many ways John Philoponus' approach as well as modern scientific approaches to cosmology (Starnes 1990).

Augustine's *Expositio Psalmorum* (Augustine, *ep.* 149.5), since Erasmus known as *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, is a collection, compiled over twenty-five years, of interpretations of Psalms. Although many of them follow the lemma format, most are predominantly paraenetic rather than philological in character. The same applies to the commentaries (*tractatus*) on John's Gospel, which originated during the same time (Fladerer and Börner-Klein 2006:324). Augustine's urge to write commentaries on the Pauline epistles was originally motivated, as were his commentaries on the book of Genesis, by his ongoing engagement with Manichaeism, but in the case of the Pauline epistles his theological interest in certain contents of the letters could not be contained by the commentary format. Only his commentary on Galatians turned out to be state-of-the-art in the sense that it tried to deal systematically with introductory questions about the title, scope, structure, main themes, etc., of the treatise (Plumer 2003). It was one of many such commentaries produced by Augustine during that period (Cain 2011:91). His commenting on Romans first took the form of 'various questions' on individual verses (*Expositio quarundam propositionum in epistula ad Romanos*). A second attempt at a 'grand scale' commentary remained pathetically incomplete (*Epistulae ad Romanos inchoata expositio*). In the end his discussion of Pauline themes was woven into the fabric of his enormous output on the Pelagian controversy, none of which was in the strict sense of the word a 'commentary'.

In a similar way as John Chrysostom in the East, Augustine was thus not strictly a 'state-of-the-art' commentator himself (such as, for example, Diodore of Tarsus in the East or Jerome in the West). His interest in biblical books and themes extended more to homiletic, epistolary, and discursive (e.g. polemical or apologetic) genres. However, alongside Jerome his influence on the further development of the biblical commentary in the West can hardly be overestimated (Stegmüller 1950–80).

## CONCLUSION

---

With its emergence from Hellenistic literary culture, early Christian biblical exegesis from its beginnings in the second century developed exegetical techniques which produced commentary-like results such as *hypomnemata* and *scholia*. Theological interests such as controversial opinions about the timing and nature of Christ's second coming accelerated this development in the area of apocalyptic writings (e.g. Daniel, Revelation). But it was left to Origen in the first half of the third century to propose a systematic approach to biblical commentary writing according to grammatical and rhetorical standards and for the entire biblical canon, and it was he who first tried to put this theory into practice.

In the fourth century, Antiochene exegetes such as Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia proposed a similar project in their own right, albeit rejecting the Alexandrian predilection for allegory, while in the Latin West Jerome took up the Origenian legacy and proposed the practice of biblical scholarship as an academic discipline (*ars*).

The monumental dimension of some of Jerome's commentaries subsequently led to the production of abridged versions with more focused and coherent forms of argument for greater pastoral use.

Fundamental questions of Christian doctrine closely connected to biblical texts, such as the creation account in the book of Genesis, led to strings of commentaries by authors such as Origen, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, John Philoponus, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and George the Arab. The scientific standards of these commentaries established a paradigm that lasted until the beginning of the early modern period.

At the same time, the work of pastorally oriented church fathers such as Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, and Augustine also shows that the scholarly biblical commentary, as Origen had proposed and as, for example, Jerome had attempted to emulate, was not the only, and not even the most important or most frequent form through which biblical exegesis was spread among Christians.

As we move through the Late Antique period, the exegetical teachings of the Greek fathers began to be collected in florilegia and catenae, 'chains' of exegeses gathered together from different authors and attached—often anonymously—as glosses to the relevant Bible verses (Harnack 1893:835–42; see also Layton's chapter in the present volume). In the Latin West catenae were less important and a prolific commentary tradition, strongly influenced by the work of Augustine and Jerome, was predominant throughout the Middle Ages (Stegmüller 1950–80). Thus the early Christian biblical commentary had come a long way from its apparently pathetic origins once mocked by Lucian of Samosata.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Julian of Aeclanum, *Commentarius in prophetas minores*. Latin text: L. De Coninck and M.-J. D'Hont (eds), *Iulianus Aeclanensis Tractatus prophetarum Osee Iohel Amos*, CCL 88 (Leiden: Brill, 1977).
- Origen, *Commentarii in Johannem*. Eng. trans.: R. E. Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John Books 1–10* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989).
- Victorinus of Pettau, *Commentarii in Apocalypsim Ioannem*. Latin text and French trans.: M. Dulaey (ed.), *Sur l'Apocalypse*, SC 423 (Paris: Cerf, 1997).

### Scholarship

- Abramowski, L. (1960). 'Diodore de Tarse', *DHGE* 14: 496–504.
- Assmann, J. (1995). 'Einleitung', in J. Assmann and B. Gladigow, *Text und Kommentar* (Munich: Fink, 1995), 9–33.
- Bultmann, R. [1912] (1984). *Die Exegese des Theodor von Mopsuestia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).

- Cain, A. (2011). 'Jerome's Pauline Commentaries between East and West: Tradition and Innovation in the Commentary on Galatians', in J. Lössl and J. W. Watt (eds), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad* (Farnham: Ashgate), 91–110.
- Cooper, S. (2011). 'Philosophical Exegesis in Marius Victorinus' Commentaries on Paul', in J. Lössl and J. W. Watt (eds), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad* (Farnham: Ashgate), 67–89.
- Dickey, E. (2007). *Ancient Greek Scholarship: A Guide to Finding, Reading, and Understanding Scholia, Commentaries, Lexica, and Grammatical Treatises* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Dorfbauer, L. (2013a). 'Der Evangelienkommentar des Bischofs Fortunatian von Aquileia (Mitte des 4. Jh.): Ein Neufund auf dem Gebiet der patristischen Literatur', *Wiener Studien* 126: 177–98.
- Dorfbauer, L. (2013b). 'Zur Biographie des Bischofs Fortunatian von Aquileia', *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 17: 395–423.
- Field, F. (1875). *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt: Veterum interpretum graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta* (Oxford: Clarendon).
- Fladerer, L., and Börner-Klein, D. (2006). 'Kommentar', *RAC* 21: 274–329.
- Fowden, G. (2014). *Before and after Muhammad: The First Millennium Refocused* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Fürst, A. (2007). *Christentum als Intellektuellen-Religion: Die Anfänge des Christentums in Alexandria* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk).
- Fürst, A. (2011). 'Origen: Exegesis and Philosophy in Early Christian Alexandria', in J. Lössl and J. W. Watt (eds), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad* (Farnham: Ashgate), 13–32.
- Grafton, A., and Williams, M. (2006). *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Grant, R. (1993). *Heresy and Criticism: The Search for Authenticity in Early Christian Literature* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press).
- Hadot, I. (1987). 'Les Introductions aux commentaires exégétiques chez les auteurs néoplatoniciens et les auteurs chrétiens', in M. Tardieu (ed.), *Les Règles de l'interprétation* (Paris: Cerf), 99–122.
- Hadot, I. (2002). 'Der fortlaufende philosophische Kommentar', in W. Geerlings and C. Schulze (eds), *Der Kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter: Beiträge zu seiner Erforschung* (Leiden: Brill), 183–99.
- Hanson, R. P. C. (2002). *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture*. 2nd edn (London: SCM Press).
- Harnack, A. (1893). *Geschichte der altchristlichen Litteratur* 1.2 (Leipzig: Hinrichs).
- Heine, R. E. (2002). *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Heine, R. E. (2010). *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Hollerich, M. J. (1999). *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the Age of Constantine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Honigman, S. (2003). *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (London: Routledge).
- Kaster, R. A. (1997). *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Lössl, J. (2001a). *Julian von Aeclanum: Studien zu seinem Leben, seinem Werk, seiner Lehre und ihrer Überlieferung* (Leiden: Brill).

- Lössl, J. (2007). 'Poets, Prophets, Critics, and Exegetes in Classical and Biblical Antiquity and Early Christianity', *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 1: 1–16.
- Lössl, J. (2009). 'Apocalypse? No. The Power of Millennialism and its Transformation in Late Antique Christianity', in A. Cain and N. Lenski (eds), *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Farnham: Ashgate), 31–44.
- Lunn-Rockliffe, S. (2011). 'Prologue Topics and Translation Problems in Latin Commentaries on Paul', in J. Lössl and J. W. Watt (eds), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad* (Farnham: Ashgate), 33–47.
- Luppe, W. (2002). 'Σχόλια, ὑπομνήματα und ὑποθέσεις zu griechischen Dramen auf Papyri', in W. Geerlings and C. Schulze (eds), *Der Kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter: Beiträge zu seiner Erforschung* (Leiden: Brill), 55–78.
- Mansfeld, J. (1994). *Prolegomena: Questions to be Settled before the Study of an Author or a Text* (Leiden: Brill).
- Markschies, C. (1999). 'Origenes und die Kommentierung des paulinischen Römerbriefs', in G. W. Most (ed.), *Commentaries-Kommentare* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht), 66–94.
- Markschies, C. (2003). 'The Canon of the New Testament in Antiquity: Some New Horizons for Future Research', in M. Finkelberg and G. G. Stroumsa (eds), *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill).
- Martens, P. W. (2012). *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Mitchell, M. M. (2000). *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Neuschäfer, B. (1987). *Origenes als Philologe*. 2 vols (Basel: Schwabe).
- Niehoff, M. R. (2011). *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- O'Keefe, J. J. (2000). "'A Letter that Killeth": Toward a Reassessment of Antiochene Exegesis, or Diodore, Theodore and Theodoret on the Psalms', *J ECS* 8: 83–103.
- Pfeiffer, R. (1968). *History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon).
- Plumer, E. (2003). *Augustine's Commentary on Galatians: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Pollmann, C. (2009). 'Exegesis without End: Forms, Methods and Functions of Biblical Commentaries', in P. Rousseau (ed.), *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (London: Blackwell), 258–69.
- Runia, D. T. (1993). *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis: Fortress).
- Schäublin, C. (1974). *Untersuchungen zu Methode und Herkunft der antiochenischen Exegese* (Köln-Bonn: Hanstein).
- Schäublin, C. (1977). 'Homerum ex Homero', *Museum Helveticum* 34: 221–7.
- Scholten, C. (1996). *Antike Naturphilosophie und christliche Kosmologie in der Schrift De opificio mundi des Johannes Philoponos* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter).
- Schor, A. M. (2011). *Theodoret's People: Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Sharples, R. W. (1987). 'Alexander of Aphrodisias: Scholasticism and Innovation', *ANRW* II.36.2: 1176–243.
- Skeb, M. (2007). *Exegese und Lebensform: Die Proömien der antiken griechischen Bibelkommentare* (Leiden: Brill).

- Sorabji, R. (2010). 'Introduction', in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, 2nd edn (London: Institute of Classical Studies), 1–41.
- Starnes, C. E. (1990). 'Augustinian Biblical Exegesis and the Origins of Modern Science', in J. C. Schnaubelt (ed.), *Augustine: Second Founder of the Faith* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang), 345–55.
- Stegmüller, F. (1950–80). *Repertorium Biblicum Medii Aevi I–XI* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas).
- Sterling, G. E. (1997). 'Hellenistic Philosophy and the New Testament', in S. Porter (ed.), *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill), 313–58.
- Van den Hoek, A. (1992). 'Origen and the Intellectual Heritage of Alexandria: Continuity or Disjunction?', in R. J. Daly (ed.), *Origeniana Quinta* (Leuven: Peeters), 40–50.
- Vinzent, M. (2014). *Marcion and the Dating of the Synoptic Gospels* (Leuven: Peeters).

### Suggested Reading

- Adamson, P., Baltussen, H., and Stone, M. W. F. (2004) (eds). *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries*, 2 vols (London: Institute of Classical Studies).
- Geerlings, W., and Schulze, C. (2002) (eds). *Der Kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter: Beiträge zu seiner Erforschung* (Leiden: Brill).
- Goulet-Cazé, M.-O. (2000) (ed.). *Le Commentaire entre tradition et innovation: Actes du colloque international de l'institut des traditions textuelles (Paris et Villejuif, 22–25 septembre 1999)* (Paris: Vrin).
- Lössl, J. (2001b). 'Julian von Aeclanum's Tractatus in Osee, Iohel, Amos', *Augustiniana* 52: 5–31.
- Lössl, J., and Watt, J. W. (2011) (eds). *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad* (Farnham: Ashgate).
- Most, G. W. (1999) (ed.). *Commentaries-Kommentare* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht).

## CHAPTER 10

---

# SCHOLIA

---

ERIC SCHERBENSKE

## INTRODUCTION

---

SCHOLIA are notes. The simplicity of this definition belies a term fraught with polyvalence and imprecision resulting from varying usage by various fields of enquiry. Such diverse definitions of scholia have resulted from an emphasis on diverse characteristics such as form, content, physical transmission, as well as traditional definitions based on ancient or Byzantine deployment (Dickey 2007:11–12). But simply put, *scholion* (pl. *scholia*) is the diminutive of *schole*, ‘learned discussion’ or ‘lecture’, and predicated on brevity its most fundamental meaning is ‘interpretation, comment’ or ‘lecture note’ (s.vv. σχολή and σχολίον in LSJ). Unsurprisingly, early references to this term reflect this understanding (Cicero, *Att.* 16.7.3). While no necessary connection of scholia to marginal placement initially existed, this definition based on the physical place of classical scholia transmitted in Byzantine manuscripts has come to predominate. Nevertheless, such marginal placement was not inherent to its meaning; rather, it fortuitously and secondarily resulted from a fundamental feature of scholia—brevity.

Because of the legacy of traditional references to scholia in classical scholarship, this usage must be understood and a clear definition of what is meant by scholia here must be established before describing early Christian scholia. This definition is based on the use and description of select scholia by early Christian writers (such as Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius, Jerome, and Evagrius): scholia are short exegetical notes (usually on passages of Scripture), either composed as an isolated treatise or deployed in the margins of a manuscript. These characteristics are neither prescriptive, nor necessarily exclusive; alternating between formal and physical criteria this definition pays deference to the original meaning of scholia, while acknowledging and attending to later developments and traditions based on their physical transmission. Between the poles of this definition based on formal content, on the one hand, and material transmission on the other, is much room for diversity based on form, genre, content, and placement. But this definition should help to distinguish scholia from related works of exegesis such as commentaries

(hypomnemata) or catenae, as well as exegetical techniques often found in scholia such as paraphrase or question and answer.

## CLASSICAL SCHOLIA

---

Early Christian use of scholia cannot be described adequately without a cursory knowledge of the history of scholarship on the term by classicists. Yet even among classicists, considerable disagreement and imprecision about this term remains: these result primarily from divergent usage by scholars and continuing disagreement over the origin of collections of marginal scholia. A fundamental feature of such scholia is their expansive scope: scholia are not simply haphazard or occasional notes supplied in the margins of manuscripts by readers or owners, which are, of course, very common; they represent extensive, sometimes full, commentaries collected and arrayed in the margins of the text with significant planning and execution (Montana 2011:105–10; Zetzel 1975:20–1).

For classicists, scholia primarily designate exegetical notes collected and excerpted from earlier commentaries before being compiled in the margins of manuscripts of the texts upon which they commented. Such scholia have been preserved alongside their texts in Byzantine manuscripts. Largely representative are the Byzantine Homeric scholia, which are the end product of a process of selection, excerption, transmission, and collection of comments culled from commentaries on Homer. This process of selection and collection began already by the first century BCE with the production of commentaries that drew on previous exegetical works. These later commentaries were themselves then excerpted, recombined, and marginally redeployed alongside the respective text; this process happened at various points and has been variously dated from the fourth to the tenth century. The case of Didymus (*c.* first century BCE) is illustrative: his commentary, which preserved numerous earlier exegetical works from scholars associated with the library of Alexandria, was excerpted and recombined with three other commentaries (which also represented the selection and collection of earlier works) probably sometime in Late Antiquity, perhaps the fourth century; this earlier source, designated VMK for the four commentaries that it preserves (i.e. Viermännerkommentar), was in turn used in a Byzantine collection designated A scholia for the tenth-century manuscript of Homer where it is preserved, Venetus A. These scholia marginally preserved alongside the physical text in Byzantine manuscripts thus represent a complex process of compilation and transmission.

Because classical scholia were compiled from earlier commentaries (or from selections and subsequent collections), they preserve excerpts of lost exegetical works and offer valuable evidence for the practice of ancient interpretation—features often found, not coincidentally, in early Christian scholia. Much of what is known about the editorial practice of the scholars at the library of Alexandria comes from scholia (Dickey 2007:1–17). The scholia also abound with references to issues addressed by ancient literary and textual critics (Nünlist 2011:8–17). Because the text supplied the referent for comment, these scholia often include lemmata. These lemmata were also sometimes destabilized by the

introduction and discussion of textual variants, which frequently dealt with interpretative problems and solutions; the latter in turn reveal a persistent interest in the ancient critique or defence of Homer and his importance for education. Owing to the introductory issues addressed (e.g. glosses and paraphrase), these scholia occasionally evince a pedagogical quality (Nünlist 2011:13–16).

The chronology of this process by which notes were selected, excerpted, and collected from earlier exegetical works before being recombined alongside the text as marginal scholia remains a matter of much disagreement and significantly touches on evidence from early and late ancient Christianity. Until the mid-twentieth century the scholarly consensus was indebted to Günter Zuntz, who argued that scholia (i.e. extensively compiled commentaries marginally accompanying the text) were first fashioned in Byzantine times, sometime after the ninth century, by ‘humanistically minded ecclesiastics, on the model of the theological *catenae marginales* with which they were familiar’ (1965:275). Alongside the importance of ecclesiastical *catenae* as a paradigm for imitation, Zuntz based his hypothesis on the development of minuscule script necessary for the placement of entire (or entire compilations of) commentaries in the margins of manuscripts. This reconstruction held sway until Nigel Wilson (1967) reopened the debate with an influential article that questioned Zuntz’s presuppositions and conclusions: he argued rather that the collection, compilation, and marginal deployment of scholia began in Late Antiquity and then culminated in the ninth century, whence most classical examples of scholia descend because of the transition to minuscule script. His reconstruction depended on (1) a heavily annotated sixth/seventh-century papyrus of Callimachus, (2) codicological considerations, (3) citation practices in scholia, and (4) the analogue of biblical *catena*, in particular its traditional invention by Procopius of Gaza (c.475–c.538). Wilson’s argument has become increasingly accepted by scholars and further developed by James Zetzel (1975) and Kathleen McNamee (1995; 1998); the latter in particular has offered further evidence for the early appearance of marginal scholia in Late Antiquity (as early as the fifth century) by drawing attention to the physical layout and apparent collection and juxtaposition of multiple authorities on legal issues preserved in documentary juristic papyri. Though McNamee’s reconstruction has not received unanimous support (Montana 2011), her attention to the physical aspects and possible pedagogical and administrative impetus of this transition has much to commend it.

This overview of classical scholia is not purely academic, but illustrates the interconnection of scholarship on classical and ecclesiastical sources. Historical reconstructions of the development of classical scholia depend on arguments for the correlative development and deployment of ecclesiastical *catenae*. McNamee (1998:285–7) especially stresses the arbitrariness of segregating ecclesiastical from legal and imperial scholia, when by the fifth century virtually all officials received similar educations and often moved freely between these various arenas. Indeed, after the rise of an imperially sponsored Church the preservation and transmission of classical texts was primarily undertaken by ecclesiastical individuals and institutions; and it bears emphasizing that neither these later innovations nor earlier composition and deployment of scholia were developed in isolation from their surroundings.

## EARLY CHRISTIAN SCHOLIA

---

### Exegetical Scholia

This discussion of early Christian scholia utilized as exegetical notes begins with Evagrius Ponticus, who (1) used scholia extensively in commenting on the Scriptures, (2) discussed the fundamental criterion of scholia, and (3) addressed many representative issues also addressed by other early Christian writers. Evagrius may be one of the latest writers surveyed here, but his collections of scriptural notes, explicitly composed as scholia, are especially important because they have been preserved and transmitted intact down to the present. Still extant are his scholia on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, and Job; and he may have also composed scholia to the Song of Songs which have not survived (Konstantinovsky 2009:24–5).

Evagrius's forty-second scholion to Ecclesiastes broaches many fundamental issues for understanding scholia, addressing, in particular, the brief scope of this exegetical form. In discussing Ecclesiastes 5.17–19, where Qoheleth offers his philosophical meditations on the goodness of bodily pleasures and acceptance of one's lot amidst life's vanity, Evagrius refocuses the referents of God's gifts (food, drink, satisfaction, portion, wealth, etc.) from the physical to the spiritual realm: 'the knowledge of God is said to be the food and drink of the mind, and the goodness and portion, and wealth and essence and happiness and distraction of God, his light and life and gift. And the Holy Spirit gives many other names to knowledge, which are impossible to catalogue here without compromising the limits of scholia' (*schol.* 42). The most important thing to observe here is Evagrius' awareness of and adherence to the formal constraints of his chosen exegetical genre. Because scholia are marked by brevity, Evagrius refrains from listing the various terms that can be predicated on knowledge and thus demonstrates in passing this form's defining feature. Evagrius' scholia also abound with their characteristic features: e.g. designations of alternative lemmata or interpretations and instructions for the reader to note something particularly significant (ed. Géhin 1987:13–22; 1993:12–16).

Equally noteworthy is what constitutes Evagrian exegesis in this scholion. He simply reframes the scriptural passage by shifting and slightly redefining the referents; the physical goodness of bodily pleasures of food and drink in Ecclesiastes 5.18 have now become noetic and lead one to a contemplation of God's beneficence. By engaging in a slight paraphrase Evagrius redirects the focus of Ecclesiastes to a psychogogic telos in keeping with his own mystical catechesis (ed. Géhin 1993:16–27). Evagrius thus incorporates and subsumes the exegetical form of paraphrase under the rubric of scholia. Evagrius frequently utilizes other (often somewhat distinct) exegetical formats in his scholia: the editor of these scholia, Paul Géhin, notes that alongside such paraphrase, Evagrius also utilizes question and answer (*erotapokriseis*), syllogisms, and essentially rewrites Scripture in the manner of a Targum (1993:14–16). Evagrius does not systematically go through the scriptural text verse by verse, but deals with the text selectively,

sometimes covering multiple verses in a single note (e.g. scholion 42) or returning to one word previously discussed, as he does in the following note on Ecclesiastes 5.19 (ed. Géhin 1993:13): ‘the distraction of God is knowledge of the truth which separates the purified soul from perceptible things’ (*schol.* 45).

Scholia provided a useful vehicle for deploying all manner of exegetical resources in a concise manner. The appearance of features typical for introductory works (e.g. question and answer, paraphrase) may suggest a pedagogic role for scholia (Sluiter 2000:190–1). In fact, Evagrius’ use of scholia for Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Job, and perhaps Song of Songs may not be accidental in that all but Job were expressly earmarked for instruction—though not for the same levels (Mansfeld 1994:10–19). But this observation should not obscure the fact that scholars utilized this genre as well. This point is aptly illustrated by the possible sources and subsequent transmission of Evagrius’ scholia. In his edition of Evagrius’ scholia on Proverbs, Géhin informs us that an eleventh-century manuscript containing Evagrian scholia appears to transmit evidence of use (and incorporation) of a previous set of scholia on the Hexaplaric text possibly prepared by Origen (ed. Géhin 1987:55–62, 82). Not only did Evagrius freely incorporate and note earlier exegetical material (as was common for his age), his own works of scholia have been excerpted, repurposed, and preserved primarily in catena manuscripts—though unabridged, unexcerpted, and unalloyed scholia have been preserved and testify to their original composition as isolated treatises (ed. Géhin 1987:55–65).

Evagrius’ contemporary, Epiphanius, also preserves evidence for the use of scholia, though his usage is less exegetical and more in line with the more fundamental meaning of scholia as notes. In his refutation of Marcion and his ‘heretical’ scriptures in the *Panarion*, Epiphanius appears to make extensive use of a notebook that he had previously composed in which he had compiled a series of notes and refutations grouped under rubrics, the remnants of which can still be seen in this later composition (Schmid 1995:169–71). This example from his discussion of Marcion’s text of 1 Corinthians 6.16 is typical: ‘Scholion 6 and 14: “Do you not know that the one joined with a prostitute is one body? For, they say, the two will become one flesh.” Refutation 6 and 14: If the law is not true, why do the honest receive testimony from the law? Of whom the apostle Paul, the holy one of God, is one, who took this testimony along with many others for the plain proof of truth and message of the good God’ (*haer.* 42.12.3 ref. 14). Elsewhere about Romans 8.4 Epiphanius writes, ‘Scholion 6 and 33: “so that righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” Refutation 6 and 33: If the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the apostles and us, how do you, Marcion, dare to say the law is alien from the apostles of God, righteous in accordance with the fulfilment of the law’ (*haer.* 42.12.3 ref. 33). Here scholia are simply noteworthy passages that Epiphanius has collected for refutation. While Epiphanius occasionally includes more than simply the reading from Marcion’s scriptures, his scholia do not exceed their limits as brief notes that highlight problem passages for later discussion.

A discussion of early Christian scholia would not be complete without mentioning Origen’s use of this form. Evidence transmitted in a variety of sources from patristic testimony to catenae and marginalia testify to Origen’s use of scholia primarily as exegetical

notes; these scholia were also sometimes deployed marginally by later writers, and perhaps even by Origen himself.

Our primary source of information about Origen's scholia comes from Jerome, who describes them in a manner that resonates with Epiphanius' scholia utilized to identify and record briefly a particular passage of Scripture for further comment in a more detailed composition; unfortunately, Jerome's inconsistent discussions also introduce some problems. Twice Jerome references works by Origen that he calls *excerpta*, which provide a brief interpretation of Scripture and apparently ought to be translated as 'notes'. In the preface to his translation of Origen's *Homilies on Ezekiel*, Jerome reports that 'Origen's works on all scripture are threefold: notes (*excerpta*) are his first work, which they call in Greek scholia, in which those that seemed obscure and to have something of difficulty to him, he touched on briefly and superficially; the second category is homiletic, about which his interpretation is at hand; the third, which he himself entitled tomes, we can call volumes' (*praef. Orig. Ez. hom.* 1). According to Jerome's definition, *excerpta* (1) are distinguished from homilies and volumes of commentaries, (2) represent a sort of provisional interpretation on select and difficult passages (rather than a systematic exegesis), and (3) are the Latin equivalent of scholia. But elsewhere Jerome's description of Origen's *excerpta* renders the Greek term *sêmeiôseis*. This other term for Origen's exegetical notes has also been transmitted in the *Philocalia* (Origen, *philoc.* 27.10). Despite problems in reconciling various descriptions of Origen's oeuvre, it seems certain that Origen utilized short exegetical writings as a first order of interpretation, whether designated scholia or *sêmeiôsies* (Nautin 1977:225–46). All told there is evidence for scholia by Origen on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes (Nautin 1977:245–50).

The ambivalent patristic testimony is corroborated by an important reference to Origen's *Scholia on Genesis* in Codex von der Goltz, a tenth-century manuscript from Mt Athos (Lavra 184 B. 64, also known by its Gregory-Aland number, 1739), descended from a fourth-/fifth-century archetype (ed. Lake 1932:143–5). Among the numerous exegetical and textual notes preserved in this manuscript is the following note to Hebrews 11.5: 'in the *Scholia on Genesis* he says expressly: "the apostle says 'death did not find him'", but "death does not find him" is not found here. But perhaps the depth of his understanding, not apprehended by anyone, "was not found"—for "the spiritual is judged by no one"—as with respect to his *hegemonikon* that he transferred to God's perfection' (ed. Lake 1932:218). If, as stated, this marginal note accurately preserves an Origenian scholion on Genesis 5.24, it corresponds fairly well to Jerome's characterization; Origen's observation of a stumbling block in the scriptural text occasions a very brief explanation. The initial format of Origen's scholia remains uncertain: while the descriptions appear to indicate that, like Evagrius' scholia, they were originally composed as stand-alone scholia, evidence from later compilations and manuscript colophons suggests that if Origen did not himself compose or arrange his scholia as marginal comments, this reallocation occurred very soon after Origen's lifetime. This scholion may then exemplify the transition from scholia as an isolated exegetical genre to scholia repurposed in margins of manuscripts.

## Marginal Scholia

The brevity of scholia may have facilitated their deployment into the margins of manuscripts, but the marginal preservation of extremely long notes, not to mention entire commentaries, confirms that, as noted, there was no necessary connection between exegetical scholia and marginal placement. Nevertheless, the margins of early and late ancient Christian manuscripts were utilized for transmitting exegetical and textual notes somewhat as we find in later Byzantine manuscripts of classical authors—at least in practice, if not in scope. Particularly important is evidence related to Origen's *Hexapla* and the late fourth-/early fifth-century archetype of Codex von der Goltz, which perhaps not coincidentally also displays Origen prominently.

Among the witnesses to Origen's *Hexapla* are numerous colophons that provide evidence for the marginal deployment of scholia. This practice is usually associated with Origen's Caesarean heirs, Pamphilus and Eusebius, who preserved, defended, and appear to have promulgated Origen's legacy. But Origen himself may have engaged in a similar practice; a colophon to Ezekiel in Codex Marchalianus intimates that Origen may have supplied marginal scholia to the *Hexapla*: 'Transcribed from the *Hexapla* according to the editions and corrected from the *Tetrapla* of Origen himself, which also contained corrections in his own hand and for which he composed notes (ἐσχολιουργήητο), whence I, Eusebius, supplied as scholia. Pamphilus and Eusebius corrected' (Nautin 1977:323). Despite the apparent corroboration of marginal arrangement of scholia, this passage is not without ambiguity. While it seems relatively certain that Eusebius juxtaposed Origen's notes as scholia in this copy, it is not clear if they came from the margins of the *Hexapla* where Origen placed them or from a companion piece on the *Hexapla* that Origen composed. While some of the notes in Codex Marchalianus came from an onomastikon prepared by Origen and many simply consist of variant readings keyed to the Hexaplaric translations, these notations were not confined to Origen's *Hexapla* but also drew on his commentaries (Klostermann 1903). Furthermore, a fundamental problem concerns the word ἐσχολιουργήητο translated as 'composed notes' and which underscores the inherent problems of classifying scholia. Based on subsequent usage in Byzantine times we are accustomed to interpret and translate this term with reference to marginal scholia; but, as John Lundon (1997) has elucidated, such terms have no necessary connection to marginal placement. While it could mean 'composed notes' without reference to marginal placement, the notes in this manuscript seem to imply brief annotations subsequently transmitted by Eusebius.

Other colophons that transmit testimony about the *Hexapla* equivocate about the presence of scholia. A manuscript containing a Syriac translation of Proverbs apparently corroborates a marginal deployment of scholia in Hexaplaric manuscripts, claiming to have been transcribed and collated from 'a copy in which scholia were supplied and written in the margins in the hand of Pamphilus and Eusebius' (Mercati 1941:43–4). At the end of 2 Esdras and Esther in Codex Siniaticus (2009), however, we find references to Pamphilus' and Eusebius' transcription, correction, and transmission of Origen's *Hexapla*, but no mention of scholia.

Although satisfying answers to the problems raised by references to Origen's scholia in Hexaplaric manuscripts are not readily apparent, it seems relatively clear that some of these manuscripts appear to have been supplied with marginal comments soon after his initial publication of the *Hexapla*. If this process cannot be traced back to Origen (and there is no firm and unambiguous evidence to do so), at least by the beginning to mid-fourth century exegetical scholia (most likely Origen's) were being repurposed paratextually alongside his Hexaplaric text of the Septuagint. Additionally, this activity was specifically linked to Pamphilus and, especially, Eusebius. Despite many unresolved problems, these colophons still provide ample evidence for the marginal distribution of scholia in Hexaplaric manuscripts.

This overview concludes with a brief discussion of a similar marginal deployment of scholia in Codex von der Goltz. But first one clarification is necessary: while early Christian manuscripts may not have been devoid of writing, most of what is extant corresponds simply to glosses, short textual notes, or other markings distinct from scholia as defined here. Yet many notes found in this manuscript could be classified similarly. The vast majority merely note variant textual readings: e.g. along the margins of Philemon 12 the scholiast notes that 'similarly he [i.e. Origen] also makes no mention of "welcome"' (ed. Lake 1932:219). Sometimes, however, the boundary between such a note and a scholion is imperceptible. At Romans 5.17 and 7.4 the following respective notes are found: (1) 'so also in the third volume of the *Stromateis* he makes mention of this lemma; and my old copy has it thus, but erased. A certain faint trace gave a hint of the erased lemma, on account of which we were persuaded after reading the *Stromateis*'; (2) 'Scholion of the Holy Basil: although the law commands to avenge those striking or treating unjustly, according to the gospel, by patiently bearing the previous beating and confiscation of his tunic, he [i.e. Jesus] died to the law and perished. Indeed, the law cursed him. But by offering his cloak and turning the other cheek he walks in the newness of life' (ed. Lake 1932:200–1). While the latter is explicitly labelled a scholion, it is scarcely longer than the former, thus revealing a certain arbitrariness and imprecision in our definitions and ancient descriptions. What is noteworthy in the scholion to 5.17 is that a problem on the scriptural text has inspired the composition and deployment of this scholion; furthermore, this problem is addressed by excerpting and redeploying previous exegetical works, thus utilizing a method similar, in practice if not in scope, to the tralatitious compilation of later catenae or Byzantine scholia of classical authors.

The transmission of earlier exegetical traditions as marginal scholia in Codex von der Goltz anticipate, mirror, and provide the elements of more extensive, catena compilations. The aforementioned references to the scholion of Basil at Romans 7.4 or those of Origen at Hebrews 11.5 provide evidence for the marginal placement of scholia in NT manuscripts by the late fourth-/early fifth-century archetype of Codex von der Goltz, a placement that complements that on Hexaplaric texts and antedates Procopius of Gaza, the traditionally identified originator of catenae. Numerous comments described as scholia in this manuscript have even been found in a catena manuscript connected to the transmission of Codex von der Goltz's archetype (Bammel 1992). Sometimes these scholia are anonymous in Codex von der Goltz, but attributed to Origen in the catenae; other times scholia are

erased in this manuscript, but attributed to Origen in the catenae (Bammel 1992:139–40). Such examples illustrate that, like classical scholia (Zetzel 2005:6, 78–88, 102–3, 148–9), Christian scholia (whether codified in catenae or earlier tradents) evince a profound malleability when their marginal deployment and subsequent transmission can be traced.

## CONCLUSION

---

This cursory overview has shown that early Christians primarily utilized scholia as a succinct exegetical genre, either as preliminary notes to be expanded upon in more fully developed exegesis or as short interpretations on select passages of Scripture. The writers surveyed here may reflect this primary meaning, but there is also evidence that quite early (if not with Origen, then with his successors Pamphilus and Eusebius) scholia began to be placed in the margins of scriptural manuscripts. It should, however, be stressed that this marginal deployment (1) fortuitously resulted from scholia's brevity, not any necessary connection to their marginal placement, and (2) was not limited to exegetical scholia, but could encompass all manner of writings that sometimes only came to be labelled scholia subsequently. The preserved evidence also indicates that this marginal deployment anticipated, but did not yet approach, the extensive compilation or allocation of later catena or classical scholia.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- Codex Marchalianus (Rahlfs Q). Facsimile edition: I. Cozza-Luzi (ed.), *Prophetarum codex Graecus Vaticanus 2125 vetustate: varietate lectionum, notationibus unicus aequae et insignis phototypice* (Rome, 1890). Commentary: A. Ceriani, *De Codice Marchaliano seu Vaticano Graeco 2125 Prophetarum phototypica arte repraesentato commentatio* (Rome, 1890).
- Codex Sinaiticus (Gregory-Aland ⲛ). Online edition: The British Library, National Library of Russia, St. Catherine's Monastery, and Leipzig University Library. *Codex Sinaiticus*. Last Modified 2009. <<http://codexsinaiticus.org>>.
- Codex von der Goltz (Mt Athos Lavra B. 64, Gregory-Aland 1739). Editio princeps: E. F. von der Goltz (ed.), *Eine textkritische Arbeit des zehnten bzw. sechsten Jahrhunderts herausgegeben nach einem Kodex des Athosklosters Lawra* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899). Updated edition: 'Codex 1739', in K. Lake et al. (eds), *Six Collations of New Testament Manuscripts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932).
- Epiphanius, *Panarion*. Greek text: K. Holl and J. Dummer (eds), GCS 25 31<sup>2</sup> 37<sup>2</sup> (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1915, 1980, 1985). Eng. trans.: F. Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2009).
- Evagrius, *Scholia in Ecclesiastem*. Greek text: P. Géhin (ed.), *Évagre le Pontique, Scholies a L'Écclésiaste*, SC 397 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1993).

- Evagrius, *Scholia in Proverbia*. Greek text: P. Géhin (ed.), *Évagre le Pontique, Scholies aux Proverbes*, SC 340 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987).
- Jerome, *Praefatio ad Homilias in Ezechielem*. Latin text: M. Borret (ed.), *Homélies sur Ézéchiel*, SC 352 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1989). Eng. trans.: T. Scheck, *Origen: Homilies on Ezekiel*, ACW 62 (New York: Paulist Press, 2010).

## Scholarship

- Bammel, C. P. (1992). 'A New Witness in the Scholia from Origen in the Codex von der Goltz', in R. Daly (ed.), *Origeniana Quinta* (Leuven: Peeters), 137–41.
- Dickey, E. (2007). *Ancient Greek Scholarship: A Guide to Finding, Reading, and Understanding Scholia, Commentaries, Lexica, and Grammatical Treatises, from their Beginnings to the Byzantine Period* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Klostermann, E. (1903). 'Onomasticum Marchalianum', *ZAW* 23: 135–40.
- Konstantinovskiy, J. (2009). *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic* (Farnham: Ashgate).
- Lundon, J. (1997). 'Σχόλια: una questione non marginale', in *Discentibus Obvius: Omaggio degli allievi a Domenico Magnino* (Como: New Press), 73–86.
- McNamee, K. (1995). 'Missing Links in the Development of Scholia', *GRBS* 36 (4): 399–414.
- McNamee, K. (1998). 'Another Chapter in the History of Scholia', *CQ NS* 48: 269–88.
- Mansfeld, J. (1994). *Prolegomena: Questions to be Settled before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden: E. J. Brill).
- Mercati, G. (1941). *Nuove note di letteratura biblica e cristiana antica* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana).
- Montana, F. (2011). 'The Making of Greek Scholiastic Corpora', in F. Montanari et al. (eds), *From Scholars to Scholia: Chapters in the History of Ancient Greek Scholarship* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 105–62.
- Nautin, P. (1977). *Origène: Sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris: Beauchesne).
- Nünlist, R. (2011). *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Schmid, U. (1995). *Marcion und sein Apostolos: Rekonstruktion und historische Einordnung der marcionitischen Paulusbriefausgabe* (Berlin: De Gruyter).
- Sluiter, I. (2000). 'The Dialectics of Genre: Some Aspects of Secondary Literature and Genre in Antiquity', in D. Obbink et al. (eds), *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons, and Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 183–204.
- Wilson, N. G. (1967). 'A Chapter in the History of Scholia', *CQ* 17: 244–56.
- Zetzel, J. E. G. (1975). 'On the History of Latin Scholia', *HSCP* 79: 335–54.
- Zetzel, J. E. G. (2005). *Marginal Scholarship and Textual Deviance: The Commentum Cornuti and the Early Scholia on Persius* (London: Institute of Classical Studies).
- Zuntz, G. (1965). *An Inquiry into the Transmission of the Plays of Euripides* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

## Suggested Reading

- Balthasar, H. U. von (1939). 'Die *Hiera* des Evagrius Pontikus', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 63: 86–106, 181–206.

- Birdsall, J. N. (1975). 'The Text and Scholia of the Codex von der Goltz and its Allies, and their Bearing upon the Texts of the Works of Origen, especially the Commentary on Romans,' in H. Crouzel et al. (eds), *Origeniana* (Bari: Università di Bari), 215–21.
- McNamee, K. (2007). *Annotations in Greek and Latin Texts from Egypt* (Oxford: Oxbow Books for the American Society of Papyrology).
- Tzamalikos, P. (2013). *An Ancient Commentary on the Book of Revelation: A Critical Edition of the Scholia in Apocalypsin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

## CHAPTER 11

---

# QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

---

LORENZO PERRONE

### EXEGETICAL METHOD AND LITERARY GENRE: SOME PRELIMINARIES

---

IN the history of the early Christian interpretation of the Bible, the ‘questions and responses’ point to an exegetical method and to a literary genre, both of them having more or less definite characteristics. The genre, first attested in Eusebius of Caesarea, develops relatively late within the patristic literature of Late Antiquity, though it has considerable predecessors in the classical Greek and Latin literatures as well as in Jewish Antiquity (see Gudeman 1927 and Dörrie 1966). These antecedents determined to a large extent the particular physiognomy that questions and responses would assume among Christian authors when dealing with the Bible. As a ‘method’ of treating the text of the Scriptures, the ‘question-and-response’ format essentially goes back to the literary criticism of the Homeric poems as presented paradigmatically in Aristotle’s *Poetics* (chap. 25). Subsequently, its application was promoted by the grammarians of Alexandria, who provided the most influential model of the philological and exegetical approach to texts for Graeco-Roman Antiquity as well as for early Christianity (see Slater 1982 and Neuschäfer 1987).

Before discussing the history of the method and the genre of *quaestiones et responsiones* in early Christian literature, I would like to broach a few preliminaries. First, the parameters of the genre are not always clear. On the one hand, it is not exclusively an ‘exegetical genre’, inasmuch as the same pattern also applies to very different matters in patristic and Byzantine writings, as was already the case in the ancient classical literatures. On the other hand, the exegetical genre of *quaestiones* has porous borders, due to its contacts with the *scholia* and *catenae*. Occasionally the short comments contained in the

*scholia* originated from the ‘question-and-answer’ format in a more or less explicit form (see Heinrici 1906 and 1909). Similar affinities are likely to be detected also with regard to the exegetical ‘florilegia’ that are drawn from the biblical catenae. Even biblical ‘riddles’, as we know especially from the Syriac or the medieval Latin and Byzantine literatures, can display analogies with the proper genre of the questions and responses on Scripture. The solving of riddles was among the most challenging and admired tasks of the ancient grammarians (Slater 1982:338). And even a relatively fluid genre like the letter often proposes and resolves questions of biblical interpretation, giving way to exegetical and/or theological treatises of different length and depth.

Further preliminaries have to do with the aims of the genre and its audience. How did questions and responses on the Bible differ from commentaries, homilies, and *scholia*? There cannot be a single answer, although generally speaking both the method and the genre imply primarily a teaching activity more than a spiritual or pastoral orientation. But ‘teaching’ supported by questions and answers can unfold with a whole range of different modalities, going from a more sophisticated application, as in Platonic dialogues, to literary products of a simply catechetical nature addressing uneducated people. Moreover, the questions and responses on the Bible mirror critiques of the Scriptures by pagan intellectuals (for instance, Celsus, Porphyry, or Julian the Emperor) and also by ‘heretics’; but such polemical and apologetic contexts are far from being the main contributing factor to the development of the genre (see, however, de Labriolle 1950:487–508; Rinaldi 1989 and 2012). Though it is not possible to deny its importance, we should give precedence to the simple fact that early Christians had real questions about the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

How did early Christian authors regard the literature of *quaestiones et responsiones*? Jerome, who contributed to the genre, seems to subsume the questions into *scholia* or ‘excerpts’, inasmuch as he defines them as brief comments on ‘obscure or difficult’ passages, without evoking any polemical intention (Jerome, *Praef. in Orig., Hom. in Ezech.*, ranking *scholia* first as an exegetical genre before homilies and commentaries). Possidius lists Augustine’s writings in this genre not among his polemical works but among those ‘that are useful to all those who are engaged in learning (*studiosi*)’ (Possidius, *Indiculus* 10; Perrone 1996:13). In the sixth century, Cassiodorus, in his influential handbook for study of the Bible, introduces the writings of questions as the final step in an itinerary of progressive education from ‘introductory literature’, to commentaries, to *quaestiones* on obscure passages of the Scripture, the difficulties of which demand to be treated by ‘catholic teachers’ (*catholici magistri*). Thus Cassiodorus reunites both the didactic and apologetic (or polemical) components, and indicates the importance of *quaestiones et responsiones* for assuring accurate biblical interpretation and concomitant Christian doctrine (Cassiodorus, *inst.* 1.10.3; Perrone 1991:488–9).

<sup>1</sup> Origen’s newly discovered *1st Homily on Psalm 77* offers a striking witness on how Christians should read the Bible by raising ‘problems from its beginnings’ (cf. Ps 77.2b). See §6: Perrone (2015:362–3).

What was the particular value of the exegetical method adopted in the treatment of *quaestiones*? Does the examination of difficult passages in Scripture avoid, as a rule, the ‘easy way’ of allegorical interpretation, preferring a literal explanation, or does it still allow for allegory? Generally, the responses to the ‘questions’ were held to be those that relied primarily on the letter, since it raised the problem in the first place. Thus a methodological affinity seems to have existed with the exegetical tradition of Antioch (Schäublin 1974). Yet the method is not tied to literalism, as proved already by Philo’s *Questions on Genesis and Exodus*, an archetype of the Christian literature of *quaestiones et responsiones*. Nevertheless, the *Questions on the Gospel* of Eusebius of Caesarea, the true ‘prototype’ of the genre for Christian authors, is concerned with finding out a literal solution to problems. Yet even within the Antiochene or Syriac tradition we find authors who are more accommodating of allegory (Haar Romeny 2004:158). Even the *Instituta regularia divinae legis* of Junillus, a biblical handbook written in the middle of the sixth century and with ties to Antiochene exegesis (Martens and Bass 2016), recognizes the necessity of interpreting the Wisdom books allegorically.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE ‘QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES’ ON THE BIBLE IN PATRISTIC LITERATURE

---

### Greek Questions and Responses

Specific works of ‘questions’ first occur with the development of biblical criticism in the second century. The *Antitheses* of Marcion can be viewed as a source of exegetical problems, due to the contrast he drew between the Hebrew Bible and the NT ‘canon’ (comprising for him only the letters of Paul and the Gospel of Luke). But the *Problemata* of Tatian, a disciple of Justin, constituted a closer antecedent for the genre. According to Eusebius of Caesarea, however, this work merely consisted of ‘questions’, whereas Tatian’s disciple Rhodo planned to work out their ‘solutions’. Tatian, apparently generalizing an approach that was already known among the Christian readers of the Bible, ‘undertook to set out what was unclear and hidden in the divine Scriptures’ (Eusebius of Caesarea, *h.e.* 5.13.8). Subsequent interpreters often raised the same questions as their forebears, such that some questions became more or less conventional.

If Tatian and Rhodo remind us of the tradition of Alexandrian philologists who searched for ‘aporias’ and ‘solutions’ respectively (Gudeman 1927:2517–18; Jacob 2004:51–2), when we turn to Origen we discover an author who engaged in both tasks. Through him we come to appreciate also the heritage of Philo of Alexandria. Our immediate impression is that Philo’s *Questions on Genesis and Exodus* is not a direct antecedent of the corresponding Christian writings. Philo offers here a continuous commentary on the biblical text, even if one can detect hidden or implicit questions behind the lemmata that he

explains. Philo is more interested in the exegetical task than in polemics or apologetics. Furthermore, he does not provide an aporetic treatment of the ‘problems’ (ζητήματα), and the uniform development of the solutions makes them resemble *scholia*. However, according to a different evaluation that takes into account the rest of his writings, Philo’s interpretation of the Bible is structurally connected with the identification of questions and the effort to respond to them. He apparently also addressed problems that figure in the later rabbinic sources, though he responded to them in a different way (van der Horst 2004).

The classical and Hellenistic-Jewish background, including a wide reading of Philo, deeply influenced Origen’s exegesis with its constant exploitation of the method of ‘question and response’ (Neuschäfer 1987:340–2; Perrone 1995). The Alexandrian philological heritage led him to employ the zetetic method in dealing with obscure or difficult passages in the Bible. His adherence to the topics of *problemata* as defined by Aristotle’s *Poetics*—the textual *loci* perceived as ‘impossible’, ‘irrational’, ‘absurd’, or ‘indecent’—comes regularly to the fore across his exegetical works (see *princ.* 4.1). For example, he applies the method in his short ‘treatise on free will’ (*princ.* 3.1). Here Origen discusses Exodus’ story of the ‘hardening of Pharaoh’s heart’—in the subsequent period a recurring issue among the biblical *problemata*—together with a series of scriptural passages from the OT and NT, all viewed likewise as aporias (Perrone 1992). The treatise *On Prayer* develops his complex discourse on the necessity and utility of prayer in response to a much debated philosophical ‘question’ that culminated in the second century with the fifth *Dissertation* of the sophist Maximus of Tyre (‘Should one pray?’). Origen therein weaves disputed passages from Scripture (problematized by Marcionism and Valentinian Gnosticism) together with the philosophers’ traditional interrogations on determinism and free will (*or.* 5–7). Origen allows for multiple answers to a given problem, especially in commentaries where he anticipates an ‘active reader’ who is willing to interact with the interpreter.

As far as the literary genre is concerned, the first Christian writing of *quaestiones et responsiones* in the proper sense is the *Questions and Responses on the Gospels* by Eusebius of Caesarea. The first part of the work mainly discusses problems of the Gospel genealogies, while the second and shorter part deals with problems in the resurrection narratives (see Johnson 1989; Perrone 1990; Zamagni 2008). With his *Gospel Questions* Eusebius situates himself in the wake of Origen, though he normally adopts a literal interpretation instead of resorting to allegory. Like his predecessor he carefully develops problems and offers a plurality of responses, yet not without a personal appreciation of their distinct merit. Eusebius uses texts of previous authors like Ignatius of Antioch, Julius Africanus, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Dionysius of Alexandria. The recourse to these authorities reflected an ‘encyclopedic’ trend suitable to the teaching aim of the genre.

Eusebius inspired similar writings in the fourth century, starting with Acacius of Caesarea, his disciple and episcopal successor. We know Acacius also as the author of a work of *Miscellaneous Questions* (in six books, according to Jerome, *vir. ill.* 98). The title suggests contact with a homonymous writing of Porphyry, but in fact the genre of ‘miscellaneous problems’ was quite widespread in ancient Greek and Latin literature

and philosophy. Unfortunately, we only have access to the original work in fragmentary form (see Devreesse 1959:105–22; Jerome, *ep.* 119). The scant evidence suggests that Acacius exploited the format of the genre on a larger scale than Eusebius by putting together problems taken from the *Octateuch* and from the Pauline epistles. Acacius' treatise certainly reveals the persistence of the rhetorical-dialectical method of question and response. Acacius is interested in solving textual problems and in explaining the 'obscurity' of certain biblical passages, such as the two variants of 1 Corinthians 15:51, a problem debated by many other exegetes during the fourth century.

A rich terminology of question and response also marks the literary remains of Eusebius of Emesa, a Syrian sharing the biblical interests of Eusebius and Acacius of Caesarea, and the author of a *Commentary on the Octateuch*. Once again the textual transmission in Greek, preserved by the *catenae* on the *Octateuch*, is very scarce and so it is not easy to establish the nature of the work. The *catenae* also transmit a work attributed to Diodore of Tarsus that was organized by question and answer (Bardy 1932:342; Perrone 1996:29–30; Haar Romeny 2004:150). If Diodore wrote a *Commentary on the Octateuch*, he must have 'contaminated' the genre of the commentary with that of questions and responses by a selective exegesis that examined the *problemata* raised either by adversaries or by the author himself. In addition, a comparison with the fragments attributed to Diodore in the *catenae* on Romans tends to confirm the different nature of the *Commentary on the Octateuch* as a 'questions-and-answers commentary' (Devreesse 1959:155–67; Perrone 1996:30–1).

Interestingly, Theodoret of Cyrus, the principal Greek witness to our genre in the first half of the fifth century, produces works of questions largely concerning the same biblical books already dealt with by his predecessors, as in his *Questions on the Octateuch* and *Questions on the Books of Kingdoms and Chronicles* (see ed. Petruccione and Hill 2007; Fernández Marcos and Busto Saiz 1984). Whereas the former appears complete, the latter was unfinished. In the section devoted to Chronicles the surviving text resembles *scholia*, presumably as a preparatory draft for a proper work of questions (see Guinot 2013; Bardy 1933:220, 224). Theodoret's main audience for these works was clerics seeking deeper biblical education. His concern was to make the text of Scripture accessible to them, with occasional recourse to typology and more rarely allegory (Petruccione 2013; ed. Petruccione and Hill 2007:li).

Between the second half of the fourth century and the first half of the fifth there are some writings of questions falsely attributed to Justin Martyr: *Questions and Responses to the Orthodox*, *Questions of the Christians to the Greeks*, and *Questions of the Greeks to the Christians*. As the titles indicate, their purpose is apologetic and theological in nature, rather than exegetical. The *Questions and Responses to the Orthodox* betrays a substantial continuity with the method of the question as practiced by Origen and Eusebius (Papadogiannakis 2008 and 2013). It should probably be dated between the councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), and Theodoret could be a good candidate for the authorship (Toth 2014:596). Subsequent to these works, the best-known example of miscellaneous questions is the *Erotapokriseis* of Pseudo-Caesarius in the sixth century. This collection deals with a wide variety of themes: in addition to the examination of

biblical passages and controversial dogmatic issues (with questions on Christology and Trinity), this author also addresses problems regarding the cosmos in reply to the cosmological views of the Greek philosophers (Papadogiannakis 2011:33). Pseudo-Caesarius' *Erotapokriseis* is to be seen in the context of the 'conversational writings' of Greek and Latin Antiquity and as a contributor to the encyclopedic tendencies of the period.

To conclude this short historical sketch of Greek patristic and Byzantine literature we should mention Maximus the Confessor (c.580–662). From the literary point of view, his works show contacts with the exegetical *scholia* as well as the theological aporias debated in that period. Maximus' writings that pertain directly to this genre include the *Questions and Responses for Thalassius* and the *Questions and Uncertainties*. The first, written in the years 633–4, deal with sixty-five problems, most on ambiguous biblical passages, for which the addressee expected an anagogical interpretation (ed. Laga and Steel 1980, 1990, and ed. Declerck 1982; van Deun 2015:276). The same can be said of the *Questions and Uncertainties* (before 633) addressing a greater number of questions, again mainly on scriptural matters. The background for these works is once more the experience of readers who encountered difficulties when reading the Bible. However, we have to think more specifically of a monastic readership, to which Maximus proposes an exegesis attentive both to the great heritage of Origen and to the needs of an ascetical life. As such, the questions of Maximus fuse the exegetical genre of the questions with the monastic *Erotapokriseis*, whose best-known example is the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza (first half of the sixth century) (Blowers 1991:28–36, 52–73). The questions and answers of the two Gazan monks is primarily an epistolary exchange with a view to spiritual direction.

## Latin Questions and Responses

In Latin Christian literature the questions and answers are essentially characterized by their biblical contents, even if the genre may occasionally include philosophical and theological problems, or even questions of a pastoral nature, as we observe in Ambrosiaster. This unknown author of a miscellaneous work called *Questions on the Old and the New Testament* deals predominantly with biblical subjects (see Bardy 1932:343–56). Jerome was acquainted with some of the questions examined by Ambrosiaster, some discussing traditional problems of biblical interpretation, such as 'the most famous question' (*famosissima quaestio*) on Melchizedek or that on Jacob and Esau. Pope Damasus himself took over a series of Ambrosiaster's questions and submitted them to Jerome (cf. *epp.* 73 and 146 with Ambrosiaster, *qu. test.* 109 and 101). Damasus and Jerome reflect the wish to satisfy the 'curiosity' (*curiositas*) of a new biblical culture. In his interpretation of Scripture, Ambrosiaster proceeds like the grammarian of the classics pointing to the necessity of attentively reading (*lectio*) the text as a prerequisite for solving problems.

The continuity with the classical paradigm of the *quaestio* as a philological-critical exercise is even more perceptible in Jerome, although his only work named after the

genre, the *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, has been considered a commentary on Genesis in the form of *scholia*. Jerome also contributed to the genre through his letter writing, so that in his case the letter becomes a ‘subgenre’ of the *quaestiones*. The *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* was written in 391, at the beginning of Jerome’s stay in Bethlehem, when he was working on the translation of the Bible. It aimed to oppose the *Hebraica veritas* to the Septuagint. Though the format does not look traditional, we can detect ‘hidden questions’, conforming with pagan literary criticism or with rabbinical exegesis, and can locate it within the tradition of the Hellenistic approach with its appreciation of the aporetic element (see Kamesar 1993). Though absent of explicit questions, the *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* reveals the didactic aspects of both the method and the genre. Similar concerns mark the numerous pieces in Jerome’s correspondence that have to do with our genre. Already during his Roman period (382–5) he acted as a ‘biblical grammarian’ by explaining, for instance, Hebrew expressions to his correspondents. Later on Jerome used letters to convey the results of his exegesis, as in *Epistle* 106 on the Psalter and its textual corruptions in the Septuagint (according to Bardy 1932:362, this letter is fictitious together with *epp.* 120–1). Even if some addressees were invented, Jerome’s recourse to the practice of questions responds to the cultural expectations of a Christian elite engaged in discovering the spiritual and cultural value of the Bible. Not incidentally, he encourages some of his closest friends and disciples to devote themselves to this same practice (see *epp.* 108, 126, 127). Jerome answers longstanding questions anew, as in *Epistle* 120, where he takes inspiration from Eusebius of Caesarea in addressing traditional aporias on the resurrection narratives. *Epistles* 119 and 121, both dealing with Pauline questions, largely profit from previous interpreters like Acacius of Caesarea and Origen.

Augustine is arguably the one Latin Christian author who most profited from the method and the genre of the questions and responses. We have more than a dozen writings, throughout his long literary activity, that could be attributed to our genre, though their individual profiles are different and not always conforming with the more common traits of the genre. Some of them, like the *Exposition on Certain Questions in the Letter to the Romans* or the *Questions on the Gospels*, are closer to commentaries or *scholia* (see Bardy 1932:515–37; Teske 2004). Furthermore, Augustine, like Jerome, discussed problems in several of his letters. Augustine’s questions largely address problems of biblical interpretation that he formulated himself or, more frequently, received from others (e.g. *On Eighty-Three Different Questions*). The people questioning Augustine were monks, but also members of the clergy and educated laymen, both Christians and pagans.

Also of interest are Augustine’s *Questions on Heptateuch*, written in the year 419 together with the *Locutions from the Heptateuch*. At that time he was in Carthage preparing Books 15 and 16 of the *City of God*. As part of this task he went through the first seven books of the Bible and noted the questions raised in his mind by the text, even those he was not able to answer (see Carrozzi and Pollastri 1997; Pollastri 1988 and 1992). As shown both by the *Questions* and the *Locutions* on the Heptateuch, the exercise of the *quaestio* proceeded in Augustine on the basis of a literary awareness supported by the techniques of ancient grammarians. He exploits their tools to address the questions

emerging not only in a polemical or apologetic context, but more generally as a result of an intellectual *curiositas* stimulated by the exegetical task itself. Thus, not substantially unlike Origen, Augustine still proves able to share the 'zetetic' attitude by investigating a problem of biblical interpretation and providing a more or less adequate solution to it in an ongoing research process.

After Augustine we notice a growing pedagogical concern in the question-and-response literature which led to certain simplifications to promote learning. For example, in his *Instructions to Saloni*, Eucherius of Lyons omits the questions in the second book, whereas he has recourse to the spiritual interpretation more than to the literal approach that was generally preferred for solving problems (Mandolfo 1989:233; see new edition of Mandolfo 2004). The drift towards the 'catechetical' determines the literary shape of Junillus' *Instituta regularia divinae legis*, a handbook designed to introduce students to the study of Scripture. The author was an important officer at the court of Justinian in the 540s. It was long held that Junillus transmitted to Latin Christianity the exegetical tradition of the Persian school of Nisibis and should be regarded as an exponent of the ideas of Theodore of Mopsuestia. This treatise, a dialogue between a teacher and a pupil, should be situated within isagogic literature rather than the zetetic, as an expression of that 'encyclopedism' for which questions and responses provided a useful format.

## CONCLUSION: THE SACRED TEXT SUBMITTED TO QUESTION

---

To sum up, the literature of questions and responses constitutes an important chapter in the history of the patristic interpretation of the Bible. Supported by polemic-apologetic concerns as well as by catechetical interests, from the beginning the *quaestiones* situated the sacred text in a perspective different from the other exegetical genres. This literature emerged with the idea of a text liable to be questioned on account of its obscurities, difficulties, and ostensive contradictions. The exercise of question and answer proved to be a useful and often necessary tool not only for rejecting the critiques directed against the Bible, but also for reinforcing its status as an inspired text. In relation to readers, the recourse to questions gave them the opportunity (real or imagined) to express their own doubts and problems when reading Scripture. At the same time it ascribed to readers a more positive role by legitimizing their curiosity. As such, it not only encouraged an attentive reading, but occasionally invited careful readers to explore different solutions for themselves. Particularly thanks to their teaching aims, the questions and responses fostered an active learning of the contents of the Bible, going beyond a superficial, or merely passive, experience of reading.

If an 'unbridled' curiosity for what was said in and behind the scriptural text came to determine, in the course of time, the collections of *quaestiones*, we should nevertheless recognize to what extent they were able to identify the difficult passages in the Bible,

even at the risk of repeating the same interrogations. The ‘classic questions’ certainly indicate major aspects of the biblical message and its Christian reception. Not incidentally, questions tended to favour certain biblical books over others: for instance, in the OT, they mainly had to do with the first seven or eight books of the Bible, especially Genesis. They discussed far less the prophets. Similarly for the NT, the questions principally addressed the Gospels (or more precisely, the Synoptics and their relations)—as the central witness to the events of Jesus’ life—and to a lesser extent the Pauline letters. In the long run, questions and responses collected the results of previous exegetical activity on the Bible (both from earlier *quaestiones* and other exegetical genres) and presented them to varied audiences, both ecclesiastical and secular.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Eucherius of Lyons, *Formulae spiritalis intelligentiae*. Latin text: C. Mandolfo (ed.), *Eucherii Lugdunensis, Formulae spiritalis intelligentiae: Instructionum libri duo*, CCL 66 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004).
- Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones et dubia*. Greek text: J. Declerck, CCG 20 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982).
- Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium de scriptura*. Greek text: C. Laga and C. Steel (eds), *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, I–II, CCG 7, 22 (Turnhout: Brepols: 1980, 1990).
- Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*. Greek text with Eng. trans.: J. Petruccione (ed.), *Theodoret of Cyrus: The Questions on the Octateuch*, vol. 1: *On Genesis and Exodus*; vol. 2: *On Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, trans. R. C. Hill (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

### Scholarship

- Bardy, G. (1932, 1933). ‘La Littérature patristique des *Quaestiones et responsiones* sur l’Écriture sainte’, *RB* 41: 210–36, 341–69, 515–37; 42: 14–30, 211–29, 328–52.
- Blowers, P. M. (1991). *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor: An Investigation of the Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Carrozzi, L., and Pollastri, A. (1997). *Locuzioni e questioni sull’Ettateuco* (Rome: Città Nuova).
- Devreesse, R. (1959). *Les Anciens Commentateurs grecs de l’Octateuque et des Rois* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana).
- Dörrie, H. (1966). ‘Erotapokriseis. A. Nichtchristlich’, in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 6 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann: Stuttgart), 342–7.
- Fernández Marcos, N., and Busto Saiz, J. R. (1984) (eds). *Theodreti Cyrensis Quaestiones in Reges et Paralipomena* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas).
- Gudeman, A. (1927). ‘Λύσεις’, in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 13/26 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler), 2511–29.
- Guinot, J.-N. (2013). ‘Les Questions sur l’ Octateuque et les Règnes de Théodoret de Cyr: œuvre originale ou simple compilation?’, in M.-P. Bussièrès (ed.), *La Littérature des questions*

- et réponses dans l'antiquité profane et chrétienne: de l'enseignement à l'exégèse* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 176–214.
- Haar Romeny, B. Ter (2004). 'Question-and-Answer Collections in Syriac Literature', in A. E. C. Volgers and C. Zamagni (eds), *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context* (Leuven: Peeters), 145–63.
- Heinrici, G. (1906). 'Scholien, patristische, zur Bibel', in *Realencyklopädie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3rd edn (Leipzig: Hinrichs), 17:732–41.
- Heinrici, G. (1909). 'Zur patristischen Aporienliteratur', in *Abhandlungen der Philologisch-Historischen Klasse der Königlich-Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 27 (24): 841–60.
- Jacob, C. (2004). 'Questions sur les questions: Archéologie d'une pratique intellectuelle et d'une forme discursive', in A. E. C. Volgers and C. Zamagni (eds), *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context* (Leuven: Peeters), 25–54.
- Johnson, A. E. (1989). 'Rhetorical Criticism in Eusebius' *Gospel Questions*', *SP* 18: 33–9.
- Kamesar, A. (1993). *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of the Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Labriolle, P. de (1950). *La Réaction païenne: Étude sur la polémique antichrétienne du I<sup>er</sup> au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 9th edn (Paris: L'Artisan du livre).
- Mandolfo, C. (1989). 'Osservazioni sull'esegesi di Eucherio di Lione', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 6: 217–33.
- Martens, P., and Bass, A. (2016). 'Junillus Africanus' Hermeneutics', in T. Toom (ed.), *Patristic Theories of Biblical Interpretation: The Latin Fathers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 133–59.
- Neuschäfer, B. (1987). *Origenes als Philologe* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt).
- Papadogiannakis, Y. (2008). 'Defining Orthodoxy in Pseudo-Justin's *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos*', in E. Iricinschi and H. M. Zellentin (eds), *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr), 115–27.
- Papadogiannakis, Y. (2011). "'Encyclopedism" in the Byzantine Question-and-Answer Literature: The Case of Pseudo-Kaisarios', in P. van Deun and C. Macé (eds), *Encyclopaedic Trends in Byzantium?* (Leuven: Peeters), 29–40.
- Papadogiannakis, Y. (2013). 'Instruction by Question and Answer: The Case of Late Antique and Byzantine *Erotapokriseis*', in S. F. Johnson (ed.), *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity: Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate), 91–105.
- Perrone, L. (1990). 'Le *Quaestiones evangelicae* di Eusebio di Cesarea: Alle origini di un genere letterario', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 7: 417–35.
- Perrone, L. (1991). 'Sulla preistoria delle *quaestiones* nella letteratura patristica: Presupposti e sviluppi del genere letterario fino al IV secolo', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 8: 485–505.
- Perrone, L. (1992). 'La *parrhêsia* di Mosè: l'argomentazione di Origene nel Trattato sul libero arbitrio e il metodo delle *Quaestiones et responsiones*', in Lorenzo Perrone (ed.), *Il cuore indurito del Faraone: Origene e il problema del libero arbitrio* (Geneva: Marietti), 31–64.
- Perrone, L. (1995). 'Perspectives sur Origène et la littérature patristique des *quaestiones et responsiones*', in G. Dorival and A. Le Boulluc (eds), *Origeniana sexta: Origène et la Bible/Origen and the Bible* (Leuven: Peeters), 151–64.
- Perrone, L. (1996). 'Il genere delle *Quaestiones et responsiones* nella letteratura cristiana antica fino ad Agostino', in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus, De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum di Agostino d'Ippona* (Rome: Città Nuova), 11–44.
- Perrone, L. (2015) (ed.). *Die neuen Psalmenhomilien, Origenes Werke*, GCS 13 (Berlin: De Gruyter).

- Petrucione, J. F. (2013). 'The Audience of Theodore's *Questions on the Octateuch*', in M.-P. Bussi eres (ed.), *La Litt erature des questions et r ponses dans l'antiquit  profane et chr tienne: De l'enseignement   l'ex g se* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 215–39.
- Pollastri, A. (1988). 'Le *Quaestiones* di Agostino su Genesi: Struttura dell'opera e motivazioni storico-dottrinali', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 5: 57–76.
- Pollastri, A. (1992). 'Osservazioni sulla presenza del corpus paolino nelle *Quaestiones* di Agostino su Deuteronomio, Giosu  e Giudici', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 9: 425–66.
- Rinaldi, G. (1989). 'Tracce di controversie tra pagani e cristiani nella letteratura patristica delle *quaestiones et responsiones*', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 6: 99–124.
- Rinaldi, G. (2012). '*Contumeliae communes*: Circolazione di testi e argomenti nelle controversie religiose di et  romana imperiale', in A. Capone (ed.), *Lessico, argomentazioni e strutture retoriche nella polemica di et  cristiana (III–V sec.)* (Turnhout: Brepols), 3–66.
- Sch ublin, C. (1974). *Untersuchungen zu Methode und Herkunft der antiochenischen Exegese* (Cologne and Bonn: P. Hanstein).
- Slater, W. J. (1982). 'Aristophanes of Byzantium and Problem-Solving in the Museum', *CQ* 32: 336–49.
- Teske, R. J. (2004). 'Augustine of Hippo and the *Quaestiones et Responsiones* Literature', in A. E. C. Volgers and C. Zamagni (eds), *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context* (Leuven: Peeters), 127–44.
- Toth, P. (2014). 'New Questions and Old Answers: Towards a Critical Edition of the *Answers to the Orthodox* of Pseudo-Justin', *JTS* 65: 550–99.
- Van der Horst, P. (2004). 'Philo and the Rabbis on Genesis: Similar Questions, Different Answers', in A. E. C. Volgers and C. Zamagni (eds), *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context* (Leuven: Peeters), 55–70.
- Van Deun, P. (2015). 'Maximus the Confessor's Use of Literary Genres', in P. Allen and B. Neil (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 274–86.

### Suggested Reading

- Bussi eres, M.-P. (2007). 'Le Public des *Questions sur l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament* de l'Ambrosiaster', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 24: 229–47.
- Bussi eres, M.-P. (2011). 'Ambrosiaster's Method of Interpretation in the Questions on the Old and New Testament', in J. L ssl and J. W. Watt (eds), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate), 49–65.
- Bussi eres, M.-P. (2013) (ed.). *La Litt erature des questions et r ponses dans l'antiquit  profane et chr tienne: De l'enseignement   l'ex g se* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Courcelle, P. (1959). 'Critiques ex g tiques et arguments antichr tiens rapport s par Ambrosiaster', *VC* 13: 133–69.
- D rries, H. (1966). 'Erotapokriseis. B. Christlich', in *Reallexikon f r Antike und Christentum* 6 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann), 347–70.
- Heinrici, G. (1911). *Griechisch-byzantinische Gespr chs-b cher und Verwandtes aus Sammelhandschriften* (Leipzig: Teubner).
- Maas, M. (2003). *Exegesis and Empire in the Early Byzantine Mediterranean: Junillus Africanus and the Instituta regularia divinae legis* (T bingen: Mohr).

- Mara, M. G. (1993). *Agostino interprete di Paolo: Commento di alcune questione tratte dalla lettera ai Romani* (Milan: Edizioni Paoline).
- Mara, M. G. (1996). 'Il *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*', in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus, De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum di Agostino d'Ipbona* (Rome: Città Nuova), 129–49.
- Marotta Mannino, B. (1991). 'Gli *Instituta* di Giunilio: Alcuni aspetti esegetici', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 8: 405–19.
- Nikiprowetzky, V. (1977). *Le Commentaire de l'Écriture chez Philon d'Alexandrie: Son caractère et sa portée. Observations philologiques* (Leiden: Brill).
- Papadogiannakis, Y. (2013). 'Didacticism, Exegesis, and Polemics in Pseudo-Kaisarios's *Erotapokriseis*', in *Bussières* 2013:271–89.
- Perrone, L. (1994). 'Quaestiones et responsiones in Origene: Prospettive di un'analisi formale dell'argomentazione esegetico-teologica', *Cristianesimo nella storia* 15: 1–50.
- Perrone, L. (1995). 'Echi della polemica pagana sulla Bibbia negli scritti esegetici fra IV e V secolo: Le *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* dell'Ambrosiaster', in F. E. Consolino (ed.), *Pagani e cristiani da Giuliano l'Apostata al sacco di Roma* (Soveria Mannelli, Italy: Rubbettino), 149–72.
- Perrone, L. (1997). 'Questioni paoline nell'epistolario di Gerolamo', in C. Moreschini and G. Menestrina (eds), *Motivi letterari ed esegetici in Gerolamo* (Brescia: Morcelliana), 81–103.
- Perrone, L. (1999). *Der formale Aspekt der origeneischen Argumentation in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts*, in W. Bienert and U. Kühneweg (eds), *Origeniana Septima: Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Leuven: Peeters), 119–34.
- Vian, G. M. (1992). 'Le *Quaestiones* di Filonè', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 9: 365–86.
- Volgers, A. E. C. (2004). 'Ambrosiaster: Persuasive Powers in Progress', in Volgers and Zamagni 2004:99–125.
- Volgers, A. E. C. (2006). 'Damasus' Request: Why Jerome Needed to Re-Answer Ambrosiaster's Questions', *SP* 43: 531–6.
- Volgers, A. E. C., and Zamagni, C. (2004) (eds). *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context* (Leuven: Peeters).
- Zamagni, C. (2004). 'Une introduction méthodologique à la littérature patristique des questions et réponses: Le Cas d'Eusèbe de Césarée', in Volgers and Zamagni 2004:7–24.
- Zamagni, C. (2008) (ed.). *Eusèbe de Césarée: Questions évangéliques*, SC 523 (Paris: Cerf).
- Zamagni, C. (2011). 'Porphyre est-il la cible principale des "questions" chrétiennes du IV<sup>e</sup> et V<sup>e</sup> siècles?', in S. Morlet (ed.), *Le Traité de Porphyre contre les chrétiens: Un siècle de recherches, nouvelles questions* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes), 357–70.
- Zamagni, C. (2013). 'Is the Question-and-Answer Literary Genre in Early Christian Literature an Homogeneous Group?', in *Bussières* 2013:241–68.

## CHAPTER 12

---

# PARAPHRASE AND METAPHRASE

---

ANDREW FAULKNER

## INTRODUCTION

---

PARAPHRASE of Scripture is well documented in early Christian literature as a tool for biblical interpretation. Paraphrase involves the recasting of Scripture in different words, often with amplification or abbreviation of the original text. Principally, although as we will see not exclusively, early Christian paraphrase has an exegetical purpose. Early Christian paraphrase might for analysis usefully be divided into two main categories: (1) prose paraphrase of Scripture in commentaries or homilies, and (2) verse paraphrase of Scripture, which renders biblical passages in poetic language and metre. I will consider these two categories separately below, after first providing a brief overview of the broader practice of paraphrase in Graeco-Roman Antiquity and some comments on its definition.

## OVERVIEW AND DEFINITION OF PARAPHRASE IN GRAECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY

---

Paraphrase was an established educational and rhetorical exercise in Greek and Roman Antiquity. It was practised both within the school curriculum and by mature orators as a form of training that imbued and honed technical proficiency. Within these contexts, paraphrase could render either a prose or a verse original, including not only the work of others but also one's own writing. Plutarch (*Dem.* 8.2) claims that the great Athenian orator Demosthenes (fourth century BCE) paraphrased his own orations, and later rhetoricians such as Quintillian (*inst.*10.5.9) also recommended the practice. Ancient

paraphrases demonstrate different degrees of fidelity to their original. So-called 'rhetorical' paraphrastic exercises aimed to express the same idea or thought in numerous different ways (in Greek *tropoi* or *schēmata*, in Latin *modi*), or attempted to improve upon the original, according to ancient theoreticians (see Roberts 1985:21–2). In contrast, so-called 'grammatical' paraphrases were frequently quite simple affairs, whose purpose was to aid or demonstrate comprehension of the original without much deviation in word order or attempt at artistic embellishment (for the schematization of 'rhetorical' and 'grammatical' paraphrase, see Roberts 1985:37–60). The latter type is closely connected to the school curriculum, but in school exercises too we find examples of paraphrase with considerable rhetorical flourish, such as the elaborate paraphrase of the beginning of the *Iliad* in *Bodleian Greek Inscription* 3019 (see Morgan 1998:205–8). The most popular verse subjects for paraphrase in schools were Homer and Virgil, while prose subjects included oratory and fable.

The early church fathers would certainly have been familiar with the practice in schools. St Augustine in the *Confessions* (1.27) describes an *ethopoiea*, the ancient school practice of composing a speech befitting a particular mythological or historical figure, which involves paraphrase: the theme is Hera's disappointment at not being able to prevent the Trojans from entering Italy, the subject of Hera's speech at Virgil's *Aeneid* 1.37–49. Augustine specifically mentions the requirement of providing a prose version of the poet's verse: *et tale aliquid dicere solutis uerbis, quale poeta dixisset versibus* (*Conf.* 1. 17; cf. Roberts 1985:22). He informs his reader that he excelled at the endeavour, but laments his misspent youth, which he would have better passed in the study of Scripture. As I will discuss in this chapter, one motivation for the production of early Christian paraphrastic poetry may have been to provide a suitable Christian alternative to pagan texts for use in the school system.

In light of ancient practice and theory, one should be cautious of overly rigid modern categorizations of paraphrase (see Green 2006:43–7). Indeed, the variance in rhetorical flourish and fidelity to the original text results, at the extremes of liberty and creativity, in a certain difficulty in defining the boundaries of what constitutes paraphrase. It was understood in Antiquity that the reworking of older material was an element of new and independent literary works. There is some overlap with other rhetorical exercises and literary reworkings (Roberts 1985:29–36; Morgan 1998:202–3, 215). One should keep in mind also that a paraphrast might not always have had a specific text for imitation before him, but could nonetheless have produced quite faithful variations of a passage and its context from memory. The paraphrase certainly requires a greater degree of fidelity than independent literary works, and *hypotheses* tend to summarize whole works rather than specific passages, but there are no precise measurements. It is also worth emphasizing that, just as in Antiquity the designation of paraphrase was supple with respect to fidelity to the source text, so in modern scholarship the term 'paraphrase' is not applied consistently.

There is considerable overlap also between the practices of paraphrase and translation: it is generally understood that paraphrase renders a source text in a different style or dialect of the same language, for example a Greek prose version of a Greek poetic text,

while translation creates a version of the source text in a different language, for example a Latin version of the Greek NT. In practice, the two activities are often so close that one might better refer to paraphrase as ‘intralingual translation’ (Jakobson 1959). The Greek terms *metaphrasis* and *metabolē* (and their cognate verbs), which together with *paraphrasis* can be used interchangeably of paraphrase (cf. Roberts 1985:26), are also employed of interlingual translation. As in the case of paraphrase (see Quintillian, *inst.* 1.9.2), ancient authors recognized that translations could be more or less faithful to the order and expression of the source text. Cicero (*opt. gen.* 14) and Horace (*ars p.* 133) speak of slavish word-for-word (*uerbum de uerbo*) translations and more liberal literary translations that nonetheless convey the original sense (*sensus de sensu*). Within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, there were particular challenges for the translator of biblical texts, for which a style of literal word-for-word translation gained approval (Brock 1979:70). Philo of Alexandria (*Mos.* 2.38) highlights the particularly precise approach taken by the Septuagint translators of Hebrew Scripture, who are also divinely inspired in their translation, not just translators but prophets and hierophants. The second-century Aquila became well known for literal translation of Hebrew Scripture (Fernández Marco 2000:109–22). Similarly, Jerome, in a letter to Pammachius (*ep.* 57.5), reserves a more literal style of word-for-word translation for Scripture, whose word order itself he considers a mystery. Jerome is in fact not entirely consistent in this matter, elsewhere accepting a less literal translation of Scripture (see Marti 1974:73–6), but his comments nonetheless demonstrate a concern for the dangers involved in rendering Scripture more freely. For Christian authors Scripture is divinely inspired, revelation not easily re-expressed in different versions, and literal word-for-word renderings could guard against heresies.

## PROSE PARAPHRASE OF SCRIPTURE

---

The Christian practice of paraphrasing Scripture in commentaries and homilies for the purpose of biblical exegesis has a precedent in the Jewish tradition of Targumim, paraphrases of Hebrew Scripture in the vernacular (often Aramaic) that sought, frequently through expansion or addition, to explain the holy words of the Bible (see McNamara 2010). Understood inclusively as interpretative recasting of Scripture, paraphrase of the OT is in fact quite widespread in Jewish literature. It is employed with various degrees of fidelity to the scriptural source by Philo of Alexandria, for example at the outset of his allegorical commentary (*leg. all.* 1.1–30), where line-by-line quotation of Genesis 2.1–6 is interpreted through explanatory paraphrase (see Borgen 1997:125). Similarly, paraphrase of both the OT and NT is commonly used in Christian commentaries and homilies. For example, the second-century Melito of Sardis, in his metrical homily on Pascha, paraphrases the biblical story of Exodus, making use of both amplification and interpretative epithets (Exod 12.21–9; see Springer 1988:12–13).

A perspicuous example of scriptural paraphrase is provided by Gregory of Nyssa, who in his treatise *On the Inscriptions of the Psalms* speaks quite openly about his interpretative paraphrase of the beginning of Psalm 57 (58):

‘O mankind, what is it that you say and do? Do you speak of justice? Do you render your judgement with uprightness? For I indeed see that your hearts are upon the earth, and that every movement in your heart is a deed and not simply a thought. For, as soon as evil is mixed with the intellect, the deed is through the hands combined with the thoughts.’ For the sake of clarity (*safēneias*), paraphrasing a bit, I have thus set forth these words of the Psalm (57 (58) 2–3): ‘Do you then truly speak righteousness? Do you judge fairly, O sons of men? Indeed, in the heart you devise acts of lawlessness on the earth; injustice your hands braid.’ (*Pss. titt. 77*)

Gregory here stays in many respects quite close to the Septuagint text, at times using identical vocabulary. On the other hand, he both adapts and expands upon his source text, emphasizing the relationship between thought and deed. Gregory’s choice of expression ‘the movement in your heart’ (ἐγκάρδιον κίνημα) finds an echo in his *Homily on the Lord’s Prayer V* (*or. dom. 5*; ed. Callahan 1992:68), where he similarly emphasizes the connection between body and soul in sin. Gregory is explicit about his exegetical purpose, indicating that he paraphrases the original text for the sake of *safēneias* (σαφηνείας), a term which generally means ‘clarity’ or ‘lucidity’ of expression but is elsewhere in early Christian authors also used specifically of interpretation or exposition of Scripture (see Lampe s.v. σαφηνεία).

Paraphrase is nowhere else as clearly marked by the author as an exegetical rhetorical technique as it is by Gregory of Nyssa, but it is a common device throughout early Christian homilies and commentaries, including in the Latin West. In the third century CE, Gregory Thaumaturgus produced in his *Metaphrasis* in Ecclesiastes an amplified paraphrase of Ecclesiastes, in which he develops his own interpretation of the text (see Jarick 1990; Blowers 2013:207–8). A striking example in Latin is provided by the fourth-century orator Gaius Marius Victorinus, a convert to Christianity, who in his commentaries on the Pauline Epistles employs a variety of paraphrastic techniques for the purpose of exegesis. On the formal level, paraphrase in Victorinus can be, but is not always, introduced by formulas of speech (‘he said’—*dixit/inquit*); it can be syntactically connected to the quotation of the verse commented upon but is at other times syntactically separate. The most prominent variation, however, in Victorinus’ paraphrastic technique is his use of two distinct paraphrastic voices: his own voice as commentator (*ex persona Victorini*), but also the first-person singular of the Apostle Paul (*ex persona Pauli*), in some instances switching from one to the other in the same sentence, thereby mingling Victorinus’ exegetical voice with the authoritative voice of the Apostle. This exegetical paraphrastic technique, which has been linked to the practice of rhetoric in schools, is employed also in Greek by St John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia in their commentaries on Paul, as well as in the commentary on Paul ascribed (although of questionably authenticity) to St Ephrem (see Cooper 2005:101–4, with earlier bibliography).

## VERSE PARAPHRASE OF SCRIPTURE

---

In the fourth and fifth centuries CE, there emerges a tradition of paraphrasing biblical texts in verse. These paraphrases use and adapt the language and metres of prominent pagan poetry, especially the epics of Homer and Virgil, to express the Judaeo-Christian content of Scripture. In Greek, two extensive Late Antique poetic paraphrases of Scripture survive: the fifth-century hexameter paraphrase of St John's Gospel by Nonnus of Panopolis, and a hexameter paraphrase of the Psalms based on the Septuagint (the *Metaphrasis Psalmoreum*), which was in Antiquity attributed to Apollinaris of Laodicea but whose authorship is uncertain. His father, Apollinaris the Elder, is also reported by the fifth-century CE church historians Socrates and Sozomen to have rendered Scripture into tragic verse (Socrates, *h.e.* 3.16; Sozomen, *h.e.* 5.18). In Latin, prominent examples of early poetic biblical paraphrase are Juvenecus' fourth-century paraphrase of the Gospels, Paulinus of Nola's (*carm.* 7–9) paraphrase of Psalms 1, 2, and 137 (136), and his *Laus Sancti Iohannis* (*carm.* 6.1–26), based on Luke 1.

The tradition of poetic biblical paraphrase must be placed in the broader context of Christian classicizing poetry, exemplified by Gregory of Nazianzus' 17,000 extant verses on Christian themes. In his poem on his own verses (*carm.* II.1.39), Gregory gives as one of four reasons for writing classicizing Christian verses their use as an educational tool for youth, seemingly a response to the edict of Julian the Apostate in 362 forbidding Christians to teach pagan literature. Apollinaris of Laodicea's paraphrases of Scripture were in Antiquity similarly linked to Julian's edict (see Simelidis 2009:24–30). Despite Julian's short-lived interdiction, increased relevance within a school system founded on the study of pagan rhetorical and poetic forms was very probably a strong motivation for producing classicizing poetic paraphrases. More generally, the production and consumption of Christian classicizing poetry would have been pleasing and natural to a Christian cultural elite who had themselves been raised on the pagan classics, such as was the case with Gregory Nazianzus or Paulinus of Nola, the latter a student of Ausonius. It is important to note, however, that early Christian scriptural paraphrase is not a complete departure from what has come before. There was some precedent in Hellenistic Jewish literature: for example, a Jewish poet of the second century BCE, Philo the Elder, who was most probably an Alexandrian, composed a Greek hexameter poem on Jerusalem, one fragment of which seems to paraphrase the biblical episode of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis (see Faulkner 2014a). In the first century CE a Jewish writer named Ezekiel treated the Exodus narrative in iambic trimeters in his *Exagôgê* (see Lanfranchi 2006).

As in the case of exegetical prose paraphrases of Scripture, early Christian poetic paraphrases vary in their fidelity to the scriptural model. Paulinus of Nola is very faithful to the original in his three prose paraphrases of the Psalms, albeit with some additional lines of exposition, but is much more free in his engagement with Luke in the *Laus Sancti Iohannis*, where one encounters considerable expansion and digression (see Green 2006:146–8). In the case of early Christian poetic paraphrase, in contrast to

prose paraphrase, exegesis is not the only motivation for the practice, in which an aesthetic value is recognized. The free-standing hexameter proem to the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* describes a poetic programme to render the Septuagint prose back into verse (as in the Hebrew), on account of the fact that in the course of rendering the Psalms accurately into the prose of the Septuagint the ‘grace’ (χάρις, 19) of the metre was lost. In the epilogue to his paraphrase of the Gospels, Juvencus also highlights the aesthetic value of his poetic exercise, pointing to the willing adoption of the ‘earthly ornaments of language’ (*ornamenta terrestria linguae*) by the divine law in his verses (4.802–5). Nevertheless, although aesthetic aims play an important role in such early Christian poetic paraphrases of Scripture, exegesis remains a central feature of the exercise.

Discernment is required in determining what constitutes exegesis in these poetic paraphrases. Broadly understood, exegesis as explanation or clarification of a text is part of any translation or paraphrase (see Sysling 2007:288 on the Septuagint and Targumim). The rendering of Scripture may therefore reflect common interpretative traditions and readings of Scripture without there being an active programme of exegesis on the part of the poet. Moreover, in the case of classicizing poetic paraphrase, in which a poet not only renders Scripture with some aesthetic aim but also must express the original in a strict metre and with archaic vocabulary, one should constantly be aware of the possibility that divergence from the original might be due to poetic exigency. A model of the requisite judgement in these respects is Green’s overview of exegesis in Juvencus (Green 2006:90–4, who highlights the distinction between implicit and explicit exegesis made by Röttger 1996:17–18). Jerome refers to Juvencus’ paraphrase of the four Gospels as ‘nearly word-for-word’ (*vir. ill. 84, paene ad verbum*) and on the whole Juvencus remains very close to the scriptural original, but he does engage in theological exegesis, whose sources, although unclear, seem to have included Origenist interpretations. For example, at 3.316–17, Juvencus expands Matthew 17.1 (the transfiguration) to add emphasis to the passage of six days after which Jesus takes the apostles up the mountain with him: the six days are described by Juvencus as cycles of light passing across the turning sky (*passus bis terna dierum | lumina converso terras transcurrere caelo*), a poetic touch possibly meant to point to Origen’s view that the passage of six days here is a reference to creation (Green 2006:91). Later Sedulius’ (fifth-century) *Carmen Paschale* and Arator’s (sixth-century) *De Actibus Apostolorum*, which are often called paraphrases, engage in much more extensive exegesis in their more liberal encounters with the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Their exegetical focus and freedom with respect to the original are in fact so pronounced that it has been questioned whether they should rightly be categorized as paraphrases (see Green 2006:226–44 and 298–321).

Nonnus of Panopolis’ fifth-century Greek hexameter paraphrase of St John’s Gospel has a more overt exegetical programme than Juvencus’ paraphrase. It remains faithful to the sequence of events in the Gospel, but more freely adapts or expands upon the Gospel original than Juvencus. Nonnus’ adaptations or expansions can in some cases be explained as poetic embellishments or may be due to the exigencies of the poetic form, but the exegetical purpose of the changes is very often clear. In the case of Nonnus, we

can also point to a specific exegetical source. It has been well established in the past century that Nonnus' paraphrase in many instances follows the exegetical commentary of St Cyril of Alexandria on St John's Gospel (see e.g. Livrea 1989:25 and *passim*). Influence of Cyril can, for example, be detected at *Paraphrasis* 20.82–3, paraphrasing John 20.18: Nonnus has Mary Magdalene tell the disciples that she has seen the resurrected Christ shining in a divine tunic (a recollection of the transfiguration), an element that does not feature in the NT text, but corresponds to Cyril's discussion of the transfiguration in relation to the scene that immediately follows in John 20.19, where Christ appears to the disciples (see Ypsilanti 2014:130). Nonnus does not, however, always follow Cyril's views and is demonstrably engaged with the broader exegetical tradition: at *Paraphrasis* 18.92 [John 18.19], for example, Nonnus makes Annas the high priest who addresses Jesus (as does John Chrysostom), whereas Cyril takes the high priest to be Caiaphas (see Livrea 1989:91).

The *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*, in comparison to Nonnus' paraphrase of John's Gospel, is a much closer, often line-by-line rendering of its Septuagint original. Apart from factors of authorial choice and style, this quality may have something to do with the stichic nature of the Psalms, which could have encouraged close correspondence to the hexameter: I have already mentioned above that the paraphrases of Psalms 1, 2, and 137 by Paulinus of Nola themselves remain very faithful to the original. Due to its close rendering of the Septuagint text, the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* has often been judged rather poor literature, supposedly lacking the finer literary qualities of the Nonnian paraphrase and engaging in exegesis in only the most limited of ways. Such a judgement is unwarranted. There is no doubt that the *Metaphrasis* is more reserved than Nonnus' paraphrase, but it nonetheless exhibits careful attention to poetic composition and at times engages in quite extensive exegesis. With respect to literary aesthetic in the *Metaphrasis*, a good example is provided by *met. Ps.* 21.36–7: 'raging greatly, they divided up my clothes, and cast lots as to who should carry off my garments' (ἄπλετα λυσσώνοντες ἐμοὺς δάσσαντο χιτῶνας, / καὶ κλήροις πεπάλαχθεν, ὅτις κ' ἐμὰ πέπλα κομίσση), which paraphrases LXX 21.18: 'they divided my clothes amongst them, and cast lots for my garment' (διεμερίσαντο τὰ ἱμάτιά μου ἑαυτοῖς / καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν ἱματισμὸν μου ἔβαλον κλήρον). It is notable that the poet adds 'raging greatly' (*apleta lyssōntes*; ἄπλετα λυσσώνοντες), which does not correspond to anything in the Septuagint. The verb *lyssaō* (λυσσάω), however, is elsewhere used of mad dogs with rabies (see Aristophanes, *Lys.* 298, Aristotle, *hist. an.* 604a4), and thus both recalls and furthers verse 16 of the Psalm, where dogs, associated with wicked men, surround David (see further Faulkner 2014b:209–10).

It is also certainly the case that the author of the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* is concerned with exegetical interpretation of the Psalms. The first nine lines of the paraphrase of Psalm 15 (16) interpret the first four verses of the Septuagint text in the following way:

Septuagint (Rahlfs)

Φύλαξόν με, κύριε ὅτι ἐπὶ σοὶ ἠλπισα  
εἶπα τῷ κυρίῳ Κύριος μου εἶ σύ, 2  
ὅτι τῶν ἀγαθῶν μου οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχεις.

*Metaphrasis Psalmorum* (Ludwich)

Ἄφθιτε, ἐμὲ φρούρησον, ἐπεὶ σύ μεν ἐλπίς ἐτύχθης.  
εἶπα θεῷ βασιλῆν. 'σύ μεν θεὸς ἔπλεο μῶνος·  
οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡμετέρων ἀγαθῶν ἐπιδεύει αὐτός.'

τοῖς ἀγίοις τοῖς ἐν τῇ γῆ αὐτοῦ 3  
 ἔθαυμάστωσεν πάντα τὰ θελήματά αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτοῖς.  
 ἐπληθύνθησαν αἱ ἀσθένειαι αὐτῶν, 4  
 μετὰ ταῦτα ἐτάχυναν·  
 οὐ μὴ συναγάγω τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτῶν ἐξ αἱμάτων  
 οὐδὲ μὴ μνησθῶ τῶν ὀνομάτων αὐτῶν διὰ χειλέων μου.

θητητὴν ὁσίων χθονίοις ἀνέφηγε γενέθλην  
 παρθέμενος πινυτοῖσι μετὰ σφίσι μῆδεα θυμοῦ. 5  
 ἀδρανῖαι πλήθουσι, καὶ ἐν σφίσι εἰσὶ ταχέαι·  
 ἀνδρῶν εὐσεβέων ταχιναι βεβρίθασι νοῦσοι.  
 νόσφι φόνων ἀδίκων, κλισίας σφέων εἰς ἐν ἀγείρω  
 οὔνομά τ' ἐκ παραπίδων, οὐ χεῖλεσι, μνήσομαι αὐτῶν.

Immortal one, protect me, since you are my hope.  
 I said to God the king, 'You are my only god,  
 For you do not yourself have need of my goodness.  
 He brought to light a wondrous generation of holy men in the land,  
 Giving over to the wise amongst them the counsels of his heart. 5  
 Weaknesses increase and are quick within them.  
 Quick illnesses of pious men weigh heavily.  
 Aloof from unjust blood, I will gather together their banquets,  
 And their name I will recall with my heart, not (just) with my lips. (*met. Ps. 15*)

Much of the paraphrase is indeed quite a close rendering of the Septuagint model. There are, however, some notable expansions or adaptations, which should not be dismissed as mere poetic embellishment: (1) lines 6–7 emphasize through repetition the quickness and expansion of illness and weakness indicated in the Septuagint; line 6 alone would have sufficed, but in line 7 the poet both repeats the fact that the weaknesses are quick and adds that these belong to 'pious men' (*ἀνδρῶν εὐσεβέων*). (2) Following this, line 8 paraphrases the Septuagint as 'Aloof from unjust blood, I will gather together their banquets,' not 'I will not convene their bloody gatherings' as seems to be meant in the Septuagint. (3) Finally, in line 9 the poet adds 'with my heart' (*ἐκ παραπίδων*), which is absent from Psalm 15.4: 'I will not make mention of their names with my lips' (trans. NETS).

In the Hebrew, there is an evident transition between verses 3 and 4, where verse 3 refers to the pious people of God and 4 to idolaters (literally, those who seek after 'another' [god]) whose illnesses increase. In the Septuagint, however, this transition from the pious to the idolatrous is not explicit, and the poet indicates with his emphasis on pious men that he does not read any transition from pious to impious men. As I indicated above, the language of line 8 in the paraphrase makes a positive statement out of the negative statement in the Septuagint: 'Aloof from unjust blood, I will gather together their banquets' for 'I will not convene their bloody gatherings'. The paraphrast is still speaking of the pious, whose banquets he will convene, banquets devoid of unjust blood. Indeed, this interpretation continues also in line 9, where the paraphrast makes the addition of 'with the heart' (*ἐκ παραπίδων*): the sense in the paraphrase seems to be not that the speaker will never bring to his lips the names of the unjust, but that he will recall the names of the pious 'in his heart, not (just) with his lips'. In this, the poet appears to have been influenced by the expression of Isaiah 29.13 ('The Lord said: these people draw near me; they honor me with their lips, while their heart is far from me' [NETS]), which became well known through its citation on two occasions in the NT (Matt 15.8 and Mark 7.6).

This last example of variation, in particular, rather than betraying carelessness or mere aesthetic embellishment, demonstrates a relatively complex encounter with Scripture on the part of the paraphrast. Moreover, the particular interpretation can now be linked to Origen's exegesis of the Psalm in his first homily on Psalm 15, discovered in Munich in 2012 (Cod. Gr. 314 Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, ff. 11r–12r; critical edition, Perrone 2015). Origen, like the paraphrast, indicates that in Psalm 15 (16).4 those whose weaknesses increased are the just people of God—in doing this he appeals to 2 Corinthians for the concept that the just are strong in weakness. He then, as in the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*, interprets in positive terms the negative expression of Psalm 15 (16).4: 'I will not convene their bloody gatherings' becomes 'It is necessary for me to gather together those whose infirmities were multiplied, who after this were quick'. Following this interpretation, Origen then asks how Psalm 15 (16).4, 'I will not make mention of their names with my lips' (NETS), can refer to those just men whose weaknesses increased and who were saved by God, citing in his explanation Isaiah 29.13, the same verse which seems to have influenced the paraphrase (see further Faulkner 2019). The consistency with which the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* paraphrase corresponds to the progression of Origen's exegesis shows that, as in the other instances of early Christian paraphrase examined above, the poet of the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* was himself invested in exegesis, a defining element of the genre.

## CONCLUSION

---

Paraphrase of Scripture is a common practice in early Christian literature, whose development and features can be linked to pagan rhetorical and scholastic traditions of paraphrase. I have herein surveyed two principal categories of Christian paraphrase, prose and verse. Prose paraphrase is frequently employed in Christian commentaries and homilies as a tool for biblical exegesis, which allows the commentator to remain close to the authority and voice of the scriptural original, in some cases even adopting the voice of the original, while imposing a particular interpretation. There also develops in the first centuries of Christianity an elaborate tradition of verse paraphrase of biblical texts. These verse paraphrases have a clear aesthetic purpose, to render Scripture into the pleasing form of poetry, providing a Christian counterpart to pagan poetry. As we have seen, however, Christian poetic paraphrases of biblical texts also undertake exegesis, both implicitly and explicitly.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

[Apollinaris of Laodicea], *Metaphrases in Psalmos*. Greek text: A. Ludwich (ed.), *Apollinarii Metaphrasis Psalmorum* (Leipzig: Teubneri, 1912).

- Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*. Latin text: C. Mayer, *CAG 2: Corpus Augustinianum Gissense*, 2nd edn (Basel: Schwabe, 2004).
- Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Johannem*. Greek text: P. E. Pusey (ed.), *Sancti Patri nostri Cyrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini In divi Joannis evangelium*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1872).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Psalmorum tituli*. Greek text: J. Reynard (ed.), *Grégoire de Nysse: Sur les titres des Psaumes*, SC 466 (Paris: Cerf, 2002). Eng. trans.: R. E. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Homiliae in orationem dominicam*. Greek text: J. F. Callahan (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni: De oratione Dominica, De Beatitudinibus* (Leiden: Brill, 1992). Eng. trans.: H. C. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord's Prayer, The Beatitudes*, ACW 18 (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1978).
- Jerome, *De uiris illustribus liber*. Latin text: E. C. Richardson (ed.), *Hieronymus: Liber de uiris illustribus* (Leipzig, 1896). Eng. trans.: T. P. Halton, *St. Jerome: On Illustrious Men*, FC 100 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).
- Juvencus, *De historia euangelica*. Latin text: J. Huemer (ed.), *GaiVetti Aquilini Iuuenti Evangeliorum Libri Quattuor*, CSEL 24 (Vienna/Leipzig: Tempsky, 1891).
- Nonnus of Panopolis, *Paraphrasis in Joannis evangelium*. Greek text: A. Scheindler (ed.), *Paraphrasis S. Evangelii Ioannei* (Leipzig: Teubneri, 1881).
- Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina*. Latin text: G. Hartel (ed.), *Paulini Nolani Carmina, Indices et Addenda: editio altera supplementis aucta*, curante M. Kamptner, CSEL 30 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1999). Eng. trans.: P. G. Walsh, *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola* (New York: Newman Press, 1975).

## Scholarship

- Blowers, P. (2013). *Drama of the Divine Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Borgen, P. (1997). *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for his Time* (Leiden: Brill).
- Brock, S. P. (1979). 'Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity', *GRBS* 20: 69–87.
- Cooper, S. A. (2005). *Marius Victorinus' Commentary on Galatians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Faulkner, A. (2014a). 'Philo Senior and the Waters of Jerusalem', in R. Hunter, A. Rengakos, and E. Sistikou (eds), *Hellenistic Studies at a Crossroads: Exploring Texts, Contexts and Metatexts* (Berlin: de Gruyter), 235–58.
- Faulkner, A. (2014b). 'Faith and Fidelity in Biblical Epic: The *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*, Nonnus, and the Theory of Translation', in K. Spanoudakis (ed.), *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 195–210.
- Faulkner, A. (forthcoming 2019). 'Recasting Prophetic Song: The *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*', in A. Avdokhin (ed.), *Resonant Faith in Late Antiquity. Idiom, Music, and Devotion in Early Christian Hymns* (London: Routledge).
- Fernández Marco, N. (2000). *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible*, trans. W. G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill).
- Green, R. P. H. (2006). *Latin Epics of the New Testament: Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Jakobson, R. (1959). 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', in R. A. Brower (ed.), *On Translation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 232–9.
- Jarick, J. (1990). *Gregory Thaumaturgos' Paraphrase of Ecclesiastes*. SBL 29 (Atlanta: Scholars' Press).

- Lanfranchi, P. (2006). *L'Exagoge d'Ezéchiel le Tragique: Introduction, texte, traduction et commentaire* (Leiden: Brill).
- Livrea, E. (1989). *Nonno di Panopoli: Parafrasi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni Canto XVIII* (Naples).
- McNamara, M. (2010). *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Marti, H. (1974). *Übersetzer der Augustin-Zeit: Interpretationen von Selbstzeugnissen* (Munich: Fink).
- Morgan, T. (1998). *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Perrone, L. (2015) (ed.). *Die neuen Psalmenhomilien: Eine kritische Edition des Codex Monacensis Graecus 314, Origenes Werke XIII* (Berlin: De Gruyter).
- Roberts, M. (1985). *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity* (Liverpool: Cairns).
- Röttger, W. (1996). *Studien zur Lichtmotivik bei Iuvencus, JbAC 24* (Münster: Aschendorff).
- Simelidis, C. (2009). *Selected Poems of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Springer, C. P. E. (1988). *The Gospel as Epic in Late Antiquity: The Paschale Carmen of Sedulius* (Leiden: Brill).
- Sysling, H. (2007). 'Translation Techniques in the Ancient Bible Translations: Septuagint and Targum', in P. A. Noss (ed.), *A History of Bible Translation* (Rome: Edizioni de storia e letteratura), 279–305.
- Ypsilanti, M. (2014). 'Image-Making and the Art of Paraphrasing: Aspects of Darkness and Light in the *Metabole*', in K. Spanoudakis (ed.), *Nonnus of Panopolis in Context* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 123–37.

### Suggested Reading

- Shorrock, R. (2011). *The Myth of Paganism: Nonnus, Dionysus and the World of Late Antiquity* (London: Bristol Classical Press).
- Whitby, M. (2007). 'The Bible Hellenized: Nonnus' *Paraphrase* of St John's Gospel and "Eudocia's" Homeric Centos', in J. H. D. Scourfield (ed.), *Texts and Culture in Late Antiquity* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales), 195–231.

## CHAPTER 13

---

# CATENAE

---

RICHARD A. LAYTON

A catena (Latin for ‘chain’) is a form of biblical commentary produced by editing excerpts from previous exegetes. The editor made verbatim excerpts from source writings, arranged these selections to address the biblical text verse by verse, and identified the sources by either name or siglum. Compilations collected from earlier authorities, such as florilegia, were common in the ancient and medieval Church and employed in contexts beyond biblical exegesis. The catena form, however, is distinctive of Byzantine exegesis, flourishing as a widespread practice from the sixth to the sixteenth century. The catena has often been labelled as a ‘genre’ of commentary, but it can equally be understood as an exegetical technology that exercised an important function in Byzantine churches, monasteries, and schools. Catena manuscripts present three different formats to their readers. The ‘marginal catena’ presents the biblical text in the interior centre of the folio and surrounded on three margins by commentary. A second format provides lemmata spanning the entire page followed by comments on each verse. In the third format, the editor produced two parallel columns of text and commentary, following the model of ancient scholia commentaries (Dorival 1986–96:II.2–4).

In lieu of the term ‘catena’, a variety of titles for these collected excerpts is evidenced in the Greek manuscript tradition, with the label a ‘collection of exegetical extracts’ (*synagôga exêgêtikôn eklogôn*) being among the most common (Devreesse 1927:1088f.). The earliest work titled as a catena is a compilation on the four Gospels produced by Thomas Aquinas at the request of Pope Urban IV (Devreesse 1927:1087). Thomas himself referred to the work as an *expositio continua* and the term *Continuum* served as the compilation’s initial title. The work’s designation as the *Catena Aurea* is first attested in 1321 and in following centuries the term catena became commonly used in Latin publication to designate anthologies of commentary on both biblical and classical texts. A number of catenae were published in print editions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, primarily by Catholic editors seeking to vindicate the role of tradition in biblical hermeneutics in confessional disputes with Protestants (Mühlenberg 1989:16).

Critical investigation into catenae began to take shape at the end of the nineteenth century. Hans Lietzmann (1897) urged study of catenae as a means to recover some

portion of the vast wealth of ancient exegesis that had not survived in direct transmission. Lietzmann and Georg Karo (1902) produced the first effort at a comprehensive catalogue of catena manuscripts to facilitate critical study. The Karo–Lietzmann catalogue also attempted to delineate a typology by which to classify catenae. The catalogue has been supplemented several times and the typology, although severely critiqued (Devreese 1927; Richard 1956), continues to provide the basis for treatment of catenae.

In keeping with Lietzmann's agenda, the Berlin Academy regularly incorporated fragments from catenae in its editions of the *Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* (GCS) series. In this context, the study of catenae was not an end in itself but a preliminary, albeit essential, task to support a comprehensive and critical edition of the Greek church fathers through the recovery of otherwise lost texts (Faulhaber 1899:vii; Reuss 1941:IV.1; Staab 1924:297). The definition of catena employed by such scholars corresponded to this conception of the task, so that as Karl Staab acknowledged, the combing of the manuscripts extended well beyond 'pure' catenae to other forms of compilation (Staab 1926:4).

This 'classical' method encountered several obstacles (Dorival 1986:1.1–32). The sheer abundance of manuscript witnesses with diverse and overlapping collections of excerpts points to a 'chaotic literary life' marked by 'divergences, contradictions, and discrepancies' that complicates the editing of fragments (Lamb 2012:32). Gilles Dorival observes that the manuscripts themselves are not homogeneous, thus rendering the typology developed by Karo and Lietzmann of little use in classifying catenae and hindering the establishment of consistent editorial criteria for textual criticism (Dorival 1986:1.6). The recopying of catenae through the centuries resulted in compression, abridgement, adaptation, and rewriting of the source material, so that the accuracy of excerpts as witnesses to the original wording of their source material can be placed in doubt (Heine 1986). Despite these difficulties, this approach has borne much fruit (Reuss 1957; Reuss 1966) and without catena evidence, contemporary scholars would have limited access to the interpretative processes of critical ancient exegetes, including Origen, Evagrius, and, from the opposite pole of the hermeneutical spectrum, Diodore of Tarsus (Gehin 1987; Gehin 1993; Devreese 1959).

In contrast to the use of catenae to extract fragments for the production of critical editions of works transmitted in the direct manuscript tradition, Robert Devreese (1927:1098) advocated an approach that takes into account the significance of the catena as an artefact in itself. A scholar should, he maintained, study a collection for what it *is*, without worrying about what it could yield. This more phenomenological approach stimulated investigation into the defining characteristics, lineages, and modes of transmission of individual catenae and the institutional practices and authority that supported the intellectual practice. Dorival's four-volume study (1986–96) reconstructing a history of the Psalms catena throughout the Byzantine period marks a notable shift in methodology, as does Lamb's edition of the Mark catena (2012) that attempts to displace focus from an originating authorial consciousness to presentation of the catena as a collaborative and cumulative process of an 'open' book. This alternative methodology also undergirds a different aim in textual editing. In contrast to the Berlin Academy's inclusion of catena fragments in the works of ancient authors, this line of scholarship aims to reconstruct and

publish the catenae of individual biblical books (e.g. Petit 1991–6; Auwers 2011; Hagedorn and Hagedorn 1994–2004; Leanza 1978; Lamb 2012).

Study of catenae has focused on individual biblical books. Consequently, a history of the catena form is dispersed among accounts of individual anthologies in all their perplexing variety. The earliest chronologically fixed point for the production of catenae is the activity of Procopius of Gaza (c.460/70–c.530/8), the ‘Christian sophist’ as he is frequently labelled in the manuscript tradition (ed. Metzler 2015:xiv). Procopius served Gaza as the head of its rhetorical academy for over thirty years, from the time of his appointment (probably between 491 and 495) until his death. He united longstanding classical rhetorical traditions with his own devout Christian piety and produced, in addition to his secular rhetorical works, massive commentaries on the Octateuch (except Ruth) and the books of Kings and Chronicles, and catenae on Isaiah (now lost), Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. These collections were widely copied and at least some were present in the library of Photius at Constantinople (*Bibl.* 206–7).

The exegetical anthologies attributed to Procopius carry the title ‘epitome of exegetical extracts’ (*exêgêtikôn eklogôn epitomê*), a designation which does not precisely define the activity of the editor or the character of the collection. The epitomes of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs preserve identifying marks for the excerpted authorities. By contrast, the Octateuch commentary, also labelled as an epitome, does not differentiate individual authorities nor does it purport to present to the reader the original words of the authors, but has rewritten, summarized, and condensed the selections. Jean-Marie Auwers (2011:xvii) takes the term epitome to refer to the abridgement of a more ancient compilation. As Dorival (1986:1.54) notes, however, abridgement can occur either through rewriting of the excerpted material or through a culling of the excerpts without rewriting. As applied to these instances, the term epitome does not distinguish between these separate editorial activities, leaving open the question of how Procopius produced these works. In either case, however, it points to the prior existence of a catena, whether the epitomes descend from earlier now-lost ur-catenae or are themselves models for subsequent compilations.

Procopius’ statement of procedure at the outset of the Octateuch epitome provides the most direct evidence for the existence of catenae in the early sixth century. In introducing his compilation, Procopius notes that the epitome does not represent his original plan:

Previously, inasmuch as God had supplied the means in abundance, we gathered the explications of the Octateuch by the fathers and the others, collecting them from commentaries and various discourses. Since, however, the excerpts we selected were in their very own words, whether or not they agreed with one another, and since our volume was stretching beyond limit, I presently set out to reduce the composition to a convenient size. Consequently, it is necessary to say only once whatever is agreed to by all interpreters, and so that one text might appear from all of them, we have set forth the voices of all as if by a single speaker; and if an interpreter differs, we have expounded it briefly at the end of the passage. (Procopius, *Gen.*; ed. Metzler 2015:1)

Procopius identifies his initial goal as the publication of an encyclopedic collection of exegetical selections by both acknowledged church authorities (the ‘fathers’) as well as less

institutionally validated exegetes ('the others'), presenting the excerpts 'in their very own words'. This undoubtedly describes a catena. The project, however, ran aground because reproducing the exegetes' own words resulted in a confusing repetition and also because the volume exceeded reasonable limits. The epitome allowed the editor/commentator to abridge and organize the mass of comments into a concise and coherent whole, while simultaneously erasing the attribution to individual exegetical authorities. According to Procopius, the Octateuch epitome varied from a catena in that its purpose was to present a coherent, unified interpretation, while the effect of a catena would be quite the opposite in presenting multiple exegetical perspectives to the reader. Procopius' introduction might suggest that his circle was responsible for the production of the catena that underlies the Octateuch epitome. Devreesse (1927:1103–1105) and Dorival (1986:1.99–115, following Gueraud and Nautin 1979:82–95) have been prepared to acknowledge Procopius as the inventor of the catena as a genre of biblical commentary. Françoise Petit, after cautiously developing her own position since 1971 (Petit, 1971:105–7; 1977:xx–xxi; 1991:xxvii–xxx), expressly set aside the Procopian origins of the catena (Petit 1996:244f.; see also Haar Romeny 2007:180–2), tracing instead the roots of catenae to the activity of anonymous editors in the second half of the fifth century. The question is unlikely to find definitive resolution, but one could safely conclude that Procopius attests to a burgeoning practice in Syria-Palestine at the turn of the sixth century.

Dating of catenae is an imprecise undertaking and outside of Procopius' ambiguous testimony there is little evidence on which to establish a firm chronology for the early history of catenae. Tentative dates are most commonly proposed on the basis of source analysis, though Dorival (1986:1.42–96) has also integrated codicological study as a tool for constructing the history of the catena form in general. On the basis of source analysis, late fifth- or sixth-century dates and Palestinian provenance have been proposed for catenae on the Octateuch, the Solomonic books, and the Twelve Prophets (Faulhaber 1899:38f.; Faulhaber 1902:6; Petit 1977:xxxiv–xxxvii). These catenae are notable for the wide number of sources extracted, use of the original wording of the authors, and the free use of exegetes who were regarded as heretical or subject to suspicion in some quarters, including Origen, Didymus, Apollinaris, Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret.

Catenae on almost all of the canonical Bible (excepting deuterocanonical writings) have also been identified as emerging in the sixth and seventh centuries, although the details are elusive in all cases. In a brief study that has proven seminal to subsequent research, Marcel Richard (1956) proposed that the earliest Psalms compilation, the massive 'Palestinian' catena, originated in the sixth century in separate editions of two and three volumes. Richard also posited a separate, near contemporary collection originating in Alexandria that he called a 'Monophysite' catena, arguing that it sought to advance a specific theological position in response to increasing pressure during the reign of Justinian. Dorival (1976, 1984) modified this scheme, proposing that a student of Procopius produced the Palestinian catena between 540 and 550 CE, thus placing the emergence of the Psalms catena somewhat later than the first series of catenae. Dorival (1986:27–9, 232–3, 297–9) further argued that Richard's second catena did not represent a militant effort to defend a 'monophysite' theology, but an enrichment of the original Palestinian catena at the

end of the sixth century to incorporate the now-lost commentary on the Psalms by Hesychius of Jerusalem. These two together formed the foundation of a Palestinian model that was paralleled by the development of Palestinian scholia collections, which, Dorival argues, had an independent literary history from the catenae and thus represented a second stream of exegetical activity that only merged later under the auspices of Constantinopolitan scholars.

Karl Staab took up the catenae on the Catholic and Pauline epistles. He concluded (1924:345–9) that the catena on the Catholic epistles developed in two stages between the sixth and eighth centuries, with the earlier stage aligning itself with the Christology of Severus of Antioch (d. 528). The second, later stage of this catena was investigated by Charles Renoux (1985–96) who published an edition of an Armenian translation of this catena from the twelfth century. Beyond providing a valuable witness to the extension of the catena form to Armenian exegesis, Renoux's publication also provided valuable evidence for reassessing the relationship of the Greek tradition of catenae with this collection of documents. Among other points, he confirmed that the attribution of the catena on the Catholic epistles to a certain 'Andrew' in the nineteenth-century edition of Cramer rested on unreliable manuscript evidence. Staab described a different process for the development of the catenae on the Pauline letters. The earliest evidence for these catenae dates to the seventh century (1926:273). The initial collection continued to be expanded and revised up to the time of Photius, after which it was eclipsed by a ninth-century compilation (known as Ps.-Oecumenius) that dominated Pauline exegesis for more than five centuries. This latter catena was distinguished by its primary, if not exclusive, reliance on Chrysostom and Theodoret as sources, a development that is paralleled in the Psalms catenae.

Reuss (1941) identified two primary catena forms for the Gospels. The earlier of the two, his 'Typus A', was titled as the 'interpretation of John Chrysostom' and consisted entirely in its earliest form of selections from Chrysostom's homilies. This compilation of Chrysostom excerpts was not a catena in the 'strict sense of the word' (Reuss 1941:19, 154). Reuss dates this foundational compilation to the late fifth/early sixth century, and while not in itself a catena, it provided the platform for a genuine catena in the seventh century by including selections from twenty exegetical authorities. The second catena ('Typus B') Reuss regards as a genuine catena from its inception, which he dates to the beginning of the seventh century of unknown provenance (Reuss 1941:87). Reuss (1941:72–87) rejects the traditional attribution of Typus B to the otherwise unknown Peter of Laodicea and holds that its anonymous editor acted independently of the Chrysostom compilation, instead making extensive use of diverse primary sources, including Origen, Apollinaris, Severus of Antioch, and Cyril of Alexandria. Reuss (1941:139–41) judges that the catena for the second Gospel was composed with heavy dependence on the Chrysostom homilies on Matthew, the Typus A for Matthew, and rejects the attribution to Victor of Antioch as only witnessed by manuscripts from the sixteenth century. While Reuss holds that dating of the catena is very difficult to establish, he entertains the possibility that the sixth century, when the Typus A of the Matthew catena is first evidenced, also is the context for the Mark catena, as a conscious completion of a compilation for all of the canonical Gospels.

As the above synopsis indicates, a single explanation for the origin of catenae is yet to be found; editors working in diverse centres with differing aims and sources produced an array of catenae, and even regularly incorporated other catenae into their own collections. While the precise dating of the earliest catenae continues to be elusive, it is clear that by the late seventh and early eighth centuries, producing such collections was an established habit that continued to dominate Byzantine exegesis throughout the medieval period. Scholars point to several conditions that supported the rise and continued relevance of the catena form. The bitter theological disputes of the fifth century frequently involved appeals to the authoritative church fathers, which prompted the collection of florilegia. The earliest compilations of dogmatic extracts are attested in the middle of fifth century in connection with the Nestorian and Eutychian controversies (Devreesse 1927:1084f.), which may have also stimulated the separate collection of exegetical traditions. As did catenae, florilegia compiled traditional authorities, but where florilegia were marshalled to support the idea of a unanimity of tradition behind the editor's preferred theological outlook, catenae represented a spectrum of the Church's outlook. Moreover, catenae could have a wider application than florilegia, which were targeted against a single opponent or doctrinal position.

A second scaffold upon which catenae seem to have developed is the school practice of producing and employing scholia in the study of canonical authorities. Isolated scholia collections are attributed to Origen by Jerome (*ep.* 33), but the systematic use of scholia is first attested in fourth-century manuscripts relating to legal education (Lamb 2012:94–8). Scholia differ from continuous commentaries and homilies in that they do not interpret the text as a whole but intervene to explicate individual words or phrases. This results in two consequences in the relationship between the user and the text. First, it adapts readily to a format that presents the scholia in one column and the text in a second, so that the reader's eye can easily scan between a scholion and the text under comment (Dorival 1986–96:2.3–4). This created space in the scholia column for an editor to add supplemental glosses and comments from more than one authority, thus providing a natural expansion to a catena format. Secondly, unlike continuous commentaries and homilies, scholia presume that the reader is an individual engaged in close study of the text, thus allowing for the development of a format that is targeted to individual rather than groups of readers (or listeners). While the relationship between 'scholia commentaries' and 'continuous commentaries' in the history of the catena remains uncertain, it does point to a general scholastic environment, as opposed to a liturgical one, as the context in which the catena emerged.

The history of catena production is one of variety and proliferation, rather than transmission of a single model. Faulhaber (1902; see also Auwers 2011), for example, identified five principal types of catenae on Song of Songs alone, each of which employed a distinct (if overlapping) source base. No single author or institution controlled the shape in which the biblical text was catenized. It was a decentralized affair, based more on a scholastic culture than on the authority of a single figure. Dorival (1984), however, points to a major transformation after the Arab conquest of Syria-Palestine and the destruction of the library in Caesarea, which eventually resulted in a shift of production of catenae to Constantinople. This shift, which Dorival dates to about 700, resulted in several changes

in both the sources used and the format of production. Constantinopolitan catenae reflect a shift from the wide range of authors in the earlier model to an overwhelming preference for John Chrysostom and Theodoret, with other authors reduced to supplementing these bastions of exegetical orthodoxy. In terms of the format, Palestinian catenae are marked by both the anonymity of the editorial hand and the careful identification of authors cited. By contrast, in Constantinople there was an increasing tendency to combine the various sources into a single compilation, produced under the name of a given teacher. This shift was accompanied as well by a practice of using previous catenae as sources for producing new combinations of collections, rather than the original commentaries, thus multiplying the possible forms while simultaneously distancing the catena from its original sources.

As noted above, the original impetus for critical investigation of catenae stemmed from their potential to expand knowledge of ancient Christian writings. This goal need not imply appreciation for the catena form itself. Modern historians have mustered little enthusiasm for the catena (e.g. Moreschini and Norelli 2005:2.705–12). Simonetti (1994:113f.), for instance, regards the appearance of the catena as a symptom of a serious decline in Christian learning that was pandemic in the Christian East from the middle of the fifth century. He judges it as ‘beyond doubt’, that the very popularity of the catena ‘contributed not a little to the decline in the use of complete commentaries of many authors and so to their disappearance’ (Simonetti 1994:114). Even specialists occasionally disavow any intellectual regard for the catena. Faulhaber (1902:vii) deems the catena as ‘the most unedifying phenomenon in the history of exegesis’.

In recent decades, scholars have grounded their assessment with more attention to the historical context in which catenae emerged. Petit sees in the anonymous activity of the fifth-century editors a scientific objectivity and a broader openness to diverse exegetical discourses that stand in stark contrast to the bitter theological disputes of the early Byzantine period. Dispute was not the aim of the catenist, as opposed to the compiler of florilegia. Instead, the editor sought ‘to inform, to transmit the exegetical tradition in its plurality, to permit comparison of interpretations’ (1996:243f., a position echoed by Haar Romeny 2007:180). Petit’s championship of the catena as a tool of scholarship remains a minority position. Others have sought to discern subtle ways in which the editor could direct theological formation without occupying explicit positions. Richard (1956) and Lamb (2012) conclude that editors could embed distinct ideological tendencies in the selection and organization of excerpted authors, which supports the possibility that catenae were employed to underwrite contested theological platforms, somewhat analogously to florilegia (thus diminishing the distance that Devresse attempted to interpose between the two). Secondly, as Uthemann (1996) documents, even when heretical authors are cited, they are domesticated. Thus, while Evagrius scholia are preserved voluminously in the catenae they simultaneously mute his exegetical voice.

Lamb (2012) identifies this strategy as a means to implement the increasing effort to control exegesis in the Byzantine empire, especially during the reign of Justinian (527–65), suggesting that catenae reflect wider trends in the Byzantine quest for unity under orthodoxy. Unlike the doctrinal conflicts of the fifth and sixth centuries, however, the catenae did not attempt to define a precise orthodoxy, but to set boundaries on permissible

exegesis through the dissemination of approved teaching tools. From this perspective, a catena defined the spectrum of legitimate interpretative diversity while modelling grammatical approaches to exegesis and grounding the students in a normative historical tradition. Importantly, for Lamb, the catena is not a 'textbook', but a template open to intervention and adaptation in different settings at different times. In this way, the catena form sought to operate within a system of orthodox control without becoming rigid and impermeable to development. Lamb's assessment can help to account for not only the emergence of the catena, but also provides insight into the endurance of this distinctive practice of the Byzantine Church, which helped to reinforce both school and imperial authority as constructed on the sturdy platform of revered authorities.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Devreesse, R. (1959). *Les Anciens Commentateurs grecs de l'Octateuque et des Rois*. ST 201 (Citta del Vaticana: Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana).
- Hagedorn, U., and Hagedorn, D. (1994–2004). *Die älteren griechischen Katenen zum Buch Hiob*, 4 vols (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter).
- Lamb, W. R. S. (2012) (ed. and trans.). *The Catena in Marcum: A Byzantine Anthology of Early Commentary on Mark*, Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 6 (Leiden: Brill).
- Petit, F. (1977). *Catena graecae in Genesim et in Exodum, I. Catena Sinaitica*. CCG 2 (Turnhout/Leuven: Brepols).
- Petit, F. (1986). *Catena graecae in Genesim et in Exodum, II. Collectio Coisliniana in Genesim*, CCSG 13 (Turnhout/Leuven: Brepols).
- Petit, F. (1991–6). *La Chaîne sur la Genèse: Édition intégrale*, 4 vols (Louvain: Peeters).
- Procopius of Gaza, *Catena in Genesim*. Greek text: K. Metzler (ed.), *Eclogarum in libros historicos Veteris Testamenti epitome, Teil 1, Der Genesiskommentar*, GCS n.f. 22 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).
- Renoux, C. (1985–96). *La Chaîne arménienne sur les épîtres catholiques*, 4 vols (Turnhout: Brepols).

### Scholarship

- Auwers, J.-M. (2011). *L'Interprétation du Cantique des Cantiques à travers les chaînes exégétiques grecques*. Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia 56 (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Devreesse, R. (1927). 'Chaînes exégétiques grecques', *DB Suppl.* 1: 1084–233.
- Dorival, G. (1976). 'Aperçu sur l'histoire des chaînes exégétiques grecques sur le psautier (V–XIV siècles)', *SP* 15: 146–69.
- Dorival, G. (1984). 'Des commentaires de l'Écriture aux chaînes', in C. Mondésert (ed.), *Le Monde grec ancien et la Bible* (Paris: Beauchesne), 361–86.
- Dorival, G. (1986–96). *Les Chaînes exégétiques grecques sur les Psaumes*, 4 vols (Leuven: Peeters).
- Faulhaber, M. (1899). *Die Propheten-Catenen nach römischen Handschriften*. Biblische Studien 4.2 (Fribourg i.B.: Herdersche Verlagshandlung).
- Faulhaber, M. (1902). *Hohelied-, Proverbien- und Predigerkatenen* (Vienna: Von Mayer & Co.).
- Gehin, P. (1987). *Évagre le Pontique: Scholies aux Proverbes*, SC 340 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf).
- Gehin, P. (1993). *Évagre le Pontique: Scholies à l'Écclésiaste*, SC 397 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf).

- Guéraud, O., and Nautin, P. (1979). *Origène: Sur la Pâque*, Christianisme Antique 2 (Paris: Beauchesne).
- Haar Romeny, B. ter (2007). 'Procopius and his Library', in H. Amirav and B. ter Haar Romeny (eds), *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron* (Leuven/Paris: Peeters), 173–90.
- Heine, R. E. (1986). 'Can the *Catena* Fragments of Origen's Commentary on John be Trusted?' *VC* 40: 118–34.
- Karo, G., and Lietzmann, J. (1902). 'Catenarum Graecarum Catalogus', *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse aus dem Jahre 1902* (Göttingen: Lüder Horstmann), 1–66, 299–350, 559–620.
- Leanza, S. (1978). *Procopii Gazaevi Catena in Ecclesiasten necnon Pseudochrysostomi Commentarius in eundem Ecclesiasten*. CCG 4 (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Lietzmann, H. (1897). *Katenen: Mitteilungen über ihre Geschichte und handschriftliche Ueberlieferung, mit einem Beitrag von H. Usener* (Freiburg i. B.: Mohr).
- Moreschini, C., and Norelli, E. (2005) (eds). *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History*, 2 vols (Peabody: Hendrickson).
- Mühlenberg, E. (1989). 'Katenen', in H. R. Balz et al. (eds), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter), 14–21.
- Petit, F. (1971). 'Les Fragments grecs du Livre VI des Questions sur la Genèse de Philon d'Alexandrie', *Le Museon* 84: 93–150.
- Petit, F. (1996). 'La Chaîne grecque sur la Genèse, miroir de l'exégèse ancienne', in G. Schöllgen and C. Scholten (eds), *Stimuli: Exegese und ihre Hermeneutik in Antike und Christentum. Festschrift für Ernst Dassmann, JbAC Ergänzungsband 23* (Münster: Aschendorff), 243–53.
- Reuss, J. (1941). *Matthäus, Markus, und Johannes-Katenen: Nach den handschriftlichen Quellen* (Münster: Aschendorff).
- Reuss, J. (1957). *Matthäus-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche, TU 61* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag).
- Reuss, J. (1966). *Johannes-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche, TU 89* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag).
- Richard, M. (1956). 'Les Premières Chaînes sur le Psautier', *Bulletin d'information de l'Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes* 5: 87–98. Reprinted in M. Richard, *Opera Minora*, vol. 3 (Leuven: University Press, 1977), no. 70.
- Simonetti, M. (1994). *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. John A. Hughes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark).
- Staab, K. (1924). 'Die Griechischen Katenenkommentare zu den katholischen Briefen', *Biblica* 5: 296–353.
- Staab, K. (1926). *Die Pauluskatenen nach den handschriftlichen Quellen untersucht*. Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici (Rome: Verlag des Päpstlichen Bibelinstituts).
- Uthemann, K.-H. (1996). 'Was verraten *Katenen* über die Exegese ihrer Zeit? Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Exegese in Byzanz', in G. Schöllgen and C. Scholten (eds), *Stimuli: Exegese und ihre Hermeneutik in Antike und Christentum. Festschrift für Ernst Dassmann. JbAC Ergänzungsband 23* (Münster: Aschendorff), 287–96.

### Suggested Reading

- Faulhaber, M. (1909). 'Katenen und Katenenforschung', *BZ* 18: 383–95.
- Leanza, S. (1983). *Un Nuovo Testimone della Catena sull'Ecclesiaste di Procopio di Gaza, Il Cod. Vindob. Theol. Gr. 147*. CCG 4 supplementum (Turnhout: Brepols).

## CHAPTER 14

---

# SENTENCES

---

LUKE DYSINGER, OSB

## SENTENCES IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

---

EARLY Christian collections of exegetical sentences (*gnomai* or *logoi*) represent the adaptation and Christianization of an established pagan literary genre. Classical anthologies of concise *gnomai* took different forms and had a wide variety of applications. One genre was the pedagogical *chreia* often found on ostraca and discarded papyri that ranged from simple copybook-phrases used to teach writing and grammar, to more advanced collections for students of rhetoric. Intended for still more advanced students were the scholia, literally ‘marginal annotations’, anthologies of succinct commentary on cited texts by revered authors such as Homer, Pythagoras, and Plato. Of particular interest to early Christians was a third genre consisting of ethical *gnomai*, collections of succinct moral aphorisms such as the Stoic *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the Neo-Pythagorean *Chreia* of Clitarchus, and the *Pythagorean Sentences*. These were often arranged in intriguing thematic clusters intended to stimulate intellectual reflection and to serve as guidebooks for ethical behaviour and moral improvement (Criore 2005:167, 201–4; 1996:316). Christian adaptation of this genre was influenced by biblical wisdom sayings, especially the sapiential literature of the OT. Early Christian fascination with the genre of ethical *gnomai* is perceptible in the ‘Ways of Light and Darkness’ of the late first-century *Letter of Barnabas* (19.1–21.1) and the *Didache* (1.1–6.1). These ‘ways’ contain pithy admonitions, commandments, curses, and biblical citations that echo NT paraenesis, and probably served in ritual pre-baptismal catechesis.

More developed Christian anthologies of *gnomai* include the *Sentences of Sextus* and texts by Evagrius Ponticus and Maximus Confessor. They contain brief proverbs, parables, commandments, and *makarisms* (beatitudes), ranging from succinct statements or allegorical definitions to more developed rhetorical questions, syllogisms, and contrasts or comparisons. Sometimes these anthologies contain clusters of sayings grouped together as interpretations of and meditations on a biblical text, thus constituting a genre of biblical

exegesis. Often the only discernible difference between exegetical sentences and biblical scholia is the format of the collections. In scholia the explicated text is generally given, with commentary following or artfully arranged around the cited text. In collections of sentences the underlying biblical text is implicit and left to the reader's intuition.

## THE SENTENCES OF SEXTUS

---

The earliest example of overt Christian adoption of the classical genre of ethical *gnomai* is the *Sentences of Sextus* (*Sextou Gnomai*), an eclectic anthology of neo-Pythagorean and neo-Platonic maxims, reworked and expanded by an anonymous second-century Christian editor. Origen attributed these 451 sentences to a certain 'wise Xistus' (Latinized as 'Sextus'); their authority was significantly enhanced by Rufinus, who described Sextus as a Christian martyr and bishop of Rome, a claim Jerome vehemently rejected. Jerome claimed that the author was clearly a pagan, and that Rufinus had attributed the text to the bishop-martyr in order to give it an impressive Christian pedigree (Jerome, *ep.* 133.3). Nevertheless, they were widely read and quoted by patristic and medieval authors in both East and West (Pevarello 2013:10–35). Rufinus' praise of both their form and content is typical: 'In each briefline one discovers vast clarification, so powerful that a sentence of only a single line could suffice for a lifetime of training' (Rufinus, *Praefatio*). Many of these *gnomai* are traditional moral maxims that would have been congenial to both Christians and pagans, such as: *sent.* §41, 'Whatever you honour most will have control over you'; §56, 'Reflect on good things so that you may also do good things'. Others, as Chadwick notes, 'could have had no other origin than a Christian author', in that they allude to baptismal promises and/or creedal formulas (ed. Chadwick 1959:139). Chadwick identified nineteen sentences he considered certainly Christian (ed. Chadwick 1959:139–40). Wilson has catalogued forty-four that 'rely on biblical sources' (trans. Wilson 2012:25–6).

Some of these Christianized sentences can be considered exegetical insofar as they explicate or presuppose a specific biblical text. Of these, many are clustered in related chains that interpret sayings of Christ concerning sexual morality and wealth. The relevant biblical sayings are not cited, but are rather alluded to and expanded as philosophical aphorisms. Thus Jesus' command to cast away the offending member (Matt 5.29–30 and 18.8–9) is restated in altered form:

§12 Neither eye nor hand nor any such member sins, but rather the one who makes bad use of hand and eye.

§13 Any member of the body that incites you to act against temperance (*sophronein*)—cast it away; for it is preferable to live temperately (*sophronos*) without the member than be destroyed along with the member. (Sextus, *sent.*)

Whereas Jesus' original admonition emphasizes the need to avoid sin altogether, Sextus has recast this ethical teaching in traditional philosophical language, applying it to the

classical virtue of temperance (*sophrosune*). In a later chain of sentences on sexual morality Jesus' description of committing adultery in the heart (Matt 5.28) is restated and expanded to include other sins of thought:

§233 Know that you are an adulterer if you so much as think of committing adultery.  
And let your attitude be the same about every sin.

On the subject of dispossession, Sextus has linked Jesus' directive not to withhold one's shirt (Luke 6.29) to the command to render unto Caesar what is his (Matt 22.21). Sextus does this through sentences that allude to Jesus' praise of poverty (Luke 6.20, 16.22) and his admonitions concerning the use of worldly things (Luke 16.9):

§17 Let your neighbour take away everything except your freedom.  
§18 A wise person lacking property is like God.  
§19 Make use of worldly things only when it is necessary.  
§20 Be careful to pay back to the world what is of the world, and to God what is of God.

Thus for 'Sextus' exegetical sentences serve the purpose of transforming familiar collections of philosophical *gnomai* into Christian pedagogical and catechetical texts.

## EVAGRIUS PONTICUS

---

The patristic author who makes most extensive use of collected exegetical sentences is Evagrius Ponticus (345–99). Simultaneously venerated as an Egyptian desert father and reviled as an 'Origenist', he received his early ecclesiastical training in Cappadocia with Basil of Caesarea and in Constantinople with Gregory Nazianzen. In Jerusalem he joined the monastery of Melania the Elder and Rufinus, whose friendship and assistance he retained throughout the last decade of his life, which he spent in the Egyptian hermit-colony of Kellia. Given the emphasis in Egyptian monasticism on reciting and memorizing sacred Scripture, it is not surprising that the largest part of Evagrius' literary output consists of scholia on the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. These scholia, stripped of the biblical text they explicate, reappear throughout his other writings, sometimes as collections of 'chapters' (*kephalaia*) or sentences (*gnomai/logoi*), but also within his longer narrative treatises where they comprise spiritual proverbs and allegorical definitions, often clustered in thematic chains of varying length. These adapt classical models of virtue, vice, and contemplation to the needs of Christian ascetics, effectively translating or 'encoding' elements from his model of spiritual progress in biblical terms (Stewart 2003:258–69). His writings represent a pedagogy in which exegetical sentences initially augment, but eventually come to replace classical collections of *gnomai*.

Like ‘Sextus’, Evagrius was familiar with the classical genre of sentences. He edited two alphabetical collections of moral proverbs, *Maxims 1 & 2* (Sinkewicz 2003:229–31), in which he intersperses his own reflections with citations from the sentences of Sextus, Clitarchus, and Pythagoras. His maxims often presume the reader’s familiarity with biblical texts:

*Maxims* §1.3 Be towards everyone, as you want everyone to be [towards you] (cf. Matt 7.12).

*Maxims* §2.17 One who makes just speeches is a drinking-cup of cold water (cf. Matt 10.42).

Two additional collections consist entirely of exegetical sentences. Often combined together in manuscript editions as *Thirty-Three Chapters* (Sinkewicz 2003:224–7), these contain a series of allegorical definitions. The first sixteen are entitled ‘Definitions of the reasoning soul’s passions’, and appear to be Evagrius’ response to a suggestion by Origen that it would be valuable for someone ‘with the leisure to do so’ to make a list of the illnesses with which malefactors are threatened in the Bible, in order to show that these refer allegorically either to the soul’s vices or to the suffering it is forced to endure (Origen, *princ.* 2.10.6) Thus Evagrius interprets diseases mentioned in Leviticus 13–22 and Deuteronomy 21–32 as symbols of maladies that afflict the soul, such as (*cap.* 1–33):

§4 Blindness (Lev 21.18; 26.16) is ignorance in the intellect that fails to devote itself to the virtues of the *praktiké* (ascetical practice) and the contemplation of creatures.

§5 Paralysis (Lev 21.18) is immobility of the reasoning soul towards the virtues of the *praktikē*.

Other maladies for which Evagrius offers spiritual definitions include: jaundice (Lev 26.16); convulsive back-spasm (Deut 32.24); gangrene (Lev 26.16; Deut 28.32); urethral discharge (Lev 15.4–33); leprosy (Lev 13.8–37; 14.3–57); dementia (Deut 28.28); crushed testicles (Lev 22.24; Deut 23.1–2); nasal deformity (Lev 21.18); mutilation of the ears (Lev 21.18); dumbness (Isa 35.6); and lameness (Lev 21.18).

The remaining exegetical sentences in this collection are extracted from his *Scholia on Proverbs* and define creatures and substances mentioned in Proverbs 30.24–8, such as ants, hedgehogs, locusts, lizards, roosters, goats, leeches, and the elements of earth, fire, and water. The following are typical (*cap.* 1–33):

§17 The *ant* (Prov 30.25) is an ascetical (*praktikos*) human being who gathers his nourishment in this present age.

§33 *Young eagles* (Prov 30.17) are holy powers entrusted with striking down the impure.

In other collections such as the *Sentences for Monks* and *Sentences for Virgins* Evagrius intersperses exegetical sentences with spiritual maxims crafted to resemble biblical proverbs. Here the arrangement of *gnomai* is not determined by the progression of themes in underlying biblical texts, but rather by Evagrius’ model of spiritual progress. The reader is expected to ponder and puzzle out subtle interrelationships between

individual sentences and thematic chains and to associate them with stages of spiritual growth (Driscoll 1994:48–72). Three texts, *Praktikos*, *Gnostikos*, and *Kephalaia Gnostica*, were written as a trilogy intended to introduce and provide an experience of his ascetic and contemplative pedagogy. In these as in other texts he encourages the reader to use his *gnomai* as a starting point for engaging in specific forms of speculative meditation (*cap. pract.* Prol.; *Gnost.* 26, 28; *keph. Gnost.* 1.67, 4.89, 6.77). The first book of the trilogy, *Praktikos*, describes ethical and spiritual failings, and prescribes remedies for obsessions and compulsions categorized according to the eight principal tempting thoughts (*logismoi*) of gluttony, lust, anger, acedia, sadness, vainglory, and pride. The second, *Gnostikos*, teaches allegorical exegesis of the Scriptures and contemplation of creation as an aid to spiritual guides and teachers. The third, *Kephalaia Gnostica*, is a deliberately enigmatic exercise book for monastic contemplatives. It contains 540 *gnomai*, mysteriously arranged ‘according to the six days of creation’ (Evagrius, *keph. Gnost.* 6.90) in intertwining chains of sayings. Of these, 28 are exegetical sentences taken from his *Scholia on Psalms*, chiefly allegorical definitions of biblical terms, such as ‘lyre’ and ‘harp’ (Ps 91.4):

§6.46 The *lyre* is the *praktiké* soul moved by the commandments of Christ.

§6.48 The *harp* is the pure mind moved by spiritual knowledge. (*keph. Gnost.*)

Sometimes his association of contemplative maxims with biblical themes is fairly straightforward, as in his interpretation of ‘sabbath rest’ as the soul’s willingness to refrain from speculation on mysteries beyond the realm of nature:

§4.44 *The Sabbath* is the reasoning soul’s rest, whereby it is naturally made not to cross the limits of nature.

In other *gnomai*, such as the following exegetical sentence concerning Jesus’ transfiguration (Matt 17; Mark 9; Luke 9), Evagrius is deliberately enigmatic and invites his reader to meditate on obscure metaphysical themes:

§4.23 Moses and Elijah are not the Kingdom of God, if the latter is contemplation and the former the saints. How is it, then, that our saviour, having himself a spiritual body, after promising to show the disciples the kingdom of God, shows them Moses and Elijah on the mountain?

Throughout the *Kephalaia Gnostica* he interweaves chains of exegetical sentences that are enigmatic, sometimes to the point of incomprehensibility, such as the following *gnomai* on the spiritual meaning of circumcision. These clearly presume the reader’s familiarity with symbolic and numerological conventions that are difficult to unravel, and may refer to texts and traditions of interpretation that have not survived:

§4.12 Intelligible circumcision is voluntary separation from the passions for the sake of acquiring the knowledge of God.

§5.83 We have found that all the circumcisions are seven: four of them are of the sixth day, one of them of the seventh day, and the others of the eighth day.

§6.6 Just as the knife circumcises the sensible Jew, so the *praktike* circumcises the intelligible Jew, he whom Christ symbolically called the ‘sword he has cast into the world’ (Matt 10.34).

§6.7 If the eighth day is the symbol of the resurrection, and Christ is the resurrection, those therefore who are circumcised on the eighth day are circumcised in Christ.

§6.66 The knife of stone (cf. Josh 5.2) is the teaching of Christ our Saviour, which circumcised with knowledge the mind that is covered by the passions.

Thus although Evagrius was unquestionably familiar with the moral-ethical genre of exegetical sentences typified by ‘Sextus’, his own approach makes much more extensive use of typology and allegory.

## THE *APOPHTHEGMATA PATRUM*

---

Recent scholarship has highlighted many similarities between the ‘*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*’ and the older philosophical collections of moral aphorisms on which the *Sentences of Sextus* and Evagrius’ sentences are modelled (Larsen 2008). It might thus be expected that the genre of exegetical sentences would be well represented in these collections, which condense into brief maxims the wisdom of revered fourth- and fifth-century Egyptian and Palestinian monks. However, this is not the case. Explicit references to or citations from the Scriptures are comparatively rare in these collections, and sayings that cite the Bible bear little resemblance to the exegetical sentences of Sextus or Evagrius. There is no interest whatever in typological or speculative interpretation of the Bible in these texts: when Scripture is cited it is generally as a proof-text, used solely in the literal sense, justifying the action or teaching of an *abba*. Of the relatively infrequent instances where scriptural references occur in the *apophthegmata*, the following are typical:

A brother asked him: ‘What shall I do?’ And he said ‘When Abraham entered the land of promise, he built for himself a grave, and bought the land as a burying-place for his posterity’. And the brother said to him: ‘What burying-place is meant?’ And the old man said: ‘A place of weeping and sorrowing’. (*Apophth. Patr. [Lat. Syst.]* §3.13)

Abba Antony said: ‘Now I do not fear God, rather I love him: for love drives out fear’. (1 John 4:18). (*Apophth. Patr. [Lat. Syst.]* §17.1)

He [Antony] also said, ‘Nine monks fell after many labours and were overwhelmed by spiritual pride, because they relied on their own works and, being deceived, did not pay proper attention to the commandment that says, “Ask your father and he will tell you”’ (Deut 32.7). (*Apophth. Patr. [Gr. Alph.]* Antony §37)

Blowers has observed that the *apophthegmata* belong to the ancient literary genre of *aporiai*, or *questio-responsio*, which highlights the spiritual authority of the sage and

which already had a rich heritage in Christian literature. The exclusively pragmatic emphasis of the *apophthegmata* and the refusal of the *abbas* they portray to speculate on biblical texts may reflect an increasing sense of the importance of the monastic teacher's own *logia*, even above Scripture itself (Blowers 1991:27, 37–9).

Recent scholarship has suggested another possible explanation for the absence of Evagrius' type of exegetical sentences in the *Apophthegmata*. Although they purport to describe monastic doctrine of fourth-century Egypt, these collections were not compiled until the mid-to-late fifth century. It is clear that they were significantly redacted, probably in the wake of doctrinal controversies. The question arises whether these collections more clearly reflect the pedagogy of the desert fathers or that of their subsequent devotees, since the editors appear to have been anxious to present revered monastic authorities as having conformed to their own, later orthodoxies (Larsen 2008:21–3; Rubenson 2013).

Whether one regards the *Apophthegmata* as reflecting the theology of Evagrius' contemporaries or that of their later editors, it is clear that after Evagrius the art of creating new exegetical *gnomai* and arranging them according to classical models fell rapidly into decline. From the mid-fifth century there is also a discernible shift from the production of original biblical exegesis to preservation of what was regarded as authoritative interpretation from the past. Exegetical works increasingly took the form of anthologies and catenae, 'chains' of extracts from sermons, commentaries, and exegetical scholia attributed to trusted authors (see the chapter by R. A. Layton in this volume).

## MAXIMUS CONFESSOR

---

The last patristic author to make significant use of purposefully arranged exegetical sentences is Maximus Confessor (c.580–662). One of the greatest Byzantine theologians of the seventh century, his spiritual writings and treatises against monophysite and monothelete Christology constitute a significant part of the theological patrimony of the Eastern Churches. Unlike the tradition reflected in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Maximus was eager to cite and interpret the Scriptures at multiple levels, literal, moral, and allegorical. His goal has been summarized as the desire 'to maximize the salvific value of every passage of scripture for the monastic life' (Blowers 1991:56). He frequently employed the 'question-response' genre of teaching and he adopted from Evagrius Ponticus the literary genre of 'centuries', collections of 100 chapters (*kephalaia*) on a particular theme. In his writings the fading genre of exegetical *gnomai* is still discernible, however his *kephalaia* are generally longer and more detailed than the *gnomai* of Sextus or Evagrius. Scholarship concerning Maximus has tended to emphasize his opposition to the 'Origenist' theology that so troubled the monks of Palestine during the so-called 'second Origenist crisis' of the sixth century and resulted in imperial and conciliar anathemas against both Origen and Evagrius. However, it may be more accurate to say that one of Maximus' goals was to explain, to correct where necessary, and to supply a semi-definitive interpretation of some of Evagrius' more obscure sentences (Thunberg 1985:18–21). In the *Centuries on Love*

Maximus quotes and explains (although without attribution) texts by Evagrius, including *gnomai* from *On Prayer* and *Praktikos*. In his *Centuries on Knowledge* Maximus regularly reproduces and expands texts from Evagrius' *Praktikos* and *Kephalaia Gnostica*, including several passages cited in this chapter.

In §36–47 of the *First Century on Knowledge* Maximus reinterprets Evagrius' *gnomai* concerning the mystical significance of the sabbath and circumcision. To Evagrius' brief definition Maximus adds the notion of multiple sabbaths, as well as the biblical 'sabbath of the land' (Lev 25), which he calls the 'sabbath of sabbaths'. This enables him to incorporate Evagrius' brief sentence into a progressive definition of different sabbaths:

§37 Sabbath is the detachment of the rational soul which has by practice completely thrown off the marks of sin.

§38 Sabbaths are the freedom of the rational soul which by natural contemplation in the Spirit has put down this natural activity oriented toward sensibility.

§39 Sabbaths of Sabbaths are the spiritual peace of the rational soul which, having withdrawn the mind even from all the more divine principles which are in beings, dwells entirely in God alone in a loving ecstasy, and has rendered itself by mystical theology totally immobile in God.

Thus Maximus creates a context for Evagrius' exegetical sentence concerning the limited capacity of the reasoning soul and the necessity for desisting from certain kinds of contemplation. He places Evagrius' sentence within a model of spiritual ascent, itself derived from Evagrius but significantly modified. In the *Praktikos* and in many other works Evagrius analysed and described the ascetical struggle against temptation that leads first to natural contemplation, then to contemplation of the divine nature. However, Maximus' final step, 'loving ecstasy . . . immobile in God', is his own creation: for Evagrius the term *ekstasis* generally denotes confusion or madness. In a similar way Maximus renders Evagrius' obscure *gnomai* on circumcision more comprehensible by locating them within a schema of progressive spiritual ascent:

§40 Circumcision is the soul's putting off of its disposition of being affected by becoming.

§41 The circumcision of circumcisions is the total loss and stripping even of natural movements of the soul with respect to becoming.

In a similar way, Evagrius' enigmatic question concerning the symbolic significance of Moses and Elijah at the Lord's transfiguration is reshaped by Maximus from an encouragement to meditation into an elaborate discussion of spiritual progress, contemplation, and eschatology.

The one who is instructed for a time about the reason of the monad fully recognizes as well the reasons of Providence and judgment associated with it. Thus he judges it a good thing, as did St. Peter, that three tents be made by him for those who appear, that is, the three ways of salvation: virtue, knowledge, and theology. The first one requires

the practice of courage and chastity, of which the blessed Elijah is a figure. The second is the righteousness of natural contemplation which the great Moses showed in his life. The third is the pure perfection of wisdom which the Lord revealed. Tents are spoken of because there are other appointed places better and more distinguished than these which those who are worthy will receive in the future.

(Maximus, *cap. theol.* 1.16; trans. Berthold 1985:151)

Here Maximus has effectively responded to Evagrius' invitation to puzzle out the symbolic meaning of the Transfiguration cited above (*keph. Gnost.* 4.23) by identifying Elijah with the virtues (i.e. asceticism), Moses with natural contemplation, and Christ with wisdom. This extended explication of the Transfiguration highlights the fact that although exegetical *gnomai* may be found in Maximus' *kephalaia*, his goal is less to create new sentences than to explain obscure ones. In general, his chains of *gnomai* are not intended to evoke speculative meditation, as in Sextus or Evagrius. Rather, Maximus embeds exegetical sentences within longer *kephalaia*, or positions them together with his explanatory *kephalaia* in order to clarify what is otherwise obscure.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Apophthegmata Patrum*. Greek alphabetical collection: Greek text: PG 65.71–440. Latin systematic collection (*Verba Seniorum*): Latin text: PL 73.855–1062.
- Evagrius Ponticus, *Kephalaia Gnostica*. Syriac text with French trans.: A. Guillaumont, *Les Six Centuries des 'Kephalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, PO 134 (28.1) (Paris: Brepols, 1958).
- Evagrius Ponticus, *Maxims*. Greek text: PG 79.1249C–1269D.
- Evagrius Ponticus, *Capitula per gradus quosdam disposita consequentiae*. Greek text: PG 40.1264D–1268B.
- Maximus Confessor, *Capitum theologorum et oeconomicorum duae centuriae*. Eng. trans.: G. C. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, CWS (New York: Paulist, 1985).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Latin text: H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti (eds), *Traité de principes, Livres I–II*, SC 252 (Paris: Cerf, 1978).
- Rufinus, *Praefatio, Sexti philosophi sententiae*. Latin text: M. Simonetti (ed.), *Tyrannius Rufinus Opera*, CCL 20 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1961).
- Sextus, *Sententiae*. Greek text: O. Chadwick (ed.), *The Sentences of Sextus: A Contribution to the History of Early Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959). Eng. trans. (with facing Greek text): W. Wilson, *The Sentences of Sextus*, Wisdom Literature from the Ancient World 1 (Atlanta: SBL, 2012).

### Scholarship

- Blowers, P. (1991). *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus Confessor*. Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 7 (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).
- Criboire, R. (1996). *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, American Studies in Papyrology 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press).

- Cribiore, R. (2005). *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Driscoll, J. (1994). 'Spiritual Progress in the Works of Evagrius Ponticus', in J. Driscoll and M. Sheridan (eds), *Spiritual Progress: Studies in the Spirituality of Late Antiquity and Early Monasticism*, *Studia Anselmiana* 115 (Rome: Sant' Anselmo), 47–84.
- Larsen, L. (2008). 'The *Apophthegmata Patrum*: Rustic Ruminations or Rhetorical Recitation', *Meddelanden från Collegium Patristicum Lundense* 22: 21–31.
- Pevarello, D. (2013). *The Sentences of Sextus and the Origins of Christian Asceticism*. Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Rubenson, S. (2013). 'The Formation and Re-formations of the Sayings of the Desert Fathers', *SP* 55 (3): 5–22.
- Sinkewicz, R. E. (2003). *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Stewart, C. (2003). 'Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy', in J. Behr, A. Louth, and D. Conomos (eds), *Abba: A Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West: Festschrift for Kallistos Ware* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press), 241–71.
- Thunberg, L. (1985). *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Blowers, P. (2012). *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Domach, Z. (2013). *Tempered in the Christian Fire: Greek and Roman Wisdom Literature in Early Christian Teaching and Moral Traditions* (MA Thesis, Emory University).
- Dysinger, L. (2005). *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Morgan, T. (1988). *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Morgan, T. (2007). *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Simonetti, M. (1994). *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark).
- Young, F. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).



---

## II. LITURGICAL INTERPRETATION

---



## CHAPTER 15

---

# CATECHESSES AND HOMILIES

---

WENDY MAYER

WHEN we approach the question of how ‘the Bible’ was interpreted in catechetical instruction and preaching in the context of the early Christian world, two methodological issues immediately arise: (1) both media were oral and performative (Stökl ben Ezra 2014:107), and (2) there is a significant gap between delivery/performance and the written versions that survive (Lipatov-Chicherin 2013). Further, the early Christian world itself was diverse and we are dealing with orality and performance across a range of languages and cultures. Additionally, scholars have insisted upon distinctions between preaching and catechesis. Although both were primarily concerned with instruction, the audience of the latter, in theory, constituted a restricted subset of the former. Another difference between the two is that preaching took place within, whereas catechetical instruction transpired outside of, Christian worship. Yet, there are questions about the validity of these distinctions. As Daniel Stökl ben Ezra (2014:106–7) points out, there is considerable fluidity across these boundaries when we consider liturgical ritual or performance itself as a verbal/non-verbal text. So he describes the ‘catechetical homilies’ of Cyril of Jerusalem as a text (an orally performed but subsequently written homily) over a (performed baptismal) ritual over (more or less standardized, written biblical) texts. In this sense the biblical texts and the images drawn from them by Cyril are intertextually present both at the performance of baptism and beyond the rite whenever the biblical texts themselves were subsequently read or performed. When we look at ritual and biblical text in this light the boundary between catechesis and homily is further complicated. The interchangeable use by modern scholars of the terms ‘catechetical homily’ and ‘catechetical lecture’ itself both reflects the fluidity of the boundaries between the two genres and indicates the uncertainty and perhaps confusion among scholars concerning their precise audience and setting. The gap between the surviving written versions of homilies/sermons/catecheses and their original, orally performed version has contributed to that uncertainty and confusion. From the perspective of biblical interpretation, all of these factors are a cause for celebration rather

than despair, in that they reveal a rich variety of ways in which, via these media, the Bible was interpreted. They also challenge us to think expansively about what interpreting the Bible meant for early Christian communities.

The aim of this chapter is to draw out the fluidity, richness, and strength of the relationship between biblical interpretation and preaching/catechetical instruction in the first Christian centuries in light of these methodological issues and current approaches to them. First, a number of aspects of that relationship are explored. Focus then turns to what 'the Bible' meant in the context of the two media and to the challenge presented by the variety of ways in which interpretation was conceived.

## AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

---

### Scripture and the Origins of Preaching/Catechesis

Amongst scholars there is general consensus that the origins of Christian preaching/catechesis go hand in hand with the transformation of a particular body of texts into the authoritative word of God. There is also consensus that this development owes much to this movement's Jewish origins. In fact, the close relationship between the growing authority of the specifically Christian Scriptures and the interpretation of the same in Christian instruction has led scholars to see continuity with Jewish synagogue practice (e.g. Harrison 2013:146; Winter 2012; Siegert 2008). Where scholars differ, however, is in precisely what that continuity meant. While most talk uncritically about 'synagogue preaching'—interpretation of the Torah and Prophets within a liturgical setting—as a natural antecedent, Annette von Stockhausen (2008) cuts through these assumptions to question whether in the Hellenistic era there was any preaching in synagogues at all. Here she draws a careful distinction between preaching and synagogue teaching (midrash), which took place in a cultic building but in a non-cultic context. While the latter was indisputably part of Hellenistic Jewish practice, the evidence for preaching as a pre-existing element in synagogue worship is exceedingly slim. Von Stockhausen is inclined to view instruction about the meaning of Scripture during worship as original to Christianity.

Some scholars have predicated a less direct relationship between Jewish and Christian practice in regard to preaching, as opposed to catechetical instruction, which could be perceived as a Christian form of midrash. For Alistair Stewart-Sykes (2001; cf. Mayer 2008:569) the origins of preaching lie in the need to test the prophetic message (the dominant form of communicating divine revelation), as a result of which Scripture became increasingly linked to prophecy. In this respect Scripture functioned as an external guarantee of prophetic validity. In the process, the techniques of scrutinizing prophecy became transferred to Scripture itself. This development took place initially within a household setting (the locus of early Christian worship), and was quite separate from preaching in the synagogue (which he assumes to have existed) or from the practices

of the Hellenistic philosophical schools. In time, and side by side with the increase in status accorded the scriptural canon and the increasing dominance of Scripture over prophecy, the households themselves developed into scholastic social organizations, with the result that the models of communication current in the synagogue, and to a lesser extent in the Hellenistic schools, came to influence how the word of God was communicated. All of these processes occurred unevenly in different regions within the first three centuries, but are viewed by Stewart-Sykes as underpinning the development of moral exhortation and scriptural exegesis, which emerged as normative elements in the preaching of the fourth century. His model, which avoids arguing for preaching as a completely novel development, offers a plausible explanation for how scriptural instruction might have developed organically within, as well as outside of, a liturgical setting. At the same time, in regard to the origins of preaching, the interpretation of Scripture is held by Stewart-Sykes to be a necessary and integral element.

This view differs from that of scholars who hold the Christian homily to exhibit Jewish and 'pagan' influences, but to be ultimately a unique genre (see Merkt 1997:76). It also differs from those who view Christian preaching as an activity that developed in parallel with, and was modelled on, the public preaching of Hellenistic moral philosophers (Maxwell 2006:11–41; cf. Harrison 2013:142–3). Whereas scholars who assume the existence of synagogue preaching give priority to the Jewish influences, the latter give priority to influences from Graeco-Roman philosophy and rhetoric. This latter approach does not deny the centrality of the interpretation of Scripture to preaching, but allows for its adscription to an additional set of factors. Just as the decentralization of Jewish worship resulted in the development of synagogal practices, the dispersal of the philosophers following the destruction of Athens (88–86 CE) led to the rise of doxography (the recording of authoritative earlier philosophical opinions and tenets) and an accompanying commentary tradition (Sedley 2003). This second development is linked to the emergence of a new conception of authority, justified by the theory of 'ancient wisdom' (Boys-Stones 2001; Van Nuffelen 2011 and 2014:345), in which, on the predication of a pure, original body of thought that existed in the past and which had progressively been corrupted or lost, the task of the philosopher became its extraction or recovery. Christianity's early self-identification as a philosophy (Van Kooten 2010:6–9; Karamanolis 2014) indicates that, as a model, neither the rise of the synagogue within the Jewish diaspora nor the rise of the doxographic tradition within the philosophical diaspora—both of which were developing at the same time that Christianity emerged—can be ignored. Where this second development has direct relevance for the connection between scriptural interpretation and preaching/catechesis lies in the continuity between not just Christianity and (especially, ethical) philosophy, but also their respective instructors. In parallel with moral philosophers of this same period (see Gill 2013), over the first four centuries CE a particular strand of Christian preachers viewed themselves explicitly as psychagogues (trainers of souls) concerned with the virtuous life, spiritual happiness (divinization), and soul-therapy. Examples include Clement of Alexandria (White 2008), Origen (Torjesen 1986), Gregory Nazianzen (Elm 2012:166–76), John Chrysostom (Mayer 2015), and Augustine (Kolbet 2010). Together with the Jewish practice of midrash,

this philosophic inheritance informs the holistic nature of the catechetical and homiletic programme, in which instruction in the truths or wisdom collected in Scripture and their application to the moral formation of the human being are indivisibly entwined.

## Two Genres or One with Fluid Boundaries?

Whether an individual was being inducted into the basics of Christian ‘philosophy’ (catechesis) or instructed more broadly and deeply in its beliefs and practices (via preaching), it is widely assumed that instruction encompassed two basic, interrelated strands: the perfection/divinization of the human person (morality); and Christianity’s Scriptures and their central truths (Rylaarsdam 2014:9–10; Harrison 2013:134–5; Gavriilyuk 2007:18; van den Hoek 1997:70). From this point of view the primary distinction between catechesis and preaching concerns the level of instruction rather than its purpose (psychagogy)—the one introductory, the other aimed at advancing the student’s spiritual progress.

From this we can see that from the point of view of genre there is greater blurring between the categories homily and catechesis than we might suppose. Where a clear distinction has been drawn by scholars it concerns location, that is, where each kind of instruction is thought to have taken place. As noted above, the catechetical lecture is thought to have transpired in a non-cultic context, whereas the homily was delivered in a liturgical setting. In the case of both, however, evidence concerning their respective settings only becomes clear in the fourth century. It is also the case that the setting of worship and the shape, size, and leadership of Christian communities changed from the second to the fourth centuries (e.g. Lampe 2003; Stewart 2014), and that these changes were, until at least the mid-fourth century, often local, inconsistent, and sporadic. Regional issues, like language and culture, and the urban–rural divide, were contributing factors. When we consider catechetical instruction and preaching over the first four centuries or in different regions of the Mediterranean world we should thus look for diversity, rather than uniformity in practice (Gavriilyuk 2007:16). Additionally, when it comes to where biblical instruction fitted into the process by which an individual was inducted into the Christian religion (that is, at the introductory level), we are hampered by the fact that the bulk of the evidence (and scholarship) concerns the rites of initiation themselves, rather than the period of instruction that preceded them (e.g. Jensen 2012; Hellholm et al. 2011; Ferguson 2009). One final complicating factor is that there were, generally speaking, two different categories of catechumen. The first included all who had nominally adopted Christianity, but had not yet undergone the rite of baptism and were thus excluded from participation in the Eucharist. The second comprised a subsection of that group—those catechumens who had enrolled in a process of instruction required before admission to the rite of baptism. The evidence for the length of that period of instruction and its precise nature and setting varies, but when scholars talk of catechetical lectures they usually are referring to the instruction delivered to this second category of catechumen. Together, these factors have implications for how we think about the interpretation of the Bible in both the catechetical and the homiletic setting.

Some of these difficulties are overcome if we view catechesis and preaching as forms of the same genre that could be expressed differently at different times in response to local factors. Scholarship generally holds that in the second and third centuries at Alexandria, for instance, instruction (to both categories of catechumen?) may indeed have been in the form of lectures that took place outside of a liturgical context in the mode of a philosophical school, in some cases even delivered by laymen. Scholars agree, however, that this practice was not representative (Gavrilyuk 2007:63–162; van den Hoek 1997; Harmless 1995:39–51). As a religion in the minority, the circumstances of individual communities in individual regions, like North Africa, Rome, or Antioch, dictated the specifics of how preliminary instruction was effected. Harmless (1995:51–6, 58) further points out that once Christianity was imperially endorsed and becoming Christian became politically and economically advantageous, the sheer numbers necessitated a variety of shifts in catechetical practice. The fact that these changes, which again were expressed diversely, went hand in hand with what he calls an ‘epidemic’ deferral of baptism (Harmless 1995:59) raises the question of just how many catechumens attended and were exposed to the catechetical curriculum required for baptism. We should rather expect that, for this period at least, the majority of catechumens received instruction via the homily (Harmless 1995:56). In this respect it may well be that in the fourth century there was little real variance in the number of second-category catechumens and that what changed was rather the make-up of the homiletic audience. This has implications for the task of the homilist, in that, of those in attendance, first-category catechumens may have outnumbered Christians who had been baptized and instructed in the more mystical aspects of Christian ritual. This issue of how to instruct an audience versed in Scripture and its truths at a variety of levels was readily addressed by the psychagogic method embraced by Augustine and John Chrysostom (Kolbet 2010; Rylaarsdam 2014), and is consciously reflected on by them and other preachers in homilies of this period. On the other hand, in the fourth and fifth centuries homilies were delivered that are explicitly catechetical (e.g. by Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia). That this catechetical instruction took place in a liturgical context raises the question of whether the second-category catechumens, and in the week following baptism the neophytes who were its focus, were present among a wider audience. The content of the homilies would thus constitute a refresher course for those already baptized. If this was the case, it also raises the question of how the presence of first-category catechumens was managed. On those occasions was the catechetical homily preached in addition to a homily addressed to the general audience?

## Where the Bible was Encountered

Regardless of how distinct or blurred the boundaries between catechesis and preaching in reality were, the final point to be made here is that for the majority of the laity, regardless of gender, age, or social status, these media, along with the scriptural lections and psalm-singing that preceded the homily (Olivar 1991:516–18), provided their sole exposure to the Bible. As István Czachesz (2010:3) points out, consulting a text, biblical or otherwise,

was not straightforward in the early Christian centuries, and when one discussed a text, even in a small group, that discussion required that the text itself be held in the participants' memory. This is because the physical constraints of book production made it difficult to locate a passage within a text or to jump from one passage to another. Moreover, the dissemination of the new Christian Scriptures initially as individual books, whether in scroll or codex form, meant that only a few private individuals would have possessed all of them. Because of these constraints, the way in which the individual books of the new Christian Bible were retold, discussed, and interpreted in catechetical instruction and homily would fundamentally have shaped the layperson's memory of them. In terms of exposure to the Bible and its truths as instructive for the Christian way of life, when we arrive at the fourth century in which baptism was often deferred, preaching, even more so than catechetical instruction, was the filter that mediated the Bible for the majority (cf. Harrison 2013:148). As we will see in the final section of this chapter, the oral character of both media in concert with their pedagogical agenda in turn played a significant role in directing how that mediation came to be expressed.

## WHICH BIBLE?

---

If preaching was *the* filter that mediated the Bible for the majority, then precisely what Bible was filtered through preaching becomes a critical issue. This is perhaps an obvious point when we consider the history of the formation of the biblical canon and its role in the construction of Christian 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy', but a point that nonetheless needs to be made. Here we will simply supply a few examples to highlight the plasticity of the Bible mediated through preaching (and, by extension, catechesis) in the first five centuries.

In the North African context, the differences between the *Vetus Latina*, the earliest Latin translation/s of the Greek Septuagint, and the Vulgate, the revised translation of the Bible in Latin produced by Jerome in the late fourth century, were sufficient for the latter to be adopted only slowly throughout the West, while some communities, like the Donatists, clung to use of the *Vetus Latina* as pure and original. In this regard, citation (and thus interpretation) of the *Vetus Latina* became a distinguishing feature of both Donatist preaching and catechesis (Dossey 2010:163–7). Additionally, not all Bibles contained the same books—the Syriac NT originally did not contain the general epistles or Revelation; the early Ethiopic Bible included the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and the Paralipomena of Jeremiah (Piovanelli 2013:90)—nor were all of the books that Bibles did contain considered worth citing or expounding. Bearing in mind what did not survive among his works and the problems of defining his genuine corpus, John Chrysostom, for instance, with regard to books of the NT, in his homilies only rarely cites Revelation or the general epistles (James, Peter, John, Jude) and, of the Gospels, exhibits only passing interest in Mark, but places great emphasis on all of the 'Pauline' epistles (among which he includes Hebrews) (Krupp 1984). In the case

of the Pauline material, this is because he was holding up Paul as an example of both the ideal interpreter of God's word and the ideal ascetic (Rylaarsdam 2014; Heiser 2012). As asceticism became a significant focus for preachers of the fourth and fifth centuries, this dictated the biblical books to which homiletic audiences were repeatedly exposed, particularly, Genesis, the Pauline letters, and 'pastorals', all of which contained key texts on sexuality (Clark 1999). As a final comment, not a few homilies preserve and cite scriptural *agrapha* (e.g. Dolbeau 2003). These are sayings (*logia*) attributed to Jesus and other fragments of extra-canonical material that do not otherwise survive. In this sense, homilies/catechesis in their written form are an important witness to the diversity of the shape and content of 'the Bible' in which the members of a local community were being instructed at a given point in time.

## A MULTIPLICITY OF INTERPRETATIVE MODES

---

The definitive book on the diversity of ways in which interpretation of the Bible was performed in preaching/catechesis across the early Christian world has yet to be written. The few specific studies that have been produced suggest, however, the expansiveness of the modes of interpretation. In this latter regard we are talking less about what a focus on rhetorical technique or exegesis has to tell us, although these play a role (Harrison 2013:136–42, 151), than about how the recent introduction into the study of early Christianity of theories of narrativity, listening and reception, intertextuality, and textual communities, to name but a few, open up the ways in which we observe 'the Bible' being communicated in these fundamental media.

We have already referred to the work of both Kolbet and Rylaarsdam with regard to the psychotherapeutic pedagogical techniques borrowed from Hellenistic moral philosophy that informed the preaching of both John Chrysostom and Augustine. For both Augustine and Chrysostom, just as the creed in which catechumens were instructed summarized Scripture (the history of salvation brought about through the incarnate Word), so Scripture played an intimate and essential role in the training of souls within a more expansive, holistic, sacramental programme. On love of God as the source of human renewal communicated through Scripture, Kolbet (2010:192) writes that in Augustine's homiletic practice Scripture was no *deus ex machina* that could mechanically heal the soul, but rather held 'a necessary place within the organic whole of God's larger economy, which includes the entire ecclesial life of the Church'. It was the Holy Spirit's use of the whole sacramental life of the Church, baptism and Eucharist included, that extended the Word's healing presence into the world. Rylaarsdam (2014:52–3) likewise argues that love is at the centre of the changed way of life required by God and his message and that Chrysostom's divinely derived adaptable homiletic therapy directed towards the soul coheres seamlessly with his theology and is larger than just preaching.

‘His sacramental reading of the adapted words of Scripture has continuity with his theories of revelation in creation and of the eyes of faith, which see beyond the physical elements in baptism and the Eucharist’ (Rylaarsdam 2014:101). For Chrysostom and Augustine, listening to preaching and listening to Scripture constitute a seamless whole, which is in turn indivisibly linked to participation in the sacramental life of the Church. On this basis, all oral spiritual instruction, whether it matches what we might categorize formally as biblical interpretation or not, is by definition scriptural instruction.

Carol Harrison (2013:134–5) draws this idea out more fully when she talks of the ‘theatre of the Church’ in which the laity were ‘key players in the regular re-enactment of the narrative of the faith in the liturgy’, of ‘Augustine’s basic intuition that it is Scripture [interpreted and communicated via teaching and preaching] that shapes and identifies Christian culture’, and of how in the process it was not just the listeners who were transformed. Rather, ‘Scripture too was transformed as its images, stories, people, and events became part of early Christian imagination through the daring and creative improvisations and extemporizations of its preachers.’ Stökl ben Ezra (2014:108) offers a related insight when he writes that ‘any production of a play and each of its performances are necessarily interpretations of the original text, and, in a certain respect commentaries on it or rewritten versions of it’. While he goes on to discuss biblical lections rather than homiletic scriptural allusions, scriptural language, citation of Scripture, or telling of biblical stories, the implication is the same—that the performance is itself an interpretative act. Pamela Jackson (1991) argues that this was precisely the way in which Cyril of Jerusalem understood the role of Scripture in relation to his catechetical task. Cyril retold and narratively performed biblical texts, allowing Scripture to teach its own truths, rather than employing his own speculative explanation (exegesis). This experiential approach to Scripture, which included drawing listeners into the biblical narrative and activating their visual and olfactory as well as aural senses (Jackson 1991:448–9), is a precursor to preachers like Amphilochius of Iconium and Severian of Gabala. The two provided highly imaginative, dramatic interpretations of encounters between biblical actors that included substantial fictitious dialogue (Kecskeméti 1993, 1996), in the latter case often with a particular doctrinal slant. Regardless of the accuracy of Marco Conti’s tentative reading of the account as allegorical (Conti 1998:34–5), Potamius of Lisbon’s graphic multi-sensory homiletic retelling of the raising of Lazarus can be seen as another example.

To put this in perspective, homilies that contain what is traditionally identified as scriptural exegesis—that is, in which a biblical passage is explained to the listener verse by verse allegorically, literally, or typologically—are abundant. A large number of homilies by John Chrysostom and Origen on individual books of the OT and NT exemplify this verse-by-verse interpretation (cf. Sheridan 2012 regarding conformity and diversity in later Coptic practice). Cyril, however, offers yet another way in which Scripture is interpreted performatively without being done so explicitly. In the mode of later florilegia, he carefully compiles lists of scriptural testimonia, which are intended to reveal or support a particular truth collectively (Jackson 1991:435–6, 438–42). In this case the listener

is directed towards a particular truth, but it is up to Scripture itself to make that truth evident. Whereas there can be a typological element to the use of such testimonia, the primary intent is, however, not exegetical in any traditional sense. The use of Scripture in this sense has a different purpose from proof-texting, being directed towards moral transformation. As Morwenna Ludlow (2012) argues in the case of Origen, we should look beyond even the more obvious employment of exegesis in preaching to how the meaning of Scripture is communicated in a way that calls for the listener's imitation and personal transformation (for an earlier expression of this idea, see Torjesen 1986). In his homilies, as opposed to his written commentaries, she finds, Origen is concerned in particular with personalizing and re-presenting Scripture, to the extent that as he 'quotes, paraphrases and expounds the Bride's words in his *Homilies [on the Song of Songs]*' he not only imprints them on his hearer's minds but 'performatively makes the Bride's words his own' in the hope of making them the listener's own, too (Ludlow 2012:57). In this sense preaching is not just about Scripture; rather, in the process both preacher and listener are drawn into and become participants in it.

These approaches call us to embark on a complete reframing of what we think interpreting the Bible means in the context of preaching/catechesis. We are only just beginning to understand how the oral and performative communication of Scripture in preaching shapes memory, or arouses affect or imitation, or feeds into pre-existing narrative structures (Czachesz 2010:2–10). What we can say at this very preliminary stage is that if we accept that early Christian scriptural interpretation was directed in those media towards effecting the transformation of the whole human person, then the interpretation of Scripture is something that extended beyond reasoned explanation to engage both preacher/teacher and listener alike in a multi-sensory and multi-layered experience. The holistic way of looking at biblical interpretation promoted by preachers like Origen, Augustine, and Chrysostom offers an additional challenge. It calls us to extend our sights beyond the liturgical context to consider the way in which the Christian person was transformed (or not) through hearing the truths of Scripture communicated in spiritual instruction—that is, to view the life of the Christian person itself as embodied biblical interpretation.

## REFERENCES

### Scholarship

- Boys-Stones, G. R. (2001). *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study of its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Clark, E. A. (1999). *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Conti, M. (1998). *The Life and Works of Potamius of Lisbon* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Czachesz, I. (2010). 'Passion and Martyrdom Traditions in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles', in T. Nicklas, A. Merkt, and J. Verheyden (eds), *Gelitten, Gestorben, Auferstanden* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 1–20.

- Dolbeau, F. (2003). 'A propos d'un *agraphon*: réflexions sur la transmission de l'homilétique latine antique, avec édition du sermon "sermo sacerdotis dei"', *CP* 98: 160–74.
- Dossey, L. (2010). *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Elm, S. (2012). *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Ferguson, E. (2009). *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co.).
- Gavrilyuk, P. L. (2007). *Histoire du catéchuménat dans l'église ancienne*, trans. F. Lhoest, N. Mojaïsky, and A.-M. Gueit (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf).
- Gill, C. (2013). 'Philosophical Therapy as Preventive Psychological Medicine', in W. V. Harris (ed.), *Mental Disorders in the Classical World* (Leiden: Brill), 339–62.
- Harmless, W. (1995). *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press).
- Harrison, C. (2013). *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Heiser, A. (2012). *Die Paulusinszenierung des Johannes Chrysostomus: Epitheta und ihre Vorgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Hellholm, D., Vegge, T., Norderval, Ø., and Hellholm, C. (2011) (eds). *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, 3 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter).
- Hoek, A. van den (1997). 'The "Catechetical" School of Early Christian Alexandria and its Philonic Heritage', *HTR* 90: 59–87.
- Jackson, P. (1991). 'Cyril of Jerusalem's Use of Scripture in Catechesis', *TS* 52: 431–50.
- Jensen, R. M. (2012). *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic).
- Karamanolis, G. (2014). *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (London: Routledge).
- Kesckeméti, J. (1993). 'Doctrine et drame dans la prédication grecque', *Euphrosyne* 21: 29–67.
- Kesckeméti, J. (1996). 'Deux caractéristiques de la prédication chez les prédicateurs pseudo-chrysostomiens: La Répétition et le discours fictif', *Rhetorica* 14: 15–36.
- Kolbet, P. (2010). *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Krupp, R. A. (1984). *Saint John Chrysostom: A Scripture Index* (New York: Lanham).
- Lampe, P. (2003). *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, trans. M. Steinhauser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).
- Lipatov-Chicherin, N. (2013). 'Preaching as the Audience Heard it: Unedited Transcripts of Patristic Homilies', *SP* 64: 277–97.
- Ludlow, M. (2012). 'Origen as Preacher and Teacher: A Comparison of Exegetical Methods in his Writings on Genesis and The Song of Songs', in W. J. Lyons and I. Sandwell (eds), *Delivering the Word: Preaching and Exegesis in the Western Christian Tradition* (Sheffield: Equinox), 45–61.
- Maxwell, J. (2006). *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity: John Chrysostom and his Congregation in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Mayer, W. (2008). 'Homiletics', in S. Ashbrook Harvey and D. Hunter (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 565–83.
- Mayer, W. (2015). 'Shaping the Sick Soul: Reshaping the Identity of John Chrysostom', in G. D. Dunn and W. Mayer (eds), *Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium: Studies Inspired by Pauline Allen* (Leiden: Brill), 140–64.
- Merkt, A. (1997). 'Mündlichkeit: Ein Problem der Hermeneutik patristischer Predigten', *SP* 31: 76–85.

- Nuffelen, P. van (2011). *Rethinking the Gods: Philosophical Readings of Religion in the Post-Hellenistic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Nuffelen, P. van (2014). 'Galen, Divination and the Status of Medicine,' *CQ* 64: 337–52.
- Olivar, A. (1991). *La predicación cristiana antigua* (Barcelona: Editorial Herder).
- Piovanelli, P. (2013). 'Rewriting: The Path from Apocryphal to Heretical,' in W. Mayer and B. Neil (eds), *Religious Conflict from Early Christianity to the Rise of Islam* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 87–108.
- Rylaarsdam, D. (2014). *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy: The Coherence of his Theology and Preaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Sedley, D. (2003). 'Philodemus and the Decentralisation of Philosophy,' *Cronache ercolanesi* 33: 31–41.
- Sheridan, M. (2012). 'Rhetorical Structure in Coptic Sermons,' in M. Sheridan, *From the Nile to the Rhone and Beyond: Studies in Early Monastic Literature and Scriptural Interpretation* (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo Sant'Anselmo), 199–223.
- Siebert, F. (2008). 'The Sermon as an Invention of Hellenistic Judaism,' in A. Deeg, W. Homolka, and H.-G. Schöttler (eds), *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 25–44.
- Stewart, A. C. (2014). *The Original Bishops: Office and Order in the First Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic).
- Stewart-Sykes, A. (2001). *From Prophecy to Preaching: A Search for the Origins of the Christian Homily* (Leiden: Brill).
- Stockhausen, A. von (2008). 'Christian Perception of Jewish Preaching in Early Christianity?,' in A. Deeg, W. Homolka, and H.-G. Schöttler (eds), *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 49–70.
- Stökl ben Ezra, D. (2014). 'Reading Ritual with Genette: Paratextual and Metatextual Aspects of the Bible in Ritual Performances,' in S. H. Aufrère, P. S. Alexander, and Z. Plese (eds), *On the Fringe of Commentary: Metatextuality in Ancient Near Eastern and Ancient Mediterranean Cultures* (Leuven: Peeters), 105–26.
- Torjesen, K. J. (1986). *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: De Gruyter).
- Van Kooten, G. H. (2010). 'Christianity in the Greco-Roman World: Socio-Political, Philosophical, and Religious Interactions up to the Edict of Milan (CE 313),' in D. J. Bingham (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Early Christian Thought* (London: Routledge), 3–36.
- White, M. L. (2008). 'Moral Pathology: Passion, Progress, and Protreptic in Clement of Alexandria,' in J. T. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman Thought* (London: Routledge), 284–321.
- Winter, S. F. (2012). "'A Daring Synagogue Sermon?'" Paul's Preaching in 2 Cor. 3:7–18,' in W. J. Lyons and I. Sandwell (eds), *Delivering the Word: Preaching and Exegesis in the Western Christian Tradition* (Sheffield: Equinox), 24–44.

### Suggested Reading

- Clark, E. A. (1999). *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Hoek, A. van den (1997). 'The "Catechetical" School of Early Christian Alexandria and its Philonic Heritage,' *HTR* 90: 59–87.
- Jackson, P. (1991). 'Cyril of Jerusalem's Use of Scripture in Catechesis,' *TS* 52: 431–50.

- Kolbet, P. (2010). *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Rylaarsdam, D. (2014). *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy: The Coherence of his Theology and Preaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Siegert, F. (2008). 'The Sermon as an Invention of Hellenistic Judaism', in A. Deeg, W. Homolka, and H.-G. Schöttler (eds), *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 25–44.
- Stewart-Sykes, A. (2001). *From Prophecy to Preaching: A Search for the Origins of the Christian Homily* (Leiden: Brill).
- Stockhausen, A. von (2008). 'Christian Perception of Jewish Preaching in Early Christianity?', in A. Deeg, W. Homolka, and H.-G. Schöttler (eds), *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 49–70.
- Stökl ben Ezra, D. (2014). 'Reading Ritual with Genette: Paratextual and Metatextual Aspects of the Bible in Ritual Performances', in S. H. Aufrère, P. S. Alexander, and Z. Plese (eds), *On the Fringe of Commentary: Metatextuality in Ancient Near Eastern and Ancient Mediterranean Cultures* (Leuven: Peeters), 105–26.
- Torjesen, K. J. (1986). *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: De Gruyter).

## CHAPTER 16

---

# POETRY AND HYMNODY

---

JEFFREY WICKES

EARLY Christian culture built itself in relation to Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Christians imitated it, rewrote it, penned public speeches and sermons on its basis, inscribed its words on personal objects, and depicted its scenes artistically. They also used the words of Scripture to construct their liturgical songs, hymns, and prayers. The earliest Christian communal prayer was itself scriptural, as the Psalms and biblical Odes were recited as the prayers of the gathered Christian community, a liturgical practice attested by the third century (Schneider 1949: 28–65). In the Gospel of Luke, Mary, upon receiving her cousin Elizabeth’s benediction—‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!’—immediately breaks into a poem, the Magnificat, itself modelled on a poem from the OT (1 Sam 2.1–10). The author of Colossians exhorts his audience to sing ‘psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your heart to God’ (3.16). In the second century, in one of the earliest non-Christian testaments to the practices of early Christians, Pliny the Younger informs Trajan that Christians meet regularly to ‘sing songs in turn to Christ as to a god’ (*Epistula ad Trajanum* 96.7). And by the fourth century, the Spanish pilgrim Egeria was singing her way across the eastern Mediterranean Christian landscape (see chapters 24–49 of *Diary of a Pilgrimage*).

Roughly twenty years ago, Frances Young noted that, in assessing early Christian exegesis, the genres of exegesis were as important as the content they embedded—that, in varying degrees, genre had a determinative effect on the exegesis that an author would produce (Young 1997:217–47). The genres of poetry and hymnody that developed in the Late Antique Christian world were as self-consciously literary as any other early Christian genre. In the Greek world, in the sophisticated poems of Gregory of Nazianzus and the *Metaphrases* of Apollinarius and Nonnus, Christian authors deliberately negotiated their pagan literary past (see Andrew Faulkner’s chapter in this volume). By writing Christian poems in classical verse, they sought to claim that past for Christianity. The cultural backdrop of the hymns and poems that would emerge in the Syriac world is much hazier, but the literary features of the work are patent.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Blake Hartung and Jacob Prahlow for their help in gathering sources and constructing the bibliography for this chapter.

How did these hymns and poems interact with Scripture? In what way did they exegete, recycle, and represent it? Most introductory studies of early Christian poetry and hymnody note the importance of the biblical Psalms and Odes for the poetic genres that would begin to emerge in the early Christian world. But, on the whole, these studies are not focused on the exegetical characteristics of hymnody per se, but on the historical and literary features of the hymns. In this chapter, I would like to chart the relationship between Scripture and early Christian hymnody in two ways: first, I suggest a typology for the way early Syriac and Greek Christian poetry and hymnody developed in response to Scripture, beginning in the early period with a scripturally imitative and allusive use of Scripture, and developing in the third and fourth centuries into a genre that reflected upon Scripture in a more self-conscious fashion. Second, I examine some of the exegetical characteristics of that Christian hymnody that developed during the fourth to seventh centuries.

## DEFINING HYMNODY AND EXEGESIS

---

What is an early Christian hymn or poem? And what role does exegesis play in early Christian poetry and hymnody? Both of these questions become much easier to answer after the fourth century. In the writings of Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), the Christian hymn takes on the specific form of a sung, metred work—one that comes to draw on Scripture in very clear, concrete ways. At that point, in the fourth century, we can begin to speak of a recognizable genre of Late Antique hymnody. In the early period, however, a hymn can be difficult to define. Scholars have yet to agree on a definition for ‘hymn’ that unites the vast array of hymnic literature in early Christianity. Some suggest its primary characteristic is doxology, while others argue that a hymn must be a sung, metred work, performed in a religious context (for a concise survey, see Löhr 2014:161–3). For the purposes of this chapter, I define ‘hymn’ or ‘poem’ simply as an early Christian piece of literature that is usually metred, and intended to be performed (typically sung or chanted) in a religious setting.

What about exegesis? Traditionally, the commentary—in which an author distinguishes clearly between a base text and his own comment upon that base text—has functioned as the exegetical genre par excellence (Fraade 1991:1–2). But much of early Christian literature engaged in acts of exegesis without embedding this exegesis in commentary form. In early Christian hymnody, reflections upon Scripture were woven into reflections upon broader theological and liturgical themes, and these in turn were woven back into the scriptural narratives. At the same time, we can trace the gradual emergence of something we might call ‘exegetical hymnody’: hymnody which, while using Scripture freely and imaginatively, nevertheless signalled clear base texts from which meanings were drawn. In the earliest hymnic literature—what I refer to below as exhibiting *imitative* exegesis—the boundaries between text and commentary are blurred. Later, however, in the works of Ephrem the Syrian and his successors, it becomes much easier to identify

base scriptural texts and the interpretations that follow from these base texts. These works draw meaning from Scripture, yet, unlike the commentary, their goal is not simply to clarify the earlier scriptural text, but to use this text to build new literary works, which speak to new theological and social situations.

## IMITATION AND EXEGESIS

---

Outside of Scripture, the earliest Christian hymns arose in the early Christian literature known as the ‘apocrypha,’ or ‘pseudepigrapha,’ but are also paralleled in that literature known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Alikin 2010:215–23; Gordley 2007:41–2, 109–10). Some of these works, such as the *hodayot* hymns of Qumran, are explicitly hymnic, and almost certainly liturgical (Davila 2000:5–12). Others, though written in prose, embed hymns of varying lengths (see e.g. *Protevangelium of James* 3.1–3 and 6.2, the *Acts of Thomas* 1.6–7, 2.27, 5.50, and 9.108–13, and the *Acts of John* 94–6). One of the most remarkable pieces of early Christian hymnody occurs in the work known as the *Odes of Solomon*. The *Odes* are a mysterious collection that only came to light about 100 years ago. Probably written in Syriac in the second or third century, they nevertheless exist, in addition to Syriac, in very old Greek and Coptic recensions (Drijvers 1984:3; Lattke 2009:3–11). The Odist delivers these non-metred, poetic works in an allusive, nearly ecstatic style, even speaking at times as the person of Christ (*Odes* 28, 41, 42). The *Odes*’ relationship to Scripture is difficult to define. On the one hand, they betray a clear knowledge of basic early Christian data—the virgin birth, the crucifixion, and the ascension (see e.g. *Odes* 19 and 28)—and frequently seem to echo loosely the Gospel of John (Charlesworth 1972). Yet, they never quote Scripture, or comment upon it in concrete and identifiable ways. The *Odes*, like most of the hymnody of this period, would be better characterized as imitative and allusive, using language in a way that sounds scriptural, but without referring to scriptural texts in any obvious way (on the distinction between exegesis and allusion, see Sommer 1998:16–17).

The origins of the liturgical hymnody that would develop in the fourth century are obscure, but these pseudepigraphal works represent an early stage in the development of the genre. Alongside these works, we can also see the origins of specifically *exegetical* hymnody in the second-century sermon known as the *On Pascha* of Melito (Wellesz 1943:41–52). Melito was a prophetic leader, possibly bishop, of Sardis in Asia Minor, in the second century (d. 190). The genre of *On Pascha* has been a cause for serious debate. Originally seen as a homily, it has come to be understood more accurately as a liturgical text betraying both Haggadic homiletic patterns and Graeco-Roman rhetorical techniques (Stewart-Sykes 1998:112–13). The first forty-six stanzas of the work function as a basic retelling of Exodus 12. Stanzas 47 to the conclusion then reveal to the audience the significance of this narrative.

Though non-metrical, many aspects of *On Pascha* resemble the hymnic literature that would emerge in Syriac during the fourth century. The work constructs long rhythmic sequences: ‘He is law, in that he judges. | He is word, in that he teaches. | He is grace, in

that he saves. | He is father, in that he begets. | He is son, in that he is begotten' (§9). It also utilizes polarities and juxtapositions: '... the mystery of the Pascha | is both new and old, | eternal and provisional, | perishable and imperishable, | mortal and immortal' (§2). From its outset, *On Pascha* situates itself in relationship to Scripture in a very direct way. The work begins, 'The Scripture of the exodus of the Hebrews has been read, and the words of the mystery have been declared.' Melito presents Scripture as fulfilled in the passion of the Lord, but that event as celebrated in the context of the gathered community: 'You have heard the narrative of the type and its correspondence: hear now the confirmation of the mystery' (*pass.* 46).

We do not know exactly how the liturgical hymns of the fourth century and later drew on this early literature—they do not quote it or allude to it in any explicit way. But this literature offers the remnants of the hymnic forms that were in the air of the eastern Mediterranean in the period before authors such as Ephrem and Romanos. While their relationship and apparent reception of this literature was organic, other factors led to a more conscious reflection on the role of hymns in the worshipping community.

## HYMNS AND HERESY

---

In 1961, the eminent Byzantine musicologist Egon Wellesz suggested that, during the fourth century, Christians ceased writing individually composed hymns because these works had become too closely associated with heresy (Wellesz 1961:146–7). Indeed, there seems to have developed in the fourth and fifth centuries an increased Christian awareness of the possible danger of newly composed hymns. The primary sources for this relationship are Ephrem's *Hymns against Heresies*, the Canons of the Council of Laodicaea, and the *Ecclesiastical History* of Sozomen.

In the 53rd hymn of the cycle *Against Heresies*, Ephrem takes on the literary remains of the third-century speculative Christian philosopher Bardaisan (on Bardaisan, see Drijvers 1966). Bardaisan's only surviving works are prose, but Ephrem tells us that he wrote 150 psalms, in imitation of David. Ephrem likewise suggests that, through the sweetness of his songs, Bardaisan was able to confuse simple people, who liked the tunes and thus became attached to their heretical words (Griffith 2006). In later historiographical sources, Ephrem's words would be dramatized and narrativized, to argue that Ephrem only began to write hymnody *because* of its heretical associations, in order to refute heresy (Amar 2011:74–84; Brock 1985). But Ephrem's own words themselves are ambiguous: he accuses Bardaisan of imitating David, and bemoans the fact that his sweet songs have managed to smuggle heretical ideas into the Church. But nowhere does he blame the literary form of the hymn itself. What his words *may* suggest, however, is a developing uneasiness about the genre of hymnody.

Much has been made about the references to music and singing in the Canons of the Council of Laodicea. The Council and its canons, however, are fraught with difficulties: we do not know if the Council actually happened, or precisely whence its canons came. Despite these uncertainties, the canons can be dated to the late fourth century

(Hess 2002:48). With respect to hymnody, Canon 59 insists that ‘no psalms composed by private individuals (*ἰδιοωτικοῦς ψαλμοῦς*) nor any uncanonical books may be read in the church, but only the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments’ (*C Laod* 59; ed. Bruns 1839:79) (this Canon would later be repeated in the acts of the Council of Braga in the year 563; Wellesz 1961:147). This is one canon only, and a local one at that. But, coupled with Ephrem’s roughly contemporaneous critique of Bardaisan’s hymnody, it suggests some debate about the role of hymnody in the community’s worship.

Finally, this evidence for the danger of hymnody appears most dramatically in the fifth-century *Ecclesiastical History* of Sozomen. Sozomen offers four different scenes in which song acts powerfully to sway the faith of a hearer (*h.e.* 3.16; 6.25; 7.23; 8.8). The best known of these narratives involves John Chrysostom from his time as bishop of Constantinople. According to Sozomen, the Arians had been kicked out of the city of Constantinople, but would gather by night within the city and march in procession singing doctrinal hymns (8.8). Noticing the catchiness of their tunes, Chrysostom became concerned, and instructed his people to ‘sing hymns in the same manner’. The orthodox songs proved catchier, and thus won the day. Sozomen concludes by suggesting that it was through this episode that liturgical singing was born.

This evidence is spotty—a couple of hymns by Ephrem, some obscure canons from an obscure council, and four narratives recounting events that happened 100 years before they were penned. But we can combine this evidence with the existence of actual Gnostic hymns—hymns preserved in Nag Hammadi, as well as Manichaean and Marcionite hymns (Meyer 2007; Gardner and Lieu 2004:237–40). Taken altogether, the evidence suggests that, in the fourth century, the literary form of the hymn, and its role in the life of the worshipping community, came into a degree of scrutiny that was new.

It is also in the fourth century that we see, in Ephrem, the birth of a type of poem—the *madrasha* (pl., *madrashē*), a didactic, community-oriented song—that did not exist before. In terms of content, one of the primary ways Ephrem’s *madrashē* would manifest their difference vis-à-vis earlier Christian hymnic material was in their extensive and clear use of Scripture. Whereas earlier hymns such as the *Odes of Solomon* had been content to imitate and very loosely allude to Scripture, the material that would emerge in the fourth century (and thereafter) engaged with Scripture in newly specific ways. I would like to suggest that all of this evidence taken together points to the development of new genres of hymnody, and new perceptions of the role of hymnody. And one of the earmarks of this hymnody compared to what came before was its close relationship to Scripture.

## AUTHORS AND TEXTS: THE SYRIAC TRADITION

---

Ephrem was born around 306 CE in the city of Nisibis—on the border of Rome and Persia—and died in 373 in the city of Edessa. He spoke and wrote in Syriac. Ninety per cent of what Ephrem wrote took the form of sung or chanted verse. He wrote two types

of verse compositions, the *madrasha* and the *mimra* (pl., *mimre*). Of these two, the *madrasha* (usually translated ‘hymn’) is the more complicated, utilizing isosyllabic stichs of three or more lines, with metrical patterns ranging from the simple (4 + 4 / 4 + 4 / 4 + 4) to the complex (alternating lines of 5 and 6 for up to eleven lines). Ephrem’s *madrashas* exhibit forty-five different metres.

Ephrem’s *madrashas* survive in collections from the early sixth century (Brock 1997:490–1). None of these collections bear explicitly scriptural titles, but all of them reflect on Scripture in very obvious ways. For example, the *Madrasha against Julian* present the apostate emperor through a lens fashioned by the OT narratives of Ahab and Nebuchadnezzar (Griffith 1987:245–6). The *Madrasha on Paradise* perform a sort of *lectio divina* on the opening chapters of Genesis (Griffith 1997:24–6). Ephrem’s hymns, in a way that is very different from the earlier *Odes of Solomon* and similar literature, interact with Scripture in a way that can be called ‘exegetical’: they base themselves on, and offer interpretations of, easily identifiable scriptural texts.

Following Ephrem’s death, the Syriac hymnic tradition would focus more on the formally simpler verse compositions known as the *mimra* and the *sogitha* (pl., *sogyatha*). Verse *mimra* (the term itself can also refer to prose treatises) take the form of isosyllabic couplets, using a variety of metres that are associated with particular authors (the metre of Ephrem is 7 + 7, Balai, 5 + 5, and Jacob, 12 + 12), often built around acrostic patterns (a practice seen already in some of Ephrem’s *madrashas*). The *sogitha* also exhibits the simple metre of the *mimra*, but is stanzaic in character, and is devoted to dialogues between different characters (Brock 1989:140). These dialogues most commonly take place between biblical characters, but there are also *sogyatha* between historical characters, and even months of the year (Brock 2008:663–5).

The genre of the *mimra* comes into its own in the works of four authors, Cyrillona and Balai (both late fourth to early fifth century), Narsai (d. 502), and Jacob of Sarug (d. c. 521). There are also a number of fifth-century *mimre* attributed to an Isaac, who we now know to be three different people, but on whose writing very little work has been done (Bou Mansour 2003; Brock 1987; Mathews 2002, 2003). There is likewise little known about the lives of Balai and Cyrillona. We have five authentic *mimre* of Cyrillona, three of which are devoted to liturgical themes (*On the Eucharist*, *On the Washing of the Feet*, and *On Pascha*), one to the invasion of the Huns (*On Scourges*), and one on the NT character Zacchaeus. All of these reflect on their subjects in explicitly biblical terms (the liturgical *mimre* taking the Last Supper discourses of John as their primary source, and *On Scourges* weaving together a range of prophetic and apocalyptic biblical texts) (Griffin 2011:48–55, 232–3, 237–9). Balai, a chorepiscopus in Aleppo, left us *mimre* devoted to his Bishop Acacius, as well as eight *mimre* on Joseph, and a fragment on the death of Aaron (Phenix 2008:4).

It is, however, the works of Jacob and Narsai that represent the height of the genre of the *mimra*. Narsai lived from 399 to 502, during one of the most tumultuous periods in church history. He was a representative of that ecclesial body that would come to be known as ‘Nestorian’ (on this term, see Brock 1996:23–6). Narsai’s authentic corpus

numbers between 82 and 84 *mimre*, mostly written in twelve-syllable verse, and a number of which treat explicitly biblical themes (on these, see Frishman 1992). Yet, of this fifth-century poetic duo, Jacob of Sarug is seen as the more original. Jacob lived slightly later than Narsai (c.450–521), and sided with Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth-century Christological debates, though he articulated this position quietly (see Brock 1989–91:448–59). Jacob was a voluminous composer of *mimre*, 222 of which were published by Father Paul Bedjan, in an edition that has recently been reprinted (trans. Bedjan and Brock 2006). Jacob's *mimre*, while always addressed to the concerns of his fifth-century audience, are explicitly exegetical in character: most bear scriptural titles and are devoted equally to characters and events from both the OT and NT.

Alongside and following these authors, the Syriac poetic tradition would also develop a body of anonymous *mimre* treating a range of biblical themes. Much of this material has only recently been made available in printed editions and English translations (Brock 1982, 2012). These anonymous poems, many of which are *sogyatha*, pit biblical characters such as Cain and Abel against one another and, building upon the silences of the biblical text, fashion psychological profiles which are theologically rich and certainly would have been entertaining for their audiences.

A final Syriac poetic genre that we should mention is the *qala* (pl., *qale*). Originally, the term *qala* ('voice' or 'tune') referred to the melody and metre that accompanied Ephrem's *madrasha*. The *qala*, often taken from the first line of a *madrasha*, would be listed prior to the first stanza of the *madrasha*, indicating the metre and the melody of the work that would follow. Over time, however, and in the specific context of liturgy, *qala* came to refer to stanzaic verses which were typically antiphonal (Brock 2011:334–5).

## AUTHORS AND TEXTS: THE GREEK TRADITION

---

Almost immediately following Ephrem's death, his poetic compositions were being translated into Greek. Out of this translation movement, there arose new Greek compositions, often attributed to Ephrem (Kalish 2009:29–30, 155; Brock 1989:141). While the Greek tradition obviously has its own hymnic pedigree, the influence of Syriac poetry would be decisive in shaping the great Byzantine liturgical poets of the fifth to ninth centuries. The Byzantine hymnographic tradition would come into its own in the works of the sixth-century hymnist Romanos the Melodist. But Byzantine exegetical hymnody of the Syrian type first began to appear in the fifth century, in the short non-metred works known as the *troparia* (sing., *troparion*). We have our first report of these in the *Life of Abba Pambo* (Palladius, *h. Laus*. 10), and our earliest examples in the *Life of Auxentius*. These *troparia* were short doxological works, intended to follow the Psalms. They were not metred, and their relationship to Scripture was betrayed more in their

structural relationship to psalmody than in their actual content. However, beginning with the *kontakia* of Romanos the Melodist (d. c.560), there emerged a Greek liturgical hymnody which was exegetical in content.

The origins of the *kontakion* are unknown. Romanos derived from Emesa in Syria, and certainly the Syriac *madrasha* and *mimra* exerted some influence on his literary development (Petersen 1985:174–7, 183–4). The *kontakion* is a metred work that does not utilize Greek classical metres, but a creatively adapted version of the syllabic style of Syriac poetry, to which the author has introduced homotony (Brock 1989:141). Each *kontakion* is introduced by a proemium, and then consists in a series of isosyllabic strophes, also known as *troparia*. Each stanza is followed by a refrain, which is woven seamlessly into the content of the stanza. *Kontakia* are typically built around acrostics on the author's name and, sometimes, the subject of the hymn (a practice also attested in Syriac literature). Like the *mimre* of Jacob, Romanos' *kontakia* relate often to liturgical feasts (using scriptural accounts to reflect on them), and characters from the OT and NT. Georgia Frank has said that 'Romanos's hymns . . . represent the emergence of biblical epic in the context of Christian worship' (Frank 2006:76).

Within the Byzantine hymnographic tradition, the *kontakion* would be replaced by a work called the Kanon. If the formal simplicity of the *Kontakion* evokes simpler Syriac *mimre*, the Byzantine Kanon resembles more complex *madrashic* forms, with its long stanzas and complex metres. As we chart the development of a specifically exegetical hymnographic idiom, the Byzantine Kanon stands as the genre most closely bound to Scripture in a formal way. Each Kanon is made up of nine odes, each of which consists of 6–9 *troparia*. In its original practice, the Kanon followed the chanting of the biblical odes. In time it came to replace those odes, but still retained allusions to them.

The preceding discussion has given us a sense of the development of exegetical hymnody, and some of the key authors who produced this hymnody, and the genres in which they articulated it. But what were the characteristics of this exegetical hymnody? How did it use and interpret Scripture?

## PERFORMATIVE EXEGESIS

---

The first step in understanding exegesis in early Christian hymnody requires some imagination. Most modern readers encounter these early Christian hymns as written texts, read silently in non-liturgical spaces—libraries, offices, classrooms, or homes. But these hymns were written to be performed within the context of the worshipping community. We cannot always determine exactly what this context looked like. Yet all of these early Christian hymns have elements that set them apart from genres such as the commentary. Ephrem's hymns, for example, carry a melody and a refrain. Most likely a soloist would have sung the stanza, while a choir (probably composed of women) responded with a refrain. This means that even at its most exegetical and theologically complex, hymnody would have been a communal, musical event.

Semantically, the refrains that accompany Ephrem's *madrashē* in the manuscripts relate to the stanzas in only the most general of ways; it is difficult to know whether they date to the time of Ephrem himself. Yet, in the *kontakia* of Romanos, stanzas and refrains were structured to flow into one another seamlessly, thus joining hymnist and choir in a single act of scriptural narration. Consider the following stanza, from Romanos' *kontakion On the Nativity* (the choral refrain is in italics):

Today the Virgin gives birth to him who is above all being,  
And the earth offers a cave to him whom no one can approach.  
Angels with shepherds give glory,  
And magi journey with a star,  
For to us there has been born,  
*A little Child, God before the Ages!*

In this hymnic account of Luke's scene of the nativity, choir and soloist join together, in the context of communal worship, to enact the biblical scene.

Taking into account the performative context of this hymnody changes the way we think about the exegesis embedded within it. To some extent, understanding any early Christian exegesis requires this same imaginative leap. But whereas the performance of a commentary might resemble something like a lecture or a public talk, the performance of a hymn resembled something more like a play or a concert. Hymns were sung (their words bound to specific metrical patterns), accompanied by ritual gestures (bowing, for example, and movement throughout the church), and performed with something like actors (for example, a woman may have sung the part of Mary) (Harvey 2005:125–49; Harvey 2010:48–64).

But hymns were different from plays in that they situated themselves in direct address to God, even when they engaged in teaching obviously intended for an audience. In his sixth *Hymn on Faith*, Ephrem spends eleven stanzas articulating a very difficult discussion of Genesis 1–2. But he concludes by surrendering the discussion to God in doxology (note that 'yod' is the first letter of Jesus' name in Syriac):

O Jesus, glorious name!  
Hidden bridge for crossing  
From death to life!  
To you I have arrived and stood.  
By a yod—your letter—I am kept back.  
Be a bridge for my word,  
So that it might cross to your truth.  
Let your love serve as a bridge for your servant—  
Upon you I will cross to your Father.  
I will cross and say, 'Blessed is he  
Who has softened his strength through this Child!'  
To this stanza, the choir then responds in unified melody:  
Glory to the womb of your Father!

Regardless of the complexity of the exegesis the hymnist put forth in song, the task of the human audience was to participate in this direct address to God. This meant that the hymns' exegetical content was always directed towards a doxological end. At the same time, the hymnists were unified with their audience: altogether, hymnist and audience engaged in an exegetically structured act of praise.

Hymnody also resituated the audience with respect to time and history. In his hymns *On Nativity*, Ephrem repeatedly affirms that Christ has been born *today* in fulfilment of the Scriptures. His repeated temporal designation places the audience in a unique space: the birth of Christ has fulfilled the images of the OT *not* in first-century Palestine, but *today*, in this northern Mesopotamian church in which Ephrem performs the hymn. There is a complete overlap between the OT, the NT, and the immediate context of Ephrem's audience. All of this comes together in the single moment of the hymn performed: Christ is born *today*, and the audience must *today* keep vigil to await his birth. The angels announce his coming *today*, and the audience must participate in that announcement with their own sleepless, singing bodies. This complete breakdown between text and audience, past and present, is characteristic of hymnic exegesis.

## HYMNODY AND REWRITING

---

The study of early Christian exegesis has been dominated by the categories of allegory and typology, and the geographic designations that accompany these categories (Alexandria and Antioch, respectively). More recently, scholars have called into question the degree to which these terms accurately map onto the literature of early Christianity (Martens 2008:283–317). 'Rewritten Bible' may provide a better category for assessing hymnody's exegesis (Bucur 2007:92). 'Rewritten Bible' was coined in 1961 by Geza Vermes to describe the works of Second Temple Judaism such as Jubilees, 1 Enoch, and the 'Genesis Apocryphon' (Vermes 1961). Rather than drawing a link between an OT and an NT event (as typology is traditionally understood to do), or making an OT narrative to stand for a spiritual reality (as allegory is often understood to do), 'rewritten Bible' resituates a biblical narrative in a context provided by the concerns of the author. Ephrem's *Madrasha against Julian*, for example, can be read as a rewriting of the narratives of Daniel and Elijah, from the perspective of the Church's persecution by Julian (Griffith 1987:245–6).

Or take, for example, Romanos' *kontakion*, *On the Meeting of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The *kontakion* has as its subject Christ's presentation in the temple to the elder Simeon, and can be read as a rewriting of the biblical source of that event (Luke 2.22–40) from the perspective of a sixth-century Chalcedonian author. The main speaker in the biblical narrative and the *kontakion* is Simeon, the elder who receives Jesus in the Temple as the expected Messiah. In the biblical text, Simeon picks up the child Christ and speaks the prayer that would come to be known as the *nunc dimittis* ('Lord now let your servant depart...'). Romanos, however, rewrites that biblical prayer so that it unambiguously bespeaks a particularly sixth-century Chalcedonian orthodoxy (choral refrains in italics):

[5.7] And earnestly entreating, [Simeon] cried out with understanding, 'Protect me,  
And do not let the fire of divinity consume me,'

*O only lover of mankind!*

[6] 'Now I, having endured toil, am strong, for I have seen Your salvation, O Lord!  
You Who are the perfect image

Of the incomprehensible paternal hypostasis, the Unapproachable Giver of Light,  
The unchangeable seal of divinity, the reflection of the glory

Which in truth shines upon the souls of all humans,

Who exists before the ages, and has created all things!

Indeed, You are the light far-shining, the light of Your father, unconfused, unseen

And incomprehensible, though You have become a man,'

*O only lover of mankind!*

Simeon's speech embeds and plays with a range of biblical vocabulary. In Luke's Gospel, Simeon picks up the child and 'says' the *nunc dimittis*. Here, Romanos has him pick up the child and 'cry out . . . "Protect me!"' Romanos' Christ-child is a decidedly Byzantine Christ, whose divinity is palpable even at forty days old. Romanos then plays with the text of Simeon's Lucan speech in line 4, the second part of which is a condensed version of Luke 2.28. The scriptural quotation suggests Romanos' desire to present Simeon's speech as an interpretation of the biblical text. The speech that follows serves as an explication of what it means for this child to be Simeon's salvation. Lines 5–6a, then, rewrite the Lucan text using Heb 1.3—a basic anti-subordinationist proof-text—to recast the Lucan Christ as decidedly pro-Nicene, pro-Chalcedonian.

In this process of rewriting we see a rhetorical technique very common to Late Ancient hymnography: the invention of speech for biblical characters (a rhetorical technique called *prosopopoeia*) (Harvey 2001:109–11). This invented speech can serve a number of literary purposes. It can explain silences in the text, develop a particular theological reading of the text (as the example above), or develop a character's psychological profile for the purposes of entertainment. In an anonymous Syriac *sogitha* from the sixth century, the author uses invented speech to enter into the silence of the text of Genesis 4.1–16 (Brock 1982:2–6; trans. Brock 2012:51–60). What is surprising about this retelling of the narrative of Cain and Abel is that the author seems uninterested in offering any but the most basic of theological explanations. Instead, in the manner of a master storyteller, his retelling develops the pathos of the biblical scene. Cain begins:

13. Since the Lord has taken delight  
In your sacrifice, but rejected mine,  
I will kill you. Because he has preferred you,  
I will get my own back on this his 'friend'.

Abel replies:

14. What wrong have I done  
If the Lord has been pleased with me?

He searches out hearts and so has the right  
To choose or reject as he likes.

As the conflict escalates, Abel tries to reason with Cain, asking only for a small corner of the earth on which to dwell, and then finally begging for his life:

18. Grant me as a favor some small corner  
In the world, and do not kill me.  
The whole world shall be yours,  
Then you can offer up your sacrifice just as you like.  
24.3–4. Show some sorrow, brother. Pity me!  
Do not shed my blood, filled with hate!

After 132 lines of verse dialogue, Abel finally resigns himself to his fate:

46. Your heart has been dulled by anger.  
I have no idea what to say to you.  
Let the mountains weep for me from now on,  
Seeing that I am going to die between them.

In this anonymous *sogitha* we see well the entertainment value of the genre. The author's goal is not to draw forth a theological lesson from Scripture, or explain its difficulty. Rather, in a culture that held the Syriac Bible to reflect the height of literary expression, simply retelling its stories—bringing out its silences, inhabiting its characters, and developing their psychological profiles—became a source of entertainment. Within early Christian exegetical culture, a verse homily such as this one—and there are many more like it—reminds us that exegesis could also be about entertainment.

## COMPARATIVE HYMNIC EXEGESIS

---

In lieu of a conclusion, I would like to suggest an area of early Christian hymnody that is ripe for study, but one which moves us outside of early Christianity strictly speaking. Alongside the plethora of early Christian hymns that developed in the eastern Mediterranean, there also developed Jewish poetic forms that shared much with the Syriac and Greek forms we have been examining. The most famous of these are the *piyyutim* (a term derived from the Greek ποιητής, 'poet')—Jewish liturgical poems that reached a golden age between the sixth and eighth centuries. The precise origins of *piyyut* are unknown (Lieber 2010:7). In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars, often motivated by explicitly ideological reasons, saw the *piyyutim* as clearly derived from Greek and Syriac liturgical forms. But as Laura Lieber has noted, the reality is more complex, involving 'mutual, and not necessarily conscious, cross-pollination' (Lieber 2010:212). Like Syriac and Greek verse forms, *piyyutim* build formally on acrostics,

freely use similar rhetorical techniques such as composed speech, and often reflect shared liturgical and exegetical traditions (Lieber 2010:221–2). In this way, we can think of these Syriac, Greek, and Hebrew poetic forms as a unique, genetically related late ancient art form, but one which can voice real differences between the communities.

This brief sketch suggests that though, from our perspective, early Christian and Byzantine hymnody was a unique literary form, it was, within the late ancient world, not a uniquely *Christian* form. Religious groups—Christians, Jews, Muslims, not to mention Manichaeans and others—used hymnic forms to exegete their Scripture, and to bring it to life in the midst of their congregations. Altogether, this pan-religious hymnic literature offers a rich avenue for examining Late Antique exegetical culture.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Concilium Laodicenum*. Greek text: H. M. Bruns (ed.), *Canones Apostolorum et Conciliorum: Saeculorum IV–VII* (Berlin: Reimeri, 1839).
- [Anonymous], *Odes of Solomon*. Syriac text and Eng. trans.: J. H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon: Edited with Translation and Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).
- Ephrem the Syrian, *Contra haereses*. Syriac text: E. Beck (ed.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra haereses*, CSCO 169–70 (Louvain: Peeters, 1957).
- Ephrem the Syrian, *Homilia in Christi Nativitatem*. Syriac text: E. Beck (ed.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, CSCO 186–7 (Louvain: Peeters, 1959). Eng. trans.: K. E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989).
- Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymni de fide*. Syriac text: E. Beck (ed.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de fide*, CSCO 154–5 (Louvain: Peeters, 1955). Eng. trans.: J. Wickes, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Faith, FC* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015).
- Jacob of Sarug, *Homiliae*. Eng. trans.: P. Bedjan and S. P. Brock (eds), *Homilies of Mar Jacob Sarug* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006).
- Melito of Sardis, *Homilia in passionem Christi*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: S. G. Hall, *On Pascha and Fragments: Texts and Translations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).
- Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*. Latin text: B. Radice (ed.), *Letters, Volume II: Books 8–10*. LCL 59 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). Eng. trans.: P. G. Walsh, *Pliny the Younger: Complete Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- Romanos, *Kontakia*. Greek text: P. Mass and C. A. Trypanis (eds), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963). Eng. trans.: M. Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, 2 vols (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1970).
- Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica*. Eng. trans.: P. Schaff, *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates, The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen*, NPNF 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2014; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

### Scholarship

- Alikin, V. A. (2010). *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Leiden: Brill).

- Amar, J. P. (2011) (trans. and ed.). *The Syriac Vita Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian* (Louvain: Peeters).
- Bou Mansour, T. (2003). 'Une clé pour la distinction des écrits des Isaac d'Antioche', *ETL* 29 (4): 365–402.
- Brock, S. P. (1982). *Soghyatha mgabbyatha* [Select Dialogue Poems] (Monastery of St Ephrem, Holland).
- Brock, S. P. (1985). 'Syriac and Greek Hymnography: Problems of Origins', *SP* 16 (2): 77–81.
- Brock, S. P. (1987). 'The Published Verse Homilies of Isaac of Antioch, Jacob of Serugh, and Narsai: Index of Incipits', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32 (2): 279–313.
- Brock, S. P. (1989). 'From Ephrem to Romanos', *SP* 20: 139–51.
- Brock, S. P. (1989–91). 'The Syrian Orthodox Reaction to the Council of Chalcedon: Jacob of Serugh's Homily on the Council of Chalcedon', *TSt* 8–10: 448–59.
- Brock, S. P. (1996). 'The "Nestorian" Church: A Lamentable Misnomer', *Bulletin-John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78 (3): 23–36.
- Brock, S. P. (1997). 'The Transmission of Ephrem's Madrashe in the Syriac Liturgical Tradition', *SP* 33: 490–505.
- Brock, S. P. (2008). 'Poetry and Hymnography (3): Syriac', in S. A. Harvey and D. G. Hunter (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 657–71.
- Brock, S. P. (2011). 'Poetry', in S. P. Brock et al. (eds), *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press and Beth Mardutho: The Syriac Institute), 334–5.
- Brock, S. P. (2012). *Treasure-House of Mysteries: Explorations of the Sacred Text through Poetry in the Syriac Tradition*. Popular Patristics 45 (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Bucur, B. G. (2007). 'Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies in Byzantine Hymnography: Rewritten Bible?' *TS* 68: 92–112.
- Charlesworth, J. H. (1972). 'Qumran, John and the Odes of Solomon', in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *John and Qumran* (London: Geoffrey Chapman), 107–36.
- Davila, J. R. (2000). *Liturgical Works*. Eerdman's Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Drijvers, H. J. W. (1966). *Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Company).
- Drijvers, H. J. W. (1984). 'East of Antioch: Forces and Structures in the Development of Early Syriac Theology', in *East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity* (London: Variorum Reprints), 1–27.
- Fraade, S. D. (1991). *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press).
- Frank, G. (2006). 'Romanos and the Night Vigil in the Sixth Century', in D. Krueger (ed.), *Byzantine Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 59–78.
- Frishman, J. (1992). *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy: An Edition, Translation and Study of Six Biblical Homilies by Narsai* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rijksuniversiteit de Leiden).
- Gardner, I. and Lieu, S. N. C. (2004). *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Gordley, M. (2007). *The Colossian Hymn in Context: An Exegesis in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Hymnic and Epistolary Conventions*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 288 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Griffin, C. (2011). *Cyrrillona: A Critical Study and Commentary* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Catholic University of America).
- Griffith, S. (1987). 'Ephraem the Syrian's Hymns "Against Julian": Meditations on History and Imperial Power', *VC* 41 (3): 245–6.

- Griffith, S. (1997). *Faith Adoring the Mystery: Reading the Bible with Ephrem the Syrian* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press).
- Griffith, S. (2006). 'St. Ephraem, Bar Dayṣān and the Clash of Madrāshê in Aram: Readings in St. Ephraem's Hymni contra Haereses', *The Harp* 21: 447–72.
- Harvey, S. A. (2001). '2000 NAPS Presidential Address: Spoken Words, Voiced Silence: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition', *J ECS* 9: 105–31.
- Harvey, S. A. (2005). 'Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's Choirs and Sacred Song in Ancient Syriac Christianity', *Hugoye* 8: 125–49.
- Harvey, S. A. (2010). 'Performance as Exegesis: Women's Liturgical Choirs in Syriac Tradition', in B. J. Groen and S. H. Teeple (eds), *Inquiries into Eastern Christian Worship: Acts of the Second International Congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy* (Leuven: Peeters), 48–64.
- Hess, H. (2002). *The Early Development of Canon Law and the Council of Serdica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Kalish, K. J. (2009). *Greek Christian Poetry in Classical Forms: The Codex of Visions from the Bodmer Papyri and the Melding of Literary Traditions* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University).
- Lattke, M. (2009). *Odes of Solomon: A Commentary*, trans. M. Ehrhardt (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress).
- Lieber, L. S. (2010). *Yannai on Genesis: An Invitation to Piyyut* (Cincinnati: Hebrew University Press).
- Löhr, H. (2014). 'What Can We Know about the Beginnings of Christian Hymnody?', in C. Leonhard and H. Löhr (eds), *Literature or Liturgy: Early Christian Hymns and Prayers in their Literary and Liturgical Context in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 157–74.
- Martens, P. (2008). 'Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: The Case of Origen', *J ECS* 16 (3): 283–317.
- Mass, P., and Trypanis, C. A. (1963) (eds). *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Mathews, E. G. (2002). 'A Bibliographic Clavis to the Corpus of Works Attributed to Isaac of Antioch', *Hugoye* 5: 1–5.
- Mathews, E. G. (2003). 'The Works Attributed to Isaac of Antioch: A [nother] Preliminary Checklist', *Hugoye* 6: 51–76.
- Meyer, M. (2007) (ed.). *The Nag Hammadi Library Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts* (New York: HarperOne).
- Petersen, W. (1985). *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist*. CSCO 74 (Lovanii: Peeters).
- Phenix, R. R. (2008). *The Sermons on Joseph of Balai of Qenneshrin: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Fifth-Century Syriac Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Schneider, H. (1949). 'Die biblischen Oden im christlichen Altertum', *Biblica* 30: 28–65.
- Sommer, B. (1998). *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).
- Stewart-Sykes, A. (1998). *The Lamb's High Feast: Melito, Peri Pascha and the Quartodeciman Paschal Liturgy at Sardis* (Leiden: Brill).
- Vermes, G. (1961). *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (Leiden: Brill).
- Wellesz, E. J. (1943). 'Melito's Homily on the Passion: An Investigation into the Sources of Byzantine Hymnography', *JTS* 44: 41–52.
- Wellesz, E. J. (1961). *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Young, Frances M. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press).

## Suggested Reading

- Baumstark, K. A. (1910). *Festbrevier und Kirchenjahr der syrischen Jakobiten: Eine liturgiegeschichtliche Vorarbeit auf grundhslicher* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh).
- Brock, S. P. (1992). *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature, and Theology* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum).
- Brock, S. P. (1999). *From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions Between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot: Ashgate).
- Church, F. F., and Mulry, T. J. (1984) (trans.). *The Macmillan Book of Earliest Christian Hymns* (New York: Macmillan).
- Deichgräber, R. (1967). *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht).
- Frank, G. (2005). 'Dialogue and Deliberation: The Sensory Self in the Hymns of Romanos the Melodist', in D. Brakke, M. L. Satlow, and S. Weitman (eds), *Religion and the Self in Antiquity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press), 163–79.
- Hausmann, H. (1976). 'Madrasche und Seblatha: Repertoireuntersuchungen zu den Hymnen Ephräms des Syrsers', *Acta Musicologica* 48: 113–50.
- Hausmann, H. (1979). 'Zur Geschichte des Qala', *OCP* 45: 99–113.
- Holleman, A. W. J. (1972). 'The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786 and the Relationship between Ancient Greek and Early Christian Music', *VC* 26: 1–17.
- Krueger, D. (2014). *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Lash, E. (1995). *Kontakia: On the Life of Christ* (San Francisco: Harper Collins).
- Lash, E. (2001). 'Metrical Texts of Greek Ephrem', *SP* 35: 433–48.
- McGuckin, J. A. (2008). 'Poetry and Hymnography (2): The Greek World', in S. A. Harvey and D. G. Hunter (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 641–56.
- Macomber, W. F. (1973). 'A Theory on the Origins of the Syrian, Maronite, and Chaldean Rites', *OCP* 39: 235–42.
- Mathews, E. G. (1990). 'On Solitaries: Ephrem-or Isaac', *Mus* 103: 91–110.
- Mitsakis, K. (1970). 'The Hymnography of the Greek Church in the Early Christian Centuries', *JbOB* 20: 31–49.
- Mother Mary and Ware, K. (1969a) (trans.). *The Festal Menaion* (London: Faber).
- Mother Mary and Ware, K. (1969b) (trans.). *The Lenten Triodion* (London: Faber).
- Petersen, W. (1985). 'The Dependence of Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem: Its Importance for the Origin of the Kontakion', *VC* 39: 171–87.
- Schork, R. J. (1995) (trans.). *Sacred Song from the Byzantine Pulpit* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida).
- Upson-Saia, K. (2006). 'Caught in a Compromising Position: The Biblical Exegesis and Characterization of Biblical Protagonists in the Syriac Dialogue Hymns', *Hugoye* 9 (2): 189–211.
- Van Rompay, L. (1996). 'The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation', in Magne Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Wellesz, E. J. (1945). 'The Earliest Example of Christian Hymnody', *CQ* 39: 34–45.

## CHAPTER 17

---

# LITURGY AS PERFORMATIVE INTERPRETATION

---

L. EDWARD PHILLIPS

LITURGY is a pattern of embodied performance. Historical study of the early Church, however, must rely to a great extent on patristic descriptions or expositions of the theological meaning of liturgical ritual. Even when the textual record can be supplemented with archaeological artefacts such as iconography, baptismal fonts, building remains, and liturgical utensils, we have at best a fragmentary picture of actual congregations engaged in liturgical practice, especially in the first two centuries of the Church for which archaeological evidence is sparse. Historical study of liturgy, therefore, can obscure the fact that liturgy is fundamentally more performance than text, and more patterns of behaviour than conscious, articulated meaning. Indeed, the meanings associated with a liturgical practice tend to be more fluid than the practice itself (Staal 1979).

Early Christian preachers and theologians were aware of the ambiguity of liturgical practice as such, and many were also aware that some Christian liturgical practices did not have obvious precedents in the scriptural text. But patristic interpreters of liturgy presumed that any wholesome liturgical practice would necessarily engage the faithful participant in the economy of salvation. And they exploited the ambiguity of practice to find ingenious typological connections and antecedents in Scripture.

### BASIL OF CAESAREA ON THE 'OBSCURITY' OF RITUAL ACTIONS

---

Near the end of his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* (c.375), which investigates the grammar of Trinitarian doxologies, Basil of Caesarea observes that not every usage in the Church comes directly from the written Scriptures:

Concerning the teachings of the church, whether publicly proclaimed (*kerygma*) or reserved to members of the household of faith (*dogmata*), we have received some from written sources, while others have been given to us secretly, through apostolic tradition. Both sources have equal force in true religion. No one would deny either source—no one, at any rate, who is even slightly familiar with the ordinances of the Church. If we attacked unwritten customs, claiming them to be of little importance, we would fatally mutilate the Gospel, no matter what our intentions—or rather, we would reduce the gospel teachings to bare words.

(*Spir.* 27, trans. Anderson 1980:98–9)

Parallel to the function of Oral Torah for the Jews, Basil argues, the Church has always also relied on unwritten traditions from the Apostles that have come down as a mystery to add substance to an otherwise bare proclamation. To illustrate his point, Basil lists several examples of important traditions not recorded in Scripture: the sign of the cross at baptism, facing east to pray, the epiclesis of the eucharistic prayer, the blessing of baptismal water and oil, baptismal anointing, the renunciation of the devil and his angels, and the triple immersion in the name of the Trinity in the baptismal font. These are teachings shared among the initiated, that is, the baptized. But they are never mentioned in the public proclamations of the Church, nor are they passed down through the writings of Scripture. Rather, Basil argues:

Are not all these things found in unpublished and unwritten teachings which our fathers guarded in silence, safe from meddling and petty curiosity? They had learned their lessons well; reverence for the mysteries is best encouraged by silence. The uninitiated were not even allowed to be present at the mysteries; how could you expect these teachings to be paraded about in public documents?

(*Spir.* 27, trans. Anderson 1980:99)

Here Basil compares the segregation of the initiated from the larger public to Moses' segregation of the Hebrews before the tabernacle into levels of ritual purity and authority. Only the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, and only once each year, and only for a short time. Thus far Basil's argument leads us to assume that the point of his illustration will be to distinguish those unworthy to receive these mysteries (the unbaptized) from those who are deemed worthy to receive them (the initiated).

Basil, however, suddenly moves his argument in a different direction. Why was the high priest allowed into the Holy of Holies once each year? '[S]o that he would be amazed by the novelty and strangeness of gazing on the Holy of Holies.' He goes on:

Moses was wise enough to realize that triteness and familiarity breed contempt, but the unusual and the unfamiliar naturally commands eager interest. In the same way, when the apostles and Fathers established ordinances for the Church, they protected the dignity of the mysteries with silence and secrecy from the beginning, since what is noised abroad to anyone at random is not mystery at all. We have unwritten tradition so that the knowledge of dogma might not become neglected and scorned through familiarity. (*Spir.* 27, trans. Anderson 1980:100)

The secret, unwritten tradition, then, not only served to establish a boundary between the initiated and the unbaptized, but it also helped to keep the tradition fresh and intriguing for the newly initiated. Here Basil proposes and applies a rudimentary anthropological principle to a religious practice: human attention is naturally drawn to what is novel, 'the unusual and unfamiliar'.

Yet Basil's argument takes one more turn. The silent teachings of ritual practice (Basil refers to these as *dogmata*, in what appears to be an idiosyncratic use of the word) are indeed alluded to in Scripture, but obscurely:

One form of this silence is the obscurity found in certain passages of Scripture, which makes the meaning of some dogmas [rituals] difficult to perceive for the reader's own advantage. For instance, we all pray facing East, but few realize that we do this because we are seeking Paradise, our old fatherland, which God planted in the East of Eden. We all stand for prayer on Sunday, but not everyone knows why. We stand for prayer on the day of the Resurrection to remind ourselves of the graces we have been given: not only because we have been raised with Christ and are obliged to seek the things that are above, but also because Sunday seems to be an image of the age to come. (*Spir.* 27, trans. Anderson 1980:100 [altered])

Basil suggests that obscurity of rituals allows the reader of Scripture the pleasure of discovering *ex post facto* the meaning, even though many routinely engage in the practices without being fully conscious of their meaning. Facing east to pray places into the bodily habits of Christians a performative interpretation of the story of Genesis 2–3, whether each participant is aware of that meaning or not. Standing to pray embodies in the believer a mimetic interpretation of Christ's resurrection as well as an expectation for the eternal sabbath that will one day come, even though the believer may not be conscious of these meanings. Basil suggests these performed interpretations happen at a pre-cognitive level, for 'not everyone knows why' the Church has these practices. The theological meanings are there in Scripture to be discovered by the careful reader who has been schooled in the bodily practices of facing east and standing to pray. The bodily practices which the Church teaches her children, Basil claims, are habits by which believers enact their relationship to God:

Moreover every time we fall upon our knees and rise from off them we show by the very deed that by our sin we fell down to earth, and by the loving kindness of our Creator were called back to heaven. (*Spir.* 27)

Actions speak louder than words, to cite the cliché. Or, more precisely, these habitual gestures embed within the believer a fundamental hermeneutical basis for grasping some deeper meanings of Scripture and tradition.

Basil obviously assumes that the practices he describes have theological meaning, but by describing them as a parallel, secret tradition running alongside the public witness of Scripture, he implies that they are not merely the *expressions* of the theological content of Scripture, but a *precondition* for this deeper understanding of the Scriptures. This is

similar to the way Basil argues in *de Spiritu sancto* for the full divinity of the Spirit by drawing upon the coordinating conjunctions and prepositions in the Trinitarian formula found in the liturgical doxologies and in the ritual of baptism used by churches throughout the empire, and in the various languages used by those churches. The fact that not everyone knows the reason the Church uses the conjunctions and prepositions is why an argument must be made. The habitual use of these conjunctions and prepositions in the doxologies is a precondition that allows him to make the argument (*Spir.* 29).

## LITURGICAL PRACTICE AS CHRISTIAN HABITUS

---

Basil argues that the ‘non-scriptural’ practical gestures and liturgical uses are essential for the Christian life and must be taught to new believers. In the first centuries of the early Church, the catechumenate served as a time of training for adult converts, and the evidence suggests the content of his training period was more practical and behavioural than doctrinal, *per se* (Bradshaw 1999:143–52). Educated pagans had access to the Gospel narratives (as Basil acknowledges), but the core of pre-baptismal catechesis seems to have been the practical and moral teachings of Scripture. For example, the *Didache* (c.90?) begins with the ‘Two Ways’ material before describing baptism. While the ‘Two Ways’ contains numerous quotations of Jesus’ teaching regarding behaviour, it does not refer to any of the Gospel narratives of his life, death, or resurrection. Likewise the *Apostolic Constitutions* 7, a late fourth-century church order based on the *Didache*, indicates that the first part of pre-baptismal catechesis is given over to instruction in the biblical stories of creation, the lives of the patriarchs, and the Exodus. It is not until the final stages of preparation that candidates are instructed ‘in the doctrines concerning our Lord’s incarnation, and in those concerning his passion, and resurrection from the dead, and assumption’ (*const. app.* 7.39, trans. ANF 7:476). The so-called *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (c.300?) also witnesses to a deferral in doctrinal instruction until the catechumens enter into the last phase of preparation:

And when those appointed to receive baptism are chosen, their life having been examined (if they lived in holiness while they were catechumens, and if they honored the widows, and if they visited those who are sick, and if they fulfilled every good work), and when those who brought them in testify in his [*sic*] behalf that he acted thus, then let them hear the gospel. (*trad. ap.* 20, trans. Bradshaw et al. 2002)

By the time of Basil, at least, we know that catechumens were dismissed from the Sunday liturgy following the reading of the Gospel lessons, and so they must have ‘heard’ the Gospels read aloud. Nevertheless, explicit instruction on the meaning of doctrines pertaining to Jesus’ passion and resurrection seems to have been delayed until late in the

catechumenal instruction. These are the difficult teachings which the Apostle Paul refers to as scandal to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1 Cor 1.23). While the practice of withholding detailed catechesis in these Christian doctrines until the last stages of preparation may sound counter-intuitive to modern ears, the early Church, as Paul Bradshaw suggests, seems to have placed behaviour before believing: 'Indeed, it appears to have been the behavior of Christians rather their beliefs as such that was the principal attraction to the religion for pagans, and the most effective means of evangelization' (Bradshaw 1999:152).

The catechuminate, according to the *Apostolic Tradition*, was a period in which the catechumens were schooled in ethical practices, such as visiting the sick and assisting widows, along with some basic liturgical habits. Some evidence highlights what catechumens were *not* allowed to do, such as praying together with believers, sharing the kiss of peace, and receiving the Eucharist. *Apostolic Tradition* 18 and 19, however, provide a few examples of the sorts of ritual practices required of new believers. They were taught to pray standing, with women and men separated, and to be blessed by the instructor with the laying on of hands. Through such habits, early Christian converts acquired ritual skills in communal participation that prepared them to be schooled in rudimentary Christian belief.

Recent scholarship on religious community formation has found in the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu a useful description of how such processes function:

One could endlessly enumerate the values given body, *made* body, by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy which can instil a whole cosmology, through injunctions as insignificant as 'sit up straight' or 'don't hold your knife in your left hand', and inscribe the most fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of a culture in seemingly innocuous details of bearing or physical and verbal manners, so putting them beyond the reach of consciousness and explicit statement... The cunning of pedagogic reason lies precisely in the fact that it manages to extort what is essential while seeming to demand the insignificant... Bodily hexis is mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking. (Bourdieu 1990:69–70)

Bourdieu is being descriptive. He does not prescribe how such practices *ought* to work, but how they in fact work at a preconscious level. Such seemingly insignificant practices as standing or facing east during prayer constitute a 'habitus', which Bourdieu defines as 'principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends' (Bourdieu 1977:72).

The habitus is instilled through *mimesis* of a community of practice. Converts learn how to be Christians by imitating the habits of seasoned Christians. To reference Basil again, new converts did not face east to pray because they first consciously longed for Eden, but because they desired to be part of the community that faced east to pray. The theological explanation of the act was secondary.

## INTERPRETATION AS A PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN HABITUS

---

Basil assumed that the constitutive practices of the Church, both scriptural and extra-scriptural, originated with the Apostles. Some liturgical gestures, however, almost certainly had simple, practical, more recent origins. For example, in his *Mystagogical Catecheses*, Cyril of Jerusalem explained the crossing and cupping of the hands at the reception of the Eucharist as the forming of a ‘throne to receive a king’ (*catech.* 5.21). Obviously receiving communion in the hand is a practical gesture. Given the solemnity of the ritual, one would expect to do it neatly so that crumbs do not fall to the ground, and reverently to avoid a rapacious gesture of grabbing. Imagining the cupped hands to form a throne is a lovely way to assure these practical ends, but it is not the origin of the practice.

Again, Bourdieu provides a helpful explanation of how this works in his description of a practice among the Kabyle people of north Algeria:

The Kabyle woman setting up her loom is not performing an act of cosmogony; she is simply setting up her loom to weave cloth intended to serve a technical function. It so happens that, given the symbolic equipment available to her for thinking her own activity... she can only think what she is doing in the enchanted, that is to say, mystified, form which spiritualism, thirsty for eternal mysteries, finds so enchanting. Rites take place because and only because they find their *raison d'être* in the conditions of existence and the dispositions of agents who cannot afford the luxury of logical speculation, mystical effusions, or metaphysical anxiety. (Bourdieu 1977:115)

We can assume that the ‘symbolic equipment’ available to the unsophisticated majority of Christians in Basil’s or Cyril’s communities would include the Scriptures they would hear read and interpreted by these theological experts. The preachers in the community were those who *could* ‘afford the luxury’ of speculation, and these interpretations would inevitably influence their congregations.

Not all ritual practices, however, can be accounted to a simple practical origin. There is good reason to accept, for example, that the use of ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’ as an early Christian baptismal formula became widespread through obedience to the command of Jesus found in Matthew 28.19. At least some first-century Christian baptisms were performed ‘in the name of Jesus’ (Acts 2.38; 10.48), but it seems likely that the designation ‘in the name of’ in Acts was a general description of the association of baptism with the confession of Jesus as Lord, rather than a precise formula pronounced at the baptism. Whether or not that is the case in Acts, the pervasive use by the third century of ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’ as a standard formula is difficult to account for without the influence of Matthew’s post-resurrection account of the Great Commission (Ferguson 2009:132–8). The formula itself became essential to fulfilling Jesus’ command, whether or not Matthew intended it as such.

## USE OF SCRIPTURE AS A CONSTITUTIVE PRACTICE

---

Early commentators on the liturgy often describe practices as an intentional mimesis of a biblical event or theological teaching. It is not surprising that Scripture became the interpretative source book for early Christian ritual, since the public reading of authoritative texts was itself a constitutive practice in the habitus of the early Church from the beginning. As Risto Uro observes, the Pauline corpus itself calls for the communal reading of the very texts that will become Scripture, for example, 1 Thessalonians 5.27 and 1 Timothy 4.13 (Uro 2011:169–70).

The Gospel of Luke (4.16–18) refers to Jesus' reading of Isaiah on the sabbath in the synagogue in Nazareth as if he were following a standard procedure in that Galilean Jewish community. By the mid-second century, Justin Martyr (c.160) lists the reading of 'memoirs of the apostles' along with the 'writings of the prophets' in his outline of the Sunday service in Rome (1 *apol.* 67.3). Following the readings, Justin tells us, the presider instructs the assembly 'to the imitation of these good things'.

Gregory Dix proposed that the first part of Justin's service was a liturgy of the Word modelled on a standard sabbath service of the synagogue (Dix 1982:36–47). Uro, on the other hand, has proposed that the practice of public reading in the early Church was an adaptation of the use of professional readers in Graeco-Roman culture more generally. Commenting on the standards of oral performance of texts in Antiquity (Shiell 2004:9–33), Uro observes: 'Even putting religious elements aside "reading" in antiquity is much closer to what we recognize as "liturgy" than to our modern sensibilities' (Uro 2011:170). Regardless of the origin of the practice of reading Scripture in common worship, and there is no reason to assume only one antecedent, the elevation of the core texts of early Christians to an authoritative status parallels the use and authority of Jewish Scripture in the synagogue. It is not a stretch to say that the early formation of the NT as Scripture developed through its liturgical use in the assembly. The inclusion of a tradition of reading and expounding on these texts in common worship virtually ensured that various ritual practices would receive explicit figurative explanations drawn from Scriptures as *ex post facto* interpretation of practice.

## EUCHARIST: AN EXAMPLE OF SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION OF LITURGICAL PRACTICE

---

At the earliest stages of development, hallmark features of the Christian habitus—baptism, Eucharist, daily prayer, the kiss of peace, the reading and expounding of sacred text—exhibited numerous variations in local practice. Gradually, theological and biblical

interpretations began to shape the practices themselves. So, for example, Basil assumes that the Last Supper accounts given by Paul and the Gospels are the core of the anaphoral prayer to which 'both in preface and conclusion we add other words as being of great importance to the validity of the ministry' (Basil of Caesarea, *Spir.* 27). At least from the mid-second century, the early churches knew the accounts of the Last Supper in the synoptic Gospels, but that particular story with its Passover setting does not dominate interpretation until the post-Constantinian Church. Paul associates the Lord's Supper with the words of Jesus at his last meal with the disciples in 1 Corinthians 11.23–5. The eucharistic prayers in the *Didache* 9–10, which date from the late first century or even earlier, look like Christian adaptations of Jewish meal prayers, with no reference to the Last Supper account. Moreover, a second reference to the Eucharist in *Didache* 14.3 does not associate it with the Passover (as the Last Supper accounts in the synoptic Gospels clearly do), but with a fulfilment of the prophesy of Malachi 1.11: 'For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and pure offering'. Ignatius of Antioch in the early second century identified the bread and cup with Jesus' flesh and blood, but his use of the word 'flesh' (*sarx*) rather than 'body' (*soma*) suggests he may be referring to the story of the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6 rather than Paul or the synoptic Gospels (*Philad.* 4). Justin refers to the Eucharist as the 'body' (*soma*) and blood of Christ, and he quotes the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, but he seems to be referring to an oral tradition rather than one of the NT accounts. There is no indication that he assumed these words to be part of an anaphoral prayer (*1 apol.* 66.3).

The earliest examples of the use of Jesus' Last Supper words in a eucharistic prayer are the anaphora of the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (mid-fourth century, though the date is contested; Bradshaw 2004:48) and the anaphora of Serapion of Thmuis in Egypt (c.350). From that time, most preserved eucharistic prayers will contain these words of Jesus, the Syrian anaphora of Addai and Mari being a notable exception. Bradshaw has speculated that the insertion of the institution account into the anaphoras began in the fourth century for catechetical reasons, as churches began to reduce the formal requirements of a catechumenate to accommodate large numbers of converts (Bradshaw 2004:11–15, 140). Regardless of the motive, once the institution narrative was inserted into the anaphoras it would become the primary interpretation of what the ritual enacted, and narrowed the range of acceptable meanings and actions. This was, perhaps, a first step toward the richly allegorical explanations developed by theologians in the eastern churches that describe the entire eucharistic rite as a dramatic re-enactment of Christ's passion and resurrection (Bradshaw 2004:144).

Other ritual practices, however, did not suggest an obvious scriptural proof-text. The justification for using a mixture of wine and water for the eucharistic cup proffered by Cyprian of Carthage provides a window into the creative mind of a third-century pastoral theologian at work. The contents of the cup, per se, do not receive any special notice in the New Testament accounts of the Last Supper, though 1 Corinthians 11 clearly assumes the contents to be wine, as does *Didache* 8. There was also a fairly widespread, primitive use of water for the Eucharist, particularly among Christian groups that leaned toward

ascetic practice (McGowan 1999:256, 272). We do not know the precise origin, but at some point the stream that would become the Great Church began to use a mixture of wine and water in the cup. In the mid-second century, Justin refers to the use of a mixed cup (*1 apol.* 65), as does Irenaeus (*haer.* 4.33.2 and 5.2.3). But neither Justin nor Irenaeus gives any sort of rationale for the practice. However, in the mid-third century, in an argument against the use of water only, Cyprian asserts that the use of a mixed cup of wine and water goes back to the practice of Jesus at the Last Supper. Cyprian makes his case through typological interpretation of several OT stories that prefigure the Eucharist. Of the types he provides, Proverbs 9.5 specifically mentions 'Wisdom' offering a mixed cup to her followers: 'Come and eat of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mixed for you' (*ep.* 63.5.2). In essence, Cyprian argues that Proverbs 9.5 is Solomon's prophecy that Christ the Lord would use a mixed cup at the Last Supper.

His historical argument is dubious at best, but Cyprian is the first author to provide a vigorous theological defence of the practice:

And so we can see that by water is meant God's people, whereas Scripture reveals that by wine is signified the blood of Christ. When, therefore, water is mixed with wine in the cup, the people are made one with Christ and the multitude of believers are bonded and united with Him in whom they have come to believe. And this bonding and union between water and wine in the Lord's cup is achieved in such a way that nothing can thereafter separate their intermingling. Thus there is nothing that can separate the union between Christ and the Church, that is, the people who are established within the Church and who steadfastly and faithfully persevere in their beliefs. (*ep.* 63.13.3)

Cyprian thus draws theological significance from the very physical qualities of the mixture of wine and water which literally cannot be separated. The cup does not merely signify the union of Christ and the Church; it physically enacts this union as wine is mixed with water. It is a performative interpretation of the Church as Body of Christ.

## CONCLUSION: PERFORMATIVE INTERPRETATION AS DISCOVERY

---

What, finally, can we conclude about the relationship between liturgical performance and interpretation of Scripture in the early Christian communities? It would be over-reductive to suggest that all liturgical rites can be accounted for by a single model, but clearly liturgical performance and Scripture worked in a dialectical tension. Practice gave rise to scriptural explanations which in turn shaped performance, and so on, in a dynamic process. But liturgical practice was rarely if ever a simple repetition of a biblical precedent. When the institution narrative gravitated to the eucharistic prayer, the performance of the Eucharist was not a mimetic re-enactment of the Last Supper in the

Gospel accounts in ritual detail. Rather it was a combination of scriptural story and unwritten tradition.

Basil observed that the meaning of unwritten tradition could be obscure, and this was good because it provoked curiosity in the mystery of divine things. Yet, if ‘we do not know why’ we do certain rituals, Basil argued that these habitual practices inscribe in the bodies of the faithful a participation in the economy of salvation, consciously or not. The relationship between liturgical performance and Scripture, finally, was an ongoing discovery of the purpose and meaning of what the Church has already been performing. It was Bishop Cyprian reading Proverbs 9.5 after years of using a mixed cup for the Eucharist and realizing, ‘There—that is why we mix wine and water. How could I not already know that?’

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Constitutiones apostolorum*. Greek text and French trans.: M. Metzger (ed. and trans.), *Les Constitutions apostoliques*, SC 329 (Paris: Cerf, 1985). Eng. trans.: A. Robertson and J. Donaldson, *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, In *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies*, ANF 7 (repr.: Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).
- Basil of Caesarea, *Liber de Spiritu sancto*. Greek text: B. Pruche (ed.), *Basile de Césarée: Sur le Saint-Esprit*, SC 17bis, 2nd edn (Paris: Cerf, 1968). Eng. trans.: D. Anderson, *On the Holy Spirit*, Popular Patristics Series 5 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980).
- Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistulae*. Eng. trans.: G. W. Clarke, *The Letters of St. Cyprian*, vol. 3 (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), 98–109.
- Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses mystagogicae*. Greek text: A. Piédagnel and P. Paris (eds), *Cyrille de Jérusalem, Catéchèses mystagogiques*, SC 126 bis (Paris: Cerf, 1966).
- Hippolytus, *Traditio Apostolica*. Coptic text: W. Till and J. Leipoldt (eds), *Der koptische Text der Kirchenordnung Hippolyts*, TU 58 (Berlin: Akademie, 1954). Eng. trans.: P. Bradshaw, M. Johnson, and L. E. Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002).
- Justin Martyr, *Apologiae*. Greek text: E. J. Goodspeed (ed.), *Die ältesten Apologeten: Texte mit kurzen Einleitungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1915), 26–77.

### Scholarship

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).
- Bradshaw, P. (2004). *Eucharistic Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Dix, G. (1982). *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 2nd edn with additional notes by P. Marshall (London: A&C Black).
- Ferguson, E. (2009). *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans).

- McGowan, A. (1999). *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Shiell, W. D. (2004). *Reading Acts: The Lector and the Early Christian Audience* (Leiden: Brill).
- Staal, F. (1979). 'The Meaninglessness of Ritual', *Numen* 26: 2–22.
- Uro, R. (2011). 'Ritual, Memory and Writing in Early Christianity', *Temenos* 47: 169–70.

### Suggested Reading

- Blowers, P. (2012). *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Bebis, G. (1997). 'Introduction to the Liturgical Theology of St. Basil the Great', *GOTR* 42 (3–4): 273–85.
- DeMaris, R. E. (2008). *The New Testament in its Ritual World* (New York: Routledge).
- Daniélou, J. (1956). *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Gamble, H. Y. (1995). *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Johnson, M. (2013). *Praying and Believing in Early Christianity: The Interplay between Christian Worship and Doctrine* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press).
- Leyerle, B. (1995). 'Clement of Alexandria and the Logic of Table Etiquette', *JECS* 3 (2): 123–41.
- Reif, S. (1999). 'The Early Liturgy of the Synagogue', in W. Horbury, W. D. Davies, and J. Sturdy (eds), *The Cambridge History of Judaism* 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 326–57.
- Rordorf, W. (1997). 'The Bible in the Teaching and the Liturgy of Early Christian Communities', in P. Blowers (ed.), *The Bible in Christian Greek Antiquity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 69–102.
- Turley, S. (2011). 'Performing Christianity: Ritual and Identity in Pauline Baptism', *The Journal of the Orthodox Center for the Advancement of Biblical Studies* 3.
- Uro, R. (2016). *Ritual and Christian Beginnings: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).



---

**III. NARRATIVE  
AND VISUAL  
INTERPRETATION**

---



## CHAPTER 18

---

# CHRISTIAN APOCRYPHA

---

STEPHEN J. SHOEMAKER

It is not uncommon to consider Christian apocryphal writings as failed Scriptures—one-time rivals to the canonical texts of the NT that were either marginalized or discarded because their teachings were considered false or unreliable by the shadowy censors of early Christian orthodoxy. Yet such a view of this sizeable and diverse corpus of Christian literature neither does it justice, nor does it accurately comprehend the phenomenon in question. Over the last several decades, scholarship on early Christian apocrypha has become increasingly nuanced as it labours to distance itself from the *sola Scriptura* mentality that inspired this older ‘scripture/rejected scripture’ binary. Instead, the apocryphal landscape is now found to be not only much more vast than once thought but also more varied in terms of form, content, and function. Pivotal in this reorientation has been the collective work of l’Association pour l’Étude de la Littérature Apocryphe Chrétienne, or AELAC, a group originally comprising French and Swiss Romande scholars that now has developed into the most important and influential international society for the study of early Christian apocrypha. Among AELAC’s most significant collective achievements is a redefinition of the contours of Christian apocryphal literature to encompass a corpus of texts much larger than previously imagined.

For much of the twentieth century, scholarship on Christian apocrypha proceeded on the basis of a definition of ‘New Testament Apocrypha’ that was enshrined in the widely influential collections of these texts edited by Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher. According to Schneemelcher’s definition, ‘The New Testament Apocrypha are writings which have not been received into the canon, but which by title and other statements lay claim to be of equal status (*gleichwertig*) to the writings of the canon, and which from the point of view of Form Criticism further develop and mold the literary genres (*Stilgattungen*) created and received in the NT, whilst foreign elements certainly intrude’ (Schneemelcher 1963–5:1:27, slightly modified). In addition, Schneemelcher limited the production of apocrypha to the period before the closure of the NT canon, which he dates to the fourth century. Accordingly, any ‘so-called’ apocrypha produced after 300 CE are not in fact true apocryphal writings: only writings written with the original

intent of their inclusion in the canon may be so named (Schneemelcher 1963–5:1:28, 40–1, 60–4). The result was a very narrow corpus, constricted by its delimitation according to the biblical norm. Yet what should one make of an *Acts* of one of the apostles composed in the sixth century, or a Gospel from the fourth, or a *Life* of the Virgin from the seventh? Are these not equally apocrypha? Such a definition is entirely inadequate for the task of investigating the phenomenon of apocryphicity more broadly and separately from the question of the NT's canonization.

Fortunately, Éric Junod developed a more useful and inclusive definition of Christian apocrypha that has been widely adopted by scholars since the foundation of AELAC (Junod 1983:409–14). Junod's reconfiguration challenges Schneemelcher's conceptualization on every front. It is not necessary that an early Christian apocryphon must have been written with the intent of joining the canon of Scriptures. Not only is it absurd to presume one could possibly discern a particular writing's intent in regard to the emerging canon, but if such a standard were rigorously applied, many of the writings included in Schneemelcher's own collection would have to be excluded. Moreover, with canonical intent removed from the list of requirements, Schneemelcher's chronological limit becomes meaningless, allowing scholars to make sense of the uninterrupted production of apocrypha during the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries and even up to the present day. Nor should strict adherence to the genres of the NT control the boundaries of Christian apocrypha, particularly since many of the so-called apocryphal 'gospels' of early Christianity often bear little similarity to their NT namesakes. Finally, the category of Christian apocrypha must also be opened to include extra-biblical writings about figures and events from the OT that were preserved by the Christian tradition. Even if their original authors were not Christian, these texts clearly informed and influenced the Christian apocryphal imagination.

Following Junod's definition, then, Christian apocrypha are

anonymous or pseudepigraphical texts of Christian origin that maintain a connection with the books of the New Testament as well as the Old Testament because they are devoted to events described or mentioned in these books, or because they are devoted to events that take place in the expansion of events described or mentioned in these books, because they focus on persons appearing in these books, or because their literary genre is related to those of the biblical writings. (Junod 1983:412)

The status of this definition as the new standard can be seen most clearly in its adoption by Christoph Marksches's new German edition of early Christian apocrypha, which is intended to supplant the older Hennecke–Schneemelcher collection (Marksches and Schröter 2012). Nevertheless, this definition needs to be expanded further still, to potentially include similar writings that may in fact not be anonymous or pseudepigraphical: it is not clear to me why this should be a requirement. Likewise, this new perspective opens up the category of apocrypha to include more recent compositions, such as the *Book of Mormon* or the *Essene Gospel of Peace*. Accordingly, the canon of Christian apocryphal literature has been broadened considerably (Piovanelli 2005). Writings that

were once dismissed as hagiographical or liturgical now must also be considered as apocryphal writings—the boundaries between these types of literature have become much blurrier than they were once imagined.

Christian apocryphal literature is thus a very large corpus, and accordingly it would make little sense to pick a few individual texts and focus on how they make use of the canonical traditions. Instead, I will focus here largely on the production of apocryphal writings itself as an act of biblical interpretation. To be sure, not every apocryphal text can be understood in this way; yet in most instances apocryphal writings offer interpretations of biblical traditions. Perhaps the most obvious examples of this apocryphal interpretation of the Bible can be found in the so-called ‘parabiblical’ literature produced within early Judaism, or ‘rewritten Bible’, as it is sometimes also called. This parabiblical literature includes such writings as the *Genesis Apocryphon* from Qumran, the Book of Jubilees, and Ps.-Philo, the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (Attridge et al. 1994; Brooke et al. 1996; Brooke 2000; Broshi et al. 1995; Fisk 2001:13–33; Ginsberg 1967). While the first of these is not in fact a Christian apocryphon, the two latter texts are, inasmuch as they were preserved largely within the Christian tradition. These writings present reworkings or paraphrases of texts and themes found in the Hebrew Bible, and in many instances, these ‘rewritings’ of the Bible are so closely related to the biblical text that it makes little sense to consider them distinctly separate texts. Rather, they present many of the biblical traditions in parallel versions that often appear expanded or revised in comparison with the received text. Yet at the same time it is not entirely clear that these texts should rightly be considered as interpretations of the canonical texts. Certainly they offer interpretations of biblical traditions, but in most instances these writings were produced before the Hebrew Bible’s canon was established. They do not, then, so much ‘rewrite’ an already established, normative text as they represent an alternative type of ‘biblical’ literature whose development is to some extent parallel with the traditional text of the Hebrew Bible (Anderson 2000; Meier 2003:57 n. 10; Talmon 2000:157). For this reason, the term ‘parabiblical’ seems more appropriate than ‘rewritten bible’, since such language draws attention to the parallel development of these now extracanonical writings.

This phenomenon is seemingly less common in early Christian literature, and so it remains preferable in this context to continue referring to these extrabiblical writings as apocryphal rather than parabiblical. In most instances, the early Christian apocrypha do not present rival versions of material that would eventually find its way into the canon. Instead, this literature, as we will see, is often supplementary to the canon, filling in gaps in the biblical narratives or adding secret teachings meant only for an elite few. Nevertheless, there are some significant examples of truly parabiblical writings among the early Christian apocrypha. The most obvious example of an early Christian parabiblical text is the *Gospel of Thomas*, which appears to draw independently on the same sayings tradition used by the Synoptic writers: this Gospel seems to be a rival collection of Jesus’ sayings that was composed about the same time as the canonical Gospels. Some scholars have also maintained that the Passion narrative from the *Gospel of Peter* is similarly an early parabiblical account, and Tatian’s *Diatessaron* must also be considered a

parabiblical apocryphon, even if it was canonical in the Syrian Church for several centuries (Junod 1992:39–41; Kaestli 1996:36–8). Likewise, the *Protevangelium of James*, a biography of the Virgin Mary from the later second century, relates traditions about the Annunciation and the Nativity that are possibly parabiblical. Although much of this early apocryphon serves a primarily supplementary function, filling in details of Mary's life before the Nativity that are absent from Matthew and Luke, its tradition of Gabriel's initial appearance to Mary while drawing water from a well is quite possibly an early alternative to Luke's canonical account of the Annunciation (*Protev.* 11; Zervos 1997). Even more so, the *Protevangelium's* Nativity account seems to be an early parabiblical tradition: its narrative of Christ's birth in a cave near the road halfway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem—rather than in a stable *in* Bethlehem—would appear to be the oldest Nativity traditions coming from the Jerusalem/Bethlehem area (*Prot. Jas.* 17–18; Ray 2000; Shoemaker 2002:81–98). Thus the *Protevangelium's* divergent memory of Jesus' birth appears to be an early paracanonical rival to the Lukan and Matthean Nativity accounts.

The *Protevangelium* is not entirely alone in this regard, however, and other early Christian Infancy Gospels similarly preserve parabiblical traditions about the birth of Christ, as Enrico Norelli in particular has demonstrated. For instance, the second-century *Ascension of Isaiah* relates Mary's virginal conception and birth of Christ in a manner that shares many similarities with the Gospel of Matthew (*Ascens. Is.* 11.2–14; ed. Bettio 1995:118–21). Yet there is no indication that the *Ascension of Isaiah* has derived these traditions from the canonical account, as some older scholarship was wont to conclude. Rather, both Matthew and the *Ascension of Isaiah* appear to have drawn independently on earlier traditions and biblical motifs in order to fashion different but related memories of Jesus' birth (ed. Norelli 1995:116–42; 2009:33–92, esp. 39–47). Their common source, Norelli explains, can be found in early collections of biblical *testimonia* related to the birth of Christ that were circulating in earliest Christianity: one such example appears in the late second-century *Acts of Peter*, for instance (*Acts of Peter* 24; ed. Lipsius 1891–1903:1:71–2). The same is true of many other early paracanonical Nativity traditions, such as those found in *Odes of Solomon*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Protevangelium of James*, and the 'special source' of the Latin Infancy Gospel tradition. Each of these narratives appears to have crafted its account of Mary's virginal conception and birthing independently from the canonical tradition on the basis of early *testimonia* collections of verses from the OT relevant (in Christian eyes at least) to the birth of Christ (Norelli 2009:48–92).

Perhaps the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* should also be included among early Christianity's parabiblical literature. This legendary account from the later second century recalls the bold deeds of one of Paul's missionary companions, a woman named Thecla who rejected her fiancé and renounced the world to become a follower of Christ and spread the gospel. In her *Acts*, Thecla appears as an apostolic figure alongside Paul, presumably reflecting the practices of early Christian communities where women were allowed to minister on equal footing with men. Likewise, Thecla's story forcefully advocates a rigorous asceticism that expects Christians to abandon the ties of family and worldly comforts for a life of celibacy, fasting, and poverty. This vision of Christianity stands notably in

opposition to the rival claims on the Pauline legacy advanced in the Pastoral Epistles, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, which firmly reject extreme ascetic practices and exclude women from positions of religious leadership. Instead, women are to be saved through bearing children (1 Tim 2.15). These inverse agendas are no mere coincidence, it would seem, and the Pastorals and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* appear to reflect a hard-fought contest to determine the direction of Pauline Christianity during the early second century (MacDonald 1983). Paul had written some ambiguous things about the status of women in the Christian community and the role of sexuality in Christian life, so that competing trajectories within the Pauline churches sought to resolve these issues more decisively in one direction or the other, as reflected in these rival memories of Paul. Obviously, the Pastorals won the day, inasmuch as they found their way into the NT canon. From this perspective, then, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* represent an alternative memory of Christian origins that sought to displace the competing vision offered by Pastoral letters, making it in effect a parabiblical narrative. Indeed, had the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and its supporters prevailed in this struggle to define early Pauline Christianity, we might instead find ourselves noting the parabiblical qualities of the Pastoral epistles.

Somewhat similar in nature is the apocryphon *Third Corinthians*, actually a pair of letters between the apostle Paul and the Corinthian community that were possibly inspired by Paul's apparent reference in 1 Corinthians 5.9 and 7.1 to an earlier letter that has not otherwise survived. Although this Pauline correspondence survives in Latin, Greek, and Coptic, on some occasions appearing as a part of the *Acts of Paul*, it was most influential in Syriac and Armenian Christianity, where it was often considered canonical, especially in the early Christian period. While the Greek- and Latin-speaking Christians of the Mediterranean world rejected this pseudonymous Pauline letter (even as they embraced others), Christians on Rome's eastern frontier and in the Persian Empire heard Paul's authentic voice in the words of this apocryphon. Persian Sage Aphrahat considered it canonical, and there is even a biblical commentary on *Third Corinthians* attributed to Ephrem the Syrian. Although it was excluded from the NT canon of the fifth-century Syriac Peshitto version, the Armenian Church regarded the writing as canonical even into the modern period (Metzger 1987:219, 23). Written sometime during the later second century, this letter aims primarily to answer the claims on Paul advanced by various heterodox varieties of early Christianity, including, it would seem, the followers of Marcion and many so-called 'Gnostic' Christian groups (Ehrman 2013:425–32). In particular, this correspondence addresses the physical reality of both Jesus' body and the resurrected bodies of Christian believers, even though Paul himself had written in 1 Corinthians that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' and that in the resurrection a new 'spiritual body' will arise in place of the 'physical' one (15.44, 50). Yet it did not matter what Paul himself had said: even his views had to be aligned with the emerging orthodoxies about the nature of the resurrection body.

Another similar text is the *Letter to the Laodiceans*, a Pauline apocryphon that at present survives only in Latin, where it often appears as a canonical letter of Paul in many (over 100) medieval manuscripts of the Vulgate, as well as in the early Albigenian, Bohemian, English, Flemish, and German translations of the NT (Metzger 1987:239). Clearly the

inspiration for this apocryphon lies in 'Paul's' remark in Colossians 4.16 (a letter which itself is most likely pseudepigraphical) that 'when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea'. Since no letter from Paul to the Laodiceans has survived (and indeed perhaps there never was one, since Colossians itself is most likely a forgery), many early Christians found themselves compelled to invent one. It seems possible that there may have been more than one effort to fill this gap with a new Pauline letter, and the best hypothesis concerning the extant Latin letter is that it was probably written to counter an earlier Marcionite forgery in which Paul was made to support the more docetic views of Marcion's Christianity. In response, proto-orthodox Christians cobbled together their own *Letter to the Laodiceans*, producing what amounts to a rather plodding pastiche of passages and ideas lifted from letters in the canonical Pauline corpus. Thus, this apocryphon answers the Marcionites by showing that in his letter to the Laodiceans Paul was still the same old Paul known from the other Pauline epistles (Ehrman 2013:439–45).

There are of course many more apocrypha that are not, strictly speaking, parabiblical texts of the sort just discussed, and these writings engage the biblical traditions in a variety of other ways. One of the most common avenues of biblical interpretation involves, as noted above, supplementarity, that is, filling in the Bible's gaps, either implicit or explicit, much as we have just seen in the case of Paul's *Letter to the Laodiceans* and possibly *Third Corinthians* as well. Among the most obvious examples of this phenomenon are the various apocryphal *Acta* of the Apostles, the most influential of which were written during the later second century. As a genre these writings were obviously inspired by the canonical Acts of the Apostles, whose glaring omissions regarding the missionary work of Jesus' earliest followers they presumably aim to correct. These acts form a large and varied corpus, although they often share a number of common elements, some of which we have already noted in regard to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Ascetic rigour is a frequent theme of these *Acta*, and it often finds expression in the plight of a well-to-do young woman who rejects her fiancé and the social order of the *polis* upon conversion to Christianity (Davies 1980; MacDonald 1983). Likewise, scholars have noted that these swashbuckling exploits of the Apostles, along with their damsels in distress, bear important similarities to the early Greek novel, which also was emerging at this time. Nevertheless, in borrowing from this secular genre these writings generally invert its conservative social values by replacing them with the Christian gospel of renunciation (Jacobs 1999). The apocryphal *Acta* certainly resemble their biblical counterpart in that they relate the preaching, healings, and contendings of the Apostles, but they are not limited either by its form or content. The *Acts of Paul* has perhaps the most significant connection with the biblical traditions, simply because there is so much more information regarding Paul than the other Apostles, although the *Acts of Peter* also has some overlap. In general, however, each of these apocryphal *Acta* expands freely on the limited biblical data available for these early Christian leaders. Thus, they concern not so much exegesis of the biblical writings as interpretations of their traditions through expansion and elaboration.

Another similarly supplementary text is the so-called *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, or as the text is perhaps more accurately titled, the *Childhood of Jesus*, for that is exactly what this apocryphon describes: the exploits of the God-boy Jesus. The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* was written most likely in the later second century, and it bears little resemblance to the Gospel genre of the NT. In fact, its Jesus was a rather mischievous young lad, who used his divine powers to strike down both children and adults who dared to cross him. There is no obvious cue in the NT writings that would have prompted the composition of such a writing, as with the *Letter to the Laodiceans*, for instance; yet the almost complete lack of any information concerning Jesus' life from his birth until the beginning of his ministry at the age of 30 surely vexed many early Christians who wished to know more about their saviour. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising, I think, that we do not find more such writings. Although a number of other such infancy Gospels would later emerge, the gap in Jesus' biography from around the age of 12 until the beginning of his ministry remains unfilled by the early Christian apocrypha, even as more recent modern apocrypha have claimed to discover just what Jesus was up to during these missing years (Beskow 1983). In any case, these writings, like their ancient counterparts, similarly interpret the biblical traditions by attempting to complete what they lack.

The same is also true of another early Christian apocryphon, the *Apocalypse of Paul*. Although there are other early apocryphal apocalypses, such as the second-century *Apocalypse of Peter*, Paul's apocalypse is particularly interesting because it seems to relate to a biblical prompt: Paul's elliptic reference in 2 Corinthians 12.2, seemingly to himself, as one 'who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven'. While it certainly was not necessary for Paul to have made such a claim in order to have a heavenly journey ascribed to him, given his importance in the formation of early Christianity, this opening in the biblical tradition doubtlessly invited later Christians to provide some content to his otherworldly travels, so much so that a second, rather different *Apocalypse of Paul* also survives in Coptic. Perhaps a similar impulse inspired the composition of the Book of Enoch, which was canonical in the Ethiopian Church (along with the Book of Jubilees) (Cowley 1974) and is cited as Scripture in the NT by the letter of Jude (14–15). According to biblical tradition, Enoch was 'taken' by God at the end of his life (Gen 5.24), which many interpreters took to mean that he ascended into heaven without dying. Such an auspicious exit from this world invited speculation as to what happened to Enoch after God took him, yielding several apocryphal writings that relate what Enoch beheld during his journey in the other world, the most successful of which we now know as the Book of Enoch, or 1 Enoch.

Many apocrypha, however, required no such biblical cue to inspire their composition, and often their connection to the biblical traditions is very slight. The apocryphal traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption, which relate her glorious departure from this life and her bodily transfer to heaven, offer an excellent example of this sort of apocryphal literature. There is nothing at all in the NT writings that would inspire such lavish attention to the end of Mary's life. To be sure, she appears an important character in some of the Gospels as the mother of Jesus, and obviously her life must have

come to an end. Yet in no way could such meagre traces be expected to generate the various apocryphal accounts of Mary's Dormition that began to develop in the third century, if not possibly even earlier (Shoemaker 2002:esp. 38–46, 146–68, 232–56). While subsequent theological reflection on the significance of Mary's Divine Maternity and nascent devotion to the Virgin certainly contributed to the emergence of these apocrypha, the Dormition narratives represent an extreme example of the supplementary character of much Christian apocryphal literature in relation to the canonical Scriptures.

Nevertheless, it was also the case that many apocryphal traditions about Mary from early Christianity became so popular in their own right that they soon became effectively quasi-canonical, particularly in the near absence of any significant competition from the Scriptures. This was certainly the case with the Dormition apocrypha, as well as the previously mentioned *Protevangelium of James*, both of which would become the canonical narratives of Mary's life and her role in the origins of Christianity (Shoemaker 2008). The only problem was that the *Protevangelium* preserved early Nativity traditions that were dissonant with the canonical accounts in Matthew and Luke, most notably in locating the birth of Jesus in a cave midway along the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. In the Christian East, these apocryphal traditions were allowed to stand, so that the interpretation of the Nativity in eastern Christian art is to this day determined by the *Protevangelium's* account, rather than Matthew and Luke. Yet the West was less comfortable, it would seem, with the *Protevangelium's* difference, and so it does not survive in a Latin version, even though its traditions would largely come to prevail in this context as well. This was made possible by two Latin revisions of the *Protevangelium* that were made during the early Middle Ages—the *Gospel of Ps.-Matthew* and the *Nativity of Mary*. These apocrypha repaired the *Protevangelium's* deficiencies by bringing its narrative more into harmony with the biblical traditions, thus enabling this authoritative apocryphon to determine the shape of Marian devotion in the West as well as the East (ed. Gijssels and Beyers 1997:1:37–58). And so not only were apocrypha used to interpret the Scriptures, but on some occasions the Scriptures were used to interpret early Christian apocrypha that had achieved an authority parallel to the Scriptures.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Acta Apostolorum apocrypha*. Greek text: R. A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet (eds), *Acta Apostolorum apocrypha*, 3 vols (Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1891–1903).
- [Anonymous], *Acta Pauli et Theclae*. Text: R. A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet (eds), *Acta Apostolorum apocrypha*, 3 vols (Leipzig: H. Mendelssohn, 1891–1903), 1: 235–72.
- [Anonymous], *Apocalypsis Pauli*. Text: M. R. James (ed.), *Apocrypha Anecdota*, TSt II/3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 11–42.
- [Anonymous], *Ascensio Isaiae*. Text: P. Bettiolo et al. (eds), *Ascensio Isaiae: Textus*, CCA 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995). Commentary: E. Norelli (ed.), *Ascensio Isaiae: Commentarius*, CCA 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995).

- [Anonymous], *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Text: T. Burke (ed.), *De infantia Iesu euangelium Thomae graece*, CCA 17 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).
- [Anonymous], *Letter to the Laodiceans*. Text: J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, rev. edn (London: Macmillan, 1897), 274–300.
- [Anonymous], *Libri de nativitate mariae*. Latin text: J. Gijssels and R. Beyers (eds), *Libri de nativitate mariae: Pseudo-Matthaei Evangelium and De Nativitate Mariae*, 2 vols, CCA 9–10 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).
- [Anonymous], *Protevangelium Jacobi*. Greek text: K. Tischendorf (ed.), *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 2nd edn (Leipzig: Herm. Mendelssohn, 1876), 1–50.
- [Anonymous], *Third Corinthians*. Text: V. Hovhannessian (ed.), *Third Corinthians: Reclaiming Paul for Christian Orthodoxy* (New York: P. Lang, 2000).
- Attridge, H. W., et al. (1994). *Qumran Cave 4, Parabiblical Texts, Part 1*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 13 (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Brooke, George, et al. (1996). *Qumran Cave 4, Parabiblical Texts, Part 3*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 22 (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Broshi, M., et al. (1995). *Qumran Cave 4, Parabiblical Texts, Part 2*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 19 (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Markschies, C., and Schröter, J. (2012). *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, vol. 1: *Evangelien und Verwandtes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Schneemelcher, W. (1963–5) (ed.). *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. M. Wilson, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Westminster Press).

## Scholarship

- Anderson, G. A. (2000). 'Law and Lawgiving', in L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam (eds), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1: 475–7.
- Beskow, P. (1983). *Strange Tales about Jesus: A Survey of Unfamiliar Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press).
- Brooke, G. (2000). 'Rewritten Bible', in L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam (eds), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2: 777–81.
- Cowley, R. W. (1974). 'The Biblical Canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Today', *OKS* 23: 318–23.
- Davies, S. L. (1980). *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press).
- Ehrman, B. D. (2013). *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Fisk, B. N. (2001). *Do You Not Remember? Scripture, Story and Exegesis in the Rewritten Bible of Pseudo-Philo*. *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, Supplement Series 37 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press).
- Ginsberg, H. L. (1967). 'Review of Joseph A. Fitzmeyer's *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1: A Commentary*', *TS* 28: 574.
- Jacobs, A. (1999). 'A Family Affair: Marriage, Class, and Ethics in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles', *JECS* 7: 105–38.
- Junod, E. (1983). 'Apocryphes du Nouveau Testament ou apocryphes chrétiens anciens? Remarques sur la désignation d'un corpus et indications bibliographiques sur instruments de travail récents', *Études théologiques et religieuses* 59: 409–21.

- Junod, E. (1992). ‘“Apocryphes du Nouveau Testament”: Un appellation erronée et une collection artificielle,’ *Apocrypha* 3: 17–46.
- Kaestli, J.-D. (1996). ‘Les Écrits apocryphes chrétiens: Pour une approche qui valorise leur diversité et leurs attaches bibliques,’ in J.-D. Kaestli and D. Marguerat (eds), *Le Mystère apocryphe: Introduction à une littérature méconnue*, Essais bibliques 26 (Geneva: Labor et Fides), 27–41.
- MacDonald, D. R. (1983). *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press).
- Meier, J. P. (2003). ‘The Historical Jesus and the Historical Law: Some Problems within the Problem,’ *CBQ* 65: 52–79.
- Metzger, B. M. (1987). *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Norelli, E. (2009). *Marie des apocryphes: Enquête sur la mère de Jésus dans le christianisme antique*. Christianismes antiques (Geneva: Labor et Fides).
- Piovanelli, P. (2005). ‘What Is a Christian Apocryphal Text and How Does It Work? Some Observations on Apocryphal Hermeneutics,’ *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 59: 31–40.
- Ray, W. D. (2000). ‘August 15 and the Development of the Jerusalem Calendar,’ Ph.D. diss. (University of Notre Dame).
- Shoemaker, S. J. (2002). *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Shoemaker, S. J. (2008). ‘Between Scripture and Tradition: The Marian Apocrypha of Early Christianity,’ in L. DiTommaso and L. Turcescu (eds), *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity*, Bible in Ancient Christianity 6 (Leiden: Brill), 491–510.
- Talmon, S. (2000). ‘Textual Criticism: The Ancient Versions,’ in A. D. H. Mayes (ed.), *Text in Context: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Zervos, G. T. (1997). ‘An Early Non-canonical Annunciation Story,’ *SBL Seminar Papers* 36, 664–91.

### Suggested Reading

- Burke, T. (2013). *Secret Scriptures Revealed: A New Introduction to the Christian Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing).
- Ehrman, B. D. (2003). *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths that We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Klauck, H.-J. (2003). *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: T & T Clark International).

## CHAPTER 19

---

# NOVELS

---

F. STANLEY JONES

ANTIQUITY did not possess a distinctive designation for its ‘novels’, most likely because the genre arose after the classical period. Contemporary scholars concur, however, that a group of ancient compositions cohere to such a degree that the modern term ‘novel’ can readily be applied to them (a convenient collection of the Greek novels in translation is Reardon 2008). Though exact definitions vary, one sign of the distinctive unity of these writings is that they use and imitate one another, thereby spawning a set of common structures, forms, themes, and motifs. Usually the story is about the tribulations suffered by a young heterosexual couple of aristocratic heritage and exceptional beauty—separated in adventurous peregrinations and then finally united through their steadfast love.

Amidst a flood of recent literature on the ancient novel, discussion of its impact on early Christian writings has been diffuse. Some have suggested that these novels provide a vibrant window onto the ancient world and thereby illuminate the life-setting of early Christian literature. Another suggestion is that Jewish intertestamental tales might be considered the trans-historical equivalent of the Greek and Roman novels (Wills 1995:24–5). Other scholars have suggested actual influence of the ancient novel on the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, the Pastorals (epistolary novel), and the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles (Pervo 2003:689–708). These suggestions have led to the current larger discussion, also in the field of Classics, of the legitimacy of the concept of ‘fringe’-novels.

In reality, only one ancient Christian writing (and its descendants) readily fits the mould of the ancient novel, the Pseudo-Clementine Basic Writing. This early Christian writing alone stands in direct interaction with the ancient novels as it clearly uses, modifies, and even counters these competitors (Jones 2001a:65–75). Accordingly, this chapter will take the Pseudo-Clementine Basic Writing as its starting point and focus. The impact the genre ‘novel’ had on exegesis will be examined in a moment, but first a word is appropriate about why, in the discussion of ancient novels and their interrelationship with early Christian literature, the Pseudo-Clementine Basic Writing has been somewhat overlooked until recently.

Most likely the main reason for lack of attention paid to the Pseudo-Clementine Basic Writing is that it has not been preserved in manuscript integrity. Instead, two later fourth-century rewritings have come down to us, the *Recognition* (usually called ‘*Recognitions*’) and the *Klementia* (usually misnamed ‘*Homilies*’). Throughout the Middle Ages and into early modern times, the West knew only the *Recognition* via a Latin translation made by Rufinus of Aquileia in c.406 CE. Still today, no continuous manuscript of the original Greek *Recognition* has been found, though a fourth-century Syriac translation has recently been discovered. Around the time of the Reformation, the Greek *Klementia* started to become available to the West; two continuous Greek manuscripts of this work are currently known. In sum, the West long knew only the Latin version of the *Recognition*, which tended to denature the novelistic character of the *Pseudo-Clementines*. So the West was desensitized to this ancient Christian novel by the time it became aware of the other rewriting, the *Klementia*. Western scholars concluded that, because of long passages shared verbatim between the *Recognition* and the *Klementia*, there must have been an earlier version of the novel, mentioned by ecclesiastical writers as bearing the title *Periodoi Petrou* (‘Circuits of Peter’). Though there has long been a call for a synoptic edition or translation of the *Recognition* and the *Klementia* where the common material would stand out as derivative from the Basic Writing, such a work has not yet been published.

A further hindrance to full notice of the *Pseudo-Clementines* as an ancient novel has been the postulation that the novelistic framework and elements in the *Pseudo-Clementines* were adopted whole-cloth from a lost pagan novel. Initially promoted at the height of nineteenth-century historical source criticism, this thesis was thereafter rejected by succeeding generations of students of the *Pseudo-Clementines*, especially after the insight that Rufinus had attached the ending of the *Klementia* to his translation of the *Recognition*. This significant advance in Pseudo-Clementine studies went unnoticed in Classics, where the old theory is often found even today and is used as a way of sidelining the (somewhat unwieldy and non-pagan) *Pseudo-Clementines* in treatments of the ancient novels.

The following chapter will not lay out the features that distinguish the *Pseudo-Clementines* as an ancient novel (for this, see Jones 2001a:66, 74–7), but will enquire about how the genre ‘novel’ affected exegesis in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. The procedure will be to ask first about exegesis in the Basic Writing and then about exegesis in each of the two rewritings, the *Klementia* and the *Recognition*. In advance, just a word about the type of novel the three present: The Basic Writing is very much an ‘idealistic’ novel, characterized by realistic narrative and portrayals, along with sincerity of emotions. The *Klementia*, in contrast, noticeably diverges from the ‘idealistic’ to present a parody, as also happened among the ancient Greek and Roman novels; here comic elements grab the upper hand. The *Recognition*, finally, seems to move in the opposite direction and assimilates the original novel to the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, where there is no need for actual discussion, only acceptance of the truth as proclaimed by the Apostles.

The realistic impulse behind the narrative of the Basic Writing (c.220 CE) led this author to engage in a naturalistic, even idealistic, portrayal of the Christian life—in actuality something rare in early Christian literature and something that decisively sets this novel

apart from the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles with their pervasive miracles, talking animals, and the like. This same realistic impulse also demanded lifelike exegesis; thus, the import of the sayings of Jesus had to be portrayed in a true-to-life narrative. This author wrote the first, and last, original ancient Christian novel with apparently exceptional imaginative powers that should not be underestimated. As will become clear in the following, the Basic Writer possessed a distinctive Jewish-Christian view of the history of God's dealings with the world (an implicit master narrative sometimes referred to as a 'hypothesis') that controls the way Scripture and traditions are interpreted.

An illustration of realistic exegesis and its integration into the very structure of this novel is found in the opening of Clement's narrative. Through a series of misfortunes initially occasioned by *eros* in concert with his mother's baneful horoscope, Clement has been deprived of his family and is essentially alone. Yet it is precisely this state of solitude that the Basic Writer needs to allow Clement readily to leave Rome and follow Peter. Likely through the writer's confrontation with Marcionism, the Basic Writer is painfully aware of the potential for sayings of Jesus to be interpreted to imply that the convert should abandon everything, including family, to follow Jesus (cf. e.g. Matt 8.22 par. Luke 9.60; Matt 10.37 par. Luke 14.26; none of these passages is ever directly cited in the *Pseudo-Clementines*). Thus later, when Peter is ready to leave Caesarea, he states that anyone who wishes may follow him, but he explicitly adds that this should be done 'reverently', which he explains to mean not leaving anyone, such as parents, a believing wife, or others for whom one is obliged to care (*Rec.* 3.72.2, confirmed for the Basic Writing by *Rec.* 7.5.5–6 par. *Hom. Clem.* 12.5.5–6, where in the following verse Clement points out that he is thus eminently fit to follow Peter; this same reasoning is likely the source of the Basic Writing's declaration that Peter and Andrew were orphans [*Rec.* 7.6.7 par. *Hom. Clem.* 12.6.7]). In this light, the entire story-line of the *Pseudo-Clementines* starts to be seen as having been carefully constructed in accord with exegesis of the Jesus-tradition. Along similar lines, the missionary whom Clement encounters in Rome is none other than Barnabas, apparently one of the seventy sent out by Jesus (Luke 10.1; cf. Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 2.20.116.3, and *Hypotyposes* 7 as preserved in Eusebius, *h.e.* 2.1.4), who is still alive at the time (*Rec.* 1.6.1–7.3 par. *Hom. Clem.* 1.6.1–7.3)—this is the sort of 'filling out' of the Gospel tradition characteristic of early Christian apocrypha.

The subsequent accounts of Peter's travels and missionary proclamation also possibly provide rare glimpses into how the Jesus-tradition was actually employed in the later missionary effort of the Church. Thus, Peter explains how he follows the famous Q-missionary commission (the source of Matt 10.7–15 par. Luke 10.4–12) by first offering peace, but then condemnation, if the message is rejected (*Rec.* 2.30.2–31.2 par. *Hom. Clem.* 3.30.2–31.1). The passage apparently freely combines elements from Matthew 10 and Luke 10.

Such 'broad' exegesis of the Jesus-tradition, where no one verse of a particular Gospel is cited, is somewhat typical of the Basic Writer, a Jewish-Christian at work in the early third century and for whom, somewhat anachronistically, a canon of NT Scripture (the four Gospels) had not been determined. Hence, evidence for acceptance of the *Book of Elchasai* (a neglected church order from 116–17 CE known mainly from citations by Hippolytus and Epiphanius, but clearly also used in *Clem. contest.* 2.1; 4.1–3) as authoritative

is virtually as great here as is the evidence for recognition of any of the NT writings. The freedom of the Basic Writer with respect to the evolving NT canon of the time, in particular the four-Gospel canon, is strikingly illustrated by the author's understanding of John the Baptist as an evil counterpart to Jesus (*Rec.* 3.61.2 Syriac par. *Hom. Clem.* 2.17.2)—a view witnessed also among 'Gnostics' (e.g. *Testimony of Truth* NHC IX,3 30.30–31.5). The Basic Writer supports this perspective with a rationalistic theory of 'pairs' ('syzygies': each consisting of an evil representative and a good figure) found throughout human history as documented in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Cain and Abel, the first pair) and then early Christian tradition (*Rec.* 3.59–61 par. *Hom. Clem.* 2.15–17).

The Basic Writer's overall exegetical procedure is perhaps comparable to Justin Martyr's, whose writings were known and used by the Basic Writer. Indeed, it is possible that Justin was partially inspirational for the Basic Writer's handling of the Jesus-tradition, where the interest in the sayings of Jesus (in contrast to narratives) is strikingly predominant. In any event, the Basic Writer drew a number of sayings of Jesus directly from Justin, most likely from his lost treatise against Marcion, as the common distinctive wording and the shared anti-Marcionite context show (Jones 2015:202–16). The Basic Writer is accordingly heir to heresiological literature and its exegesis but also to apocryphal Acts (*Acts of Peter*) and other genres (e.g. the philosophical dialogue known not least from *The Book of the Laws of the Countries*, featuring Bardaisan), though the writer successfully integrates these materials into the Pseudo-Clementine novel, just as the pagan novels exploited previously developed genres. While the Basic Writer perhaps displays a slight preference for Matthew, this author has an image of Jesus that is informed by a variety of Jesus-traditions, which are then subject to specific exegesis. For example, the writer knows the parable of the wedding feast (cf. Matt 22:1–14), interprets it to apply to the Christian mission, and specifies that the required wedding garment is baptism (*Rec.* 4.35.5 par. *Hom. Clem.* 8.22.4). Letters of Paul are indeed known, but they are used only as historical documentation of Paul's heretical views and actions (*Clem. Ep. Petr.* 2.2–4; Paul is the evil part of the penultimate syzygy and is identified with the enemy who sows tares, mentioned in Matt 13:25, 28 [*Rec.* 3.61.2 Syriac par. *Hom. Clem.* 2.17.4]).

Distinctive for the Jewish-Christian Basic Writer's promotion of purity (bathing, menstrual separation, etc.) is the peculiar exegesis of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees. The Basic Writer insists that, in the 'woe' reflected in Matthew 23.25–6 (par. Luke 11.39–40), Jesus did not criticize *all* the Pharisees, but rather only *some* of them, namely, the hypocrites among them (*Rec.* 6.11.2–3 par. *Hom. Clem.* 11.28.4–29.2). Linked with this notion is the view that the 'chair of Moses' (*Clem. Ep. Petr.* 1.2; 3.2; *Hom.* 11.29.1; *Rec.* 3.30.1 Syriac; *Rec.* 3.75.1 Syriac; Matt 23.2) has received an exegetical tradition that knows how to interpret properly the polysemous Hebrew Bible/LXX—the only actual 'Scripture' in this author's mind—that otherwise leads novices astray into thinking that there is more than one God (*Clem. Ep. Petr.* 1.3–4; *Rec.* 1.21.8; 10.42.4). The author approximates here a rabbinic view that Scripture is difficult to interpret and thus a tradition of interpretation is required to avoid going astray (*Numbers Rabbah* 14.4). Peter stands in this tradition and can thus properly explain passage after passage from the Hebrew Bible.

A final example of the power of novelistic (realistic) exegesis is the overall treatment of Peter in the novel. The Basic Writer carefully exegetes an image of Peter as the most

esteemed disciple of Jesus (*Rec.* 1.12.2 par. *Hom. Clem.* 1.15.2) and thus greatest in the wisdom of God (*Rec.* 1.12.6 par. *Hom. Clem.* 1.15.6; cf. also *Rec.* 7.7.1 par. *Hom. Clem.* 12.7.1) in order to show in a lifelike way exactly how high the pious human can possibly rise in this world. Accordingly, Peter cannot see through the fibs and false names that Clement's (unrecognized) mother initially provides (*Rec.* 7.20.1 par. *Hom. Clem.* 12.20.1); similarly, he can only pray that God might heal the sick (*Rec.* 7.23.6 par. *Hom. Clem.* 12.23.6) and that he might have success in his debate with Simon (*Rec.* 2.19.5–6 par. *Hom. Clem.* 3.29.3–4), where he might appear to be defeated (*Rec.* 1.17.6 par. *Hom. Clem.* 1.20.6). Every word, reaction, habit, and mannerism of Peter is infused with the greatest possible significance. Peter thereby serves both as a locus for Christian anthropology and as a realistic example for Christian life.

The *Klementia*, in its redaction from c.320–4 CE, puts a clear comic spin on the Basic Writer's idealistic novel. This author not only allows the leading characters, including Peter, to engage in intrigue and prevaricate (*Hom. Clem.* 20.18–22; 5.2–28), but also introduces fantastic elements such as the magic that Simon uses to avoid apprehension when he transforms the face of Clement's father to appear to be Simon's own (*Hom. Clem.* 20.11–23; Peter's eyes alone are impervious to this magic: *Hom. Clem.* 20.12.6–7). When an earthquake occurs upon Peter's entry to Beirut, Peter does not initially deny the charge that he caused the tremor but instead asserts that he is ready to overturn the entire city unless the inhabitants obey what he says (*Hom. Clem.* 7.9). Terrified, the inhabitants immediately agree to do whatever Peter commands (*Hom. Clem.* 7.10.1), soon grabbing sticks violently to chase Simon and his companions from the city (*Hom. Clem.* 7.10.2).

In terms of exegesis, the author employs equally radical means. The Klementinist's treatment of the Syro-Phoenecian woman has attracted much scholarly attention for its bold interpretation (it also displays dependency on Mark, which is absent from the Basic Writer): the woman received healing for her daughter only after having adopted a Jewish lifestyle (*Hom. Clem.* 2.19). The flagrant disregard for realistic chronology here highlights the Klementinist's hand, while the (admittedly free) use of the Gospel narrative (and not just the sayings of Jesus) reflects an advancing canonical consciousness. Elsewhere, too, the Klementinist brazenly draws biblical and other notorious figures into the novel's story: this same woman is the one who purchased Clement's twin brothers from pirates in Caesarea (*Hom. Clem.* 2.20.3). Alongside the infamous anti-Jewish Apion, the fantastic exegesis of the Klementinist introduces Cornelius the centurion from Acts 10 and rebaptizes him as someone whom the Lord had cured from demonic possession in Caesarea (!); described now as the emperor's envoy to the governor of the province, Cornelius promises to act as if he was actually sent to search out Simon for death as a magician (*Hom. Clem.* 20.13.4–8).

Perhaps the most outrageous exegetical manoeuvre of the Klementinist is the introduction of a theory of 'false pericopes'—the idea that the Hebrew Bible has been interpolated by the devil with passages that speak against the oneness and righteousness of God (*Hom. Clem.* 2.38). Given the parodic nature of the *Klementia*, it is difficult to know how seriously its author took this view, though it is developed in great detail. Perhaps it is best to understand this doctrine as 'venting' on the part of the Klementinist, a term also applied to the procedures in the parodies of the idealistic novels. In any event, the author

provides several logical methods by which ‘false’ passages can be distinguished (*Hom. Clem.* 3.46: identification of opposing passages in Scripture [revealed by syllogism: *Hom. Clem.* 3.42], conflict with the doctrine of creation; *Hom. Clem.* 3.43: conflict with the doctrine of God; *Hom. Clem.* 3.50.2: conflict with what is reasonable), though ultimate recourse is taken in the person and teaching of Jesus (*Hom. Clem.* 3.48–9, 52–3). True to the Klementinist’s form, this doctrine is stated, on the one hand, to be unintended for open discussion (*Hom. Clem.* 2.39.2–4), though, on the other hand, Peter soon lays it out for public consumption (*Hom. Clem.* 3.42–51).

The *Recognition* (c.325 CE), in contrast, moves the novel and its exegesis in a conservative direction. This author explains that the Apostles, of which there are only twelve and no more to come (*Rec.* 4.35.2–3), have the task not even of repeating the words of Jesus, but only of showing how each of the sayings of Jesus is true and not in conflict with other pronouncements (*Rec.* 2.33). Somewhat in contradiction to the spirit of the original novel, the Recognitionist thus states that the Apostles are not to say anything on their own (*Rec.* 2.33.5). Accordingly, the author uses the novel as a lifelike locus for Peter to explain apparently contradictory sayings, such as the instruction to use the peace greeting and the saying of Jesus that he has come with a sword to divide (*Rec.* 2.26–31; Matt 10.12–13 par. Luke 10.5–6; Matt 10.34–6 par. Luke 12.51–3). A similar attitude is taken to seemingly contradictory remarks in the Hebrew Bible. In truth, this author places little value on actual discussion (*Rec.* 1.25.8) and is of the opinion that the side in disagreement with the good truth of the Christian message should just give up without argument (*Rec.* 2.24.1–4). One sees here a ‘realistic’ portrayal of what the ‘authoritative interpretation’ (and the toning down of actual discussion and exegesis) looked like in the life of the fourth-century Church. The Christian should concentrate on good works, which lead to the Holy Spirit, which in turn gives knowledge without enquiry (*Rec.* 2.21.6). When these attitudes are overlaid on the original novel, the result is tedious—the debates and speeches of Peter are sapped of their original intellectual vigour and turned into sermons, a point that has often been cited to disqualify the *Pseudo-Clementines* from being a novel.

The *Recognition* is nevertheless distinctive in its attempt to use certain sayings of Jesus (Matt 10.28 par. Luke 12.4–5; Matt 5.27–8), alongside some standard Hebrew Bible passages (e.g. Ps 109.1), to argue its Christological opinion (*Rec.* 3.4–11). As in the theological treatises of the first half of the fourth century, attention is drawn here to the exact wording of the biblical texts in order to extract specific Christological implications. The novel-format, however, allows the (authoritative) solution to the early fourth-century Christological controversy to be placed directly on the lips of Peter himself in this extensive monologue.

The Pseudo-Clementine novel can thus be seen as a welcoming framework for exegesis of several sorts. By comparing the three versions of the novel, one can often follow the variations among early Christian exegetical debates in considerable detail and thereby see what was on the minds of Late Antique Christians. So, the saying of Jesus that the poor are blessed (Matt 5.3 par. Luke 6.20) was perceived as touching an economic nerve and calling for explanation: the Klementinist specifies that the *faithful* poor are blessed because they are not condemned for not giving alms since they have nothing to give (*Hom. Clem.* 15.10.4); the Recognitionist, in contrast, states that the blessing was simply

encouragement of the poor to bear poverty with equanimity and not to undertake any unrighteous act since they will eventually obtain the kingdom of heaven (*Rec.* 2.28.3–5); the Basic Writer's view on this point has perhaps been obscured, but this author partially admitted the interpretation of an older Jewish-Christian source (*Rec.* 1.27–71) that the saying implied chiliastic fulfilment in an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem (*Rec.* 1.61; cf. Jones 2001b:542–6).

The genre 'novel' unleashed distinctive creative forces even in early Christian exegesis. Further comparison of the exegetical effect of these forces with the exegesis in other early Christian literature would seem to be a promising field of enquiry.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Pseudo-Clement of Rome, *Clementina syriace*. Syriac text: W. Frankenberg (ed.), *Die syrischen Clementinen mit griechischem Paralleltex: Eine Vorarbeit zu dem literargeschichtlichen Problem der Sammlung*, TU 48/3 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1937). Eng. trans.: F. S. Jones, *The Syriac 'Pseudo-Clementines': An Early Version of the First Christian Novel*, Apocryphes 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).
- Pseudo-Clement of Rome, *Clementina*. Greek text: B. Rehm (ed.), *Die Pseudoklementinen I: Homilien*, 3rd edn G. Strecker (ed.), GCS 42 (Berlin: Akademie, 1992). Eng. trans.: T. Smith, P. Peterson, and J. Donaldson, 'Clementine Homilies', in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 8: *The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, the Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages*, American repr. A. C. Coxe, 10 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 213–346.
- Pseudo-Clement of Rome, *Clementis quae feruntur Recognitiones a Rufino translatae*. Latin text: B. Rehm (ed.), *Die Pseudoklementinen II: Rekognitionen in Rufins Übersetzung*, 2nd edn G. Strecker (ed.), GCS 51 (Berlin: Akademie, 1994). Eng. trans.: T. Smith, 'The Recognitions of Clement', in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 8: *The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, the Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages*, American repr. A. C. Coxe, 10 vols (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978) 73–211.

### Scholarship

- Jones, F. S. (2001a). 'Eros and Astrology in the *Περίοδοι Πέτρον*: The Sense of the Pseudo-Clementine Novel', *Apocrypha: Revue internationale des littératures apocryphes* 12: 53–78. Repr. in F. S. Jones, *Pseudoclementina Elchasaiticaque inter Judaeochristiana: Collected Studies*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 203 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 114–37. (This volume also contains a general introduction to the *Pseudo-Clementines*, an extensive general history of research, and other studies on specific aspects of the *Pseudo-Clementines*, including its confrontation with Marcionism.)
- Jones, F. S. (2001b). 'Jewish-Christian Chiliastic Restoration in Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 1.27–71', in J. M. Scott (ed.), *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian*

- Perspectives*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 72 (Leiden: Brill), 529–47. Repr. in F. S. Jones, *Pseudoclementina Elchasaiticaque inter Judaeochristiana: Collected Studies*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 203 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 252–66.
- Jones, F. S. (2015). ‘The Distinctive Sayings of Jesus Shared by Justin and the *Pseudo-Clementines*’, in T. Burke (ed.), *Forbidden Texts on the Western Frontier: The Christian Apocrypha in North American Perspectives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 200–17.
- Pervo, R. (2003). ‘The Ancient Novel Becomes Christian’, in G. Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World*, rev. edn, Mnemosyne 159 (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 685–711.
- Reardon, B. P. (2008) (ed.). *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Wills, L. M. (1995). *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World. Myth and Poetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Amsler, F., Frey, A., Touati, C., and Girardet, R. (2008) (eds). *Nouvelles Intrigues pseudo-clémentines: Plots in the Pseudo-Clementine Romance*, Publications de l’Institut romand des sciences bibliques 6 (Lausanne: Éditions du Zèbre).
- Côté, D. (2015). ‘Les *Pseudo-Clémentines* et le choix du roman grec’, in B. Bitton-Ashkelony, T. de Bruyn, and C. Harrison (eds), *Patristic Studies in the Twenty-First Century* (Turnhout: Brepols), 473–96.
- Edwards, M. J. (1992). ‘The *Clementina*: A Christian Response to the Pagan Novel’, *CQ* 42: 459–74.
- Hansen, D. U. (1997). ‘Die Metamorphose des Heiligen: Clemens und die *Clementina*’, in H. Hofmann and M. Zimmermann (eds), *Groningen Colloquia on the Novel Volume VIII* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten), 119–29.
- Hock, R. F., Chance, J. B., and Perkins, J. (1998) (eds). *Ancient Fiction and Early Christian Narrative*, SBL Symposium Series 6 (Atlanta: Scholars).
- Holzberg, N. (1995). *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction*, trans. C. Jackson-Holzberg (London and New York: Routledge).
- Jones, F. S. (1982). ‘The Pseudo-Clementines: A History of Research’, *SCe* 2: 1–33, 63–96. Repr. in Jones, *Pseudoclementina Elchasaiticaque inter Judaeochristiana: Collected Studies*, 50–113.
- Jones, F. S. (1995). *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: Pseudo-Clementine ‘Recognitions’ 1.27–71*, Texts and Translations 37, Christian Apocrypha Series 2 (Atlanta: Scholars).
- Jones, F. S. (2012). ‘Introduction to the *Pseudo-Clementines*’, in *Pseudoclementina Elchasaiticaque inter Judaeochristiana: Collected Studies*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 203 (Leuven: Peeters), 7–49.
- Morgan, J. R. (1993). ‘Make-Believe and Make Believe: The Fictionality of the Greek Novels’, in C. Gill and T. R. Wiseman (eds), *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press), 175–229.
- Vielberg, M. (2000). *Klemens in den pseudoklementinischen Rekognitionen: Studien zur literarischen Form des spätantiken Romans*, TU 145 (Berlin: Akademie).
- Whitmarsh, T. (2008) (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

## CHAPTER 20

---

# HAGIOGRAPHY

---

BRONWEN NEIL

THE production of *Lives* of saints developed to meet a devotional need in the Christian monastic movement of the third and fourth centuries. Hagiography was one of the few genres of biblical interpretation aimed at both edifying and entertaining Christian audiences. The life of the early Christian saint was by its very nature an allegory of Scripture. This chapter focuses on the appropriation of scriptural figures and *personae* in developing the profiles and narratives of saints in the Greek, Latin, and Syriac traditions. An important feature of any Late Antique literary production was its intertextuality, and we can see this plainly at work in the crafting of early Christian hagiography, in its internal dialogue with the Scripture, the *Lives* of pre-Christian philosophers, and the *Acts* of the martyrs. To illustrate this intertextuality we will consider *Lives* and commemorations of saints, as well as the literature of the monastic tradition, such as the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. These sub-genres of hagiography furnish multiple examples of the narrative interpretation of Scripture in the lived example of the holy man or woman.

## CLASSICAL AND CHRISTIAN ORIGINS OF HAGIOGRAPHY

---

The *Lives* (Latin *vita*; Greek *βίος*) of holy men and, less frequently, women, were a popular subject for the Christian reader from the fourth century CE. The holy men and women who were considered suitable subjects included bishops, martyrs, confessors (who had suffered for their faith but not been killed), monks, and nuns. This kind of text, with its reliance on the miraculous as proof of its subject's holiness, allowed a greater degree of poetic licence to the author than most other genres, with the exception of the apocrypha and novels or romances. Hagiography made recourse to its own stock of proof-texts from Scripture, often presenting Christ and the Apostles as models of the holiness exhibited by their subjects. Acts of charity, in particular, were an 'imitation of

Christ' (*imitatio Christi*/μίμνησις τοῦ Χριστοῦ). OT prophets and patriarchs such as Moses, Ezekiel, and Elijah were also cited as the direct ancestors of the contemporary saint. Christian hagiography had its origins in both pagan and Christian models: the Hellenistic *Lives* of philosophers, the *Acts of the Martyrs*, and the literature of the eastern desert monks. The extent to which fourth- and fifth-century hagiography was influenced by each of these genres is a major methodological question.

## Hellenistic *Lives* of Philosophers

In Late Antique Christian literature the virtues of the philosopher-monk became the virtues of priests and bishops. The influence of pagan philosophers' *Lives* on Pontius' *Life and Passion of Cyprian* has been traced by Elm (2003:65–78). Many of the stock themes of saints' *Lives* are already found in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, the third-century Neoplatonic philosopher (trans. Valantasis 2000). Although Porphyry (232–305 CE) was hostile to Christianity, and although his *vita* was directed at an elite pagan audience, his account of his teacher's life and teaching prefigures many of the characteristics of fourth-century Christian *vitae*, such as Plotinus' scorn of the body (1–2); his love of wisdom (*philosophia*) (3); his withdrawal to country estates to practise philosophy (5 and 12); his attracting of disciples (7), including women (9). Even an element of the miraculous is found in Plotinus' demonstration of supernatural powers of clairvoyance (11). These similarities are testimony to the continuity of Neoplatonic and Stoic ideals in Christian asceticism. In their treatment of the works of Plato as sacred texts, needing interpretation by subsequent generations of philosophers, the Neoplatonists resembled early Christians.

Although Plotinus did not perform miracles per se, mystical out-of-body experiences of union with the divine were attributed to him that would later find a parallel in Augustine's *Confessions*. Philosophers like Plotinus adopted voluntary poverty as part of their way of life: Plotinus refused to bathe and never celebrated his birthday, according to Porphyry. Similarly, the parable of the rich young ruler, who was commanded to give away all he had to the poor if he wanted to follow Jesus (Matt 19.16–30, Mark 10.17–30, Luke 18.18–30), was a common trope in *Lives* of bishops and monks. This can be seen in the *Lives* of Antony of Egypt, Cyprian of Carthage, and Augustine of Hippo, all of which are treated in this chapter. We can also find retrospective attempts to style Jewish patriarchs in the mode of Greek philosophers, as for example in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*. Moses, who saw only the back parts of God, while hidden in the cleft of a rock (Exod 33.22–3), was made the antetype of every ascetic who pursued the *via negativa*, or apophaticism, according to which one grows closer to God by recognizing that nothing can be truly said about God (Krueger 2004). Whatever one might think or say God is, it will fall short of the truth. We find this theme of the inadequacy of words also in the *Life of Antony* 80, which we treat below.

## The Acts of the Martyrs

Many features of the *Acts of the Martyrs* were carried over to the new Christian genre of the saint's *Life*. Imitation of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection was the foundation narrative of the martyrial acts (*acta*) and passion stories (*passiones*). Common features of these narratives from the first three centuries and early Christian hagiography included a preoccupation with the subject's manner of death, and the description of his or her life and death as a contest, primarily against demons. Pauline metaphors from athletics (1 Cor 9.24, Gal 2.2, Gal 5.7, 2 Tim 4.7; cf. Heb 12.1) and military contest were common to both genres (e.g. 1 Tim 6.12, 2 Tim 4.7). The account of Stephen the protomartyr (Acts 6–7), itself modelled on Christ's passion narrative in the Gospels, and the celebration of second-century BCE Jewish martyrs in Book 4 of Maccabees, an inter-testamental book, were also strong influences on both genres.

Perhaps the most famous of the martyr acts is the record by an anonymous supporter that is known as the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (c.199 CE). Felicity and Perpetua were female heroes of the Montanist movement in Carthage, North Africa, and Perpetua, a young mother with a baby at her breast, wrote a graphic account of her journey to death in a prison diary. North African Montanism in Tertullian's day (c.208 CE) continued to emphasize long fasts, and to prohibit second marriages and flight to avoid martyrdom. Perpetua and Felicity, the young women who went voluntarily to their gruesome deaths in a public arena, were cherished examples of the imitation of Christ, embodying the model Christian attitude to persecution and death in the wider Church as well.

## HOLY MEN AND WOMEN IN EGYPTIAN DESERT LITERATURE

---

The attribution of the phrase 'white martyrdom' to the ascetic life indicated that the ascetic was following in the footsteps of the martyr. As Peter Brown (1971) memorably demonstrated, the saint was presented not just as a model to follow but as a powerful friend of God in the court of heaven. His power to intercede in that court for his clients gave him great influence and authority, and encouraged people to cultivate a relationship with him.

The first desert father to be celebrated by the new genre of monastic saints' lives was Antony, who withdrew to the Egyptian desert around 270 CE to live a solitary life of extreme self-denial. The *Life of Antony*, composed in Greek some eighty years later by Athanasius of Alexandria, became a model for all future hagiographers of monks and nuns. Antony was one who heard the Gospel reading of Jesus to the rich young ruler: 'If you would be perfect, go and sell all you have and give it to the poor' (Matt 19.21), and

took it literally, like the Apostles of Jesus (Matt 4.20, Acts 4.35). He only kept a little aside to support his sister (*v. Anton.* 2). Again entering the church he heard the injunction of Matthew 6.34, ‘Do not be anxious about tomorrow’, and instantly decided to sell the remainder of his possessions and put his sister in a monastery, so he could devote himself full time to his spiritual discipline (*v. Anton.* 3). Like the Apostle Paul, he continued to work with his hands, inspired by 2 Thessalonians 3.10: ‘Let he who is idle not eat.’ Like his martyr predecessors, he embraced the struggle against demons and the contest of the ascetic life with enthusiasm. Satan had a devil of a job trying to defeat him, and eventually assumed the guise of a woman to try to overcome him with lust. Even this temptation Antony resisted unscathed, mindful of Paul’s words, ‘not I but him who is in me’ (1 Cor 15.10) (*v. Anton.* 5). The devil appeared to Antony as a black boy, but the saint was not deceived, and demanded to know who his enemy was. In reply the spirit of lust said: ‘I am he on account of whom the prophet reproves those who have fallen, saying, “You have been caused to err by the spirit of whoredom”’ (Hos 4.12) (*v. Anton.* 6). Even demons quoted Scripture in the highly charged spiritual atmosphere of the Egyptian desert. Other biblical tropes used by Athanasius in this very influential *Life* include 2 Corinthians 12.10, ‘when I am weak then I am strong,’ which Antony cited as his reason for enervating the body through such measures as sleeping on the bare ground, abstaining from wine altogether, often spending all night in prayer, and eating only once a day, or every two days, or even every four. The words of Philippians 3.14 and 1 Kings 18.14 spurred him on to even greater efforts day by day (*v. Anton.* 7). Antony took Elijah, prophet and miracle worker of the Book of Kings, as the model of his way of life and that of every hermit. Having failed to defeat him by the spirit of lust, the devil tried physical violence, attacking Antony as he slept among the tombs. Antony countered with a personalized version of Paul’s great dictum in Romans 8.35, shouting at the devil: ‘Here am I, Antony! Even if you inflict more on me, nothing shall “separate me from the love of Christ”’. Then he sang a verse from the Psalms, ‘Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not be afraid’ (Ps 27.3, *v. Anton.* 9). In another place he cites Jesus’ promise of ‘power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon all power of the enemy’ as the reason why his followers had no reason to fear demons (Luke 10.19, *v. Anton.* 30). Scripture was one of the most powerful weapons that the saint had at his disposal when he put on the armour of God against the schemes of the devil (Eph 6.11). However, words without deeds are nothing. When some philosophers came to confront Antony with clever arguments against his faith, he answered with the words of ‘his teacher’ Paul: ‘We make our proof “not in the persuasive words of Greek wisdom” (1 Cor 2.4)... but we persuade by the faith which clearly precedes argumentative proof.’ He proceeded to cast demons out of some men in their midst, and the philosophers withdrew, defeated and amazed (*v. Anton.* 80).

### *Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*

A subgenre of hagiography on the desert ascetics is the collected sayings of the monks and nuns who inhabited the Egyptian desert from the end of the third century onwards.

These sayings have been preserved by unknown sources, in several collections, including the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, preserved in Greek, Coptic, Syriac, and later in Latin (Ward 1981). They include the sayings of monks and nuns from St Antony to the sixth-century Abba Phocas. Although the sayings and actions attributed to the desert mothers Sarah, Synclitica, Pelagia, and the ambiguously gendered Mary/Marinos were not necessarily ever uttered or performed by historical women, their inclusion in edifying literature for men and women illustrates biblical principles of a godly life for women. These ascetic women, who sacrificed their biological distinctiveness to become equal with men in spiritual terms, can be seen to embrace the concluding mandate of the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*: ‘For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven’ (*Gos. Thom.* 51.26).

## LATER SAINTS’ LIVES

---

Patterning themselves on the *Life of Antony*, most later hagiographers presented a stylized account of key moments of the saint’s life according to the following formula: early youth, characterized by love of philosophy and scorn for earthly pursuits; the decision to embrace the ascetic life, either as a solitary or in a *coenobium*, accompanied by the renunciation of worldly goods; the reluctant assumption of the role of spiritual leadership; the saint’s spiritual teachings; the battle against demons; persecution by secular authorities; his/her welcome death (often foretold by the saint), followed by miracles attesting to his/her holiness. The earliest example of hagiography with a female subject is the *Life of Macrina* by Gregory of Nyssa, Macrina’s younger brother. Gregory presents an idealized account of his sister’s life, seeking to fill the gap left by her death in 380, two or three years before his composition (Krueger 2000:484–6). Macrina was more than a virgin who consecrated her life to God’s service and led a community of like-minded women in her house at Pontus; Gregory styles her as a philosopher and as his own teacher, whose moral and philosophical training derived solely from her study of Scripture, especially the Psalms (*v. Macr.* 3). Krueger aptly calls her life of simplicity and constant prayer ‘a living liturgy’ (Krueger 2000:487).

## BISHOPS’ LIVES

---

Let us now consider the use of biblical tropes in episcopal hagiography. Following the model of humble kingship advocated by the Messiah who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the early Christian bishop ‘was a new type of leader; he was not rich (or not supposed to be), and he operated outside the traditional civic power structure... Moreover, the sanctity of his office added greatly to his authority and influence’ (Drijvers 2004:68). It is easy to see how the bishop took over the role of the ‘holy man’,

and became an intercessor in temporal affairs as well as spiritual matters, interceding on behalf of his people with the emperor and other powerful figures in the community. *Lives* of bishops perhaps had an antecedent in Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*.

The oldest surviving example of this tradition is the *Life and Passion of St Cyprian*, written by the Carthaginian deacon Pontius in 259. This text, with its strong focus on Cyprian's death which is portrayed as the death of a martyr, is inseparable from the martyr acts of Cyprian. By association, Cyprian, the presbyter and later bishop, assumed other virtues of the martyr: a cultivated disregard for property as well as an ascetic mortification of the flesh and adoption of total celibacy.

Augustine, bishop of Hippo, credited the reading of Athanasius' *Life of Antony* as the trigger for the conversion of Pontitianus, an African who held high office in the imperial court, and whose recounting of the *Life* to him was persuasive in his own eventual turning towards God (*Conf.* 8.39–40). Inspired by the tale of Antony's instant conversion upon reading Matthew 19.21, Augustine opened the Bible at random and read: 'Let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires' (Rom 13.13–14, *Conf.* 8.53–5). Thereupon, he wrote: 'No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away' (*Conf.* 8.55). The *Confessions*, a kind of auto-hagiography, has been read by many subsequent generations as an inspiring story of God speaking directly to the convert through the words of Scripture.

Bishops' *Lives* were a sub-category of saints' *Lives* that proved more popular in the Latin West than the East. For the East, we have very few such *Lives* in this period: there are no contemporary biographies, for example, of the Cappadocians, although there is a *Life* of Macrina, the sister of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa. Nor are there *vitae* of Cyril of Alexandria, Athanasius, or Cyril of Jerusalem (Louth 2004:360). In the West it was a different story, with the appearance in Latin of *Lives* of many bishops, the most popular among them those of Ambrose, Augustine, Martin of Tours, and Gregory the Great. Interestingly, all these bishops adopted voluntary poverty upon their conversion or acceptance of the episcopal role, following Jesus' advice to the rich young man: 'Go and sell all you have and give it to the poor' (Matt 19.21). However, as Louth notes, the biographers of Ambrose, Augustine, and Martin of Tours 'all present their subjects not simply as bishops, but as monk-bishops, so they are not unrelated to monastic literature' (Louth 2004:360–1). (Paulinus' *Life of Ambrose* [chap. 9] presents the bishop of Milan as a self-styled 'holy man' who practised ascetical disciplines, but not explicitly as a monk.) To this list we may add Palladius' *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*, which also portrays as a monk-bishop its subject John Chrysostom, priest of Antioch and patriarch of Constantinople until he was deposed after the Synod of the Oak in 403. The Syriac tradition conveys the *Life* of exiled bishop Severus of Alexandria, an opponent of Chalcedonian Christology who absconded to Alexandria in 518 before he could be arrested. He died some twenty years later, and never ceased opposing the imperial will to impose Chalcedon as the standard of orthodoxy. The need for a *Life* in both of these

cases is obvious: John's and Severus' supporters wanted to clear their bishop's name of charges of heresy.

While, as we have seen, the virtues of the philosopher-monk became the virtues of priests and bishops, there remained important differences between the *Lives* of monks and nuns and their episcopal counterparts. One key difference is the lack of miracles in bishops' *Lives*. Written biographies of monks originated in an Egyptian context among the desert fathers, and their characteristic features are well illustrated by the *Life of Hypatius*, fourth-century monk and bishop of Gangra. In this *Life*, which probably dates to the sixth century, Hypatius is portrayed as finding 'peasants weak from hunger or disease lying in the road whom he brought into his monastery' (Callinicus, *v. Hyp.* 4.6 and 9.4), recalling Jesus' mandate to go out and seek the poor in the highways and byways 'that my house might be filled' (Luke 14.23), as well as the parable of the Good Samaritan. Finn (2002:141) warns against uncritically accepting the biblical stereotyping manifest in such portrayals:

The influence of biblical models may operate first at a literary level: authors of saints' *Lives* sought to show the conformity of their heroes and heroines to Christ and his apostles so that they are shown giving help to the poor in the same way as their biblical exemplars.

Finn reminds the modern reader of hagiography that the 'gravitational pull' of the Scriptures exerts a strong influence on the kinds of information that are included and discarded by hagiographers (Finn 2002:144). This conclusion is true of Egyptian monastic literature generally, especially the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.

## *LIVES OF CONFESSORS*

---

To illustrate how the *Lives* of confessors, or those who suffered for the faith but were not directly martyred, adopted biblical tropes, we adduce the examples of Pope Martin I and Maximus the Confessor, both victims of the monothelite controversy in the mid-seventh century. The hagiography of Martin I, bishop of Rome from 649 until his death in exile five years later, is a particularly good example of a confessor's death being reconfigured as a martyrdom. Martin is portrayed in his Greek *Life* and in the Latin *Liber pontificalis* as a confessor of the true faith of two wills in Christ (dythelitism). His suffering is compared with that of Christ's passion on several occasions, such as when those who mocked the degraded bishop as he was paraded half-naked through the streets of Constantinople after his trial in 653 or 654, asking: "'Where is your God" [now]?' (cf. Mic 7.10), are compared with the onlookers who taunted Christ as he was dying on the cross (*narr.* 21), suggesting that Martin was martyred by the monothelite authorities, rather than condemned to see out his days in exile. This is most obvious in the Latin *Account of the Exile of Holy Pope Martin* (*Narrationes de exilio sancti papae Martini*),

written by an anonymous supporter for the benefit of dyothelites in Rome and North Africa, and the *Commemoration* (*Hypomnesticon*), which survives in Greek and a Latin translation. According to the *Account*, Martin was disappointed when his death sentence was commuted, and he was sentenced instead to exile. ‘For he was eager to “fight the good fight” (1 Tim 6.12; 2 Tim 4.7), and to depart for the one for whom he longed’ (*narr.* 23). Similarly, the *Commemoration* depicts him as ‘eagerly desiring and passionately longing to undergo martyrdom for Christ’ (*hypomn.* 5).

Classical echoes of Ovid’s *Tristia* in the *Account* have been noted elsewhere (Neil 2010). Martin’s place of exile in the Chersonese, on the Crimean peninsula, was the same as the imperial poet Ovid’s in 8 CE. The anonymous composer of the *Account* naturally engaged with the well-known classical Latin tradition of Ovid’s writings from exile. On the other hand, the author also sought to engage with tropes of exile from the Hebrew Scriptures, sometimes in conflict with the ideology of the pagan poet. These ideas included: the importance of maintaining orthodox religious purity (Ezra 10.10–11, Neh 1.6–7); an assumption of self-righteousness as the ‘Chosen People’ of Yahweh (Isa 65.22, Tob 1.3–8); seeking God’s punishment of one’s enemies (Ps 137.8–9, Hab 2.5–20); longing for restoration to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple (Ps 137.4–7, Joel 4.17, Tob 13.15–23); and characterizing one’s place of exile as a place forsaken by God (Hos 9.3–6) (Neil 2010:187). Was Martin’s beloved city of Rome his lost Jerusalem, or was the heavenly kingdom which awaited him after death his true spiritual home? These two opposing narratives are held in tension in the text. Echoing 1 Corinthians 10.13, Martin affirms his belief that God dispenses suffering according to his providential plan (*narr.* 29). He dismisses bodily suffering and commends himself to God’s keeping, using the language of persecution familiar to readers of the apostle Paul: “For the Lord is near” (Phil 4.3) and why should I be troubled? I hope indeed in his mercy, that he is not slow now to finish my race, which he commanded’ (*narr.* 31).

Secular rulers frequently come under attack in *vitae* as opponents of the work of spiritual leaders, a popular theme in Hebrew Scriptures. In the Greek preface to the *Commemoration* (Allen and Neil 1999:197), the Emperor Heraclius (610–41 CE) is introduced with a phrase from Job, ‘I will give a king who is “a hypocrite because of the people’s sins”’ (Job 34.30). The author of the *Commemoration* attacks the imperial party of monothelites, likening them to the Jews who failed to receive the word of God, a familiar *topos* from Acts (Acts 13.45, 17.5): ‘But those most profane and wretched apostates of the truth did all this to them for no other reason than out of envy alone, truly most wicked, which the old enemy the devil sowed in them as in the Jews whom they resemble . . .’ (*hypomn.* 2 [Latin]).

Similarly, the Greek *Life of Maximus* in its third recension disparages the Jews for refusing to receive the true faith. This is a common trope in Latin, Greek, and Syriac hagiography. Heraclius’ descendants, especially Emperor Constans II (d. 668), are said to have received the empire and held sway over it in succession ‘like “a gangrenous sore”’ (*hypomn.* 2 [Greek]), in an echo of 2 Timothy 2.7.

The third and longest recension of the Greek *Life of Maximus* starts as most *Lives* do, with a fictitious account of Maximus’ early years. From an early age, he disparaged

childish games and amusements, preferring instead the study of philosophy ‘and the disciplines derived from it’ (*v. Max.* 2 and 3). The sage’s early vocation for the study of wisdom is borrowed from the *Lives* of classical philosophers such as Plotinus. According to the Greek tradition, Maximus grew up as the privileged son of a noble family in Constantinople, and was eventually employed in the imperial court as the chief secretary (*protoascretis*) (*v. Max.* 4), as he asserts in *Epistula* 12 (PG 91.505B). Here he was exposed to the emerging monoenergist (or ‘monothelite’ as the Greek *Life* has it, anachronistically) doctrine, and left the court in protest for an ascetic life in the nearby monastery of Chrysopolis, across the Bosphorus, ‘which was then flourishing with regard to philosophy’ (*v. Max.* 5). He took up the practices of the desert ascetic: cropping his hair and donning a hair shirt, and wearing his body down by lack of sleep and fasting, during all-night prayer vigils. Tried as a traitor and blasphemer by the imperial court in May 655, the monk refused to give any ground and was sent into exile in Bizya, Thrace. Maximus was not just a saintly opponent of monothelitism but also an exegete, one whose skill in getting to the inner meaning of obscure scriptural passages from the OT and NT was celebrated by his hagiographer in the language of apophaticism. ‘[H]e would be able both to lay hold of knowledge which is above knowledge and to reach contemplation of the world above . . . both by not surrendering to the obvious sense but advancing to the more interior meaning, and by challenging abyss with abyss’ (cf. Ps 41.7; *v. Max.* 19). His ability to manipulate Scripture was most obvious in the course of his dispute at Bizya with the hapless bishop of Bithynia, Theodosius. Maximus released a torrent of biblical quotations and allusions, likening his suffering to that of the saints who are put to the test (cf. Rom 5.4), and his enemies to ‘that proud and apostate serpent, the devil’ (cf. Ps 91.13, Luke 10.19; *v. Max.* 26). In 662 he was recalled to Constantinople, tried again, had his tongue and right hand amputated, and was condemned to exile in Lazica, where he died after six months of being dragged on foot from camp to camp.

## CONCLUSION

---

The selection of various biblical tropes adopted in early Christian hagiography depended greatly upon its subjects, whether bishops, monks, nuns, martyrs, or confessors. Louth’s *caveat* is apposite: we need to read early Christian hagiography ‘not so much as a rather grubby window through which we can catch glimpses of a few historical events and historical conditions, but rather as a mirror in which we can see reflected the mind and values of the society to which they belong’ (Louth 2004:361). What mattered most to Late Antique hagiographers was how the personal sanctity of their subjects reflected their continuity with biblical times, in a correspondence of type and antetype. From Moses to Elijah to Christ or John the Baptist, from Antony to Pontitianus to Augustine, hagiographical narratives—deeply rooted in Scripture—made both their subjects and their devotees part of a seamless continuum of holiness, or as Williams (2008:147) put it, ‘the continuity of sacred history’. To this end, hagiographers interwove themes and *topoi*

from a range of texts calculated to edify, from the lives of Hellenistic philosophers to the Hebrew Scriptures; from classical narratives of exile and loss to the letters of the apostle Paul, celebrating suffering and persecution for the sake of the Gospel; from the canonical Gospels to the apocrypha. This multi-layering produced a rich vibration beneath the surface of the text, giving off a complex series of signals to which every early Christian was alert.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Apophthegmata Patrum*. Eng. trans.: B. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, rev. edn (London: Cistercian Publications, 1981).
- [Anonymous], *Evangelium Thomae*. Eng. trans.: R. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas*, New Testament Readings (London: Routledge, 1997).
- [Anonymous], *Hypomnesticon*. Greek text and Latin trans.: P. Allen and B. Neil (eds), *Scripta saeculi VII vitam Maximi confessoris illustrantia*, CCG 39 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999).
- [Anonymous], *Vita Maximi Confessoris*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: B. Neil and P. Allen, *The Life of Maximus the Confessor. Recension 3*, Early Christian Studies 6 (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2003).
- [Anonymous], *Narrationes de exilio sancti papae Martini*. Latin text and Eng. trans.: B. Neil, *Seventh—Century Popes and Martyrs: The Political Hagiography of Anastasius Bibliothecarius*, *Studia Antiqua Australiensia* 2 (Sydney and Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).
- Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*. Eng. trans.: H. Ellershaw, *Life of Antony*, in P. Schaff and H. Wace (eds), NPNF vol. 4 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892).
- Augustine, *Confessionum libri XIII*. Eng. trans.: E. Pusey, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, vol. 7/1, Harvard Classics (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1909–14).
- Brock, S. (1973/1984). 'An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor', *Analecta Bollandiana* 53: 299–346; repr. S. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, Collected Studies Series 199 (London: Ashgate), XII.
- Callinicus, *Vita Hypatii*. Greek text: G. J. M. Bartelink (ed.), *Vie d'Hypatios*, SC 177 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Macrinae*. Greek text and French trans.: P. Maraval (ed.), *Grégoire de Nysse: Vie de sainte Macrine*, SC 178 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971).
- Porphry, *Vita Plotini*. Eng. trans.: R. Valantasis, 'Porphyry. *On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of his Books*', in R. Valantasis (ed.), *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, Princeton Readings in Religions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 50–61.

### Scholarship

- Brown, P. (1971). 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *JRS* 61: 80–102.
- Drijvers, J. W. (2004). *Cyril of Jerusalem: Bishop and City*, Supplements to VC 72 (Leiden: Brill).
- Elm, E. (2003). *Die Macht der Weisheit: Das Bild des Bischofs in der Vita Augustini des Possidius und anderen spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Bischofsviten*. Studies in the History of Christian Thought 109 (Leiden: Brill).

- Finn, R. (2002). 'Portraying the Poor: Descriptions of Poverty in Christian Texts from the Late Roman Empire', in M. Atkins and R. Osborne (eds), *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 130–44.
- Krueger, D. (2000). 'Writing and the Liturgy of Memory in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*', *J ECS* 8/4: 483–510.
- Krueger, D. (2004). *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East*. Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Louth, A. (2004). 'Hagiography', in F. Young, L. Ayres, and A. Louth (eds), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 358–61.
- Neil, B. (2010). 'From *Tristitia* to *Gaudia*: The Exile and Martyrdom of Pope Martin I', in J. Leemans (ed.), *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity*, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium* 241 (Leuven: Peeters), 179–94.
- Williams, M. (2008). *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography: Between Eusebius and Augustine*. Cambridge Classical Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

### Suggested Reading

In an essay that is still pertinent, Brown (1983) surveys various methodological approaches to the study of hagiography and its biblical models. Saxer (1986) remains an important source-book for biblical themes in the Acts of the martyrs from the first three centuries. Other studies of the influence of martyr acts on early Christian hagiography are Ashbrook Harvey (2008), especially good on the Syriac sources; Scorza—Barcellona (2001), offering an analysis of early Western martyr narratives, and a summary of early Latin and Greek hagiographical traditions from North Africa, Gaul, Italy, and Rome; and Avemarie and van Henten (2002) on the influence of apocryphal Scriptures on early Christian martyr passions, especially the Books of Maccabees. The authority on episcopal *Lives* and their borrowing of tropes from the *Lives* of Hellenistic philosophers is Elm (2003). Krueger (2000) and Williams (2008) offer diverse takes on the development of early Christian hagiography, with Krueger emphasizing its complete reliance on the continuity of biblical time with the holy men and women of the early Christian centuries. This common scriptural milieu brought the early Christian reader/hearer of hagiography into contact with its holy subject and bound them together in a single spiritual dimension. Williams (2008) makes a distinction between early Christian biography (e.g. the *Lives* of Christian emperors) and hagiography proper; similar questions are raised in the 2002 conference proceedings edited by Odorico and Agapitos (2004). Ashbrook Harvey (2008) provides an excellent bibliography of modern translations and anthologies of hagiographic texts, and an illuminating account of contemporary scholarship on early Christian hagiography from the mid—twentieth century to the present.

- Allen, P., Neil, B., and Mayer, W. (2009). *Preaching Poverty in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Realities*. *Arbeiten zur Kirchen und Theologiegeschichte* 28 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt), 35–68.
- Ashbrook Harvey, S. (2008). 'Martyr Passions and Hagiography', in S. Ashbrook Harvey and D. Hunter (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 603–27.
- Avemarie, F., and van Henten, J. W. (2002). *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco—Roman, Jewish, and Christian Antiquity* (London: Routledge).

- Brown, P. (1983). 'The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity', *Representations* 1 (2): 1–25.
- Odorico, P., and Agapitos, P. (2004) (eds). *Les Vies des saints à Byzance: Genre littéraire ou biographie historique?*, *Actes du IIe colloque international philologique «EPMHNEIA», Paris 6–7–8 juin 2002* (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, néo—helléniques et sud—est européennes, L'École des hautes études en sciences sociales).
- Saxer, V. (1986). *Bible et hagiographie: Textes et thèmes bibliques dans les Actes des martyrs authentiques des premiers siècles* (Bern: Peter Lang).
- Scorza—Barcellona, F. (2001). 'Agli inizi dell'agiographia occidentale', in G. Phillipart (ed.), *Hagiographies III: Histoire internationale de la littérature hagiographique latine et vernaculaire en Occident des origines à 1550*, *Corpus Christianorum* (Turnhout: Brepols), 17–97.

## CHAPTER 21

---

# EARLY CHRISTIAN VISUAL ART AS BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

---

ROBIN M. JENSEN

### OVERVIEW: NARRATIVE ART AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

---

IN his letter to a brother bishop, Acacius of Scythopolis, Cyril of Alexandria asked if an artist could portray a lengthy biblical story in a single image. Focused on the episode of God's testing of Abraham, Cyril wondered how an illustrator could show all the events that led up to the moment of would-be sacrifice. Might Abraham first appear mounted on a donkey, accompanied by Isaac and followed by servants, and then kindling the fire, binding his son, and brandishing his knife? That would require showing Abraham in several different guises and performing various actions sequentially. But even this would lack certain narrative details (Cyril of Alexandria, *ep.* 41.22).

This is essentially how depicting stories in pictorial art differs from telling them with words. Narratives unfold in time—they have beginnings, middles, and ends—but visual artworks function differently. In most cases, they can be perceived more or less in a single glance, even if a viewer lingers over certain elements of a given composition.

In the third century, biblical narratives began appearing in Roman art and are one of the bases for distinguishing certain monuments as specifically Christian. These earliest examples survive primarily in funerary settings: catacomb paintings and sarcophagus reliefs, although the wall paintings from the house church at Dura Europos in Syria indicate that they would have been found in ecclesial contexts as well. Both textual and material evidence confirm that churches and their furnishings were adorned with painted, woven, carved, and mosaic renderings of Bible stories no later than mid-fourth century. Such images also turned up on domestic or personal objects including clothing,

jewellery, pottery lamps and bowls, gold-decorated glasses, and ceramic tiles. By the sixth century illuminated Bibles started to appear, their images paired with texts in a more direct way than earlier and therefore, to a certain extent, more beholden to the narrative than the figures on those earlier artefacts.

Yet, if one believes that a pictorial rendering should faithfully represent the unfolding of a complete tale, the only possible solution is the one Cyril imagined: to show each scene episodically, as in a modern graphic novel or comic book. But even then, short of captions or other verbal aids, images will fail to convey the equivalent of a textual narrative. This does not imply that images are inferior to words; rather, it demonstrates that they serve a different purpose. Observers *perceive* rather than read images.

Despite this categorical difference, the grammar of reading often pertains when discussing narrative or pictorial art, because artworks based on literary narratives are essentially exegetical. Simply put, they present an interpretation of a story (or scene), albeit in a non-verbal and arguably more subjective mode. For example, Cyril's reason for raising the matter of visual narratives in his letter to Acacius was less about the ways an artist might go about it than how events recounted in the Hebrew Scriptures prophetically point to Christ's establishment of the New Law.

In the same letter, Cyril discusses the figure of the scapegoat in Leviticus (16.5–10) and explains how it foreshadowed Christ's Passion. This leads him to recount the story of Abraham's offering of Isaac, insofar as it is another type of Christ's atoning sacrifice. He draws a parallel between biblical prefiguration and visual art and argues that such types—like pictures—are valid but incomplete in themselves. Stories in the Hebrew Scriptures are like artists' preliminary outlines, waiting for their colours to be filled in (*ep.* 41.21). They contain all the seeds of truth but remain unfinished (*ep.* 41.23). Thus, Cyril ultimately understands iconography to have a purpose beyond being a comprehensive catalogue of narrative details. For Cyril, the value of iconography lies in the degree to which it reveals some meaning or potential reality that waits beneath the narrative surface. Cyril's musings do more than bemoan the fact that visual art is inadequate to providing a literal narration.

But granting that art's task is more to *interpret* a scene than to *recount* it, one may validly pose the question of how effectively it does that. At the most basic level, pictorial depictions of scriptural narratives might simply aid observers in recalling stories they have heard or read elsewhere. Gregory the Great accorded iconography this sort of minimal value when he asserted that pictures painted on church walls instruct the illiterate in their Bible stories (Gregory I, *ep.* 9.209; *ep.* 11.10). Gregory, of course, must have realized that unless the story was already known in its full details, a picture would have limited value as a teaching tool. Without viewers' having some comprehension of the source narrative (from reading or hearing), illustrations are subject to almost infinite possible interpretations. For example, unless spectators already knew Isaac's story, and why an old man should be brandishing a knife over his head, they would have no way of intuiting God's initial test of the father and ultimate deliverance of the son. Even less would they have any reason to connect that story with its NT parallel in the Passion of Christ.

Some decades after Cyril wrote his letter to Acacius, Augustine of Hippo also mentioned visual depictions of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac. It comes up in a rancorous

communication with the Manichaean bishop Faustus. In his *Reply to Faustus*, Augustine defends the Hebrew patriarchs against Faustus' characterization of them as despicable sinners. Noting that Faustus had specifically cited the example of Abraham, Augustine explains that if Abraham had planned to sacrifice his son on his own initiative, it would have indeed been a wicked act. However, he points out, Abraham obeyed God's command, and so must be judged a pious and faithful man. Augustine adds that Faustus presumably cited this particular case because he had been emotionally affected by the many dramatic verbal recitations and vivid visual depictions of the story. Given their power and popularity, he could not have been immune to the scene's impact, and thus spontaneously conjured the disturbing image in his mind (Augustine, *Faust* 22.73).

That Faustus would have cited this story as a demonstration of the patriarchs' iniquity rather than fidelity or obedience to God shows how it could be open to interpretation. Since Faustus apparently judged Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his beloved only son as vile, he would have perceived this in the visual depictions of the scene as much as in reading or hearing the tale. The problem of uncontextualized visual images is, however, particularly acute. Viewers lacking knowledge of the actual narrative—much less its many possible interpretations—could justifiably conclude that it merely depicted a wicked old man slaying a helpless child. The presence of an altar in the image would further suggest that it showed an instance of ancient human sacrifice and prompt horrifying parallels: Agamemnon about to slay Iphigenia, or a Canaanite offering an infant on Baal's fiery altar (2 Chr 28.3; 33.6).

While Cyril's discussion of images addresses narrative art's ability to point beyond itself to a deeper signification, Augustine's example speaks to art's affective power. Rather than envisioning a certain scene exclusively in the mind's eye, a spectator actually confronts it as if encountered in reality. The visual image vivifies a historical event and allows it to become imprinted on the memory more deeply than a read or spoken account. Pictures, taken in as a whole, are also recalled as such; once glimpsed, they can be very difficult to forget, especially emotionally charged or disturbing images. This is what Augustine asserts must be true in Faustus' case.

Another fourth-century theologian, the Cappadocian father Gregory of Nyssa, actually described how seeing depictions of Abraham's offering of Isaac had a powerful impact on him:

Many times I have seen this tragic event depicted in pictures and I could not pass by the sight without shedding tears, so clearly and evidently did the art present it to my eyes. Isaac, kneeling, his arms behind his back, faces his father next to the altar itself. The father, standing behind him, grasps the son's hair with his left hand and brings it toward himself, stoops over the face that looks with pity up at him as with the right hand he points the deadly sword. Already the point of the sword touches the boy's body when a divine voice sounds forth to prohibit the act.

(Gregory of Nyssa, *deit.*; *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 10.2)

Gregory's recollection of seeing this scene attends to the power of graphic images to arouse compassion, desire, and even terror. Visual art can arouse feelings that approximate

those one might have if witnessing the event in reality. This visceral impact might explain why images of Christ's crucifixion appear relatively late in Christian art: it was possible to describe or discuss, but much harder to depict or to gaze upon. Similarly, despite the many instances in which the stories of the martyrs were recounted, very few actual visual images of their deaths have survived.

In this brief statement, Gregory also points out another exegetical dimension of visual imagery. Art takes a section of a story and gives it a specific physical setting. It necessarily fills out certain details. The scene he describes of Abraham binding Isaac must have included details not mentioned in the biblical text: the colour of the father's beard, the child's expression of fear, the glint of the upraised knife. Once such details appear in art they become components of viewers' experience and are sometimes so impressed on their memories that they become permanent elements of the story, even if never actually present in the text itself.

Thus, visual artists amplify and expand certain features of the narratives they depict. This aspect of art-making is not an exercise in accuracy; it is a work of invention and exposition. It is like other types of imaginative mediation of the Scriptures (e.g. dramatic performances) in which the subject is asked to enter the scene and bring it alive. Yet, an artist's work is not purely intellectual, and its products are necessarily finite. Artists must render many things about which the narrative is silent; but they cannot depict everything. They must select and edit the objects of their attention, arrange them in a frame, and then give them surroundings, physical features, and clothing. They will choose elements to emphasize through manipulation of light, colour, and shape. Certain details must be omitted or changed for the sake of the composition; others must be added at the artist's discretion. Was Paul riding a horse on the road to Damascus? Were the magi dressed like Persian astrologers? Did the sea creature that swallowed Jonah have fins and a tail?

Artists, by necessity, are required to go beyond the written narrative, incorporating their own ideas about how it would have looked, and adding dimension and relevance to the story out of a visualizing practice that may have been guided by tradition as much as by personal vision. They may even intentionally diverge from the text, or incorporate incongruent elements in order to convey a certain idea or message. For example, many early Christian depictions of Jesus' healing or resuscitation show the recipients as child-like and small (e.g. Figure 21.1), despite the fact that the narrative presents them as adults. This may be to suggest that healing is a kind of restoration to the innocence of childhood or an allusion to rebirth as in baptism. Yet, despite the various ways artists manipulate their images, biblical images cannot sever their basic connection with their sources without losing their purpose, which is to provide commentary on or interpretation of that story. Each image is engaged with what the narrative offers.

The simple nature of visual art is that it offers another dimension: one with perceived and particular texture, colour, and form. Insofar as artists must make all those decisions, their works are actively constructive rather than passively representative. In the same way that artists interpret texts, viewers interpret images. No two spectators will see an image in exactly the same way, nor will a single observer always see the same thing in any given image. The process of construction continues in the beholder's eye.



FIGURE 21.1 The sacrifice of Isaac and Jesus healing, early Christian sarcophagus, Rome, c.325–50. Now in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Vatican)

This is exactly parallel to the ways that Scripture is continually being reinterpreted. Just as a passage of Scripture never conveys only a single, fixed meaning for readers or hearers, so a work of art may have near infinite implications for spectators. This malleability is compounded by the endless variables that apply to the historical reception of texts, including those of time and space, culture and class, gender and age.

## THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC IN EARLY CHRISTIAN ART: A CASE STUDY

Cyril's, Gregory's, and Augustine's reports of early Christian depictions of Abraham's offering of Isaac are rare references to visual art in early Christian texts. The literary record contains few other examples of specific biblical scenes in any detail. Fortunately, surviving representations of Isaac's near-sacrifice are plentiful (even if not necessarily the actual examples to which these early writers refer) and provide an opportunity to examine them as instances of visual exegesis.

The earliest surviving depictions of Abraham and Isaac come from the environs of Rome, found among the paintings in the Christian catacombs. Most date to the late third and early fourth century (Figure 21.2). Other early examples were carved in relief on early Christian sarcophagi. The scene also appears in one of the lunette mosaics in the sanctuary of Ravenna's San Vitale (Figure 21.7), and on small ivory, glass, and ceramic objects dated to the late fourth through sixth centuries (Figure 21.3).



FIGURE 21.2 The sacrifice of Isaac, Via Latina Catacomb, Rome, mid-fourth century



FIGURE 21.3 Sacrifice of Isaac, ivory pyxis, late fourth or early fifth century. Now in the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin

Nearly all the depictions on these varied monuments correspond with the details mentioned in Gregory's description. Abraham stands behind his son. He often grasps the boy's hair with his left hand to expose his neck, and almost always raises the knife in his right hand. He is poised to deliver the deadly blow. The child usually kneels next to a small flaming altar with his hands bound behind his back. Sometimes he looks back at his father with an expression of fear, but more often he looks downward and appears to calmly accept his fate. Abraham has turned away from his son, apparently being distracted from his deed by the voice of God. The voice, depicted as God's right hand, has issued the divine command to stop the sacrifice at the last second. A ram or lamb stands nearby—the miraculously appearing substitute victim (Figure 21.4).

In many early Christian sarcophagi, the sacrifice scene is juxtaposed with the hand of God holding out the Law to Moses (Figure 21.5). God's hand holds out a scroll (or tablet) to Moses, usually placed just to the left of a central portrait of a husband-and-wife pair who probably commissioned the casket for burial. The image just to the right of this portrait depicts Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac. God's hand appears in both—giving the Law to Moses or staying Abraham's knife. One possible explanation for this frequent pairing is that the composition symbolizes Jesus' dual roles as lawgiver (the New Moses) and sacrificial victim (the New Isaac). The rest of the composition frequently includes a seemingly random collection of abbreviated scenes from other biblical stories, many of which may be seen as types or prophetic references to events in the life of Christ, or the establishment of the Christian Church and its sacraments.

Several other early Christian sarcophagus reliefs present Isaac's sacrifice in relation to a depiction of Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate. In one instance, the two images



**FIGURE 21.4** Sacrifice of Isaac, terracotta tile relief, from Hajeb el Aiou Region (Tunisia), fifth century. Now in the Bardo Museum, Tunis



FIGURE 21.5 Early Christian sarcophagus with biblical scenes, Rome, c.320–5. Now in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Vatican)

appear on opposite ends of the main frieze, but in one case, the two episodes are joined, so that Isaac actually replaces Jesus (Figure 21.6). These examples appear to illustrate a typological interpretation that proposes Isaac's sacrifice to be a prefiguration of Christ's sacrifice, even serving as a visual substitute for the crucifixion, which was rarely depicted in Christian art prior to the early fifth century. The typological link between Isaac and Christ was, of course, a standard motif in early Christian biblical interpretation. Both were beloved only sons, both were miraculously conceived, both were willing and obedient sacrificial victims. Isaac is the prophetic figure, while Jesus is that prophecy's fulfilment, a self-offering that is both divine and salvific. Isaac's appearance in early Christian art thus functions as much more than an illustration of an OT narrative, it also stands in for the crucifixion—the event to which it ultimately points.

Among the myriad instances of this, one example may suffice. John Chrysostom provided an instance of this parallel and, in the process, explained how typological exegesis works:

A lamb was offered for Isaac, and a spiritual lamb was offered for the world. The reality had to be depicted beforehand in type. Consider, I beg you, to what extent everything had been told in advance. In both instances we have an only son; in both instances one who is greatly loved. The first was offered as a victim by his father and so was the latter offered by the Father. The type carries us a long way, but how much further does the reality go. (John Chrysostom, *hom. in Gen.* 47.3)

Images, too, can perform typological exegesis. One of the most richly embellished depictions of Abraham's offering of Isaac is a mosaic panel found in the sixth-century sanctuary of Ravenna's Basilica of San Vitale (Figure 21.7). Here, in the context of a sacred space, the image does more than interpret a story; it also integrates that story into the liturgical life of the community. In this instance, both the physical setting (a church)



FIGURE 21.6 Two Brothers Sarcophagus, Rome, 320–5. Now in the Museo Pio Cristiano (Vatican)

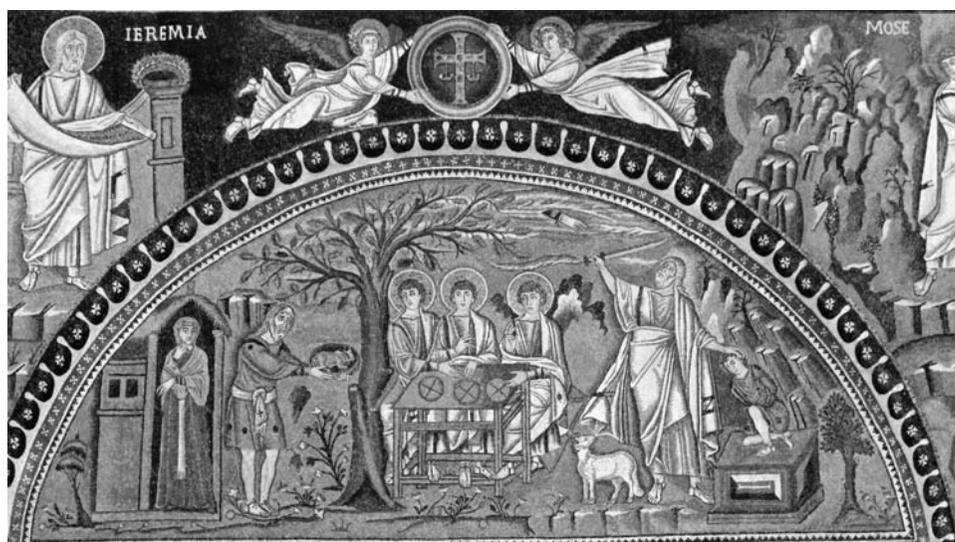


FIGURE 21.7 Hospitality of Abraham and Abraham offering Isaac, lunette mosaic, Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, c. 540–50

and the image's place in the larger decorative scheme prove important for understanding what it might mean in context.

The scene is part of a lunette mosaic that is visible just above and to the left of the main altar (the north wall). The sacrifice scene occurs within a composition that also displays two episodes from the Genesis narrative of the hospitality of Abraham. On the far left,

Abraham's wife, Sarah, stands in the doorway of a small thatched booth. She has her finger to her lips and appears to be amused at the pronouncement that she, an elderly and barren woman, will bear a son (Gen 18.9–12). To her right, Abraham extends the offering of a prepared calf to his three identical, haloed guests, who sit at table under the shade of an arching tree (Gen 18.7–8). The table holds three loaves of bread, each marked with a large X (Gen 18. 5–6). Abraham's short, brown tunic identifies him as a herdsman.

To the right of the three angelic visitors is the representation of Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22.9–14). The story has skipped ahead several chapters in order to link the themes of trusting God's promise with faithful obedience to God's command. In this scene Abraham has exchanged his rustic herdsman's tunic for a formal white tunic and *pallium*. His left hand rests on the head of his son; his right wields a long knife as if about to strike his blow. As on the sarcophagi, Abraham's attention has turned to the voice (hand) of God, who reaches out to him from heaven. Meanwhile, young Isaac (here kneeling upon the altar rather than next to it) faces toward and gazes at the observer. The substitutionary ram at Abraham's feet looks up at him, and even tugs at the hem of his mantle, as if trying to alert him to his presence.

Directly across the sanctuary, on the south wall, and in the same relative location, a different lunette mosaic depicts the sacrifices of Abel and Melchizedek. This mosaic is the second half of an intertextual exegesis that also corresponds to the ritual action that is taking place in real time in the space below. A large, elaborately draped altar stands at the centre of the image; an embroidered and fringed linen cloth is spread on top of a purple undercloth. A double-handled gold chalice and two loaves sit on the altar. Abel, on the left and identified by name, wears a rustic tunic (although not identical to Abraham's) with a red mantle slung over one shoulder. He has emerged from a small shepherd's hut (much like Sarah's across the way) and holds out his offering: a small, white lamb (Gen 4.4). Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem, stands to the right of the altar and is also identified by name. His palace or temple is behind him, in a similar position to Abel's hut. His garb suggests the vestments of an OT priest or eastern potentate, his white undertunic is belted with green and he wears a purple cape. He, like Abraham's three visitors, has a halo, which sets him apart from the other figures in the two mosaics. Above the altar, God's hand (thumb, first, and fourth fingers extended) reaches directly down from heaven to receive and bless the two offerings.

The presbyterium contains many other famous mosaics, including depictions of the Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora presenting the eucharistic gifts. The apse contains a monumental scene of Christ, enthroned on the cosmic orb, presenting a crown to St Vitalis while the city's bishop and two angels look on. Scenes from the life of Moses and representations of prophets and evangelists adorn the walls above the lunette mosaics.

Yet, the image that may be most directly linked with the two lunette mosaics featuring the sacrifices of Abraham, Melchizedek, and Abel is the figure of the Lamb of God (the *Agnus Dei*) that is directly over the altar, high in the apex of the presbytery vault. This lamb appears to float on a starry ground. Four angels support the wreathed medallion that encloses him. From on high, he makes a direct and visual link both with the substitutionary ram tugging at Abraham's mantle and with Abel's proffered (and divinely

favoured) offering. One may reasonably imagine that the celebrant at San Vitale's altar would have gazed up at this lamb when he elevated the host and chalice in the course of the eucharistic canon. Of course, as he did this act, he also symbolically took on the roles of Abel, Melchizedek, and Abraham, and in a sense re-enacted their offerings.

The link between these mosaics and their liturgical context becomes all the more striking if one surmises that the words of the eucharistic prayer may have referenced the offerings of Abraham, Abel, and Melchizedek, as it does in the ancient anaphora known as the Old Roman Canon. Although the exact eucharistic canon in use in San Vitale in the sixth century is unknown, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that it echoed the one recorded in the ancient Western eucharistic prayer that recalls the sacrificial prototypes of Abel, Melchizedek, and Abraham. As it has come down through the centuries, the Canon beseeches God to accept the offerings of Abel, the sacrifice of Abraham, and Melchizedek. Thus, the stories of Abraham, Abel, and Melchizedek are not only linked exegetically, they are incorporated into the living practice of the Church and made ritually, symbolically, and visually present each time the Eucharist is celebrated.

Another instance in which the story of Abraham's sacrifice is visually linked with a different biblical narrative—and in a way that accords it a sacramental as well as exegetical purpose—is the scene's concurrence with an image of Christ raising Lazarus. This is evident in some early sarcophagi, where it appears that the iconography is intended to allude to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ through the typological figures of Isaac and Lazarus (cf. Figure 21.6). However, this juxtaposition also appears in at least one instance on a fifth-century eucharistic pyx from Syria (now in the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna), which depicts the scene of Abraham and Isaac on one side and Christ raising Lazarus on the other.

## CONCLUSION

---

Although this chapter has focused on one example of early Christian visual exegesis, this example is not unique. Early Christian depictions of Daniel, Jonah, Noah, or Moses, for instance, should not be taken simply as stock references to familiar Bible stories, but as signs pointing to more expansive concepts.

Likewise, one should not assume the arrangements of these scenes to be arbitrary. Rather, every aspect of their visual representation paralleled the myriad ways that these stories were interpreted in homilies or written commentaries as prophetically or typologically significant. In this regard, early Christian art used methods like those of verbal exegetes. However, while the images and texts used similar hermeneutical strategies, it would be mistaken to conclude that visual exegesis replicated verbal exegesis. While both modes of interpretation arose from a common cultural and religious context, they had different values and purposes. Viewing imagery was not equivalent to—or a substitute for—reading and hearing. Rather, it had its own narrative logic, one that depended

on the viewer's familiarity with both the story and its exegetical tradition, which are the dual bases for its perceived meaning.

Thus, these two modes, verbal and visual, were mutually enriching. Using a sacred story or text as a springboard, both forms imaginatively drew out the meaning and elaborated the relevance of a given narrative by making connections and associations. In ways both sophisticated and calculated, words and images highlighted certain aspects of a story, then expanded on the significance of those aspects for the proof of the gospel (prophecy); formation of faith (dogma); the living of a Christian life (morality); or promoting love or fear of God (devotion). Practitioners, whether writers of commentaries, preachers, catechists, liturgists, or artists, relied on the experiences, memory, and education of their audience to make their interpretations both intelligible and meaningful in specific times, places, and contexts. And they did this through identifying the analogies, allegories, and types they believed to be embedded in the narratives.

Because both imagistic and textual interpretations arose in a common culture, they can also be studied together in order to judge their respective levels of coherence. Divergences may be as signally important as mutual reinforcement for understanding the special function of a particular iconographic motif in a particular context. Distinctive characteristics or themes of visual art may not be so much an indication of a different audience (e.g. 'viewers' versus 'readers') as the ways that images were deployed in different contexts (e.g. tombs, churches, or small devotional objects). This certainly holds true for different varieties of verbal production in the early Christian period. No story ever has a single, fixed interpretation.

Finally, because images often offer divergent interpretations or independent testimony as to the significance of certain biblical narratives at particular times and places, they are essential to the work of historians who desire a fuller view of the beliefs and values of ancient Christian communities. At the same time, attention to the varied types, applications, and content of written or oral sources will illuminate the meaning and function of visual interpretations of narratives (e.g. the ancient Canon used at San Vitale). These parallel processes, joined together, lead to a more integral sense of each—and to a fuller understanding of the whole.

---

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*. Latin text: J. Zycha (ed.), *Sancti Aureli Augustini Contra Faustum*, CSEL 25 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1891). Eng. trans. Roland Teske, SJ (2007), *Answer to Faustus a Manichean*, The Works of St Augustine 1.20 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press).
- Cyril of Alexandria, *Epistula* 41 (To Acacius, Bishop of Scythopolis). Greek text: PG 77.202–22. Eng. trans.: J. McEnerney, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, Letters 1–50*, FC 76 (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1987), 168–82.
- Gregory the Great, *Epistulae*. Latin text: D. Norberg (ed.), *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum epistularum* CCL 140A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982). Eng. trans.: J. R. C. Martyn, *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, vol. 3 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004).

- Gregory of Nyssa, *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*. Greek Text: PG 46.572; W. Jaeger (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 10.2 (Leiden: Brill, 1952). Eng. trans.: C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453* (Toronto: Medieval Academy of America, 1986).
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesim*. Eng. trans.: R. C. Hill, *St. John Chrysostom Homilies on Genesis 46–87*, FC 87 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

### Suggested Reading

- Davis, S. (2000). 'Jonah in Early Christian Art: Allegorical Exegesis and the Roman Funerary Context', *Australian Religion Studies Review* 13 (1): 72–83.
- Jensen, R. M. (2000). *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge).
- Jensen, R. M. (2007). 'Early Christian Images and Exegesis', in J. Spier (ed.), *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 65–85.
- Kessler, H. (2006). 'The Bible as Icon', in M. Brown, *In the Beginning: Bibles Before the Year 1000* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books).
- Kessler, H. (2007). 'The Word Made Flesh in Early Decorated Bibles', in J. Spier (ed.), *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 141–68.
- Lowden, J. (1999). 'The Beginnings of Biblical Illustration', in J. Williams, *Imaging the Early Medieval Bible* (Universtiy Park, PA: Penn State University Press), 9–59.
- O'Kane, M. (2007). *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press).
- Spier, J. (2007) (ed.). *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press).



PART IV

---

COMMUNITIES  
AND CRITERIA

---



## CHAPTER 22

---

# CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM

---

JAMES CARLETON PAGET

## INTRODUCTION

---

CELSUS, the anti-Christian philosopher of the mid-second century, recognizes that Christians share a Bible in common with Jews and that they argue about it, a dispute he characterized, using a well-known metaphor referring to a pointless discussion, as an argument about the shadow of an ass (Origen, *Cels.* 3.1–2).

Celsus' opinion has not been adopted by modern scholars. They have tended to see the issue of Jewish and Christian discussion of the Bible in Antiquity (understood here as running from the first to the sixth century) as an important area of debate, informing a range of subjects. For a generation of older, mainly Jewish, scholars, the subject was pursued to extend knowledge of Jewish midrashic traditions by seeking out evidence for them in patristic sources, and indicating parallels between the latter and rabbinic literature (Ginzberg 1909–38; Krauss 1893 and 1894). But more recently interest in the subject has been stimulated by a concern with ancient Jewish–Christian relations (Kamesar 2005a:22). Here material which, to some, implies contact between Jews and Christians on questions of the exegesis of Scripture has been debated as part of a broader discussion of ancient Jewish–Christian encounter (see the contrasting views of Stemberger 1996 and Horbury 1998b). Not all discussion, however, has been concerned with this contested issue. Some scholars have interested themselves with questions of identity, focusing on whether we can talk about a distinctive Christian and Jewish mode of exegesis, a debate stimulated by new approaches to the question of Jewish–Christian separation (Becker and Reed 2003). And others have wanted to examine the patristic evidence as a way of illuminating Christian perceptions of rabbinic exegesis (Kamesar 2005a).

## PROBLEMS

---

Our primary difficulty in studying this question lies in the character and distribution of the extant sources. On the Christian side the relevant sources are abundant and diverse. They range from letters to apologies, to dialogues, to homilies, to works devoted to the exegesis of biblical texts (Schreckenberg 1999). They are largely preserved in Greek, Latin, and Syriac, and come from as far west as Spain and as far east as Ctesiphon. The Jewish material, by contrast, is less abundant and less diverse. This is especially the case for the period following 100 CE for which we possess no literary text in Greek that can unambiguously be attributed to a Jew. And yet, one can assume that Jews continued to write in Greek (see the new Greek translations of the Bible by Jews, attributed to Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, and the plethora of Jewish inscriptions in Greek) and to use the LXX as well as expounding the Bible in Greek (Rajak 2009:278–313; de Lange 2015). The Jewish sources which we possess for much of the period are almost exclusively rabbinic, consisting of the Mishnah, Tosefta, the Talmudim, the Midrash, and the Targumim. These sources, apart from the last, are predominantly in Hebrew, and partly exegetical in character (exclusively so in the Midrash).

What difficulties do these facts create? First, the almost complete absence of any Jewish literature composed in Greek, not including translations, makes the process of comparison between Christian and Jewish sources more complex. Christians clearly made use of Jewish sources in Greek—for instance, from an early stage Christians saw the works of Philo as an important aid in their exegetical endeavours (Runia 1993), together with those of Josephus and some so-called pseudepigraphical works, but these probably all date from before 100 CE. After this Christians show knowledge of the non-Septuagintal Jewish Greek versions of the Hebrew Bible, already referred to, and it is possible that they may have known midrashic texts in Greek (de Lange 1976:41). They probably also knew other literature in Greek now preserved in Christian literary *corpora* together with polemical works aimed against Christianity implied by Celsus' references to an anonymous Jew in his attack upon Christianity. But these works are only fragmentarily known, and it may well have been such works which betrayed greater knowledge of and concern with Christianity.

Secondly, explicit evidence of actual interaction between Jew and Christian in the context of exegetical discussion is haphazard, often being associated with Origen and Jerome, who lived for part of their lives in Palestine and showed a striking interest in the Bible, and so may have been exceptions. Otherwise, aside from sporadic references in different places to Christian visits to synagogues, we are heavily dependent on polemical texts written by Christians, either in the form of dialogues between Jews and Christians, tracts *adversus Judaeos*, or testimony books, consisting of collections of mainly OT citations arranged under particular headings. Such works are tendentiously crafted, stimulating a debate about whether they provide evidence of actual Jewish–Christian encounter, and to what extent they represent widely held opinions among Christians about Jews and their understanding of the Bible.

A third problem lies in the character of the Jewish evidence. For much of the period, this material is exclusively rabbinic. Such texts, once held to be representative of normative Jewish opinion, have come to be understood as products of a specific body of Jews (Hezser 1997:353–404; Schwartz 2010:284; Lavee 2010:323–4) whose power and influence only gradually developed with the emergence of a Jewish Patriarch in the fourth century, and whose works barely hint at the varieties of Judaism in Antiquity (Schwartz 2001). This material is difficult to date, a problem applying both to the works as a whole, and the traditions contained within them (Lavee 2010:314). Moreover, even if agreement is possible about dating, we need to be aware that the material itself may emerge from a much earlier date, a point confirmed by the presence of what some have termed proto-rabbinic material in earlier Jewish works such as those at Qumran. To some this observation becomes especially problematic when attempts are made to match up rabbinic and patristic sources in order to demonstrate contact.

We should also note that while Christians are ‘generally noisy’ in their refutation of Judaism (Alexander 2010a:5), the rabbis almost never refer explicitly to Christians (the word *nozerim* refers unambiguously to Christians, but *minim*, the usual word for heretic, cannot always be assumed to refer to Christians [Horbury 2010:366f.]). As a result, discerning the presence of exegetical texts, which concern themselves with a Christian position, is difficult and this is often established by using apparent parallels between rabbinic and Christian sources to establish influence. In an earlier period such parallels were often seen as clear evidence of borrowing, but such a tendency has been criticized (Neusner 1970; Baskin 1985). Samuel Sandmel’s essay of 1962 dubbed many examples of this practice parallelomania, defined as: ‘that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to define source and derivation as if implying literary connection in an inevitable or predetermined way’ (Sandmel 1962:1). Many parallels, Sandmel asserted, were best explained by reference to the shared background of the two sources rather than by direct influence. Identifying other problems in comparing ancient material, he drew attention to ‘seeming parallels which are so only imperfectly, and statements which can be called parallels only by taking them out of context’ (Sandmel 1962:7). Sandmel’s observations have influenced the present discussion (Siegal 2013:29–34). Importance has been attached to the problem of shared traditions and the possibility that many parallels between rabbinic and patristic material can be explained in such a way (Siegal 2013). Others have noted that some parallels arise from the fact of the interpretation of the same text and the shared recognition of its exegetical difficulties and possibilities. More practically, some have wondered about the context in which such encounter occurred, how Christians knew about rabbinic material, which may only, at least in the case of the Talmudim and Midrashim, have been written down quite late (for different perspectives on this issue concerning Aphrahat, see Neusner 1970 and Koltun-Fromm 2010:20–6). In the face of such caution, criteria for establishing parallels to determine whether a text gives evidence of encounter have been introduced. These range from the presence in a particular writing of an explicit reference to a source, to questions about the elucidatory value of a comparison of a Jewish text with a Christian one, the presence of similar or opposite conclusions in Christian or Jewish texts taken

up with the same passage, as well as the presence of shared extra-biblical material (Kessler 2004:25–9). The criteria are hardly scientific, and those applying the same criterion can differ in their conclusions about the degree to which they imply exegetical contact. Sandmel’s warnings have hardly been overcome.

## A SHARED BIBLE?

---

In his *Dialogue with Trypho* 29.2, Justin declares that the Jewish Bible now belongs to the Christians (‘it is ours not theirs’). But was Justin appropriating for Christianity, on the basis of the view that Christians interpreted the text correctly, the same Bible as the Jews laid claim to? Some have contended that from an early stage in Jewish–Christian argumentation a sharp distinction emerged between what Jews and Christians regarded as their Bible. Martin Hengel argued that the Septuagintal canon, which came to include books like Wisdom, generally viewed as outside the Jewish canon, was a Christian book collection, originating in the first-century Roman Christian community (Hengel 2002). Hengel’s thesis seems overdone, however. First, though the Christian collection of the LXX might differ from the canon of Jews, as outlined in Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.40, we should not assume that the apparently non-canonical books identified by Hengel carried equal weight in a Christian collection (this might be supported by the positioning of Wisdom in the Muratorian Fragment [Horbury 1998a, 31–2], and by Origen’s assertion that the books of the Maccabees are ‘outside books’ [Eusebius, *h.e.* 6.25.1f.]). Secondly, there are numbers of places where Christian authors, even those who are hostile to Jews, imply a strong respect for a Jewish canon, or a desire to possess the Scriptures revered by the Jews. Melito went to Palestine to gain information about the contents of the Jewish canon (his list complies with the twenty-two books of Josephus with the omission of Esther), though there is no direct reference to consultation with Jews (Eusebius, *h.e.* 4.26.12–14). Justin states that he has not attempted to find proof about Christ in texts other than those accepted by the Jews (*dial.* 120.5) and Tertullian notes that many people reject the Book of Enoch because it is not in the Jewish book cupboard (*armarium*), implying that use of this book required justification (*cult. fem.* 1.3). In the *Letter to Africanus* Origen indicates the importance of Jewish opinion on the canon (in this instance the importance of a book having originally been written in Hebrew, a point which Africanus had insisted upon in his rejection of the book of Susanna), stating that the Jews do not accept Tobit or Judith, and that the book of Susannah, though known by the Jews, is placed among the apocrypha (*ep.* 1 13). Moreover, we find Jewish opinion appearing in discussion of non-canonical books in the writings of Athanasius, Epiphanius, Rufinus, and Cyril of Jerusalem—all of whom reverence more books than the twenty-two, implying that Jewish opinion stands for something, a point made clear by the fact that the question of what books will be the subject of a dialogue between Timothy, a Christian, and Aquila, a Jew, is a necessary preamble to the probably fifth-century dialogue of that name.

Related to the question of canon is that of text. In the middle of the second century Justin notes that Jews argue that the Septuagint's reading of the Christian proof-text of Isaiah 7.14 with *parthenos* (virgin) should be rendered with *neanis* (young woman), stating that 'your teachers . . . refuse to admit that that the interpretation made by the 70 elders (that is, the Septuagint) is a correct one' (*dial.* 71.1). Justin, who recounts a version of the legend of Aristaeus (1 Apol. 31.1-5), which tells the story of the translation of the LXX, fails to mention alternative named versions of the Greek Bible, which are first referred to by Irenaeus (*haer.* 3.21.1), at least in the form of Theodotion and Aquila. The emergence in the second century of Greek versions of the Hebrew Bible other than the LXX, to which we should add Symmachus' translation to those mentioned in Irenaeus, has sometimes been seen as a response by Jews to Christian adherence to the LXX. But this thesis, first suggested by Christians (Epiphanius, *mens.* 15, referring to Aquila's translation), underestimates evidence of ongoing Jewish attachment to the LXX (Tertullian, *apol.* 18.8; and Justinian's *Novella* 146, implying ongoing use of the LXX, discussed by Rajak 2009:302-3), as well as disregarding evidence, found in the Twelve prophets scroll, which implies the existence of more literalist Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible that precede the emergence of Christianity (Salvesen 2003:238-9).

Whatever we think about why Greek versions of the Bible emerged in the second century, it is true that their appearance together with a growing interest in the Hebrew original of the Bible, witnessed from the late second century onwards, reflected, and contributed to, a Jewish questioning of the authority of the LXX. This led to defences of the authority of the LXX on the part of Christians, either by reference to the *Aristaeus* legend, or by the use of subtler arguments. These included the claim that the LXX was a legitimate interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, which had its origins in secret traditions, given to Moses on Mount Sinai, an argument which constituted an adaptation of a well-known Jewish tradition about the origins of the oral law (Hilary, *Psal.* 2.2, discussed by Kamesar 2005b). The versions themselves were attacked, too, especially Aquila. Others took the textual issues more seriously. Origen, anxious about the existence of variant readings found in LXX manuscripts, but mindful also of the need to be aware of the texts from which Jews were arguing their case against Christians (*ep.* 1 2-5), produced the vast textual aid known as the *Hexapla*, which consisted of parallel columns, in which were found the Hebrew Bible, a transcription of the same into Greek letters, Symmachus, Aquila, and Theodotion (and possibly other versions), and a fifth column which was probably a corrected version of the LXX using asterisks and obeli to indicate corrective additions and deletions respectively. While it is clear that Origen was broadly a defender of the LXX as the version of the Church (Kamesar 1993:4-28), his Hexaplaric endeavours, which probably involved the help of Jews, implied the vulnerability of the LXX as a translation as well as the importance of Jewish opinion on this matter. Jerome's turn to the Hebrew original, more emphatic than that of Origen, and involving explicit criticism of the LXX, emerged from a growing Christian interest in the Hebrew implied not just in Origen's work (Horbury 1988:772-3). Some have seen Jerome's motivation for prioritizing the Hebrew as literary, though he provides a number of motivations (Salvesen 2003:250-1). His production of the *juxta Hebraeos* translation, which also relied on some of the Greek

versions of the Bible to which we have referred, came at the end of a long process, and was strongly opposed by many in the Church, not least Augustine (*Letter 71*). In the end, however, people in the Latin West came to accept Jerome's position.

In the East, among Syriac-speaking Christians, such linguistic concerns were less to the fore as the Peshitta itself was probably closer to the Hebrew than the LXX was and the question of textual difference seems to have played less of a role.

The above shows that while Christians and Jews came to differ over the content of their shared Bible and over its text, Christians remained conscious of Jewish difference in a variety of ways. This might have motivated people like Origen and Jerome to adopt particular positions in relation to the text of the OT, which could be seen as deferential to Jewish opinion, though the motivations for their textual works were not based exclusively upon knowledge of Jewish practice; or it could lead to more involved justifications of Christian difference. Either way, Jewish opinion stood for something and could not be disregarded. This is not the same as saying that Christians and Jews had the same Bible (clearly Jews came to favour the Hebrew in the ways the Christians never did), but it acknowledges the fact that Christians could not afford to ignore Jewish opinion on the subject both at a scholarly and a popular level. In relation to the latter, it is interesting to see how Augustine records in *Letter 71* that when the congregation at Oea in North Africa responded negatively to Jerome's translation of Jonah 4.6, their immediate reaction 'through their bishop' was to consult the neighbouring Jewish community.

## EXEGESIS: SHARED CULTURE AND VARIED ENCOUNTER

---

### Christian Reliance upon Jewish Interpretation

When the earliest Christians came to express their convictions about Jesus, they did so by showing that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Scriptures. Paul implies that the assertion that Christ died for our sins and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures was an early part of the tradition (1 Cor 15.3–4); and Luke makes the risen Jesus twice demonstrate how what has happened to him is according to the law and the prophets (Luke 24.27 and 44). Clear evidence of Christian reliance upon the Scriptures early in their history and the recurrence of certain scriptural texts, sometimes in groups, led some scholars to argue that the earliest form of Christian theologizing lay in the compilation of testimony books of citations gathered around an individual theme (Albl 1999). The view of the scriptural texts as prophetic and the compilation of testimony books could both be seen as reflecting Jewish interpretative habits as could other forms of scriptural argumentation. This is unsurprising as the first Christians were Jews, and in the case of the former Pharisee, Paul, well grounded in Jewish traditions of interpretation. Such observations apply equally to other methods of interpretation, not least that of allegory. Jews had been

practitioners of such an approach to Scripture for several centuries before the time of Jesus. The best known of these were to be found in ancient Alexandria, beginning with Aristoboulos and continuing especially with Philo's philosophically oriented exegesis of Scripture. Philonic influence became explicit with Clement of Alexandria, writing at the end of the second and beginning of the third century, and his use of Philo is strongly exegetical in character, marking the explicit beginning point of a striking appropriation of Philo's exegetical works, witnessed in Origen, Didymus the Blind, Ambrose, Basil, and many others (Runia 1993).

The sense that Christians could learn from Jewish methods of interpretation is further witnessed in Origen's likening of Scripture to a set of rooms, which he explicitly ascribes to a Jew: 'He said that the whole inspired scripture resembles, because of its obscurity, a number of locked rooms, no key fitting the room by which it is placed, and it is a very difficult task to find the keys and fit them to the rooms which they can unlock. So it is with the understanding of scriptures, because they are so obscure; the only way to begin to understand them is by means of the explanation dispersed throughout them' (*philoc.* 2.3). Here Origen presents the idea that one passage of the Bible can be explained by another, that Scripture is a coherent whole, and that each passage contains the key to its interpretation, a view of Scripture witnessed in Philo and in rabbinic literature, though we should be aware that such a rule is found in classical literature in the idea that Homer is illuminated by Homer. Overt acceptance of the fact that Jews engaged in such forms of interpretation, seen especially in the passage from *Philocalia* 2.3 cited above, raises questions about the sincerity of Origen's standard depiction of Jews as literalist interpreters of Scripture.

The extent to which Christians made use of Jews in their interpretation of Scripture has been disputed. Jerome, admittedly in a polemical setting, asserts that Clement, Origen, Eusebius, and many others consulted Jews (*Ruf.* 1.13). Some might dispute this for Clement, though there are grounds for thinking that his original teacher was a Jew, probably Pantaenus (*str.* 1.11), and that he was familiar with a range of Jewish traditions (Carleton Paget 2010b). The evidence for Origen, however, should not be doubted. For the second part of his life he resided in Caesarea, which was known to be a centre of Jewish biblical learning, He often states, 'I once heard a Jew interpreting this passage and he said...', frequently refers to a *Hebraeus* in an exegetical context (*hom. in Ezech.* 4.8), writes of public disputes about Scripture (*Cels.* 1.45 and 55), and probably produced the *Hexapla* with Jewish help. He only refers, however, by name to one Jew, 'Ioullus the Patriarch', to whom he attributes teachings about certain psalms in a Greek fragment on the Psalter (PG 12.1056B–1057C). Because Ioullus is not a known patriarch and referred to nowhere else, his identity has been disputed with some thinking of him as a leader of the Jewish community in Caesarea, possibly Rabbi Hoshaya (Heine 2010:148–9). Jerome's reliance upon Jews, a habit which he had to justify in the face of objections from fellow Christians, has generally been treated as reliable, though some have argued that such Jewish references are often to traditions from Origen, or to the advice of Christian converts from Judaism (Stemberger 1996:582–3). Interestingly, Jerome's clear statements of reliance upon Jews, including Baranina, are balanced by many negative assertions about Jewish interpretation, though these can be understood in a variety of ways.

Origen and Jerome, whose contacts with Jews seem proven, have been seen as exceptional—it is difficult to extrapolate from their experience, in spite of Jerome's claims about the similar practices of other Christians. In the end when it comes to consideration of the habits of other known Christian writers, we are heavily reliant upon the presence in their work of apparent parallels with Jewish traditions of interpretation.

Such parallels appear in different forms. Some give evidence of knowledge of a particular Jewish interpretation, seen perhaps in the way a particular prophecy is understood (see Justin, *dial.* 36.2, who knows that Jews apply Psalm 24 to Solomon, a tradition found in Talmud Bavli *Shabbat* 30a), or by whom a Psalm was written (Origen *sel. in Ps.* Prol. [PG 12.1056]), or how one might divide up the collection of Psalms (Origen *sel. in Ps.* Prol. [PG 12.1056]). Others may betray knowledge of a Jewish tradition through the way in which particular verses are combined (see *Barn.* 12.2–7, which combines Exod 17.1 and Num 21.8, seen also in Mishnah *Rosh Hashanah* 3.8, discussed by Visotzky 1995:12–13). Some utilize Jewish tradition in the way they solve a particular problem, or interpret a particular word or biblical name. Some show knowledge of halakhic traditions, that is extra-biblical legal traditions (see *Barn.* 7.6; Justin, *dial.* 40.6; and Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.7.8, which all, without any biblical justification, mention that the two goats on the day of Atonement should be alike, a tradition found in Mishnah *Yoma* 6.1), and some betray knowledge of such traditions which pertain to haggada or narrative parts of the Bible (de Lange 1976:123–32; and Kamesar 2005a, who includes material in Greek and Syriac). Especially in the case of the latter, such additions to the narrative were often defended as a legitimate form of history writing and a proper way of filling out the otherwise silent text, though some Christian writers, especially those related to the Antiochene tradition, disputed this. In this context Jews appeared especially helpful with literal interpretation, a point which Jerome expresses in his *Commentary in Zechariah* (Kamesar 2005a:31f.).

In many instances use of such traditions is positive and elucidatory of the meaning, even if acknowledgement of a source is rare, perhaps because it has been forgotten. This is an important point because worshippers of Jesus began life as Jews and so the presence of Jewish traditions of exegesis were there from the start. However, from very early on, for different reasons, Christian sources criticized the latter. Jesus, for instance, is made to criticize the 'tradition' (associated in this instance with the Pharisees) (Mark 7.9–15 and pars.), and some take the reference in Titus 1.14 to 'Jewish fables and commandments of men' to be a derogatory reference to the same. In later writings, Jewish tradition can be referred to as *deuterosis* (here aping the word 'Mishnah', though often the reference is not specifically to the Mishnah but to Jewish tradition more generally), or it can often refer to laws given after the Ten Commandments, and not to Jewish tradition (Bietenhard 1957; Kamesar 2005b:21).

Reliance upon Jewish methods of interpretation and Jewish exegetical traditions was also reflected in repetitions of Jewish defence of the OT against pagan attack. Here the fact that Christians shared a Bible with the Jews was exploited by pagans as they attacked its contents. This is seen in Origen's *Contra Celsum*, where the history of the Jews as it is contained in the OT, the contents of the OT, and its literary style are criticized. In Origen's defence, the Jews emerge as an ancient people (4.11f.), as a possible source for the Greek

philosophical tradition (4.39), and, through allegorical exegesis (4.51), as the possessors of a text of divine and inspired writings (1.16) (de Lange 1976:65–8 and 73).

The above points to Jews as helpmeets in Christian exegesis, an observation which contributes to giving a more balanced vision of Jewish and Christian interaction in Antiquity. But as we have seen, what evidence of borrowing exists was not always acknowledged and attempts were made to conceal it beneath a welter of polemic, as in Christian characterization of Jewish interpretation as literalist, or in attacks made upon Jewish tradition beginning in the NT.

## Christian Use of the Old Testament in *Adversus Judaeos* Literature

Much discussion of Jewish and Christian engagement over the Bible has emphasized its polemical character. This is partly because of the nature of the extant evidence, especially on the Christian side, where texts *adversus Judaeos* predominate in a number of forms, including: dialogues, beginning probably with the second-century *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus*, and continuing with Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* and later examples such as the probably fifth-century *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* (Lahey 2007); sermons (Chrysostom's eight *Discourses against the Judaizing Christians*); tracts like Tertullian's *Adversus Judaeos*; and testimony literature, that is, collections of scriptural citations attacking Jews and defending Christian positions under a variety of headings. The best example of this last genre is the Cyprianic work *adversus Judaeos*, and according to many scholars it was probably this genre which preceded all others in attacking Jews, underlining the centrality of Scripture to the dispute. These works concerned themselves with a relatively constant set of issues focusing on three major subjects: Christology, here taken up both with proving Christ's messianic identity but also and more frequently his pre-existent status as God's son, and, as time goes on, proofs of the Trinity; the issue of the Mosaic Torah and Christian failure to observe it; and the question of the identity of the people of God, in which attempts were made both to prove that God had rejected the Jews and sealed a new covenant with the Christians, who were largely Gentiles. Other subjects also appear such as Christian asceticism or matters relating to various Christian practices.

The passages cited and the arguments used are repetitive. Jesus' messianic identity was supported by a litany of texts (Zech 9.9; Ps 2.7; Isa 7.14, 45.1; Num 24.17–18) and texts like Genesis 1.26, 18, 19.24, and Proverbs 8.22 became very important in proving Christ's pre-existence and his divine status. Use of some of the messianic texts was accompanied by arguments, which asserted that the conditions assumed in these texts only pertained now. In this context attempts were made to show that Christ's passion and crucifixion were compatible with his messianic identity not only because it was predicted but also because it was clear that the Messiah would come in two manifestations, one in suffering and one in glory (possibly at the end time). That the Jews were rejected was supported by texts in which they were berated for their immoral activity or their lack of understanding

(cf. Exod 32.31–3; Jer 7.25; Isa 1.2–4, 6.9–10). The newly acquired covenantal status of Christians was supported by, *inter alia*, passages which indicated God's preference for the younger brother over the older (Gen 25 and 48), and places where the Gentiles could be understood as the subject of divine favour. Arguments about the Jewish law played a significant role for, after all, it seemed odd that Christians should appropriate the Scriptures but at the same time disregard precepts found within them, a decision which from an early stage marked them off from Jews (for an early expression of this view see Justin, *dial.* 10). Arguments varied. In some, the laws were interpreted allegorically with, for instance, the spiritual circumcision of the Christians contrasted with the carnal circumcision of the Jews (*Barn.* 9; Tertullian, *Iud.* 6; Irenaeus, *haer.* 4.14.3). Other arguments pointed to the laws as somehow unnatural (e.g. circumcision did not exist from the beginning of time; or why should God create creatures which could not be eaten?), contrasting them with the more natural precepts of the Ten Commandments (Tertullian, *Iud.*; Irenaeus, *haer.* 4.15.1). In an extension of this argument, the 'cultic' laws were seen as remedies, albeit temporary ones, for the activities of the Jews when they worshipped the golden calf in Exodus 34. Such laws fell away once the true law, Christ, arrived (Justin, *dial.* 18.2; 22.1; and Irenaeus, *haer.* 4.15). Some of these interpretative strategies had their origin in the NT where Paul in particular argued for the temporariness of the Mosaic law, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews appeared to advocate an allegorical view of the true meaning of the Jewish cult. In such a schema, Christians pointed to the fact of Jerusalem's destruction and particularly the destruction of the temple, to argue for the invalidity of the law (many laws now could not be obeyed) and to support the idea that God had abandoned Israel.

A constant refrain in such polemic was the claim that Jews were, through their literalism, incapable of interpreting the Scriptures in a way that made plain its Christian contents. Passages such as 2 Corinthians 3.14f. and Hebrews 8.4f. were intoned by Christian critics, as well as passages in the OT which referred to the Jews as blind guides to support this view. Cyprian spoke for many Christian writers when he wrote 'That the Jews could understand nothing of the scriptures unless they first believed in Christ' (*test.* 1.4).

To what extent were these arguments real reflections of debates with Jews, or if not that, texts written to be used in such disputation? Scholars have drawn different conclusions from this material (Carleton Paget 2010a; Jacobs 2008). Some, highlighting the recurrence over many centuries of the same arguments, the broadly monolithic presentation of the Jew in dialogue material, and the apparent indifference to these arguments in rabbinic texts, argue that the material is exclusively relevant to inner-Christian discussions and that these texts are, therefore, poor guides to actual debate (Taylor 1995; Schreckenberg 1999). Others, by contrast, argue that the very fact that Christians produce literature *adversus Judaeos* in addition to apologetic literature aimed at pagans, both containing some of the same material, is suggestive of the importance of the particularity of the former; that such texts are not as repetitive as is sometimes claimed; and that the level of anti-Jewish polemic varies among writers, often dependent on whether Jews are present in the area from which the writing comes, thereby showing that such literature assumes some form of Jewish-Christian contact (Simon 1986; Horbury 1998a).

The matter remains contested, though the persistence of such polemical literature is difficult to explain if Jews and Christians never argued about the Bible, and there may indeed be evidence of Jewish response to Christian discussion.

Also important in this discussion is the view that such literature constitutes the ‘formal’ commentary on Jewish interpretation of Scripture. In fact, many Christians may have taken a different view of Jewish understandings of the OT, and may have been keener to invoke—and some may have been more receptive to—Jewish interpretations of certain matters such as the Jewish law. In this context, *adversus Judaeos* literature is aimed at making clear, even creating, boundaries between Jewish and Christian understandings of the OT/Tanak, rather than simply endorsing widely held opinions.

## Jewish Responses to Christian Interpretation

There is direct evidence in the rabbinic literature of Christians interacting with Jews, here in the form of the *minim*, or heretics. So at Avodah Zarah 4a the Babylonian Rabbi, Rav Safra, now resident in Palestine, is unable to hold his own against the *minim* (probably the Christians). The latter are puzzled as normally they face more formidable opposition. Then Rabbi Abbahu explains that Rav Safra is learned in Tannaitic literature, not the Bible: ‘We (Palestinian sages understood) who are frequently with you (the *minim*), set ourselves the task of studying scripture thoroughly, but the others do not study it carefully’ (Horbury 1998b:204–5). Stories which partially confirm the message of this anecdote occur in Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 8.7, where we find the comment that Adam was composed on the last day of creation lest the *minim* should say, God had a partner in his work, an assertion which seems to be echoed in a number of Christian writings, and may be reflected in Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4.3 where the *minim* are accused of saying there are many powers in heaven (Horbury 2010:368–9). The possibility that some of this argumentation lies in pre-Christian, inner-Jewish discussion, witnessed, for instance, in Philo and elsewhere, cannot be dismissed.

However, evidence relating to passages concerning *minim* is relatively small and often cannot be shown to refer unambiguously to Christians. By far the greatest amount of evidence for Jewish engagement with Christian exegesis comes, some claim, in passages where no reference is made to an opponent. Here a few examples might be in order. Philip Alexander takes as his starting point *Genesis Rabbah* 1.1, which consists of an interpretation by the third-century Rabbi Hoshaiah of Genesis 1.1 by reference to Proverbs 8.22. In this interpretation the *amon* of Proverbs 8.30 becomes an *uman* or craftsman and the rabbi argues that the Torah is in fact the working tool that God used to make creation. This then is worked into Genesis 1.1 by showing that *reshit* (beginning) occurs in both passages, that is, in Genesis 1.1 and Proverbs 8.22. So *bereshit* can now be understood as meaning ‘through the agency of the craftsman-Torah God created the world.’ After a discussion of other related interpretations of Torah in later Jewish literature, Alexander shows how similar moves, that is, an association between Genesis 1.1 and God’s son, are found in Christian texts including Colossians 1.15–17 and Origen’s *de Principiis* 1.2.1, and

then asks whether one can argue for an exegetical encounter—after all, both Christians and Jews assert that God created the world through an agent by linking Genesis 1.1 and Proverbs 8.22, which involves associating wisdom with the creative process. But they disagree in associating wisdom with Torah and Christ respectively. Alexander rejects the view that these two interpretations developed in parallel and without contact with each other, preferring to argue that the Jewish attribution of creation to the agency of Torah is a response to Christian claims that Christ, the pre-existent wisdom, was involved in the creative process. Much of the argument which follows is taken up with showing that, in spite of evidence from Ben Sirach onwards that the Torah and wisdom were identified with each other, there is no evidence until *Genesis Rabbah* 1.1 for Torah as a participant in the creative process. This means, Alexander argues, that Rabbi Hoshaiiah is the originator of the interpretation and did so as a refutation of Christian claims that Jesus was the agent of creation. This is supported by (a) noting that there is little rabbinic logic to the claim that Torah was involved in creation (in fact it goes against the logic of the general context of the discussion of *Genesis Rabbah*, which is keen to assert the unaided nature of God's creation); (b) assuming that much of *Genesis Rabbah's* account of creation is pre-emptive in its manner (so the general context of the discussion fits Alexander's interpretation), and (c) there is a lack of logic to elements of the account (Alexander 2010b).

Another example of an argument of polemical encounter in texts which do not explicitly refer to it lies in Edward Kessler's assertion that rabbinic emphasis upon the suffering of Isaac in a variety of interpretations of Genesis 22.9–12 is related to the Christian claims that Isaac did not suffer, an assertion which arises out of Christian desire to make Isaac a type of Christ and Christ the perfect fulfilment of what Isaac can only anticipate. In arguing his case Kessler brings together an array of Christian texts from Melito of Sardis to Cyril of Jerusalem to Athanasius, the last of whom actually notes that Abraham was asked not to lay a hand on Isaac precisely to prevent Jews on the basis of the sacrifice of Isaac from rejecting the prophecies about Christ (Kessler 2004:119–37; note also Grypeou and Spurling 2013).

These comparisons are suggestive, however, rather than clear evidence of interaction. Even after such comparative work, it remains the case that only a small fraction of rabbinic literature seems to be taken up with Christian concerns, and the Christian interpretations of many OT passages, which were important to them, remain undiscussed by the rabbis (Stemberger 1996:575).

## Context of Discussion

As we noted at the beginning of this piece, discovering a context in which debate and exchange, of whatever kind, occurred has proved a problem and some remain agnostic on the matter (Reuling 2005:197–8). We have already noted the possibility of formal meetings for scholarly exchange, as mentioned by Origen and Jerome, but this remains a circumscribed setting. General knowledge, even rumour, must have played a role, as well

as possible encounter in the synagogue, which as Tertullian notes, is a place where the Scriptures are read openly and where there is common access each sabbath (Tertullian, *apol.* 18.8). Converts from one community to another may also have been sources of information. Failure to arrive at precision on this matter need not exclude the fact of such exchange.

## Jews and the New Testament

During the period here under review the Christian conception of Scripture grew to include what came to be termed the NT. The NT is rarely a source of contention in *adversus Judaeos* literature; that is, Christians rarely seek to defend stories about Jesus against Jewish attack, except to show that they are predicted in the OT. And yet there is some evidence from the Jewish side of attack upon Christianity, indicating knowledge of the NT.

It is likely that Celsus' Jew knows the Gospels and gives us evidence of their satirical reworking. An example of this is the claim that Jesus was the child of an illicit union between Mary and a Roman soldier called 'Panthera', where the latter name is possibly a play on the word 'parthenos' for virgin, and so displays knowledge of Gospel claims about Jesus' virginal conception (Origen, *Cels.* 1.28, 32). Other examples relate to the passion narrative, where the Jew accuses Jesus of wanting to flee from the scene (2.9, 70), a possible play on Jesus' words in Gethsemane about the cup (Mark 14.36 and pars.), and claims that Jesus' cry for sustenance on the cross is a mark of greed (2.37).

Similar traditions have been found in the Talmudim, especially the *Bavli*. We find there a repetition of the satirical account of Jesus' origins (Talmud Bavli *Shabbat* 104b) together with claims that Jesus is a magician and stories about his followers. Recent investigations of this material have led some to posit knowledge of the Gospel of John (Schäfer 2007:122–9).

That the Gospels were known to some rabbis is supported by a passage where Matthew's Gospel appears to be quoted (Talmud Bavli *Shabbat* 116a–b, here quoting words close to Matt 5.17 and alluding to an 'awon gilyon', which is probably a play on Greek 'euaggelion'). References to *Gilyonim*, possibly a word for the Gospels, are found in the Tosefta (Tosefta *Yadayim* 2.13; and Tosefta *Shabbat*. 13 [14].5). Added to this evidence is the story of the fourth-century Jewish convert to Christianity, Count Joseph of Galilee, who supposedly told Christians of the existence of a copy of John in Hebrew which was kept in the Jewish treasury together with a copy of the Acts of the Apostles (Epiphanius, *haer.* 30.3.8–9; 30.6.9; 30.12.10).

None of the above, whose interpretation has been disputed (Maier 1978 in contrast to Schäfer 2007), implies a detailed exegetical engagement with the Gospels (except possibly the evidence in Celsus), though some scholars have argued that the extant evidence, both Jewish and Christian, points to the possible existence of developed traditions of anti-Jesus polemic.

## CONCLUSION

---

In the first of his eight sermons against the Judaizing Christians, Chrysostom asks his Christian opponents why they regard the synagogue as holy. The answer comes: because the law and the prophets are kept there (*Jud.* 1.5.2). The exchange indicates the extent to which Jews were respected by Christians because of their relationship to what Christians came to call the OT, and that that fact could not be ignored by Christians as they sought to expound Scripture in the light of the revealed truth they claimed had come through Christ. Christians in varying ways remained conscious of the character of the Jewish Bible, feeling it necessary to account for the different contents of the Christian OT and its retention of the text of the LXX; or, as in the case of Jerome, coming close to accepting a Jewish Bible. Jews, it seemed, could also be consulted on difficult passages within the Bible, and their richly developed traditions used in its interpretation, something which occurred both in scholarly contexts as well as popular ones.

But Christians attacked Jews for what they took to be their failure to understand the Scriptures in their way, and this attack could be harsh because Jews were the ancient owners and interpreters of these texts but differed in their interpretation. In the same passage quoted above, Chrysostom asserts: ‘This is the reason above all others why I hate the synagogue and abhor it. They have the prophets but do not believe them, they read the sacred writings but reject their witness’ (*Jud.* 1.5.2). The Jewish satchel bearer was considered a guarantor of the truth of the Bible ‘for us’, as Augustine had it (*Psal.* 40.14), but he was one who was blind to its truth; and so it is polemic which dominates in Christian presentations of Jewish engagement with Scripture. Contextualizing such polemic in a developing history of Jewish–Christian interaction is difficult and it is possible to attribute to it different purposes, some of which are unconnected with opposing Jews. That the literature was in some way related to the latter, however we conceive of its presentation of the reality of Jewish opinion or argumentation, is probably true, though such polemic should be seen as indirect evidence of the attractiveness of Jewish interpretation and the ongoing appeal of the synagogue as the place where the law and the prophets were to be found.

Jews appeared less concerned with Christians and Christian interpretations of Scripture, though levels of interest may have grown after the rise of Constantine and the gradual increase in Christian influence in the Roman Empire. No Jew, as far as we know, wrote a work *adversus Christianos* (except possibly the anonymous Jew quoted by Celsus) and in relation to explicit references to Christians, one must live off a thin gruel of material. To some, such silence about Christians is deafening, a denial to their opponents of the oxygen of publicity—in fact Jewish works buzz with concealed intertextual references to those they called *nozerim* or *minim*. To others, the silence should be taken at face value and much of the assumed intertextuality dismissed as manifestations of parallelomania. In the face of ambiguous evidence, both parties come at the evidence with pre-existing assumptions about Christian interaction, in spite of efforts to create criteria for establishing interaction.

One cannot write a history of Jewish–Christian interaction on the Bible, only describe a set of possibilities suggested by fragmentary evidence. No account need be entirely negative but the overriding impression is a negative one. Origen may have attributed to an anonymous Jewish writer a complex exegetical method, but his Jews were by and large literalists blind to the truth of the text they called their own. Jerome might defend his right to seek out Jewish opinion, but his reference to Jews is in general polemical. The presence of such polemic, however, may also point to the ongoing concern on the part of some Christians for what Jews had to say about the Bible and the impression that had on other Christians. This subject, in spite of its difficulties, will continue to attract attention, not only because there is much evidence still to interpret (Grypeou and Spurling 2013), but because it remains one of abiding importance in a time when Jews and Christians see their shared pasts as ways of understanding and developing their shared presents.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*. Greek text: F. Winkelmann (ed.), *Die Kirchengeschichte*, GCS NF 6, 3 vols (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999).
- Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*. Greek text: M. Marcovich (ed.), *Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone*, Patristische Texte und Studien 47 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997).
- Origen, *Philocalia*. Greek text and French trans.: M. Harl and N. de Lange (eds), *Philocalie 1–20 et Lettre à Africanus*, SC 302 (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 162–468.

### Scholarship

- Albl, M. C. (1999). ‘*And Scripture Cannot be Broken*’: *The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections* (Leiden: Brill).
- Alexander, P. (2010a). ‘Using Rabbinic Literature as a Source for the History of Late-Roman Palestine: Problems and Issues’, in M. Goodman and P. Alexander (eds), *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press [British Academy]), 7–24.
- Alexander, P. (2010b). ‘“In the Beginning”’: Rabbinic and Patristic Exegesis of Genesis 1:1’, in E. Grypeou and H. Spurling (eds), *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill), 1–29.
- Baskin, J. R. (1985). ‘Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts in Late Antiquity: A Bibliographical Reappraisal’, in W. S. Green (ed.), *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, vol. 5 (Atlanta: Scholars Press), 53–80.
- Becker, A. H., and Reed, A. Y. (2003) (eds). *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Bietenhard, H. (1957). ‘Deuterosis’, *RAC* vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann), 842–7.
- Carleton Paget, J. (2010a). ‘Clement of Alexandria and the Jews’, in J. Carleton Paget, *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 91–102.
- Carleton Paget, J. (2010b). ‘Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity’, in J. Carleton Paget, *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 43–76.
- De Lange, N. (1976). *Origen and the Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

- De Lange, N. (2015). *Japheth in the Tents of Shem: Greek Bible Translations in Byzantine Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Ginzberg, L. (1909–38). *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America).
- Grypeou, E., and Spurling, H. (2013). *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill).
- Heine, R. E. (2010). *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Hengel, M. (2002). *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of its Canon* (Edinburgh and New York: T & T Clark).
- Hezser, C. (1997). *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Horbury, W. (1988). 'Old Testament Interpretation in the Writings of the Church Fathers', in J. Mulder (ed.), *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 727–87.
- Horbury, W. (1998a). 'Introduction', in W. Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), 1–42.
- Horbury, W. (1998b). 'Jews and Christians on the Bible; Demarcation and Convergence [325–451]', in W. Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), 200–25.
- Horbury, W. (2010). 'Rabbinic Perceptions of Christianity and the History of Roman Palestine', in M. Goodman and P. Alexander (eds), *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press [British Academy]), 353–76.
- Jacobs, A. S. (2008). 'Jews and Christians', in S. Ashbrook Harvey and D. G. Hunter (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 169–85.
- Kamesar, A. (1993). *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Kamesar, A. (2005a). 'Rabbinic Midrash, and Church Fathers', in J. Neusner and A. J. Avery-Peck (eds), *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, vol. 1: *Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism* (Leiden: Brill), 20–40.
- Kamesar, A. (2005b). 'Hilary of Poitiers, Judeo-Christianity, and the Origins of the LXX: A Translation of *Tractatus super Psalmos* 2.2–3 with Introduction and Commentary', *VC* 59: 264–85.
- Kessler, E. (2004). *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Koltun-Fromm, N. (2010). *Hermeneutics of Holiness: Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality and Religious Community* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press).
- Krauss, S. (1893 and 1894). 'The Jews in the Works of the Church Fathers', *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 5: 122–57 and *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 6: 82–99, 225–61.
- Lahey, L. (2007). 'Evidence for Jewish-Christian Believers in Christian–Jewish Dialogues through the Sixth Century (excluding Justin)', in O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik (eds), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody: Hendrickson), 581–639.
- Lavee, M. (2010). 'Rabbinic Literature and the History of Judaism in Late Antiquity: Challenges, Methodologies and New Approaches', in M. Goodman and P. Alexander (eds), *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press [British Academy]), 319–52.

- Maier, J. (1978). *Jesus in der Talmudischen Überlieferung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft).
- Neusner, J. (1970). *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill).
- Rajak, T. (2009). *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Reuling, H. (2005). *After Eden: Church Fathers and Rabbis on Genesis 3:16–21* (Leiden: Brill).
- Runia, D. (1993). *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Assen: van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress Press).
- Salvesen, A. (2003). 'A Convergence of the Ways? A Judaizing of Christian Scripture by Origen and Jerome', in A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed (eds), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Sandmel, S. (1962). 'Parallelomania', *JBL* 81: 1–13.
- Schäfer, P. (2007). *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press).
- Schrekenberg, H. (1999). *Adversus-Judeaos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1–11. Jh.)*. 4th edn (Frankfurt: Peter Lang).
- Schwartz, S. (2001). *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 bce to ce* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Schwartz, S. (2010). 'Rabbinic Culture and Roman Culture', in M. Goodman and P. Alexander (eds), *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press [British Academy]), 283–300.
- Siegal, M. B.-E. (2013). *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Simon, M. (1986). *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire ad 135–425*, trans. H. McKeating (London: The Littman Library).
- Stemberger, G. (1996). 'Exegetical Contacts between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire', in M. Sæbo (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 1: 569–86.
- Taylor, Miriam (1995). *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Consensus* (Leiden: Brill).
- Visotzky, B. (1995). *Fathers of the World: Essays in Patristic and Rabbinic Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).

### Suggested Reading

- Becker, A. H., and Reed, A. Y. (2003) (eds). *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- De Lange, N. (1976). *Origen and the Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Grypeou, E. and Spurling, H. (2010) (eds). *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill).
- Horbury, W. (1988). 'Old Testament Interpretation in the Writings of the Church Fathers', in J. Mulder (ed.), *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 727–87.
- Kamesar, Adam (1993). *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

- Kessler, E. (2004). *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Simon, M. (1986). *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire ad 135-425*, trans. H. McKeating (London: The Littman Library).
- Stemberger, G. (1996). 'Exegetical Contacts between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire', in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation* 1: 569-86.

## CHAPTER 23

---

# CHRISTIANS AND PAGANS

---

JOHN GRANGER COOK

ONE can trace a very distinct pattern with regard to pagan responses to the Septuagint. Before Celsus in the second century of the Common Era when pagan authors apparently became interested in Christianity, very few references to the Scriptures of Israel and the LXX have survived in non-Jewish Graeco-Roman literature. There are scattered references in Hecataeus of Abdera (c.360–290 BCE), possibly ‘Ocellus Lucanus’ (c.150 BCE), Alexander Polyhistor (born c.105 BCE), Diodorus Siculus (first century BCE), Nicolaus of Damascus (born c.64 BCE), Pseudo-Longinus (first century CE), and Numenius (second century CE).<sup>1</sup> Their comments on the LXX were largely positive. None of them, however, had the detailed knowledge of Celsus. Lucian mocked the crucifixion and probably the Christians’ belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Celsus, Galen, Hierocles, Porphyry, Julian, and Macarius Magnes’ anonymous philosopher were quite negative about the LXX and the NT. In this chapter I will survey these authors in turn. Common themes that emerge include an interest in the creation narrative in Genesis, the law of Moses, the miracles of Jesus, his crucifixion and resurrection, Christology, ‘blind faith’, and comments about the persecutions against the Christians. When possible I will include some of the responses the Christians made to the pagans’ arguments. The Platonist philosophers were apparently able to find little common ground with ancient Christianity, although Numenius admired Moses and possibly Jesus, and Amelius respected the Johannine logos Christology.

<sup>1</sup> Most dates are from the articles in the *4OCD*. Although I will not review all these figures here, my own comments on this period may be found in Cook 2004:1–54. The translations are my own unless noted otherwise. Some are taken from Cook 2000 and Cook 2004.

## EARLY REACTION TO THE SEPTUAGINT

---

Diodorus Siculus preserves a tradition of Hecataeus of Abdera from his *Aegyptiaca* in which he refers to the Scriptures of Israel: ‘It is additionally written at the end of the laws that Moses heard God say these things to the Jews’ (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 40.3.6). The material on the Jews from the *Aegyptiaca* that Diodorus includes does not, however, encourage one to believe that Hecataeus had a Torah in front of him (*Bibliotheca historica* 40.3.1–8), although he had a vague idea that after a plague in Egypt the Jews were driven out of the country along with other details about Jewish practice and worship that indicate he had a Jewish informant. Immediately preceding the statement quoted above is a reference to the Jewish high priest: (‘One says that this individual in their assemblies and their other meetings declares what is commanded’ ... [*Bibliotheca historica* 40.3.6]). The verb *φησίν* (‘one says’) probably indicates that Hecataeus had an oral source (on the possibility of written translations before the LXX, see the references in Cook 2004:4).

The author of *De universa natura* (*On the Nature of the Universe*), spuriously called Ocellus Lucanus in the tradition, discusses the place of sex in the grand scheme of things:

Reflecting on these things first, it is not necessary to approach sexual pleasures like irrational animals, but to accept as necessary and good what good people think is necessary and good—namely that houses will not only be filled with inhabitants and most of earth’s area will be filled (*πληροῦσθαι*), (for the human is the most civilized and best living being of all) but what is the greatest thing, that they will abound in good people. (*De universi natura* 46; Thesleff 1961:136, 4–9)

The verb *πληροῦσθαι* (be filled) stands only in manuscript Marcianus 263. Richard Harder (1926:128) defends the reading because of the context. There is a close similarity with Genesis 1.28, *Αὐξάνεσθε καὶ πληθύνεσθε καὶ πληρώσατε τὴν γῆν* (‘increase and multiply and fill the earth’), although one cannot show beyond doubt that the author is dependent on the text of Genesis. The probable date of the treatise, however, is subsequent to that of the translation of Genesis into Greek in the third century BCE (trans. Kraus and Karrer 2010:3), and it may be that the author knew of Jewish tradition through an intermediary.

## PSEUDO-LONGINUS

---

An anonymous author of the first century CE, called Pseudo-Longinus, either knew the LXX directly or was dependent on a Jewish source:

In the same way the lawmaker (*θεσμοθέτης*) of the Jews, not an average man, since he grasped and revealed the power of the divine in a worthy manner, writing immediately in the beginning of the laws says: ‘God said’—what? ‘Let there be

(γενέσθω) light. And there was (Gen 1.3). Let there be (γενέσθω) earth. And there was (Gen 1.9–10).’ (*De sublimitate* 9.9)

John Gager (1973:59) has made the important point that this is the first time *θεσμοθέτης* (lawmaker) is used for Moses. Although Philo uses the word twice, in neither instance does it describe Moses as lawmaker (*Mig.* 23, ‘the lawgiving word’, and *Her.* 167, God as lawmaker). The LXX has the form *γενηθήτω* for ‘let there be.’ Aquila (*apud* Philoponus, *De officio mundi* [Reichardt 1897:73, 25]) and Eusebius (*p.e.* 11.25.2, 13.13.12) each have *γενέσθω*. Both texts of Eusebius are quotations of Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.14.94.1 (who has *γενηθήτω*; cf. Wevers 1974:75–6, app. crit.). Philo, *De somniis* 1.75 also quotes Genesis 1.3 using the same verbal form as Pseudo-Longinus. *γενέσθω φῶς* (let there be light) appears embedded in a larger phrase in a magic recipe in *Papyri Graecae magicae* 4.970. It is not difficult to believe that Pseudo-Longinus had a LXX in front of him, although he summarized verses 1.9–10. A similar paraphrase of the two verses occurs in a late text attributed to Chrysostom (*Chan.*, PG 52.460: *γενηθήτω γῆ, καὶ ἐγένετο γῆ* [let there be earth, and there was earth]).

## NUMENIUS OF APAMEA

Numenius of Apamea (second century CE; cf. Cook 2004:36–41) allegorized the prophets and a story about Jesus, according to Origen:

I also know Numenius the Pythagorean... who often in his writings expounds on texts of Moses and the prophets and gives them a not unconvincing allegorical interpretation, as in his work called *Hoopoe* and in his *Concerning Numbers* and in *Concerning Place*. In the third book of *Concerning the Good*, he also expounds a certain narrative about Jesus, but does not mention his name, and he allegorizes it; whether he does so successfully or unsuccessfully there will be time later to say. He also expounds on the narrative concerning Moses, Jannes, and Jambres.

(Origen, *Cels.* 4.51 = des Places 1973:frag. 1c, 10a)

From the third book *Concerning the Good* of Numenius, Eusebius preserves a fragment in which the philosopher asserts that Jannes and Jambres were chosen by the Egyptians to resist the mightiest of the plagues of Moses whom he calls ‘Musaïos’:

These individuals were considered worthy by the people of the Egyptians to stand before Musaïos, a man who was most powerful in prayer to God; and they appeared to be able to undo the most violent of the plagues that Musaïos brought on Egypt.

(Eusebius, *p.e.* 9.8.2 = des Places 1973:frag. 9)

Although it is clear that Numenius has a source other than Exodus (see the discussion in Stern 1980:§365 and Cook 2004:39–40), he is aware of Jewish tradition. He quotes Genesis 1.2 (‘the spirit of God was born on the water’) in one of his writings and apparently

ascribed it to the prophet in a text used by Porphyry (*De antro* [*On the Cave of Nymphs in the Odyssey*] 10 = des Places 1973:frag. 30). Eusebius (*p.e.* 11.10.14 = des Places 1973:frag. 8), in a discussion of the famous saying attributed to Numenius, ‘What is Plato but Moses Atticizing’, precedes the quotation by noting that Numenius clearly interpreted the teachings of Plato and of Moses. Hence it is apparent that both Origen and Eusebius affirm that the philosopher had a direct knowledge of at least some of the LXX. Consequently, I cannot share M. J. Edwards’s scepticism with regard to Numenius’ knowledge of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures (Edwards 1990).

## LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA

---

Lucian (b. c.120) probably wrote his book *On the Passing of Peregrinus* soon after Peregrinus’ self-immolation in Olympia in 165, although the question is far from settled (Goulet-Cazé 2011:202). Lucian knew something of Palestinian Christianity (*De mort. Peregr.* 11–13, 16), but his knowledge was not extensive (Goulet-Cazé 2011:223–5; Betz 1990:18). It is unlikely, however, that he had read the Gospels (Betz 1990:10), although his comment that Peregrinus interpreted certain Christian books (*De mort. Peregr.* 11) and read them (12) indicates he was aware of Christian sacred texts. The narrator (*De mort. Peregr.* 13) complains that Christian beliefs are not based on any form of careful proof. He is aware of their worship of Jesus whom he calls a ‘crucified sophist’ (*De mort. Peregr.* 13). After Peregrinus’ cremation, an old man claims that he had seen him in white clothing and had left him walking joyfully in the seven-voiced (i.e. with a sevenfold echo) colonnade wreathed with a garland of wild olive (*De mort. Peregr.* 40). ‘White clothing’ in itself is not enough to prove that Lucian was satirizing the resurrection of Jesus. Although the angels in the Gospels (and other figures in the NT and Jewish literature) are described with white or shining clothing (Matt 28.3, Mark 16.5, Luke 24.4, John 20.12; cp. Luke 9.29, Acts 1.10, Rev 3.4, 5, 18, 4.4, 6.11, 7.9, 19.14, etc., 2 Macc 11.8, T. Levi 8.2), one can find the presence of figures in white or shining garments in various Graeco-Roman epiphanies (Plato, *Crito* 44a–b, P. Oxy 1381, col. vi, 119–20 [second century CE], Lucian, *Philops.* 25, Philostratus, *Imagines* 1.27, Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.1.22). Nevertheless, it seems likely that Lucian was aware of the Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus and may have satirized that belief with his picture of the ‘risen’ Peregrinus. Betz (1961:125–6) compares the schema of death, resurrection, appearance to disciples, and foundation of a cult in both Lucian and the Gospels.

## CELSUS

---

It was Christian pressure against paganism that drew the ‘eyes of all’ to the foundation of Christianity, the Bible, according to Jacob Freudenthal. He specifically mentions the exhaustive knowledge of Scripture of Celsus and Julian as examples (Freudenthal 1875:180).

Celsus was a philosopher in the Platonic tradition who wrote a vicious attack against the Christians entitled the *True Discourse/Word/Doctrine*. Attempts to date Celsus using his hypothetical reference to the potential conversion to Christianity of ‘those who rule over us’ (οἱ νῦν βασιλεύοντες ἡμῶν) are notoriously unreliable (Origen, *Cels.* 8.71). Aurelius shared his rule with Verus 161–9 and with Commodus 177–80. In addition, ‘those who rule over the Jews’ (οἱ τῶν Ἰουδαίων βασιλεύοντες) in *Cels.* 1.53 is merely a general statement. Celsus’ reference to ongoing persecutions (*Cels.* 8.69) is also unhelpful (cf. Cook 2000:23–4). Lucian knows of persecutions of Christians, for example (*Peregr.* 12–13). T. D. Barnes has shown that the evidence for the date of the persecution of Vienne and Lyons is contradictory. He considers a date after 180 (Barnes 1968:518–19, 2010:62). And Celsus’ appeal to Christians to help defend and support the empire (*Cels.* 8.68, 71, 73, 75) does not provide any chronological help, since he refers to no specific war(s) (e.g. in 161 the Parthians invaded).

Although Celsus knows part of the LXX (such as Genesis) and the NT well (such as the Gospel of Matthew) he rarely quotes the texts in the material that has survived in Origen’s treatise. In an attack on the concept of the creation of the world in six days, he writes,

Again referring to the matter discussed above let us examine how it would not be absurd for the first and greatest God to command, ‘let this be, and this other, or that’, and to make just so much on the first day, and again on the second day something more, and on the third and fourth and fifth and sixth [Gen 1.3–31]?

(Origen, *Cels.* 6.60)

The ordinal numbers indicate that Celsus had read Genesis 1 closely and found it philosophically objectionable. Origen himself does not subscribe to a literal interpretation of the six-day creation narrative (*Cels.* 6.60) and so appears to concede part of the argument to Celsus, but he quotes Genesis 2.4 in support of his own position. It is coincidental that Celsus shares the same word for ‘let it be’ (γενέσθω) as Ps.-Longinus did, in contrast to γενηθήτω of the LXX. He only quotes the NT directly a few times. In *Contra Celsum* 2.24, in the persona of a Jew, he refers to Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane:

Why does he implore loudly, and wail, and pray to escape the fear of death saying something like, ‘Father if this cup could pass by’ (Matt 26.39)?

This is very close to Matthew’s ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.’ Origen (*Cels.* 2.24) denies that Jesus ‘wailed’ in the Gospels and so accuses Celsus of exaggeration. In a discussion of various Gnostic groups, Celsus mentions (*Cels.* 5.64) those who in their disagreements with one another say ‘the world has been crucified to me and I have been crucified to the world’, which is a quotation of Galatians 6.14, although Celsus does not identify it. Origen responds that this is apparently the only text of Paul that Celsus remembered. In addition (*Cels.* 5.65), there are some groups such as the Ebionites and Encratites that reject the letters of Paul, according to Origen, so

Celsus is incorrect, because *all* do not argue about the text among themselves. Celsus (*Cels.* 6.12) appears to refer to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3.19 when he charges the Christians with believing that 'we say that the wisdom that is among people is foolishness with God'. This is a transformation of Paul's 'For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God'. Celsus' critique of Paul's statement is that it is designed to attract the stupid and uneducated: 'He thinks that the reason for this is that we only want to convince the uneducated and foolish.' Celsus and Origen both agree that there is a difference between divine and human wisdom, and Celsus quotes Heraclitus (Diels and Kranz 1951:frag. 78–9) and Plato (*Ap.* 20d) to make his point. Earlier (*Cels.* 1.9), Origen himself was willing to distinguish between the mass of Christian believers who had been made better people by their simple faith and those believers who were able to follow rational arguments.

Celsus quotes a Jew in some of his objections and probably had contact with the Jewish community either orally or through written sources (on the latter possibility, cf. Niehoff 2013, who speculates that Celsus knew a document written by an Alexandrian Jew around 150—a hypothesis that seems unlikely due to the extreme syncretism of the 'Jew'). The Jew of the *Contra Celsum*, however, is probably a fictional character. He accuses Jesus of being fathered by a Roman soldier named Panthera (1.28), a charge which does have resonance in Jewish tradition (Cook 2000:25, 29–30), although Schäfer (2007:19–20) thinks Celsus fabricated the Jew. Celsus' Jew argues with Jesus by unfavourably comparing him with the Greek heroes:

The ancient myths (οἱ μὲν παλαιοὶ μῦθοι) that attributed a divine begetting to Perseus, Amphion, Aeacus, and Minos (we do not believe these) nevertheless truly showed their great and marvellous works for humankind so that they would not seem un-persuasive. But you, what beautiful or marvellous thing have you done in word or deed? You showed us nothing even though they summoned you in the temple to present a clear sign that you were the child of God (ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ παῖς). (*Cels.* 1.67)

It is not impossible that a strongly Hellenized Jew would make a statement like this, but it is more probable that they are at least a partial invention of Celsus. Even one of the most syncretistic of Hellenistic Jewish authors, Artapanus (Holladay 1983:189–243), did not attribute 'great and marvellous works' to figures from the Egyptian pantheon in the surviving fragments. In any case, the fundamental critique is that Jesus had done nothing worthy. Celsus and his Jew are clearly aware of Jesus' appearance before the Sanhedrin in the Gospels. Origen responds by asking which of the Greek heroes did anything to benefit the human race as Jesus has benefited people by turning them away from evil and healing them from various diseases. The Jew continues to mock Jesus' passion (*Cels.* 2.33): 'What noble action worthy of a god did Jesus do? Did he despise people, or did he laugh and jest about what was happening to him?' Jesus compares unfavourably to Bacchus, whom the Jew quotes (*Cels.* 2.34): 'Euripides' Bacchus says, "The daimon/divine power himself will free me when I wish" [Euripides, *Bacch.* 498] . . . But the one who condemned him suffered nothing like Pentheus who was driven mad and torn

apart' [*Bacch.* 1014–36]. These statements are unlikely to be those even of a syncretistic Jew like Artapanus since the focus is entirely on a member of the Greek pantheon (Bacchus and his divine power). According to Artapanus, for example, Moses invented animal worship for the Egyptians for the sake of political stability, but he does not praise any of the gods whom the Egyptians worship (Holladay 1983: Artapanus frag. 3.4–5 = Eus., *p.e.* 9.27.4–5), and he depicts Moses as superior to Isis whom he identifies with the earth (Artapanus frag. 3.32 = Eusebius, *p.e.* 9.27.32).

Celsus was a skilled critic of Christianity who seems to have foreseen the massive transformation of the Roman social order that Christianity threatened:

It would also not be acceptable for you to say that if those who now rule over us were persuaded by you and captured, that you would persuade those who rule next, then others, and if those should be taken, then others after others, until when all those persuaded by you are taken [by the enemy], one in authority will come to his senses and know beforehand what is happening and before he is destroyed first, will utterly destroy all of you with your whole race. (*Cels.* 8.71)

Clearly he was a social conservative who valued order and cohesion. He was well aware of Christianity's evangelistic bent (see *Cels.* 3.55) and was willing to countenance the use of violence to stop it. The emphasis on the words for persuasion reflects Celsus' knowledge of Christian preaching and missionary endeavour. The phrase 'those who rule over us' may refer to one of the periods in Marcus Aurelius' reign when he shared power, or it could simply be a reference to the Roman emperors in general.

## GALEN

---

Galen (129–216 CE), the physician of Marcus Aurelius, was unimpressed by the rationality of Jews and Christians, although he found elements that he could admire in their respective faiths. In a work only transmitted in Arabic, *On Hippocrates' Anatomy*, Galen is reputed to have written, 'They compare those who practise medicine without scientific knowledge to Moses, who framed laws for the tribe of the Jews, since it is his method in his books to write without offering proofs, saying "God commanded, God spake"' (Walzer 1949:11). In his work on pulses, *De pulsuum differentiis*, Galen compares those who do not demonstrate their beliefs about the eight qualities of pulses with Jews and Christians: '... Thus one would not, at the very start, as if one had come into the school of Moses and Christ, hear about laws that have not been demonstrated, and concerning a matter where it is least appropriate' (Kühn 1821–33:8.579, 15–17; trans. Stern 1980:§377).

An Arabic text from Abulfeda's *Universal Chronicle* 3.3 is a witness to a tradition from Galen's *Epitomes of the Platonic Dialogues*. The tradition appears in various forms (Walzer 1949:15, 57, 89–98), but it is a comment referring to the *Republic*.

‘Most people are unable to follow any demonstrative argument consecutively; hence they need parables and benefit from them’—and he (Galen) understands by parables tales of rewards and punishments in a future life—‘just as now we see people called Christians drawing their faith from parables [and miracles], and yet sometimes acting in the same way [as those who philosophize]. For their contempt of death [and of its sequel] is patent to us every day, and likewise their restraint in cohabitation. For they include not only men but also women who refrain from cohabiting all through their lives; and they also number individuals who, in self-discipline and self-control in matters of food and drink, and in their keen pursuit of justice, have attained a pitch not inferior to that of genuine philosophers.’

(trans. Walzer 1949:15–16)

The word which Walzer translates as ‘parables’, *rmuz*, means in the singular a sign such as one made with the lips or eyebrows or hand (Lane 1863–93:3.1155). Abulfeda interprets that to mean narratives (*ʿxbʿr*) of reward (*θwʿb*) or punishment (*ʿqʿb*) in the hereafter (*dʿr ʿlʿxrt*; or more literally ‘the last house’). The first reference to ‘parables’ is probably to the myth of Er in the *Republic* (*Respublica* 10.614a–621d; Walzer 1949:60). ‘Miracles’ (*mʿjz*) is present in two of the Arabic versions of the tradition (Walzer 1949:57, Lippert 1903:128,4). Galen seems aware of the Mosaic account of creation, and in an account of the length of hair he philosophizes:

Then did our demiurge command only these hairs [eyelashes] to always maintain their length, which either fear the command of the lord or are in awe of the God who gave the order or which themselves are persuaded that it is better to observe what they were commanded? Did not Moses thus discourse on nature and is this way better or that of Epicurus? Neither way, indeed—rather it is best to keep the principle of creation from the demiurge in all created things, like Moses, but to improve it with the principle of matter . . . For to him [Moses] it is sufficient for God to will to set matter in order, and it is immediately set in order. For he thinks that all things are possible to God, even if he should wish to make ashes into a horse or a bull, but we do not think this way, for we say that some things are impossible by nature and that God would not try to do these things at all, but chooses the best to come into existence from things that are possible.

(*De usu partium* 11.14; trans. Cook 2004:273)

Galen admired some aspects of Christianity, but had fundamental doubts about its rationality and the rationality of the Torah.

## PORPHYRY

---

Porphyry (c.234–c.305) was probably the most skilled pagan critic of Christianity, and his fifteen-volume work *Against the Christians* disturbed some Byzantine sovereigns. Constantine (Socrates, *h.e.* 1.9.30 = Smith 1993:38T, and cf. other refs. in Cook 2000:125)

claimed that Porphyry's lawless works against religion had disappeared, and he made possession of Arius' works illegal in the same letter dated c.332 or 333 (cf. Barnes 1981:232–3). It was a capital crime to possess the writings of Arius (and perhaps also those of Porphyry). His decision was made during the Council of Nicaea. Theodosius II and Valentinian condemned Porphyry's text to the flames on 17 February 448 (*Codex Iustinianus* 1.1.3.1 = Smith 1993:40T). *Against the Christians* only survives in scattered fragments (citations that include some kind of quotation formula) and allusions to its contents. Many of the texts in Adolf Harnack's (2016) famous edition are not 'nominal'. They do not mention Porphyry's name. Becker (2016:94–107) and Morlet (2011:32–45) argue for a 'minimalist' edition.

In the third book of the treatise, Porphyry attacked Origen for his conversion to Christianity and for his use of Hellenistic ideas to allegorize the LXX (cf. Cook 2008). Part of his critique is:

Listen therefore to what he expressly says: Some who are zealous not for giving up the depravity of the Jewish scriptures but for discovering an explanation [for them] have been driven to interpretations that do not cohere with or harmonize with what has been written—not rather producing an apology for the foreign texts but acceptance and praise for their own personal writings. For they boast that the things that are said clearly by Moses are enigmas, and they ascribe inspiration to them as if they were oracles full of hidden mysteries (*θεσπίσματα πλήρη κρυφίων μυστηρίων*). Bewitching the mind's critical faculty through nonsense, they bring forward interpretations. (ed. Becker 2016:6F = Eusebius, *h.e.* 6.19.4)

It is immediately apparent that Porphyry had a more negative view of the LXX in this text than in the fragment he quoted from Numenius in his *De antro* (see above; cf. Cook 2004:151–9 [*De philosophia ex oraculis haurienda* (*On Philosophy Drawn from Oracles*)] and 169–70 [*Ad Gaurum*] for texts in which Porphyry says positive things about the LXX and the God of the Jews). Porphyry's objection to allegory of the LXX by Christians was shared by Celsus (*Cels.* 1.17, 20, 4.38, 48–50; cf. Cook 2000:70–2). Julian, however, thought that creation narratives in Genesis are myths that do need allegorical interpretation (*Galil.* frag. 17 [Masaracchia] in Cyril, *Juln.* 3.29; cf. Cook 2004:263). Porphyry's emphasis on abandoning the Jewish Scriptures indicates that part of the goal of his work against the Christians was to induce them to abandon their faith. Severian of Gabala (fl. c.400) claimed that Porphyry 'drew many people away from the divine dogma' (*creat.*, orat. VI (PG 56.487). If this is correct, then it reveals one of the reasons the two Byzantine sovereigns burned Porphyry's work. He successfully demonstrated that much of Daniel was a Maccabean text, and called it a forgery (cf. ed. Becker 2016:13T, 14T; see also Cook 2004:187–247 [a survey of all the fragments of Porphyry on Daniel]; and Rinaldi 1998:2.211–42).

In one of the few other nominal Greek citations of Porphyry's text, he attacks Johannine Christology—in particular John 1.2. Theophylact (eleventh century CE), who preserves the fragment, refers to a distinction used by the Stoics and Neo-Platonists between a word that is uttered and one that is in the mind (for reference, cf. Cook 2000:149; e.g. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* II, §135, 223; Plotinus, *Enn.* 5.1.3; see also Rinaldi 1998:2.361–2).

Theophylact argues that this distinction does not apply to the word of God, but applies to natural and human beings.

Therefore the sophism of the Hellene Porphyry failed; because trying to subvert the Gospel, he used such distinctions: If the Son of God, he says, is the word (logos), he is either the uttered logos or the logos that resides in the mind. But he is neither the latter nor the former, therefore he is not the logos.

(Theophylact, *Enarratio in Johannem* [ed. Becker 2016:68F])

The argument fails, according to Theophylact, because the logos of God is beyond nature. The objection shows Porphyry's predilection for finding logical difficulties and contradictions in the Scriptures. It also shows that he read the texts through the eyes of an elite philosopher.

## AMELIUS GENTILIANUS

---

One of Plotinus' oldest students, Amelius Gentilianus, had a positive attitude toward the Johannine prologue:

And this then was the Word, on whom as being eternal depended the existence of the things that were made, as Heracleitus [Diels and Kranz 1951:frag. 1?] also would maintain, and the same forsooth of whom, as set in the rank and dignity of the beginning, the Barbarian maintains that He was with God and was God: through whom absolutely all things were made; in whom the living creature, and life, and being had their birth: and that He came down into bodies, and clothed Himself in flesh, and appeared as man, yet showing withal even then the majesty of his nature; aye, indeed, even after dissolution He was restored to deity, and is a God, such as He was before He came down to dwell in the body, and the flesh, and Man.

(Eus., *p.e.* 11.18.26–11.19.1; trans. Gifford 1903:583; cf. Rinaldi 1998:2.359–60)

Amelius, who is frequently mentioned in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* (*Plot.* 7.20, etc.), apparently shared an enthusiasm for the Johannine prologue with another anonymous Platonist philosopher whom Augustine (*ciu.* 10.29) knew and who said that the text of John 1.1–5 should be placed in gold letters in highly visible places in every church.

## SOSSIANUS HIEROCLES

---

Sossianus Hierocles served the empire in various administrative capacities, including governor of Bithynia and prefect of Egypt (cf. Cook 2000:251–3), and participated in the Great Persecution (Lactantius, *div. inst.* 5.2.12, cp. 5.3.22; *de mort. pers.* 16.4). He wrote a

two-volume work entitled *The Lover of Truth* or *The Truth Loving Discourse* in which he compared the first-century holy man Apollonius of Tyana with Jesus (Eusebius, *Hierocl.* 1.19, 2.33; Forrat and des Places 1986:100, 104). His work can be dated before or after the beginning of the Great Persecution in 303 (Cook 2000:253–4). Eusebius responded with a book entitled *Of Eusebius Son of Pamphilus Against the Writings of Philostratus Concerning Apollonius Occasioned by the Parallel Established by Hierocles Between Him and Christ*. According to Lactantius, Hierocles made an unfavourable comparison of Apollonius and Christ in which he accused Christ of being a magician:

If Christ is a magician because he did miracles, Apollonius is certainly more skilful (because as you describe, ‘when Domitian wanted to punish him suddenly he was no longer present in the tribunal’ [Philostratus, *V A* 8.5, 10]) than he who was arrested and fastened to the cross. (Lactantius, *div. inst.* 5.3.9)

Lactantius attributes the feat of Apollonius to the impostures of the magic art (*praestigiiis artis magicae*). Eusebius discusses the disappearance of Apollonius from the tribunal (*Hierocl.* 38; Forrat and des Places 1986:184) without explicitly saying that Hierocles mentioned it, but he responds by arguing that Apollonius’ miracles were an illusion done with the help of a familiar demon (*ὑπὸ τοῦ παρέδρου δαίμονος*, *Hierocl.* 39; Forrat and des Places 1986:184). The anonymous philosopher of Macarius Magnes mentions the same deed of Apollonius, but uses it to criticize Christ’s weak behaviour before Pilate during the trial and does not relate it to both the trial and the crucifixion itself (*Monogenes* 3.1.1; ed. Goulet 2003:2.72). Celsus, apparently like Hierocles, believed Christ should have disappeared from the cross (*Cels.* 2.68).

## JULIAN

Julian (imperator c. Feb. 360—26/7 June 363), known in Christian tradition as Julian the Apostate, had a close working knowledge of the Greek Scriptures. He converted from Christianity to Hellenism when he was 20 (Cook 2000:277–84). Julian wrote his *Contra Galilaeos* (*Against the Galilaeans*) during the winter of 362/3 (cf. ed. Riedweg 2016:lxviii; Libanius, *Oratio* 18.178). He had even served as a lector according to Christian tradition (Sozomen, *h.e.* 5.2.10; Gregory Nazianzen, *or.* 4.23). Eunapius (*VS* 7.1.7; Goulet 2014:43) writes that he knew all the Christian writings by heart (*πάντα γούν οὔτω διὰ στόματος εἶχε τὰ βιβλία*). Cyril of Alexandria responded to the three volumes of Julian’s work (ed. Riedweg 2016:cix–cxvi) in his own twenty-volume work that was probably written between 416 and 428. Only the first ten books and fragments up to book 19 survive (Cook 2000:285).

He was highly critical of the Eden narrative in Genesis and attacked it philosophically:

And the fact that God forbade the knowledge of good and evil to the people whom he had created, is that not the extreme of absurdity? For what could be more stupid

than a person who cannot distinguish between good and evil? For it is clear that he/she will not avoid those things, I mean the evil, and will not pursue the others, I mean the good. In sum, God forbade the human to taste wisdom—than which nothing would be more honourable for him/her. For that the capacity to distinguish between good and evil is a fitting work of wisdom is clear even in some degree to fools.

(*Galil. frag.* 16 [Masaracchia] in Cyril, *Juln.* 3.23 [ed. Riedweg 2016:195–6]; Cook 2004:258–9; cf. Boulnois 2008; Riedweg 2008)

Part of Cyril's response (*Juln.* 3.23 [ed. Riedweg 2016:196–7]) is that Julian confused mere solitary knowledge of reality with knowledge through ability and experience. According to Cyril, Julian concludes that the serpent was a benefactor and not a corrupter of the human race (*Galil. frag.* 17 [Masaracchia] in Cyril, *Juln.* 3.29 [ed. Riedweg 2016:207]) and that 'In these matters God is said to be jealous.' Porphyry possibly shared part of Julian's objections to this aspect of the Creation narrative (cf. Cook 2012:*passim*).

Isho'dad of Merv (ninth century CE) indicates that apparently Porphyry and Julian shared the same objection to the resurrection narratives:

Julianus and Porphyrius, the wicked, here accuse the Evangelists of disagreement, that is to say, about the times forsooth and the hours in regard to the Resurrection of our Lord. Matthew says, In the evening of the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, came Mary and Mary [Matt 28.1]. But Mark says [16.2], In the morning of the first week, at the rising of the sun, they came; and Luke [24.1], On the first day of the week, while it was yet dark, they came; and John says [20.1], On the first day of the week came the Magdalene while it was yet dark.

(*Comm in Ioh.* 20.1; trans. Gibson 1911:1.278–9; 3.211 [Syriac])

Isho'dad's statement is confirmed by a Syriac fragment from Book XIV of Cyril's *Contra Iulianum* (*Juln.*, frag. 28 ([ed. Kaufhold 2017:883 (Syriac), 779 (German)], cf. Cook 2016). Both Julian and Porphyry seem to have noticed the apparent inconsistencies in the Resurrection narratives.

Clearly Julian knew the Christian Scriptures well even if his criticisms were not profound.

## THE ANONYMOUS PHILOSOPHER OF MACARIUS OF MAGNESIA

---

Macarius of Magnesia wrote a treatise, probably during the last quarter of the fourth century (cf. ed. Goulet 2003:1.48–54, 57–66), which comprises the objections of an anonymous philosopher against the NT. The arguments of the philosopher are probably largely based on those of Porphyry (ed. Goulet 2003:1.112–49). The title, as reconstructed by Richard Goulet (2003:2.2–3), was *Discourse of a unique genre directed to the Hellenes*

concerning difficult questions in the beginning of the Gospel and their solutions. The philosopher seeks to find contradictions in the NT. An example is one based on the fates of Peter and Paul, in contrast to the promises made to them by Jesus.

4.4.1 This statement must be considered in an obscure place. Let us consider that which was said to Paul. ‘The Lord spoke during the night in a vision to Paul: “Do not be afraid, but speak, because I am with you and no one will attack you to do you harm”’ [Acts 18.9–10]. And almost immediately after he was arrested in Rome, his head was cut off—this boaster who said, ‘we will judge angels’ [1 Cor 6.3]. 2. And not only this, but Peter having received authority to feed the lambs [John 21.16, 17], was nailed to the cross and crucified. But also, of tens of thousands who are of the same opinion as these, some have been burned, and others have been destroyed by receiving some punishment or outrage. 3. It is not worthy of the intention of God, nor of a pious man, that a multitude of people should be inhumanely punished because of having wanted to please him and believe in him, while the resurrection and coming that are expected remain unseen. (*Monog.* 4.4; ed. Goulet 2003:2.246)

The ‘pious man’ may be a reference to Jesus. The pagan philosopher’s compassion for persecuted Christians is inconsistent with what is known of Hierocles and renders any identification of the two unlikely. The philosopher in another text (*Monog.* 2.25.1–3; ed. Goulet 2003:2.36–8) attacks the resurrection of Jesus and his alleged appearance to two obscure Marys and demands why Jesus did not appear to Pilate, Herod, the High Priest, and the Roman Senate:

For if he had appeared to well known men, through them all would have believed, and none of the judges would have punished them on the pretext of manufacturing strange myths. For it is indeed not pleasing to God or any intelligent person that many individuals are being subjected to the extreme penalties for his sake.

(*Monog.* 2.25.3; ed. Goulet 2003:2.38)

Celsus makes a number of references to the persecution of Christians (*Cels.* 2.45, 8.39, 41, 54, 69; cf. Cook 2000:89–90 for other references) and on occasion notes that God does not defend them (8.69) or take vengeance on the persecutors (*Cels.* 8.39). The pagan in Minucius Felix’s *Octavius* (12.2) earlier noted that God allows the Christians to suffer poverty, cold, and hunger. An anonymous pagan in Arnobius’ apology (*Adv. nat.* 2.76) poses a similar question:

Why, if you are the servants of the almighty God and if, according to your own belief, he watches over your salvation and safety, does he then allow you to undergo so many persecutions and to endure so many kinds of punishments and torments?

Part of Macarius’ reply is that Christ protected both men before their deaths for the sake of the Christian proclamation (*Monog.* 14.4.8; ed. Goulet 2003:2.276). Some pagans would object, if God protected all of his just from punishments, that they would have

denied their faith if they had been executed. Other pagans would object, if the just triumphed over tortures by their patience, that if they had been pious they would not have been overlooked by omniscient Providence (*Monog.* 14.14.12–13; ed. Goulet 2003:2.278). Consequently, some like Daniel were delivered, and others such as Peter and Paul died to show their love for Christ (*Monog.* 14.14.14–17; ed. Goulet 2003:2.278).

## CONCLUSION

---

It is not difficult to imagine that the pagan philosophers could have made profounder comments on the nature of the Christian Scriptures had they desired. This state of affairs may be due in part to the fact that their responses are only transmitted in Christian sources. It is clear that Porphyry developed an extensive analysis of Daniel, and his demonstration that it is a Maccabean document has been accepted by modern biblical scholarship. The existing evidence indicates that Celsus was the first to read the LXX and NT closely, and he was a cultural conservative who was extremely disturbed by the spread of Christianity. With few exceptions, Galen and the Platonist philosophers who responded to the Christian Scriptures had unfavourable views about what they read. The creation account was irrational. The miracles were not credible. They despised the crucifixion and did not accept the resurrection. The interchange was lively among some elite pagans and Christians, and the pagan philosophers clearly understood that the LXX and NT were the foundation for Christian belief, which they had to attack in order to undermine the growing faith.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- Artapanus, *Fragments*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: C. Holladay (ed.), *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 1: *Historians* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).
- Codex Iustinianus*. Text: P. Krueger (ed.), *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 2, 9th edn (Berlin: Weidmann 1969).
- Cyril of Alexandria, *Contra Iulianum*. Greek text: C. Riedweg (ed.), introduction by C. Riedweg and W. Kinzig, *Kyrill von Alexandrien, Gegen Julian. Teil 1: Buch 1–5*, GCS, Kyrill Werke I (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).
- Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: C. H. Oldfather et al., *Diodorus of Sicily*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, LCL 1–12 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933–67).
- Eunapius, *Vitae sophistarum*. Greek text and French trans.: R. Goulet (ed.), *Vies de philosophes et de sophistes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2014).
- Eusebius, *Preparatio Evangelica*. Greek text: K. Mras (ed.), *Die Praeparatio evangelica*, Eusebius Werke VIII/1–2, GCS (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1954–6). Eng. trans.: E. H. Gifford, *Eusebii Pamphili Evangelicae Praeparationis libri XV*, Tomus III.2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903).

- Eusebius, *Contra Hieroclem*. Greek text and French trans.: E. des Places (ed.), M. Forrat (trans.), *Contre Hiéroclès*, SC 333 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1986).
- Galen, *Opera*. Greek text: C. G. Kühn (ed.), *Claudii Galeni opera omnia*, 20 vols (Leipzig: Knobloch, 1821–33).
- Genesis. Greek text: J. W. Wevers (ed.), *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum*, I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974). German trans.: W. Kraus and M. Karrer (eds), *Septuaginta Deutsch: Das griechische Alte Testament in deutschen Übersetzung*, 2nd edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010).
- Heraclitus, *Fragmenta*. H. Diels and W. Kranz (eds), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1951).
- Ibn al-Qifti, *Tà'rih al-Hukama*. J. Lippert (ed.), *Ibn al-Qifti's Tà'rih al-Hukama: Auf Grund der Vorarbeiten Aug. Müller's* (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1903).
- Isho'dad of Merv, *Commentaries*. Syriac text and Eng. trans.: M. D. Gibson (ed.), *The Commentaries of Isho'dad of Merv bishop of Hadatha (c.850 A.D.)*, *Horae Semiticae* 5–7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).
- Julian, *Adversus Galilaeos*. Greek and Syriac text: C. J. Neumann and E. Nestle (eds), *Iuliani Imperatoris librorum contra Christianos quae supersunt: Insunt Cyrilli Alexandrini fragmenta Syriaca* (Leipzig, 1880). Greek text and Italian trans.: E. Masaracchia (ed.), *Giuliano Imperator Contra Galilaeos*, *Testi e Commenti* 9 (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1990).
- Macarius of Magnesia, *Monogenes*. Greek text and French trans.: R. Goulet (ed.), *Macarios de Magnésie: Le Monogènes*, *Textes et traditions* 7 (Paris: Vrin, 2003).
- Numenius, *Fragments*. Greek text and French trans.: E. des Places (ed.), *Numénius: Fragments*, *Collection des Universités de France* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1973).
- Ocellus Lucanus, *De universi natura*. Greek text: R. Harder (ed.), *Ocellus Lucanus: Text und Kommentar*, *Neue philologische Untersuchungen* 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1926).
- Origen, *Contra Celsum*. Greek text: M. Marcovich (ed.), *Contra Celsum Libri VIII*, *Supplements to VC* 54 (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Eng. trans.: H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).
- Philoponus, *De opificio mundi*. Greek text: W. Reichardt (ed.), *Joannis Philoponi de opificio mundi libri vii* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1897).
- Porphyry, *Contra Christianos*. Greek text: A. von Harnack (ed.), *Porphyrius 'Gegen die Christen', 15 Bücher: Zeugnisse, Fragmente und Referate*, *APAW, philosoph.-hist.* 1 (Berlin: Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften 1916). Greek text and German trans.: M. Becker (ed.), *Porphyrios, Contra Christianos: Neue Sammlung der Fragmente, Testimonien und Dubia* (Berlin: de Gruyter 2016).
- Porphyry, *Fragmenta*. Greek text: A. Smith (ed.), *Porphyrii philosophi fragmenta*, *Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1993).
- Pseudo-Longinus, *De sublimitate*. Greek text: D. A. Russell (ed.), *On the Sublime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).
- Severian of Gabala, *Orationes in mundi creationem*. Greek text: PG 56.429–98.

## Scholarship

- Barnes, T. D. (1968). 'Pre-Decian Acta Martyrum', *JTS* 19: 509–31.
- Barnes, T. D. (1981). *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Barnes, T. D. (2010). *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History*. *Tria Corda* 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).

- Betz, H. D. (1961). *Lukian von Samosata und das Neue Testament: Religionsgeschichtliche und paränetische Parallelen*, TU 76 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag).
- Betz, H. D. (1990). 'Lukian von Samosata und das Christentum', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze I, Hellenismus und Urchristentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 10–20 (first published [1959] in *NovT* 3: 226–37).
- Boulnois, M.-O. (2008). 'Genèse 2–3: Mythe ou vérité? Un sujet de polémique entre païens et chrétiens dans le Contre Julien de Cyrille d'Alexandrie', *REAug* 54: 111–33.
- Cook, J. G. (2000). *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism*. Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Cook, J. G. (2004). *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism*. Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Cook, J. G. (2008). 'Porphyry's Attempted Demolition of Christian Allegory', *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 2 (1): 1–27.
- Cook, J. G. (2012). 'Porphyry's Critique of the Septuagint: Three New Fragments', in S. Kreuzer, M. Meiser, and M. Sigismund (eds), *Die Septuaginta—Entstehung, Sprache, Geschichte, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 286 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 561–81.
- Cook, J. G. (2016). 'Julian and Porphyry on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospels', *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 10: 193–207.
- Edwards, M. J. (1990). 'Atticizing Moses? Numenius, the Fathers and the Jews', *VC* 44: 64–75.
- Freudenthal, J. (1875). *Alexander Polyhistor und die von ihm erhaltenen Reste jüdischer und samaritanischer Geschichtswerke, Hellenistische Studien* 1–2 (Breslau: Grass, Barth und Comp.).
- Gager, J. G. (1973). *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville/New York: Abingdon).
- Goulet-Cazé, M.-O. (2011). 'Peregrinus surnommé Proteus RE Per. 16 Pr. 3', in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, vol. 5.1 (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), 199–230.
- Lane, E. W. (1863–93). *An Arabic English Lexicon in Eight Parts* (London: Williams and Norgate).
- Morlet, S. (2011). 'Comment le problème du Contra Christianos peut-il se poser aujourd'hui?' in S. Morlet (ed.), *Le Traité de Porphyre contre les Chrétiens: Un siècle de recherches, nouvelles questions. Actes du colloque international organisé les 8 et 9 septembre 2009 à l'Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne*, Collection des études augustinienes 190 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes), 1–49.
- Niehoff, M. H. (2013). 'A Jewish Critique of Christianity from Second-Century Alexandria: Revisiting the Jew Mentioned in *Contra Celsum*', *JECS* 21: 151–75.
- Riedweg, C. (2008). 'Das Verbot, vom Baum der Erkenntnis von Gut und Böse zu essen (Gen 2, 17): Zeichen eines missgünstigen Gottes? Kaiser Julian und Kyrill von Alexandrien in einer virtuellen Debatte', in K. Schmid and C. Riedweg (eds), *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2–3) and its Reception History*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2, 34 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 187–208.
- Rinaldi, G. (1998). *La Bibbia dei pagani. I. Quadro storico. II. Testi e Documenti*. La Bibbia nella storia 19–20 (Bologna: Editioni Dehoniane).
- Stern, M. (1974, 1980, 1984). *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism. Vol. I, From Herodotus to Plutarch. Vol. II, From Tacitus to Simplicius. Vol. III, Appendixes and Indexes* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities).
- Schäfer, P. (2007). *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

- Thesleff, H. (1961). *An Introduction to the Pythagorean Writings of the Hellenistic Period*. Acta Academiae Aboensis Humaniora 24/3 (Åbo: Åbo Akademi).
- Walzer, R. (1949). *Galen on Jews and Christians* (London: Oxford University Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Rinaldi, G. (1989). *Biblia Gentium: A First Contribution Towards an Index of Biblical Quotations, References and Allusions made by Greek and Latin Heathen Writers of the Roman Imperial Times* (Roma: Libreria Sacra Scrittura), for translations of most of the relevant material.
- Wilken, R. (1984). *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- W. Kinzig, T. Brüggemann, and H. Kaufhold (eds.), *Kyrill von Alexandrien I. Gegen Julian. Teil 2: Buch 6–10 und Fragmente*, GCS, Kyrill Werke I (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017).

## CHAPTER 24

---

# MARCION AND HIS CRITICS

---

H. CLIFTON WARD

MARCION, a shipowner from Sinope in Pontus, arrived in Rome sometime around 140 CE. Of his life prior to his arrival in Rome, we know almost nothing. Upon his arrival, Marcion provided its church with a healthy sum of money—200,000 sesterces—and seems to have flourished within the Roman Church until the summer of 144 CE (Tertullian, *praescr.* 30.2). It was at this point that Marcion's thought and teachings became suspect, and a gathering was called to look into his views more closely. It is possible that Marcion himself called for this examination. He failed to convince the Roman majority of his teachings and was subsequently excluded from their church. Upon his departure, Marcion established a new church community that operated concurrently with the church in Rome and allowed his views to achieve a much broader circulation (Aland 1992; Lampe 2003:241–56). Justin Martyr, writing from Rome around 155 CE, explains in his *1 Apology* that Marcion's reach extended to people throughout the world:

And there is someone called Marcion, from Pontus, who even now is still teaching those he can persuade to consider some other [god], greater than the creator God. And with the help of the demons, he has persuaded many from every race of humankind to utter blasphemies, and he has made them deny God the Maker of this universe and confess some other who is greater, beyond him.

(*1 apol.* 26.5; trans. Minns and Parvis 2009:148–51; cf. *1 apol.* 58.1–2).

The goal of this chapter is to present the significance of Marcion's legacy for the continued development of early Christian interpretation of the Bible. I will proceed in three steps, beginning with an examination of Marcion's theological conceptions. Thereafter I will consider the strategies of his literary criticism. Finally, I will look at the critical response to his undertaking.

A major difficulty for scholars is that any reconstruction of Marcion's biblical text or antithetical statements is entirely dependent on the words of his critics, given that his three works (*Antitheses*, *Gospel*, and *Apostolikon*) are no longer extant. Thus, since Marcion's

texts are only transmitted by his critics, how are we to know which testimonies are trustworthy? Any such study must be conducted with some hesitation, since heresiological claims that win the upper hand for the polemicist may very well be inauthentic. Yet in those instances where our sources concede ground to Marcion and his text(s), a position which they must strive to win back, one may justifiably consider such cases as authentic (Scherbenske 2013:72). For a reconstruction of Marcion's *Antitheses*, *Gospel*, and *Apostolikon*, then, the most significant sources—both of which appear to have used Marcion's own writings in their responses—are Tertullian's *Against Marcion* from the early third century and the *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis in the late fourth century. Other sources of note are Justin Martyr's *Apology*, Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, and the *Dialogue of Adamantius*.

## MARCION'S PHILOSOPHY

Adolf von Harnack famously asserted that Marcion was unconcerned with the philosophical discussions of his day (Harnack 1924:160), a view that would prove extraordinarily influential throughout much of the twentieth century. In recent decades, however, a growing number of scholars have challenged Harnack's picture of Marcion as a biblicist unconcerned with metaphysics (Gager 1972:53–9; Mühlenberg 1979:111–13; May 1987:143–8; May 1997:197–8). This picture stands in stark contrast to the witness of Marcion's opponents who suggest that he was, in fact, dependent on philosophy. We find this position as early as Irenaeus, who links him with Epicurean thought (*haer.* 3.24.2). Tertullian connects Marcion's thought with both Epicurus (*Marc.* 1.25.3; 2.16.2ff.; 4.15.2; 5.19.7) and the Stoics (*Marc.* 5.19.7; *praescr.* 7.3; 30.1). It is entirely plausible that Irenaeus and Tertullian are both engaging in polemical tactics to discredit Marcion. Clement of Alexandria, however, is not as easily pinned with this accusation. Writing in his *Stromateis* at the end of the second century, Clement claims that Marcion draws his strange doctrines from Plato without fully understanding them (*str.* 3.12.1–25.4). Though Clement may also be employing a similar heresiological polemic here, it is important to recall that Plato, for Clement, occupied a privileged place as the philosopher who had come nearest to the divine truth. Thus, his affiliation of Marcion with Plato at the very least intimates a philosophical knowledge—even if it is not all that sophisticated (cf. May 1987:141–2). To be sure, it is unlikely that we could identify Marcion's attraction to the thought of specific philosophical schools, especially given the jargon that was frequently shared between them in the second century. But it is an open question whether aspects of his exegetical activity and thought were shaped by contemporary philosophy.

One way to begin to answer this question is to turn to Tertullian, who provides an extended example of how Marcion thought about God:

If God is good, you ask, and has knowledge of the future, and also has power to avert evil, why did he suffer the man, deceived by the devil, to fall away from obedience

to the law, and so to die? For the man was the image and likeness of God, or even God's substance, since from it the man's soul took its origin. So if, being good, he had wished a thing not to happen, and if, having foreknowledge, he had been aware that it would happen, and if he had had power and strength to prevent it from happening, that thing never would have happened which under these three conditions of divine majesty it was impossible should happen. But, you conclude, as that did happen, the very opposite is proved, that God must be assumed to be neither good nor prescient nor omnipotent: because inasmuch as nothing of that sort could have happened if God had possessed these attributes of goodness and prescience and omnipotence, it follows that it did happen because God is devoid of these qualities.

(*Marc.* 2.5.1–2; trans. Evans 1972:98–9).

From this passage, one can see the thread of Marcion's logic. If this God is good, knowledgeable of the future, and powerful, yet cannot prevent evil, then it is impossible for such a God to be responsible for the affairs of this world, where evil abounds. Marcion's concern is to account for what is suitable to the nature of the Deity (*θεοπρεπής*), and his reading of Genesis, in turn, provides support for his infamous construction of two distinct gods (cf. *Marc.* 2.25.1–2). The fall of humanity merely accentuates the incongruity Marcion sees between the nature of God and the reality of the world (see May 1997:197–8; Scherbenske 2013:73).

There was a time in the scholarship on Marcion when, in an attempt to correct Harnack's Protestant portrait of Marcion, scholars too quickly categorized Marcion's thought—and particularly his distinction of two gods—as 'Gnostic' (Knox 1942; Blackman 1948; Grant 1959:121–8; Bianchi 1967). The classification of Marcion as a 'Gnostic' stemmed not only from his doctrine of two gods, but also from his inclusion in such heresiological treatises as Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, where he is specifically linked with the Syrian Gnostic Cerdo (*haer.* 1.27; 3.12.12). While Marcion does appear in Irenaeus' account of 'evil interpreters' (*haer.* Pref.1), a close reading of *Against Heresies* indicates very little direct interaction with Marcion's thought (Pagels 2002:345–7; cf. Watson 2013:494). While Irenaeus finds a deep affinity between Marcion and the Valentinians, he quite clearly sees the Valentinian challenge as more urgent (Ayres 2015).

Moreover, the very term 'Gnosticism' has been reconsidered in recent years, particularly in light of the discovery of the texts at Nag Hammadi. The result is that most scholars do not find the blanket term helpful for describing the diversity of speculative thought in the second century (Williams 2001; Brakke 2010). Even scholars who find a category such as 'Gnosticism' helpful for heuristic purposes are nonetheless forced to admit that Marcion 'only very indirectly' relates to Gnostic thought (Markschies 2003:86–9). While Marcion makes no attempt to retain the Jewish Scriptures, the 'Gnostics', in fact, maintained a 'conflicted engagement' with the Jewish Bible, as David Brakke has demonstrated. They sought to verify their roots in Jewish thought, even while rejecting many of the core beliefs of most Jews. Marcion, however, wanted to present Christianity as entirely new, separate from the Jewish tradition (Brakke 2010:97–9). Moreover, Marcion's theology employs no cosmological myth to explain either the Creator or the unknown God.

In the Gnostic myth, the Creator maintains a connection to the higher God, even if it is as a 'disfigured offspring of true divinity' (Brakke 2010:97). In Marcion's thought, however, the Creator has no relation to the Father of Jesus. Rather, there are two distinct gods, eternally coexistent but unrelated.

But there are striking affinities between Marcion's dualism and contemporary philosophy. His conception of the two gods is brought into greater relief by a comparison with the Middle Platonist Numenius of Apamea. Numenius distinguished the 'first God' from the 'Demiurge' and 'lawgiver' (Fr. 21, *des Places* 1973; cf. Dillon 1996:361–79). For Numenius, the supreme God was absolute 'Good', and the Demiurge imitates the first God and is also good, but only by participation in the first God (Fr. 16, *des Places* 1973). Thus, as Gerhard May has argued, inasmuch as the Demiurge has a relationship with and participates in the good God, Numenius' doctrine resembles the Valentinian myth. But inasmuch as the Demiurge has always been and never come into existence, there is also substantial agreement between Numenius and Marcion (May 1987:145). It is obviously a complex task to situate Marcion within the philosophical discussions of the second century. Nevertheless, we can see that central to his reading of Scripture was a concern to identify how behaviour of the Demiurge was incommensurate with his conception of a fitting deity (see Dungan 1988:189). It was this concern with a reading's 'suitability'—which itself has a long history in the Hellenistic tradition of philology—that set the stage for the literary-critical activity for which Marcion is known.

## MARCION'S PHILOLOGY

---

By 'philology' I mean the interpretation and study of texts—particularly those texts that constitute the Christian OT and NT—and all the questions that its readers might formulate in order to elucidate their meaning. In Antiquity, those concerned with philology in this sense were referred to as 'grammarians' or 'critics'. Thus, in the instances throughout this chapter where I speak about the 'grammatical' or 'critical' practices of Marcion and others, one should assume that I have this broad sense of philology in mind. In the case of Marcion, it was his philosophical thought on the nature of God that had consequences for his philological practice. On the one hand, Marcion was compelled to reject the portrayal of deity in the Jewish Scriptures, as it did not accord with his conception of the goodness of the supreme God. On the other hand, he was motivated to demonstrate the content of the original gospel of this supreme god, revealed as the Father of Jesus, in such a way that his followers could understand it. Thus, Marcion's philological practice had two distinct activities: (1) a subtle hermeneutic that provided his followers with a proper method of reading his Bible; and (2) a text-critical project of fashioning a new Bible in accordance with his understanding of the two gods. To consider Marcion's literary analysis in more detail, it will be helpful to divide our enquiry between these two activities.

## Marcion's Hermeneutics

The most significant challenge posed by Marcion for the emerging orthodox Church came from the hermeneutical pressure he exerted on the reading of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. This hermeneutical challenge can be seen in two arenas in particular: (1) the question of the OT and its authority for the Christian community, and (2) Marcion's editorial work on the NT, specifically in his *Antitheses* and the *argumenta* prefixed to the Pauline letters.

Judith Lieu puts it well in her recent study of Marcion, that he 'has come to be associated in particular with giving voice to the enduring and deep-seated "question of the Old Testament" for Christian thought' (Lieu 2015:6). As we have seen, Marcion was aware of the Middle Platonist distinction between 'Father' and 'Demiurge'. But in his reading of the Jewish Scriptures Marcion's concept of the Creator was refocused. Only in his interaction with the OT could Marcion characterize the Creator as fond of war, perpetrating evil, retaining jealousy, and so on (Lieu 2015:357). Therefore, what Marcion recognized above all in his reading of the OT were the 'problems' one encountered in the OT's characterization of the Creator, questions that ranged from the existence of evil—and the fact that it seemingly originates with God—to the narratives of Scripture that indicated qualities Marcion deemed inappropriate for deity, especially the lack of (fore)knowledge, jealousy, and inconsistency.

Of course, these were not merely 'problems' or 'questions' for Marcion; all Christian interpreters would have to face them. Origen tells us that the second century philosopher Celsus accumulated many of the same problems that Marcion seems to have treated (see *Cels.* 7.18, 28; Dungan 1988:191). For Celsus, these accounts undermined the Christian narrative as a whole, and thus the OT should be regarded as mere fables (*Cels.* 1.20). Marcion, on the other hand, took the accounts seriously as a testimony to the character of the Creator. For Marcion, the Jewish Scriptures retained the necessary evidential authority to confirm his understanding of the Creator and this Creator's distinction from the supreme, beneficent God. Perhaps, then, we should give pause before claiming that Marcion 'rejected' the OT wholesale. On the contrary, the OT—and a very particular reading of it—was absolutely necessary for Marcion's hermeneutics. As his critics charged, Marcion's 'problems' arose because he simply resisted figural reading. Of course, it is not true that Marcion rejected allegory *in toto*. He retained Paul's figural reading in 1 Corinthians 10 and Galatians 4, so he must have read figurally in some manner (cf. Grant 1957:66). More helpful is Gerhard May's suggestion that 'since the Old Testament is not sufficient for [Marcion's] theological demands, he traces it back to a God of low rank. The rejection of allegorical interpretation is the consequence, not the presupposition, of criticism' (May 1987:147). From this perspective, Marcion's reading of the OT was motivated by his desire to locate the inconsistencies between what he considered fitting for God and the qualities and character given to the Creator by a literal reading of the OT (Dungan 1988:189). This would provide a marked challenge for Marcion's critics, which we will look at more closely later in this chapter.

A second interpretative challenge for his critics was found in Marcion's editorial hermeneutics, particularly in the text of his *Antitheses*. For a consideration of Marcion's *Antitheses*, the most significant passage comes from Tertullian's *Against Marcion*:

The separation of the law and the gospel is the principal work of Marcion. His disciples are not able to deny this, which they have in the main document (*in summo instrumento*), through which in fact they are initiated and are hardened in this heresy. For these are Marcion's *Antitheses*, that is contrary opposites, which endeavour to display the discord of the gospel with the law, so that from the contradiction (*diversitate*) of statements in both documents they may also prove the diversity (*diversitatem*) of gods. (*Marc.* 1.19.4; author's trans.)

Tertullian makes two significant points in this passage. First, he confirms that Marcion's conception of two gods drove his literary analysis. For Marcion, the argument was a movement from lesser to greater. Proof of the contradiction between the OT and NT furnished the opportunity to prove the diversity of gods. Second, however, Tertullian claims that Marcion's 'disciples' had a 'main document' in which they found such *diversitas* outlined. Adolf von Harnack was the first to suggest that Marcion's *Antitheses* may have exercised an authoritative role in the Marcionite communities, and perhaps served as an introduction to his *Gospel* and *Apostolikon* (Harnack 1924:74–6). In her recent study on Marcion, however, Judith Lieu rightly suggests that we exercise caution about this passage (Lieu 2015:273–6). After all, the phrase *in summo instrumento* is ambiguous and could signify multiple things. Tertullian may simply be claiming that the antithesis between Law and Gospel—Marcion's 'principal work'—stands out clearly from the text of Marcion's Bible. In this reading, the '*Antitheses*' are not understood as a separate document, but simply as the significant movement of Marcion's thought. That the antithetical or contradictory thought of Marcion represents the key feature of his interpretation is well known. It would be no surprise, then, for Tertullian, who seems to have worked from a copy of Marcion's text, to call attention to the contradictions apparent within the work. But given the ambiguity of *in summo instrumento*, one might just as easily read 'main document', implying the existence of a text separate from the *Gospel* and *Apostle*. Just such a reading may be strengthened by Tertullian's statements later in the treatise:

For certainly the whole of the work he has done, including the prefixing (*praestruendo*) of his *Antitheses*, he directs to the one purpose of setting up opposition between the Old Testament and the New, and thereby putting his Christ in separation from the Creator, as belonging to another god, and having no connection with the law and the prophets. (*Marc.* 4.6.1; trans. Evans 1972:275).

In this passage, Tertullian suggests that Marcion's *Antitheses* are 'set out beforehand' (*praestruere*). It is possible, however, given Tertullian's earlier suggestion that the *Antitheses* were used to initiate (*initiantur*) Marcion's followers into his teaching, that the term *praestruendo* may indicate a physical attachment of the *Antitheses* before Marcion's *Gospel*

and *Apostolikon*. This position has been argued compellingly by Eric Scherbenske, who identifies Marcion's *Antitheses* as an isagogic text that 'transmitted Marcion's hermeneutic' and 'prepared the reader to approach the following texts of the *Gospel* and *Apostolikon* through a proper Marcionite reading' (Scherbenske 2010:274; cf. Le Boulluec 1997:202; *contra* Moll 2010:114). Ancient isagogic texts, and particularly those of a philosophical nature, offered the answers to a number of preliminary questions as a means of introducing a given text: (a) the purpose, or scope, of the text; (b) a text's position within a given corpus; (c) its utility; (d) the function of its title; (e) its authenticity (especially if this was in doubt); (f) its division into chapters or sections; and (g) to what part of philosophy it belonged (Mansfeld 1994). When viewed from the perspective of ancient isagogic texts, it becomes clear that the *Antitheses* do in fact introduce the purpose, or scope, of Marcion's Bible: the contradiction of law with gospel and the resultant diversity of the gods about which they speak hold the key to understanding both the gospel and Paul (Scherbenske 2013:83–6). Marcion's editorial hand is concerned to pass along this authoritative reading of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

In addition to the *Antitheses*, we may also see Marcion's editorial work in the so-called 'Marcionite prologues' that introduce the Pauline epistles in many Latin manuscripts. These prologues, or *argumenta* in Latin, introduce the material to be found within the individual letters to which they are prefixed. Much like Marcion's *Antitheses*, these *argumenta* provide short answers to fundamental preliminary questions about the epistles. Donatien De Bruyne argued in the early twentieth century that these Latin prologues could be traced to a Marcionite origin (De Bruyne 1907). More recently, Eric Scherbenske has retraced the significance of these *argumenta* and affirms De Bruyne's hypothesis. Specifically, it is difficult to imagine any other historical setting for the origin of these prologues, given their concern with such items as (1) the issue of false apostles who corrupted both Paul's original message and his texts, (2) the superior status of Paul, and (3) an antagonism between law and gospel (Scherbenske 2013:85–93). Though the *argumenta* could be read in a non-Marcionite way (so Dahl 1978; cf. May 1987:132), the simplest and best solution remains a Marcionite origin. Much like the *Antitheses*, Marcion's *argumenta* carried on his hermeneutical and theological concerns, particularly with respect to the Law–Gospel distinction and the distortion of Paul's original kerygma by the 'false apostles'.

Though we have no extant copies of Marcion's texts, both the *Antitheses* and the *argumenta* allow us to appreciate Marcion's ability to direct readers *editorially* to a particular interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. These editorial practices applied a hermeneutical pressure on his followers to read these texts in a properly Marcionite fashion. But they also provided justification for the text-critical practices seen in Marcion's Bible.

## Marcion's Bible

As we noted in the passage from Tertullian (*Marc.* 1.19.4), Marcion's philological work on the Scriptures was expressly directed to revealing the contradiction between the

OT and NT, the Jewish jealous god and the good God, who is the Father of Jesus (Mühlenberg 1979). There are a number of features of Marcion's painstaking text-critical work that display just how he intended to reach this goal. To be sure, before an assessment of Marcion's significance in the development of early Christian biblical interpretation can be made, one must consider the actual text of Marcion's Bible—what it said, and, in some key instances, which biblical texts Marcion removed. For this reason, a primary task must be to reconstruct Marcion's Bible.

Since none of Marcion's works are extant, we must carefully reconstruct the text of the *Gospel* and *Apostolikon* through the words of his critics, particularly Tertullian and Epiphanius. Fortunately, scholars have already provided reconstructions of Marcion's texts. In the case of the *Apostolikon*, Ulrich Schmid's 1995 critical edition remains the standard (Schmid 1995). Marcion's *Apostolikon* contained ten Pauline letters: Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 'Laodiceans' (which was Ephesians), Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. The order of the *Apostolikon* is striking. Marcion began his Pauline collection with Galatians rather than Romans, a point of focus for Epiphanius in the *Panarion* (see *haer.* 42.12.1–3). Though there is no way to explain his reasons definitively, it seems likely that the early chapters of Galatians provided Marcion with the clearest justification for his reading of the scriptural narrative. Paul is presented as the apostle par excellence in the very first verse of the letter, where he confesses to be an apostle 'not from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ' (Gal 1.1). The gospel, therefore, that Paul preached to the Galatians could be considered a direct revelation from Christ. Moreover, Paul's dispute with Peter, whom he chastised for turning from 'the truth of the gospel' (Gal 2.14), provided an explanation directly from the apostle for Marcion's conception of a 'new', unadulterated gospel against Judaism. This may be inferred from Tertullian's admission that 'we also claim that the primary epistle against Judaism is that which instructs the Galatians' (*Marc.* 5.2.1). Indeed, the placement of the Corinthian correspondence immediately following Galatians may be seen as Marcion's attempt to draw attention to the conflicts that Paul continued to describe in those texts. For Marcion, Pauline Christianity was a struggle to maintain the one true gospel against those who would introduce a false one. Finally, in accordance not only with the Marcionite *argumentum* that prefaced Galatians but also with Marcion's emphasis on the Pauline conflict for the one true gospel, the first chapter of Galatians introduces the subtle attack on 'another gospel', contrary to the one Paul originally preached (Gal 1.6–9)—a gospel that Marcion claims was perpetrated by false apostles, who were perhaps the 'false brothers' of Galatians 2.4 (cf. *Marc.* 5.3.2–3). The deliberate choice to place Galatians first in the *Apostolikon* reinforced the central theological tenets of Marcion's hermeneutics—particularly, the distinction between law and gospel and the need to remove the spurious alterations of the false apostles.

Dieter Roth has recently completed an edition of Marcion's *Gospel* (Roth 2015). This text, which bore no title, was an attempt to provide the true text about Jesus—free from all interpolations of another false gospel as Paul had warned in Galatians—according to his antithetical presupposition between law and gospel, demiurge and the Father of Jesus (Grant 1993:37–45; Lieu 2015:209–33). Irenaeus claims that Marcion excised portions

from the Gospel of Luke to fit his 'new' gospel and, as a result, only provided his followers with a 'portion of the gospel' (*haer.* 1.27.2). Although some scholars in recent years have argued for the priority of Marcion's gospel, this remains a minority view (Vinzent 2014; Klinghardt 2015). Moreover, the reasons Marcion chose to edit the Gospel of Luke are unclear. It is entirely possible that he was aware of Papias' link between Mark and Peter, and if the dispute between Peter and Paul served as the foundation for Marcion's thought (May 1989:209)—an entirely reasonable proposition given the placement of Galatians in the *Apostolikon*—then Marcion's choice of the Gospel of Luke, the companion of Paul, rather than the Gospel of Mark, the companion of Peter, seems possible (Markschies 2009:255–6).

Irenaeus reports that Marcion removed all references to the birth of the Lord at the beginning of his *Gospel*, a point which Tertullian confirms by providing the initial words of Marcion's text: 'In the fifteenth year of the principate of Tiberius he came down to Capernaum' (Luke 3.1; 4.31a; see *Marc.* 4.7.1; 1.19.2). By omitting the Lukan infancy narratives, Marcion was able to divorce the history of Jesus from any Jewish ancestry. There is no narrative of Jesus' conception or birth in Marcion's *Gospel*, and the significant Jewish features of the infancy narratives, such as Mary's Magnificat (proclaiming as it does God's help to 'Israel' and 'Abraham's seed') or the Benedictus to 'the Lord God of Israel', were likewise omitted in light of the obvious relationship with the OT narratives. Instead, Jesus 'descends' or 'comes down' directly from the Father, a reading with echoes in such Valentinian interpreters as Heracleon. We can see, then, how the omission of the infancy narratives creates the conditions to read all that followed in Marcion's *Gospel* along the lines of his antithetical theology. This hermeneutical pressure is only intensified as Marcion continues with Luke 4.31b–32.

The first few verses of Marcion's *Gospel* read as follows, with the corresponding Lukan references in parentheses and Marcion's alterations in italics:

In the fifteenth year of the principate of Tiberius (3.1), he came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee (4.31a). He was teaching *in the synagogue* (4.31b). And they were astonished at his teaching, because his word *was against the law and the prophets* (4.32).

Given his desire to detach Jesus from any Jewish heritage, Marcion must find Jesus' appearance 'in the synagogue' less offensive than his teaching 'on the sabbath', which is Luke's original phrase in 4.31b. Tertullian, however, argues that this is no less than a concession that Jesus had been sent to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (*Marc.* 4.7.6–7), a point Marcion would want to avoid. The more significant alteration, however, is found in Marcion's emphasis from Luke 4.32 that Jesus' proclamation was 'against the law and prophets' (Grant 1993:38; *contra* Roth 2015:412). Through the omission of the infancy narrative and the alteration of Luke's description of Jesus' proclamation, Marcion constrains his readers to interpret this account of Jesus in a very particular manner—one in which the gospel is altogether new and entirely opposed to 'the law and the prophets.'

Similar alterations of Luke may be found elsewhere in Marcion's *Gospel*. Epiphanius says that, in addition to the infancy narratives at the beginning of the Gospel, Marcion cut many 'words of truth' from the end and middle of Luke (*haer.* 42.9.1)—perhaps offering a play on Marcion's own phrase ('word of truth'), so prevalent in the *argumenta* to the Pauline texts. It seems likely that Marcion considered the whole of the Jewish people hostile, and not simply their leaders (Grant 1993:39). Thus he frequently deleted references to Jewish authorities; for instance, in the passion prediction of Luke 9.22, he removed 'and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes' (cf. Epiphanius, *haer.* 42.11.6 [16]). Perhaps the best way to consider the motivations behind Marcion's textual criticism is to account for the twenty-three passages that both Tertullian and Epiphanius say he removed. Robert Grant has categorized the deleted texts and provided the following taxonomy (Grant 1957:115–16):

- (1) Any references to the Father as Creator (12.6–7) or likewise as the God of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob (20.37–8);
- (2) Texts concerning prophecy or the OT generally (3.1b–4.30; 11.29b–32; 11.49–51; 17.10b; 18.31–3; 24.27; 24.44–6);
- (3) References implying concern for Jews (13.1–9; 15.11–32; 19.9b; 19.29–46; 20.9–18; 21.21–4; 22.16) or that Jesus was messiah of the Jews (22.35–8; 22.50);
- (4) Texts that imply either the resurrection of the body (12.28; 21.18) or immediate entrance into paradise (23.43); and
- (5) Narratives on the human birth and growth of Jesus (1.1–2.52) or references to Jesus' family (8.19).

Very rarely are Marcion's textual alterations or deletions hard to explain. If the argument I suggested earlier is correct, that Marcion's philology was employed to account for his theology, then we can clearly see that Marcion's textual criticism of Luke and the resultant version of the *Gospel* are most likely intended to confirm his conception of God and transmit this hermeneutical position to his followers.

One final item remains for us to consider about Marcion's Bible before turning to the critical responses to his work: what role did Marcion play in the canonical development of the Christian NT? Scholars have often argued that the constitution of Marcion's *Gospel* and *Apostolikon*, established as a 'new' canon for his community, became the significant event that hastened the development of the orthodox canon. According to this position, Marcion played a central role in the development of the Christian canon of the NT, since the Christian collection can best be seen as a reaction to him (Harnack 1924:444\*; Knox 1942:19–26; Campenhausen 1972:147–63). Recent scholarship, however, suggests that this position probably overestimates Marcion's significance in this regard. As Christoph Marksches observes, Marcion's own editorial work on the texts that would comprise the Christian NT, combined with the vigorous response of critics to this work, more plausibly suggests that these texts already had significance at the midpoint of the second century CE (Marksches 2009:260; cf. Koester 1957; Grant 1966:126; Metzger 1987:97–9; Gamble 2002:59–62).

## THE CRITICAL RESPONSE TO MARCION

---

The response to Marcion's work was critical in two distinct senses. It was most obviously 'critical' because it was deeply opposed to his theological tenets. But it was also critical because the most sophisticated challenges to his conclusions—such as those by Tertullian—employed a similar literary analysis (a 'criticism') on the texts that would become the NT. We see both criticisms in the early responses to Marcion. The earliest response comes from Justin Martyr, writing from Rome while Marcion was apparently still alive. In the passage from his *1 Apology* that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Justin's opposition to Marcion centres on his view of God—that is, his ability to persuade others to esteem another god who is 'greater than the creator God' (*1 apol.* 26.5). Justin is silent about Marcion's literary analysis. This is perhaps because Justin was unaware of Marcion's reading practices, a point that may be confirmed by his statement that Marcion's followers 'have no demonstration for the things they say' (*1 apol.* 58.1–2). It is hard to imagine someone who had seen Marcion's *Antitheses*, *Gospel* or *Apostolikon* making such a statement. Regardless, Justin's main concern is the Christian worship of the OT God, whom he identifies as 'the creator God'.

In Irenaeus' response to Marcion there still remains the vital 'question of the Old Testament', but Irenaeus inaugurates a second dispute with the Marcionite programme. Not only did Marcion reject the Creator as a second god—the point on which Justin had criticized Marcion—but, additionally, Irenaeus claims that Marcion mishandled and abused the texts of the NT:

[Marcion] uttered the impudent blasphemy that the God who was proclaimed by the law and the prophets was the author of evil, and desirous of war . . . Besides all this, he mutilated the Gospel according to Luke, discarding all that is written about the birth of the Lord, and discarding also many of the Lord's discourses containing teaching in which it is most clearly written that the Lord confessed His Father as the Maker of the universe. Marcion persuaded his disciples that he was more truthful than the apostles who handed down the gospel, though he gave them not a gospel, but only a portion of the gospel. In like manner, he mutilated the Letters of Paul, removing whatever was clearly (*manifeste*) said by the Apostle about the God who made the world, inasmuch as he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; for the Apostle taught by quoting from the Prophetical Writings that foretold the Lord's coming.

(Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.27.2; trans. Unger and Dillon 1992:91).

Irenaeus spends very little time here condemning Marcion's handling of the OT. Rather, his primary critique concerns the reading practices that Marcion employs on the texts of the NT—the Gospel of Luke and the Pauline letters. For Irenaeus, the critical response to Marcion must be conducted on the front lines by disputing Marcion's own literary criticism of the texts the two interpreters shared. Irenaeus promises to 'expose him by his own writings' at a later point (*haer.* 1.27.3), though we have no record of the fulfilment

of this promise. It is on this very front—refuting Marcion from his own texts—where we find the most extended critical response from Tertullian.

As we have seen, Tertullian grasped the link that Marcion forged between scriptural exegesis and theological conviction. We need only remember the passage already quoted from the first book *Against Marcion*, in which Tertullian claims that Marcion's endeavours to display the discordant relationship of the gospel with the law is expressly intended to prove 'the diversity of gods' (*Marc.* 1.19.4). Moreover, in his extended response, Tertullian's most potent arguments against Marcion's thesis are found in passages where his own philological acumen is on display. For example, Tertullian calls attention to issues of grammatical punctuation in order to provide a creative rereading of the Genesis fall narrative. Whereas Marcion understood the phrase, 'Adam, where are you?' (*Gen.* 3.9) to express the Creator's lack of foreknowledge—a quality unbefitting deity—Tertullian offers a different take on the passage, though still reading it in a non-figural fashion. For Tertullian, an alternative punctuation reveals that the Creator is not asking a question but instead offering a critical exclamation: 'Adam, behold where you are!' (*Marc.* 2.25.2). In a second example, Tertullian critiques the initial scene of Marcion's *Gospel*. By juxtaposing Luke 3.1 and 4.31–2, Marcion suggests that Jesus, after his initial appearance in Capernaum from above, was found immediately teaching in the synagogue. Tertullian recognized, however, that Marcion's narrative, with its omission of the Lukan infancy story, provides no details on Jesus' background. As a result, Tertullian argues that Marcion's Jesus could never have even entered the synagogue in the first place, and much less be found *teaching* there:

how can he [Jesus] have obtained admittance into the synagogue, appearing so suddenly, so unknown, no one as yet having certain knowledge of his tribe, of his nation, of his house, or even of Caesar's census, which the Roman registry still has in keeping, a most faithful witness to our Lord's nativity? They remembered, surely, that unless they knew he was circumcised he must not be admitted into the most holy places. Or again, even if there were unlimited access to the synagogue, there was no permission to teach, except for one excellently well known, and tried, and approved, and already either for this occasion or by commendation from elsewhere invested with that function. (*Marc.* 4.7.7; trans. Evans 1972:278–9)

Tertullian here vividly employs the historical part of the grammarian's expertise, wherein a reader would use any pertinent geographical or cultural information to come to a suitable interpretation of the text (Cribiore 2001:185–219). According to Tertullian, readers would understand that Jesus could only be granted access to the synagogue if the people 'knew he was circumcised'. Since there are no details of Jesus' 'tribe, nation, or house'—as Luke's infancy narrative provides but Marcion omits—one must suppose that Jesus would not have been given access. Thus, for Tertullian, Marcion's text is not even intelligible as it stands, since it mangles the very details one would expect in a text that presents historical events. In the end, the validity of Marcion's philological activity *per se* was never in question for Tertullian. Quite the opposite, Tertullian himself employs

techniques from his grammatical repertoire to oppose the theological foundation he sees in Marcion's literary activity.

## CONCLUSION

---

Marcion's *Antitheses* opened famously, 'O wealth of riches! Folly, power, and ecstasy!— Seeing that there can be nothing to say about it, or to imagine about it, or to compare it to!' (Schäfers 1917:262; cf. Harnack 1924:256\*). Most scholars have suggested that the content of the exordium, as Judith Lieu put the matter, 'betrays nothing of the extent or character of the [*Antitheses*] that follow it' (Lieu 2015:272). But this might not be the case. The exordium itself employs key words found in Marcion's *Gospel* and *Apostolikon* (Burkitt 1929). Moreover, as Robert Grant has argued, if the wording of the exordium gestures toward the unique quality of Marcion's corpus, then its striking claim that the message to follow cannot be 'imagined' or 'compared' to anything else may also express the requirement that Marcion's three texts—the *Antitheses*, *Gospel*, and *Apostolikon*—be interpreted in light of the words found in them alone. In other words, one would need 'to interpret Marcion by Marcion' (Grant 1984:211), a principle that harkens back to the literary analysis of Aristarchus of Samothrace. This reading of the exordium is supported by the description of Marcion's *Antitheses* as a 'proevangelium' by an anonymous Syriac author, a term that may suggest that this work served as an explicit introduction to Marcion's *Gospel*, or perhaps was prefixed to it (Schäfers 1917:3–4; Harnack 1924:74 n. 3; Scherbenske 2010:257–8). If this reading of the exordium is correct, then it would verify Marcion's attempt to associate himself with the philological strategies of the ancient grammarians of Hellenistic Alexandria (Markschies 2009:260–1; Scherbenske 2013:115). In the biblical interpretation that would follow in the shadow of Marcion's legacy, Christian readers would now argue for their own theological positions by employing philological techniques on Scripture, just as Marcion did.

Now, to be sure, we must temper our judgements of Marcion's ultimate significance in this regard in three crucial ways. First, Christian exegetes could find readers of the Jewish Scriptures, like Philo, who had already been employing the philological techniques of Alexandria (Niehoff 2011). Second, some of Marcion's most prized critical techniques—like the sheer removal of passages or texts (a strong version of what the ancient grammarians termed 'athetesis')—would not be adopted by later Christian readers. Instead, later Christian readers often furnished creative figural readings to interpret superfluous or contradictory texts. Finally, whereas Marcion's deployment of these literary critical techniques was intended to confirm the diversity of the gods in Scripture, subsequent Christian readers would emphasize those critical reading strategies that could be used to affirm the unity of God. The Valentinians were the first to respond to Marcion's challenge, and as Christian exegetes after Marcion worked out the precise ways that grammatical techniques could be employed on the texts of the NT, their polemics would predominantly turn away from Marcion and toward the Valentinians, who posed a more urgent threat to Christian hermeneutics.

Marcion's literary activity is a significant early witness for the use of reading strategies that would come to characterize early Christian exegesis. Though later authors would reject certain critical techniques that Marcion employed on the Scriptures, subsequent Christian readers—both Valentinians and those of the majority Church—were forced to offer fresh re-evaluations of the validity of the OT (often through figural reading) and to consider the proper use of philological skills on the texts that would come to be the NT. For these biblical interpreters, the procedures of literary analysis that Marcion used to accentuate contradiction and the diversity of the Demiurge and the supreme God would subsequently be employed to argue for the unity of God—Creator *and* Father of Jesus Christ—whose work extends in one narrative from OT to NT.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*. Greek text: K. Holl (ed.), *Epiphanius, Bände 2: Ancoratus und Panarion*, GCS 31 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922). Eng. trans.: F. Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I (Sects 1–46)*, 35 (Leiden: Brill, 1987).
- Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses, Book 1*. Latin text: A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau (eds), *Contre les hérésies, livre 1*, SC 263–4 (Paris: Cerf, 1979). Eng. trans.: D. J. Unger and J. J. Dillon, *Against the Heresies, Book 1*, ACW 55 (New York: Newman Press, 1992).
- Justin Martyr, *Apologiae*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: D. Minns and P. Parvis (eds), *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, OECT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- Numenius of Apamea, *Fragments*. Text: É. des Places (ed.), *Numénius: Fragments*, Collection Budé (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1973).
- Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*. Latin text: E. Dekkers et al. (eds), *Tertullianus: Opera catholica. Adversus Marcionem*, CCL 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954). Eng. trans.: E. Evans (ed.), *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem* (2 vols; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

### Scholarship

- Aland, B. (1992). 'Marcion (ca. 85–160)/Marcioniten', *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 22: 89–101.
- Ayres, L. (2015). 'Irenaeus vs. the Valentinians: Toward a Rethinking of Patristic Exegetical Origins', *J ECS* 23: 153–87.
- Bianchi, U. (1967). 'Marcion: Théologien biblique ou docteur gnostique', *VC* 21: 141–9.
- Blackman, E. C. (1948). *Marcion and his Influence* (London: SPCK).
- Brakke, D. (2010). *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Burkitt, F. C. (1929). 'The Exordium of Marcion's Antitheses', *JTS* 30: 279–80.
- Campenhause, H. von (1972). *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Fortress Press).
- Criamore, R. (2001). *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Dahl, N. A. (1978). 'The Origin of the Earliest Prologues to the Pauline Letters', *Semeia* 12: 233–77.
- De Bruyne, D. (1907). 'Prologues biblique d'origine marcionite', *RBen* 24: 1–16.
- Dillon, J. (1996). *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth).

- Dungan, David L. (1988). 'Reactionary Trends in the Gospel Producing Activity of the Early Church: Marcion, Tatian, Mark', in M. Sabbe (ed.), *L'Évangile selon Marc: Tradition et rédaction* (Leuven: Leuven University Press), 179–202.
- Gager, J. G. (1972). 'Marcion and Philosophy', *VC* 26: 53–9.
- Gamble, H. Y. (2002). *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock).
- Grant, R. M. (1957). *Letter and Spirit* (London: SPCK).
- Grant, R. M. (1959). *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Grant, R. M. (1966). *The Formation of the New Testament* (London: Hutchison).
- Grant, R. M. (1984). 'Marcion and the Critical Method', in P. Richardson and J. C. Hurd (eds), *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press), 207–15.
- Grant, R. M. (1993). *Heresy and Criticism: The Search for Authenticity in Early Christian Literature* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox).
- Harnack, A. von (1924). *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (Leipzig: Hinrichs). Trans. J. E. Steely and L. D. Bierma, as *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1990).
- Klinghardt, M. (2015). *Das älteste Evangelium und die Entstehung der kanonischen Evangelien*. 2 vols (Tübingen: Francke).
- Knox, J. (1942). *Marcion and the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Koester, H. (1957). *Synoptische Überlieferung bei den Apostolischen Vätern* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag).
- Lampe, P. (2003). *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, ed. M. D. Johnson, trans. M. Steinbauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).
- Le Boulluec, A. (1997). 'The Bible in Use among the Marginally Orthodox in the Second and Third Centuries', in P. M. Blowers (ed. and trans.), *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 197–216.
- Lieu, J. M. (2015). *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Mansfeld, J. (1994). *Prolegomena: Questions to Be Settled before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden: Brill).
- Markschies, C. (2003). *Gnosis: An Introduction*, trans. J. Bowden (London: T&T Clark).
- Markschies, C. (2009). *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen: Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der antiken christlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck); trans. W. Coppins, as *Christian Theology and its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire: Prolegomena to a History of Early Christian Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015).
- May, G. (1987). 'Marcion in Contemporary Views: Results and Open Questions', *SCe* 6: 129–51.
- May, G. (1989). 'Der Streit zwischen Petrus und Paulus in Antiochien bei Markion', in W. Homolka and O. Ziegelmeier (eds), *Von Wittenberg nach Memphis: Festschrift für R. Schwartz* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 204–11.
- May, G. (1997). 'Markions Genesisauslesung und die "Antithesen"', in B. Aland et al. (eds), *Die Weltlichkeit des Glaubens in der Alten Kirche: Festschrift für Ulrich Wickert zum siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Berlin: DeGruyter), 189–98.
- Metzger, B. M. (1987). *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Moll, S. (2010). *The Arch-Heretic Marcion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).

- Mühlenberg, E. (1979). 'Marcion's Jealous God', in D. Winslow (ed.), *Disciplina Nostra: Essays in Memory of Robert F. Evans* (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation), 93–113.
- Niehoff, M. R. (2011). *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Pagels, E. (2002). 'Irenaeus, the "Canon of Truth", and the *Gospel of John*: "Making a Difference" through Hermeneutics and Ritual', *VC* 56: 339–71.
- Roth, D. T. (2015). *The Text of Marcion's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill).
- Schäfers, J. (1917). *Eine altsyrische antimarkionitische Erklärung von Parabeln des Herrn und zwei andere altsyrische Abhandlungen zu Texten des Evangeliums: Mit Beiträgen zu Tatians Diatessaron und Markions Neuem Testament* (Münster: Aschendorffschen Buchhandlung).
- Scherbenske, E. W. (2010). 'Marcion's *Antitheses* and the Isagogic Genre', *VC* 64: 255–79.
- Scherbenske, E. W. (2013). *Canonizing Paul: Ancient Editorial Practice and the Corpus Paulinum* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Schmid, U. (1995). *Marcion und sein Apostolos: Rekonstruktion und historische Einordnung der marcionitischen Paulusbriefausgabe* (Berlin: DeGruyter).
- Vinzent, M. (2014). *Marcion and the Dating of the Synoptic Gospels* (Leuven: Peeters).
- Watson, F. (2013). *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Williams, M. A. (2001). *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

## Suggested Reading

For a thorough study of the heresiological polemics at work in the second and third centuries, see Le Boulluc (1985). On the development of textual culture in Late Antiquity and its philological foundations, Irvine (1994) is a fundamental text. For varied perspectives on the significance of this textual culture in early Christian reading, see Dawson (1992; 2002), Gamble (1995), Young (1997), and Clark (1999). The focus of this chapter has been on Marcion's own philology and its first rebuttals. Thus, I have remained close to the texts of either Marcion's earliest critics or those who worked from Marcion's text first-hand. The unfortunate result is a minimization of the intriguing eastern tradition of Marcionite polemics. For an introduction to the Syrian response to Marcion, see Lieu (2015:143–80). Other pieces of significant secondary literature are Drijvers (1987) and Bundy (1988).

- Bundy, D. (1988). 'Marcion and the Marcionites in Early Syriac Apologetics', *Mus* 101: 21–32.
- Clark, E. A. (1999). *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Dawson, D. (1992). *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Dawson, D. (2002). *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Drijvers, H. J. W. (1987). 'Marcionism in Syria: Principles, Problems, Polemics', *SCe* 6: 153–72.
- Gamble, H. Y. (1995). *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Irvine, M. (1994). *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Le Boulluc, A. (1985). *La Notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque, IIe–IIIe siècles*. 2 vols (Paris: Études augustiniennes).

- Markschies, C. (2002). 'Die valentinianische Gnosis und Marcion—einige neue Perspektiven,' in G. May and K. Greschat (eds), *Marcion und seine kirchengeschichtliche Wirkung = Marcion and his Impact on Church History: Vorträge der Internationalen Fachkonferenz zu Marcion, gehalten vom 15.–18. August 2001 in Mainz* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 159–76.
- Vinzent, M. (2011). *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate).
- Young, F. M. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

## CHAPTER 25

---

# GNOSTICS AND THEIR CRITICS

---

DAVID BRAKKE

‘It is not as you have heard that Moses wrote.’ Thus in the *Secret Book according to John*, the divine Saviour prefaces his explanation, addressed to the curious disciple John, of what the ‘deep sleep’ or ‘trance’ (ἐκστασις in the Septuagint) in Genesis 2.21 means. What was the nature of the *ekstasis* that the creator placed on Adam when he made Eve? The Saviour clarifies that the creator did not literally put Adam to sleep; rather, he caused Adam’s ‘perception’ (αἴσθησις) to become inactive. In support of this interpretation, the Saviour cites Isaiah 6.10: ‘For also he (the creator) said through the prophet, “I shall make their hearts heavy, that they might not understand, and might not be able to see”’ (*Ap. John* II 22.20–8; trans. Layton 1987:46). While Isaiah attributes to the blinded people themselves their failure to see (‘For this people’s heart has grown fat . . . and they have shut their eyes so that they might not see with their eyes’), the Saviour has the creator take responsibility (‘I shall make their hearts heavy’). Perhaps this modification of Isaiah 6.10 reflects knowledge of Mark 4.11–12, which evinces a similar understanding of the prophetic text (that perceptual blindness has been imposed on people). The Gnostic author recognizes that his interpretation of Genesis 2.21 is not the most widespread in his reader’s context: he has the Saviour say, ‘It is not as you have heard that Moses wrote.’ Nonetheless, he defends it by citing another biblical text that shows the creator god proclaiming his power to make the human heart heavy and unperceptive: this must be what Genesis 2.21 means by *ekstasis*.

This kind of thoughtful interpretation of the Bible, one that makes use of other biblical passages (even the NT) to understand the one in question, is most likely not what most modern people imagine when they consider ‘Gnostic biblical interpretation’. Rather, statements like ‘It is not as you heard that Moses wrote’ and ‘Do not suppose that it means “over the water” as Moses said’ (*Ap. John* II 13.19–21, referring to Gen 1.2) seem to confirm that Gnosticism was characterized by a rejection of the Jewish Bible or by a systematic ‘reversal’ of its meaning—or that Gnostics rejected tradition completely (Cahana 2014) or considered themselves ‘above “culture”’ (Young 1997:62). Rather than

studying the Bible with rational methods that might elucidate its meanings, the Gnostics (usually including the Valentinians) engaged in ‘protest exegesis’ (Pearson 1990:37–40) in which they accepted and rejected portions of Scripture ‘in an arbitrary way’ (Klijn 1981:224–5). Such modern perspectives on Gnostic and Valentinian exegesis echo the complaints of their ancient critics. Even if the Valentinians do come up with a coherent view of the Bible’s overall meaning, Irenaeus of Lyons argued, it is a false one: rearranging biblical passages as if they were tiles in a mosaic, they create the picture of a dog or fox from what was the picture of a king (*haer.* 1.8.1).

In his landmark study of the modern conception of ‘Gnosticism’, Michael Williams (1996:54–79) refuted this stereotypical understanding of Gnostic biblical interpretation in two ways. First, he made plain the diversity of the ways in which so-called Gnostic sources interpreted key passages and figures in Genesis, including the eating from the tree of knowledge (Gen 3.6–7), the serpent in the garden (Gen 3.1), and Noah and the flood (Gen 6.5–9.29). He found that alleged Gnostic authors assigned different values and meanings to these passages, rather than consistently evincing an attitude of rejection or strategy of reversal. For example, not all of them considered eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil to be a good thing. In this way, Williams contributed to his persuasive dismantling of the monolithic category ‘Gnosticism’, an intervention with which scholars in the field are still grappling (or which they are trying to forget). Second, Williams argued that many of the so-called reversals of meaning that the Gnostics imposed upon passages in Genesis actually presented reasonable solutions to exegetical questions that perplexed other ancient Jewish and Christian biblical interpreters. Why does God appear to be ignorant of where Adam is (Gen 3.9)? How can a perfect God experience regret and decide to wipe out everything he has made (Gen 6.5–7)? When the Gnostics offered answers to such questions, Williams argued, they did not practise ‘protest exegesis’, but ‘hermeneutical problem-solving’ (1996:54).

In the wake of Williams’s analysis, historians of early biblical interpretation face two questions. Can we think of ‘Gnosticism’ in a way that does justice to the diversity of the sources that have been traditionally so categorized? And can we move beyond Williams’s notion of ‘hermeneutical problem-solving’ in characterizing Gnostic biblical exegesis without falling into the trap of clichés like ‘rejection’ of the Bible or ‘reversal’ of its meaning? One’s answer to the first question lays the basis for answering the second. This chapter follows the approach to ‘Gnosticism’ first articulated in Layton (1995) and defended in Brakke (2010). It identifies one particular ancient Christian group, active especially in the second and third centuries, as ‘the Gnostics’ or ‘the Gnostic school of thought’ (Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.29–31) and associates with that group a set of literary works that corresponds roughly to so-called ‘Sethian’ literature. The most important such works for the history of biblical interpretation are the *Secret Book according to John*, *Gospel of Judas*, *Revelation of Adam*, and *Reality of the Rulers*. Next the Christian teacher Valentinus (c.100–175), as Irenaeus suggested, ‘adapted the fundamental principles of the so-called Gnostic school of thought’ (*haer.* 1.11.1) to his own understanding of Christianity, which drew from the Bible and works of philosophy as well. He inspired a school of Christian theologians (‘Valentinians’), who called themselves not ‘Gnostics’

but instead, drawing from 1 Corinthians 2.13–15, ‘spiritual ones’. They included such exegetes as Ptolemy, Heracleon, and Theodotus and the authors of such works as *The Tripartite Tractate* and *Treatise on Resurrection*. This reconstruction of Christianity’s social and intellectual history in the second century eschews a larger category called ‘Gnosticism’ and leaves a number of teachers (e.g. Marcion and Basilides) and works (e.g. *Gospel according to Thomas* and *On the Origin of the World*) outside any such category and thus free to be studied on their own terms.

Although this hypothesis (especially the exclusive application of the term ‘Gnostic’ to the school that Irenaeus identifies as such) remains the subject of scholarly controversy, it does reveal some fundamental differences in how these Christians interpreted Scripture, whether the LXX or the NT or both. The Gnostics (strictly speaking) primarily engaged in what we can loosely call ‘rewritten Bible’: they retold and augmented the stories of Genesis and in at least one case of the Gospels, sometimes seeming to replace the biblical book as much as to explicate it. Valentinus, however, practised a highly allusive form of biblical interpretation, in which the Bible and other literature enabled him to express a vision that was highly personal and that he presented as divinely inspired. The students of Valentinus participated fully in the emerging ‘academic’ culture of Christian biblical interpretation that arose in the second and third centuries, producing commentaries, homilies, and even a treatise on the basic problems of the Jewish Bible and its authorship. For all of these Christians, interpreting the Bible was a thoroughly theological endeavour, guided by fundamental beliefs about God, salvation, and the Church, beliefs that they also drew from the Bible in their own version of the hermeneutical circle. In this respect they hardly differed from other Christians, even those who most vigorously attacked their beliefs and exegeses. It was the results of their methods as much as the methods themselves that the critics of the Gnostics and Valentinians attacked in their responses.

## THE GNOSTIC SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

---

The dominant exegetical mode in Gnostic literature is ‘rewritten Scripture’: Gnostic authors interpreted the Bible by ‘retelling’ its stories (Pearson 1988:647–52; Luttikhuisen 2005; Creech 2015:59–63, 105–7). Most Gnostic works are pseudepigraphic works of mythology that purport to be apocalypses, revelations from a divine Saviour or an authoritative human being such as Adam or Nōrea (Burns 2014:359–64). Whatever or whoever a revelation’s source may be, it is that revelation that serves as the foundation or centre for Gnostic theology and thus for the use and interpretation of authoritative materials, whether philosophical works like Plato’s *Timaeus* or works of Scripture like Genesis. As King writes about the *Secret Book according to John*, ‘Christ’s revelation [to John] is what establishes, corrects, and supplements Scripture’ (2006:180). Most often Gnostic revealers interpret, correct, and supplement Scripture by narrating its stories, sometimes making explicit the gap between the original narrative and the newly revealed

one (as in the *Secret Book*) and sometimes effacing that gap through close mimicry of biblical style and diction (as in *The Reality of the Rulers*). Scholars of early Jewish literature debate whether ‘rewritten Bible’ should be considered a genre and, if so, how to define it (Bernstein 2005). For the study of Gnostic literature, it functions best if we think of it not as a genre, but as a mode of biblical interpretation that occurs within the genre of apocalypse and its relatives (e.g. the revelation dialogue).

The earliest datable Gnostic works are the *Secret Book according to John* and the *Gospel of Judas*, for Irenaeus knew both of these works (or versions of them) in the 170s; he summarized part of the *Secret Book*’s myth as the teaching of the Gnostics (*haer.* 1.29) and attributed to them the ‘fabrication’ of *Judas* (*haer.* 1.31). While the *Secret Book* presents itself as a revelation dialogue between the Saviour (Christ) and the disciple John, *Judas* features a series of such dialogues between Jesus and his disciples or between Jesus and Judas alone. These revelations provide information about God, the origin of the cosmos, the structure and population of the heavens, the origin and early history of humanity, and the eventual salvation of humanity and end of the present world order. In each case, the divine revealer departs at the conclusion of the dialogue—confusingly so in the *Gospel of Judas* because in the next scene Jesus is praying in a ‘guest room’ while Judas is betraying him. The author of *Judas* has placed the generic structure of the revelation dialogue (appearance, revelatory dialogue, departure) within a narrative drawn from existing Scripture.

Both the *Secret Book* and *Judas* insert themselves into known Gospel narratives, specifically the Gospel of John. The *Secret Book* opens after the crucifixion and depicts an encounter between John and a Pharisee named Arimanius; the Pharisee’s accusations against Jesus leave John asking many questions, which prompt the Saviour’s appearance and revelation. The questions that John asks—why Jesus was sent into the world, who his Father is, what is the realm to which he has gone and to which his followers will go—echo themes of the Fourth Gospel (King 2006:235–8; Dubois 2012). It concludes with John reporting the revelation to his fellow disciples. Some scholars interpret the resonances between the *Secret Book* and the canonical Gospel as parallel developments of shared traditions (e.g. Turner 2010), but the *Secret Book*’s use of the Gospel (or some version of it) seems equally if not more likely. The *Gospel of Judas* places its revelation dialogues in the days before Judas hands Jesus over to his opponents, concluding with Jesus in the ‘guest room’ sharing the last supper with his disciples while Judas is on the street outside betraying him. It depicts what happens ‘off-stage’, so to speak, in the Gospel narratives and may reflect particularly the Fourth Gospel’s version, in which Judas leaves the dinner (John 13.30; Emmel 2008). Both works, then, in their imagined settings and contexts, supplement or insinuate themselves into existing Christian scriptures, specifically the Gospel of John. The Fourth Gospel is authoritative for these Gnostic authors, but not beyond elaboration.

In the *Secret Book*, Christ’s revelation in part retells the first six chapters of Genesis, especially the first three, on two levels—as a key to the unfolding of the divine entirety in the spiritual realm and as a primary source for the creation of this universe and humanity as well as the first generations of human history. The revelation weaves together not only

Genesis, but also Plato's *Timaeus*, Jewish wisdom literature, and (in the long version) at least one other Gnostic work, the *Book of Zoroaster*. The Saviour revises, corrects, and clarifies all these predecessor texts and thereby reveals their true meaning. What Moses wrote is not so much wrong as it is incomplete or lacking in full understanding, for Moses mistakenly identified the god who created this world as the ultimate God, when in fact he is the demonic and hostile lower divinity, Ialdabaōth, not the Invisible Virgin Spirit, the source of all that exists. This error led Moses, for example, to conflate at times the spiritual entirety of the Invisible Spirit and its aeons with this lower realm of Ialdabaōth and his rulers. Wisdom, then, did not move 'over the waters,' as Moses wrote; rather, she moved back and forth in repentance within the entirety (*Ap. John* II 13.18–26). The 'Moses' whose interpretations the author rejects stands for the generally accepted ('literal') readings that the Saviour's revelation revises (Dunderberg 2011:392). As we have seen, the author can use other works in the Bible such as Isaiah to clarify Genesis, for such books also grant access to the voice of Ialdabaōth or his rulers, as in fact Irenaeus reported the Gnostics claimed (*haer.* 1.30.10–11). The proposed answers to such perennially fascinating questions as the double creation of humanity in Genesis 1–2 resemble those offered by other contemporary Platonizing Jews and Christians, especially Philo (Pearson 1990). The revelation that the Saviour offers shows how Genesis can provide the answers to the questions about Christ, God, and the destiny of humanity that John (and presumably his readers) asks. Moreover, it completes what Christ revealed in the Gospel of John as 'the fulfilment of his promise to return and show them [the disciples] the way back to the Father [John 14.3, 18, etc.]' (King 2006:238).

The *Revelation of Adam* and the *Reality of the Rulers* follow the *Secret Book* in providing new narrations of Genesis. The former presents itself as a kind of double revelation: Adam himself tells the story of his and Eve's creation and 'fall' as a final testament to his son, but then Adam narrates the (future) story of Noah and his sons as it was revealed to him by a divine revealer, whose three forms recall the appearance of the Saviour in the *Secret Book* (*Apoc. Adam* 65.25–32). Although this work takes up the traditional problems of humanity's creation and the events in the Garden, it focuses much more on Noah, the flood, and lines of descent from Noah's sons. The author exploits Genesis's penchant for genealogies to map religious identities and to place the Gnostics within a coherent, biblically based salvation history, which culminates in the incarnation of a divine saviour in a human being whose flesh the cosmic powers will 'chastise' (*Apoc. Adam* 77.16–18; Brakke 2002:52–4). That history includes one of the Gnostics' most famous 'reversals' of the biblical text: God's fiery attack on Sodom and Gomorrah becomes an instance of the evil world ruler's efforts to destroy 'Those People,' the mythical prototypes of the Gnostics (74.25–75:8). This interpretation may revalue the biblical event, but it serves a larger narrative whose structure of creation and fall, genealogical descent, incarnation and salvation, and final eschatological judgement lies not so far from Irenaeus' 'plot line' (*hypothesis*) of Scripture.

The *Reality of the Rulers*, in contrast, embeds a revelation of the luminary Ēlēlēth to Seth's (Gnostically created) sister Nōrea within a learned treatise, in which an anonymous Gnostic teacher explains to a student the origin and nature of the cosmic powers against

which Paul warns in Ephesians 6.12. Here the angelic revelation sticks mostly to the generation of the world rulers before and apart from Genesis. It is the human teacher who retells Genesis, and he does so in a style and diction that so closely resemble the LXX (so far as the Coptic translation allows us to see it) that the gap between the base text and its interpretation is effaced. Consider, for example, the following passage:

And Adam [knew] his female counterpart Eve, and she became pregnant and bore [Seth] to Adam. And she said, 'I have borne [another] man through god, in place [of Abel]':

Again Eve became pregnant, and she bore [Nōrea]. And she said, 'He has begotten on [me a] virgin as an assistance [for] many generations of human kind'. She is the virgin whom the powers did not defile. (*hyp. Arch.* 91.30–92.3)

The first two sentences virtually reproduce Genesis 4.25 (LXX). The subsequent sentences add an entirely new character to the biblical story, Nōrea, but because they maintain the same style and diction, their supplementary character is masked. Unlike the *Secret Book according to John* or the *Revelation of Adam*, this work does not claim authority for its 'new Genesis' based on revelation (Christ or Adam), but its mimicry of the Bible still suggests that the author seeks not merely to interpret Genesis, but also to replace it.

Retelling of Genesis comprises a relatively small portion of the *Gospel of Judas*, and yet here too a revelation from Christ is its source. Several scholars have demonstrated *Judas's* dependence on the canonical Gospels (e.g. Nagel 2007; Gathercole 2012). Its relationship to these earlier narratives about Jesus, however, is less like that of Matthew to Mark and more like that of John to the synoptic Gospels. That is, it does not repeat these Gospels' basic narratives and supplement and subtly correct them, as Matthew and Luke do with Mark; rather, it assumes the reader's knowledge of them and presents a clear alternative to them, as John seems to do with the synoptics (Petersen 2012). For example, early in the Gospel, Jesus asks the disciples, 'How do [you] know me?' and challenges them to 'represent the perfect human being and stand before my face'. The other disciples misidentify Jesus ('the son of our god'), while Judas alone makes an accurate confession of Jesus' true identity: 'I know who you are and where you have come from. You have come from the immortal aeon of the Barbēlō'. Jesus grants Judas a privileged status relative to the other disciples ('Separate from them, and I will tell you the mysteries of the kingdom...') but then immediately condemns him ('...not so that you will go there, but so that you will be much grieved') (*Gos. Judas* 34.11–35.27). The scene's force depends on the reader's knowledge of Peter's confession of Christ at Caesarea Philippi in the synoptic tradition, especially the Matthean version with its elevation of and subsequent rebuke of Peter (Matt 16.13–23 par.). Judas replaces Peter as the leading disciple, but only for the reader who knows the original story. Just as the Fourth Gospel can allude to and reject synoptic traditions (John 12.27–8), so too the *Gospel of Judas* depends on the canonical Gospels for its meaning and yet constructs a 'counter-narrative' to serve its sharp critique of other Christians groups (Petersen 2012:266–7).

Despite this polemical stance, the *Gospel of Judas*, like the other Gnostic works that engage extensively with the emerging Christian Bible, shares in the apocalyptic and eschatological orientation that characterizes much of the earliest Christian literature. The true meanings of earlier authoritative works became clear thanks to a new revelation from God, which looked forward to a dramatic destruction and reorganization of this universe in the future. While the canonical Jesus promised his twelve disciples that they would 'sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matt 19.28; cf. Luke 22.30), the Gnostic Jesus promised Judas that, although he would not enter the spiritual realm, he would rule over a reorganized cosmos as 'the thirteenth', higher than the twelve (*Gos. Judas* 46.19–23; cf. 55.7–13). The Gnostics may have revised biblical stories in startling ways, but they too recognized in the Bible a plot line that would culminate in a new world order and that God or his representatives had revealed to them.

## VALENTINUS, THE VALENTINIAN SCHOOL, AND THEIR CRITICS

---

Valentinus interiorized the Jewish and Christian eschatological drama and so announced, in David Dawson's apt phrase, an 'apocalypse of the mind': 'an atemporal revelation that occurs in the mind rather than in history' (Dawson 1992:145). Valentinus' vision of a divine voice that speaks in the heart collapsed the distinction between text and reader and thus between base text and interpretation. When he moved revelation from external divine revealer (cf. the Gnostics) to texts that come from the heart, however, he paved the way for the practices of close reading, including the commentary, that his followers pioneered among Christian intellectuals of the later second century.

According to Valentinus, the same divine voice speaks through non-Christian literature, Christian Scriptures, and the individual human being: 'For this shared matter is the utterances that come from the heart, the law that is written in the heart' (Fragment G in Layton 1987:243). Valentinus, then, looked for revelation in the same scriptural texts that other Christians used, especially the NT: his fragments cite or allude to Genesis, Matthew, John, Romans, and other biblical books (Markschies 1992:195); the *Gospel of Truth*, if we attribute it to him, interprets numerous passages especially from the Fourth Gospel, Revelation, and the Pauline letters (Williams 1988). But Valentinus did not stop there: he revised and so interpreted portions of Gnostic myth as well (Dawson 1992:133–51). His interpretations seldom preserved the distinction between the original work and his own commentary; rather, Valentinus engaged in a highly creative process of allegorical composition, in which his own voice appropriated those of earlier works (Dawson 1992:145–70). For example, in one dense passage the *Gospel of Truth* collapses together the biblical accounts of the Garden of Eden and of the crucifixion, evokes the Eucharist, and concludes with a proclamation of the mutual indwelling of God and the human being (*Gos. Truth* 18.11–34). Another alludes to 'the record that

stood against us' and which Christ 'nailed to the cross' in Colossians 2.14 and, by drawing upon passages from Matthew, Hebrews, Revelation, and other books, transforms it into a metaphor for the knowledge of the Father that Jesus' death made possible (*Gos. Truth* 20.10–21.8). The result is a spirituality that is thoroughly biblical and yet utterly personal.

This interweaving of biblical texts and personal vision constructed a specific understanding of Scripture, canon, and revelation at a time when Christians like Marcion were raising these issues. Valentinus articulated 'a performative view of textuality', in which 'canon is not a content or collection of texts so much as a texture of relationships undergirded by the desire in language signified by both its disseminative and its polyvalent dynamics' (Miller 1989:278–9). Like the Gnostics, Valentinus read the LXX and the emerging NT in light of new revelation, but not in the apocalyptic mode of the Gnostics. Instead, Valentinus conceived of all believers as 'texts of truth, which speak and know only themselves' (*Gos. Truth* 23.8–11), for at creation the Son deposited within human beings 'a seed of higher essence', which enabled them to 'speak freely' (Fragment G in Layton 1987:235). Enlightened by the apocalypse of the mind, not a revelation from outside the self, the inspired Christian could engage in the textual interweaving that speaks the truth with freedom.

As the second century progressed, however, Christians increasingly located revelation within the words of the Bible itself, both the Jewish Bible that they inherited and the new Scriptures that made up the emerging NT. The teachers and authors who were indebted to Valentinus' theology—the 'Valentinians'—participated fully in this development and were pioneers in developing methods and genres of commenting on the biblical works. Unlike the Gnostics, they did not write pseudepigraphic apocalypses, but treatises, philosophical epistles, and commentaries, either anonymously or under their own names (Burns 2014:365). In their letters, teachers answer their students' questions about doctrine (Rheginus in *Treatise on Resurrection*) or present their basic ideas to potential students (Flora in Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*). Origen describes Heracleon as having written 'comments' (ὑπομνήματα) on the Fourth Gospel (Fragment 4 = Origen, *Jo.* 6.8). These genres reflect the study groups that arose among Christian communities during the second century and gathered around teachers like Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, as well as Ptolemy and Heracleon (Brakke 1994:400–3). Unlike their predecessor Valentinus, these writers did not weave together biblical passages into their own revelatory visions; rather, they used the techniques of literary criticism to expose the meanings of sacred works (Ayres 2015:168–9).

Ptolemy provided one of the earliest programmatic statements on interpretation of the LXX—or at least of the Law it contains—from any Christian in his letter to the non-Valentinian Christian Flora. Staking out a position midway between that of the (unnamed) Gnostics, whom he characterizes as believing that 'the Law' comes from the devil, and that of (unnamed) 'proto-orthodox' Christians, who claim that it comes from the perfect God (*ep.* 33.3.4–8), Ptolemy argues that the Jewish Law comes from a god who is intermediate and merely just, but who, in contrast to the view of Marcion, is an 'image' of the ultimate God (33.7.3–7). There can be little doubt that the views of Marcion

haunt Ptolemy's exposition, not because Marcion claimed that the Law comes from Satan (he did not) (cf. Rasimus 2010:147–8), but because Marcion's position was so close to that of Ptolemy (Dunderberg 2008:87–90). Turning to the content of the Bible, Ptolemy argues that some portions of the Law come from Moses and 'the elders' rather than from God (33.4.1–14) and that even the portion that comes from God can be divided into three kinds: (1) legislation that is pure but required fulfilment by the Saviour (e.g. the Decalogue); (2) laws that include injustice and which the Saviour abolished (e.g. laws of retribution); and (3) laws that are symbolic and should be interpreted allegorically (e.g. the Temple cult) (33.5–6). Ptolemy's approach to specific interpretative cruxes, especially his allegorical interpretation of ritual laws, differs little from that of other second-century Christian authors and texts, like the *Epistle of Barnabas*. For Ptolemy the hermeneutical key to interpreting the Jewish Bible comes from Christ (Löhr 2013:596–7)—not, however, in a revelatory appearance as in the Gnostic *Secret Book according to John* nor as an inner voice as in Valentinus, but in his words as they are recorded in the Gospels (33.3.8). Paul too can shed light on this issue (33.6.6). Scripture interprets Scripture.

When Ptolemy explains to Flora that the God of the OT created this world and so cannot be the devil (as the Gnostics argued), he cites John 1.3 ('all things came into being through him') (33.3.6). When Irenaeus provides a lengthy quotation of Ptolemy's exegesis of the opening verses of the Fourth Gospel, however, Ptolemy says that this verse refers to the Word's being 'the cause of the forming and origination of all the aeons [in the fullness] that came after it' (*haer.* 1.8.5). We cannot be certain of the genre of the work from which Irenaeus takes his excerpt, but it shows Ptolemy engaged in the close reading of biblical works (including the NT) that characterized the exegesis not only of Valentinians and not only of other Christians but of a variety of literary critics of the first centuries CE. As he reads John 1.1–14, Ptolemy pays attention to the order of words and statements, identifies homonyms and words that are used as synonyms, and cites Ephesians as an authoritative intertext—all of this to discern how John enigmatically 'spoke of the origination of the entirety', that is, the divine fullness of aeons that the Valentinians identified as the godhead. Ptolemy resembled other ancient interpreters in construing an authoritative text as symbolic and employing sophisticated reading techniques to explain it (Ayres 2015:157–64). That Ptolemy and other Valentinian exegetes could interpret John 1.3 in multiple ways indicates not that Valentinian exegesis was particularly arbitrary, but that they could see the same passage as referring to different levels of reality or moments in the history of salvation (Pagels 1973:23–35) or that they could disagree among themselves (Dunderberg 2008:194–5) or both. Christ as encountered in the Scriptures remained the norm, however, at least for Ptolemy: he identifies the author of the words that he studies so precisely as 'John the disciple of the Lord' (*haer.* 1.8.5).

Irenaeus criticized the exegesis of Ptolemy and other Valentinians as distorting the basic message of Scripture, which is generally clear and summarized in the rule of faith. He frequently argued that the meaning of the Bible is 'clear' and 'without ambiguity', certainly not containing the enigmatic references to divine aeons and other mythological themes that Valentinians found (Ayres 2015:171–8). Some passages, he admitted,

are written ‘in parables,’ but the Christian exegete must ‘work out’ their meaning in ‘conformity with the general scheme (*ὑπόθεσις*) of truth’ (*haer.* 1.10.3; Van Unnik 1977). Christians of the second and third centuries (and throughout their history) claimed that the Scriptures are clear or obscure in their efforts to promote some reading practices and textual communities as more valid than others (Brakke 1999). This does not mean, however, that an exponent of the text’s clarity did not use sophisticated literary techniques, including allegorical interpretation, to elucidate it: Irenaeus simply appropriated learned methods of commentary to his own perspective and stood in a wider Christian tradition of anti-allegorical rhetoric in the ancient world (Ayres 2015:178–80). He insisted, however, that readings of individual passages must conform to the overall plot line of the Bible, summarized in the rule of faith. Otherwise, in his famous metaphor, one is rearranging the tiles in a mosaic portrait of a king into a portrait of a fox (*haer.* 1.8.1).

Irenaeus had to concern himself not only with the allegorically inclined Valentinians, but also with the Gnostics and Marcion. The Valentinians considered the God of the OT to be a lower craftsman, who (at least in Ptolemy’s view) gave up his ignorant and arrogant ways with the incarnation of the Saviour and took responsibility for the care of this universe (*haer.* 1.7.4). Ptolemy’s approach to the Law was as careful and differentiated as that of any second-century Christian author. In contrast, the Gnostics considered the creator god to be the ignorant and malicious Ialdabaōth, and they rewrote the Scriptures of the uncomprehending Moses; Marcion rejected the utility of the Jewish Scriptures altogether. Irenaeus, then, promoted an embryonic biblical canon, consisting of two parts, an OT and an NT, with four Gospels. The Bible, he said, contains two covenants. The first may be ‘old’ and more suited for ‘slaves’ and the ‘undisciplined,’ and the second may be ‘new’ and meant for ‘children’ and ‘free’ people—but they came from the same God, who adjusted his revelation to the progression of humanity (*haer.* 4.9). The rule of faith provided the overall narrative of the one God’s dealing with humanity and thus the basis for the full inclusion of the OT as Scripture (Young 1997:18–21). As far as we know, Irenaeus did not write a work devoted entirely to biblical commentary, but he provided a compelling framework for interpretation that could compete with the sophisticated exegesis that Valentinian scholars were producing.

It is traditional to identify the Valentinian Heracleon as the earliest known author of a Christian commentary on a biblical book, the Gospel of John. Possibly Basilides preceded him in producing such a work, for Clement of Alexandria identifies him as an ‘interpreter’ of Peter and the author of a book called *Commentaries* (*ἐξήγητικὰ*) (*str.* 1.108.1; 4.81.1; Löhr 2013:585). Moreover, the term that Origen uses for Heracleon’s work—‘comments’ (*hupomnēmata*)—may indicate notes for instruction, designed for use within a school setting rather than for formal publication (Wucherpennig 2002:32–4). In any case, even in its fragmentary state of preservation only as 48 fragments quoted by Origen, Heracleon’s set of ‘comments’ represents an important example of second-century biblical interpretation by a Christian of any stripe. Kaler and Bussières (2006) have expressed doubts about Heracleon’s Valentinian affiliation, but both Dunderberg (2008:5) and Thomassen (2010:173–4) provide persuasive responses to their arguments. Heracleon did not limit his exegetical work to the Fourth Gospel, for Clement also quotes from what might be a commentary on Luke or on passages in the synoptic

Gospels (Löhr 2003). Like Ptolemy, Heracleon considered the Saviour's words (and acts) as the primary source of religious truth, especially as they are recorded in the Gospels: he 'regarded the text itself of the gospel as a repository of spiritual truth' (Thomassen 2010:197–8). Accordingly, exposition of Christian Scriptures provided the medium through which Heracleon presented his Christian teachings on God, the cosmos, and human salvation.

Heracleon's work on John deployed the reading techniques of contemporary literary critics in the service of theological questions drawn from the biblical text and current among Christian intellectuals. Wucherpennig (2002) has convincingly demonstrated that Heracleon explicated the Gospel through the reading strategies that characterized the work of professional philologists: glossing words, clarifying topographical and chronological problems, and adducing learned knowledge about animals and matters of physics and metaphysics. The themes that he investigated—the status and role of the Word (*logos*), the nature and mission of Christ, and the diverse ways that human beings respond to the gospel—are those of the Fourth Gospel itself but were also matters of discussion among Christian thinkers of the second century. For example, for Heracleon the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4.1–42), the official whose son Jesus heals (4.46–54), and the sceptical Jews of John 8 exemplify the Valentinian categories of 'spiritual', 'animate' ('psychic'), and 'material' people. While Origen argued that Heracleon saw these categories as fixed and thus human responses to the Saviour as predetermined by nature, Heracleon in fact seems to have held a more flexible view. Referring to the 'material' Jews whose father Jesus identifies as the devil, Heracleon writes: 'It is because they loved and performed the devil's desires that they became the devil's children, although they were not such by nature' (Fragment 46 = *Jo.* 20.20; Bastit 2009:165–70; Thomassen 2010:185–93). Origen's and Heracleon's views on this point and their roots in ambiguous passages of the Fourth Gospel continue to engage scholarly interest (Trumbower 1989; Attridge 2005; Thomassen 2010).

Origen criticized Heracleon's exegesis not so much on its methods as on its results: when Heracleon's readings are heretical, they are wrong, and they are wrong because they are heretical (Martens 2012:114–18). Diversity in biblical interpretation may have troubled Irenaeus deeply, but it was no surprise to Origen: the varied ways in which Jews understood the Bible had led to the emergence of Jewish sects, and so too Christian scholars understood their sacred Scriptures differently, generating multiple Christian groups. Such disagreements characterized the search for truth in any context, whether medicine or philosophy (*Cels.* 3.12). But disagreement became heresy when readers transgressed the Church's rule of faith, particularly in the matters of the God of the OT and the free will of every human being to choose the good and pursue virtue. Denigrating the God of the OT, discerning pleromic aeons, attributing to people fixed natures—these are wrong interpretations, without regard to the methods by which one arrived at them. Otherwise, Origen could be open to Heracleon's suggestions. Going through the Valentinian's comments on John 4, Origen can say that Heracleon is 'not mistaken' on one point, that another reading is 'unpersuasive', and that at another point he makes 'an unsubstantiated inference'. Other readings of Heracleon might be 'sound' depending on what Heracleon precisely means, which it seems Origen does not always

know for certain (*Jo.* 13:57–74; trans. Trigg 1998:158–60). What separated Heracleon and Origen was not method, but results, and in Origen's view that difference reflected the poor spiritual formation of the Gnostic exegete, who was prone to turn away from the Church's doctrine as found in the rule and to be seduced by non-Christian teachings (Martens 2012:119–31).

## CONCLUSION

---

The story that this chapter has told about Gnostic biblical interpretation may sound very familiar, even if the main characters are not the usual representatives of 'mainstream' Christianity. Our earliest readers, the Gnostics, approached the Bible in light of new revelations; indebted to apocalyptic eschatology, they retold and revised earlier Scriptures to correct their errors and show how they point to a future cosmic reorganization. The Valentinians, however, located revelation within the biblical texts themselves, OT and NT, and employed professional literary techniques to extract meaning from enigmatic authoritative literature and to instruct their students in matters of theology, cosmology, and virtue. The pivotal figure was Valentinus: he internalized and psychologized the apocalyptic eschatology of the Gnostic myth; by conceiving of sacred texts as utterances of a divine Word within the human heart, he laid the basis for his disciples to devote their intellectual energy to those texts. We seem to have travelled from charisma to the schoolroom.

Matters are not so simple, of course. While Heracleon was using his literary skills to ferret out the wisdom hidden in the Fourth Gospel, the adherents of New Prophecy were receiving new revelations from the Paraclete promised there. Valentinus may have had mystical experiences of the Word, but 100 years later Origen was having them too—now as he read the Bible and tried to investigate its secrets (*Cant.* 3.11). The second century was a kind of Christian laboratory, in which readers in varied social settings experimented with new ways of reading, proclaiming, and writing sacred literature—new scriptural practices that would persist and evolve through the following centuries (Markschies 2015:191–299; Brakke 2012). The Gnostics, Valentinians, and their critics contributed to this experimentation and thus to the eventual formation of a canon and the multiple roles it would play in Christian life.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Apocalypsis Adam*. Coptic text: D. M. Parrott (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2–5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,1 and 4* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 151–95. Eng. trans.: Layton 1987:52–64.
- [Anonymous], *The Gospel of Truth*. Coptic text: H. W. Attridge (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts, Translations, Indices* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 55–122. Eng. trans.: Layton 1987:250–64.

- [Anonymous], *The Reality of the Rulers (Hypostasis of the Archons)*. Coptic text: B. Layton (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex II,2–7 Together with XIII,2\**, *Brit. Lib. Or.4926(1), and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 220–59. Eng. trans.: Layton 1987:65–76.
- [Anonymous], *The Secret Book (Apocryphon) according to John*. Coptic text: M. Waldstein and F. Wisse (eds), *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). Eng. trans.: Layton 1987:23–51.
- [Anonymous], *The Gospel of Judas*. Coptic text: L. Jenott, *The ‘Gospel of Judas’: Coptic Text, Translation, and Historical Interpretation of the ‘Betrayal’s Gospel’* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).
- Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*. Greek text: O. Stählin (ed.), *Stromata Buch I–VI*, vol. 2 of *Clemens Alexandrinus*, GCS 15 (3rd edn; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1960).
- Heracleon, *Commentarius in Johannem*. Greek text: A. E. Brooke, *The Fragments of Heracleon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891).
- Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*. Greek and Latin text: A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau et al. (eds), *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les hérésies*, SC 100, 151, 152, 210, 211, 263, 264, 293, 294 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965–82).
- Layton, B. (1987). *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday).
- Origen, *Commentarii in Johannem*. Greek text: E. Preuschen (ed.), *Origenes Werke: Der Johanneskommentar*, GCS 4 (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1903). Eng. trans.: J. W. Trigg, *Origen* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- Ptolemy, *Epistula ad Floram*. Greek text: G. Quispel (ed.), *Ptolémée, Lettre à Flora: Analyse, texts critique, traduction, commentaire et index grec*, SC 24 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966).

## Scholarship

- Attridge, H. (2005). ‘Heracleon and John: Reassessment of an Early Christian Hermeneutical Debate’, in C. Helmer with T. G. Petrey (eds), *Biblical Interpretation: History, Context, and Reality* (Leiden: Brill), 57–72.
- Ayres, L. (2015). ‘Irenaeus vs. the Valentinians: Toward a Rethinking of Patristic Exegetical Origins’, *J ECS* 23: 153–87.
- Bastit, A. (2009). ‘Forme et méthode du Commentaire sur Jean d’Héracléon’, *Adamantius* 15: 150–76.
- Bernstein, M. J. (2005). ‘“Rewritten Bible”: A Generic Category Which Has Outlived its Usefulness?’ *Textus* 22: 169–96.
- Brakke, D. (1994). ‘Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria’s Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter’, *HTR* 87: 395–419.
- Brakke, D. (1999). ‘Parables and Plain Speech in the Fourth Gospel and the Apocryphon of James’, *J ECS* 7: 187–218.
- Brakke, D. (2002). ‘The Seed of Seth at the Flood: Biblical Interpretation and Gnostic Theological Reflection’, in C. A. Bobertz and D. Brakke (eds), *Reading in Christian Communities: Essays on Interpretation in the Early Church* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 41–62.
- Brakke, D. (2010). *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Brakke, D. (2012). ‘Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon’, in D. Brakke, A.-C. Jacobsen, and J. Ulrich (eds), *Invention,*

- Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang), 263–80.
- Burns, D. M. (2014). 'Apocalypses among Gnostics and Manichaeans,' in J. J. Collins (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press), 358–72.
- Cahana, J. (2014). 'None of Them Knew Me or my Brothers: Gnostic Antitraditionalism and Gnosticism as a Cultural Phenomenon,' *JR* 94: 49–73.
- Creech, D. (2015). *The Use of Scripture in the Apocryphon of John: A Diachronic Analysis of the Variant Versions* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Dawson, D. (1992). *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Dubois, J.-D. (2012). 'La Tradition johannique dans l'Apocryphe de Jean,' *Adamantius* 18: 108–17.
- Dunderberg, I. (2008). *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Dunderberg, I. (2011). 'Gnostic Interpretations of Genesis,' in M. Lieb, E. Mason, and J. Roberts (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 383–96.
- Emmel, S. (2008). 'The Presuppositions and the Purpose of the Gospel of Judas,' in M. Scopello (ed.), *The Gospel of Judas in Context: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the 'Gospel of Judas'* (Leiden: Brill), 33–9.
- Gathercole, S. (2012). 'Matthean or Lukan Priority? The Use of the NT Gospels in the Gospel of Judas,' in Popkes and Wurst 2012:291–302.
- Kaler, M., and Bussi eres, M.-P. (2006). 'Was Heracleon a Valentinian? A New Look at Old Sources,' *HTR* 99: 275–89.
- King, K. L. (2006). *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Klijn, A. F. J. (1981). 'An Analysis of the Use of the Story of the Flood in the Apocalypse of Adam,' in R. van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (eds), *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions: Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Leiden: Brill), 218–26.
- Layton, B. (1995). 'Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism,' in L. M. White and O. L. Yarbrough (eds), *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks* (Minneapolis: Fortress), 334–50.
- L ohr, W. (2003). 'Valentinian Variations on Lk 12,8–9/Mt 10,32,' *VC* 57: 437–55.
- L ohr, W. (2013). 'Gnostic and Manichaean Interpretation,' in J. C. Paget and J. Schaper (eds), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to 600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 584–604.
- Luttikhuisen, G. P. (2005). *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions* (Leiden: Brill).
- Markschies, C. (1992). *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Markschies, C. (2015). *Christian Theology and its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire: Prolegomena to a History of Early Christian Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck). Eng. trans. of *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen: Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der antiken christlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).
- Martens, P. W. (2012). *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

- Miller, P. C. (1989). ‘“Words With an Alien Voice”: Gnostics, Scripture, and Canon,’ *JAAR* 57: 459–83.
- Nagel, P. (2007). ‘Das Evangelium des Judas,’ *ZNW* 98: 213–76.
- Pagels, E. H. (1973). *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon’s Commentary on John* (Atlanta: Scholars).
- Pearson, B. (1988). ‘Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in Gnostic Literature,’ in M. J. Mulder and H. Sysling (eds), *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Assen: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress), 635–52.
- Pearson, B. (1990). *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress).
- Petersen, A. K. (2012). ‘The Gospel of Judas: A Scriptural Amplification or a Canonical Encroachment?’, in Popkes and Wurst 2012:253–90.
- Pleše, Z. (2012). ‘Intertextuality and Conceptual Blending in the Apocryphon of John,’ *Adamantius* 18: 118–35.
- Popkes, E. E., and Wurst, G. (2012) (eds). *Judasevangelium und Codex Tchacos* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Rasimus, T. (2010). ‘Ptolemaeus and the Valentinian Exegesis of John’s Prologue,’ in T. Rasimus (ed.), *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: Brill), 145–71.
- Thomassen, E. (2010). ‘Heracleon,’ in T. Rasimus (ed.), *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: Brill), 173–210.
- Trumbower, J. A. (1989). ‘Origen’s Exegesis of John 8:19–53: The Struggle with Heracleon over the Idea of Fixed Natures,’ *VC* 43: 138–54.
- Turner, J. D. (2010). ‘The Johannine Legacy: The Gospel and Apocryphon of John,’ in T. Rasimus (ed.), *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Leiden: Brill), 105–44.
- Van Unnik, W. C. (1977). ‘An Interesting Document of Second Century Theological Discussion (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.10.3),’ *VC* 31: 196–228.
- Williams, J. A. (1988). *Biblical Interpretation in the Gnostic Gospel of Truth from Nag Hammadi* (Atlanta: Scholars).
- Williams, M. A. (1996). *Rethinking ‘Gnosticism’: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Wucherpennig, A. (2002). *Heracleon Philologus: Gnostische Johannesexegese im zweiten Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Young, F. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Ayres, L. (2015). ‘Irenaeus vs. the Valentinians: Toward a Rethinking of Patristic Exegetical Origins,’ *J ECS* 23: 153–87.
- Brakke, D. (2002). ‘The Seed of Seth at the Flood: Biblical Interpretation and Gnostic Theological Reflection,’ in C. A. Bobertz and D. Brakke (eds), *Reading in Christian Communities: Essays on Interpretation in the Early Church* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 41–62.
- Dawson, D. (1992). *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

- Dunderberg, I. (2008). *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Jorgensen, D. W. (2016). *Treasure Hidden in a Field: Early Christian Reception of the Gospel of Matthew* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter).
- King, K. L. (2006). *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Luttikhuisen, G. P. (2005). *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions* (Leiden: Brill).
- Thomassen, E. (2006). *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'* (Leiden: Brill).
- Williams, M. A. (1996). *Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

## CHAPTER 26

---

# MANICHAEAN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

---

JASON BEDUHN

MANICHAEISM had an organic relation to the Christian tradition, and many of its core concepts and institutions found either inspiration or justification in Christian Scripture. The attempt to portray Christian and biblical elements of Manichaeism as a veneer artificially added to a fundamentally alien religious system must be dismissed as a polemical ploy (e.g., *act. Archel.* 65.2–6; on the polemical strategies of this work, see BeDuhn and Mirecki 2007). Nevertheless, Mani (216–c.277) did not know or recognize the Bible as we now think of it; he lived before the fixing of a Christian canon, and was exposed to a broader, fluid Christian movement with a variety of written and unwritten authoritative traditions. Moreover, he critiqued the transmission of the Christian kerygma in a manner reminiscent of, and probably influenced by, Marcion. Consequently, Christian biblical literature held an ambivalent status within Manichaeism. Mani himself quoted the words of Jesus from the *Diatessaron* and other gospel sources such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, as well as the writings of Paul. Yet these authorities came to be subordinated to Mani's own compositions as Manichaeism developed after him. Among Asian Manichaeans for the next 1,000 years, Jesus and Paul continued to be quoted in the form of isolated agrapha mostly dependent on Mani's own application and interpretation of this material. Only in its mission to the Roman Empire did Manichaeism maintain and expand its direct engagement with the developing orthodox Bible. The literature produced by Egyptian Manichaeans, for instance, shows them drawing fresh connections between their ideology and the images and themes of biblical literature, both canonical and non-canonical. At the same time, Western Manichaeans came to terms with the orthodox canon as the battlefield on which to carry out their apologetic and polemical efforts to prove Manichaeism to be the true Christian faith (e.g. Augustine, *Fort.* 20).

The extensive list of NT passages commented upon by the Manichaeans demonstrates that their biblical interpretation went well beyond a selection of a handful of amenable verses. For example, Allberry 1938 identified 123 NT allusions in the half of the Coptic *Psalm-Book* (2 Ps) he edited. Several times that number is found in the Latin Manichaean

literature preserved in Augustine of Hippo. Böhlig 2013 (based on a 1947 dissertation) surveys a representative portion of this material topically. Pedersen 2017 and 2019 provide a comprehensive compilation of all non-Latin Manichaean sources referencing biblical literature arranged according to the biblical order. Manichaean leaders within the Roman Empire built on Mani's substantial foundation to produce a body of exegetical work that moves throughout the entire NT, and often shows remarkable facility and coherence. Manichaean exegetes move between Gospel and Apostle in crafting seamless interpretations of the Scriptures; the presumption of artificiality and eisegesis finds little to support it. Indeed, Manichaean biblical interpretation typically departs from orthodox readings precisely in those passages where ambiguity and multivalence have given rise to competing interpretations throughout Christian history. Moreover, the Manichaean handling of the Bible confronts the orthodox one with passages the latter has struggled to qualify and downplay, such as the contrast of Law and Gospel, or the depiction of the forces of this world as at war with God. Once we set aside the a priori assumption that orthodox biblical interpretation is necessarily more legitimate, the Manichaean variety can be seen to have a coherence of its own that demands consideration and at times even has an advantage over the weak points of its opponents.

## MANI AND THE BIBLICAL LITERARY TRADITION

---

Mani articulated a programmatic reception of the world's sacred Scriptures into a single 'great wisdom':

The writings, wisdom, apocalypses, parables, and psalms of all the earlier churches are gathered from everywhere and returned to my church and added to the wisdom that I have revealed. As a river is added to another river to form a powerful current, just so is it that the ancient books are added to my writings, and become a great wisdom such as has not been uttered this way in all earlier generations.

(1 Ke 151, 372.11–19; cf. ed. Funk 2000:372)

This position carried a key corollary: the individual scriptural traditions cannot be interpreted properly in isolation, but only when brought together and read through Mani's dualistic exegetical lens. A recently deciphered Manichaean text shows Mani actively putting the authoritative words of Jesus and Zarathustra in dialogue with one another, and demonstrating their congruence within his world view (Dilley 2014). This new passage confirms the syncretism implicit in long-known passages from Mani's *Šābuhragān*, wherein he interprets eschatological teachings of Jesus through Iranian concepts and terminology. Mani's efforts to interpret the Christian kerygma within his Mesopotamian and Iranian cultural context is no more contrived or less legitimate than the parallel interpretative projects among Christians in the Graeco-Roman milieu. Like

key leaders among the latter enterprise (e.g. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea), he assumed that the message of Jesus had continuity with and consummated the highest truths and insights achieved by sages of his own culture's past.

Working from a self-consciously literate vantage point, Mani understood his role as God's messenger to entail a hermeneutical responsibility to clarify the meaning of prior Scriptures. His followers stressed and perhaps expanded this character of Mani's mission, as Augustine of Hippo characterized their views:

They say that the divine mysteries which the ancient writers set forth in figures in the scriptures were left to be resolved and revealed by this man who was going to come last. And they say that no teacher will come from God after him precisely for the reason that Manichaeus said nothing in figures and allegories. For he had made clear what the ancients had said in that way and plainly and openly revealed his own thoughts. (Augustine, *Fund.* 23.25; trans. Teske 2006:250).

Manichaeans identified their founder as the promised Paraclete (John 16.7), and the claim may go back to Mani himself. He is quoted using the John passage in an explanation of the relation of his mission to that of Christ in the Coptic *Kephalaia*: 'When the church of the Savior was raised to the heights, my apostolate began. . . . From that time on was sent the Paraclete. . . . Just like the Savior said: "When I go, I will send to you the Paraclete. When the Paraclete comes, he can upbraid the world concerning sin, and he can speak with you on behalf of righteousness"' (1 *Ke* 1, 14.3–11; trans. Gardner 1995:20. For Paraclete traditions in Iranian Manichaean texts, see Sundermann 1988). Whether Mani understood himself to be the Paraclete, or to be guided by the Paraclete, he had the function to fill the deficit indicated by Paul's admission of incomplete knowledge (1 *Cor* 13.9f.; *act. Archel.* 15; Augustine, *Fel.* 1.9; *Faust.* 15.6; cf. the citation of John 16.13 on the same subject in *Fel.* 1.2 and, along with John 14.26 to the same effect, in *Faust.* 32). In this way, Mani became the well-spring of a long tradition of scriptural interpretation whose main features he determined through the authority he claimed for his own exegetical insights.

Despite being raised in an Elchasaite community typically characterized as 'Jewish-Christian', Mani shows no direct engagement with the Tanakh in any of the surviving passages certain to come from his own compositions. Unlike 'Gnostic' writers, his creation account is not based on a direct exegesis of Genesis. Instead, Mani knew various parabiblical Jewish texts and traditions, especially the Enoch literature (Reeves 1992). This material supplied many details of Mani's rich mythology and complex cosmology: a dualistic conflict between good and evil throughout world history; armies of angels; multiple heavenly firmaments with God remotely transcendent above subordinate godlike authorities; beings imprisoned in the firmaments and falling from them to earth; and so forth. From such literature, Mani accepted the Jewish patriarchs Adam, Seth, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, and Shem as messengers of God, with accounts taken from apocryphal developments of the spare biblical narratives, rather than directly from the latter. The *Cologne Mani Codex* 48–61 quotes apocalyptic texts attributed to each of these

figures with the exception of Noah, but the latter appears in Manichaean lists of prior prophets (e.g. 2 *Ps* 142.4–9). The Manichaean Faustus of Milevis mentions Seth and Enoch (Augustine, *Faust.* 19.3) and more generally the pre-Mosaic patriarchs (22.2). This evidence may support suggestions that the Elchasaïtes represent part of a broader Jewish tradition with alternative scriptures in place of the orthodox canon; later Rabbinic tradition managed to incorporate many of the elements of this rich mythology into exegesis of the biblical text. Mani's use of the Trisagion in chants he composed similarly reflects connections to Jewish-Christian hymnody rather than direct knowledge of the Tanakh (Durkin-Meisterernst and Morano 2010:53–85). Criticism of the Genesis creation account, and of the values reflected in the Tanakh generally, is a product of the Manichaean mission to the Roman Empire, where it formed part of a polemic against a form of Christianity that had adopted the Tanakh as the Christian OT.

The surviving bits of Mani's books, letters, and hymns, on the other hand, reveal a deep and sustained immersion in the nascent Christian literary tradition. Quotations from or allusions to gospel traditions and Paul's letters permeate this material, along with express responses to other Christian writers, such as Bardaisan. Secondary scholastic literature such as the immense collection of *kephalaia*, preserved mostly in Coptic but also in important fragments of Iranian versions, attribute to Mani more discussions of biblical themes. NT passages are rarely cited verbatim, but form the subtext and provide language and imagery taken up into discussions of theology, creation, cosmology, and religious practice (see Böhlig 2013:65–71). Mani apparently organized the leadership of his religious community on the model of Jesus' selection (as reported in the *Diatessaron*) of an inner circle of twelve disciples and an outer group of seventy-two (see 1 *Ke* 1, 12.28–29 and the newly deciphered caption of *Kephalaion* 337 from 2 *Ke* in BeDuhn 2014:56: 'This chapter talks about Goundesh, when he asks the Apostle: "These twelve persons that you selected, you selected them by what mystery? These seventy-two, also, you selected them by what mystery?"'). Mani's use of Paul's letters is evident in both his own epistolary style and in the frequent quotation of and allusion to Pauline phrases, imagery, and themes (see Ries 1989).

Mani identified himself as, like Paul, an 'apostle of Jesus Christ' on the basis of visions rather than the transmitted traditions of Jesus 'in the flesh'. Nevertheless, he made use of gospel texts and cited teachings of Jesus from them. Almost certainly the 'mixed' gospel text of the *Diatessaron* figured prominently among these gospel resources (Hansen 1966; Quispel 1993), and so far no direct citation by Mani of one of the 'separated' four Gospels has been confirmed. Other quotations plausibly traceable to Mani himself give evidence of the use of other sources, such as the *Gospel of Thomas* (Funk 2002). The preserved fragments of the closing sections of Mani's *Šābuhragān* provide perhaps the lengthiest example of his reading and application of gospel material (MacKenzie 1979–80). This composition represents a conscious attempt by Mani to convey Jesus' eschatological teachings (including verbatim quotations of the *Diatessaron* passage corresponding to Matthew 24.29–31; 25.31–46) through Iranian concepts and terminology. For example, he identifies the eschaton with the Zoroastrian idea of the Renovation (*frašegird*).

## DUALISM

---

The proof-texts for Manichaean dualism include Matthew 7.17f. on the two trees, Matthew 13.24ff. on the enemy who sows weeds among the wheat, John 1.5 on the blindness of darkness to the light sent into the world, and 2 Corinthians 4.4 on the god of this world who blinds people's minds (2 *Ps* 56.31; 172.26f.; *act. Archel.* 15; Augustine, *Fel.* 2.2; *Faust.* 18; 21). The two trees was a classic image of Manichaeism, appealed to time and again. *Kephalaion* 2 is entirely devoted to elaborating this basic image in terms of the full Manichaean mythology (Gardner 1995:22–6), and *Psalm-Book* 134.11–20 interprets the root, trunk, branches, and fruit of the good tree according to the Manichaean theological formula 'God, light, power, and wisdom' (Allberry 1938:134; see Coyle 2009:65–88). Manichaeans noted that the bad tree is said explicitly by Jesus to be 'not planted by my heavenly Father', and to be destined to be rooted up and cast into the fire (Matt 3.10; 15.13; Augustine, *Fort.* 14; *act. Archel.* 15). The 'fruits' of evil are distinguished from those of good with reference to Galatians 5.19–22 (*Letter to Menoch* 177; *act. Archel.* 19). The Gospel of John's sharp opposition of light to darkness finds repeated use in Manichaean texts (e.g. John 3.19 in 1 *Ke* 184.11–12; 185.12–13; 2 *Ps* 165.29–30; *Letter to Menoch* 177; *act. Archel.* 15). Likewise, Paul's expressions of interior conflict (e.g. Rom 7–8; Gal 5.17; Eph 2.1ff.) were taken as confirmations of the dualistic underpinnings of human nature (Augustine, *Fort.* 16–17, 21; *Fel.* 2.2). The Manichaeans offered their unique view of human creation (fashioned by the forces of evil in imitation of the divine image) as a reconciliation of Jesus' declaration of humans as the devil's children (John 8.44) with Paul's affirmation that they bore the image of God (1 Cor 11.7; Col 3.9–10).

## CHRISTOLOGY

---

Manichaeans argued on the basis of scripture that Jesus had only a docetic body, and his physical experiences (such as his passion) had a primarily symbolic meaning (Gardner 1988). They contended that Jesus' own self-characterization must be given precedence over the genealogies and birth stories reported by others. That self-characterization involves descent from heaven (John 3.13), affirmation of Peter's identification of him as son of God (Matt 16.16f.), and correction of others who suggested he had a human mother and brothers (Matt 12.47f.; Augustine, *Faust.* 5, 7; *act. Archel.* 54–55). Jesus had only the *schēma* of humanity (John 1.14; 1 Tim 3.16; Phil 2.7; 1 *Ke* 12.24ff.; 61.21ff.; 2 *Ps* 194.1–3; *act. Archel.* 59). Nevertheless, that appearance represented a physically real Jesus—the 'vulnerable Jesus' (*Jesus patibilis*), 'hanging from every tree' as the essence of all life, revealed as his true nature by the docetic Jesus in the institution of the Eucharist (Augustine, *Faust.* 20.2; cf. 2 *Ps* 54.8–55.15). This identification of Christ with all living things made his story the tale of every soul, and allowed ordinary believers to see

themselves in him (Gardner 1991). The Manichaean Fortunatus, in his debate with Augustine of Hippo, expresses this interpretation of the Philippians Hymn, noting Paul's introductory phrase: *hoc sentite in vobis* ('have this view in regard to yourselves'). Christ's voluntary descent from divinity to humble servitude in the world symbolically reveals the inner truth of the place and function of all souls in the world, and points towards a final resolution in a return to divine exaltation (Augustine, *Fort.* 7–8). The wider Christological context for this reading of Scripture is surveyed in Franzmann 2003 and BeDuhn 2009.

## THE MANDATUM CHRISTI

---

Manichaean exegesis and application of gospel material centred almost exclusively on the words of Jesus. These provided what Faustus calls the *mandatum Christi*, a set of primarily moral guidelines, interpreted according to Mani's ascetic understanding. For Faustus, the ethical precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, encapsulated in the Beatitudes, constitute the 'gospel' in its essence and are the hallmark of the true Christian (Augustine, *Faust.* 5.1; cf. *Fort.* 3).

You ask whether I accept [the gospel] when it is apparent that I do accept it because I observe what it commands... I have left father and mother, wife, children, and the other things that the gospel commands, and do you ask whether I accept the gospel? Or are you still ignorant of what is called the gospel. For it is nothing but the preaching and commandment of Christ. I have rejected silver and gold, and I have ceased to carry money in my wallet, as I am content with food for the day, am not worried about the morrow, and have no concern over what to fill my belly or to clothe my body with, and do you ask me whether I accept the gospel? You see in me these beatitudes of Christ that constitute the gospel, and do you ask whether I accept the gospel? You see someone poor, someone meek, a peacemaker, someone with a pure heart, who mourns, who hungers and thirsts, and who endures persecutions and hatred for the sake of righteousness, and do you doubt whether I accept the gospel?

(Augustine, *Faust.* 5.1; trans. Teske 2007:84)

Faustus went on to cite passage after passage where Jesus commands his followers to carry out the conduct he commands, instead of placing any importance on believing particular tenets, such as the Virgin Birth (Augustine, *Faust.* 5.3). This *tour de force* argument equated Christian identity with an ascetic ethic seen widely in second-century Christian literature, which Manichaeans could claim to carry forward with greater uncompromised consistency than seen in the 'broad path' of the now established and ethically mainstream Catholic Church Faustus confronted, where orthodox belief took precedence over a counter-cultural way of life. Paul also confirmed the *mandatum Christi* by promoting ascetic practices, such as celibacy (1 Cor 7.1), and abstention from meat and wine (Rom 14.21; Augustine, *Adim.* 14).

## THE PASSION

---

Of narrative material, only the passion found application within Manichaeism: first as a symbolic drama reflecting cosmic dualism, and second as a model by which to understand Mani's own suffering and death. Alexander Böhlig provided a compelling analysis of how the passion supplied key motifs underpinning the Manichaean account of a primordial self-sacrifice of a divine 'First Man' into the hands of evil, in order to effect ultimate salvation of all souls in the heavenly realm of light (Böhlig 1983). Ephrem Syrus reports that the Manichaeans related the prologue of John to this descent of the First Man as light into the midst of darkness (Mitchell 1912:xc). Werner Sundermann identified quotations from the *Diatessaron's* passion narrative in Iranian Manichaean sermons comparing Mani's suffering and death to Jesus' (Sundermann 1968). Zsuzsanna Gulácsi has demonstrated that painted scenes of the life of Jesus based on the *Diatessaron* were being copied in medieval Central Asia and probably used in connection with sermons like those identified by Sundermann (Gulácsi 2008). Mani had initiated some of these points of comparison in connection with the hardships of his life (Gardner 2001:101); his martyrdom inspired further elaboration of this analogy in a literary tradition connected to annual commemorations of his death (Böhlig 2013:159–171; Morano 2000).

## MANICHAEAN EXEGESIS OF PAUL

---

Manichaeans shared with their orthodox rivals a valuation of Paul above any other Christian authority other than Jesus. When NT interpretation entered its Pauline era in the mid-fourth century, the Manichaeans represented *the* major alternative reading of the apostle that orthodox exegetes confronted. North African Manichaeans produced a significant body of such Pauline exegesis (Decret 1989), mostly preserved by Augustine, but also in the highly fragmentary *Tebessa Codex*, discovered a century ago, which offers an interesting example of the use of Paul in support of Manichaean church institutions and practices (Stein 2004). Every orthodox commentary on Paul from this period should be assumed to be responding to the Manichaeans either directly or indirectly, and a systematic investigation of this likelihood remains a desideratum.

Paul supplied the Manichaeans with the terminology for and the characterization of their dualistic anthropology in such passages as Romans 6–7; Ephesians 3–4; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 4.16; and Colossians 3.9–10 (Böhlig 2013:45–46).

For, according to the apostle, there are two men, one of which he at times calls the outer, but usually the earthly and sometimes also the old, while the other he says is the inner, the heavenly and the new. We ask, then, which of these God made, because

there are two times of our birth. The first is that whereby nature brought us forth into this light, enmeshed in bonds of flesh, but the other is that whereby the truth gives us a new birth for itself after we have been converted from error and initiated into faith. Signifying the time of this second birth, Jesus says in the gospel, 'Unless someone has been born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3.3).

(Augustine, *Faust.* 24.1; trans. Teske 2007:381; cf. *1 Ke* 136, 337.11–17; ed. Funk 1999:337)

Paul's contrast of old and new man corresponds to Jesus' declaration, 'What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the spirit is spirit' (John 3.6).

For, if God forms us to his image when we are shaped in the womb, as the pagans, the Jews, and you yourselves would have it, he makes us old men and creates us through passion and lust, which is something that I doubt is appropriate to his divinity. But if God forms us when we come to believe and are converted to a better state of life, as Christ, his apostles, and we hold, God certainly makes us new men and makes us in a morally good and pure way. What is more fitting than this, or what is more suited than this to his holy and venerable majesty?

(Augustine, *Faust.* 24.1; trans. Teske 2007:381)

For this reason, Paul condemns the old man, commands that he be 'put off', and speaks of the new man who is to be 'put on' as alone 'the image of him who created him in you' (Eph 4.22–24; Col 3.9–11). As Paul himself stresses, this new identity has nothing to do with gender or ethnicity or social status (Gal 3.27–28). 'A man, then, is made by God when he is made one from many, not when he is divided from one into many. But our first, that is, our bodily birth, has divided us; our second, that is, our intelligible and divine birth, unifies us' (Augustine, *Faust.* 24.1; trans. Teske 2007:382). These fourth-century formulations by North African Manichaeans build on foundations laid by Mani himself in close readings of Paul, such as in his *Letter to Menoch* (Harrison and BeDuhn 2001).

Paul's rhetoric of moral disability in such passages as Romans 7 set the terms for the distinctive Manichaean position on grace (Böhlig 2013:44–5). In the pre-Augustinian period, the Manichaeans confronted an orthodox Christianity that emphasized free will. By comparison, the Manichaeans were charged with denying the freedom of the will and falling into a kind of determinism. A more careful reading of the Manichaean position reveals that it stressed the necessity of divine grace to overcome the inherent moral deficits of human nature, stemming from its 'mixed' pedigree from both good and evil (e.g. Augustine *Fort.* 11, 16, 21; *nat. bon.* 41). The Manichaeans cited Paul to this effect, and found correlations to other scriptures, such as John 15.22 (Augustine, *Fort.* 21), and Augustine was forced to yield ground to their reading, albeit reframed within a Nicene world view (BeDuhn 2013). The objections of his contemporaries within the Catholic Church highlight the degree to which this reading of Paul was seen as an innovation with suspect Manichaean roots.

## MANICHAEAN CRITICISM OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

---

Manichaeans followed Marcion in attributing the authorship of the Tanakh to a being different from and at odds with the God of Truth who sent Jesus: ‘one of the princes of darkness’ (Augustine, *Faust.* 15.8; *Gen. Man.* 2.26.39; *ep.* 236.2), or the ‘demon of the Jews’ (*Faust.* 18.2; cf. Ephrem Syrus in Mitchell 1912:xci), or Satan (*1 Ke* 2, 21.15–23; 65, 159.108; *act. Archel.* 15.8–11). In Augustine of Hippo’s characterization, their position ‘does not consist in a wrong interpretation of the writings of the Old Testament’, but in ‘rejecting and detesting them’ (Augustine, *Gen. litt.* 8.2.5; cf. *Faust.* 8.2, 14.1, 22.3–6; *ep.* 237; *Conf.* 3.7.12; 11.10.12). Their critique, fully developed only in conflict with orthodox Christians in the Roman West, rested upon a literal reading of the text, which yielded both logical and moral criticisms, as well as points of contradiction to positions taken by Jesus and other NT authorities. Manichaeans cited (1) NT passages critical of OT principles, values, or doctrines (e.g. Luke 16.16; Rom 2.27ff.; Rom 3.20; Rom 4.1f.; Rom 7.6; 1 Cor 15.46–50; 2 Cor 3.6–11; Gal 2.18; Gal 3.13; Gal 4.9; Phil 3.8; Eph 2.15; see Augustine, *Fort.* 16; *Faust.* 8.1; 14.1; 32.1; *Fel.* 2.10; *act. Archel.* 44); (2) OT passages incongruent with NT principles, values, or doctrines (especially the conduct of the deity portrayed there, as well as of the biblical heroes; see Augustine, *Faust.* 12.1); and (3) OT and NT passages juxtaposed in a way to illustrate antithetical positions. Faustus of Milevis echoes Marcionite argumentation when he contrasts the promises of the Jewish God to Christ’s:

Or are you unaware that the Old Testament promises the land of the Canaanites, but promises it to the Jews, that is, to the circumcised, to those who offer sacrifices and abstain from pork and the other meats that Moses calls unclean, to those who observe the Sabbaths, the feast of unleavened bread, and the other things of this sort which, as their lawgiver, Moses commanded them to observe. No Christian has approved of these, nor does any one of us observe them. Hence it is fitting that we give back the documents of the law along with the inheritance we have been denied.

(Augustine, *Faust.* 4.1; trans. Teske 2007:82).

Faustus goes on to offer a devastating critique of the supposed orthodox valuation of the OT, pointing out that, despite their avid avowal of its scriptural status, these ‘semi-Christians’ hypocritically fail to actually keep its commandments (Augustine *Faust.* 6.1; cf. 22.2).

The Manichaeans granted, however, as did the Marcionites, that the OT could contain some accurate information about creation or human history, albeit from the distorted perspective of an author antagonistic to the true God (Augustine, *Gen. Man.* 2.26.39). The North African Manichaeans known to Augustine could argue in an apologetic

context on the basis of the Genesis creation story, raising questions about the coherence of the narrative, and pointing towards dualistic solutions:

How do so many evils come to pass, although God is omnipotent, and effects nothing evil? For what purpose did he make the world, though he had need of nothing? Did evil always exist, or began in time? And if it always was, then was it under God's control? And if it was, then did this world also, wherein the evil is curbed by divine order, always exist? But if the world had a beginning sometime, how was evil held in check by divine power before that time? What need was there to construct a world in which evil, which divine power had already controlled, was included for punishment of souls? If, however, there was a time when evil was not under God's dominion, what suddenly happened which had not happened before throughout the eternal years? (Augustine, *Ord.* 2.17.46; Russell 1942)

Augustine lists these as the cosmogonic questions he had at the time of his conversion to Nicene Christianity; that they derive from Manichaean polemic only becomes clear in his later works. Contending that a good God would not create an evidently flawed world entirely on his own initiative, the Manichaeans argued that creation must be some sort of necessary response to an external stimulus that presented an even less satisfactory alternative. Such an external stimulus to creation explained why God, after an immeasurable eternity, suddenly created the world at a specific point in time. 'They say, "If God made heaven and earth in some beginning of time, what was he doing before he made heaven and earth? And why did he suddenly decide to make what he had not previously made through eternal time?"' (Augustine, *Gen. Man.* 1.2.3; trans. Teske 1991:49; cf. *Conf.* 11.12.14). They cited Paul's reference to 'the knowledge of truth . . . which God promised before eternal time' (*ante tempora aeterna*, Tit 1.2), suggesting some sort of pre-creation compact between God and human souls, the details of which Mani revealed.

Manichaeans pointed to the presence of other things besides God at the beginning of the Genesis narrative: 'From where did that darkness over the abyss come, before God made light? Who made it or gave birth to it? Or if no one had made it or gave birth to it, the darkness was eternal' (Augustine, *Gen. Man.* 1.4.7; trans. Teske 1991:55). 'From where did that water come, over which the Spirit of God was borne? Did Scripture previously say that God made the water?' (Augustine, *Gen. Man.* 1.5.9; trans. Teske 1991:57). Orthodox writers such as Augustine could only agree with the Manichaeans that the Genesis narrative begins *in medias res*, with each side offering their own metaphysical prelude: an eternal dualism in one case and a *creatio ex nihilo* of everything present at the beginning of narrative in the other. Manichaeans raised additional problems with the creation narrative:

They say, 'What need did God have for rest? Was he perhaps tired and worn out by the works of the six days?' They also add the testimony of the Lord, where he says, 'My father works up to now' (John 5.17), and by this they deceive many of the uneducated, whom they try to convince that the New Testament contradicts the Old Testament. (Augustine, *Gen. Man.* 1.22.33; trans. Teske 1991:81; cf. *Adim.* 2)

The broader critique of the OT developed among those Manichaeans working in the Roman Empire upon the foundation established by Marcion in the second century. The leader of the Manichaean mission to the Roman West, Adda (aka Adimantus), expanded Marcion's *Antitheses* in order to address the NT canon of third-century orthodox Christians, which was larger than that used by Marcion, adding further examples from the Gospels and those letters of Paul, such as the Pastorals, unknown to Marcion. Adda's Manichaean *Antitheses* can be partially reconstructed from Augustine (*Adim.*, but also *Gen. Man.*, *Leg.*, and various sermons) and Titus of Bostra (Berg 2010). The OT, for instance, reports that God spoke with and appeared to various beings, whereas the NT calls him invisible (1 Tim 1.17; Augustine, *Adim.* 28; cf. *Gen. Man.* 1.17.27), and declares, 'No one has ever seen God' (John 1.18; Augustine, *Adim.* 11). Jesus says that the world has not known his Father (John 17.25; Augustine, *Adim.* 11), and he told the Jews that 'You have never followed his voice, nor viewed his face' (John 5.37–8; Augustine, *Adim.* 9). The Manichaeans also objected to the OT depiction of God as jealous, as exacting vengeance on the third and fourth generation of those who commit sin (Exod 20.5), as a 'devouring flame' (Deut 4.23–4), who desiccates breasts and sterilizes seed (Hos 9.14; Augustine, *Adim.* 7.1; 13; 25). It is said, 'Can evil come to a town without God being its author?' (Amos 2.3–6; Augustine, *Adim.* 26). How can this be reconciled with Jesus' teachings that 'Every good tree yields good fruits and every evil tree evil fruits' (Matt 7.17–19; Augustine, *Adim.* 26; *Fel.* 2.2; *act. Archel.* 5; 2 Ps 134.11, 17ff.)? In the NT God is expressly said to be good (Mark 10.17–18), to make the sun shine on both the good and the wicked, and to command forgiveness seventy times seven times (Matt 5.45, 18.22; Augustine, *Adim.* 13; 7.1; cf. *Faust.* 33.1; 2 Ps 40.33, 41.1f., 194.16). The commands of the god of the OT also stand at odds with those of Christ: Exodus 21.24 ('an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth') vs Matthew 5.38–40/Luke 6.29 ('turn the other cheek'; Augustine *Adim.* 8; *Faust.* 19.3; 2 Ps 195.16; *act. Archel.* 44); Numbers 15.32ff. (prohibition of work on the sabbath) vs Luke 5.24 (paralytic told to take up his pallet on the sabbath) and Luke 6.1ff. (defence of plucking grain on the sabbath; Augustine, *Adim.* 22; *Faust.* 32.5; *act. Archel.* 44); Proverbs 22.2 ('I make the rich and the poor') vs. Luke 6.20 ('Blessed are you poor'), Luke 6.24 ('Woe to you rich'), and Luke 14.33 ('Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple'; Augustine, *Adim.* 19; *act. Archel.* 44). Manichaean authors pointed out that the Law itself curses Jesus, both in his death on a cross, as Paul noted (Gal 3.13, referring to Deut 21.23), and through his failure to have offspring (Deut 25.5–10; Augustine, *Adim.* 21; *Faust.* 14.1, 16.5, 32.5; *Fel.* 2.10; *act. Archel.* 32). The lives of the Israelite patriarchs and prophets also came in for severe criticism for moral turpitude that is either accepted without punishment or even commanded by their god (e.g. *Faust.* 22.5).

## MANICHAEAN CRITICISM OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

---

Manichaeans recognized the authority of the words of Jesus, but did not extend the same status to the narrative frame within which they had been embedded by gospel writers. This principle reflects the continuation within third-century Manichaeism of the attitude

that had generally prevailed in Christianity as a whole in the second century. Early Christian writers cite the logia of Jesus as independent *agrapha*, without relying on the authority of gospel texts to lend them legitimacy (Petersen 2006). Marcion's attempt to shift authority to specific texts was an innovation only gradually embraced by other Christians. In the last quarter of the second century, figures such as Irenaeus sought to counteract Marcion on the one hand, and the proliferation of Gospels on the other, by vesting authority in specific Gospels identified and legitimized by authors linked to apostolic authority. But there is no reason to think that Irenaeus' view had reached the nascent Christian movement in Mesopotamia prior to the time of Mani. The latter was the recipient of a still fluid set of Jesus traditions.

Mani did have access to written gospel material, such as the *Diatessaron*, but he and other Manichaeans questioned the authorship and reliability of this written gospel tradition. Anticipating the work of modern biblical scholars, they pointed to the period of orality in which the sayings of Jesus could have been altered in the course of transmission (Augustine, *Faust.* 33.3), and questioned the motives and intentions of those who committed the traditions to writing (Augustine, *Faust.* 32.2). Mani himself initiated this critique:

At the time that [Jesus] walked... the land of the west, [he...] proclaimed his hope [... he chose] his disciples. [But Jesus did not write a book.] That which Jesus uttered [his disciples remembered, and] afterwards they wrote that which [they remembered in a book]: his parables [and...] and signs and wonders... They wrote a book concerning his [wisdom]. (*1 Ke* 7:18–26).

This passage includes closely parallel statements about the similar failure of Zarathustra and the Buddha to write down their teachings. Mani's position took its start from Marcion's criticism of the 'interpolation' of 'the gospel' by 'false apostles'. Mani broadened this into the idea that all prior religions suffered from the same issue: founders who did not write, leaving their teachings in the hands of disciples whose grasp of the teachings could not be relied upon. 'And this, in that the fathers of righteousness did not write their wisdom in books, [because of this] know that their righteousness and their church will pass away from the world, because they did not write' (*1 Ke* 8.8–10). The fragmentary sentences that follow refer to followers being led astray and to teachings being adulterated. Manichaean missionaries to the Roman West, such as Adda, built more systematically on Marcion in formulating criticism of the Gospels. The Manichaean bishop Faustus speaks for this development in late fourth-century North Africa. Augustine of Hippo raised the fair question how Manichaeans could trust the authenticity of the words of Jesus if they did not accept the reliability of the Gospels that contained them. Nevertheless, the Manichaean double-standard corresponds with the transmission habits of early Christianity, in which the words of Jesus were handled more conservatively than the narrative material around them. The earliest Christians had been 'red-letter Christians', and the effort to shift authority from Jesus' *ipsissima verba* to narrative elements supplied by gospel writers—such as the birth stories—was ridiculed by Faustus. He could readily see in the Gospels themselves the authors' relatively greater liberties with

narrative than with logia, which reinforced the Manichaean predisposition to view the latter as more reliable.

The Manichaeans exercised a similar textual criticism on the letters of Paul, rejecting some passages as later interpolations, and qualifying others as aberrations with no place in Paul's 'mature theology'. For example, in Augustine, *Faust.* 30–1, Faustus challenges 1 Timothy 4.1–3 and Titus 1.16 as interpolations. Both Faustus and Fortunatus question Romans 1.3 (Christ as 'of the seed of David according to the flesh'): Fortunatus regards it as a probable interpolation incompatible with 1 Corinthians 15.50 ('Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God, neither shall corruption inherit incorruption'; Augustine, *Fort.* 19), while Faustus entertains the possibility that the passage is authentic, but later corrected by Paul himself in 2 Corinthians 5.16–17 ('We know no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth we know him no more'; Augustine, *Faust.* 11.1). Such rejection of individual verses remained a very minor aspect of Manichaean use of Paul, exaggerated in its significance by the reaction of orthodox interlocutors.

## CONCLUSION

---

Manichaeans constituted major players in Christian biblical interpretation between the third and sixth centuries, whose contributions to this genre have remained in obscurity. Compiling and analysing this rich body of exegesis will not only provide a deeper understanding of the Manichaean religion, but also aid researchers in identifying when Manichaean interpreters are the unnamed opponents to which orthodox exegetes respond in their own works. Mani and his followers produced many intriguing readings of the NT, a number of which must be assessed as astute and insightful. Some of those readings even managed to work their way into the orthodox interpretative tradition, not surreptitiously, but because major authorities such as Augustine of Hippo were forced to accept that their opponents had the better interpretation in spite of being 'heretics'. Manichaean biblical interpretation may yet provide more fresh perspectives for students of the Bible today. Much work remains to be done on identifying the ways Manichaeans transmitted biblical material into Asia, and brought it into engagement with the religious traditions of Iran, India, Central Asia, and China. The renewed appreciation of the history of global Christianity in modern biblical studies invites consideration of these early ambassadors of inter-religious dialogue and inter-cultural translation.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Archelai episcopi liber disputationis aduersus Manichaeum*. Latin text: C. H. Beeson, *Hegemonius, Acta Archelai*, GCS 16 (Leipzig, 1906). Eng. trans.: M. Vermes, *Hegemonius, Acta Archelai (The Acts of Archelaus)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001).

- [Anonymous], *Kephalaia*. Coptic text and German trans.: A. Böhlig and H. J. Polotsky (eds), *Kephalaia, I, 1. Hälfte (Lieferung 1–10)* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1940); A. Böhlig, *Kephalaia, I, Zweite Hälfte. Lieferung 11/12 (Seite 244–291)* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1966); W.-P. Funk, *Kephalaia, I, Zweite Hälfte. Lieferung 13/14* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1999); W.-P. Funk, *Kephalaia, I, Zweite Hälfte. Lieferung 15/16* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 2000).
- [Anonymous], *Psalm-Book*. Coptic text and Eng. trans.: C. R. C. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book, Part II* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938).
- Augustine, *Contra Adimantum*. Latin text: J. Zycha (ed.), CSEL 25 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1891). Eng. trans.: R. Teske, *The Manichean Debate*, Works of Saint Augustine I.19 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 176–223.
- Augustine, *Contra epistulam Manichaei quam uocant fundamenti*. Latin text: J. Zycha (ed.), CSEL 25 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1891). Eng. trans.: R. Teske, *The Manichean Debate*, Works of Saint Augustine I.19 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 234–67.
- Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manicheum*. Latin text: J. Zycha (ed.), CSEL 25 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1891). Eng. trans.: R. Teske, *Answer to Faustus a Manichean*, Works of Saint Augustine I.20 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007).
- Augustine, *Contra Felicem*. Latin text: J. Zycha (ed.), CSEL 25 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1891). Eng. trans.: R. Teske, *The Manichean Debate*, Works of Saint Augustine I.19 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 280–316.
- Augustine, *Contra Fortunatum*. Latin text: J. Zycha (ed.), CSEL 25 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1891). Eng. trans.: R. Teske, *The Manichean Debate*, Works of Saint Augustine I.19 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 145–62.
- Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*. Latin text: J. Zycha (ed.), CSEL 28.1 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1894). Eng. trans.: J. H. Taylor, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, ACW 41–2 (New York: Newman Press, 1982).
- Augustine, *De Ordine*. Latin text: W. M. Green and K. D. Daur (eds), CCL 29 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1970). Eng. trans.: R. P. Russell, *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Cosmopolitan Science and Art Service, 1942).
- Augustine, *De Genesi contra manicheos*. Latin text: D. Weber (ed.), CSEL 91 (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998). Eng. trans.: R. Teske, *Saint Augustine on Genesis: Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, FC 84 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991).
- Ps-Mani, *Letter to Menoch*. Latin text and Eng. trans.: G. Harrison and J. BeDuhn, ‘The Authenticity and Doctrine of (Ps.?) Mani’s *Letter to Menoch*’, in P. Mirecki and J. BeDuhn, *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in Manichaeism* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 128–72.

## Scholarship

- BeDuhn, J. (2009). ‘The Manichaean Jesus’, in O. Hammer (ed.), *Alternative Christs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 51–70.
- BeDuhn, J. (2013). *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma, 2: Making a ‘Catholic’ Self, 388–401 C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- BeDuhn, J. (2014). ‘Parallels between Coptic and Iranian *Kephalaia*: Goundesh and the King of Touran’, in I. Gardner, J. BeDuhn, and P. Dilley, *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex* (Leiden: Brill), 52–74.

- BeDuhn, J., and Mirecki, P. (2007). *Frontiers of Faith: The Christian Encounter with Manichaeism in the Acts of Archelaus* (Leiden: Brill).
- Berg, J. A. van den (2010). *Biblical Argument in Manichaean Missionary Practice: The Case of Adimantus and Augustine* (Leiden: Brill).
- Böhlig, A. (1983). 'The New Testament and the Concept of the Manichaean Myth', in A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn (eds), *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), 90–104.
- Böhlig, A. (2013). *Die Bibel bei den Manichäern und verwandte Studien*, ed. P. Nagel and S. G. Richter (Leiden: Brill).
- Coyle, J. K. (2009). *Manichaeism and its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill).
- Decret, F. (1989). 'L'Utilisation des Épitres de Paul chez les Manichéens d'Afrique', in J. Ries et al., *Le Epistole Paoline nei manichei, i donatisti e il primo Agostino* (Rome: Istituto Patristico Augustinianum), 29–83.
- Dilley, P. (2014). 'Also Schrieb Zarathustra? Mani As Interpreter of the "Law of Zarades"', in I. Gardner, J. BeDuhn, and P. Dilley, *Mani at the Court of the Persian Kings: Studies on the Chester Beatty Kephalaia Codex* (Leiden: Brill), 101–35.
- Durkin-Meisterernst, D., and Morano, E. (2010). *Mani's Psalms: Middle Persian, Parthian and Sogdian Texts in the Turfan Collection*. Berliner Turfantexte XXVII (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Franzmann, M. (2003). *Jesus in Manichaean Writings* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark).
- Funk, W.-P. (2002). "Einer aus tausend, zwei aus zehntausend": Zitate aus dem Thomasevangelium in den koptischen Manichaica', in H. G. Bethge et al. (eds), *For the Children, Perfect Instruction: Studies in Honour of Hans-Martin Schenke* (Leiden: Brill), 67–94.
- Gardner, I. (1988). 'The Docetic Jesus', in *Coptic Theological Papyri II* (Vienna: Hollinek), 57–85.
- Gardner, I. (1991). 'The Manichaean Account of Jesus and the Passion of the Living Soul', in A. van Tongerloo and S. Giversen (eds), *Manichaica Selecta: Studies Presented to Professor Julien Ries on the Occasion of this Seventieth Birthday* (Louvain: Center of the History of Religions), 71–86.
- Gardner, I. (1995). *The Kephalaia of the Teacher* (Leiden: Brill).
- Gardner, I. (2001). 'The Reconstruction of Mani's Epistles from Three Coptic Codices (Ismant el-Kharab and Medinet Madi)', in P. Mirecki and J. BeDuhn (eds), *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in Manichaeism and its World* (Leiden: Brill), 93–104.
- Gulácsi, Z. (2008). 'The Life of Jesus According to the *Diatessaron* in Early Manichaean Art and Text', *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 22: 143–69.
- Hansen, G. C. (1966). 'Zu den Evangelienziten in den "Acta Archelai"', in F. L. Cross (ed.), *SP* 7: 473–85.
- Harrison, G., and BeDuhn, J. (2001). 'The Authenticity and Doctrine of (Ps?)Mani's *Letter to Menoch*', in P. Mirecki and J. BeDuhn (eds), *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in Manichaeism and its World* (Leiden: Brill), 128–72.
- MacKenzie, D. N. (1979, 1980). 'Mani's *Šābuhragān*', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 42: 500–34; 43: 288–310.
- Mitchell, C. W. (1912). *St. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan* (Oxford: Williams and Norgate).
- Morano, E. (2000). 'A Survey of the Extant Parthian Crucifixion Hymns', in R. E. Emmerick et al. (eds), *Studia Manichaica. IV. Internationaler Kongress zum Manichäismus, Berlin, 14.–18. Juli 1997* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag), 398–429.
- Pedersen, N. A. et al. (2017). *Biblia Manichaica I: The Old Testament in Manichaean Tradition* (Turnhout: Brepols).

- Pedersen, N. A. et al. (2019). *Biblia Manichaica II: The New Testament in Manichaean Tradition* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Petersen, S. (2006). 'Die Evangelienüberschriften und die Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons', *ZNW* 97: 250–74.
- Quispel, G. (1993). 'A Diatessaron Reading in a Latin Manichaean Codex', *VC* 47: 374–8.
- Reeves, J. C. (1992). *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the Book of Giants Traditions* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press).
- Ries, J. (1989). 'Saint Paul dans la formation de Mani', in J. Ries et al., *Le Epistole Paoline nei manichei, i donatisti e il primo Agostino* (Rome: Istituto Patristico Augustinianum) 7–27.
- Russell, R. P. (1942). *Divine Providence and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Cosmopolitan Science and Art Service).
- Stein, M. (2004). *Manichaica Latina, Band 3: Codex Thevestinus* (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh).
- Sundermann, W. (1968). 'Christliche Evangelientexte in der Überlieferung der iranisch-manichäischen Literatur', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 14: 386–405.
- Sundermann, W. (1988). 'Der Paraklet in der ostmanichäischen Überlieferung', in P. Bryder (ed.), *Manichaean Studies: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Manichaeism* (Lund: Plus Ultra), 201–12.

PART V

---

SCRIPTURE  
IN THE LIFE  
OF THE CHURCH

---



## CHAPTER 27

---

# SCRIPTURE AND MARTYRDOM

---

JOHAN LEEMANS AND ANTHONY DUPONT

## INTRODUCTION

---

THE history of Late Antique Christianity was coloured by the recurrent reality of persecution, suffering, and martyrdom. These first came as a consequence of the conflict with non-Christian authorities in the context of local pogroms, and later in the form of more systematic persecutions. From the fourth century onwards, they occurred as a consequence of inner-Christian dissensions, most notably in North Africa with the 'orthodox Church' versus the Donatist Church. Christian communities often confronted the reality of becoming victims of violence. This challenge resulted in a dialectic between the reality of violence and a reflection on how Christians, as followers of Jesus of Nazareth, had to react to it. To what extent was dying for God an ideal to which one should aspire? How was martyrdom to be articulated theologically as an *imitatio Christi*? And how far should the *imitatio Christi* go? Was voluntary martyrdom a behaviour worthy of praise or was a more reluctant attitude to be preferred? Reflection on these issues did not have to start from scratch. A first source of inspiration was the more generally shared idea of a noble death, which was present in classical Antiquity. Socrates' brave acceptance of the unjust death sentence by the Athenian state was vividly described by his pupil Plato in the *Phaedo*. Socrates the sage ultimately embodied the Antique notion of a courageous and dignified death and became the earliest model victim of state persecution. Socrates even became an example for Christians, and was used as a literary model by Christian authors to reflect upon the nature of martyrdom (see van Henten and Avemarie 2002; Roskam 2010).

A second source of inspiration was the literary heritage of Hellenistic Judaism, most notably with the example of 4 Maccabees (van Henten et al. 1989; Seeliger and Wischmeyer 2015:21–7). The philosophical schools also provided foundational insights, such as the Stoic ideal of *ὑπομονή* (endurance in suffering). The Pauline writings were

instrumental in bringing these ideas within the mainstream of Christian thought (Pfitzner 1967). Yet the historical events and the theological reflections they elicited were by no means univocal. Each instance of martyrdom was different, and the martyrdom discourse the early Church developed showed different nuances in content and a considerable diversity in context and literary genre.

After the writings that eventually composed the NT, the *Letters* of Ignatius of Antioch and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* rank among the earliest testimonies of Christian martyrdom, followed quite soon by some other early well-known martyr *Acta* and *Passiones* (Seeliger and Wischmeyer 2015:16–21), such as the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* and the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*. The North African Tertullian reflected on the topic, as did Cyprian in his letters and in the *Ad Fortunatum* and Origen in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. During the third and fourth centuries the reality of persecution and martyrdom kept generating an increasing number of martyr acts. By the middle of the fourth century, the martyr cult got into full swing and spawned a substantial body of panegyric sermons. Those panegyrics and poems often reflected on experiences of martyrdom of the (sometimes distant) past while also addressing contemporary challenges. They were also part of the liturgy. The remembrance of the martyrs with their feast-days and their place in the liturgical calendars and other liturgical books (most notably the martyrologia) would only increase. Thus, Late Antique Christianity digested pagan and Jewish concepts, fused them with its reflection on the Christ-event and its own experience of persecution and martyrdom, and bequeathed to the subsequent centuries a richly textured discourse and set of ideas. Scriptural material in the form of ideas and concepts, but even more so, in the form of *exempla* and biblical borrowings (quotations and allusions), played a pivotal role in the unfolding Christian discourse on martyrdom, adding to its richness, variety, and texture.

## MARTYRDOM AS *IMITATIO CHRISTI*: THE NEW TESTAMENT DISCOURSE AND ITS RECEPTION

---

In his *Letter to the Romans* Ignatius of Antioch expresses his desire for martyrdom as a longing ‘to be an imitator of my suffering God’ (Rom 6.3). Drawing on a Pauline idea already present in 1 Thessalonians, Ignatius here grasps the quintessence of the early Christian theology of martyrdom: an *imitatio Christi*. The narrative of the martyr’s life, suffering, death, and post-mortal bliss, as well as the meanings they generated, have imitation of Christ’s example as their central guiding principle. The message of the martyr literature is directed towards a varied audience of church leaders and ordinary Christians. The account of the martyr’s *acta* should be inspiring to them and, hence, should not only present the martyr as an *exemplum* worthy to be imitated, but should also spell out how the martyr’s *exemplum* as *imitatio Christi* had salvific potential for the faithful later on.

Drawing on the content of their Holy Scriptures, early Christians explored this theology of martyrdom as *imitatio Christi* from many angles, using a plethora of metaphors, images, and ideas attached to it and tying this into the religious and cultural context of which early Christianity was part. In *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom*, Candida Moss has teased out how early Christian martyrs were presented as Christ-figures in the NT and the martyr literature of (roughly) the first four centuries (Moss 2010).

The NT and the group of early Christian writings known as the apostolic fathers laid the groundwork for much of the later development. Interpreting the suffering of individuals or communities in relation to the suffering of the crucified Christ (e.g. similarity, participation by imitation) is a recurring theme. It receives a particularly strong expression in the exhortation in 1 Peter to accept unjust suffering and persecution willingly as Christ did (1 Pet 2.20–25; 4.12–14) or in the list of *exempla* of endurance in suffering in Hebrews 11–12. The Ignatian corpus adds to the imitation idea that of discipleship: true discipleship and martyrdom go hand in hand. In *1 Clement* (5.1–6.2) the suffering Peter and Paul are presented as models of *imitatio Christi*. ‘The assumption of the exemplary role is a form of imitation that begins here in *1 Clement* and flourishes in the production of martyrological literature’ (Moss 2010:40). In this martyrological literature the *imitatio Christi* is often explicitly explained as the ultimate meaning of the martyr’s suffering (e.g. *M. Polyc.* 1.2 and 17.3; *M. Lyons and Vienne* 2.2; *M. Montanus and Lucius* 14.9), but it can also be presented as following a biblical command at the cost of one’s life. Martyrdom, then, is seen as the fulfilment of the Law or the gospel (*M. Polyc.* 1.1–2; 4 and 19.1; *M. Agap.* 1.2) or as obedience to the Johannine command to love others as Jesus loves us, including self-sacrifice and death (*M. Lyons and Vienne* 1.10 and 1.17; *M. Agap.* 5.3). Obviously, the most readily available scriptural resource offering a framework for martyr stories as *imitatio Christi* is Christ’s passion. For instance, in the story of Stephen and that of Polycarp of Smyrna, we witness in the narratives of Acts 6–7 and the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* a wholesale mirroring of the passion narratives in their complete sequence of episodes. Most often, however, individual episodes of Christ’s passion are reused by the authors of martyr literature, still confirming their pervasive influence (Moss 2010:53–9).

If the martyr was in his or her suffering portrayed as an *alter Christus*, this begs the question: what about his or her death? If salvific meaning was attached to Christ’s death and the martyr’s death was perceived as imitation thereof, what precise meaning did the latter have? According to Moss, essentially three different models make sense of the martyr’s death: sacrifice, cosmic battle, and moral exemplarity, all three with roots in the NT. The model of sacrifice is widely present in the martyr acts and this surely has to do with the centrality of the act of sacrifice in pagan cults, Judaism, and the public sphere. Yet, the strong notion of the martyr’s death as expiatory is only present in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and some passages of Ignatius of Antioch (*M. Polyc.* 2.3; 6.1; 14.1–3; Ignatius, *Rom.* 2.2 and 4.2; *Eph.* 21.1; *Smyrn.* 10.2). Many other texts, though, describe the effect of sacrifice not as beneficial to others, but as the means by which the martyr is brought into God’s presence (e.g. *M. Polyc.* 14.2; *M. Con.* 6.7). Still others use sacrificial imagery to denounce the crude savagery of the martyr’s opponents (*M. Lyons and Vienne* 1.38–9) or

as a critique of sacrificial practices (e.g. *M. Das.* 5.2). Besides sacrificial imagery, the martyr's death was also depicted as a salvific element in the cosmic battle between good and evil, between God and his helpers (including the angels and the martyrs) and Satan with his accomplices (the official, the judge, the executioners). The narrative of the martyr's death is de-historicized and integrated in a much wider scheme of cosmic proportions (Moss 2010:87–102; see e.g. *M. Agap.* 1–2; Gregory of Nyssa, *M. Seb. Ib.* 149.22–151.16). Finally, the martyrs are, in their suffering and death, presented as moral *exempla*, the imitation of which will be beneficial for other Christians. Their courage and fearlessness are evidently highlighted, but other virtues may also be brought to the fore, such as hospitality in receiving their executioners (cf. *M. Polyc.* 7.2 and Asterius, *hom.* 9.8).

The martyrs are characterized as imitators of Christ not only in their lives, sufferings, and deaths, but also in their post-mortal state. After their deaths, martyrs enjoy a privileged place in the hierarchy of the heavenly court, abiding close to God in heaven. They have the ear of God and are capable of intervening on behalf of human petitions. While the stories may differ somewhat in establishing their relationship to the angels and other heavenly beings, it is clear that martyrs share in the eternal bliss of the afterlife as a reward for their martyrdom. Here too biblical descriptions of the afterlife such as the ones in the Book of Revelation were instrumental in providing the authors of martyr stories with authoritative yet malleable material.

The picture Moss sketches of the many ways in which the interpretation and rereading of scriptural material informed a Christian theology of martyrdom remains somewhat vague and kaleidoscopic. This is certainly due to the vast scriptural material, patterns and structures, themes and motifs available to the authors of martyrological literature, and to the creativity with which these authors laid down their edifying narration of the life, suffering, and death of actual martyrs for a concrete audience in a concrete historical and geographical context. Yet this seemingly ever-flowing stream of writing and rewriting martyr texts did not come about by way of a *creatio ex nihilo*. In its collective memory, the early Church preserved those major patterns of a theology of martyrdom and the scriptural material that could be used to animate it. Lists of biblical *exempla* and of relevant scriptural passages circulated. Cyprian of Carthage's understudied *To Fortunatus* grants us access to this collective memory in a most extensive way and demonstrates that the early Church had a coherent theology of martyrdom as well as a systematic overview of scriptural material supporting it.

Cyprian's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* was written in a situation in which the afflictions of persecution weighed heavily upon North African Christians. Fortunatus, possibly a colleague-bishop of Cyprian, had asked him to write a treatise on the basis of the Holy Scriptures that would be an exhortation 'for preparing and strengthening the minds of the brethren, whereby I might animate the soldiers of Christ for the heavenly and spiritual contest' (*Ad Fort.* 1). Cyprian is happy to honour Fortunatus' request, but instead of a ready-made garment to put on, he wants to provide him with the rough materials to make his own garment. The treatise presents itself as a systematic, thematically organized catalogue of scriptural quotations, ranging in length from part of a verse to very long quotations of ten verses or more. In his *To Quirinus* Cyprian had done the same thing for

a diversity of theological and ecclesiastical themes, but here he offers in this vein, through a kind of florilegium of scriptural quotations without much commentary, the foundation and direction for a sustained theological reflection on martyrdom. In this florilegium many of the crucial scriptural verses that play a role in the early Church's reflection on martyrdom are listed. It is clear that the author could rely on a collection of systematically organized scriptural material that was readily available to him.

A schematic presentation of *To Fortunatus* (Weber and Bévenot 1972; titles taken from the ANF translation, modified), including rubrics provided by Cyprian himself with the relevant scriptural quotations, gives a good overview of the architecture and content of this large collection of *testimonia*:

- I. That idols are not gods, and the elements are not to be worshipped in the place of gods: Ps 134.15–18; Wis 15.15–17; Exod 20.4; Wis 13.1–4.
- II. That God alone must be worshipped: Deut 6.13; 5.7; 32.39; Rev 14.6–7; Mark 12.29–31; Matt 22.40; John 17.3.
- III. What is God's threatening against those who sacrifice to idols? Exod 22.20; Deut 32.17; Isa 2.8–9; 57.6; Jer 25.6; Rev 14.9–11.
- IV. That God does not easily pardon idolaters: Exod 32.31–3; Jer 11.14; Ezek 14.12–16; 1 Sam 2.25.
- V. That God is so angry against idolatry, that he has even enjoined those to be slain who persuade others to sacrifice and serve idols: Deut 13.7, 9–11; 13.13–19; Matt 10.32–3; 2 Tim 2.11–12; 1 John 2.23; Matt 10.28; John 12.25.
- VI. That being redeemed and enlivened by the blood of Christ, we ought to prefer nothing to Christ: Matt 10.37–8; Deut 33.9; Rom 8.35–7; 1 Cor 6.19–20; 2 Cor 5.15.
- VII. That those who are snatched from the jaws of the devil, and delivered from the snares of this world ought not again to return to the world, lest they should lose the advantage of their withdrawal therefrom: Exod 14.11–14; Luke 9.62; 17.31–2; 14.33.
- VIII. That we must press on and persevere in faith and virtue, and in completion of heavenly and spiritual grace, that we may attain to the palm and the crown: 2 Chr 15.2; Ezek 33.12; Matt 10.22; John 8.31–2; Luke 12.35–7; 1 Cor 9.24–5; 2 Tim 2.4–5; Rom 12.1–2; 8.16–17; Rev 3.11; Exod 17.11–14.
- IX. That afflictions and persecutions arise for the sake of our being proved: Deut 13.4; Sir 27.5; Rom 5.2–5; 1 Pet 4.12–14.
- X. That injuries and penalties of persecutions are not to be feared by us, because greater is the Lord to protect than the devil to assault: 1 John 4.4; Ps 117.6–7; 19.8–9; 26.3–4; Exod 1.12; Rev 2.10; Isa 43.1–3; Matt 10.19–20; Luke 21.14–15; Exod 4.11–12; Num 22.28–30.
- XI. That it was before predicted that the world would hold us in abhorrence, and that it would stir up persecutions against us, and that no new thing is happening to the Christians, since from the beginning of the world the good have suffered, and the righteous have been oppressed and slain by the unrighteous: John 15.18–20; 16.2–4; 16.20; 16.33; Matt 24.4–31; Dan 3.16–18; 14.5; Tob 13.6; Matt 23.9; 2 Macc 7.9–29 passim; 2 Macc 6.30; Rev 7.9, 10, 13–15.

- XII. What hope and reward remains for the righteous and for martyrs after the conflicts and sufferings of this present time: Wis 3.4–6.8; 5.1–9; Ps 115.6; 125.5–6; 118.1–2; Matt 5.10; Luke 6.22–3; 9.24; 18.29–30; Rev 20.4.
- XIII. That we receive more as the reward of our suffering than what we endure here in the suffering itself: 2 Cor 12.2; Rom 8.18.

## BIBLICAL *EXEMPLA*: THE MACCABEES AND STEPHEN THE PROTOMARTYR

---

In pagan and Jewish writings the use of *exempla* to instil virtues in readers was commonplace. Thus it is no surprise that early Christians adopted this practice as well. Gradually, but from quite early on, lists seem to have been compiled of biblical characters that served as *exempla* to promote the martyr's virtues such as perseverance in the faith amidst hardships or suffering for a good cause (or dying for it).<sup>1</sup> Generally, these lists featured many more *exempla* from the OT than from the NT, bearing testimony to the Jewish influence on Christian reflection on martyrdom. We can see this in Cyprian's *To Fortunatus* 11, in which an extensive list of biblical *exempla* occurs.

In the later development of the Christian discourse on martyrdom biblical *exempla* remained important. Christ was of course the paradigmatic character par excellence, the prism through which a theology of martyrdom was shaped, but this prism also made it possible to include and associate many diverse biblical characters. Other biblical books featured many more characters that could be brought to bear upon a theological reflection on martyrdom. Much work (especially for the Latin material) has been done in two essays by Simone Déléani-Nigoul (1985a; 1985b) and a monograph by Victor Saxer (1986). In what follows we will, therefore, sketch some main lines of the role two biblical *exempla* played in the development of a Christian theology of martyrdom: the Maccabees and Stephen the Protomartyr. The trajectory of their reception in patristic martyrdom texts is surprisingly different: though the Maccabees were Jewish heroes whose story was told in a book of doubtful canonicity, their integration into Christian literature occurred remarkably swiftly, whereas Stephen emerged very slowly as a paradigmatic character to whom more extensive attention would only later be given.

2 Maccabees 6 and 7 narrate two different episodes of martyrdom during the persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, one of the 90-year-old scribe Eleazar, and another of seven anonymous brothers encouraged by their mother. Following the prescriptions of the Law, they refused to eat pork, despite being tortured. Two centuries later their

<sup>1</sup> See Déléani-Nigoul (1985a:259 n. 50), who cites the following passages with lists of *exempla*: 1 *Clem.* 4–6; Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.18; id., *Iud.* 10; id., *pat.* 13; id., *Scorp.* 8; Cyprian, *mort.* 10–13; id., *Ad Fort.* 11; id., *pat.* 10; id., *zel. et liu.* 5; id., *epp.* 62; 58.5–6; 59.2, 4; 67.8; Commodian, *apol.*, 24, 513–19; Ps-Cyprian, *Iud.* 2.6–8; id., *mart.* 29.

story was much more fully developed in 4 Maccabees, which was ascribed to Josephus. In this version, the narrative shows even more of the characteristics of the later martyr acts and passions: the same basic structure (witty dialogue with an official; extensive tortures and promises with the martyr not giving in; a moment of reflection or feigned doubt in which the persecutor's hopes were briefly raised; ultimate refusal of the martyr to give in, followed by death sentence) as well as agonistic language, dialogical diatribe, and the ideal of perseverance and endurance (*ὑπομονή*) in circumstances of suffering. In the Christian reception of this Jewish story, surely strengthened by these Jews being venerated together once the martyr cult got into full swing, Eleazar, the seven, and their mother were fused to become 'the Maccabees'. As a harmonious unity, the Maccabees were particularly suited to function as an *exemplum* in the hagiographical narratives of groups of martyrs, such as the Forty of Sebaste (Lesser Armenia). But at the same time, Eleazar, the seven, and their mother each retained their own individuality as narrative characters, and they did not always occur together as a group. Because of their variety (an old man, a mother, seven brothers) they were very flexible *exempla* capable of being adopted in many different ways.

This flexibility in literary adoption or adaptation is clear in the *Letter on the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne*. Though the document contains no direct quotations of 2 or 4 Maccabees, the story of the Maccabees is clearly present in the author's mind, most obviously in its influence on the characters of the story. Thus, Blandina is clearly modelled after the mother of the Maccabees, and in Bishop Pothinus one may recognize quite well the old scribe Eleazar. Young Ponthicus seems to show some resemblance to the seventh son of the Maccabean brothers. Thematically both stories deal with the victory of the seemingly weak in a battle with their persecuting powers, and stylistically both employ strong and frequently agonistic language. In similar ways, the story of the Maccabees as told in 2 and 4 Maccabees has left its traces on the narrative and theological content of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and the *Letters* of Ignatius of Antioch.

In the third century, the Maccabees are prominently present in the writings of Cyprian and Origen. But they are not the only ones. Hippolytus of Rome devotes considerable attention to the Maccabees in his *Commentary on Daniel*, in which he offers an exhortation to martyrdom. The Maccabees are included here in conjunction with Daniel and the young men in the furnace as biblical *exempla* that should inspire endurance and perseverance in the face of persecution. The martyrs' eloquence is mentioned. That God did not save the martyrs from death is to be understood as a purposeful act: he explicitly wanted that their death should be an example for later generations and hence Hippolytus admonishes his readers to adopt the martyrs' attitude so that they too may win the crown of immortality.

In the *Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius*, as well as in the *Martyrdom of Marian and James*, the mother of the martyrs plays a central role in the narrative. In both instances, this character is very much modelled upon the mother of the Maccabees. In both texts, the woman encourages the martyrs in their pursuit of their heavenly reward. Her maternal love is celebrated as well as the Stoic manner in which she expressed this maternal love. Her love as a mother for her child was not directed by tenderness and a natural desire to

see him survive but rather by her faith and by a desire to see her son attain salvation by dying as a martyr (see Ziadé 2007).

In the fourth century, the author of the *Passion of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste* again adopted the theme of the mother of the Maccabees. The mother of one of the Forty exhibits the same behaviour and inspiration as the mother of the Maccabees and she is lauded in very similar terms (*M. Seb.* 11–12, in Gebhardt 1902:179–80). In his *First Homily on the Forty of Sebaste* Gregory of Nyssa expands at length on the role of the mother of the last one of the Forty who died. He not only describes and comments in a laudatory manner on the courageous way in which she displayed her maternal love, but he even has her delivering a farewell speech in which she exhorts her son to run the ultimate part of the contest and obtain the martyr's crown. She even lifts her dying son on the chariot and accompanies him to his burial place (*M. Seb. Ib.* in Heil, Cavarinos, and Lendle 1990:154–5).

Besides the role of the mother of the Maccabees, also the unity of the group of the Maccabees is mirrored in the hagiographical tradition of the Forty of Sebaste. Thus, the *Testament* of the Forty is a most idiosyncratic document in which the Forty express their wish to remain forever together after death and that their relics should not be dispersed (Seeliger and Wischmeyer 2015:293–307). Also in Basil's panegyric on the Forty and the two panegyric sermons by Gregory of Nyssa, this 'Maccabean unity' is a recurring theme (Vinel 1997).

But the Maccabees were not simply models for other martyrs. They were themselves venerated as Christian martyrs in the second half of the fourth century: well-established cults are attested in Nazianzus, Antioch, and Constantinople, and panegyrics by Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom reveal a rich martyrdom discourse developed in their homilies on the Maccabees.<sup>2</sup> Much of this discourse consists of elements that are typical to the martyr sermons of the fourth century and later. The martyr of the day is portrayed as an example of Christian virtues such as endurance in times of hardship, constancy of faith in God, and resistance to polytheism. Other traditional elements such as the agonistic language and martyrdom as a battle with the devil are also abundantly present. A typical feature of the discourse about the Maccabees is their Jewishness. Not surprisingly, both Gregory and John had to deal with some negative animosity in their audience because of the issue that the Maccabees were Jewish, not Christian heroes: they had died before the Incarnation (temporal argument) and they had died for the Law and not for Christ (theological argument). If the essence of martyrdom was the *imitatio Christi*, how can the Maccabees then be Christian martyrs, receiving a cult and veneration within a Christian community? What, then, is the legitimacy of the Maccabees as 'Christian' martyrs? Both bishops deal with the temporal and theological arguments in a similar manner. The temporal argument is turned in favour of the Maccabees: they suffered pain and suffered for a good cause without the Christological foundation of the promise of resurrection and eternal life. This makes their achievement of endurance and commitment

<sup>2</sup> The dossier consists of the following four texts: Gregory of Nazianzus, *or.* 15 (PG 35.912–33); John Chrysostom, *pan. Macc.* 1–2 (PG 50.617–22, 623–6), and his *Homily on Eleazar and the Seven Children* (PG 63.523–30). See also Ziadé 2007.

at least equal to that of the Christian martyrs, who could build their hope on Christ's victory over death. A theological argument is also advanced in their favour: in mysterious ways, the Maccabees already had knowledge of Christ's salvific work. Christ has a central role in God's salvific work but his revelation was also going on before the incarnation. The Maccabees had knowledge of the Word's presence in the world before the incarnation. In their supersessionist hermeneutics, both John and Gregory take it for granted that Christ was already animating and enlightening the events described in the OT. The Maccabees were among the very few who had, thanks to a mysterious process, access to this pre-incarnational revelation. They were Christian martyrs *avant la lettre*.

In the Latin West, Augustine of Hippo followed suit in taking up some of the themes associated with the martyrdom and cult of the Maccabees in the Greek East. Three Augustinian *sermones* preached on the feast of the Maccabees are extant (*sermo* 300; 301, 301A) and the *doctor gratiae* also mentions the martyrs in a few other passages (*Gaud.* 1.38; *ciu.* 18.36; *Psal.* 32.2.22). Even though he too is struggling with their Jewish background, he clearly holds them in high esteem. Martyrs indeed have quite an exceptional place in Augustine's theology: they constitute the sole exception to the strict condition that one needs to be baptized in order to enter heaven (*ciu.* 13.7), and he accepts the existence of Christian martyrs (such as the Maccabees, executed OT prophets, John the Baptist, the Holy Innocents) even before Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgical celebration of the Maccabees seems to have been well established in Augustine's Africa. Augustine explicates that despite the fact that the *passio* of the Maccabees took place before Christ's incarnation and passion, they are nevertheless to be considered as Christian martyrs. First of all, even before his own death, Christ already gathered his people (*serm.* 300.1). Hence, the Maccabees were Christian; moreover, they were martyrs, because they suffered for the sake of the Law of Moses, as the later martyrs would die in the name of Christ (*serm.* 300.2). More specifically, the Maccabees died for the name of Christ veiled in the Mosaic Law, as the later martyrs died for Christ's revealed name in the Gospel. Christ helped and crowned both groups of martyrs (*serm.* 300.5). Hence, it is not only fitting that the Maccabees are venerated, they should also be imitated in their love for the truth for which they were willing to die (*serm.* 300.6). The holy spectacle offered by the *passio* of the seven Maccabees purifies the heart—contrary to the lusts of the theatres that defile the eyes (*serm.* 301.7). Additionally, the Maccabees' mother serves as a prime example of patience and virtue (*serm.* 300.6). Willing to sacrifice her children for God, she is an image of the future Church (*serm.* 301.7).

The story of the life and death by stoning of Stephen, deacon in the church of Jerusalem (Acts 6–7), is clearly patterned on that of Jesus, and on this basis his *exemplum* was perceived to be worthy of imitation by other Christians. The early reception of this story was rather fragmentary and haphazard. Tertullian and Cyprian both refer once to him as an example of endurance in suffering (Tertullian, *pat.* 14.1; Cyprian, *pat.* 16), but Cyprian omits him in *To Fortunatus*, nor does Origen's *Exhortation* mention him. The liturgical reception of Stephen is unclear and shadowy at best. Yet, in the middle of the fourth century a liturgical feast for Stephen 'the first martyr' (*protomartyr*) is included in the *Martyrologium Syriacum* on his traditional feast-day of 26 December. In the final

decades of the fourth century several homilies by Gregory of Nyssa and Asterius of Amasea confirm the central place of this liturgical feast on the day after Christmas and its constitutive place in the post-Nativity block of feasts commemorating Stephen, James, John, Peter, and Paul (Bovon 2003; Mendez 2014). A most forceful illustration of how Stephen functioned as an imitator of Christ and as an example for the audience is offered in the brilliantly construed prologue of Gregory of Nyssa's *First Homily on Stephen the Protomartyr*, in which Christ and Stephen are juxtaposed six times in two clauses in the Greek text edited by Otto Lendle. Moreover, each clause of each pair has at least one keyword in common, which creates an echoing effect:

Yesterday the Master of Everything entertained us hospitably, today the Master's imitator is doing the same. How the former and how the latter? The former by putting on humanity because of us, the latter by putting off humanity because of him; the former by entering the cave of life because of us, the latter by leaving the cave because of him; the former by being wrapped up in swaddling clothes because of us, the latter by being lapidated because of him; the former by annihilating death, the latter by trampling upon the allayed death.

(*Steph.* I; Heil, Cavarinos, and Lendle 1990:75, ll. 6–13; translation ours)

This elaborated, symmetrical construction presents the Protomartyr, the main character of the homily, as 'the imitator of the Master' (*μιμητῆς τοῦ δεσπότου*). For, far more than as a biblical character, Stephen is presented to the audience as an imitator of Christ and it is precisely in this feature that he should become a source of inspiration and a model to follow. Moreover, the repetition of the 'him/us' opposition stylistically underlines the soteriological *theologoumenon* that Christ's life and death effected salvation, whereas Stephen's life and death occurred in imitation of Christ. In this way, the antithesis sets the tone of the homily and directs the way Gregory wishes his audience to perceive Stephen: not as a biblical character, but as a laudable imitator of Christ (Leemans 2010).

This idea is also present in Gregory's *Second Homily on Stephen* and in Asterius of Amasea's *Homily on Stephen*. But these are all still somehow isolated, sparse testimonies to the cult of the Protomartyr. The cult of Stephen received a new impetus when his remains were discovered near Jerusalem in 415 and quickly spread over the empire. Many local cults emerged as well as a rich hagiographical dossier consisting of texts in Latin, Greek, and many oriental languages (Bovon 2003).

In the Latin West Augustine of Hippo became the champion of the cult of the Protomartyr. After the discovery of the remains of Stephen in Jerusalem, through mediation of his Spanish friend Orosius, Augustine received relics of the first Christian martyr for his church in Hippo Regius, for whose honour he raised a *memoria* in 424 (*serm.* 318.1; also Dupont 2006). The bishop of Hippo preached frequently on 26 December, the day of the death of Stephen, celebrated as his heavenly *dies natalis*, the anniversary of his coronation (*serm.* 314.1). Frequently, Augustine alludes to the well-known *topos* of the meaning of Stephen's own first name, *Stephanos*, in Greek, namely the crown of leaves granted to the winners of the ancient games, which he agonistically explains as the

crown granted to Stephen through his martyrdom (*serm.* 314.1–2; 315.1, 6, 7, 9; 316.1–2, 5; 317.1, 5; 318.2–3; 319.6; 324).<sup>3</sup> Identical to sermons dedicated to other martyrs, Augustine gives the veneration of Stephen a Christological orientation: Stephen should be honoured and loved—not for his own sake—but for Christ’s. Christ gave him the strength to become a martyr, he was a witness of Christ (*serm.* 316.1; 318.1–3; 319.1). Unique in Augustine’s dealing with Stephen, however, is that he sees a striking similarity between Christ’s and Stephen’s passion (*serm.* 319.4). Christ commended his spirit to the Father on the cross (Luke 23.46), and Stephen commended his spirit to Christ during the stoning (Acts 7.59). Christ asked the Father for forgiveness for his murderers on the cross (Luke 23.34); likewise Stephen asked for forgiveness for his murderers during the stoning (Acts 7.60) (*serm.* 319.5; cf. *serm.* 314.2; 316.3; 317.6). The key difference between the two is that Jesus remained silent during his questioning (fulfilling Isa 53.7), whereas Stephen did not, in obedience to Jesus’ command to proclaim truth (Matt 10.27) (*serm.* 315.3).

This leads Augustine to a very particular appreciation of Stephen’s martyrdom. Stephen, like all the martyrs, is a model because he fought the temptation to sin. Martyrs do this, even under threat of death, like Susanna and Joseph in the OT. They differ from Adam and Eve, whom God threatened with death so they would not sin. The martyrs are victorious because by dying to avoid sin, they vanquished the death which was Adam and Eve’s punishment (*serm.* 318.2). Augustine further argues that Stephen followed the example of Christ (*serm.* 315.8–10; 317.3–6; 382.5), but the core of this *imitatio Christi* is not to be found in their common tragic and bloody death, but rather in their love for their enemies. If Christians despair that it is for humans too difficult to forgive their enemies, that it is too difficult to follow Christ’s divine example, Augustine answers: *Attende Stephanum conseruum tuum*. Stephen, as a *conservus*/fellow-servant, was not God, as Christ, but human, thus illustrating for Augustine’s audience that Christians are capable of forgiving their enemies (*serm.* 317.3–4; 382.3; cf. *serm.* 317.3). This rich multifaceted portrayal as developed by Augustine would then find its way into the bloodstream of Western Christianity through the inclusion of many of his homilies on Stephen in florilegia and lectionaria, such as the *Lectioarium* of Piacenza.

## PSALM 115.6 AS EXAMPLE OF A BIBLICAL CHORUS

---

Some biblical passages do not occur very often in patristic literature but are, as it were, ‘handmade’ to support a martyrdom discourse. They are more like ‘back-up vocals’ or choirs. They invite multiple interpretations, are flexible in application, and, therefore, occur very frequently, yet often unexpectedly. But they are of equally great importance for

<sup>3</sup> Augustine often uses agonistic imagery: Stephen is an *athlete* (*serm.* 315.5) involved in an *agon* (*serm.* 315.10) and *certamen* (*serm.* 314.1; 317.5) in a *stadium* with a *palma* as reward (*serm.* 318.3), a *miles* (*serm.* 314.1; 317.5) who battles in a *praelium* (*serm.* 314.2). The result of that battle was a victory and a triumph for Stephen (*serm.* 318.2; 319.2; 319.6).

understanding the martyrdom discourse as are the more foundational biblical passages noted above. A prime example of such a passage is Psalm 115.6: 'Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints.' It functions in several martyrdom-related contexts.

The first context is that of the martyr cult and the hagio-biographical literature composed by Gregory of Nyssa. In his *Homily in Praise of Theodore the Recruit* Gregory discusses the post-mortal fate of the martyr. His body is the object of veneration and his soul abides in a blessed place where it is awaiting the *apokatastasis* (Heil, Cavanros, and Lendle 1990:62–4). Psalm 115.6 is quoted in confirmation of this blessed state of Theodore's body and soul (Heil, Cavanros, and Lendle 1990:64). In Gregory's funeral orations *On Flacilla* and *On Meletius*, Psalm 115.6 is used as consolation: because the beloved, now deceased, has lived an exemplary Christian life, she or he will certainly also share in a blessed post-mortal state after death (Heil et al. 1992:455, ll. 2–5; 482, ll. 18–19). Similarly, Basil of Caesarea points out in his *Homily on Psalm 115* that God's commitment expressed in Psalm 115.6 is enough to show that death must be seen as a transition to a better life (*hom. in Ps. 115.4*; PG 30.112A).

Psalm 115.6 also functions within the discussions about the sense and usefulness of martyrs and the martyr cult. In *Against Celsus* Origen reacts to his opponent's assertion that the martyrs' refusal to sacrifice to pagan idols and therefore undergo suffering and death is in vain. 'It is with good reason,' he writes, 'that we have regarded it as a matter dear to God if one is crucified for virtue, and is tortured for piety, and dies for holiness. *Precious before the Lord is the death of his holy ones*' (*Cels. 8.54*). In a similar vein Gregory of Nyssa's epigone Asterius, bishop of Amasea (Pontus) in the late fourth century, uses Psalm 115.6 to highlight the attraction and wide distribution of the cultic locations for the veneration of the martyr Phocas, hailing from nearby Sinope, but being venerated in many places in the Mediterranean region (*hom. 9*; Datema 1970:123). The *Apostolic Constitutions*, a text from the late fourth century, also discusses the person of the martyr, the meaning of martyrdom, and the role of martyr festivals. The author sings the praise of the martyrs as blameless, tireless in their pursuit of virtue, and never giving in to evil. God blessed them and until this very day they are venerated by holy men and women. Quotations from Psalm 115.6, Proverbs 10.7, and Isaiah 57.1 support this eulogy of the martyrs (*const. app. 5.8.2*). At the end of Book VI the author exhorts his readers not to attach too much value to the criticism of the martyr cult by its opponents. With reference to Psalm 115.6 he encourages them to go on venerating and paying the normal and due honour to the martyrs (*const. app. 5.30.2–3*). A passage at the end of Asterius' sermon *On the Holy Martyrs* confirms that by the late fourth century the martyr cult had become a bone of contention between different Christian factions, and that Psalm 115.6 was an argument in favour of it. We read that in Amasea there were heretics who rejected the martyr cult and considered their graves not as cultic places but just as polluted mass-graves. Apparently they were, says Asterius, unaware of the divinely inspired scriptural verse from Psalm 115.6 (though, as Christians, they should have recognized it!) (*hom. 10.18.5*; Datema 1970:146).

In his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, when commenting on Matthew 26.39b ('My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me'), Origen argues with reference to Psalm 115.6

that martyrdom in imitation of the one Jesus suffered is something worthy to pursue (Origen, *mart.* 29). The same thought is expressed in some commentaries on the Psalms, as we have already seen in the above-mentioned comment on Psalm 115.6 by Basil of Caesarea. Just like Basil, other authors also relate this verse to martyrdom. Eusebius of Caesarea does so twice (*Ps.*, PG 23.812C, 1360D). In the *Commentary on the Psalms* ascribed to Athanasius, a conditional aspect is introduced. The death of his holy ones is indeed precious in the Lord's eyes on condition that they have shaped their lives and death as a radical *imitatio Christi*, which may be understood as a reference to martyrdom as well as other forms of radical Christian life (*exp. Ps.*, PG 27.473C). Didymus the Blind proffers a similar line of thought in his comment on Psalm 33.22a ('a sinner's death is bad'). Didymus quotes Psalm 115.6 in juxtaposition to Psalm 33.22a: while the death of sinners is bad, the death of those who have lived with Christ is good. Those who have associated themselves with his life and death will also share in his resurrection. When they die the same good death as Christ, they may count on also receiving the same resurrection (*Ps.* 203.17).

## MATTHEW 10.23 AND KAIROLOGICAL MARTYRDOM

---

From the above, one may have the impression that this martyr discourse and the large corpus of writings connected to it reflect a high amount of enthusiasm for martyrdom as an ideal that was to be sought and pursued at all costs. This is certainly true *post factum*: somebody who had suffered and died as a martyr was invariably held in high esteem; the same holds for the 'confessors', those who had suffered because of their faith, carried the marks of their tortures, but survived. Yet this does not mean that a priori, at the moment when fleeing for persecution was still an option, one had deliberately to choose the road to martyrdom. This was far from self-evident and in general it is fair to say that a more moderate, 'kairological' attitude towards martyrdom prevailed. The tension between voluntary and kairological martyrdom is a recurrent point in the theological debate about martyrdom. A voluntary martyr is a Christian who 'deliberately and unnecessarily provoked persecution and thus sought a death which he might have avoided without any sacrifice of Christian principle' (Ste Croix 2008:153). Besides these truly zealous martyrs suffering from *Martyriumsenthusiasmus*, there also were quasi-voluntary martyrs, such as those who refused military service, openly refused to sacrifice, or deliberately attracted the attention of the authorities to themselves. It seems that not too many Christians actually died as voluntary martyrs (see Ste Croix 2008; Butterweck 1995). Kairological martyrdom is the opposite; martyrdom is not to be sought but is not to be fled either, on condition that it presents itself at the right time, the *kairos*. As long as this *kairos* has not come and martyrdom has become inevitable, it is lawful to flee persecution. This position in one form or another was usually that of the church authorities. It was often buttressed

with reference to Matthew 10.23, in which Jesus says: 'If they persecute you in one city, flee to another.' This more moderate approach would become the majority position in the early Church, but certainly during the first centuries this issue did not pass without debate.

On the narrative level this debate is clearly present in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*. The opening chapters of this *passio* describe the atrocities taking place on occasion of a local pogrom in Smyrna, where Polycarp was bishop. Christians are thrown before the beasts in the arena and we are told a certain Germanicus fought bravely. The mass then is crying for their bishop Polycarp. At that point, the narrator introduces a new character:

There was a Phrygian named Quintus who had only recently come from Phrygia, and when he saw the wild animals he turned cowardly. Now he was the one who had given himself up and had forced some others to give themselves up voluntarily. With him the governor used many arguments and persuaded him to swear by the gods and offer sacrifice. This is the reason, brothers, that we do not approve of those who come forward of themselves; this is not the teaching of the Gospel

(*M. Polyc.* 4; trans. Musurillo 1972:4–5).

The 'teaching of the Gospel' refers to Matthew 10.23 and the narrator has Polycarp immediately give the correct example of a kairological approach to martyrdom. For indeed, when Polycarp hears about the atrocities in the city, he wants to remain there and to lend his support to his flock. But ultimately he gives in to the urgent requests of some of his friends to flee to an estate at the outskirts of the city. There he remains for some weeks, praying and fasting. Then he receives a vision, informing him that those hunting him down are near. Yet even then he flees to another estate. Only when some of the servants at that estate betray him do his persecutors manage to capture him. The narrator makes it abundantly clear to his readers that voluntary martyrdom is to be avoided and that, even when the *kairos* seems near, it still is not necessary to be too hasty.

The theologians of the early Church explicitly reflected on kairological martyrdom. In the early third century, Clement of Alexandria offers a good example. For him, martyrdom is not a shortcut to heaven. In the Christian's process of spiritual growth, martyrdom has its place as just one step, albeit the last one, on the road to perfection. This final step, however, cannot be separated from the life somebody led before. When a Christian did not grow in his or her daily life towards this perfection, he or she could not compensate for this by sacrificing his or her self in an act of voluntary martyrdom. 'Martyrdom . . . was a culminating act, the rare climax of a life already directed solely by love towards God' (Frend 1965:355). Only on this condition, and when the right circumstances presented themselves and the unavoidable *kairos* had come, was martyrdom the legitimate choice. Voluntary martyrdom was to be rejected for two reasons: the Lord's command in Matthew 10.23 and the necessity not to become a cause of evil. When giving oneself up for a martyr's death, one caused one's own death and, on top of that, one made the one who executes the sentence a sinner against God (Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 4.10.76–7).

Following Clement, many church leaders and authors (no doubt partly because they fled persecution themselves) defended as lawful the fleeing from persecution. Interestingly,

there seems to have been some sort of an Alexandrian ‘tradition’ that defended fleeing from persecution (Leemans 2003). Somewhat surprisingly, Origen also defends this interpretation. The vigorous defender of martyrdom of the *Exhortation* in some other passages of his writings brings forward a more nuanced stance. The following elements are brought to the fore: the Lord’s command in Matthew 10.23, but also his own example and that of other biblical characters; the fact that one should not underestimate this terrible ordeal that one should not take all too lightly upon oneself; the fact that by taking flight one preserves the persecutor from committing a graver sin; and the fact that it is much more advisable to await the moment determined by divine providence than to determine it oneself and rush to martyrdom (cf. *Jo.* 28.23; *comm. in Mt.* 10.23, 16.1; *Cels.* 1.65). Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria defended his own flight from persecution in his *Letter to Germanus*. Similar to Origen, he underlines the importance of the role of divine providence and of obedience to the divine economy (letter extant in Eusebius, *h.e.* 6.40). Peter of Alexandria, who himself had fled during the Diocletianic persecution, in canon 9 of his *Canonical Letter* brings forward the same arguments, though with strong biblical overtones. In addition to Matthew 10.16–23, he also refers to the *exempla* of Stephen, James, Peter, and Paul who all at one time evaded persecution (*ep. can.*, PG 18.484–5). The tradition is brought to a close in Athanasius of Alexandria’s *Apology for his Flight*, in which all the above-mentioned elements are brought together and in which the most extensive list of biblical *exempla* is included (next to arguments of historical and polemical nature) (Pettersen 1984; Butterweck 1995:73–85; Leemans 2003:901–10).

Also elsewhere, in other regions of the empire, reflections on flight from persecution and kairological views on martyrdom were developed in a variety of writings and discourses. Along with the other themes we have addressed in this chapter, this form of *imitatio Christi* was also brought to a contextualized synthesis by Augustine of Hippo. To him we now turn.

## DIFFERING BIBLICAL APPROACHES TO MARTYRDOM IN AUGUSTINE AND THE DONATISTS

---

The veneration of martyrs ‘was one of the most deeply ingrained characteristics of African Christianity’ (Burns and Jensen 2014:519). Many martyr narratives (*passiones, acta*) were produced in this region, beginning with the *Acta* of the martyrs of Scilli (around 180), as well as, for instance, the famous *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*. In these primary sources, and in later North African martyr theologies, Scripture played a pivotal role in reflections about the true significance of martyrdom.

In 1990 Maureen Tilley published a paradigmatic analysis of the use of the Bible in two North African martyr stories (Tilley 1990), foreshadowing the variant positions of

Augustine and the Donatists that we will further elaborate below. Martyr stories are not only meant as memorials of the courage of the martyrs, but are also intended 'to achieve some control over the behavior and beliefs of readers by assigning value to community standards'. In particular, Tilley argues, the way in which biblical quotations were used is indicative for 'specific problems facing the communities that produced the martyr stories' (Tilley 1990:384). She notices three levels of scriptural references in the *Passions of Sts. Montanus and Lucius* (Carthage, late 250s, Valerianic persecution): (1) the sketching of the (historical) conflict with the (outside) world that would result in certain glory/victory (Ps 118.105; Prov 21.1; Eccl 1.7; Matt 28.20; 1 Cor 15.55–7); (2) the conferring of authority on the martyrs as role models by explicitly linking them to Christ (Matt 28.20; Rom 8.17; Rev 20.4); and (3) the reinforcing of the message of the martyrs, namely the endurance (Ps 50.15; Luke 23.42; 2 Cor 6.9; 1 Tim 2.4) and unity of the community by reconciliation with the penitent *lapsi* (Matt 5.9; 7.7; 18.19; 1 John 2.4–7; Col 3.14; 2 Tim 2.12; Rom 8.17). The fact that most of the quotations are provided to support the message of the martyrs, and the majority of these are dedicated to preserve the concord of the community by readmitting *lapsi*, clearly indicates the latter issue was the most urgent problem of the Carthaginian Church at that moment. The second martyr story investigated by Tilley was the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* (Donatist version of *Acta Martyrum Saturni Presbyteri, Felicis, Dativi, Ampelii et Aliorum*, dating to 303–4, Diocletianic persecution), which forms a stark contrast with the previous *Passio*. Again we find the Bible quoted according to three functions. First, different from the *Passio*, the conflict now depicted is an anti-historical, eschatological combat (Acts 5.38–9; Eph 6.14; 1 Cor 15.52 and several passages from Revelation). Second, the endorsement of the martyrs is here not based on their proximity to Christ, but on the OT 'black-or-white' distinction between fidelity and idolatry. Like the heroic Eleazar (2 Macc 6.23), or the seven Maccabean brothers (2 Macc 7), or the solemn and ritually pure assembly of Israel during liturgy (the *collecta*: 2 Chr 7.9; Deut 16.8; Lev 23.36), the martyrs remained faithful at all costs. Third, identical with the previous *Passio*, the majority of the biblical quotations in the *Acta* express the message of the martyrs, but with a completely opposite content and objective: condemnation of all sinners, division, and separation (2 Cor 6.13–18; Rev 22.18–19). Thus, the *Passio* and the *Acta* show the lines of the future debate: reconciliation or excommunication. Following the same lines, they also illustrate how in North Africa two very different martyr theologies (and intertwined ecclesiologies) emerged, and how the Bible was used to serve the distinct objectives of both.

We find around 1,600 references to the notion of martyrdom in Augustine's literary corpus, mainly in his preaching. Martyrs/martyrdom clearly mean *testes/testimonia* according to Augustine (e.g. *Serm.* 299F.1), and this on two levels, namely Christological and ethical (see den Boeft 1989; Pellegrino 1982; Saxer 1980; von Campenhausen 1936:101–6; van Bavel 1995). Scriptural references substantiate both aspects.<sup>4</sup> Christ plays the central

<sup>4</sup> Frequently quoted Bible passages in this perspective are: Song 8.6; Matt 10.39; 13.31; John 10.11; 12.24–5; 15.13; 1 Cor 13.3; 1 Pet 2.21; 1 John 3.16.

role—the first level. Martyrs followed in the footsteps of Christ, as 1 Peter 2.21 exhorts (*tract. eu. Io.* 80.1; 105.4). Similar to him, as mustard seeds or as grain, they died in order to bear fruit (Matt 13.31; John 12.24) (*Psal.* 68.11; *serm.* 335E). Like Christ, martyrs gave up their lives for their fellow Christians (John 15.13; 1 John 3.16) (*Psal.* 51.9; 102.3; 141.11; *serm.* 392.2; *tract. eu. Io.* 47.11). More importantly, martyrs do not only follow Christ's example, for it is Christ who gives them the strength to undergo their tortures. It is Christ who speaks in them the words of Matthew 10.20 and John 16.4 (*serm.* 128.3; 313.3; *Psal.* 103.4.4.14; 118.13.2; 118.15.3; 141.5; *tract. eu. Io.* 94.2). Here the first level is interwoven with the second, ethical level: by imitating Christ, therefore, the martyrs offer Christians of all times a model of a virtuous ethical life (*serm.* 4.37; 325.2). In this way, they embody the virtues of hope, love, faith, and conscience praised in 1 Timothy 1.5 and 1 Corinthians 13.13 (*Faust.* 19.12; *Psal.* 67.36). As Psalm 120.7 reads, they are always directed to the Lord, whatever they do (*Psal.* 36.2.3; 40.2; 118.32.5; 120.13). They exemplify the biblical virtue of self-denial, e.g. expressed in Matthew 10.39 and John 12.25 (*serm.* 313C; 326.1; 331.1). Precisely because of his plea of an ethical *imitatio martyris*, Augustine takes care not to put them on a pedestal. Portraying them as tangible persons, close to his flock, he intends to stress that it is not impossible or unfeasible to imitate their virtues.

Inspired by 1 John 3.16 and John 15.13 Augustine describes martyrs as (exemplary) members of the body of the Church, who spilled their blood for the sake of the Church (*Psal.* 51.9; 67.36), with Christ as their head and leader (*serm.* 316.2; 335G, 335H.1; *tract. eu. Io.* 43.12). Augustine developed his martyr ecclesiology and his specific kairological definition of martyrdom in contradistinction to the Donatists. Donatism, the majority Church in North Africa at the start of Augustine's episcopacy, found its origin in the rejection of the *lapsi* during the period of persecutions. They considered literal martyrdom as the hallmark of true Christianity, which resulted in an elitist and rigorist ecclesial model, as well as a self-appropriation of martyrdom—two features of Donatism severely condemned by Augustine.

First, the Donatists held to an elitarian Church model: the Church consists only of sinless members, and all sinners should be immediately excluded. They used biblical images to advocate their claim. They considered the Church to be 'a closed garden, a sealed fountain'. The Donatists combined these images, found by Cyprian in Song of Songs 4.12–13 (16a) and 6.8, with Ephesians 5.27 to emphasize the Church as a closed and sinless community (Cyprian, *ep.* 69.2.2; 74.2; Augustine, *bapt.* 4.27.38). Similarly, they observed that Noah's ark only housed eight persons. The Church should thus be limited to a small group of righteous people, for which reason all sinners should be excommunicated. Augustine argues that their exegesis is faulty, and stresses that the earthly Church is not a restricted and exclusive group, but on the contrary a large and inclusive community, a *corpus mixtum*, containing saints and sinners. Respectively, he notices that the garden mentioned in Song of Songs 2.2 contained both lilies and thorns (Augustine, *bapt.* 5.27.38; see also Henry 1996), and that there were also 'stinking' animals on board of Noah's ark (*ep. ad cath.* 5.9; cf. also Tertullian, *idol.* 24). In the end, distinguishing sinners from non-sinners is God's prerogative, and will take place in the afterlife. Here on

earth, the only responsibility Christians have is to tolerate sinners and pray for their forgiveness. As exemplified above by the *Acts of Abitinian Martyrs*, the Bible is referred to in the Donatist martyr narratives to underline the enduring quest of martyrs to remain pure, to refuse any form of accommodation or collaboration, underpinning the strict and restrictive church model propagated by the Donatists. For that reason, the Maccabean martyrs are important examples for Donatists too (see e.g. the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* 19–21; Augustine, *c. litt. Petil.* 2.92–202). And they too selected citations to support the aspiration of the martyrs to remain pure, for instance John 15.16–20 in the *Sermon on the Passion of Sts. Donatus and Advocatus* 7, attributed to Donatus (for whom Donatism is named) (see also Frend 1952; Tilley 1996 and 1997a). Augustine replies that martyrs are fundamentally driven by their love for ecclesial unity, and repudiates the Donatists' exclusivistic exegesis of Song of Songs 1.6–7, which they used to claim that North Africa was the sole locus of the true Church (see Dupont and Dalvit 2014).

Second, when Donatism was outlawed by imperial decree (at the instigation of Augustine and his 'Catholic' confreres), they viewed their persecution as martyrdom, and proclaimed their community, based on Matthew 5.10 ('Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'), to be the true Church of martyrs.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, they sometimes purposefully sought martyrdom for themselves. Here Augustine introduced his famous distinction between cause and punishment: only the correct *causa* and not the actual *poena* constitutes authentic martyrdom (*ep.* 185; *serm.* 275.1; 327.2; *Psal.* 34.2.1; 68.1.9; *Cresc.* 3.47.51; *ep.* 89.2). He refers to the difference between Hagar and David, the thieves crucified with Christ, and Christ himself: the first were persecuted righteously, the second was not (*ep.* 185.9). As 1 Corinthians 13.3 stipulates, true martyrs are driven by *caritas* (*Psal.* 118.21.8; 118.30.7), quite different from many Donatists, whose motivation according to Augustine was to break ecclesial unity (*serm.* 89.2; 108.14; 204.4; 325.2; *epp.* 88.8; 89.2; 93.6; 105.5; 185.9; *Gaud.* 1.6.22). For the latter crime, which was not the proper *causa* to acquire the title of martyr, such Donatists deserved their punishment (*poena*).

Augustine moulded the theme of martyrdom into a doctrinal identity marker, especially against his two most important adversaries, the Donatists and the Pelagians (see Dupont 2010 and 2012). He rejected the Donatist appropriation of the martyrs, and by distinguishing *causa* from *poena*, he likewise rejected the classical ideal of a noble death/suicide (*ciu.* 1, *passim*), which was accepted by contemporaries such as Ambrose and Jerome. The martyrs' *timor mortis*, for which they needed divine grace to overcome (*serm.* 299.8), is used by Augustine as an anti-Pelagian argument for the existence of

<sup>5</sup> During times of peace, when there were no persecutions, an alternative form of Donatist self-identity was that of the Hebrew *collecta* (the worshipping, ritually clean assembly of Israel: Lev 23.36; Deut 16.8; 2 Chr 7.9; Neh 8.18; Exod 12.3; 16.10), which evidently also expressed an exclusivist ecclesiology. Tilley (1997b) suggests that Donatists appealed to the assembly of the people of Israel in a more 'positive' manner for the sake of promoting their self-identity (*vis-à-vis* their adversaries depicted as the 'enemies of faithful Israel'), as opposed to the Catholic position which saw in Israel a counter-type against which the Christian community should define itself (negatively referring to the 'sins of Israel', and in a supersessionist way stating that the Church replaces Israel).

original sin: the penalty for this sin was death, which caused fear, and so by overcoming this fear of death, through the help of Christ, the martyrs fulfilled the definition of faith in Hebrews 11 (*ciu.* 13.4). Even more innovative, however, was Augustine's 'pastoral instrumentalization' of the martyr. This move is illustrated par excellence in his more than 100 sermons delivered on the feast-days of martyrs (see Lapointe 1972:73–6; Margoni-Kögler 2010:143–70), in which he relentlessly explains to his flock the 'correct' understanding of martyrs, namely as Christological and ethical signposts. The cult of martyrs may never replace Christ. Martyrs themselves always refer to Christ, hence venerating martyrs is essentially worshipping Christ. Despite factual martyrdom belonging to the past, martyrs still offer an example to follow—according to the pastor of Hippo. Venerating martyrs leads to imitating their virtues. Augustine did not ask for literal or bloody copies of the original martyrs, but he invites his flock to embody the virtues that led to their death, and thus to internalize their attempt to live in an authentic Christian way. The idea that martyrdom is not about the suffering, pain, and punishment (*poena*), but the disposition of love and a life directed towards God, is part of Augustine's enduring legacy that to this day still plays a part in the Christian theological tradition.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Martyrium Polycarpi*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).
- Asterius of Amasea, *Homiliae*. Greek text: C. Datema (ed.), *Asterius of Amasea: Homilies I–XIV: Text, Introduction and Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).
- Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad Fortunatum de exhortatione martyrii*. Latin text: R. Weber and M. Bévenot (eds), *Cyprianus: Opera I*, CCL 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1972). Eng. trans.: E. Wallis, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novation*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (repr.: Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 496–507.
- Gebhardt, O. van (1902). *Acta martyrum selecta: Ausgewählte Märtyreracten und andere Urkunden aus der Verfolgungszeit der christliche Kirche* (Leipzig: Hinrichs).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Encomia in Stephanum*. Greek text: G. Heil, J. Cavanros, and O. Lendle (eds), *Sermones*, Gregorii Nysseni Opera, vol. 10, pt. 1, 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1990).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *First Homily on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (Ia and Ib)*. Greek text: G. Heil, J. Cavanros, and O. Lendle (eds), *Sermones*, Gregorii Nysseni Opera, vol. 10, pt. 1, 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1990). Eng. trans.: J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen, and B. Dehandschutter, in *'Let Us Die That We May Live': Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine, and Syria (c. AD 350–AD 450)* (London: Routledge, 2003), 91–106.
- Origen, *Contra Celsum*. Greek text: M. Borret (ed.), *Contre Celse*, SC 150 (Paris: Cerf, 1969). Eng. trans.: H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).
- Rebillard, E. (2017) (ed. and trans.). *Greek and Latin Narratives about the Ancient Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

- Seeliger, H., and Wischmeyer, W. (2015) (ed. and trans.). *Märtyrerliteratur herausgegeben, übersetzt, kommentiert und eingeleitet* (Berlin: De Gruyter).
- Tilley, M. (1996) (ed. and trans.). *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in North Africa*, Translated Texts for Historians 24 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press).

## Scholarship

- Bavel, T. J. van (1995). 'The Cult of the Martyrs in St. Augustine: Theology versus Popular Religion?', in M. Lamberigts and P. van Deun (eds), *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective: Memorial Louis Reekmans* (Leuven: Peeters), 351–61.
- Boeft, J. den (1989). 'Martyres sunt, sed homines fuerunt: Augustine on Martyrdom', in A. A. R. Bastiaensen, A. Hillhorst, and C. H. Kneepkens (eds), *Fructus Centesimus: Mélanges offerts à Gerard J. M. Bartelink à l'occasion de son soixante-cinquième anniversaire* (Dordrecht: Kluwer), 115–24.
- Bovon, F. (2003). 'The Dossier on Stephen, the First Martyr', *HTR* 96: 279–315.
- Burns, J. P., and Jensen, R. (2014). *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Butterweck, C. (1995). *Martyriumssucht in der Alten Kirche? Studien zur Darstellung und Deutung frühchristlicher Martyrien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Campenhause, H. von (1936). *Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Déléani-Nigoul, S. (1985a). 'Les Exempla bibliques du martyr', in J. Fontaine and C. Piétri (eds), *Le Monde latin antique et la Bible* (Paris: Beauchesne), 243–60.
- Déléani-Nigoul, S. (1985b). 'Utilisation des modèles bibliques du martyr par les écrivains du IIIe siècle', in J. Fontaine and C. Piétri (eds), *Le Monde latin antique et la Bible* (Paris: Beauchesne), 315–39.
- Dupont, A. (2006). 'Imitatio Christi, Imitatio Stephani: Augustine's Thinking on Martyrdom Based on his Sermons on the Protomartyr Stephen', *Augustiniana* 56: 29–61.
- Dupont, A. (2010). 'Augustine's Anti-Pelagian Interpretation of Two Martyr Sermons: Sermones 299 and 335B on the Unnaturalness of Human Death', in J. Leemans (ed.), *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter* (Leuven: Peeters), 87–102.
- Dupont, A. (2012). 'Augustine's Homiletic Definition of Martyrdom: The Centrality of the Martyr's Grace in his Anti-Donatist and Anti-Pelagian *Sermones ad Populum*', in P. Gemeinhardt and J. Leemans (eds), *Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity (300–450 AD): History and Discourse, Tradition and Religious Identity* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 155–78.
- Dupont, A., and Dalvit, M. (2014). 'From a Martyrological *Tabernacula pastorum* towards a Geographical *In meridie*: Augustine's Representation and Refutation of the Donatist Exegesis of Sg. 1,6–7', *RHE* 109: 5–34.
- Freund, W. H. C. (1952). *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Freund, W. H. C. (1965). *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Henry, N. (1996). 'The Lily and the Thorns: Augustine's Refutation of the Donatist Exegesis of the Song of Songs', *REAug* 42: 255–66.

- Henten, J. W. van, and Avemarie, F. (2002). *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (London and New York: Routledge).
- Henten, J. W. van, Dehandschutter, B., and van der Klaauw, H. J. W. (1989) (eds). *Die Entstehung der jüdischen Martyrologie* (Leiden: Brill).
- Lapointe, G. (1972). *La célébration des martyrs en Afrique d'après les sermons de saint Augustin* (Montreal: Cahiers de Communauté Chrétienne).
- Leemans, J. (2003). 'The Idea of "Flight for Persecution" in the Alexandrian Tradition from Clement to Athanasius', in L. Perrone (ed.), *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition* (Leuven, Peeters), 901–10.
- Leemans, J. (2010). 'Reading Acts 6–7 in the Early Church: Gregory of Nyssa's First and Second Homilies on Stephen the Protomartyr', *SP* 47: 9–20 (Leuven: Peeters).
- Margoni-Kögler, M. (2010). *Die Perikopen im Gottesdienst bei Augustinus: Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der liturgischen Schriflesung in der frühen Kirche* (Vienna: Verlag Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften).
- Mendez, H. (2014). 'The Origin of the Post-Nativity Commemorations', *VC* 68: 290–309.
- Moss, C. (2010). *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Pellegrino, M. (1982). 'Chiesa e martirio in sant'Agostino', in *Ricerche Patristiche (1938–1980)* 1 (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus), 597–633.
- Pettersen, A. (1984). 'To Flee or Not to Flee: An Assessment of Athanasius' *De Fuga Sua*', in W. J. Sheils (ed.), *Persecution and Toleration* (Oxford, Blackwell), 29–43.
- Pfifzner, V. (1967). *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* (Leiden: Brill).
- Roskam, G. (2010). 'The Figure of Socrates in the Early Christian *Acta Martyrum*', in J. Leemans (ed.), *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity* (Leuven: Peeters), 241–56.
- Saxer, V. (1980). *Morts, martyrs, reliques en Afrique chrétienne aux premiers siècles: Les témoignages de Tertullien, Cyprien et Augustin à la lumière de l'archéologie africaine* (Paris: Beauchesne).
- Saxer, V. (1986). *Bible et hagiographie: Textes et thèmes bibliques dans les Actes des martyrs authentiques des premiers siècles* (Bern and New York: Peter Lang).
- Ste Croix, G. E. M. (2008). 'Voluntary Martyrdom in the Early Church', in G. E. M. de Ste Croix, J. Streeter, and M. Whitby (eds), *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 153–200.
- Tilley, M. (1990). 'Scripture as an Element of Social Control: Two Martyr Stories of Christian North Africa', *HTR* 83: 383–97.
- Tilley, M. (1997a). *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress).
- Tilley, M. (1997b). 'Sustaining Donatist Self-Identity: From the Church of the Martyrs to the *Collecta* of the Desert', *J ECS* 5: 21–35.
- Vinel, F. (1997). 'Sainteté anonyme, sainteté collective? Les quarante martyrs de Sébastée dans quelques textes du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle', in G. Freyburger and L. Pernot (eds), *Du héros païen au saint chrétien: Actes du colloque organisé par le Centre d'Analyse des Rhétoriques Religieuses de l'Antiquité (C.A.R.R.A.), Strasbourg, 1er–2 décembre 1995* (Paris: Études augustiniennes), 125–31.
- Ziadé, R. (2007). *Les Martyrs Maccabées: De l'histoire juive au culte chrétien. Les homélies de Grégoire de Nazianze et de Jean Chrysostome* (Leiden: Brill).

**Suggested Reading**

- Gemeinhardt, P, and Leemans, J. (2012) (eds). *Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity (300–450 AD): History and Discourse, Tradition and Religious Identity* (Berlin: De Gruyter).
- Musurillo, H. (1972) (ed. and trans.). *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Saxer, V. (1997). 'The Influence of the Bible in Early Christian Martyrology', in P. Blowers (ed. and trans.), *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 342–74.

## CHAPTER 28

---

# SCRIPTURE IN THE TRINITARIAN CONTROVERSIES

---

LEWIS AYRES

THE Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century were exegetical. This statement is, however, easily open to misinterpretation. I do not, for example, intend to imply that the controversies were not also 'philosophical'. Rather, I mean that particular exegetical questions were central to the debates, even as those texts and debates had generated questions that Christians had long approached by adapting to their use non-Christian philosophical doctrines and modes of thinking. Indeed, the fourth-century debates were themselves dependent on modes of arguing philosophically about scriptural texts that Christians had been shaping since the early second century.

During that century Christians came to treat the texts of the inherited Jewish Scriptures and the emerging Christian Scriptures as a unified textual resource. But even before they did so, we find Christians using the language of these scriptural resources to describe their faith and the world around them. In the same way that Christ himself and the earliest generation of Christians adapted the language of the Jewish Scriptures to describe their place in the world and its history, later generations of Christians continued to do so, now drawing also on established traditions of Christian speech. However, the second century also saw Christians using new methods of reading and of argument on their emergent unified Scripture.

First, Christian writers adapted reading techniques from traditions of textual analysis developed by their non-Christian Greek forebears (in the disciplines known as grammar and rhetoric; see Irvine 1994; Eden 1997; Pfeiffer 1968). Some of these are already used within the texts that would come to form part of the New Testament, and some closely parallel reading techniques developed in pre-Christian Jewish contexts. But, in the late second and early third centuries—with such figures as Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen—we see a new intensity in Christian usage of these texts and we see them applied to both 'Old' and 'New' Testament texts together (see

Ayres 2015). Thus when examining the texts of the emerging New Testament canon, Christians now closely parsed sentences, explored the grammar of their Scriptures, commented on etymology and figures of speech, and offered arguments about the common styles of speech found in individual authors and across the scriptural canon as a whole. These techniques remained the staple of Christian writers throughout the early Christian centuries and beyond (for more advanced studies of these techniques I recommend three books: Meijering 1987; Mansfeld 1994; and Nünlist 2009; for a foundational study of these techniques as used by Origen, see Neuschäfer 1989).

Second, Christian writers began to adopt with new intensity modes of argument developed in ancient philosophical contexts. Simply put, thinkers as diverse as Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria argued that appropriate Christian thinking must interpret the temporal and spatial language used in some scriptural texts in the light of beliefs that the divine transcends those conditions. The same figures also assumed that the appropriate tools for undertaking such analysis began with those taught by the grammarian and the teacher of rhetoric, but also included the more advanced methods of dialectical reasoning used in philosophical traditions. It is also important to note that these thinkers saw such assumptions about divine existence and about the path along which human reason should approach the divine as endorsed by Scripture and by the manner in which the Word reaches down to the world to draw us upward in contemplation. There is, perhaps obviously, a persistent tension between the vision of intellectual expertise that such theological reasoning endorses and Christians' emphasis on spiritual authority, that is, on the power to interpret that is given by the Spirit. But this practice grounds the techniques of argument used by virtually all parties in the fourth-century controversies—although, of course, some were far more philosophically adept and learned than others. Similarly, the tension remains, addressed in a variety of ways. Even where thinkers decry the value of non-Christian learning, versions of these techniques and assumptions remain central. It is, then, within this cultural context that we may say that early Christian doctrinal disputes are exegetical. In what follows I hope to show how Scripture generates, limits, and interrupts Christian thought throughout the fourth-century controversies. I will explain these terms as we go.

One final piece of ground-clearing is necessary before we turn to the actual exegesis of those involved in the fourth-century controversies. Why do I speak of 'controversies' in the plural? Most simply because the fourth century saw a series of different controversies that were in some ways interrelated, rather than one constant dispute in which the same question was clearly under dispute by clearly defined parties (see Ayres 2004; Barnes 1998).

## PROVERBS 8.22

---

One of the most important lessons students of patristic exegesis can take away from the study of the fourth-century controversies is the sheer complexity of the manner in which exegetical arguments are made. While key verses or sections of verses were often

the subject of extended reflection, it is vital to understand how those scriptural verses were interpreted within complex and diverse networks of beliefs and networks of other scriptural texts. At the same time, Christians engaged key verses using those same complex tools of Greek and Roman literary-criticism that became the foundation of Christian interpretative culture in the late second century. The best way to show this in action will be to explore a few extended examples. The first of those is Proverbs 8.22. In the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew the text reads, ‘The Lord created me the beginning of his ways for his works’ (κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ). As we shall see, the surrounding context of this verse was also highly relevant.

This verse was argued over and alluded to by many writers throughout the fourth century. One of the most extensive discussions is to be found in the second of Athanasius’ three *Oration Against the Arians*. The first two of these orations were composed around the year 340. Athanasius begins his treatment of Proverbs 8.22 by arguing that the correct interpretation of the verse must occur within the context of the account of the Word or Son that he has so far developed. Thus Athanasius argues that he has already shown that the Word is neither ‘work’ nor ‘creature’, and hence whatever Proverbs 8.22 means, it cannot be that the Word is a creature (*Ar.* 2.18). Athanasius thus begins not so much with this verse in isolation, but by demanding that the verse be interpreted within a broader context. We can see this wider context both by looking at the very beginning of the *Oration* and by looking at the first sections of *Oration 2*.

In *Oration 1*, after first quoting and ridiculing some verses from Arius’ theological poem *Thalia*, Athanasius offers a summary of his faith concerning the Son that he tells us has been drawn from the Scriptures:

He is the true and legitimate Son of the Father by nature, proper to his essence, Wisdom and Only-begotten; he is true and only Word of God, not a creature of work, but an offspring proper to the Father’s essence. For he is the expression of the Father’s being, and light from light, and power and true image of the Father’s essence... the Father being everlasting, his Word and his Wisdom must be everlasting  
(*Ar.* 1.9; trans. Atkinson 1968, modified)

This statement includes at least one phrase that may have been taken from the Nicene creed (‘light from light’), but overall we should notice its reference to a range of scriptural terms and texts and the subtle interpretation that those texts receive. Son, Wisdom, Only-begotten, Word are all scriptural; Athanasius qualifies them with the addition of ‘proper to’, emphasizing that the Son is, for example, the Father’s own natural Wisdom, proper to, belonging to him (on this terminology see Louth 1989). At the same time, Hebrews 1.3’s presentation of the Son as the ‘expression of the Father’s being (*hypostasis*)’ introduces the phrase ‘light from light’ and the terms ‘power’ and ‘image’ (both, of course, used elsewhere in Scripture) to emphasize that, if these titles and phrases seem to indicate that the Son is a lesser reality than that from which it came, we must remember that it is the sort of image that fully expresses what it is to be Father, and indeed is proper to the Father. Thus Athanasius sets up a network of beliefs and titles as a frame within which we must read any scriptural material describing the Son’s status.

In the second place, Athanasius further frames his reading of Proverbs 8.22 within the flow of the orations more broadly. *Oration 2* actually begins at a somewhat arbitrary point. At *Oration 1.37* Athanasius had announced the project of refuting key texts used by his opponents. He treats Philippians 2.9–10, Psalm 45.7–8, and Hebrews 1.4, and begins *Oration 2* with Hebrews 3.2 and Acts 2.36. But already, when he turns to Hebrews 1.4 he also mentions Proverbs 8.22, showing the importance that this text will have for him. In each case, however, Athanasius returns to the language and themes articulated in the passage from the first oration we considered above. Athanasius certainly offers a detailed reading of each text, but he constantly frames that reading by reference to the basic principles and images of his initial constellation of texts and interpretations. Thus, at the beginning of *Oration 2*, Athanasius turns to Hebrews 3.2: ‘He [Jesus] was faithful to him who made him/appointed him (ποιήσαντι αὐτόν).’ Athanasius links this verse with the longer string of controversial texts he has undertaken to treat. In each, Jesus appears to have been ‘made’, but Athanasius tells us that whenever we ask ‘whether the Lord is a creature or work, it is proper to ask of them this first, whether he is Son and Word and Wisdom’ (*Ar.* 2.5; trans. Anatolios 2004). But when he says this, he of course presupposes that these titles are in turn read within the interpretative matrix he has been sketching since the beginning of the first oration. Athanasius eventually and more positively argues that whenever the Son is said to be ‘created’, the ‘creation’ of the incarnate Son through the sending of the Son in flesh is meant. In the case of Hebrews 3.2 his reading is not extensive or peculiarly detailed; only when we turn to the much longer exposition of Proverbs 8.22 will we see the sophistication with which he can combine the general framing of an exegesis with the use of complex reading techniques.

But let us stay for a moment with this ‘framing’. We can best relate Athanasius’ style of argument here to the use of the concept of the ‘rule of faith’ in the late second and early third centuries (at the time he wrote the *Oration*s, the Nicene creed was not yet a universal standard of faith; the context for Athanasius’ use of a framing statement is likely to have been traditions that go back to the second century). Sometimes the ‘rule of faith’ or ‘rule of truth’ refers to a short statement of Christian belief that identifies key points of reference (often in the form of a narrative), but sometimes it is used more vaguely to refer to the Christian community’s fundamental sense of the unity of old and new covenants (or even the fundamental sense of the moral life). In all these senses the rule is a way of broadly framing exegetical work, setting an overall context within which disputed texts can be explored. Exactly how the rule of faith applies to any particular verse often requires the Christian writer to build a persuasive case where easy answers are not obvious, and the rule itself—what is and is not intrinsic to it—is something also under negotiation at some points. This is perhaps the context within which we can best understand how Athanasius argues here; he identifies a set of fundamental points of reference specifically with reference to the Son or Word (rather than with reference to the whole of the Christian faith) and tries to show how they may serve as a frame for arguments about disputed texts and questions. These points of reference show the mark of Athanasius’ own developing thought, but seem mostly to have been inherited from his bishop Alexander of Alexandria and to represent a tradition of thought that long pre-existed

him. Within this frame he will then have to offer persuasive arguments for his particular reading, and, as we shall see, he does so by deploying an extensive armoury of literary-critical and dialectical tools.

In this light, it perhaps becomes easier also to see that Athanasius actually opposes his own interpretative matrix to a different 'Arian' web of texts and interpretations—although he tries to show that their web is incoherent and impious, and refuses to recognize its validity as another possible Christian theological tradition. Thus, Athanasius accuses his opponents of illogicality in their insistence that '[the Son] is a creature, but not as one of the creatures', but in so doing he opens for us a window onto the exegetical and doctrinal networks within which his opponents read this text (*Ar.* 2.19). Those opponents also read 'created' as having a range of meaning, and as interpreted within a world view within which God needs intermediary realities to interact with the creation and within which it makes sense to talk of degrees of divinity. And so we see one of the most important ways in which different parties in this dispute read Scripture similarly. Networks of texts and interpretations developed within particular traditions of reflection and came into open conflict that could not be easily resolved.

We can now look at how Athanasius argues within the frame he has set up. To present the Son as 'created, but not as one of the creatures', is, he argues, only a logical fallacy because the statement *a priori* assumes that the Word can be compared to the other creatures, that the Word is among, even if distinguished from, them (*Ar.* 2.19–20). Athanasius presents his opponents' words as an example of the rhetorical form *synkrisis* (*Ar.* 2.20), an exercise in comparing two like realities in order to highlight the prominence of one. This presentation cleverly charges his opponents with using a form of expression that only applies between comparable realities.

This aspect of Athanasius' argument helps us to put into a wider context the distinction between 'begotten' and 'created' mentioned frequently here and used in the Nicene creed. The distinction, which can hardly be said to be one clearly and consistently marked within Scripture, is drawn using scriptural texts, and is best understood as reflecting a far wider network of exegeses. Thus we have seen that Athanasius refuses any comparison on a continuum between the Son and created things. He continues by arguing that to present the Son as 'generated or made' *as if* these two meant the same necessarily leads to the Son being placed on that continuum of the created. If the Son's status as 'begotten' is parallel to 'created', then he is being compared with other created things even if he has more power. This does not accord with the manner in which, at 1 Esdras 4.36, 'all the earth calls upon Truth, and heaven blesses her'. This language best accords, Athanasius insists, with the statement that Father and Truth (that is, Son) are together uncreated and that to which the whole creation looks.

The network of beliefs and exegeses to which 'begotten not created' points expands further as Athanasius points to another fundamental theme in his theology, the joint working of Father and Son. Athanasius frequently refers to John 1.3, arguing that if all things are created *through* the Word, then Father and Son work together and the Word cannot be one of the things made. But here he interweaves Proverbs 8. 29–30 ('when he made strong the foundations of the earth, I was beside him, fitting together') with

John 5.17: ‘As he himself says, “I was arranging beside him”; and “My Father works until now, and I work”. So the “until now” shows his eternal existence in the Father, as Word. For it belongs to the Word to work the works of the Father, and not to be external to him’ (*Ar.* 2.20; trans. Anatolios 2004). Interweaving these two verses creates an exegetical space that Athanasius fills with his vision of the eternal Word in the Father working the works of the Father, assisting as the Father’s ‘own’ Word. The consequences of this vision for his opponents’ theology are then drawn out in the sentences that follow. If the Father and Son create together, then the Son cannot be a creation *of* the Father without also being his own creation (*Ar.* 2.21)!

Leaping forward to the second half of the oration, at *Oration* 2.44 Athanasius turns to the genre of Proverbs. The fact that the book contains ‘proverbs’ (*παροιμίας*) means that we must interpret them proverbially or parabolically (*παροιμιωδῶς*), not by taking them simply at face value. Athanasius justifies himself by reference to Christ’s own claim at John 16.25 that he speaks in parables (once again the Greek word is *παροιμίας*). The tactic Athanasius adopts follows the standard questions that an ancient literary critic knew to ask about the genre of a work or the character of a particular figure of speech being used by an author. Athanasius’ use of these traditions may be seen in two further comments. First, he tells us that over against reading the passage according to the ‘bare letter’ we must ‘enquire as to the person, and accommodate the meaning to it’ (*Ar.* 2.44). Again, this is a standard ancient literary-critical concern long adopted by Christians. Learning to ask who is speaking in a given text, or to whom a text refers, were basic techniques that Christians found constantly useful, especially with reference to the interpretation of the inherited Jewish Scriptures.

Second, Athanasius attempts to show that his ultimate reading of Proverbs 8.22 is founded on a consistent pattern of scriptural reference. Thus, at *Oration* 2.53 we are told that *any* reference to the Son being ‘created’, ‘formed’, or ‘appointed’ is a reference not to his *arche* or essence, but to the renewal that came about through his gifts, to his becoming incarnate. This, he tells us, is the *ethos* of Scripture, the character of Scripture, the way in which Scripture presents itself. In using this term Athanasius draws on a long literary-critical way of identifying the character of a text that goes back at least as far as Aristotle.

Expanding on this observation, Athanasius says that when Christ or the scriptural writers speak about his divinity, matters are stated ‘simply’ and ‘absolutely’; when he or they speak of his incarnate ‘becoming’, they also indicate the cause or reason (*aitia*) for his so becoming. And thus, using this foundation, Athanasius reads two verses together:

8.22: ‘the Lord created me as a beginning of his ways for his works’.

8.25: ‘But before all the hills, he begets me’.

The first verse, with its explanatory clause explaining the reason ‘as a beginning...’, refers to the Lord becoming incarnate as part of the divine economy of salvation. Verse 25, speaking directly and simply of the Lord, identifies his eternal begetting from the Father (*Ar.* 2.60). Athanasius presents the precise logic of this language as reflecting the overall

pattern of scriptural speech. The use of ‘but’ at the beginning of verse 25, for instance, is there to highlight the contrast between creating and begetting.

There is not space here to explore in detail the full range of complex interweavings between Old and New Testament texts that Athanasius performs, nor the manner in which he draws out, through what remains of *Oration* 2, how he sees the Son’s incarnate work as dependent on his status as the Father’s own Word and Wisdom. To round out this account of Athanasius’ exegesis, however, it will be helpful to draw attention to the way in which he sketches an alternate reading of Proverbs 8.22 in the final paragraphs of the text. At *Oration* 2.76 Athanasius emphasizes that the economy of salvation was ‘prepared beforehand’ in the Word. He argues that ‘[Paul] provides an interpretation of the words of the Proverbs, “before the ages” (Prov 8.23) and “before the earth was made” (Prov 8.24) when he says to Timothy, “... who has saved us... according to his own design and grace, which he has given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages...”’ (*Ar.* 2.75). This means that Christ was destined to take on himself all the punishment destined for us, and that we were ‘prefigured in him.’ So far, his reading conforms to the main interpretation he has developed.

Then, at *Oration* 2.77, he changes tack. Some scholars have argued that what he now offers is a more mature reading tacked on at a later date. That seems implausible, not least because some years later Athanasius happily repeats in condensed form the main reading he has offered here. Luckily, I think we can see what Athanasius actually attempts. His new reading is a way of deepening and confirming his account of how we are saved in the Word, and an attempt to show how the text continues to be enigmatic or parabolic, offering yet more to the attentive reader. Thus, Athanasius announces: ‘who, when he hears that the only-Begotten Son of God saying that he was created as “a beginning of the ways” would not enquire into the meaning and wonder how the only-begotten Son could become a beginning for many others? This indeed is an enigma’ (*Ar.* 2.77). He approaches this enigma by suggesting that in each of us there is a form or outline of Wisdom’s image, and through cultivation of that form within us we receive the true Creator-Wisdom (and she receives us), and thus we come to know her Father. Wisdom in herself cannot be called ‘created’, but may be called so on account of us, speaking *as us*. In this sense we can read ‘he created me for his works’ as a statement made by created beings containing the imprint of Wisdom, hymning the Father for giving us the means of advancing toward the true uncreated Wisdom (*Ar.* 2.80). Indeed, the Father rejoices in the Son and the Son in the Father—Proverbs 8.30 tells us, ‘day by day, I rejoiced in his presence’—and this eternally. Similarly, when we interpret Proverbs 8.31 (‘[the Father] delighted in the sons of people, having consummated the world’), we should recognize that the Father’s delight is not somehow increased because his delight is eternal and perfect—the Father delights in the Son and in those made in and according to His image (*Ar.* 2.82). This reading is an artful use of ancient literary-critical techniques, refocusing our reading of the passage by offering us a different account of who is speaking, locating the reading of this verse within the wider arc of the passage, and playing on the supposed qualities of that which has been identified as parabolic.

That Athanasius closes with this exegesis reveals much about what he takes to be persuasive exegesis. For example, he does not simply offer his initial reading and then stick to it at all costs. Rather, he tries to show that, if the text is parabolic and enigmatic, there are new depths to be plumbed within it; he tries to present his reading as respecting the depths of Scripture better. Moreover, Athanasius also tries to show us that the more deeply and attentively we read the text, the more it accords with and draws us toward an appreciation of the whole of the divine economy. Thus, while he agrees that the verse concerns the status of the Word, he seeks to convince by showing how, properly understood, his reading places the verse within a broader statement about the whole economy of salvation that he takes Scripture to reveal. Just as he sought to show throughout that his opponents' reading contrasted with, rather than conformed to, a series of basic framing images of the Son's status, so now he also wants to show how his reading reflects and deepens our understanding of the basic structure of the divine economy.

## SCRIPTURE AS LIMIT AND INTERRUPTION

---

The extended example I have offered so far should, I hope, provide a clear sense of the dense and rich manner in which the most contested texts were read during the fourth-century controversies. By no means were all exegetes able to offer accounts as complex as Athanasius', and yet his sophistication reveals something of the ideal. I have emphasized two features that we find throughout this text, the use of complex networks or webs of texts and interpretations that function in a manner parallel to the rule of faith, and the central significance of ancient literary-critical techniques for reading. And, while it is simplistic to speak of one 'ideal' exegetical style in the fourth century—in different places and traditions different emphasis was found—Athanasius' combination shows us all the elements that were thought to mark good exegesis.

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that we may see the text as generating, bounding, and interrupting Christian thought. Scripture generates because its images, narratives, phraseology, and figures of speech suggest paths of exploration and generate reflection in particular ways for one skilled in ancient literary-critical practice. At the same time, Scripture bounds because it generates *this* rather than *that*, and because in so doing it forbids the Christian reader from following roads that might otherwise have proved intellectually passable. This, of course, does not mean that there were not extensive debates and arguments about where those bounds were, and about the different positions that could be articulated within them. Modern writers have sometimes presented the fourth-century arguments as essentially concerned with the 'judgements of' or the 'logic' embedded in the text of Scripture, arguing that even if non-scriptural terms were introduced at certain key moments (most famously *homoousios*), the logic of scriptural argumentation is preserved (see e.g. Yeago 1994). While there is much that is

helpful in such an account, it does tend to give the impression that only one coherent account could be drawn from the text, rather than acknowledging the plurality of ways in which images and terminologies could generate thought.

Of course, the text of Scripture generates and bounds in the context of a particular culture of reading. I have tried to show how fourth-century exegetes made use of certain ancient literary-critical techniques to generate readings of texts; the sort of options and experiments possible in reading stemmed in quite large part from the fact that those exegetes were deeply embedded in this culture rather than another. This observation should be placed alongside another. What fourth-century theologians think of as Scripture's literal sense is not the same as that which many modern historical-critical scholars identify. Understanding the 'letter' of the text certainly had some key points of reference to the history 'behind' the text. Thus ancient exegetes could use their knowledge of events in the past to provide explanatory comments on details that might otherwise be unclear, and identifying the plot or direction of a text would often take the form of identifying the intentions of an author, or his characteristic modes of expression. At the same time, because they took the text of Scripture to be ordered and arranged for us by divine agency, early Christian exegetes read 'according to the letter' by following closely the details of the text before them, following the twists and turns of the letter, rather than placing primary interpretative weight on a reconstruction of the history 'behind' the text. At the same time, while they certainly explored the plot of and figures of speech used within particular scriptural texts (or used by particular authors), they also read across the whole of Scripture as if it were one text. Thus the meaning of a term according to the letter might be found by gathering uses of that term from Old and New Testament texts.

So much for 'generating' and 'bounding'. It is also helpful to think about Scripture as *interrupting* the path of Christian speculation. From an early date, Christian thinkers had adapted to their use notions of thinking and reasoning shaped within non-Christian philosophical traditions. Christian thinkers quickly took on the mantle of the philosopher and also took on the principle that the task of the Christian thinker was to think through, and in some ways beyond, the language that Scripture uses to speak of God. These adoptions helped to shape a basic notion of Christian speculative activity.

While Scripture speaks of God as unchanging (e.g. Mal 3.6, Jas 1.17) and as spirit (John 4.24), it also speaks of God as emotional and as having hands and feet. Already in the second century it is clear that there are occasions on which Christian thinkers assume that we are bound to honour scriptural language even if it defeats our ability to understand. In such contexts Scripture is not only generating thought and limiting our ability to understand, it is also interrupting the path of philosophical speculation in the direction of humble acknowledgement of human incapacity to understand the divine. In the fourth century the manner in which Scripture defeats the intellect becomes an important and contested theme.

An excellent example is provided by the distinction between 'begotten' and 'made' in the creed of Nicaea. At one level, this division is an exegetical one and captures something that might fairly be drawn from the text of Scripture. But at another level, the

distinction is one imposed on Scripture as a result of a roughly century-long argument. Thus, even though 1 John 5.18 speaks of Christ as ‘he who was born of God’ almost as a title, Nicene usage invests a precision in the term that has as much to do with Christian debates since the second century, and especially since Origen, as it has with any particular constellation of scriptural usage. As we have seen, the search for a way of describing the Son’s relationship to the Father continued after this simple distinction was inserted into Nicaea’s creed. We might even say that the marking of this distinction invited, even demanded, further philosophical reflection about the types of generative activity of which we may speak, and about the possibilities for applying analogically any of these types to the divine. Thus, for example, Gregory of Nyssa famously explores different notions of generation only to explain that none describes the divine generation (*Eun.* 349–50). And so while the language of ‘generation’ fuels and bounds Nicene readings, it also interrupts any attempt to fully comprehend terms used of the divine. It is, then, no accident that the septuagintal version of Isaiah 53.8 (‘who can understand his generation?’) is frequently quoted in the context of supposed attempts at definition. Nor should it surprise us when, later in the century, attempts are made to distinguish generation and spiration; insistence on the importance of naming the distinction even though we cannot understand it is a frequent tactic. In the next section of the chapter I turn to one more extended example, to show how, during the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Nicene theologians could read in a way that illustrates all three of the functions I have accorded to the scriptural text.

## JOHN 5.19

---

John 5.19–20 makes a series of statements that were not only controversial, but which resist easy interpretation of any kind: ‘Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing . . .”’ In the first half of the fourth century, non- or anti-Nicenes occasionally took an interest in the verse; not surprisingly, it initially sits easily with theologians that emphasize the Father’s superiority. The verse becomes particularly important in the years after 360 (for a fuller discussion see Ayres 2010:233ff.). Eunomius reads the implications of the verse unambiguously: ‘he who creates by his own power is entirely different from him who does so at the Father’s command and acknowledges that he can do nothing of his own accord, just as the one who is worshipped is different from the one who worships’ (*apol.* 20; trans. Vaggione 1987). Perhaps because of Eunomius’ use of the verse, pro-Nicene exegetes were forced to offer their own readings.

One reading of the text is to be found in Gregory Nazianzen’s *Oration* 30 (the third of his five famous ‘Theological Orations’), delivered in 380. Gregory first argues that ‘cannot’ has many meanings (using a standard ancient literary-critical technique of carefully defining the precise sense in which a term is used). In this case, to say that the

Son ‘cannot’ do anything on his own means that it is ‘inconceivable that’ the Son would act of his own accord. This is so because the Son shares a nature with the Father, a nature that has come from the Father: ‘all that the Father has is the Son’s and *vice versa* . . . all things belong to both’. When the Son says, ‘I live because of the Father’ (John 6.57), he indicates not that the Father constrains him or holds him in existence, but that the Son exists under identical conditions, timelessly and without cause. Thus we may also rule out the possibility that Father and Son sequentially undertake the same actions (e.g. creating subsequent and distinct worlds). Gregory suggests as a reading that ‘the Father indicates the outline, while the Word makes a finished product’, seeing and acting not as a subordinate but in a manner we might even call ‘Fatherly’ (*or.* 30.10–11; trans. Wickham and Williams 2002)! Gregory’s interpretation is, in part, a call to the imagination to think beyond temporal and material categories and to think with the principles of Nicene theology. At a number of points in his five ‘Theological Orations’ Gregory recognizes the strains and paradoxes this creates for the imagination—as in the fifth, when he suggests that we are drawn to look at the Trinity both as three suns and as one (*or.* 31.14). In such statements, paradox is celebrated to emphasize the impossibility of a final grasp in this life of the realities toward which Scripture points. The imagination has not only been channelled by the manner in which Scripture generates and bounds, but it has come to recognize something essential about the process of advancing down that channel as Scripture interrupts.

I want, however, to spend the rest of my time with two Latin authors. In the first book of his *On the Trinity*, c.355–8, Hilary already professes to know the anti-Nicene use of John 5.19. But it is only in Book 7, probably finished c.358–60, that Hilary deals with the text in depth. Hilary defines ‘sight’ here as ‘knowledge’, and argues that the power to act found in the Son’s nature comes not from successive gifts of strength, but from the Son’s knowledge. But the Son, he continues, does not receive knowledge by imitating the Father’s bodily performance of actions:

... but by the action of the nature of God, he had come to subsist in the nature of God or, in other words, had been born as Son from the Father, [and thus] because He was aware of the Father’s power and strength that was in him, the Son asserted that he could do nothing by himself except what he saw the Father doing.

(*trin.* 7.17; trans. McKenna 1954)

The Son is born from the Father and shares the Father’s nature: he thus has ‘by nature’ an awareness of the Father’s own power. It is this ‘awareness’ that constitutes his knowing that is the ‘seeing’ to which the verse refers. Hilary adds that God’s ‘seeing’ is never corporeal, but always a function of the power of his nature. A little later Hilary suggests that the Father’s showing of his works to the Son is the very content of the Son’s being born in the divine nature (*trin.* 7.19). On this basis Hilary can be clear that we should not speak of distinct and parallel works of Father and Son, but of Father and Son working together in each act. Hilary’s reading introduces a clever step: the Father’s eternal begetting of the Son is (or, at least, intrinsically involves) the Father’s eternal showing to the

Son of all that the Father is and that is now in the Son. The combination of this text, Nicene beliefs, and some fundamental philosophical assumptions about the nature of divine existence has prompted Hilary to an almost poetic interweaving of narrative elements and doctrinal statements.

With Augustine we come to what is arguably one of the simplest and yet most theologically rich readings. That reading is to be found in his *Tractates*—homilies—on John. In tractate 18 Augustine opposes the ‘Arians.’ He begins his offensive by invoking John 1.1’s claim that the Word was God. The Arian can only reply that there are two Gods, one greater and lesser; the Catholic admits the equality of Father and Son as God but also undivided love (*tract. Io. 18.4*; trans. Rettig 1988). In this love—the Spirit—Father and Son are one, not two Gods. Augustine now asks his audience and putative opponents to bear in mind not only John 1.1, but also John 1.3: ‘all things were made through him.’ The ‘Arian’ reading that ‘the Son cannot do anything of himself...’, Augustine tells us, imagines two craftsmen, the Father as the master who trains his apprentice, the Son, who in turn observes and copies the former. But, if one thinks thus, then John 1.3 is being ignored, for the Father makes *all* things *through* the Word: there can be no primary making without the Word which then serves as a model for imitation (*tract. Io. 18.5*). Augustine then focuses our attention on the Son’s seeing: it is this that precedes doing in John 5.19. We see, but cannot see God: because we forget this distinction we wish to transfer that which we can see to explain that which we cannot. It cannot be that the Son sees some works done by the Father and then does others, because the verse insists that the Son does the same things as the Father ‘in like manner’ (*tract. Io. 18.6–8*; trans. Rettig 1988). To explain the force of ‘in like manner’, Augustine offers the analogy of thinking and writing: the hand writes the same letters as the heart thinks, but not ‘in like manner’. But how does the Father ‘show’ to the Son and how does the Son ‘see’? We cannot deny that the Word or Son sees and hears because of Scripture (Ps 93.9: ‘He who planted the ear, does he not hear? Or he who formed the eye, does he not perceive?’). But, ‘Both to see and to hear are together in the Word; and to see is not one thing, to hear another, but hearing is sight and sight is hearing’ (*tract. Io. 18.9*; trans. Rettig 1988).

For proof that this is so, Augustine makes a move that should not surprise readers of the homily: he suggests that we turn inward and realize that in the ‘heart’ the eyes and the ears are the same. Right at the end of this section of the sermon Augustine suddenly takes us to the heart of his solution:

In your flesh you hear in one place, you see in another; in your heart you hear there where you see. If the image [does] this, how much more powerfully [does] he [do it] whose image this is? Therefore the Son both hears and the Son sees; and the Son *is* the very seeing and hearing. And for him hearing is the same as being, and for him seeing is the same as being (*et hoc est illi audire quod esse, et hoc est illi uidere quod esse*). But for you seeing is not the same as being, because even if you should lose your sight, you can still be, and if you should lose your hearing, you can still be.

(*tract. Io. 18.10*; trans. Rettig 1988)

Augustine directly identifies the Son and his seeing (and hearing).

Throughout this chapter I have emphasized the manner in which fourth-century interpreters made significant use of the literary-critical techniques of the grammarian and rhetor, techniques first adapted extensively to Christian use in the late second century. That adaptation occurred also in the context of the adaptation of philosophical themes (as well as the modes of philosophical thinking I identified earlier), most importantly, accounts of the divine existence drawn from the transformed Platonism of the first two centuries (and then, later, from Neoplatonic authors). Christians gradually adapted these themes to the needs of their own theological traditions of reflecting on Father, Son, and Spirit. And with Augustine we see an excellent example of how those themes shaped Christian reading of the Scriptures, suggesting patterns of quite complex reading while still attending closely to the text. The elegance of Augustine's solution is to use his understanding of divine simplicity (and of the Son's status as fully divine) to identify the Son's seeing, hearing, and existence. This follows on lines laid down by Hilary, but presses further because of the directness with which Augustine presents the Son *as* a seeing and hearing of the Father. Tractate 18 is the first of a series addressing John 5.19 and it will be helpful to see one related passage from tractate 23:

What the Father shows the Son, he does not receive from without. The entirety is done within (*intus totum agitur*); for there would be no creatures unless the Father had made them through the Son... the Father showed it to be made and the Son saw it to be made, and the Father made it by showing it because he made it through the Son seeing it (*sed faciendam pater monstravit, faciendam filius uidit, et eam pater demonstrando fecit, quia per filium uidentem fecit*). Thus it ought not to be disturbing because it was said 'but only what he sees the Father doing'; it was not said 'showing'. For through this it was signified that for the Father 'to do' is the same as 'to show', so that from this it may be understood that he does all things through the Son seeing (*ut ex hoc intellegatur per Filium uidentem omnia facere*). Neither that showing nor that seeing is temporal... But the Father's showing begets the Son's seeing in the same way as the Father begets the Son. Showing, of course, generated seeing; not seeing showing. If we could look more purely and more perfectly, we would perhaps find that the Father is not one thing and his showing another, nor is the Son one thing and his seeing another. (*tract. Io. 23.11*; trans. Rettig 1988)

Here Augustine emphasizes that John 5 also enables us to see the Father's showing as equivalent to his generation of the Son. The relationship between showing and seeing provides one key way of describing the eternal relationship between Father and Son.

Augustine's reading nicely demonstrates what it means for scriptural texts to generate reflection. Here we see very carefully how the combination of the words of the text and a network of Nicene beliefs and assumptions serve to make possible an imaginative construal. But once again Scripture also interrupts Christian speculation. There is a clue in the conditional Augustine uses in the last quotation, 'if we could look more purely...'. Augustine is clear both that he is attempting a logical argument—if the Son is simple, *then* his seeing and hearing and existence must be identical—and that he is asking for an act of the imagination in the context where the human imagination is necessarily defeated—by sin and by incapacity. The scriptural text thus both invites reflection and it

leads that reflection toward recognition of its own defeat. It is important to note how much this pattern is enhanced by the Nicene beliefs.

## FIT TO INTERPRET?

---

Richard Hanson, the erudite twentieth-century student of early Christian thought, famously wrote:

The last word on the appeal to the Bible during this crucial period in the history of Christian doctrine, however, must be of the impression made on a student of the period that the expounders of the text of the Bible are incompetent and ill-prepared to expound it. This applies as much to the wooden and unimaginative approach of the Arians as it does to the fixed determination of their opponents to read their doctrine into the Bible by hook or by crook. (Hanson 1988: 848)

The answer one gives depends on one's criteria of judgement. Hanson's judgement is based on the assumption that the modern historical-critical scholar is better able to understand the text than the ancient reader. At the same time Hanson assumes that texts have, at the least, a fairly limited range of meanings, identical to what a text meant to its composers, editors, or first hearers.

In the years since Hanson wrote, much has changed. Indeed, even as he wrote many historians of Christian thought would have found his judgement unhelpful. His judgement assumes a universal standard by which he can adjudicate between the different models of exegesis in Christian tradition, rather than trying first to understand the rationality and complexities of early Christian readings within their own cultural contexts. In the second place, the face of modern biblical studies has changed considerably. Biblical critics of both Christian faith and none are more likely to admit the possibility of a plurality of readings and appreciate the skill of early Christian readers. In the third place, some Christian theological reflection on the reading of Scripture has come to reassert the principle that the scriptural texts are a gift to each generation and should be read in the light of Christian faith. In such a context it becomes possible for theologians to see the reading of Scripture in the Nicene theologians of the fourth century as one that highlights well the fundamental direction of Scripture. The more one also endorses theologically a vision of Scripture as drawing the intellect and heart toward a vision of the divine beyond temporal and material categories, the more also one is likely to value exegesis of the kind we have explored here. And indeed, for theologians committed to the faith of Nicaea, the interpretative world by which that faith was shaped is surely of deep concern.

But it is important to end by noting the complexity of the task involved in appropriating the exegesis of the fourth-century controversies. To appropriate this exegetical practice not only would one need to appropriate a particular view of how the text was

authoritative and a vision of how God used the text in the reformation of the human mind and heart, one would need also to provide some account of which particular techniques from the set used by early Christian exegetes were to be endorsed. One would need also, perhaps, to construct a theological account of the development of this ancient interpretative culture as itself providentially ordained—and an account of how this interpretative culture may be combined with elements of modern biblical study. Despite the enthusiasm for *ressourcement* which has nurtured much of the past century's interest in early Christian exegesis, the full dimensions of this task have as yet been barely measured!

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Athanasius, *Orationes tres adversus Arianos*. Eng. trans.: K. Anatolios, *Athanasius, The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 2004); M. Atkinson, revised A. Roberston, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, NPNF 4 (repr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 97–148.
- Augustine, *In euangelium Ioannis tractatus*. Eng. trans.: J. W. Rettig, *Tractates on The Gospel of John 11–27* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988).
- Eunomius of Cyzicus, *Apologeticus*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: R. P. Vaggione (ed. and trans.), *Eunomius: The Extant Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes theologicae*. Eng. trans.: L. Wickham and F. Williams, *God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002).
- Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*. Eng. trans.: S. McKenna, CSSR., *Saint Hilary of Poitiers: The Trinity*, FC 25 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1954).

### Scholarship

- Ayres, L. (2004). *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth Century Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Ayres, L. (2010). *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Ayres, L. (2015). 'Irenaeus vs the Valentinians: Toward a Rethinking of Patristic Exegetical Origins', *J ECS* 23: 153–87.
- Barnes, M. R. (1998). 'The Fourth Century as Trinitarian Canon', in L. Ayres and G. Jones (eds), *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community* (London: Routledge), 47–67.
- Eden, K. (1997). *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Hanson, R. P. C. (1988). *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381 ad* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark).
- Irvine, M. (1994). *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Louth, A. (1989). 'The Use of the Term *Idios* in Alexandrian Theology from Alexander to Cyril', *SP* 19: 198–202.
- Mansfeld, J. (1994). *Prolegomena. Questions to be Settled before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden: Brill).

- Meijering, R. (1987). *Literary and Rhetorical Theories in Greek Scholia* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten).
- Neuschäfer, B. (1989). *Origenes als Philologe*. 2 vols (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt).
- Nünlist, R. (2009). *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Pfeiffer, R. (1968). *History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Yeago, D. S. (1994). 'The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis', *Pro Ecclesia* 3: 152–64.

### **Suggested Reading**

- Ayres, L. (2004). *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth Century Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Ayres, L. (2010). *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Ayres, L. (2015). 'Irenaeus vs the Valentinians: Toward a Rethinking of Patristic Exegetical Origins', *J ECS* 23: 153–87.

## CHAPTER 29

---

# SCRIPTURE IN THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTROVERSIES

---

ANDREW HOFER, OP

### IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES

---

‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ They said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, still others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets’. He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’

(Matt 16.13–15)

THIS dialogue between Jesus and his disciples serves as the springboard for this chapter on biblical interpretation during the Christological controversies (cf. Behr 2001). The earliest Christological controversies occurred during the time of Jesus and his first disciples. The answers to the question of Jesus’ identity varied, yet one common element is that people interpreted Jesus with reference to the Scriptures of Israel, such as the Psalms and the prophetic books. In John’s Gospel, Jesus says, ‘You search the Scriptures’, which he says testify on his behalf, and in Luke’s Gospel the risen Lord interprets ‘all the Scriptures about himself’ (John 5.39, Luke 24.27). In Matthew 16, the answers that people give reflect their interpretation of those Scriptures where they would have come across the apparently self-referential title used by Jesus, ‘Son of Man’, a familiar biblical expression found in Ezekiel, Daniel, the Psalms, and Numbers. When Simon Peter responds, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Matt 16.16), Jesus confirms that this answer came directly from the heavenly Father, an indication that something new had appeared in God’s revelation to the people of Israel. This newness of Christ came to be seen as foretold by the Scriptures, such as in the use of Psalm 39/40 in Hebrews 10.5–10. Paul understood Christ himself to be the very end or fulfilment of the Law (Rom 10.4). Paul also gives early testimony of receiving and handing on what was most essential in the confes-

sion of faith: 'Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures' (1 Cor 15.3; cf. 1 Cor 15.4). Indeed, the importance of early Christian biblical interpretation, whether by NT authors or by subsequent Christians, became most acute in rendering faithful witness to Jesus amidst the possibilities (and accusations) of confessing him wrongly.

The history of early Christianity demonstrates significant debate over the person of Jesus. We find conflicting claims about his relationship with Israel's Scriptures, acrimonious debates within and beyond Christian communities, appeals to privileged, non-scriptural authorities to understand Scripture, use of philosophies for greater precision in understanding biblical revelation, and developments of rival 'schools' of exegesis. A 'Christological scholasticism' eventually emerged out of these swirling debates about the identity of Jesus, debates invariably rooted in the Scriptures. Without recognizing this development of an elaborate culture that has biblical interpretation at its core, the dogmatic formulas at the end of the era of the ancient Christological councils would seem quite disconnected from the primitive belief that Christ died and rose in accordance with the Scriptures.

This chapter examines the critical issues at stake in biblical interpretation as it pertains to the Christological controversies. The story begins with the answers to the questions, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' and 'But who do you say that I am?', and continues through the increasingly scholastic debates about the divinity and humanity of the one Christ. We begin with a methodological consideration of the path in biblical interpretation to Christological scholasticism. Special attention is then given to how exegetes during the era of the Christological councils developed rules and fixed terminology to describe the subject of Christ's suffering, i.e. precisely who or what suffers, according to the scriptural accounts. Cyril of Alexandria's Christological exegesis, in its sources, formulations, opposition, and reception, is of capital importance, and I will also examine other figures such as Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Nestorius, Theodoret of Cyrus, Emperor Justinian, and Maximus the Confessor. Finally, the chapter's brief conclusion considers the link between a late patristic, scholastic Christology and the aforementioned biblical questions that first raised the issue of Jesus' debated identity.

## FROM BIBLICAL QUESTIONS TO SCHOLASTIC ANSWERS

---

Patristic biblical exegesis was at the heart of the formation of a Christian culture (Young 1997). Christological exegesis, which increasingly became scholastic in Late Antiquity, played no small part in that development. But what does 'scholastic' mean? José Ignacio Cabezón gives a list of characteristics of scholastic thinking in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism as a basis for defining what could commonly be called 'scholastic': a strong sense of tradition, a concern with language, 'proliferativity' (textual and analytical inclusivity, reconciling inconsistent texts), completeness and compactness, epistemological accessibility of the world, systematicity in ordering an exposition, commitment to

reasoned argument and non-contradiction, and the self-reflexivity of critically analysing first-order practices (Cabezón 1998:4–6). Similarly, Paul Griffiths identifies a number of key features in scholasticism across time, space, and intellectual milieux, such as: a canon of authoritative writings, an index of prohibited writings, a community with identifiable characteristics, and a tradition that is passed on and developed through generations (Griffiths 1998). Such a breadth in thinking about the ‘scholastic’ can take us out of focusing on a particularly Western trajectory made most prominent in the high Middle Ages (Leinsle 2010). While some may be reluctant to apply the term scholastic to elements of early Christian biblical interpretation, Cabezón and Griffiths provide frameworks to see that such a label can be warranted. In dialogue with both of these scholars I identify ten markers of this increasingly scholastic turn in early biblical interpretation as it related to Christology:

1. Philosophizing the subject: Use of classical philosophical traditions to theorize the scriptural accounts of the mystery of the one Jesus Christ as both divine and human, in consideration of the subject of his actions, especially his suffering, death, and resurrection, with the undergirding principle that human salvation depends on Christ’s composition.
2. Scriptural rules: Appeals to an authoritative rule of faith and to individual verses as guides to the totality of scriptural exegesis and as sources for answering subtle questions asked of the scriptural text, often in second-order genres more removed from the text than biblical commentaries and homilies.
3. Tradition: Claims that an exegetical position follows necessarily from the Scriptures and the fathers, or written and unwritten traditions together, in a harmony or ‘royal way’ (Num 20.17), citing teachings from the fathers for their authority.
4. Anathematizing: Arguments against past, present, or imagined adversaries whose opposition is reduced by a logical display to an absurdity and prior heresy, often condemned by anathemas.
5. Trinitarian mirroring: Reciprocity with the Trinitarian controversies, so that the debates on who and what Christ is (and is not) follow upon the right identification of the Trinity as the ultimate and central mystery of Christian faith, and that the terms used in the Christological controversies continue to sharpen the precision of saying who and what the Trinity is (and is not).
6. Catholicity: Theological connections with all other mysteries of the faith intimated in the Scriptures, most especially the Trinity, but more broadly with all creation, the sacraments, and the Christian way of living, in a systematic presentation of biblical teaching.
7. Orthodox culture: Use of Christological exegesis to support a solid knowledge of Christian doctrine within a very broad temporal-spatial ecclesial culture, such as is represented by ecumenical councils.
8. Terminological invention: Terms, such as ‘Trinity’, ‘theology’, and ‘incarnation’, rarely or not found in the Bible, gradually acquiring a fixed meaning as technical terms for protecting and proclaiming the biblical revelation and redescribing the more ambiguous use of such terms in earlier scriptural commentaries by fathers.

9. Shibboleths: Watchwords and stock phrases that are indicators of the community's interpretation to be extolled or denied, such as: 'Theotokos', 'one and the same', 'two sons', 'impassible', 'mere human', 'body with a rational soul', and 'suffered in the flesh'.
10. Refining common terms: A refinement of thinking about terms in social, philosophical, and religious discourses—like person, hypostasis, nature, essence, union, relationship, properties, energy, will, love, knowledge, eternity, time, suffering, spirit, soul, body, the human being, and God—that surpasses previous reflection but, though influential, is often not identical to the interpretation of these terms many centuries later.

How do these markers appear in the history of early Christological exegesis? If we compare Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor, we find some of these markers already at play in Gregory's writing, but all are found in Maximus' corpus. Far fewer are found in the third-century Origen, the most influential early Christian exegete; and the presence of these markers is negligible in the second-century *Shepherd of Hermas*, a remarkable text whose author claims revelations and confesses faith in the Son of God. In tracing the origins of the Christian homily before Origen, Alistair Stewart-Sykes judges that 'prophecy gives way to Scripture as the primary indication of the word of God under the influence of a process described as scholasticization' (Stewart-Sykes 2001:1). From this vantage point, the appeal to a canon of OT and NT, rather than to an unmediated inspiration as Simon Peter is said to have enjoyed in Matthew 16, lays the ground for Christological scholasticism to take root, and follows well upon the broader observations of scholasticization laid out by Cabezón and Griffiths.

Exegesis in argumentation about the person of Christ, in the philosophically rich cultures of early Christianity, tended toward precision (*ἀκρίβεια*), a term already used to describe Apollonius of Alexandria's teaching concerning Jesus, as well as Priscilla and Aquila's correction of it (Acts 18.25–6). Through the heat of intra-Christian controversies, additional elements of scholastic thought were forged, especially in the fifth century, and they were increasingly employed by opposing theologians. Of special importance to this development is Leontius of Byzantium, an ardent early sixth-century Chalcedonian who applied scholastic rigour to Scripture (Daley 2017). He both typified the scholastic method of his era and was influential on subsequent Chalcedonian traditions, such as were found in Maximus and John of Damascus. Illustrative of Leontius' approach is the following: '[W]hen there is a struggle and a discussion about doctrine, we must refrain from using verbal ambiguities and take the proper meanings from the definitions themselves, so that the precision of the things themselves may not be damaged by the imprecision of words' (*arg. Sev. 3*; trans. Daley 2017:283; cf. Daley 1993:246).

Scholastic precisions triumphed over what could be called the anti-scholasticism of imperial decisions made to establish peace among disputants, such as the avoidance in Zeno's *Henotikon* (482) of Christological teaching on one or two natures, the forbidding in Heraclius' *Ekthesis* (636 or 638) of argument about one or two operations, and

the similar strictures against distinguishing one or two wills in Constans II's *Typos* (648). In each of these cases, and others, the solution proposed in place of precise argument proved unworkable. Christological scholasticism called for arguments with proper authorities and the creation of distinctions to answer new questions asked of the biblical texts.

What are we to make of this scholastic turn in biblical interpretation? Considering Chalcedonian controversies, Aloys Grillmeier tempered the apprehension of his readers by noting that this 'development of the fifth and sixth centuries should not be assessed simply as a "scholastic" aberration of patristic theology'. He highlighted the fruitfulness of the term 'person' and 'the theme of the "autonomy" of created being in concurrence and cohesion with divine being' in discussions about Christ's modes of operation and whether Christ had one or two wills (Grillmeier 1987:9). Rather than being an aberration, this biblical-interpretation-as-Christological-scholasticism can be hailed as an achievement by scholars who prize the use of philosophy for its assistance in answering the questions of Jesus' identity (White 2015).

There are two competing trends in the secondary literature concerning this gradually emerging scholasticism that I think begins earlier and is broader than what Grillmeier identified in the Chalcedonian debates. On one hand, the twentieth-century academic renewal in patristics was marked by a rejection of formulaic Latin scholasticism and an exaltation of Christ-centred Greek mysticism. Dichotomies were drawn so that the fathers—exemplified by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, the heroes of the *nouvelle théologie*—were collectively deemed mystical in a *ressourcement* antidote to the malaise of neo-scholastic manuals (Daley 2005). A polemic against Western scholasticism, through an appeal to the Greek fathers, had various adherents in the twentieth century and would resist the idea of any turn to scholasticism in Greek Christian biblical interpretation. This approach often denied that early Eastern scholasticism existed. Vladimir Lossky, for instance, wrote: 'The theology of the Orthodox Church, constantly soteriological in its emphasis, has never entered into alliance with philosophy in any attempt at a doctrinal synthesis: despite all its richness, the religious thought of the East has never had a scholasticism' (Lossky 1957:104). More recent scholarship, however, has recognized that scholasticism, as understood by Grillmeier, is indeed found in later Greek fathers, and that Byzantine theology, including the Palamite tradition, inherited this legacy (Plested 2012:44–53).

On the other hand, disputes over such terms as person, nature, union, operation, and will have dominated the secondary literature on early Christological exegesis. This is indicative of the fact that later, more philosophically precise ways of expressing the mystery of Christ have shaped the scholarship on Christological controversies in the early centuries. Rather than deny scholasticism, this approach neglects the real contexts, contours, disruptions, and reasons for its development. John Behr cautions: 'Histories of dogma that only look to the pre-Nicene period for anticipations of the theological formulae of the Nicene and post-Nicene era, run the risk of overlooking the context which gives meaning to those formulae' (Behr 2001:241). Even more broadly, Robert L. Wilken rightly comments that 'the study of early Christian thought has been too preoccupied

with ideas. The intellectual effort of the early church was at the service of a much loftier goal than giving conceptual form to Christian belief. Its mission was to win the hearts and minds of men and women and to change their lives' (Wilken 2003:iv). Especially pre-Chalcedonian Christological exegesis has been routinely mistranslated by scholars to be more philosophically or dogmatically precise than it really was, and scholars still today sometimes miss the spirit of early Christian thinkers by ignoring their distinctive expressions.

Recent expansion of the scholarly field is allowing for more diverse approaches, exemplified by studies that link Christological exegesis to: related doctrinal matters, such as grace (Fairbairn 2003; Keech 2012); liturgical and ascetical practices (Davis 2008; Michelson 2015); and authors' lives transformed through engagement with the Word (Cameron 2012; Martens 2012; Hofer 2013). The NT certainly gives witness to broad controversies that surround Christ, such as who Jesus is and what he does with respect to the God of Israel, Israel's Scriptures, Law, grace, faith, salvation, the Church, practices of worship, individual believers and their sufferings, life after death, and the world (Hurtado 2005; Bauckham 2008; Wright 1996). It should not be forgotten that debate over unity versus duality in Christ's ontology, which counts for much of the controversy in early Christianity after the fourth century and in much academic Christology today, has these wider scriptural interpretative issues in the background.

Indeed, Christ's suffering is the interpretative crux for early Christian identification of Jesus. Matthew 16, with which we began this chapter, shows Simon Peter's refusal of the mystery of the cross after he confessed Jesus as 'the Christ, the Son of the living God', and for that he was called 'Satan' (Matt 16.23). Answering the questions of Jesus' identity entails an acceptance of his cross. But how does the cross relate to Christ's identity with divinity and humanity? Paul says that the 'Lord of glory' was crucified (1 Cor 2.8). And we read in 1 Peter 2.21: 'Christ suffered for you.' Divine impassibility has been taken as a test case for scriptural exegesis and doctrinal controversy over the identity of the one who saves by his cross (Weinandy 2000; Gavriilyuk 2004). Early Christians typically had a keen sense of the infinite distance between the all-powerful God and frail humanity, and so, for that reason, all the more marvelled at the incarnation from the perspective of suffering. The cross, which most powerfully signifies the plan of the incarnation, stands as the hermeneutical key to understanding the early Christians' grasp of Jesus, as they focused on his scriptural identity as the crucified and risen one (Behr 2001:49–50). Without that key, it is hard to appreciate what many early exegetes were arguing about in questions on the unity and duality of Christ.

Having set forth these methodological considerations, this chapter now considers some representative examples of the scholasticization of biblical interpretation from the fourth to seventh centuries. This period is called the era of Christological *controversies* for good reason. Scholastic reading strategies become most developed through intense argumentation with the result that Christological doctrines emerged from a culture of competing claims about how to read Scripture rightly. Without recognizing this complex growth, the conciliar Christological doctrines can seem disconnected from biblical interpretation.

## THE ERA OF THE ANCIENT CHRISTOLOGICAL COUNCILS

---

Scholars debate how Athanasius' biblical interpretation sets the stage in the fourth century for the subsequent Christological tradition, as exemplified in the contrasting accounts of coherence by Khaled Anatolios (1998) and complication by Christopher Beeley (2012:105–70). An exegetical mistake of his 'Arian' opponents, according to Athanasius, was that they read the Scriptures uniformly, without distinction. Seeing the human actions of the Saviour, they judged him as a creature (*Ar.* 3.35.2). To counter that error, Athanasius argued: 'Moreover, this scope and character of Scripture, as we have often said, is twofold about the proclamation of the Saviour in it: both that he has eternally been God, and is the Son, being Word and Radiance and Wisdom of the Father, and that later for us, taking on flesh from the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, he became a human' (*Ar.* 3.29.1; my translation). Athanasius' opponents failed to see this distinction between theology and economy united in the Son incarnate, and so they thought the Son who suffered could not truly be God. In citing Nicaea's authority, exegetes of the era of the Christological councils, in sundry controversies, followed the path set out by Athanasius: 'For my part I had hoped that all the empty talk of all the heretics in existence had been ended by the council held at Nicaea, for the faith which the fathers confessed there, in accordance with the divine Scriptures, is enough in itself to overthrow all impiety and to establish devout faith in Christ' (*ep. Epict.* 59.1; trans. McGuckin 1994:379 [altered]). The four Christological councils running from Ephesus (431) to Constantinople III (680–1), and the work of the major exegetes of that era on all sides of the debates, were explicit attempts at retrieving Nicaea (cf. Anatolios 2011; Anatolios 2014).

Grillmeier characterized the era before the Council of Ephesus (431) as a dispute between the Alexandrian *logos-sarx* school and the Antiochene *logos-anthropos* school. According to him, this dispute then gave rise, respectively, to the early fifth-century opposition between Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius the Antiochene bishop of Constantinople (Grillmeier 1975:167–439). Scholars have, however, persuasively challenged Grillmeier's thesis since it imported twentieth-century preoccupations: ancient discussions of the 'person' of Jesus were taken to refer to his human consciousness, thereby implicitly framing Antiochene exegesis as a precursor to historical Jesus studies (Daley 2015:123; McGuckin 1994:134, 207). Yet, the characterization of contrasting poles of thought in biblical interpretation, and thus Christology, has some purchase—even if not by the *logos-sarx* and *logos-anthropos* labels. Brian Daley exposes one of the key points of difference; after quoting the Antiochene Theodore of Mopsuestia about the unbridgeable gulf between Creator and creation, he clarifies that:

[u]nlike Athanasius, who also emphasized God's otherness than creation but who laid an equal, coordinate emphasis on the divine Logos' personal, substantial presence within creation, the Antiochenes were concerned to maintain only God's

distance—out of an underlying concern not to promote any idea of creation or salvation that might compromise the transcendent qualities of the three divine Persons. (Daley 2015:123)

Antiochene exegesis distinguished divinity from humanity within Christ against ‘Arian’ and Apollinarian errors, but it ultimately failed to safeguard the unity of Christ. This Antiochene lack of emphasis on Christ’s unity was most famously countered by Cyril of Alexandria’s Christological exegesis, triumphant at Ephesus and the standard for subsequent conciliar history (Wickham 1983; McGuckin 1994; O’Keefe 2000; Fairbairn 2003; Behr 2011; Anatolios 2014).

Gregory of Nazianzus is regarded as neither Alexandrian nor Antiochene, yet he is increasingly recognized in the scholarship as influential on nearly every significant Christological controversy after the fourth century. Gregory presided over Constantinople I (381) for a brief time and was named ‘the Theologian’ in the acts of Chalcedon (451). John Behr calls Gregory’s *Oration* 29.18 ‘the clearest statement of the principle of partitive exegesis from the fourth century’ (Behr 2004:349). Gregory explained:

In one main point, apply the loftier things to the divinity and to the nature more powerful than sufferings and the body, but the lowlier things to the composite (*τῷ συνθέτῳ*) and to the one who, on account of you, was emptied and became incarnate, not to speak more crudely, and became human. Then he was raised up, so that you may be released from your carnal and base opinions and learn to be loftier and to rise up with divinity, and not to dwell on things seen, but to pass to the things understood, and know what is a statement about nature and what is a statement about economy (*τίς μὲν φύσεως λόγος, τίς δὲ λόγος οἰκονομίας*).

(Gregory of Nazianzus, *or.* 29.18; my translation)

Gregory’s concern in this passage is to prove that Christ, whom his opponents see in a mere creaturely way, is God enfleshed, a new and wondrous mixture. Gregory distinguishes the scriptural actions of Christ so as to emphasize that the same one does contrasting actions as a human (*ὡς ἄνθρωπος*) and as God (*ὡς θεός*) in the Scriptures: baptized as human, absolves sins as God; tested as human, victorious as God, etc. (*or.* 29.19–20). The comparison of two actions in *Oration* 29.20 is not between the divine nature and the composite of the God-human, nor between humanity and divinity as separate subjects, but between considering the one Christ as human, from a natural point of view, and then considering him through the economy as God (who is that same one considered as human). This point is illustrated more clearly in the following comparison: ‘He is sold, and cheap was the price—thirty pieces of silver; yet he buys back the world at the mighty cost of his own blood’ (*or.* 29.20; trans. Wickham 2002:88). Knowing that his opponents, like those of Athanasius, were confused by Christ’s humanity and did not affirm Christ’s divinity, Gregory concludes (in Wickham’s clever rendition of Gregory’s rhyme): ‘If the first set of expressions starts you going astray, the

second set takes your error away' (*or.* 29.20; trans. Wickham 2002:88). Such exegesis provides a basis for the continued scholastic argumentation and refinement of doctrine in the fifth century.

The Council of Ephesus in 431 has been called 'the ecumenical council that never was' (Daley 2016:170). This is not the place to review scholarship on the contorted political manoeuvres of the events of 431. For all their significant exegetical differences (McGuckin 1994:126–226), Nestorius and Cyril had some similar strategies in biblical interpretation. They both wanted to give interpretations of Scripture in accord with the fathers, especially the fathers of the Council of Nicaea, and to deal with the question of divine impassibility (*ἀπάθεια*).

For Nestorius, the notion of divine impassibility did not permit God to be the subject of the sufferings of Christ. In his *Second Letter to Cyril* (trans. Tanner 1990:1.44–50), which was condemned at Ephesus, Nestorius presented his exegetical principle: 'Holy scripture, wherever it recalls the Lord's economy, speaks of the birth and suffering not of the godhead but of the humanity of Christ, so that the holy virgin is more accurately (*κατὰ ἀκριβεστέραν*) termed mother of Christ than mother of God (*χριστοτόκον, οὐ θεοτόκον*)' (trans. Tanner 1990:1.47). Nestorius appealed to speaking 'more accurately', a precision characteristic of his style (McGuckin 1994:28). That 'more accurately' could also be seen within elements of the growing scholasticization of biblical interpretation. After quoting Matthew 1.1, 1.16, 1.18, John 2.1, Acts 1.14, Matthew 1.20, 2.13, Romans 1.3, 8.3, 1 Corinthians 15.3, 1 Peter 4.1, and 1 Corinthians 11.24, Nestorius continued: 'Ten thousand other expressions witness to the human race that they should not think that it was the godhead of the Son that was recently killed but the flesh which was joined to the nature of the godhead' (trans. Tanner 1990:1.49). In nearing his conclusion, Nestorius summed up: 'These are the traditions of the holy fathers. These are the precepts of the holy scriptures' (trans. Tanner 1990:1.49).

For Cyril, who also affirmed the impassibility of divine nature in itself, there was only one acting subject for all Christ's actions. In his *Third Letter to Nestorius* (*Acta conc. oec.* 1.1.33–42; trans. McGuckin 1994:266–75), Cyril counters with his own exegetical principle: 'We do not divide out the sayings of our Saviour in the Gospels as if to two hypostases or prosopa. The one and only Christ is not twofold (*διπλοῦς*) even though he is understood as compounded out of two different elements in an indivisible unity, just as a man is understood as consisting of soul and body and yet is not twofold but rather is one from out of both' (trans. McGuckin 1994:271; cf. Cyril, *Chr. un.* 736; SC 97:374). Cyril then takes a contrasting set of scriptural phrases to exemplify his exegetical work. To show the Son's identity of essence with the Father, he quotes, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14.9) and 'The Father and I are one' (John 10.30). To show the limitations of Christ's humanity, Cyril quotes, 'Now you are seeking to kill me, a man who has told you the truth' (John 8:40), and writes, 'it is necessary to believe that he who is God by nature became flesh, or rather became man ensouled with a rational soul' (trans. McGuckin 1994:271). Cyril then concludes: 'This is why all the sayings in the Gospels are to be attributed to one prosōpon, and to the one incarnate hypostasis of the Word, just as

according to the Scriptures there is One Lord Jesus Christ' (trans. McGuckin 1994:271 [altered]). For Cyril, 'one incarnate hypostasis', given here, and the more famous phrase 'one incarnate nature', are interchangeable. Cyril's terminology has some fluidity, and one should not underestimate the variety of definitions in the secondary literature for the key terms used by Cyril (van Loon 2009:250).

Like Gregory of Nazianzus in his *ep.* 101, Cyril lists anathemas in his *Third Letter to Nestorius*. Like Gregory's anathemas, these anathemas show the index of prohibited ways of Christological exegesis, condemning false doctrinal results from reading the Scriptures impiously. In yet another sign of increasing scholasticization, Cyril would later offer explanations of these anathemas at Ephesus in 431 (*Acta conc. oec.* 1.1.5.15–25; trans. McGuckin 1994:282–93). The anathemas close with, 'If anyone does not confess that the Word of God suffered in the flesh, was crucified in the flesh, and tasted death in the flesh, becoming the first-born from the dead, although as God he is life and life-giving, let him be anathema' (trans. McGuckin 1994:275). At Ephesus in 431, Cyril explains how this twelfth anathema does not violate the impassibility of the divine nature, but communicates the wonder of the incarnation. Eliding 1 Corinthians 2.8 and 1 Peter 4.1, Cyril writes, 'The Lord of Glory himself suffered in the flesh, in accordance with the Scriptures' (trans. McGuckin 1994:293 [altered]). All of Cyril's anathemas, and his scholastic explanations of his anathemas at Ephesus, are meant precisely to protect the biblical interpretation that God, and not a mere human, suffered in the flesh for the salvation of the world.

Arguably the most remarkable achievement of the events surrounding the Christological controversy of 431 is Cyril's letter to John of Antioch with its embedded 'Formula of Reunion' in 433 (*Acta conc. oec.* 1.1.4.15–20; trans. McGuckin 1994:343–8). Here we see that Cyril recognizes a difference in theological formulations that maintain central truths. The Formula acknowledges the Lord Jesus Christ to be perfect God and perfect man, consubstantial with the Father in divinity and consubstantial with us in humanity: 'for there was a union of the two natures (δύο γὰρ φύσεων ἔνωσις γέγονεν), and this is why we confess One Christ, One Son, One Lord. According to this understanding of the unconfused union we confess that the holy virgin is the Mother of God, because God was made flesh and became man, and from the very moment of conception he united to himself the temple that was taken from her' (*Acta conc. oec.* 1.1.4.17; trans. McGuckin 1994:344–5). The Formula gives this important exegetical principle that contrasts with Cyril's fourth anathema, but was not seen by Cyril as reason to deny the reunion: 'As for the evangelical and apostolic sayings about the Lord, we are aware that theologians ascribe the things common as to one person and the things different as to two natures; that they interpret the God-befitting ones in accordance with the Godhead of the Christ and the humble ones in accordance with the manhood' (*Acta conc. oec.* 1.1.4.17; trans. McGuckin 1994:345 [altered]). Who or what is that 'one person', and how do the things ascribed to the two different natures relate to that person? Attempts at answering these questions would occupy later Christological exegesis.

The Formula of Reunion was perhaps composed by Theodoret of Cyrus (Chadwick 1951:147), Cyril's theological opponent condemned at the 'robber synod' of

Ephesus in 449 and rehabilitated at Chalcedon in 451 a few years before his death. Comparing Theodoret to Nestorius, Paul Clayton says, ‘Theodoret’s position, role, and Christological confessions are much more central to the history of the way in which conciliar Christology actually evolved’ (Clayton 2007:30). Together with Cyril, Theodoret has been recognized as a key proponent of the early scholasticization that would become more prevalent after Chalcedon (Daley 1984:167)—his pre-Chalcedonian *Eranistes* is already a thoroughly scholastic work of biblical interpretation. Setting up three dialogues between ‘Orthodox’ and ‘Eranistes’, Theodoret treats in logical order the topics of the Immutable, the Unmixed, and the Impassible, with an epilogue that summarizes each one, so that his readers can follow the gradual argument that God is immutable, that in the incarnation there is not a mixing when the Word of God was made flesh, and that consequently God remains impassible in Christ’s suffering. The first dialogue begins with a thorough examination ‘of terms about divine things, namely, substance, hypostases, persons, and properties’ (περὶ τῶν θείων ὀνομάτων, οὐσίας φημι καὶ ὑποστάσεων καὶ προσώπων καὶ ἰδιοτήτων) (Theodoret, *eran.*; trans. Ettlinger 2003:30 [altered]). Each dialogue closes with quotations from authorities, including, surprisingly, Apollinarius, in order to show that not only the holy fathers but even heretics can agree on the basic principles of interpretation. In the third dialogue, Theodoret shows how the Nicene Creed should be used as a rule for reading the scriptural account of Christ’s suffering.

In connection with the person of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Ibas of Edessa’s *Letter to Mari the Persian*, Theodoret’s anti-Cyrrillian writings were condemned by Emperor Justinian and by Constantinople II (553) in the extended Three Chapters controversy to win back the Miaphysites who dissented from Chalcedon (451) (trans. Price 2009). Justinian’s edict *On the Orthodox Faith* (c.545) addresses concerns of the defenders of these three earlier theologians, Theodore, Theodoret, and Ibas, as well as the followers of the leading Miaphysite theologian of the early sixth century, Severus of Antioch. To prepare for his own interpretation of the hymn from Philippians 2, which speak of both ‘form of God’ and ‘form of a slave’, so important in these early controversies, Justinian explains:

When we profess one composite Christ from each nature, that is from Godhead and manhood, we do not introduce merger into the union. Recognizing in each nature, that is, in Godhead and manhood, the one Jesus Christ our Lord, the Word of God incarnate and made man, we do not impose on his one hypostasis division into parts or scission, but we indicate the difference between the natures from which he was composed, which is not abolished by the union, since each nature is in him. For when composition is professed, the parts are in the whole and at the same time the whole is acknowledged in the parts. (CCP [553], trans. Price 2009:131)

Constantinople II, convened by Justinian, issued fourteen anathemas in its canons. The tenth canon, repeating the sixth anathema of Justinian’s *On the Orthodox Faith* (and echoing Cyril’s twelfth anathema), reflected the resolution of the Theopaschite controversy

and the concern of John Maxentius and the Scythian monks to uphold that the one subject of the crucifixion is the eternal Son, one of the Trinity: 'If anyone does not profess that our Lord Jesus Christ, crucified in the flesh, is true God and Lord of glory and one of the holy Trinity, let him be anathema' (trans. Price 2009:123).

The debates continued into the seventh century, concentrating on the operations and, then, wills in Christ. Maximus the Confessor has been increasingly seen in the scholarship to be of towering importance in these debates; his own views on these issues were often expressed through a careful exegesis of Christ's agonized prayer in the garden (Allen and Neil 2015). For example, in his *Opusculum* 6, he interprets Matthew 26.39, 'Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me. But let not what I will, but what you will prevail.' He adapts an authoritative interpretation from Gregory of Nazianzus' *Oration* 30.12, which was originally concerned with defending the unity of the will between the Father and the Son against the Eunomians; now, in Maximus' hands, this passage from Gregory takes on a much greater Christological precision about who in the garden is saying those words to the Father. Against the emerging Monothelitism, Maximus emphasized the uniqueness of the Saviour in the perfect concurrence of his human will with the divine will. He writes:

[W]ith the duality of his natures there are two wills and two operations respective to the two natures, and that he admits of no opposition between them, even though he maintains all the while the difference between the two natures from which, in which, and which he is by nature.

(*opusc.*, PG 91.65C; trans. Blowers and Wilken 2003:174; cf. Leontius of Byzantium, *cap. Sev.* 6 and Bathrellos 2004:108–9)

Rather than debating whether he is a 'proto-scholastic' in preparation for later Byzantine scholasticism, scholars can view him as someone whose biblical interpretation reflected a gradually developing Christological scholasticism (Blowers 2016:64–6). While not applying a scholastic label to Maximus without qualification, Paul Blowers propounds 'Maximus' own capacity for conceptual severity, theological exactness, and linguistic rigor on those linchpins of theology and Christology which he deemed worthy of uncompromising interpretive precision' (Blowers 2016:98).

Another example of this mode of scholarship can be found in Maximus' treatment of Gregory of Nazianzus' *Oration* 29.18 (Louth 1993:125–6). Maximus distinguishes between essence and hypostasis, neither of which is given by Gregory in this passage, and takes pains to make sure that readers understand that it is the Son's hypostasis that is incarnate and can be called, as it is by Gregory elsewhere, 'God passible' (*or.* 30.1). Maximus comments:

The Word of God is whole, complete essence (for he is God), and he is whole, undiminished hypostasis (for he is the Son). Having *emptied himself*, he became the *seed* of his own *flesh*, and being thus compounded by means of his ineffable conception, he became the hypostasis of the flesh that he assumed. In this new mystery, he truly and without change became a whole human, being himself the hypostasis of

two natures, created and uncreated, impassible and passible, for he accepted without exception all the attributes of [human] nature, of which, as we have said, he was the hypostasis. (Maximus, *ambig.*; trans. Conostas 2014:13 [altered])

Having laid this foundation for his argument, Maximus continues:

If, therefore, he accepted essentially all the principles of [human] nature—of which he himself was the hypostasis—it was with great wisdom that the teacher (i.e., Saint Gregory) allocated the sufferings of the flesh to him who became composite according to hypostasis by assuming the flesh, precisely so that his sufferings would not be deemed merely nominal, because the flesh in question was his own, and it was by virtue of the flesh that truly ‘God is able to suffer in opposition to sin’.

(Maximus, *ambig.*, quoting Gregory’s *or.* 30.1; trans. Conostas 2014:13 [altered])

Maximus goes on to show how Gregory’s teaching defends the faith against ‘Arians’ and Apollinarians. What is implied, however, is that Gregory was a bulwark against errors that occurred after the fourth century. Maximus did this work by returning to the Scriptures, in a more scholastic manner than Gregory, revising the earlier rhetorical theologian’s work with greater philosophical precision for the needs of a later day (Louth 1993).

Maximus’ scholastic achievement of precision on wills and operations not only appears in the Lateran Synod of 649, such as the explication of two connaturally united wills and two connaturally united operations in chapters 10 and 11 of its Fifth Session, but also after his death, in modified form, in the sixth ecumenical council, Constantinople III (680–1). Thanks especially to seventh-century scholastic refinement in interpreting Christ’s agony in the garden, this council was able to redeploy Chalcedon’s logic about natures—acknowledged in 451 with the famous four alpha-privative adverbs—to a proclamation on Christ’s energies and wills: ‘And we proclaim equally two natural volitions or wills in him and two natural principles of action which undergo no division, no change, no partition, no confusion, in accordance with the teaching of the holy fathers’ (trans. Tanner 1990:1.128). The guarantee that biblical interpretation articulated right faith in Christ is, as we have seen in the growth of this scholastic culture, in its ‘accordance with the teaching of the holy fathers’ (trans. Tanner 1990:1.128; cf. the twenty chapters from the Lateran Synod’s Fifth Session). Constantinople III provided quotations from Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Leo the Great, and Cyril of Alexandria. These fathers communicated the right reading of Scripture on Christ. Again, Scripture and the teaching of the holy fathers became virtually synonymous in the era of the ancient Christological councils, and at the end of this era anyone who rejected any written or unwritten tradition of the Church would be anathematized (canon 4 of Nicaea II [787]). In concluding its exposition of the faith, Constantinople III asserted: ‘So now that these points have been formulated by us with all precision in every respect (*μετὰ πάσης πανταχόθεν ἀκριβείας*) and with all care, we definitely state that it is not allowable for anyone to produce another faith’ (trans. Tanner 1990:1.130). In sum, the ambiguity of scriptural phrases about Christ was clarified through the work of theologians during the period of the ancient councils, so that increasingly precise dogmatic interpretations emerged.

## FROM SCHOLASTIC ANSWERS BACK TO BIBLICAL QUESTIONS

---

At the culmination of the patristic era, in the first half of the eighth century, John of Damascus' *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* illustrates the scholastic achievement of Greek biblical interpretation that developed through centuries of controversies. John's writing on faith is found alongside his treatments of philosophical chapters and heresies in a threefold structure of his mature vision (Louth 2002:34). In *Exposition* chapter 91 (4.18 in common Western numeration), John gives an extraordinarily detailed treatment of how to divide all sayings about Christ in four manners (τρόποι): (i) Before the incarnation; (ii) In the union; (iii) After the union; (iv) After the Resurrection. Each of these manners is subdivided, and sometimes further distinguished through sub-subdivisions, with scriptural quotations as examples and technical terms, often in a series of combinations, to unite various expressions in the tradition into a coherent whole. For example, the third manner, 'After the union,' has three considerations: of the divine nature, of the human nature, and of showing the one hypostasis confirming the combination. Under the subcategory of the human nature six further subdivisions appear: economically; by claim of acquisition; by appropriation and classification; by distinction of thought; for our assurance; and by appropriation of the voice of the Jews. To take one example from this list, that of appropriation and classification, John quotes the beginning of Jesus' prayer on the cross from the Psalm, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me' (Matt 27.46), and cites similar passages (2 Cor 5.21, Gal 3.13, and 1 Cor 15.28). As God, Jesus was never forsaken by his Father, to whom he is equal and in no way at variance or subject. 'So it was,' John finds, 'in appropriating our voice (πρόσωπον) and classing himself with us that he said these things, for it was we who were subject to sin and curse, because we were disobedient and unhearing and for that reason forsaken' (f.o. 91; trans. Chase 1958:381 [altered]). John concludes his elaborate rubric with more general rules for Christological exegesis that apply some language of Gregory of Nazianzus' *Oration* 29.18 to the framework of the Formula of Reunion's principle of dividing biblical sayings, and then quotes Cyril's *Epistle* 41.14, to Acacius of Melitene, one of Cyril's letters that explain the Formula of Reunion. To ignore the final words of this *Exposition's* chapter, in which Gregory and Cyril are adduced as authorities for Christological exegesis, would be to neglect John's sense of exegetical rules for confessing who Jesus is according to the Scriptures.

Thus we eventually find an elaborate scholastic system in Christological exegesis, a system evidenced by many markers that gradually developed over the early centuries and took firm hold in the contentious era of the Christological councils. Like Maximus, John of Damascus should not be considered a 'proto-scholastic' according to some subsequent standard. Chapter 91 of the *Exposition* evinces a deep and thorough scholasticism in biblical interpretation that developed over many centuries through intense controversies over Christological exegesis. Yet John himself, responsible for much liturgical

preaching and poetry, was also identified many centuries later as ‘the liturgical poet’ (Louth 2002:252). This form of scholasticism at the end of early Christianity was not the sort of totalizing discourse that obliterated other forms of biblical interpretation, but rather can be seen as one that safeguarded, in a philosophically sophisticated culture, the community’s use of literary forms including poetry and mysticism. Moreover, John himself could ridicule his Miaphysite opponents as having introduced Aristotle as the thirteenth apostle (*Jacob.* 10.13; cf. Louth 2002:159). He follows a long patristic tradition of claiming to imitate the Apostles who spoke like fishermen, not like Aristotle (Gregory of Nazianzus, *or.* 23.12).

In conclusion, readers of early Christian biblical interpretation can be conscious of a development of a Christological scholasticism, and retrace the steps back in history to the apostolic belief that Jesus suffered, died, and rose in accordance with the Scriptures. Over the first Christian centuries, elaborate and philosophically informed reading strategies were developed with appeals to the scriptural canon, index of prohibitions, the community of the Church’s authorities, and claims to a continuous tradition of following the fathers. Opposing sides during the conciliar period held many of the same presuppositions, presuppositions not held by all who interpret the Bible today. Recent scholars have worked to show how this early Christian reading culture developed through the various forms of biblical interpretation, and particularly how such early ‘schools’ as Antioch and Alexandria, or the later broad ranges of those who accepted the Council of Chalcedon and of those who did not, differed from each other. These opponents to one another in the era of the ancient councils commonly recognized the problem of divine impassibility and Christ’s cross, but they offered different exegetical rules to interpret who or what suffered. Competing Christological teachings resulted from competing exegetical strategies about the biblical descriptions of Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection. For each side, the development of Christ-centred scholasticism in early biblical interpretation was an effort for people to be united in the right faith of Simon Peter and the Apostles as recorded in the Scriptures, amidst the possibilities of erroneous faith. By this communion in faith, what I have identified as a form of scholasticism was ultimately meant to be at the service of uniting believers to Jesus himself, proclaimed in accordance with the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum.* Greek and Latin text: E. Schwartz et al. (eds) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1924–92).
- Athanasius, *Epistula ad Epictetum.* Greek text: G. Ludwig, *Athanasii Epistula ad Epictetum.* (Diss. Jena, 1911), 3–18. Eng. trans.: J. A. McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology and Texts* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary, 1994, repr. 2004).

<sup>1</sup> The author is grateful to John Baptist Ku, OP, Dominic Legge, OP, and the editors for their assistance.

- Athanasius, *Orationes tres adversus Arianos*. Greek text: K. Metzler and K. Savvidis (eds), *Athanasius: Werke*, vol. 1: *Die dogmatischen Schriften, Erster Teil*, 3, Lieferung (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 305–81.
- Concilium Constantinopolitanum anno 553, oecumenicum quintum*. Eng. trans.: R. Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553, with Related Texts on the Three Chapters Controversy*, 2 vols (Liverpool: Liverpool, 2009).
- Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistulae*. Greek text: P. Gally, *Lettres théologiques*, SC 208 (Paris: Cerf, 1974).
- Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes theologicae*. Greek text: P. Gally, *Grégoire de Nazianze Discours 27–31*, SC 250 (Paris: Cerf 1978). Eng. trans.: F. Williams and L. Wickham, *The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters of Cleodnius* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002).
- John of Damascus, *De fidei orthodoxa libri quattuor*. Greek text: P. B. Kotter (ed.), *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973), 3–239. Eng. trans.: F. H. Chase, *John of Damascus: Writings*, FC 37 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1958).
- Leontius of Byzantium, *Adversus argumenta Severi*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: B. E. Daley, *Leontius of Byzantium: The Complete Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguorum liber*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: N. Constat, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
- Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theologica et polemica*. Greek text: [PG columns]. Eng. trans.: P. Blowers (etc.). Greek text: PG 91. 9–286. Eng. trans.: P. Blowers and R. L. Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003).
- Tanner, N. P. (1990) (ed. and trans.). *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990).
- Theodoret of Cyrus, *Eranistes (dialogus)*. Greek text: G. H. Ettlinger (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975). Eng. trans.: G. H. Ettlinger (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2003).

## Scholarship

- Allen, P. and Neil, B. (eds) (2015). *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Anatolios, K. (1998). *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought* (New York: Routledge).
- Anatolios, K. (2011). *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic).
- Anatolios, K. (2014). 'The Soteriological Grammar of Patristic Christology', *The Thomist* 78: 1–24.
- Bathrellos, D. (2004). *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Baukhham, R. (2008). *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Beeley, C. A. (2012). *The Unity of Christ: Continuity and Conflict in Patristic Tradition* (New Haven: Yale).
- Behr, J. (2001). *The Way to Nicaea*, vol. 1 of *Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Behr, J. (2004). *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 2 of *Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).

- Behr, J. (2011). *The Case against Diodore and Theodore: Texts and their Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Blowers, P. (2016). *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Cabezón, J. I. (1998). 'Introduction', in J. I. Cabezón (ed.), *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 1–17.
- Cameron, M. (2012). *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Chadwick, H. (1951). 'Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy', *JTS* NS 2: 145–64.
- Clayton, P. (2007). *The Christology of Theodoret of Cyrus: Antiochene Christology from the Council of Ephesus (431) to the Council of Chalcedon (451)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Daley, B. E. (1984). 'Boethius' Theological Tracts and Early Byzantine Scholasticism', *Medieval Studies* 46: 158–91.
- Daley, B. E. (1993). "'A Richer Union": Leontius of Byzantium and the Relationship of Human and Divine in Christ', *SP* 24: 239–65.
- Daley, B. E. (2005). 'The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols and Science of Theology', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7: 362–82.
- Daley, B. E. (2015). 'Antioch and Alexandria: Christology as Reflection on God's Presence in History', in F. A. Murphy (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Christology* (New York: Oxford University Press), 121–38.
- Daley, B. E. (2016). 'Unpacking the Chalcedonian Formula: From Studied Ambiguity to Saving Mystery', *The Thomist* 80: 165–89.
- Daley, B. E. (2017). *Leontius of Byzantium: Complete Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Davis, S. (2008). *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Fairbairn, D. (2003). *Grace and Christology in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Gavrilyuk, P. (2004). *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Griffiths, P. (1998). 'Scholasticism: The Possible Recovery of an Intellectual Practice', in J. I. Cabezón (ed.), *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 201–35.
- Grillmeier, A. (1975). *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 1: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon*, trans. J. Bowden, revised edn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox).
- Grillmeier, A. (1987). *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 1: *From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604)*, trans. P. Allen and J. Cawte (London: Mowbray).
- Hofer, A. (2013). *Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Hurtado, L. (2005). *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Keech, D. (2012). *The Anti-Pelagian Christology of Augustine of Hippo 396–430* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Leinsle, U. G. (2010). *Introduction to Scholastic Theology*, trans. M. J. Miller (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press).
- Lossky, V. (1957, repr. 1976). *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).

- Louth, A. (1993). 'St Gregory the Theologian and St Maximus the Confessor: The Shaping of Tradition,' in S. Coakley and D. Pailin (eds), *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 117–30.
- Louth, A. (2002). *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- McGuckin, J. A. (1994, repr. 2004). *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology and Texts* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Martens, P. W. (2012). *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Michelson, D. (2015). *The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug* (Oxford: Oxford).
- O'Keefe, J. J. (2000). "A Letter that Killeth": Toward a Reassessment of Antiochene Exegesis, or Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret on the Psalms, *J ECS* 8: 83–103.
- Plested, M. (2012). *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Stewart-Sykes, A. (2001). *From Prophecy to Preaching: A Search for the Origins of the Christian Homily* (Leiden: Brill).
- Van Loon, H. (2009). *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill).
- Weinandy, T. (2000). *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame).
- White, T. J. (2015). *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America).
- Wickham, L. (1983). *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon).
- Wilken, R. L. (2003). *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University).
- Wright, N. T. (1996). *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress).
- Young, F. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

### **Suggested Reading**

- Daley, B. E. (2018). *God Visible: Patristic Christology Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Price, R., and Whitby, M. (2009) (eds). *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils 400–700* (Liverpool: Liverpool).
- Young, F., and Teal, A. (2010). *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*. 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic).

## CHAPTER 30

---

# SCRIPTURE AND A CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

---

MICHAEL HOLLERICH

## INTRODUCTION

---

ASSESSING the place of the Christian Roman Empire in early Christian exegesis must begin with the paradox that the empire was ubiquitous but largely invisible. Only occasionally does it get discussed directly in the conventional genres of the exegetical commentary and the homily. At the same time, the empire was the political and cultural horizon for much of what literate Christians had to say about the Bible, more often unacknowledged and taken for granted than alluded to explicitly. Jeremy Schott has suggested that works like Eusebius of Caesarea's *Commentary on Isaiah* did not just presume the empire as a given, they actually *constructed* the space in which the empire was conceived as existing (Schott 2013). A check of patristic commentaries on Isaiah, for example, shows only scattered references to the Roman Empire, and the vast majority of those are to the empire in its pre-Christian form. The editor of Theodoret of Cyrus' Isaiah commentary has observed that 'In contrast to ancient history, the history of the fifth century shows up relatively little in the commentary. One can see only with difficulty the political reality of an Empire whose dignitaries are henceforth Christian' (ed. Guinot 1980:64). Every reference Theodoret makes to Rome or Romans is aimed at the historic Roman Empire *before* Constantine, and very largely to the Romans' suppression of the Jewish revolts and the burning of the Temple—a telling reflection of the centrality of anti-Jewish apologetics in patristic exegesis. The same is true of Jerome, who makes just three references to the Christian Roman Empire in an 800-page commentary: one regarding Constantinian legislation against public display of male youths for prostitution, and two regarding the conversion of the emperors and their services to the Church (Jerome, *Is.*; ed. Adriaen 1963:32.53–7; ed. Adriaen and Morin 1963:694.86–94, 700.21–9). By comparison, there are dozens of references to the Roman punishment of the Jews. Jerome is pleased, for example, to apply Isaiah 40.2 ('She [Jerusalem] has received from

the LORD's hand double for all her sins,' a well-known exegetical crux) to the destruction of both the first and the second Temples (*Is.* 40.2; ed. Adriaen 1963:455). John Chrysostom's fragmentary Isaiah commentary (first eight chapters) mentions Rome and Romans just twice, once in connection with the peace prophecy of Isaiah 2.2–4 (*Is. interp.* 2). Even Eusebius of Caesarea's commentary is reserved in its contemporary allusions.

For more overt allusions one needs to look at non-exegetical genres such as eulogies, apologies, controversial writing, and the like. Patristic writers were intimately familiar with the Bible and naturally depended on it as a primary rhetorical resource for illustration, exhortation, diatribe, and praise. And some writers were just more interested in the empire than others.

In the following sections, this chapter presents the formative contribution of Eusebius of Caesarea, the chief apologetic architect of the Christian Roman Empire; discusses complementary and contrasting voices to the Eusebian consensus; and concludes with the role the Bible played in patristic writing on military service.

## EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA AND THE CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

---

Eusebius of Caesarea is rightly hailed as the godfather of a political theology inspired by the incipient Christianizing of the Roman Empire under Constantine. Christian imperial ideology begins here. From a rich bibliography, it is sufficient to name Norman Baynes's sketch 'Eusebius and the Christian Empire' (Baynes 1955:168–72) and Erik Peterson's analysis in *Monotheism as a Political Problem*, in which Eusebius is the Christian political theologian par excellence (Peterson 2011). Attention to this aspect of Eusebius' legacy has led to a rather one-sided picture of a man who was also the premier exegete of his generation. More recent scholarship has corrected that imbalance. One result of that work is to show us how his biblical scholarship, and particularly his massive commentaries on the Psalter and on Isaiah, are more restrained where the Christian Roman Empire is concerned—while at the same time revealing how the empire creates the political and historical context for so much of what Eusebius says about the Bible.

Eusebius' view of the Roman Empire is in direct continuity with a line of Christian apologetics identifiable already in the NT, most explicitly in the Acts of the Apostles, which presents the empire as a religiously neutral peace-keeping operation whose role is to protect the fledgling Christian Church from being crushed by its enemies among the Jewish people. The chronological framework of Acts is salvation history (Pervo 2009:22–3), constructed of mundane realities such as real emperors, real Jewish and Roman officials, and absent an apocalyptic end-time scenario. Although the Holy Spirit impels the gospel to go out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, the destination that matters to Acts is the city of Rome itself. Paul goes there as a prisoner, but in Acts' final passage he is said to be able to preach the gospel 'unhindered' (*akôlutôs*; Pervo 2009:688).

Eusebius shares the same salvation history structure, in which the Roman Empire is a divine instrument to enable world peace, its establishment coincides with the birth of Jesus, the prince of peace (*h.e.* 4.26.7–8), and its officials cooperate with God’s plan for the spread of the gospel in a world at peace. Origen had already noted how the Pax Romana allowed the uninhibited preaching of the gospel (Origen, *Cels.* 2.30), as prophesied in Psalm 71.7–8, a key text for Eusebius as well. Eusebius notes the empire’s assistance of the Christian churches in the Emperor Aurelian’s response to the appeal of the Eastern bishops for help in suppressing the renegade bishop of Antioch, Paul of Samosata (*h.e.* 7.30.19). Persecutions of Christians are deviations from this basic pattern and are attributed to demonic subversion of the empire and to divine retribution for Christians’ own sins (cf. his account of the outbreak of the Great Persecution, *h.e.* 8.1.7–8). The empire is also God’s instrument for punishing the Jews for the death of Jesus, in the crushing of the revolt of 66–70 CE and destruction of the Temple—a fulfilment of Jesus’ prediction in Matthew 24.1–2—and in the suppression of the later revolts of 118–19 in Cyrenaica and of 132–5 in Palestine, after which Jews were banned from Jerusalem and the city renamed and paganized. Already a Christian apologetic trope, the empire’s role as scourge of the Jews will be deepened under Constantine. Eusebius was also hostile to apocalyptic views of history. In the introduction to the *Chronological Canons*, his work of universal history, he quotes Acts 1.7 where the risen Jesus discourages end-time speculations (*chron.*; Karst, 1–2). His discussion of the canonization of the NT was meant in part to devalue the canonicity of the Book of Revelation and its description of the Roman Empire as the beast from the sea and the creature of the dragon (*h.e.* 3.24.18, 25.2). His hostility to chiliasm is evident in his embarrassment that Irenaeus should have shared such a doctrine, which he blames on Papias (*h.e.* 3.39.11–13). The discrediting of Revelation and chiliasm also underlie his lengthy quotations from the third-century Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria’s literary critique of the Johannine authorship of Revelation, and from Dionysius’ response to a work called *Refutation of the Allegorists*, by an Egyptian bishop named Nepos (Eusebius, *h.e.* 7.24–5).

Eusebius extended this apologetic tradition in important and original ways. One has to do with his placement of the history of the Roman Empire in the larger context of world history. The *Chronological Canons* synchronized in parallel columns the rise and decline of fifteen different ancient states, starting with Ninus, the legendary king of Assyria, and ending with Constantine and Rome. The massive tabulation listed as many as nine parallel histories at once, until only the single column of the Roman Empire remained—in which the rise of Christianity was embedded. And even though the ambition is to record universal history, it is the Bible and its data that provide the fundamental chronological spine, beginning with the birth of Abraham in 2016 BCE. The *Ecclesiastical History* incorporates the same chronological framework with its synchronization of imperial reigns and the successions of the bishops in the cities of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Both works culminate in Constantine’s reign and the fore-ordained convergence of empire and Church. The *Chronological Canons* ended with the year 325, Constantine’s *vicennalia* and the Council of Nicaea, and the *Ecclesiastical History*

with Constantine's defeat of his last imperial rival and unification of the empire under his sole rule.

A further elaboration of this apologetic tradition produced a full-blown political theology in the panegyric and biographical literature on Constantine. The *Life of Constantine* is 'a literary hybrid' that combines elements of classical panegyric, biography, and history in the service of something new and distinctively Christian—despite the classical elements, it contains about forty citations or scriptural allusions (Cameron and Hall 1999:21). It begins and ends with a celebration of the emperor's attainment of universal rule. But it adapts this traditional Roman imperial theme by reframing it in terms of Christianity's own distinctive universalism, its mission to bring the message of eternal salvation to the whole human race. In the prologue, Eusebius celebrates Constantine's acquisitions of territory not just as conquest but as evangelization: '... he illuminated with beams of the light of true religion the ends of the whole inhabited earth [Greek *oikoumenê*], as far as the outermost inhabitants of India and those who live around the rim of the whole circle of earth... he used imperial addresses to announce his own God openly and boldly even to the people of those lands' (v.C. 1.8.3–4; trans. Cameron and Hall 1999:70). The event that most brilliantly embodies this universal aspiration is not a war but the Council of Nicaea, which is presented in good biblical typological fashion as a reprise of the Pentecost story in Acts 2.1–13 (v.C. 3.7–8). His letter to the Persian king Shapur II is a religious pronouncement as much as a diplomatic communiqué (Eusebius, v.C. 4.8–13; Barnes 1985). And when Constantine does make plans for war with Persia—a Roman tradition, to be sure—Eusebius gives his campaign an explicitly religious sanction, even if it is premature to call it a crusade (v.C. 4.56–7; Smith 2016).

The *Life* is replete with biblical motifs adapted for Eusebius' political theology. He reports a painting over the gate of Constantine's palace that represents Constantine, with the cross of Christ over his head, piercing a dragon with a javelin. This painting fulfils Isaiah 27.1, which tells how God will send 'his great and fearful sword against the crooked dragon-serpent who flees' (Eusebius, v.C. 3.3; trans. Cameron and Hall 1999:122), the dragon representing both the devil and the persecutors whom Constantine has defeated. When the bishops are honoured guests at a dinner celebrating Constantine's *vicennalia*, Eusebius does not shrink from describing the event as an imaginary representation of the kingdom of Christ, though he also glosses the comparison not with a biblical text but with an allusion to Homer: '... that what was happening was "dream not fact"' (v.C. 3.15.3; cf. Homer, *Od.* 19.547). The 'new Jerusalem' predicted by the prophets is not the eschatological city of God but the physical church built over Christ's grave, sitting in judgement over against the old Jerusalem for its crime of having killed the Lord (v.C. 3.33.1–2). Traditional Roman tolerance of Judaism gives way to overt hostility inspired by Christian anti-Judaism, as shown by Constantine's adoption of the deicide charge in his letter to the churches after the Council of Nicaea (Eusebius, v.C. 3.18.2–4, 19.1–2). The emperor's stress on Jewish blindness has echoes of Eusebius' lengthy gloss on the same theme in Isaiah 6.8–11 in *The Proof of the Gospel* (Eusebius, d.e. 7.1.4–19). And Eusebius' favourite exemplar for Constantine is not the Emperor Augustus nor

Alexander the Great, but Moses, who led God's people from slavery to freedom. Parallels between Moses and Constantine dominate the first third of the *Life of Constantine* (trans. Cameron and Hall 1999:35–9). Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge reminded Eusebius of the Israelites' escape through the Red Sea: of Maxentius' drowning soldiers, he wrote that 'they sank like lead in the water (Exod 15.10)' (Eusebius, *v.C.* 1.12, 1.38; already in *h.e.* 9.9.5–8), thus inaugurating a long tradition of political appropriations of the Exodus story. A prospective war with Persia included a tent-like mobile church, evoking the Mosaic tabernacle in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40 (Eusebius, *v.C.* 4.57; Smith 2016).

The most ambitious such biblical inversion of classical tropes is Eusebius' Christianizing of what Erik Peterson called Antiquity's 'political theology' of monotheism, in which the one ruler on earth imitates the one god in heaven. That motif is developed most elaborately in the panegyric he wrote to honour the thirtieth anniversary of Constantine's reign. In florid language Eusebius describes how Constantine models his sovereignty in imitation of the cosmic rule of the Logos: 'Thus outfitted in the likeness of the kingdom of heaven, he [Constantine] pilots affairs below with an upward gaze, to steer by the archetypal form. He grows strong in his model of monarchic rule . . .' (Eusebius, *l.C.* 3.5; trans. Drake 1975:87). That has obvious Platonic and Hellenistic antecedents. But Eusebius gives it a Christian twist by claiming monarchy and empire as Christianity's distinctive political form, while national pluralism or 'polyarchy' is polytheism's political corollary, and with it the inevitability of war. Thus the correlation follows: on the one hand, monotheism, monarchy, and peace; on the other hand, polytheism, 'polyarchy', and war (*l.C.* 3.6; also 16.5–7, 17.2).

When we turn from Eusebius' historical and panegyric works to his more strictly exegetical oeuvre, a different picture of the Roman Empire emerges, or perhaps it would be more correct to say different accents or emphases. The focus is on the Christian Church more than on the empire per se, with little of the overt political theology of the Constantinian literature. Traditional apologetic views of the empire as God's peace-keeping agent and chastiser of the Jews are still dominant, but there are also curious echoes of more apocalyptic notions.

Eusebius' approach to the Bible is basically shaped by his belief that the Bible is a reliable master key to the whole course of history, which is under God's direction for the sake of universal human salvation. This key is intelligible, he believes, not just to the eyes of faith but to any impartial scrutiny. At the core of his conviction is his understanding of biblical prophecy, which he sees as a divinely inspired commentary on the entire historical process. This is one reason why he chose to write line-by-line commentaries on the OT rather than the NT. The biblical authors wrote both about their own times and, in various degrees of concealment, about future times as well, including 'time beyond time' in eternity. Thus past prophecy served to make the future understandable, at the same time that prophecy's fulfilment validated the inspired claims made in the past. This thoroughgoing providentialism underlies his view of the Roman Empire, and also allows him to find both empire and Christian Church already in the pages of the OT. But unlike in the political theology outlined above, in Eusebius' exegesis he focuses on the Church, or 'the godly polity' (*to theosebes politeuma*) as he is fond of calling it. He regularly

equates the Christian Church with the biblical ‘city of God’ (cf. Ps 45.5; Ps 86.3, LXX; Heb 12.22–3). The empire is an adjunct of the Church rather than the other way around. Compare, for example, his many glosses on Psalm 71.7–8 (Eusebius, *d.e.* 7.2.23; 7.3.55; 8. Prol.3; 8.3.15; and 8.4.15), a core biblical proof-text on the Pax Romana—his discussion of which inspired Erik Peterson’s protest against what he saw as ‘a striking lack of exegetical tact’ (Peterson 2011:94). In the panegyric on the Holy Sepulchre, the text is said to refer to the Pax Romana (Eusebius, *l.C.* 16.5–7). In one of the few passages in which the commentary on the Psalms mentions the empire, Psalm 71.7–8 (LXX) is indeed said to speak of contemporary universal peace, but the stress is not on the empire but on the Christian Church, which ‘... is called the City of God, because of the legal and juridical *politeia* that she embodies’ (Eusebius, *Ps.* 71:7; Hollerich 2013:158).

The *Commentary on Isaiah*, written not too many months after Constantine’s *vicennalia* and unification of the empire under his sole rule, incorporates the standard apologetic motifs regarding the empire, now including explicit recognition of the active involvement of the empire in the life of the Church (Hollerich 1999:188–96). Isaiah 2.2–4, the great messianic peace prophecy, is said to refer to the contemporary peace established by Constantine. Isaiah 49.23 (‘Kings shall be your foster-fathers, and queens your nursemaids’) is said to speak of ‘the supreme rulers and their governors’ attending church services and prostrating themselves in worship. These future rulers will be generous benefactors of the Church in their offerings and gifts to the poor. And they fulfil the prophecy in Isaiah 2.20–1 by confiscating idols and melting down their precious metals (Eusebius, *Is.* 316.10–25 and 20.29–21.5). But Eusebius’ lengthy gloss on Isaiah 27.1 is exclusively typological and eschatological, unlike its political-apologetic application in the *Life of Constantine* (*Is.* 172.5–174.19; cf. *v.C.* 3.3). And the commentary shows no trace of the emperor’s imitation of the Logos in his monarchical rule, and Constantine fails to appear even in a passage where one might have expected to meet him: Isaiah 45.1, the Septuagint version of which reads, ‘Thus says the Lord God to Cyrus, my anointed, whose right hand I have held, that nations might be obedient before him ...’ Eusebius, sticking to the historical approach that he often preferred, comments only that Cyrus could be called *christos* (‘anointed’) because the Hebrew people’s divinely appointed kings were anointed and therefore called ‘christs’ (Eusebius, *Is.* 288.30–3).

The figure of Moses, who is so prominent in the *Life of Constantine*, served Eusebius in numerous other ways as well, most importantly of course as a typological anticipator of Jesus himself. In his biblically based work of apologetics *The Proof of the Gospel*, Eusebius compares them as lawgivers, and says that the new law given by Jesus recapitulates and subsumes the law of Moses (Eusebius, *d.e.* 1.8; Hollerich 2002). The new law accommodates both a celibate spiritual elite, who live by a purer and higher way of life, and the mass of humanity, who are permitted to marry, pursue careers, and serve in the government and the army. This biblically grounded endorsement of two permanently distinct ways of life in Christianity marks an important turning point in Christian thinking about how the kingdom of God relates to this world, as we will see in our concluding section on military service.

Before concluding this section, I want to point to a few places where Eusebius restrains his distaste for apocalyptic long enough to acknowledge the political import of

certain biblical texts. One of those is Paul's enigmatic passage about the 'restrainer' (*ho katechôn*) in 2 Thessalonians 2.3–9, the unnamed power that is 'restraining' for the time being the manifestation of the Antichrist, 'the son of perdition'. Eusebius is probably alluding to this richly apocalyptic text when he speculates that 'the restraining force' which held back the powers of evil was the Roman Empire (*d.e.* 3.7.34)—though God also, he admits, occasionally allowed the powers of evil to usurp the empire and to impose bloody persecution, a concession that might remind a reader of the theology of persecution found in the book of Revelation. Also in *The Proof of the Gospel*, Eusebius appears to accept an interpretation of the fourth kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2, the kingdom of iron, as the Roman Empire—which is destroyed, like its predecessors, to make way for the Kingdom of God (*d.e.* 15.frag.2). In a related passage, Eusebius quotes 2 Thessalonians 2.7 on the *katechôn*, and connects it explicitly to Daniel 2, which he sees as a reference to the Antichrist (*d.e.* 15.frag.5). In a candid moment, Eusebius confesses his explanation for why the prophets did not refer to the Roman Empire explicitly by name but spoke of it obliquely, often as 'Assyria' (!):

For my part, and I have thoroughly reasoned out the grounds of my opinion, I am persuaded that the only reason why the prophetic writings abstain from naming the Romans is that the teaching of our Savior Jesus Christ was going to shine throughout the Roman Empire on all mankind, and that the books of the prophets would be popular in Rome itself, and among all the nations under Roman rule. It was therefore to prevent any offence being taken by the rulers of the Empire from a too clear reference to them, that the prophecy was cloaked in riddles, in many other contexts, notably in the visions of Daniel [emphasis added], just as in the prophecy we are considering, in which it calls them Assyrians, meaning Rulers.

(Eusebius, *d.e.* 7.1.71–3; trans. Ferrar 1920:2:61–2)

## OTHER VOICES

---

What we may call a Eusebian consensus on the Christian Roman Empire prevailed among later Christian writers, even if few adopted his political theology in its fullest form. Space allows only a look first at Augustine, whose views present a partial contrast to Eusebius', though the difference is sometimes exaggerated; then at fourth-century witnesses on the empire's eastern, Syriac-speaking periphery; and finally at some exceptions to the rule, particularly the Donatist schism in North Africa.

### Augustine

It has long been recognized that Augustine, especially in his great work *The City of God*, conceived a highly original Christian view of history and 'earthly realities' such as the state. Central to this view was a certain de-sacralizing of the Roman Empire, at least in the form that Eusebius had made almost canonical for patristic writers of the next century

(Markus 1988; Szidat 2006). Here we will comment briefly on how his view of the empire in its current Christian form differed from Eusebius’.

First, it is interesting that despite Augustine’s many references to Rome and its empire, the phrase *imperium christianum* only appears three times in Augustine’s writings (Szidat 2006:556). *The City of God* says practically nothing about the Christian phase of the empire’s history. He did think it was advantageous for the earthly city (*civitas terrena*) to be ruled by Christians, because Christian rulers would be in the best position to advance the well-being, especially the spiritual well-being, of their people. And he praised the achievements of Christian emperors like Constantine, whose long reign God had allowed to demonstrate that being a Christian was no bar to imperial success (Augustine, *ciu.* 5.25), and Theodosius, ‘who never relaxed his endeavors to help the Church by just and compassionate legislation,’ ‘who ordered the demolition of pagan images,’ and ‘who was constrained by the discipline of the Christian Church to do penance’ for his sin (*ciu.* 5.26, trans. Bettenson 1972:223). But he emphatically denied that the emperor’s Christianity, or anyone else’s, could in itself win a purchase on God’s providence: that was the instrumental view of religion that *On the City of God* was dedicated to demolishing. Augustine had little sense that the empire per se, or any form of government, could itself be Christian. Why? Because the coercive instruments of government existed to secure this-worldly goods and as damage control on the effects of original sin, and were therefore particularly vulnerable to the human vices of pride and the love of domination. Human dominion over other humans is the result of the Fall, as the institution of slavery most dramatically illustrates (Augustine, *ciu.* 19.15). The argument has been made that Augustine believed that every form of the earthly city was ultimately under the sway of Satan (Szidat 2006:550–1). We are a long way from Eusebius’ apologetics and even further from his political theology.

At the same time, God commanded obedience to all governments, whether ruled by pagans or Christians, so long as nothing was commanded contrary to Christian faith (Augustine, *ciu.* 19.17). The citizens of the city of God, while they were on pilgrimage in this world, were obliged to do their part to secure the peace of the earthly city, whether ruled by pagans or Christians (*ciu.* 19.6–7, 13–17, 19–21, 24–7). This certainly included military service: when a certain Boniface, a commander of border troops in North Africa, discussed entering a monastery after the death of his wife, Augustine actively discouraged him because his military skills were badly needed to protect against barbarian invasion (Brown 2000:425–8).

Augustine’s deflation of Roman pretensions is well demonstrated in styling Rome’s closest historical parallel as the empire of Assyria, and—since he regarded Assyria and Babylon as two names for the same political entity—the city of Rome as a second Babylon. Assyria and Rome are the supreme instances of ‘the society whose common aim is worldly advantage or the satisfaction of desire, the community which we call by the general name “the city of this world” . . .’ (*ciu.* 18.2, trans. Bettenson 1972:762). At the same time, Augustine passed over the apocalyptic theory of a succession of empires when he discussed the visionary prophecies in the book of Daniel. He refused to endorse the interpretation of Rome as the fourth beast from the sea (Dan 7), and merely referred

interested readers to Jerome's commentary on Daniel. All we know, he said, is that the reign of Antichrist—which could come at any time—would be short (Augustine, *ciu.* 20.23). He showed a similar reticence about the identity of 'the restrainer', the *katechôn*, in 2 Thessalonians 2. It might be Rome, he said, but we really didn't know, and cited an alternative theory—is it that of the Donatist exegete Tyconius?—that it was the presence of 'the evil people and pretended Christians' in the Church, and that the 'man of sin', Antichrist, would not appear until they left the Church openly (*ciu.* 20.19, trans. Bettenson 1972:933). In the meantime, there was no way to calculate the end, and there might well be further persecutions before the last one imposed by Antichrist (*ciu.* 18.52–3, with citation of Acts 1.6–7).

Augustine's reading of the millennium text in Revelation (20.1–10), though not original with him, became normative for the Western Christian tradition (cf. *ciu.* 20.7–9). Those who understand the passage literally 'have turned it into ridiculous fables that can only be believed by materialists' (Augustine, *ciu.* 20.7, trans. Bettenson 1972:907). Either the thousand years mean the remainder of the thousand years of the sixth millennium in the common patristic scheme of a 7,000-year world history, according to the rhetorical figure in which the whole stands for the part; or they mean the remaining history of the world as a whole, however long that may be. The earthly reign of the saints with Christ means their reign in the Church during its pilgrimage through time, in which good and evil will be mixed until the final judgement. And the thrones on which the seer of Revelation saw some sitting in judgement (Rev 20.4) 'are to be interpreted as the seats of the authorities by whom the Church is now governed', meaning the bishops (Augustine, *ciu.* 20.9, trans. Bettenson 1972:916).

This reference to the bishops sitting on thrones in judgement even now is a disturbing reminder that Augustine took this status seriously enough that he came to accept—after initially rejecting—state-imposed coercion on recalcitrant Christians, justifying it by the command 'compel them to come in (*cogite intrare*)', from the parable of the king and the wedding feast (Luke 14.12–24, at 14.23) (Lancel 2002:300–4). While Augustine was unique in his articulate and vigorous pastoral and biblical defence of coercion, it is good to remember that the same vision of the bishops as judges on thrones—the allusion is to Jesus' eschatological words to Peter in Matthew 19.28—is shared by Eusebius as well (Eusebius, *Is.* 110.6–11, 180.12–17; *h.e.* 10.4.67). When it came to seeing the Church and its clergy—not the Roman Empire—as the true embodiment of the kingdom of God in this world, there was less separating these two archetypal figures than is sometimes believed (Hollerich 1999:165–88).

## Borderlands

Eusebian themes appear even on the eastern periphery of the Roman Empire, in the writings of Syriac-speaking Christians like Aphrahat and Ephrem (Griffith 1986). They hold them so strongly that they largely overlook the Arianizing policies of Constantine's son Constantius II (337–61). Aphrahat, living in Persian territory, apparently heard of

Constantine's military plans and welcomed the prospect of a Roman invasion by an emperor who was also a Christian. In the fifth of his twenty-three *Demonstrations*, written in 336–7, he writes:

The people of God have received prosperity, and success awaits the man who has been the instrument of that prosperity [Constantine]; but disaster threatens the army which has been gathered together by the efforts of a wicked and proud man puffed up with vanity [Shapur II] . . . The [Roman] empire will not be conquered, for the hero whose name is Jesus is coming with his power, and his armor will uphold the whole army of the empire. (Aphrahat, *dem.* 5.24; trans. Brock 1982:8)

The book of Daniel is the primary reference point for Aphrahat's meditation on war. Daniel 2 tells of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a giant statue composed of four metals that represent four empires, the last of which is Rome's. In the dream, a stone cut from a mountain smashes the statue, which Daniel interprets as the abolition of Rome's empire by King Messiah, whose kingdom replaces all the kingdoms of this world and will last forever (Aphrahat, *dem.* 5.11–14). The same interpretation is applied to the four beasts and the empires that they represent in Daniel 7. But the empire of the fourth beast, which is Rome's, is only 'keeping' the kingdom until the One shall come for whom it is intended (cf. Gen 49.10), whose kingdom is an eternal one that shall not pass away (Aphrahat, *dem.* 5.15–24; Murray 1975:241–2).

Ephrem (d. 373) lived in Nisibis, a Roman city in northern Mesopotamia until it was ceded to the Persians after the defeat of the Emperor Julian in 363. After Nisibis was handed over, Ephrem and many other Christians emigrated to Edessa, where he lived until his death. The city had successfully resisted earlier Persian assaults, and an embittered Ephrem blamed its loss on Julian's apostasy and the re-establishment of paganism. His four hymns or *madrāše* 'Against Julian' deploy a rich store of biblical invective, with Daniel again providing core material (Griffith 1987:251–60). But they also reveal how committed Ephrem was to an 'almost Eusebian view of Church and State' (Griffith 1987:249). Kingship had been established to govern and care for cities, and to chase away 'wild animals', i.e. pagans and heretics: Constantine and his son Constantius were the exemplars, 'the righteous kings [who] like two oxen had made (equal and) yoked together the two Testaments with the yoke of harmony . . .' (Ephrem, *c.Jul.* 1.1,12; trans. Lieu 1989:105, 107). They are 'the glorious ones' and Jovian, the Christian commander whom Roman troops had chosen as Julian's successor, is 'the believing king' who is 'their associate' (Ephrem, *c.Jul.* 3.8; trans. Lieu 1989:119). Julian was no yoked ox but a bull who had gone mad like Nebuchadnezzar before him (*c.Jul.* 1.18–19). The bull metaphor probably owed something to a coin of Julian's that had a bull and two stars on it (*c.Jul.* 1.16–18; Lieu 1989:108 n. 19). But the bull also evoked the golden calf of Exodus 32, and Ephrem imagines that the iron with which Moses would have destroyed the calf was a type of the spear that killed Julian in battle (Ephrem, *c.Jul.* 2.8). That spear in turn reminds him of the sword that was set at the entrance to paradise after the expulsion of Adam and Eve:

‘Because he had dishonored him [Christ] who had removed the spear of Paradise, the spear of justice passed through his belly’ (Ephrem, *c.Jul.* 3.14; trans. Lieu 1989:120), reflecting possible word play between Syriac *rumhâ* (spear) and Greek *rhomphaia* (sword, cf. Gen 3.24; Griffith 1987:255). Julian is King Ahab trusting in the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 22.5–23), he is Saul trusting in the one who summons the dead to speak (1 Sam 28), and the Jews who had hoped he would rebuild the Temple did not heed Daniel’s prediction (Dan 9.24–7) that ‘it would be desolate forever’ (Ephrem, *c.Jul.* 4.5, 8, 18–23; Griffith 1987:258–60).

## Dissenters

The Eusebian consensus on Church and empire was contradicted primarily in two rather different ways: by critics who protested that the emperor was not Christian *enough*, as when the imperial government supported unorthodox theological doctrine; and by dissidents who criticized the Constantinian settlement in more fundamental ways.

Emperors thought to be on the wrong side of orthodoxy could expect to meet resistance that was often framed in biblical terms. The outstanding example is probably Athanasius (d. 373), who made life difficult for several emperors. Constantine’s successors tended to be lukewarm about the creed of Nicaea, and found in Athanasius a resourceful and tireless opponent, who didn’t shrink from calling Constantius II the Antichrist (Athanasius, *apol. Const.* 67; *h. Ar.* 67–8; Barnes 1993:127). He was not alone, as the defenders of Nicaea could be quite bold, perhaps encouraged by their legal umbrella: ‘No matter what his crime, a bishop could only be deposed and exiled, not legally tortured or executed’ (Barnes 1993:174). In his book on Athanasius and Constantius, Timothy Barnes cites a list of biblical exemplars that the redoubtable Lucifer of Cagliari pinned on Constantius: Saul, Holofernes, Antiochus IV, Herod, Judas Iscariot, and the Jewish high priests who tried Jesus (Barnes 1993:272 n. 52). When the imperial government pressured Liberius, bishop of Rome, to assent to the condemnation of Athanasius, the church historian Theodoret reports that Liberius compared Constantius to Nebuchadnezzar, with reference to the three young men who defied the ordinance of the Babylonian king (Dan 3.12–30) (Theodoret, *h.e.* 2.16.14–16; cf. Athanasius, *h. Ar.* 35–40, and Sozomen, *h.e.* 4.11).

A more fundamental type of critique was mounted during the course of the long and bitter schism in the Christian churches of North Africa, which began simultaneously with the end of the Great Persecution. Donatism has traditionally been seen as the virtual archetype of Christian separatism, epitomized in Donatus of Carthage’s famous protest, ‘What does the emperor have to do with the Church?’ (*Quid est imperatori cum ecclesia*, in Optatus, *c. Donat.* 3.3.3). The remark is preserved in the anti-Donatist treatise of Optatus, Catholic bishop of Milevis, who in responding quoted 1 Timothy 2.2 (‘Pray for kings and rulers...’) and applied it to the Roman Empire: ‘For the Republic is not in the Church, but the Church is in the Republic, that is, in the Roman Empire, which

Christ calls “Lebanon” in the Song of Songs, when he says, “Come, my bride, come from Lebanon” (Song 4.8), that is, from the Roman Empire, where there is holy priesthood and modesty and virginity, which don’t exist among barbarian peoples, and if they do exist, aren’t safe’ (Optatus, *c. Donat.* 3.3.5).

‘Separatist’ Donatism certainly was, but in the sense that Donatists sought to separate from communion with Christian communities they considered tainted with the sin of apostasy for having handed over the Scriptures to the Roman authorities during the persecution. Donatism’s relationship with the Roman Empire as such was more complicated. From the very beginning of the schism, the Donatists were willing to appeal to imperial authority, and only resisted it when it ruled against them. They even appealed for government help against the dissidents in their own communion, as happened late in the fourth century, when they had grown to be the majority Christian community in North Africa. Research into the Donatists’ use of the Bible has shown how they altered their approach over the course of the century and a quarter after 313, in response to the changing fortunes of their competition with the rival Catholic community. Maureen Tilley has argued that the Donatists’ most fundamental biblical self-image was as the *collecta*, the gathered assembly, of Israel, striving to preserve its purity in its devotion to the Law, but not, save for occasional periods of persecution, as the gathered community of the saints in the End time (Tilley 1997:55, 46, 74–6, 91–2, 155–62). Apocalyptic eschatology and its equation of the empire with the beast from the sea and the creature of Satan (Rev 13) are themes they seem to have avoided (Tilley 1997:106–9, 144–7, 152–3). They saw themselves less as the church of the martyrs in ultimate struggle with a demonic government than as a disciplined community engaged in a ‘long-term, low level conflict’ against seduction by and absorption into a pseudo-Christian community. When they criticized Catholic resort to imperial laws to enforce unity, it was not the empire per se they targeted but the inappropriate use of violence in matters of belief. As the Donatist bishop Gaudentius said, ‘The all-powerful God gave the proclamation to the people of Israel through prophets; he did not order it through kings. The savior of souls, the Lord Christ, sent fishermen to establish the faith, not soldiers’ (cited in Tilley 1997:161).

A figure of special interest is the Donatist exegete Tyconius (d. c.395), whose *Book of Rules* had an impact on Latin exegesis far beyond the borders of Donatism, starting with Augustine himself (Simonetti 1994:95–9; Tilley 1997:112–28). He is also the author of a commentary on the book of Revelation that modern scholarship has partially reassembled from its use by later writers, a work of such importance and influence that its most recent editor has written, ‘It is thanks to Tyconius that the Latin West received Revelation, as opposed to what happened in the Byzantine East after the Constantinian epoch’ (ed. Gryson 2011:7). Tyconius became alienated from his fellow Donatists by his teaching that good and evil would remain in the Church until the final separation at the end of time—the eschatological interpretation of, for example, the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24–30) that Augustine would also make canonical for Catholics (Tilley 1997:124). But he remained a Donatist insofar as his great concern was for the *present* response of Christians to the call to repentance.

Consistent with that pastoral focus, Tyconius avoided the book of Revelation's overt denunciations of the empire, and likewise its chiliasm. In the *Book of Rules*, Satan gets major attention, especially in the seventh and last rule on 'The Devil and his Body' (a phrase meant to be analogous to 'Christ and his Body, the Church', the first rule). Kings and rulers are said to be part of Satan's body insofar as they do not fulfil what had been their divinely given duties as ministers of justice (Tyconius, *reg.* 7.3.2). Interpreting the taunt song against the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14, always regarded as a figure for the fall of Satan, Tyconius says of Isaiah 14.17 ('He did not loosen his captives' bonds') that it applies spiritually to all those who rule and oppress their subjects (*reg.* 7.5.3), whereas Isaiah 14.18 ('All the kings of the earth lay in honour, each in his own house') is taken to mean the saints, who lie in the house they have chosen (*reg.* 7.6.1). At the end of his third rule (*reg.* 3.29), Tyconius protests against Catholic abuse of imperial power but not imperial power per se. He does quote the *katechôn* text from 2 Thessalonians 2.3–9 and identifies 'the man of sin' as the body of Satan, but his manifestation appears to be still in the future, not the present. Otherwise, the *Book of Rules'* citations of the 2 Thessalonians text—there are seven in all—understand 'the restrainer' to be the Christian Church itself, not the Empire (e.g. *reg.* 4.19.1 and 7.4.3).

The newly published reconstruction of Tyconius' lost commentary on Revelation bears out this interpretation. When he comes to Revelation 20.1–10, the *locus classicus* of millenarianism, Tyconius construes the thousand-year reign of the saints with Christ figuratively as their reign in the Church, 'for a thousand years, i.e., until the end of the world' (Tyconius, *Apoc.* 7.22). There appears to be only one instance in which the Roman Empire is named, in connection with Revelation 17.10, which speaks of 'seven kings', whom Tyconius historicizes as the successive Roman rulers from Julius Caesar to Otho. Tyconius says only that the reference to Otho's short reign of three months and six days was 'a figure of Antichrist, when he is revealed', for according to Revelation 20.3, the reign of Antichrist would be brief (Tyconius, *Apoc.* 6.11). Discussing chapters 12–13 of Revelation, which are intensely anti-Roman, Tyconius ignores Rome altogether. Revelation 12.4 ('And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth') is taken to refer not to Rome but to Herod the Great, who had the male infants of Bethlehem murdered. For Tyconius, Herod stands for 'the entire body of internal enemies' (*omne intestinorum hostium corpus*), meaning those *within* the Church who persecute the innocent, not its external enemies. Herod is their type because he feigns devotion to the newborn baby whom the Magi are seeking to worship, but in reality his intentions are murderous (Tyconius, *Apoc.* 4.12; ed. Gryson 2011:300–301; Tilley 1997:86–7, 199 n. 25). Such internal enemies or 'false brothers' (*malos fratres*), who say falsely that they are Zion, are condemned elsewhere as well (Tyconius, *Apoc.* 1.36, 7.9, etc.). As noted, Augustine cites an unnamed commentator who says that it is 'pretended and false Christians' in the Church that are the restrainer, and that Antichrist will only appear when they openly leave the Church, an interpretation that seems to show up in Tyconius' commentary (Augustine, *ciu.* 20.19; Tyconius, *Apoc.* 2.44).

## THE BIBLE AND MILITARY SERVICE IN THE CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

---

Christian teaching on military service changed in important ways after the conversion of Constantine (Swift 1983). It is true that already by the third century, if not earlier, Christians were serving in the Roman army. But no testimony has survived that explicitly defended and authorized such service, whereas we have considerable counter-evidence that rejected it. From the early fourth century, however, military service became approved and even required. The pre-Constantinian prohibitions had been based on the circumstantial temptations to idolatry and apostasy in military life, and on Jesus' teaching on non-violent resistance to evil (Matt 5.43–4 and the word on the sword in Matt 26.52). The conversion of the emperors removed the former obstacle (apart from the brief period of Julian's apostasy) but not the latter. The earliest evidence of an apparent change in teaching is the third canon of the Council of Arles (314), convened by Constantine primarily to deal with the Donatist agitation: 'Concerning those who throw down their arms in [a time of] peace, it is determined that they be kept from communion' (*De his qui arma proiciunt in pace, placuit abstineri eos a communione*; trans. Gaudemet 1977:48). The most plausible interpretation is simply that Christian soldiers were forbidden, on pain of excommunication, to resign from the army just because there were no wars under way. If that is the correct reading, it represents a significant (though unacknowledged) change and one that did not seem to inspire protest or opposition.

Two developments help explain how it was rationalized. The first was the sanctioning of a permanent double standard of two different ways of life in the Christian Church, one for a spiritual elite and another for the rank and file. Eusebius is our earliest witness to this, in a passage we have already noted from his book *The Proof of the Gospel* (d.e. 1.8), written around 318 and therefore almost contemporary with the Council of Arles. Jesus' followers, he said, had obeyed his will and established two distinct ways of life (*duo biōn tropoi*), one that was 'above nature' and embraced celibacy, poverty, and intercessory prayer, and a less demanding and 'more human' one for those who had families and children, worked in agriculture and trade, and served in government and the army. This distinction between higher and lower ways existed already in the OT. The pre-Mosaic patriarchs and saints, whom Eusebius called 'Hebrews', practised a pure, ethical monotheism. Those who came after Moses he called 'Jews', and they followed a lower way of life based on the cultic and sacrificial practice rooted in the Temple, which was more suited to the weakened state of their souls (Eusebius, p.e. 7.1, 6–9 and 8.1, 10–12). Jesus' fulfilment of the old law consisted in the way he preserved but transcended the older version of higher and lower ways of life. There were still two ways of life, but each transcended its predecessor, in that the spiritual elite (whom Eusebius does not explicitly equate with the clergy) were celibate, unlike the procreative zeal of the patriarchs; and the mass of Christians were no longer bound to the local cult in Jerusalem but could practise their worship anywhere in what Eusebius called 'a secondary grade of piety'.

In a refinement of the typology, Eusebius claimed that Moses too recognized two levels of adherence, the higher way being exemplified by the celibacy, the commitment to sharing everything in common, and pacifism of the Essenes as reported by Philo (Eusebius, *p.e.* 8.11–12). Via this rather ingenious construction, Eusebius reconciled OT and NT, and was able to give a biblical validation for a Christian Church that no longer had martyrdom as the perfect form of the Christian life, and that needed to embrace the political and military responsibilities of governance.

The other development was the determination that the ethics of non-violent resistance to evil applied to individuals but not to authorized defence of the common good. The biblical basis for this would be first of all Paul's letter to the Romans, 13.1–7, which says, 'Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God' (Rom 13.1); and that the one who bears the sword is 'the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer' (Rom 13.4), along with related texts that recognize the legitimacy of earthly governance, such as 1 Timothy 2.1–2 and 1 Peter 2.17 ('Fear God, honour the emperor'). In addition, mentions of soldiers in the NT that appear to take military service for granted are cited to prove it was not in contradiction to the gospel: the centurion at the foot of Jesus' cross (Matt 27.54); the Roman centurion in Matthew 8.5–13, whose servant Jesus cured, and who explicitly models his submission to Jesus by analogy with his servant's submission to him; the Roman centurion Cornelius in Acts 10.1–48, whose house Peter is enjoined to visit, and who is given a divine command to overlook the ancestral prohibition against associating with Gentiles ('God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean [Acts 10.28]'); the soldiers who go out to be baptized by John the Baptist and are told not to extort from anyone and to be content with their pay (Luke 3.14) (Swift 1987: 94–5, 126–7).

A refinement of this rereading of Jesus' teaching on non-violent resistance to evil is the idea that one may, and at times must, act with severity, especially persons placed in authority: fathers, rulers, and bishops, for example. The assumption here is that what matters is less the act itself than the motive behind it. The person administering the discipline or correction must act with benevolence and not let base passions get the better of him (Swift 1987:101–3, 121–6). Such a doctrine was used to justify violence and even killing in situations where it was necessary to preserve order and act in everyone's best interests. We have seen how Augustine used such arguments in justifying imperial coercion against the Donatists. They will also be used to create the rudiments of just-war theory. Augustine will argue in *The City of God* that what Christians are forbidden to do as individuals—to kill in self-defence—they are permitted by God to do when ordered by lawful public authority (*lex iusta*). In that case 'You shall not kill' is rightly suspended (Augustine, *ciu.* 1.21, 1.26, 19.7).

In the same breath, Augustine adds the further exception of a direct divine command to kill, such as happens in various places in the OT. In general, the OT offered more obviously relevant grounds for divinely authorized violence. In contrast to Origen's allegorization of the holy wars and other violent episodes in the OT, Augustine was willing to take them at face value when it suited his purposes. His massive work *Answer to*

*Faustus, a Manichean* offers an excellent example of this (Augustine, *Faust.* 22.69–79). Faced with the Manichean critique of the contradictions between OT and NT, Augustine argues that the two testaments become compatible when one understands that God authorizes different actions at different times. Divine command or permission to kill may be given in order to punish those who deserve it, to deter those inclined to evil, or to demonstrate by the suffering of the righteous that the things of this world are insignificant in comparison with the things that are eternal, though the specific reasons will never be known to us. So wars are commanded of God's people in the OT, whereas in the NT his people endure persecution and martyrdom—in the first instance 'in order to show that God gives and removes these kingdoms', and in the second 'in order to show that we should instead long for the kingdom of heaven' (Augustine, *Faust.* 22.76; trans. Teske 2007:353). But wars and military service are also authorized in the NT, as we see in John the Baptist's injunction to the soldiers who come out to be baptized that they should be content with their wages (Luke 3.14)—and since taxes go in part to pay soldiers, Jesus was also endorsing soldiering when he said 'Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God' (Matt 22.21) (Augustine, *Faust.* 22.74). The true meaning of his rejection of the right of resistance is not an absolute prohibition of war but a teaching about proper attitude, since 'this disposition [of non-violent resistance] lies not in the body but in the heart' (Augustine, *Faust.* 22.76; trans. Teske 2007:352). And the proof of that, says Augustine, is Jesus' injunction in Luke to sell a tunic and buy a sword (Luke 22.36), even if he also says they were not to use it (*Faust.* 22.77).

We should not end this discussion without noting that the traditional Christian aversion to shedding blood by no means vanished (Swift 1983:149–57). It still shows up in canonical collections, such as the *Canons of Hippolytus*, variously dated from 336–40 to the late fourth/early fifth century, in which canon 14 discouraged military service, without forbidding it absolutely, and required that a soldier who shed blood should refrain from communion until he had done penance (Swift 1987:93; Hippolytus, *can.* 14; ed. Coquin 1966:369; Barrett-Lennard 2005:138–40). A letter of Basil of Caesarea says that killing in war has been recognized by earlier authorities as an act distinct from murder, but which nevertheless should incur excommunication for three years (Swift 1987:94). Ambrose preserved the traditional teaching but restricted it to the clergy, who were forbidden to engage in coercion and war (Swift 1983:108; Ambrose, *off.* 1.35.175). And the life of Martin of Tours, by Sulpicius Severus, vividly describes Martin's resignation from the Roman army on the grounds that he was forbidden to fight (Swift 1983:150–2, citing Sulpicius Severus, *Mart.* 4).

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Concilia Arelatense*. Latin text and French trans.: C. Munier (ed.), J. Gaudemet (trans.), *Conciles Gaulois du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, SC 241 (Paris: Édition du Cerf, 1977).  
 Aphrahat, *Demonstrationes*. Eng. trans.: S. Brock, 'Christians in the Sasanian Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties', *Studies in Church History* 18 (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1982), 1–18.

- Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*. Eng. trans.: R. Teske, SJ, *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, I/20 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007).
- Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei*. Eng. trans.: H. Bettenson, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans* (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1972).
- Ephrem, *Contra Julianum*. Eng. trans.: J. M. Lieu, *Hymns against Julian*, in S. N. C. Lieu, *The Emperor Julian: Panegyric and Polemic*, 2nd edn, Translated Texts for Historians 5 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 105–28.
- Eusebius, *Chronicon*. Armenian text and German trans.: J. Karst, *Die Chronik: aus dem Armenischen übersetzt, Eusebius Werke* 5, GCS 20 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1911).
- Eusebius, *Commentarius in Psalmos*. Greek text: PG 23.65–1396.
- Eusebius, *De laudibus Constantini*. Eng. trans.: H. A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
- Eusebius, *De vita Contantini*. Eng. trans.: A. Cameron and S. G. Hall, *Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).
- Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica*. Eng. trans.: W. J. Ferrar, *The Proof of the Gospel*, 2 vols (London: SPCK; New York: Macmillan Co., 1920).
- Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*. Greek text: E. Schwartz, *Die Kirchengeschichte, Eusebius Werke* 2,1–3, GCS n.F. 6,1–3, 2nd edn, F. Winkelmann (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999).
- Eusebius, *Commentarius in Isaiam*. Greek text: J. Ziegler, *Der Jesajakommentar, Eusebius Werke* 9, GCS (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1975).
- Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*. Greek text: É. des Places, G. Schroeder, *La Préparation évangélique*, SC 215, 369 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1975, 1991).
- Hippolytus, *Canones Hippolyti*. Arabic text: R.-G. Coquin, *Les Canons d'Hippolyte, PO* 149 (31.2) (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1966).
- Jerome, *Commentariorum in Isaiam libri XVIII*. Latin text: M. Adriaen (ed.), *Commentariorum in Isaiam libri I–XI*, CCL 73 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963); M. Adriaen and G. Morin (eds), *Commentariorum in Isaiam libri XII–XVIII. In Isaiam parvula adabbreviatio*, CCL 73A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963).
- Optatus, *Contra Parmenianum Donatistam*. Latin text and French trans.: M. Labrousse (ed.), *Traité contre les Donatistes*, SC 412–13 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1995–6).
- Theodoret of Cyr, *Commentarius in Isaiam*. Greek text: J.-N. Guinot, *Commentaire sur Isaïe*, SC 276, 295, 315 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1980–4).
- Tyconius, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*. Latin text: R. Gryson (ed.), *Tyconii Afri: Expositio Apocalypseos*, CCL 107A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).
- Tyconius, *Liber regularum*. Latin text and French trans.: J.-M. Vercruyssen, *Le Livre des Règles*, SC 488 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2004). Eng. trans.: W. S. Babcock, *Tyconius: The Book of Rules* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

## Scholarship

- Barnes, T. D. (1985). 'Constantine and the Christians of Persia', *JRS* 75: 126–36.
- Barnes, T. D. (1993). *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Barrett-Lennard, R. J. S. (2005). 'The *Canons of Hippolytus* and Christian Concern with Illness, Health, and Healing', *J ECS* 13: 137–64.

- Baynes, N. H. (1955). *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: University of London/Athlone Press).
- Brown, P. (2000). *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Griffith, S. H. (1986). 'Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire', in T. Halton and J. P. Williman (eds), *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press), 22–52.
- Griffith, S. H. (1987). 'Ephraem the Syrian's "Hymns against Julian"—Meditations on History and Imperial Power', *VC* 41: 238–66.
- Hollerich, M. J. (1999). *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the Age of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Hollerich, M. J. (2002). 'Hebrews, Jews, and Christians: Eusebius of Caesarea on the Two States of the Christian Life', in P. M. Blowers, A. R. Christman, D. G. Hunter, and R. D. Young (eds), *In Dominico Eloquentio—In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans), 172–84.
- Hollerich, M. J. (2013). 'Eusebius' Commentary on the Psalms', in A. Johnson and J. Schott (eds), *Eusebius of Caesarea: Tradition and Innovations*, *Hellenic Studies* 60 (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies/Harvard University, 2013), 151–65.
- Lancel, S. (2002). *Saint Augustine*, trans. A. Nevill (London: SCM Press).
- Markus, R. (1988). *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*. rev. edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Murray, R. (1975). *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Pervo, R. (2009). *Acts: A Commentary*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).
- Peterson, E. (2011). *Theological Tractates*, trans. Michael Hollerich (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press).
- Schott, J. (2013). 'Textuality and Territorialization: Eusebius' Exegesis of Isaiah and Empire', in A. Johnson and J. Schott (eds), *Eusebius of Caesarea: Tradition and Innovations*, *Hellenic Studies* 60 (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies/Harvard University, 2013), 169–80.
- Simonetti, M. (1994). *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, trans. J. A. Hughes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark).
- Smith, K. (2016). *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*. *Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 57 (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Swift, L. J. (1983). *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*. *Message of the Fathers of the Church* 19 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc.).
- Szidat, J. (2006). 'Imperium Romanum', in C. Mayer et al. (eds), *Augustinus Lexikon*, vol. 3/4 (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co. AG), 544–60.
- Tilley, M. A. (1997). *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Barnes, Timothy (1981). *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Hollerich, M. J. (1999). *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the Age of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Jacobs, Andrew (2004). *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

- Markus, Robert (1988). *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*. Rev. edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Murray, Robert (1975). *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Peterson, Erik (2011). *Theological Tractates*. Trans. and introd., Michael Hollerich (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press).
- Roth, John D. (2013) (ed.). *Constantine Revisited: Leithart, Yoder, and the Constantinian Debate* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013).
- Schott, Jeremy (2008). *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Swift, Louis J. (1983) (ed.). *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, Message of the Fathers of the Church, 19 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc.).
- Tilley, Maureen A. (1997). *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).

## CHAPTER 31

---

# SCRIPTURE AND ASCETICISM

---

ELIZABETH A. CLARK

GIVEN both the burgeoning of asceticism in the first centuries of Christianity<sup>1</sup> and a canon of Scripture largely if not wholly agreed upon by the mid-fourth century, what techniques for interpreting Christianity's sacred books could partisans of renunciation employ to further their cause? Devising ingenious interpretative techniques, early Christian exegetes found messages of restraint and renunciation adaptable to Christians of every status.

This chapter focuses largely (although not exclusively) on early Christian writers' exegesis pertaining to renunciation of marriage, sexual functioning, and reproduction. After some introductory remarks, I illustrate the interpretative techniques employed by Greek, Latin, and Syriac theologians in their appeal to different audiences and note passages that elicited frequent commentary.

## AUDIENCE

---

First, the question of 'audience': to whom were these patristic sermons, treatises, letters, and commentaries addressed? Here, we must register *both* the growth of ascetic devotion from the second century onward, *and* the need for Christian leaders to speak to the married faithful, always the majority (albeit usually 'silent' in our sources). Bishop John Chrysostom in Antioch and Constantinople, for example, directed some sermons and treatises to married urban householders but others to monks and virgins. Although

<sup>1</sup> It is no longer claimed (as did Malone 1950) that ascetic renunciation simply took the place of martyrdom as the 'opportunity' for the latter vanished in the early fourth century. Asceticism was encouraged from the first years of Christianity, 1 Corinthians 7 being a case in point. Recall Durkheim's claim that religion's 'purpose' is to create 'difference'. See Durkheim 1915:145–7, 299–317; for discussion and elaboration by Pierre Bourdieu and Jonathan Z. Smith, see Clark 1999:155, 204–8.

Chrysostom can take a strongly ascetic line in addressing the latter, in homilies delivered to congregations that included many married people, he enlists OT figures as exemplars to encourage marital chastity. Nevertheless, he 'reads' these characters as approximating the ascetic restraint he encourages in his audience. Thus Abraham and Sarah, whom he portrays as exempt from sexual desire, wish only to produce children before they die (*hom. 38 in Gen. 1; 2; 4*). Here, marriage resonates with ascetic restraint.

Other audiences ripe for ascetic exhortation by patristic authors include monks or virgins in closely regulated communities who must learn the patience to live together, and semi-solitary renunciants of the desert who ask their superiors for 'a word' of guidance (Burton-Christie 1993). Verses selected to exhort monks in all-male communities (or to console them for their shame at nocturnal emissions [Brakke 1995]) might differ from those enlisted by bishops to frighten wayward husbands into a less-exuberant marital chastity. Wealthy women needed to be encouraged in their widowhood (and in their philanthropy) without insulting or alienating them (Brown 2012:chap. 18 and 322–5; Clark 1989). Audience mattered.

## TYPES OF ASCETIC INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

---

Although modern interpreters of the Bible often distinguish 'literal' and 'figurative' (typological and allegorical) interpretation, this distinction too simply characterizes the interpretative moves that Christian exegetes devised, especially when seeking to extract an ascetic message from biblical verses.

'Literal' interpretation carried no clear meaning for ancient Christian exegetes who lived centuries before the advent of the historical-critical approach to biblical scholarship and who had little sense of (or interest in) 'history' for its own sake (Young 1997:166, 187–9). The 'plain sense' of Scripture is simply what a given religious community takes it to be (Frei 1986:68; Childs 1977:81; Tanner 1987:63–6).

Figurative exegesis, however, was necessary to extract meaning from passages that were problematic or obscure, to serve as 'the antidote to scandal' (Bruns 1984:147–8). Without allegory and related modes of figurative interpretation, Frances Young writes, the biblical text would have been only of 'archaeological interest' (1997:3). Moreover, figurative interpretation was not simply a matter of tropes: it was a *social* practice designed to help ancient interpreters 'secure for themselves and their communities social and cultural identity, authority, and power' (Dawson 1992:2, 5, 236; Young 1997:139). Of the patristic masters of allegorical interpretation, Origen and his followers stand supreme (Martens 2008; Dively Lauro 2005; Torjesen 1986; O'Keefe 2004).

Allegory, however, sometimes proved *less* useful in encouraging rigorous asceticism. While it helped (for example) to 'de-sexualize' the Song of Songs (Clark 1986:386–427; Harrison 1992:113–30; Miller 1993:21–45), it also could be deployed by laxer Christians to

lighten the ‘harder’ biblical injunctions. Thus, arguing the necessity for monks to engage in work, Augustine cites ‘if anyone will not work, neither let him eat’ (2 Thess 3.10), but cautions that ‘work’ should *not* be interpreted (as some claimed) as ‘spiritual labours’ to the exclusion of labour that supported the community: Paul was not a ‘spiritual tentmaker’ (*mon.* 1.2; 3.4; 19.22; 17.20; Brown 2012:chaps 10, 11, 19–23). Likewise, to allegorize the ‘camel’ to something so small that it could pass through the eye of a needle (Mark 10.25 and parallels), thus encouraging greed, provided a regrettable loophole for the wealthy (Clark 1999:94–9; Clark 2013:428–44; Brown 2012:*passim*). Figurative interpretation was not always the preferred mode of ascetic exegesis.

As I have detailed elsewhere, means *other* than typology or allegory were frequently used to counsel renunciation (Clark 1999:chap. 5). Among them: finding ascetic-leaning verses (often taken out of context) in the OT itself; employing intertextual exegesis, in which one verse could allude to, or be surrounded by, others to strengthen its ascetic import; enlisting one biblical passage to ‘talk back’ against another and hence control its meaning, much as Jesus ‘talked back’ to the Tempter (Matt 4.1–11; Luke 4.1–13; Evagrius, *antirr.* [trans. Brakke 2009]); ‘imploding’ passages *not* about marriage, reproduction, or any form of asceticism into discourses ‘about’ ascetic renunciation (such as Origen’s and Jerome’s interpretations of Paul’s discussion of slavery versus freedom and circumcision versus uncircumcision in 1 Corinthians 7.17–24 [Origen, *comm. in 1 Cor.* 7.21–4; Jerome, *Iou.* 1.11]); arguing from the ‘difference in times’ between the ‘carnal’ days of the Israelites and ‘spiritual’ Christian present; changing context, audience, speaker, or gender to bring home an ascetic message; and even ‘asceticizing’ translations of Greek words of the Bible into Latin (for example, Jerome’s penchant for rendering *sōphrosunē* as *castitas* [1 Tim 2.15], interpreted as ‘abstention from sex’ [*Iou.* 1.27]).

Finally, we should recall that early Christian exegesis was rooted in a rhetorical training that saw interpretation as adversarial and antagonistic (Eden 1997:2; Mitchell 2010:20–1). As Margaret Mitchell claims, ancient biblical interpretation aimed at ‘utility to the purpose at hand’; the ‘agonistic paradigm’ could provide a ‘medial path between the rhetorical labels of “literal” and “allegorical” exegesis’ for *both* Alexandrine and Antiochene interpreters (2010:ix, 107; cf. Eden 1997:2). This paradigm, she admits, designed to trounce one’s opponents, was less suited to explain how ‘orthodox’ Christians could hold varied explanations of biblical passages (Mitchell 2010:56). Here, recall Augustine’s conclusion that the sheer multiplicity of edifying interpretations signals divine generosity (*doct. chr.* 3.27.38). In asceticizing exegesis, the *agon* is sometimes on full display; at other times, a more ameliorative approach is in evidence.

## The Old Testament: Problem and Source

The OT, replete with stories that seemed to praise marriage, reproduction, and the acquisition of property and wealth, posed a central interpretative problem for ancient asceticizing commentators. In the second and third centuries, churchmen had fought Marcionites and others to retain the books of the ancient Hebrews as sacred and to claim

themselves (not Jews) as the rightful owners (cf. *Barn.* 4.6–7). To keep these books as ‘Scripture’, however, required considerable interpretative work by ascetically inclined exegetes. Moreover, from the fourth century onward, Manichaean claims (such as levelled by Augustine’s opponent Faustus) that the OT was unworthy of a spiritual people and should be discarded posed a similar challenge for Catholic exegetes. How could these books be redeemed?

Although it would have been convenient for ascetic exegetes simply to denounce some OT passages, such critique could bring down charges of ‘heresy’ upon oneself, as various Catholic interpreters of an ascetic bent learned to their chagrin. Jerome, for example, protested that his ascetic agenda did *not* cast him as an Encratite, Marcionite, or Manichaean (*Iou.* 1.3; 2.16; *ep.* 22.12; 22.38; *Tit.* 1.6; cf. Augustine, *c. Iul. op. imp.* 1.24; 1.115). ‘Interpretation’ provided a way to treat OT passages without landing oneself in the camp of ‘heretics’. The fathers often rehearsed the line, ‘These things . . . were written down for *our* instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come’ (1 Cor 10.11; Origen, *Jo.* 1.6.8; *hom. 2 in Ex.* 1).

To be sure, not all OT texts posed problems for ascetically inclined Christian exegetes. Numerous verses could be taken ‘as is’ to champion ascetic renunciation. For example, Isaiah 54.1 (“‘Sing, O barren one, who did not bear . . . For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married”, says the Lord’) could easily be read to support the Christian ascetic agenda (Ambrose, *exh. uirg.* 7.42; *vid.* 3.15; Jerome, *ep.* 66.4). The eunuchs of Isaiah 56.3–5, to whom God will give an ‘everlasting name’, ‘a name better than sons and daughters’, provided a similarly easy passage for ascetically inclined exegetes to claim (Cyril of Alexandria, *Is.* 5.3; Ambrose, *inst.* 6.45; [Anonymous], *cast.* 17). Moreover, exegetes noted, had not Abraham left his home and homeland (Gen 12.1; Jerome, *ep.* 22.1; 39.5)? Did not the Psalmist tell the king’s daughter to ‘forget your people and your father’s house’ (Ps 45.10; Ambrose, *inst.* 1.2; Jerome, *ep.* 22.1, 39.5)? In addition, an argument from silence proved useful: OT figures for whom no ‘wife’ was explicitly mentioned could be enlisted as ascetic exemplars: Elijah, Elisha, Joshua, Jeremiah, Daniel. The OT, read without flourish, could sometimes provide useful passages for ascetic interpretation.

Absent such verses, however, ‘close reading’ of details in otherwise recalcitrant OT texts might rescue them for the ascetic *agon*. An ingenious example is provided by several Latin fathers’ reading of the first chapters of Genesis: since only in Genesis 4.1 is Adam said to ‘know’ his wife, sexual relations could be construed as occurring only *after* the first sin and the couple’s expulsion from Paradise (Tertullian, *mon.* 17.5; Ambrose, *exh. virg.* 6.36; Jerome, *ep.* 22.19).

Jerome is particularly adept at this form of interpretation. Considering the story of Noah’s ark, he claims that the animals that marched in ‘two by two’ were the *unclean* ones (*Iou.* 1.16; 1.17; 2.15). Likewise, he praises Abraham not for his marital arrangements, but for his willingness to sacrifice his son, a manifestation of proper disregard for family (*Iou.* 1.19; *ep.* 39.6).

Moreover, through intertextual exegesis, interpreters could press a more ascetic reading of a text by alluding to, citing, or indeed ‘drowning’ the text to be explicated with others

of a highly ascetic nature. Thus Jerome turns the Song of Songs into a dire warning to virgins by interlarding the more sexually suggestive passages with others that form an ascetic *cordon sanitaire* around them (Clark 1999:127–38). Gregory of Nyssa, for his part, cleverly explicates Genesis 1.27b (‘male and female he made them’) to suggest that since humans are made in God’s image (Gen 1.27a), and God’s ‘image’ is first and foremost Christ (Col 1.15) in whom there is ‘no male and female’ (Gal 3.28), the original human creation was in effect sexless. Gregory encourages his Christian contemporaries to capture that original state, one to which they hope to return after the resurrection (Luke 20.35–36; *hom. opif.* 16.7; 16.9; 17.1; 17.2).

## ‘Purity’ and ‘Impurity’: Old Testament Law and Christian Adaptation

Some texts, at least if removed from their original context, required minimal interpretative effort by ascetic exegetes: ancient Hebrew laws pertaining to purity and pollution, with little prodding, could ‘speak’ to ascetics. For example, God’s command to the Israelites, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’ (Lev 11.44–5), was frequently cited by patristic authors to counsel sexual abstinence (Tertullian, *exh. cast.* 10.4; Ps.-Clement, *ep. 1 virg.* 7). Similarly, ascetic Christians found numerous ways to interpret the texts of the ritual law; virgins could be described as ‘altars’, ‘sacred vessels’, ‘temples’, and ‘sacrifices’ (Clark 1999:213–15).

NT verses as well prompted reflection on what constituted ‘purity’ or ‘impurity’. Paul’s advice (1 Cor 7.5) that married couples should separate for prayer raised the suspicion that marital intercourse was ‘impure’ and hence to be avoided: some, like John Chrysostom, were uncomfortable with that assumption (*hom. 51 in Mt.* 5); others, like Jerome, bluntly claimed that ‘in view of the purity of the body of Christ, all sexual intercourse is unclean’ (*Iou.* 1.20: *quod ad munditias corporis Christi, omnis coitus immunda sit*). The anonymous author of the treatise *De castitate*, for his part, interprets the ‘women’ with whom the 144,000 blessed men of Revelation 14.4 have not ‘stained’ themselves as ‘wives’ ([Anonymous], *cast.* 10.4).

## Some Techniques: A ‘Difference in Times’?

A favoured mode of ‘correcting’ less ascetic OT passages appealed to ‘the difference in times’. Early Christian writers solicited many scriptural verses to press this view, among them, Ecclesiastes 3.5 (‘a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing’; Jerome, *ep.* 22.19; Tertullian, *mon.* 3.8; Augustine, *bon. coniug.* 13.15) and 2 Corinthians 5.17 (‘old things have passed away, all has become new’; Jerome, *Iou.* 1.37; [Anonymous], *cast.* 14.6). The claim that the OT ‘times’ of marriage and reproduction differed from the Christian era of ascetic renunciation could be deployed *more* generously (for example, to excuse the patriarchs for behaviour now disallowed, such as polygamy and incest

[Augustine, *ciu.* 16.38; 15.16; *Faust.* 22.45; 22.43; Hunter 2002]), or *less* so, by fiercer champions of asceticism who strongly dissociated Christian ascetics from Hebrew forefathers. Those advocating the latter approach sometimes verged close to ‘heresy’ in denunciations that seemed to impugn the OT and God’s chosen people. Here, ascetically inclined exegetes countered passages in the OT commanding or praising marriage and reproduction with NT passages such as 1 Corinthians 7 and Luke 14.26 (‘hating’ relatives, including wives [Jerome, *Helu.* 20; Horsiesius, *ep.* 1.5]). Yet the unsavoury behaviour of some OT characters needed defence against Manichaean critics, who catalogued numerous alarming details in their bid to discard the OT: so Augustine attempted a point-by-point refutation in *Against Faustus the Manichean*.

A second problem attending the argument from the ‘difference in times’ was the question of where to start and where to stop the trajectory from the Old Covenant to the New. Did one stress a high point for the virginal Adam and Eve at creation, followed by a precipitous ‘fall’ and then gradual improvement until one reached the NT, where one ‘stopped’? Or did one take the ascetic trajectory further into the patristic era—a move implying that the NT did *not* represent the height of Christian teaching? Variations on this ascetic trajectory can be found in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, and John Chrysostom, none of whom thought that God at creation intended humans to engage in sexual intercourse (Gregory of Nyssa, *virg.* 12–13; Jerome, *Iou.* 1.16; 1.18; 1.29; John Chrysostom, *virg.* 14.3; 14.5; 14.6). A particularly ingenious approach to the ascetic trajectory was offered by Methodius in his *Symposium*: God first forbade what previously had been allowed (incest, polygamy, adultery); then recommended a single marriage; next, advocated marital continence; and last, championed perpetual virginity. Methodius depicts the Israelites as little calves whom God allowed to frolic about before putting strict discipline upon them (*symp.* 1.2).

Some expressions of the ‘difference in times’ argument were especially sharp. Basil of Caesarea, responding to a correspondent who had not correctly perceived that ‘difference’, excoriates the proposal that a man might marry the sister of his dead wife; he cites various verses that stand against the proposition and concludes, ‘Don’t read to me Genesis 1.28 or I’ll laugh!’ (*ep.* 160). Jerome, too, bluntly informs a correspondent that Genesis 1.28 is *not for us*, upon whom ‘the end of the ages has come’ (1 Cor 10.11; *ep.* 123.12).

## Other Techniques: Origen’s Allegory

A different model of ‘reading renunciation’ is provided by Origen.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Chrysostom, who aligned marriage as much as possible with ascetic restraint, and also unlike Jerome,

<sup>2</sup> That Origen himself does not stick to the threefold scheme of interpretation (flesh, soul, spirit) that he sets forth in *princ.* 4.2.4, sometimes aligning the latter two, sometimes proclaiming there is no ‘bodily’ sense at all has been pointed out by numerous modern commentators, including Couzel 1989; 1985; Trigg 1983; Torjesen 1986; Dively Lauro 2005; Martens 2008.

who pitted Christian renunciation against the allegedly debased practices of the ancient Hebrews, Origen removed biblical narratives from a temporal, 'historical' framework by his transhistorical allegorizing. Although himself an exemplary ascetic, Origen preferred to interpret biblical texts that spoke of men, women, marriage, bodies, sex, and reproduction as tokens for reflection on categories of sense versus reason, virtue versus vice. In his gendered interpretation, reason and virtue were 'male' properties, sense and vice, 'female'. (In this, Origen takes cues from Philo [Baer 1970].) Yet Origen stresses that many 'real' biblical women were 'male' in their virtue and readiness for spiritual combat, and, conversely, many men are 'female' in their 'weakness' (Origen, *hom. 9 in Jud. 1*; *hom. 26 in Num. 1*; *hom. 9 in Jos. 9*). In effect, Origen uses allegory to overcome 'the difference in times'. Temporal difference is irrelevant for Christians of the present: the OT narratives that proved a *skandalon* to Jerome are rescued through allegory to encourage virtue and discourage vice to Christians of a later era.

Origen, however, does not always appeal to allegory; in fact, he gives a 'straight' reading to OT texts that counsel sexual abstinence (albeit temporary, e.g. Exod 19.10–15) and NT passages (e.g. 1 Cor 7) that contain an appropriately ascetic message (*hom. 11 in Ex. 7*). Passages suggesting that ancient Hebrew males were excessively uxorious, however, could be tamed through allegory: thus Abraham's marriage to yet another wife at the age of 137 (Gen 25.1) does not prompt a critique of patriarchal marriage, but when read in tandem with Wisdom of Solomon 8.9 ('take wisdom as my wife'), stands as an exhortation to the elderly, like Abraham, never to flag in their pursuit of wisdom (Origen, *hom. 11 in Gen. 1*). Likewise, the many scriptural passages praising fecundity, in Origen's view, intend to urge hearers and readers toward spiritual and moral growth (*hom. 11 in Lc. 1*; *hom. 1 in Gen. 15*). Through figurative readings and help from intertextual exegesis, the OT as well as the New could be understood as proclaiming the 'good news' of a spiritualizing Christianity.

## The New Testament: Source and Problem

Yet, for ascetic interpreters, some NT verses also needed exegetical assistance to render them appropriately 'renunciatory'. The Pastoral Epistles posed a special problem for various patristic writers, who believed that they had been written by Paul, the author of 1 Corinthians 7. How to reconcile the seemingly diverse messages? Jerome argues that the Pastorals' encouragement of second marriage for widows is intended only for Christianity's moral dregs who need this outlet to keep from falling into prostitution and harlotry (*ep. 79.10*). Attempting to constrain 1 Timothy 5 on widows' remarriage, he calls up a bevy of biblical verses that (allegedly) discourage remarriage: the unclean animals of Noah's ark (Gen 7.2) make another appearance, coupled with the Parable of the Sower, in which the 100-fold harvest stands for virginity, the 60-fold for widowhood, and the 30-fold for marriage. Here there is no room for second marriage which, Jerome claims, is best described as the 'weeds' that cannot take root in good ground, but grow among the thorns (Matt 13.7 and parallels; *ep. 123.8*).

## 1 Corinthians 7

1 Corinthians 7 proved most useful to ascetic interpreters.<sup>3</sup> For our purposes, I pick a few of its verses that elicited a variety of interpretations, some highly asceticizing, some less so.

First, there were disagreements concerning who ‘spoke’ 1 Corinthians 7.1 (‘It is well for man not to touch a woman’). Options included pseudo-apostles (Ambrosiaster, *comm. in 1 Cor.* 7.1); the ‘perfect’ already devoted to abstinence (Origen, *comm. in 1 Cor.* 7.1–4); Corinthian Christians ‘making progress’ from the incest and frequenting of prostitutes in which they had previously indulged, according to 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 (John Chrysostom, *hom. 19 in 1 Cor.* 1–2); or Paul, advising married couples ‘not to touch’ each other ([Anonymous], *cast.* 10.1–2). Athanasius engages the verse to warn against ‘spiritual marriage’: if Paul writes that it is ‘good’ not to touch a woman, ‘how much better’ it is not to touch ‘a bride of Christ’, that is, a consecrated virgin (*ep. 2 ad virg.* 21)? The anonymous author of *De castitate* argues (10.14) that this verse overrules all later ‘concessions’ of marriage; Paul himself, the author protests, could *not* have written v. 38 (‘he who marries does well’), since it contradicts 7.1, Paul’s true opinion. Tertullian, for his part, follows the logic that if it is ‘good’ not to touch, the touching of sexual relations can only be an ‘evil’ (*mon.* 3.2). Here, he perhaps borrows the Old Stoic admonition that the opposite of a virtue is always a vice.

Augustine’s response to the debate between Jerome and Jovinian on marriage centres on 1 Corinthians 7.1 to argue that marriage as a ‘good’ can be compared only with another ‘good’, virginity (Hunter 2007). Inverting the logic of Tertullian and Jerome, Augustine implies that there can be no comparison between the stark opposites of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. If marriage were imagined as a ‘good’ only in contrast to the ‘evil’ of fornication, both might be deemed ‘evils’; and on down the slippery slope...fornication would be a ‘good’ in comparison with adultery, adultery in comparison with incest—and below this, behaviours deemed ‘unspeakable’. Only because *both* marriage and virginity are ‘goods’ can they be compared at all (*bon. coniug.* 8.8). Augustine had earlier developed his pro-marriage stance in his critique of Manichaeism (Clark 1988). Later in his career, he returned to 1 Corinthians 7.1 to claim that although ‘not touching’ is the ideal, only ascetics can sustain this level of purity (*nupt.* 1.16.18). By not *requiring* this level of ascetic renunciation, he elsewhere adds, God leaves open to Christians *voluntary* renunciation with its great rewards (*serm.* 161.11.11).

The next verses of 1 Corinthians 7, Paul’s ‘concession’ to marriage, were variously read. More ‘pro-marriage’ interpreters cited these verses to prove that Paul deemed marriage ‘allowable’ (Ambrosiaster, *comm. in 1 Cor.* 7:2). For Clement of Alexandria, any implied

<sup>3</sup> Along with such passages from the Gospels as Matthew 10.34–9 (Jesus brings a ‘sword’ to divide families); Luke 14.26 (‘hating’ relatives); Matthew 12.46–9 and parallels (rejection of blood relations); Matthew 19.10–12 (‘eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven’); Matthew 22.30 and parallels (in the resurrection, not marrying = being like the angels in heaven); Luke 11.27–8 (Jesus’ correction of ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you...’).

critique of marriage in verse 1 did not apply to chaste married couples who engaged in sexual relations *only* in order to produce children, for such activity needs no ‘concession’ (*str.* 3.15.96.1–2). Augustine, sadly surveying humans now consumed with ‘lust’, counts (somewhat by default) the sexual outlet of faithful marriage as one of marriage’s ‘goods’ (*bon. coniug.* 4.4). Augustine can cite 1 Corinthians 7:3–4 to *exonerate* the sexual behaviour of the Hebrew patriarchs: Abraham and Jacob reluctantly submitted to their barren wives’ requests that they have sexual relations with other women since they knew that their bodies were not ‘their own’ (*Faust.* 22.31; 22.49; *ciu.* 16.38).

Commentators of stronger ascetic commitments, however, could scoff at Paul’s ‘concession’. Jerome shrouds these verses by ‘shaming’ any one who appealed to them to allow sexual indulgence within marriage: a Christian husband should consider his wife as a sister, not engage in sexual intercourse (*Iou.* 1.7). The author of *De castitate* (10.3), portraying Paul as a good physician, remarks that only ‘sick’, not ‘healthy’ Christians, need such a concession. And 1 Corinthians 7:3–4, on the couple’s mutual obligation, is taken by some authors to signal that the husband is bound to the same strict standard of chastity as the wife (John Chrysostom, *hom. in 1 Cor.* 7:2 4). For Jerome and Ambrose, Paul’s words should suggest to Christians that marriage is bondage (Jerome, *Iou.* 1.7; Ambrose, *exh. uirg.* 4.21; 10.62; *vid.* 11.69).

Verse 5 (Paul’s advice that the married couple might [sexually] separate to devote themselves to prayer), as noted above, offered a fair field for ascetic expansion. Jerome argues that since 1 Thessalonians 5.17 instructs Christians to ‘pray without ceasing’, couples cannot so pray if engaged in sexual activity (*ep.* 22.22). Jerome reads 1 Corinthians 7.5 in tandem with 1 Peter 3.7: husbands ‘bestow honour’ on their wives by abstaining from sexual relations. And if couples must separate to pray, Jerome asks, must they not also do so to receive the Eucharist? (*Iou.* 1.7). On the latter point, Jerome borrows from Origen’s teaching on the state of ‘purity’ necessary for taking the Eucharist (Origen, *comm. in 1 Cor.* 7.5).

More pro-marriage interpreters of 1 Corinthians 7.5, however, posited that Paul’s words were inspired only by the ‘busyness’ of life (Ambrosiaster, *comm. in 1 Cor.* 7.5); or, perhaps Paul suggested separation only for especially ardent prayer (John Chrysostom, *hom. 5 in 1 Thess.* 3; *hom. 19 in 1 Cor.* 2). Besides, since Paul tells the couple to ‘come together again’, he cannot deem the marriage relation evil (John Chrysostom, *hom. 23 in 2 Cor.* 6; Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 3.12.82.1; Methodius, *symp.* 3.11).

A last example is taken from the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7.39–40 (allowing the remarriage of widows, but suggesting that they will be happier remaining unmarried). Almost all church fathers criticized the remarriage of widows and widowers (here, the Pastorals’ recommendation of such behaviour caused exegetical trouble). Some took a more ameliorating stance, content to point out that Paul merely suggested that the woman would be ‘happier’ without remarriage (Chrysostom adds, since her husband now ‘sleeps’, why doesn’t she wait for him to ‘wake up’, presumably in the resurrection? [*hom. in 1 Cor.* 7:39 4; 1]). Here again, the more rigorous partisans of asceticism have sharper interpretations. Tertullian insists that the passage does not refer to women who were *already* Christians when their first husbands died, but (merely) the woman who

converted to Christianity *after* her husband's death. Such women may marry again, but only 'in the Lord' (*mon.* 11.1–9; 14.3).

Jerome's technique surrounds 1 Corinthians 7.39–40 with intertextual references that press in a more ascetic direction. The one rib of Adam (Gen 2.21–2) betokened 'one wife', a reference he borrows from Tertullian (*mon.* 4.2). Moreover, if having a second husband disbars a woman from the Church's order of widows and its 'bread' supply (1 Tim 5:9), how much more is she to be deprived of 'the bread of Heaven' (John 6.32–5), that is, the Eucharist? (*Iou.* 1.14).

Without doubt, 1 Corinthians 7, more than any other chapter in the NT, provided abundant opportunity for patristic authors to take a more, or less, ascetic line.

## SYRIAC EXEGESIS

Syriac-writing authors developed distinctive techniques of ascetic interpretation and forms of organization (Griffith 1995:220–45; Van Rompay 1997:103–23).<sup>4</sup> In early Syriac asceticism, the 'single ones' (*ihidāyê*) strove to emulate Christ, the 'single one of God the Father' (cf. John 1.18); at baptism, they 'put on' the Lord by vowing to become 'covenanters' (*bnay* and *bnāt qyāmā*). These renunciants enjoyed a station *within* the community of the Church, unlike another strand represented by, for example, the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, which taught that true followers of Jesus should remain homeless and poor (Murray 1975:69, 70, 72–3; *Acts of Thomas* 7; Griffith 1995:223–34, 238). Recent commentators, in fact, caution against overemphasizing the 'outlandish' features that are highlighted in some later texts purporting to describe Syrian asceticism.

Scholars of Syrian Christian exegesis often note its links with Jewish interpretation (Griffith 1997:15, 10). For example, Aphrahat, 'the Persian Sage', writing in the mid-fourth century in the Sassanid Empire and encountering actual Jews as well as Judaizing Christians, read the ritual practices of the Jewish Law 'literally', but placed them in their historical context (e.g. *dem.* 11 [circumcision]; 12 [Passover]; Van Rompay 1996:620). Typological and symbolic interpretation (*tupsā, rāzā*) were common forms of a spiritualizing exegesis; Alexandrian allegory left less of an imprint (Brock 2006:67, 75). Frequently deployed genres include dialogue poems, with biblical characters engaging each other, and verse homilies that retold biblical narratives in dramatic fashion (Brock 2006:81–5; Harvey 2001; 2002).

An example of symbolic interpretation concerns the Virgin Mary, who was a frequent subject of Syriac biblical exegesis: an anonymous hymnist compares Mary to the budding staff (Num 17.8–9) that 'sprouted without being planted', that 'though unwatered, was crowned with leaves'. 'It is her symbol that is hidden in the Levite's staff', the author proclaims ([Anonymous], *Hymns on Mary* 5.6). Here, Mary's virginal conception is symbolized in the miraculous staff.

<sup>4</sup> I thank Duke graduate students Erin Galgay Walsh and Emanuel Fiano for assistance with this section.

Three Syrian theologians illustrate both the types of exegesis and the audiences to which these interpretations were directed.

In his hymns, Ephrem, a mid-fourth-century Syrian ‘protomonastic’ (Brock 2008:32; Matthews and Amar 1994:19–54), appeals to biblical characters as types and as examples of behaviour for Christians’ emulation. His interpretations address the married as well as celibates. For example, unlike Jerome’s claim that only the *unclean* animals entered the ark two by two, Ephrem emphasizes the animals’ chastity—although, he adds, Mary’s was superior in that it was voluntary. Ephrem here blocks an overly ascetic interpretation, proclaiming ‘intercourse is not defiled, | nor is marriage accursed’ (Ephrem, *nat.* 28, stanzas 1, 3). Although himself an ascetic, Ephrem refrained from making disparaging comparisons between ‘superior’ ascetics and ‘lesser’ Christians. Thus he gives a more ameliorative interpretation of the very stories of Abraham and Sarah that some Latin commentators found unsavoury or embarrassing: Sarah, he writes, preserved her chastity even in Pharaoh’s embrace, since she had not willed the latter (Ephrem, *virg.* 1, stanza 9). Ephrem also praises NT women; even ones rebuffed in Scripture (e.g. Martha) are glorified as brides of Christ (Ephrem, *virg.* 26, stanzas 1–16).

Interpretations of Genesis are particularly revelatory of their authors’ preferences. In his treatment of Adam, Ephrem does not stress (as does Augustine) the raging lust that entered the world with Adam’s sin. Rather, he stresses that the ‘young, fair’ man, ‘full of joy’, received as his punishment a burden of woes that he carried into his old age. Although Ephrem portrays David the Psalmist weeping over Adam’s descent to the level of the wild animals (Ps 48/49.13), Adam’s bestiality is signalled by his eating grass and roots, and by dying—not first and foremost by copulation (Ephrem, *par.* 11.1; 13.3).

Another example of a less-sharply ascetic interpretation of stories from Genesis comes from the writings of Jacob, bishop of Sarug in the first part of the sixth century. Mar Jacob avoids negative comment on marriage and sexuality in his treatment of Genesis 2.24 (a man’s leaving his father and mother to become ‘one’ with his wife). Rather, he provides a Christological and ecclesiological interpretation: Moses’ words were ‘veiled’ descriptions of Christ and the Church; much later, Paul revealed their true meaning to the world, exclaiming ‘how great is this mystery!’ (Eph 5.21–33). Moreover, Jacob (unlike Jerome) refrains from negatively contrasting the ‘one flesh’ of Genesis with the ‘one spirit’ of Ephesians (Jacob of Sarug 2008:89–117). Similarly, he does not denounce polygamy, deceit, and ancient Israelite sexual mores more generally in recounting the tales of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah (Gen 29); he merely notes in passing that Jacob felt no lust when he kissed Rachel at the well (Jacob of Sarug 1993:77–85). The homily is rather ‘about’ the Church and the Synagogue.

Sharper ascetic claims, however, come to the fore in the Syriac *Book of Steps* (*Liber Graduum*), perhaps best dated to the fifth century (Smith 2014). Its recent translators claim that this work marks a ‘transition from the “pre-monastic” period of early Syriac asceticism to the subsequent era when the image of Egyptian monasticism’ coloured the representation of Syrian ascetic practices (trans. Kitchen and Parmentier 2004:xliv). The *Liber Graduum* offers a more pronounced differentiation between ascetics and non-ascetics than had Ephrem.

The anonymous author of the *Book of Steps* sharply distinguishes scriptural passages meant for the more lowly married folk (the ‘Upright’) from those directed at ascetic devotees (the ‘Perfect’) (Mēmrā 1, c.12). A chief differentiating marker is that the Upright have not abandoned riches and wives (Mēmrā 3.3). The commandment to ‘honour father and mother’ (Exod 20.12), the author claims, is meant for ‘children’ still attached to earthly concerns (Mēmrā 19.9).

Although the *Book of Steps* sharply distinguishes ‘higher’ from ‘lower’ Christians, the author’s *method* of interpretation does not differ significantly from that of Ephrem; like Ephrem, he holds up biblical exemplars for emulation and finds ‘symbols’ in Scripture’s words. Thus he compares those who live by the lower (‘minor’) commandments, the Upright, to Paul’s vegetable-eaters and milk-drinkers; the Perfect, to those who can digest ‘solid food’ (Rom 14.2; 1 Cor 3.2; Mēmrā 1.2). He admits that some commandments were meant only for a specific individual at a particular time and place, and could not be undertaken today without severe critique (e.g. God’s commands to Abraham to sacrifice his son [Gen 22], and to Hosea, to marry a harlot [Hos 1]; Mēmrā 1.5–6): such is one way the anonymous author deals with ‘the difference in times’.

Biblical characters stand as ‘symbols’ in the *Book of Steps*: in the Lucan story of Mary and Martha, Mary, dead to the business of the world, symbolizes the Perfect who choose the ‘better part’; Martha, who had a house and possessions, the Upright (Luke 10.38–42; Mēmrā 3.13). The author deploys the story of Abraham, Isaac, and their wives to send a message to *both* Upright and Perfect: these patriarchs would willingly have abandoned their property and their wives, as did the Apostles (and thus entered the ranks of the Perfect), if God had so instructed—but the Lord held them back from such renunciation to serve as examples to the married (that is, to the Upright) (Mēmrā 9.19). The Upright might, the author suggests, in midlife imitate Enoch who, after he begot Methuselah, became holy (i.e. celibate) and did not taste death (Gen 5.21; Heb 11.5; Mēmrā 13.4).

Sergey Minov, explicating the interpretative techniques found in the *Book of Steps*, notes that its author ‘completely ignores’ God’s blessing on procreation in Genesis 1.28, instead assigning the command, ‘be fruitful and multiply’ to Satan, a move resonant with Encratism (Mēmrā 15.21; Minov 2014:224–5, 235–50). By dividing up the commandments and arranging them hierarchically, the author limits the authority of Scripture’s pro-marriage passages ‘by interpreting them as addressing not those who follow the way of perfection, but only the regular “upright” Christians’ (Minov 2014:226). Through these interpretative moves, the author dissociates himself from Ephrem’s positive appreciation of marriage as reflected in his biblical interpretation (Minov 2014:245, 247–8).

A last set of examples, from the *Discourses* of the late fifth-century miaphysite Philoxenus of Mabbug (Hierapolis), reveals the influence of Origenist interpretation, especially that of Evagrius Ponticus, on Syrian exegesis (Michelson 2014:82–111). Whereas in the *Book of Steps*, written approximately a century and a half earlier, commitment to celibacy was the entry point on the road to holiness, in Philoxenus’ *Discourses* celibacy seems taken for granted. (Only to worldly persons was the command given, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; to the monk, ‘You shall not desire’ [Mēmrā 13.41].) Rather, it is memories of past life and the ‘lust of the belly’ that plague the renunciant.

Life in a monastery, not in the midst of the world, is needed for perfection: the ‘Upright’ are here understood as novice monks, not married people in ‘the world’ as in the *Book of Steps* (Kitchen 2013:lii–liii, lxiv). Baptism breaks the tie with one’s family, as it did for Jesus (Mēmrē 8.23, 29–30; 9.38). God commands his followers to become strangers to the world, ‘to take it off like a worn-out coat’ (Mēmrā 13.20).

Philoxenus also appeals to biblical examples and types to stimulate good behaviour and discourage bad. Of the former, Joseph fleeing Potiphar’s wife, Daniel rejecting food, and Mary avoiding kitchen duty provide positive models for the monk (Mēmrē 13.61–3; 11.58; 8.15); of negative exemplars, Esau gorging on lentils (Mēmrē 13.57; 10.63).

In Philoxenus’ writings, food, or the desire for it, is a chief temptation: ‘food’ spurred Adam’s sin, awakening lust (Mēmrē 10.59; 12.3), and was the first temptation that the devil posed for Jesus (Mēmrā 11.66). As in Evagrius’ works, demons (‘the Egyptians’) tempt the ascetic to imagine the dangers of fasting and what virtuous deeds he might accomplish if he remained in the world (Mēmrā 9.18, 19). The passion of gluttony is said to render people ‘in the image of the animals’, taking from them ‘the movements of knowledge appropriate to rational beings and submerg[ing] and darken[ing] their mind under the weight of food’; it ‘paints images’ on their minds (Mēmrā 10.1, 15).<sup>5</sup> How do we gain the angelic ‘image’? By not eating more than absolutely necessary (Mēmrā 11.7).

However dissimilar from Greek and Latin exegesis in its particular styles, Syrian asceticizing interpretation of the Bible worked to the same purpose: to wean Christians from the temptations and pleasures of ‘the world’ and bring them to a higher joy and otherworldly glory.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Ambrose, *Exhortatio uirginitatis*. Latin text: PL 16.335–64.  
 Ambrosiaster, *Commentarius in XIII epistulas Paulinas: Ad Corinthios*. Latin text: H. J. Vogels (ed.), *Ambrosiastri qui Dicitur Commentarius in Epistulas Paulinas* CSEL 81/2 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1968).  
 [Anonymous], *De castitate*. Latin text: PLS 1.1464–505.  
 [Anonymous], *Hymns on Mary*. Eng. trans.: S. Brock, *Bride of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches* (Kerala, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1994), 40–2.  
 [Anonymous], *Liber Graduum*. Eng. trans.: R. A. Kitchen and M. F. G. Parmentier, *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2004).  
 Aphrahat, *Demonstrationes*. Eng. trans.: A. Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> A distinctively Evagrian expression. The opponents of fasting are represented as skilled exegetes: they cite Matthew 15.11, Luke 24.42, John 6.9, 1 Timothy 4.4, 1 Corinthians 6.13, and Romans 14.3 to support their position (Mēmrā 10, 40).

- Athanasius, *Epistulae 1–2 ad virgines*. Eng. trans.: D. Brakke, 'First and Second Letter to Virgins,' in *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 274–91, 292–302.
- Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*. Latin text: J. Zycha (ed.), *Sancti Aureli Augustini Contra Faustum*, CSEL 25 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1891).
- Augustine, *De bono coniugali*. Latin text: J. Zycha (ed.), *Sancti Aureli Augustini De Bono Coniugali*, CSEL 41 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1900).
- Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei*. Latin text: B. Dombart and A. Kalb (eds), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini De Civitate Dei*, CCL 48 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955).
- Augustine, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia ad Valerium comitem*. Latin text: C. F. Vrba and J. Zycha (eds), *Sancti Aureli Augustini De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia ad Valerium Comitem Libri Duo*, CSEL 42 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1902).
- Augustine, *De opere monachorum*. Latin text: J. Zycha (ed.), *Sancti Aureli Augustini De Opere Monachorum*, CSEL 41 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1900).
- Augustine, *Sermones*. Latin text: PL 38.23–1484.
- Basil of Caesarea, *Epistulae*. Eng. trans.: Roy J. Deferrari, *Basil: Letters 59–185*, LCL (London: W. Heinemann, 1928).
- Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*. Greek text: O. Stählin (ed.), *Stromata, Buch I–VI*, GCS 52 [15] (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1960).
- Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymni de nativitate*. Eng. trans.: K. E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989).
- Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymni de paradiso*. Eng. trans.: S. Brock, *Saint Ephrem, Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990).
- Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymni de virginitate*. Eng. trans.: K. E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989).
- Evagrius Ponticus, *Antirrheticus*. Eng. trans.: David Brakke, *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons* (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*. Greek text: PG 44.123–256.
- Jacob of Sarug, *A Homily on Our Lord and Jacob, On the Church and Rachel, and on Leah and the Synagogue*. Eng. trans.: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The True Vine* 4/4 (1993): 50–62.
- Jacob of Sarug, *Homily on the Veil of Moses' Face*. Eng. trans.: S. Brock (ed.), *Studies in Syriac Spirituality* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2008), 177–209.
- Jerome, *Aduersus Iouinianum libri II*. Latin text: PL 23.211–338.
- Jerome, *Epistulae*. Latin text: I. Hilberg (ed.), *S. Eusebii Hieronymi Opera: Epistularum*, CSEL 54, 55, 56 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1996–9).
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in 1 ad Corinthios*. Greek text: PG 61.9–382.
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in 2 ad Corinthios*. Greek text: PG 61.381–610.
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesim*. Greek text: PG 53.21–384.
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaëum*. Greek text: PG 58.21–794.
- John Chrysostom, *Homilia in illud: Mulier alligata est (hom. in 1 Cor 7:39)*. Greek text: PG 51.217–26.
- Methodius, *Symposium*. Greek text: G. N. Bonwetsch (ed.), *Methodius Olympius Werke*, GCS 27 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1917; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Latin text: P. Koetschau (ed.), *De principiis = Peri archon*, GCS 22 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913).
- Origen, *Fragmenta ex commentariis in 1 ad Corinthios*. Greek text: C. Jenkins (ed.), 'Documents: Origen on 1 Corinthians,' *JTS* 9 (1908): 231–47, 500–14; 10 (1909): 29–51.

- Origen, *Homiliae in Exodum*. Latin text and French trans.: M. Borret (ed.), *Homélie sur l'Exode*, SC 321 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985).
- Origen, *Homiliae in Genesim*. Latin text and French trans.: M. Doutreleau (ed.), *Homélie sur la Genèse*, SC 7bis (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976).
- Origen, *Homiliae in Josuam*. Latin text and French trans.: A. Jaubert (ed.), *Homélie sur Josué*, SC 71 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1960).
- Origen, *Homiliae in Judicum*. Latin text and French trans.: P. Messié, L. Neyrand, and M. Borret (eds), *Homélie sur les Juges*, SC 389 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993).
- Origen, *Homiliae in Lucam*. Latin text and French trans.: H. Crouzel, F. Fournier, and P. Périchon (eds), *Homélie sur S. Luc*, SC 87 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1962).
- Origen. *Homiliae in Numeros*. Latin text: W. A. Baehrens (ed.), *Homilien zum Hexateuch in Rufins Übersetzung*, GCS 30 (Leipzig: J. C. Heinrichs, 1920).
- Philoxenus of Mabbug, *Discourses*. Eng. trans.: R. A. Kitchen, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013).
- Tertullian, *De monogamia*. Latin text: A. Gurlo et al. (ed.), *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani opera*, CCL 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954).

## Scholarship

- Baer, R. A. (1970). *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: Brill).
- Brakke, D. (1995). 'The Problematization of Nocturnal Emissions in the Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul', *J ECS* 3(4): 419–60.
- Brock, S. (2006). *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*. 2nd edn (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press).
- Brock, S. (2008). 'St Ephrem the Syrian (+373): On Reading the Scripture', in *Studies in Syriac Spirituality* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications), 31–48.
- Brown, P. (2012). *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 ad* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press).
- Bruns, G. L. (1984). 'The Problem of Figuration in Antiquity', in G. Shapiro and A. Sica (eds), *Hermeneutics: Questions and Perspectives* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press), 147–64.
- Burton-Christie, D. (1993). *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Childs, B. S. (1977). 'The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem', in H. Donner et al. (eds), *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 80–93.
- Clark, E. A. (1986). 'The Uses of the Song of Songs: Origen and the Later Latin Fathers', in E. A. Clark (ed.), *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays in Late Ancient Christianity* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press), 386–427.
- Clark, E. A. (1988). 'Vitiated Seeds and Holy Vessels: Augustine's Manichean Past', in K. King (ed.), *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 367–401.
- Clark, E. A. (1989). 'Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism: Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine', *JFSR* 5: 25–46.
- Clark, E. A. (1999). *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Clark, E. A. (2013). 'Jews, Camels, and "Literal" Exegesis: The Pelagian Treatise De divitiis', in H.-U. Weidemann (ed.), *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity: The Reception of New Testament Texts in Ancient Ascetic Discourse* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 428–44.

- Crouzel, H. (1989; 1985). *Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian*, trans. A. S. Worrall (San Francisco: Harper & Row).
- Dawson, D. (1992). *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Dively Lauro, E. A. (2005). *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature).
- Durkheim, E. (1915) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, trans. J. W. Swain (London: George Allen and Unwin; New York: Macmillan).
- Eden, K. (1997). *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy & Its Humanist Reception* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Frei, H. (1986). 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will It Break?', in F. McConnell (ed.), *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press), 36–77.
- Griffith, S. H. (1995). 'Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism', in V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (eds), *Asceticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press), 220–45.
- Griffith, S. H. (1997). *'Faith Adoring the Mystery': Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press).
- Harrison, V. E. F. (1992). 'Allegory and Asceticism in Gregory of Nyssa', *Semeia* 57: 113–30.
- Harvey, S. A. (2001). 'Spoken Words, Voiced Silence: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition', *J ECS* 9: 105–31.
- Harvey, S. A. (2002). 'Why the Perfume Mattered: The Sinful Woman in Syriac Exegetical Tradition', in P. M. Blowers et al. (eds), *In Dominico Eloquio: In Lordly Eloquence. Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Lewis Wilken* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 69–89.
- Hunter, D. G. (2002). 'Reclaiming Biblical Morality: Sex and Salvation in History in Augustine's Treatment of the Hebrew Saints', in P. M. Blowers et al. (eds), *In Dominico Eloquio: In Lordly Eloquence. Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Lewis Wilken* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 317–35.
- Hunter, D. G. (2007). *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press).
- Kitchen, R. A. (2013). 'Introduction', in *The Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbug*, trans. R. A. Kitchen (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), xiii–lxxiv.
- Malone, E. E. (1950). *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press).
- Martens, P. (2008). 'Revisiting the Typology/Allegory Distinction: The Case of Origen', *J ECS* 16: 283–317.
- Matthews, E. G., and Amar, J. P. (1994). 'General Introduction', in K. E. McVey (ed.), *St. Ephrem the Syrian. Selected Prose Works*, trans. E. G. Matthews, Jr and J. P. Amar (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press), 19–54.
- Michelson, D. A. (2014). *The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Miller, P. C. (1993). 'The Blazing Body: Ascetic Desire in Jerome's Letter to Eustochium', *J ECS* 1: 21–45.
- Minov, S. (2014). 'Marriage and Sexuality in the Book of Steps: From Encratism to Orthodoxy', in K. S. Heal and R. A. Kitchen (eds), *Breaking the Mind: New Studies in the Syriac 'Book of Steps'* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press), 221–61.

- Mitchell, M. M. (2010). *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Murray, R. (1975). 'The Features of Earliest Christian Asceticism', in P. Brooks (ed.), *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp* (London: SCM Press), 63–77.
- O'Keefe, J. J. (2004). 'Scriptural Interpretation', in J. A. McGuckin (ed.), *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 193–7.
- Smith, K. (2014). 'A Last Disciple of the Apostles: The "Editor's" Preface, Rabbula's Rules, and the Date of the Book of Steps', in K. S. Heal and R. A. Kitchen (eds), *Breaking the Mind: New Studies in the Syriac 'Book of Steps'* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press), 72–96.
- Tanner, K. E. (1987). 'Theology and the Plain Sense', in G. Green (ed.), *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 59–78.
- Torjesen, K. J. (1986). *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin and New York: Walter DeGruyter).
- Trigg, J. W. (1983). *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century* (Atlanta: John Knox Press).
- Van Rompay, L. (1996). 'The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation', in M. Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), I.1: 612–41.
- Van Rompay, L. (1997). 'Antiochene Biblical Interpretation: Greek and Syriac', in J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay (eds), *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation: A Collection of Essays* (Leuven/Louvain: Peeters), 103–23.
- Young, F. M. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Blowers, P. M. (1988). 'Origen, the Rabbis, and the Bible: Toward a Picture of Judaism and Christianity in Third-Century Caesarea', in C. Kannengiesser and W. L. Petersen (eds), *Origen of Alexandria: His World and his Legacy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 96–116.
- Burrus, V., and Conti, M. (2013) (eds). *The Life of Saint Helia: Critical Edition, Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Carleton Paget, J. N. B. (1996). 'The Christian Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Alexandrian Tradition', in M. Saebø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), I.1: 478–542.
- Clark, E. A. (2013). 'Status Feminae: Tertullian and the Uses of Paul', in T. D. Still and D. E. Wilhite (eds), *Tertullian and Paul* (New York and London: Bloomsbury), 127–155.
- Juhl, D. (1996). *Die Askese im Liber Graduum und bei Afrahat: Eine vergleichende Studie zur frühsyrischen Frömmigkeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag).
- Martens, P. W. (2012). *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Mitchell, M. M. (2002). *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Louisville, KY and London: Westminster John Knox Press).

- Timbie, J. A. (2013). 'Writing Rules and Quoting Scripture in Early Coptic Monastic Texts,' in B. Leyerle and R. D. Young (eds), *Ascetic Culture: Essays in Honor of Philip Rousseau* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 29–49.
- Young, R. D., and Blanchard, M. J. (2011) (eds). *To Train his Soul in Books: Syriac Asceticism in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press).
- Weidemann, H.-U. (2013) (ed.). *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity: The Reception of New Testament Texts in Ancient Ascetic Discourses* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).



PART VI

---

SCRIPTURAL  
FIGURES AND  
MOTIFS

---



## CHAPTER 32

---

# CREATION

---

PAUL M. BLOWERS

‘CREATION’ ultimately suggested various interrelated themes in early Christian biblical interpretation and imagination. Not only did it signal as scriptural fact, posited in stark contrast with rival cosmogonies, that God freely elected to create the cosmos, but it also came to elicit the world’s createdness itself and the strict ontological and epistemic boundary dividing the cosmos from its uncreated Creator. As well, ‘creation’ indicated the abiding action of God to sustain and nurture the world once created, and providentially to steer it through and beyond the threats of chaos and ‘nothingness’ posed by the sin of rational creatures and their role in introducing moral evil into the universe. Interpreted in the light of Jesus Christ, however, ‘creation’ also pointed to *new* creation, to the prerogatives of the Creator to bless his work afresh, and to fulfil his former creative activity by inaugurating a new, transformed state of things.

## INTERPRETING THE BIBLE ON THE ORIGINS OF THE WORLD

---

Apologists, preachers, and theologians throughout the early Christian age readily acknowledged the primary and critical importance of the ‘Hexaemeron’, the six-day creation story (Gen 1.1–2:4a), and of Genesis 1–3 as a whole, for developing normative Christian teaching about divine creation of the world. The earliest Christian commentary on Genesis 1 appears in Theophilus of Antioch’s apology *To Autolytus* (c.182), a work at once repudiating Hesiod’s time-honoured cosmogonic myth and setting a precedent for how Christian theological exegesis of the Hexaemeron might proceed. Certain of Theophilus’ interpretative intuitions proved enduring, such as the axiom that God created primarily through his Word or Wisdom; or that he omnipotently created the world *ex nihilo* from previously non-existent matter (*Autol.* 2.10); or that certain features of the creation story warranted figural or allegorical interpretation (*Autol.* 2.14–17). Significant as well is Theophilus’ comment that certain writers or philosophers ‘mimicked’

(ἐμμυήσαντο) the Genesis narrative in order to explain cosmic origins, but fell drastically short of its truth (*Autol.* 2.12). He probably has in mind Plato's creation narrative in the *Timaeus* as a failed approximation of the Hexaemeron, though he concedes these alternative pagan accounts can appear plausible (ἀξιόπιστα), even beautiful. For Theophilus and most of his patristic exegetical successors, interpretation of Genesis 1 thus requires both *logos*, or reasoned exposition, and effective rehearsal of the *mythos*, the larger revelatory drama into which the text fits.

Subsequent patristic interpretation of the Hexaemeron, some more analytical and other more devotional or doxological in orientation (see Blowers 2012:107–35), approached the six-day creation story as a 'thick' narrative, that is, as having unique rhythms, latent senses, and multiple layers of meaning rather than as reporting transparent cosmogonic events. Origen, who often finds significance even in the most minute features of a biblical text, warns in his *Commentary on Genesis* against reading it superficially without rigorously scrutinizing the different languages and translations, and using sound reason to clarify 'the equivocations, ambiguities, analogous usages, literal usages, and fine distinctions' (*comm. in Gen.* 3 [= *Philocalia of Origen* 14.1–2]). Especially thorny in biblical discourse is equivocation. If 'creation' is equivocal, so too is 'cosmos' in biblical usage, a fact fatefully lost on Gnostics:

An example would be the term *cosmos* (κόσμος). Ignorant that it was an equivocal term, some have fallen into most impious thinking about the 'Demiurge'—some, that is, who have not been clear on how 'the world lies in the grips of the evil one' (1 John 5.19), and who have failed to understand that John there is speaking of 'cosmos' in the sense of mundane and human affairs. For thinking purely literally that 'cosmos' indicates the whole system of heaven and earth and the things therein, they betray their exceeding overconfidence and impiety toward God. Whatever they do they cannot possibly demonstrate how the sun and moon and stars, in their orderly movements, 'lie in the grips of the evil one.' Then there is this text: 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the cosmos' (John 1.29). 'Cosmos' here is properly read as the place where sin abounds, that is, various earthly localities. These errant interpreters concede this reading but, in their contentiousness, they foolishly turn right around and continue in the fallacious views they have once for all embraced because of their ignorance of equivocation. If, yet again, we broach the text 'God was in Christ reconciling the cosmos to himself' (2 Cor 5.19), they will not be able, by their own best arguments, to show that this applies to the entire cosmos, that is, the contents of the cosmos as a whole. Even by their own account they are forced to examine the term 'cosmos' as equivocal.

(*comm. in Gen.* 3 [= *Philocalia of Origen* 14.2]; cf. also *princ.* 2.3.6; 2.9.3)

Scrutinizing the fine points of the Hexaemeron was all the more crucial because, like the whole of Genesis 1–3, it was *prophecy* (Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.9, 13; Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 4.1.3; Severian of Gabala, *creat.* 1.2; Blowers 2012:103–5), and adumbrated the fuller economy (οἰκονομία) of the Creator's providential purposes, exhibiting creation as the theatre of ongoing divine interventions and performances. The very opening phrase 'In the beginning...' (Gen 1.1), thought to stand alone in relation to the subsequent story, was pregnant with prophetic meaning (see Centre d'Études des Religions du Livre 1973).

Christian interpreters recognized early on the parallel with John 1.1, suggesting that the true ‘beginning’ (ἀρχή; *principium*) need not necessarily be chronological. Its meaning could be prosopological. In other words, Genesis implicitly, and John explicitly, disclosed the *person* of the Word or Wisdom—or even the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, the ‘Alpha and Omega’ (Rev 1.8; 21.6; 22.13)—as the purposive ‘beginning’ of creation and of sacred history (cf. Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.10; Tertullian, *Herm.* 20; Origen, *hom. 1 in Gen.*; *Jo.* 1.17.101–1.19.116; 1.22.132; Ambrose, *hex.* 1.4.15). In addition, Basil of Caesarea (*hex.* 1.6) and Ambrose of Milan (*hex.* 1.4.16) validated Aquila’s alternative Greek translation of Genesis 1.1—‘In sum (ἐν κεφαλαίῳ) God created the heavens and the earth’—as similarly supporting a Christocentric rendering of the initial act of creation.

Patristic interpreters (e.g. Origen, *hom. 1 in Gen.*) took special note, as did Philo before them, that uniquely among the days of creation, the inaugural day (Gen 1.1–5) was designated by a cardinal rather than an ordinal number: ‘day one’ (ἡμέρα μία, LXX; *dies unus*, Vg) as opposed to the ‘first day’ (ἡμέρα πρώτη; *prima dies*). Day one, announcing the creation of ‘heaven and earth’ as a fait accompli, stood on its own as a kind of preamble to the larger creation story. Philo deduced that it signalled an original, instantaneous, or simultaneous moment in which God projected the whole of creation in ideal form before materializing it in time and space (*opif. mundi* 15–130). A variation, also proposed by Philo, was to construe the whole of the first creation account (Gen 1.1–2.4a) as the simultaneous, ideal creation, followed by its actualization in the second account (2.4b–25) (*opif. mundi* 129–50). Early Christian interpreters were clearly familiar with Philo’s versions of ‘double’ creation. Clement of Alexandria shows sympathy with Philo’s first version, seeing ‘heaven and earth’ as aggregately indicating the archetypes of all creatures (*str.* 5.14.93). Origen ostensibly saw ‘heaven and earth’ referring to God’s initial creation of the substances of all things, as can be inferred from his *On First Principles* 2.3.6 and select fragments of his *Commentary on Genesis* in the fourth-century Christian philosopher Calcidius (see Blowers 2012:111–13, 146; Köckert 2009:52–66; van Winden 1997:99–101). Gregory of Nyssa, echoing Philo and Clement, surmises that ‘heaven and earth’ is indeed a simultaneous creation of all that is in its potential but not yet actual form (*hex.* 3–9), while Augustine envisions ‘heaven’ as the perfectly formed intelligible cosmos and ‘earth’ as the still formless sensible cosmos (*Conf.* 12.20.29; *Gen. litt.* 1.1.3). Not all patristic exegetes, however, accepted a duality of the ‘ideal’ and ‘actual’ creation. In the Syriac tradition, Ephrem instead proposed that the creation of ‘heaven and earth’ in Genesis 1.1 simply indicated the initial fact of the Creator’s accomplishing a creation *ex nihilo*, even before he created the material elements themselves (*comm. in Gen.* 1.2).

Numerous other features of Genesis 1–3 were also read inter-scripturally so as to elicit the narrative’s larger prophetic meaning within the economy of salvation. The appearance in Genesis 1.2 of a ‘spirit’ hovering or ‘borne over’ (ἐπεφέρετο, LXX) the waters inspired distinctive interpretative traditions, one seeing here merely a wind animating a lifeless and formless mass (e.g. Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.13; Ephrem, *comm. in Gen.* 1.7; Severian of Gabala, *creat.* 1.4; John Chrysostom, *hom. in Gen.* 3.1), the other, a majority, confirming this as the Holy Spirit cooperating in the work of creation (e.g. Tertullian, *bapt.* 3–4; Origen, *princ.* 1.3.3; *Cels.* 6.52; Athanasius, *ep. Serap.* 1.5; Basil of Caesarea, *hex.* 2.6;

Ambrose, *hex.* 1.8.29; Jerome, *qu. Hebr. Gen.* 1.2; Leo the Great, *serm.* 75.2). Given the broad commitment to a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, reinforced by appeal to ancillary texts (Wis 11.17; 2 Macc 7.28; Rom 4.17; Heb 11.3), the image of the void itself, the *tohu wa-bohu* or ‘abyss’ (ἄβυσσος, LXX), generated considerable speculation about its precise character (see Blowers 2012:167–84). Resisting pagan notions of the eternity of matter, and the pervasive pagan truism that ‘nothing comes from nothing’ (Lucretius), some patristic interpreters judged that the true ‘void’ had to precede matter if God omnipotently created matter itself *ex nihilo* (cf. Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.4, 13; Irenaeus, *haer.* 2.10.4; Tertullian, *Herm.* passim). The formlessness or nothingness described in Genesis 1.2, then, was either raw matter awaiting formation (e.g. Ephrem, *comm. in Gen.* 1.3; Augustine, *Gen. Man.* 1.5.9–1.7.12) or else matter already having been given form but waiting to be revealed in the order and diversity of creatures (cf. Tertullian, *Herm.* 29.1–6; Basil, *hex.* 2.3; Gregory of Nazianzus, *carm.* 1.1.4 = *Poemata arcana* 4).

Early Christian exegetes were also keen on the fact that God created ‘light’ (Gen 1.3) before the luminaries (1.14). Such subtleties in the text could hardly be incidental, leading to strikingly divergent interpretations. For some the primordial light (Gen 1.3) was the initial revelatory moment, light from the Logos illuminating the whole region under heaven (Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.13), or the disclosure of order and beauty amid the previous darkness (Basil, *hex.* 2.4–7; 3.10). Origen, in the first of his *Homilies on Genesis*, dwells on the spiritual sense whereby Christ is the true ‘light of the world’ (John 8.12) who illumines all believers in the Church who are, in turn, his ‘luminaries’ in the world (cf. Matt 5.14). But in his more analytical *Commentary on Genesis*, Origen instead takes up, in opposition to pagan astrology, how God set out the lesser luminaries to be ‘signs’ (σημεῖα, Gen 1.14, LXX), concluding that they have prophetic but not causative power in relation to historical events. For having been ‘from everlasting to everlasting imprinted in the book of the heavens, a book worthy of God’, the stars neither defy divine providence nor override human free will (*comm. in Gen.* 3 [= *Philocalia of Origen* 23.15–21]). Basil later sees different nuances, such as that the primordial light was created first lest pagans later find justification in worshipping the sun as a god, and that light’s very essence (Gen 1.3) is to be contrasted with its derivative light reflected from the luminaries (1.14) (*hex.* 6.2). Syriac exegetes connected the primordial light with the initial angelic praise of the Creator (Narsai, *hom. in creat.* 1; Jacob of Sarug, *hom. in hex.* 1).

The creation of humanity on the sixth day posed its own exegetical challenges. Not surprisingly, many patristic commentators understood the divine plural (‘let us make humanity in our image, after our likeness’) as referencing the Trinity (e.g. Tertullian, *Prax.* 12; Gregory of Nyssa, *hom. opif.* 6; Ambrose, *hex.* 6.7.40; Augustine, *Trin.* 7.6.12; Maximus the Confessor, *qu. Thal.* 28). Humanity’s creation in the ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ of God generated an extensive tradition of speculation, though most of the fathers understood these terms as designations both of human giftedness and the human vocation. For many, the ‘image’ indicated the ontological endowment of rationality, freedom, or other inherent dignities of human nature, to be distinguished from the ‘likeness’ to God that could be perfected only through voluntary moral and spiritual progress (cf. Irenaeus, *haer.* 5.6.1; Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 2.38.5; Origen, *princ.* 3.6.1; *Cels.* 4.30;

Basil, *hex.* 10.5–7; Augustine, *Trin.* 7.6.12; Maximus the Confessor, *qu. dub.* III, 1; *cap. theol.* 1.13; John of Damascus, *f.o.* 2.12). That Genesis seemed to recount either two versions or two phases of the creation of humanity (1.26–7 and 2.7, 22) invited speculation as well. Origen seeks to sustain his dual creation theory by suggesting that humanity's creation in the image (Gen 1.26) applies to the pre-existent spiritual nature, while the 'man of dust' (Gen 2.7) refers solely to the formation of bodies—a perspective he justifies using Paul's distinction between the 'inner' and 'outer' human being (2 Cor 4.16) (*Cant. Prol.* 2.4). Later, Gregory of Nyssa would take a different tack, in part intended to correct Origen: universal human nature was created 'in the image' (Gen 1.26), in an archetypal excellence, with the intellectual nature having ontological but not temporal priority to the bodily nature. Genesis 1.27, however, with its mention of 'male and female' designates the concretization of bodily human existence, providentially anticipating the human fall and the introduction of sexually modulated procreation with the 'tunics of skins' (Gen 3.21) (*hom. opif.* 16; 28; *or. catech.* 8).

The Creator's 'rest' from creation, concluding the Hexaemeral story (Gen 2.2), ultimately erupted significant exegetical controversy, especially since the text became vulnerable to various dualist (especially Manichaean) interpretations pitting the Creator-god of the Hebrew Scriptures against the benevolent God of the NT. Manichaean and anti-Manichaean interpreters both appealed to Jesus's clam in John 5.17 that 'my Father is working even up to now (*ἔως ἄρτι*), and I too am working', Manichaeans to argue that Jesus was debunking the divine 'rest' in Genesis (as noted by Augustine, *Gen. Man.* 1.22.33; *Adim.* 2), catholics to show how the Creator's primeval 'rest' was relative to his ongoing, seamless labour of redeeming and perfecting his creation, climactically through the incarnation of the New Adam (cf. Ps-Archelaus, *Acta disp. cum Manete* 31; Gregory of Nazianzus, *or.* 30.11; Augustine, *Gen. Man.* 1.22.33). Ambrose instead proposes that the divine rest of Genesis 2.2 symbolically or prophetically foreshadowed the 'repose' of death experienced by the Saviour for humanity's sake (*hex.* 6.10.76).

I have only provided a sampling here, but on the whole, patristic Hexaemeral interpretation may be characterized as a rigorous endeavour to identify and explain oddities within the Genesis text, to enhance its subtle or hidden nuances, and to explore its deeper moral, spiritual, and theological meaning in relation to the whole of scriptural revelation.

## INTERPRETING CREATION AS A DIVINE ECONOMY

---

As Hellenistic Jewish sources like Philo and Wisdom of Solomon had already recognized, just as did Paul, John the Evangelist, and the Sethian-Gnostic author of the *Apocryphon of John*, Genesis 1–3 was a narrative 'Big Bang', a story truly of mythic proportions that recounted cosmic and human origins but also much more. In their narrative density, these chapters were shot through with signals of the Creator's character and providence,

the contingency and vulnerability of the world, the tragedy of creaturely infidelity, and the prospects of their restoration. Patristic interpreters sensed reverberations of these themes beyond Genesis, insofar as the biblical witnesses as a whole appeared less occupied with cosmic beginnings per se than with the sustained covenantal relation between Creator and creation, and with how the beginning of the world needed to be reread from the perspective of its *end*. Like a massive prophetic kaleidoscope, texts from across the Bible divulged different insights into the Creator's *oikonomia*, his ongoing strategy to preserve, redeem, and perfect his creation.

Ancient Christian commentators recognized especially how the Psalms consistently referenced creation, depicting it as the very theatre of the cosmic drama of salvation, but even as a spectator and actor in that drama (see Blowers 2012:189–98). They noted how the Psalter for various purposes personified creation, be it to dramatize creation's witness on behalf of the Creator's ways or against Israel's deviance (cf. John Chrysostom, *exp. in Ps.* 49; Theodoret of Cyrus, *qu. in Dt.* 40), or to amplify creation's exemplary but voiceless praise for the Creator (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ps.* 18; Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 2.219; Diodore of Tarsus, *Ps.* 18). Some instead suggested that 'heaven and earth', most notably in Psalm 18, was simply a metonymy indicating the universe's rational inhabitants being invoked altogether to exalt the Creator's glory (Origen, *sel. in Ps.* 18; Didymus the Blind, *fr. Ps.* 18; John of Damascus, *f.o.* 2.6). Augustine, among others, highlighted how the Psalms, as Christocentric prophecy, thoroughly implicated creation in the larger mystery of Christ, the Church, and the new creation. Just as, in Book XIII of his *Confessions*, he interprets the Hexaemeral narrative figuratively as the creation of the Church, where 'heaven and earth' are its spiritual and carnal members, the ingathered 'waters' its purifying community, its 'luminaries' the good works of the saints, etc. (*Conf.* 3.12.13–13.34.49), Augustine applies the rich imagery of Creator and creation in Psalm 103(104) to the Church. 'He has founded the earth on its firmness' (Ps 103.5) also proclaimed in spirit that the Creator grounded his earthly Church in Jesus Christ, 'through whom all things were made' (John 1.3). Here once more the 'waters' (Ps 103.6–7) are the Church, since the Church is the true 'Deep' that envelops the earth and must outlast the 'flood' of persecutions covering the earth (*Psal.* 103, *serm.* 1.17; *Psal.* 103, *serm.* 2.9–3.1). Later in the Psalm, the allegory shifts, as the 'great sea' (Ps 103[104].25–6) instead becomes the cosmos, whose storms and stresses the churches, like ships, must navigate with Christ as their pilot (Augustine, *Psal.* 118, *serm.* 4.4–10; cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Ps.* 103; Cassiodorus, *Psal.* 103.25–6). For still other commentators, Psalm 103(104) hinted at the eschatological new creation. Pseudo-Athanasius, for instance, surmises that when the Psalmist extols the Creator who 'stretched out the heaven like a tent', he already had in mind that 'tent' which is the 'new heavens and new earth' (Isa 65.17; 66.22; 2 Pet 3.13; Rev 21.1) (*fr. Ps.* 103).

Deutero-Isaiah (= Isa 40–66) as well provided patristic apologists and interpreters with strong testimonies to the priority and sovereignty of the Creator-God and the implicating of all creation in the economy of salvation (see Blowers 2012:198–202). Certain texts, however, were especially vulnerable to misconstruals. Tertullian addresses, for example, Isaiah 43.18–19: 'Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing.' Against Marcionites who took this to mean that the 'alien'

God of Jesus, with his novel gospel, had totally displaced the misdeeds of the malevolent ‘creator’ of the OT, Tertullian insisted that, quite the contrary, the text affirmed precisely the freedom of the Creator-Redeemer to *renew* his creation (*Marc.* 4.1.6–10). The same prophet who proclaimed that the Creator measured the whole earth in the palm of his hand (*Isa* 40.12), interpreted to mean that he ‘contains’ all things (Hilary of Poitiers, *Trin.* 1.5–6) while his own essence is all-transcending (Gregory of Nyssa, *beat.* 7), nonetheless also declares that God ‘creates evils’ (*Isa* 45.7). Various interpreters, again countering Marcionite readings, insisted that said ‘evils’ were only the punitive or rehabilitative sufferings dealt to the wicked (cf. Irenaeus, *haer.* 4.40.1; Origen, *Cels.* 6.55; Basil of Caesarea, *hom.* 9.4–5; John Cassian, *Coll.* 6.5–6). Augustine upholds the same view against Manichaeans (*mor. eccl.* 2.7.9; *leg.* 1.23.48).

Over and beyond the importance of OT Wisdom literature as a source used to identify the Son of God as the true Wisdom of God in creating and redeeming the world (e.g. *Prov* 8.22–31; *Sir* 24.3–7; see also Young 2004), early Christian interpreters also explored its insights into the outworking of divine Wisdom and providence amid the contingencies, vicissitudes, and tragedies of the history of creation (Blowers 2012:202–12). Ecclesiastes proved especially fruitful in this regard, considered by some Christian exegetes a book of ‘physics’ in its philosophical contemplations of the nature of corporeal existence (Origen, *Cant.* Prol. 3.1, 6; Basil, *hom.* 12.1; Evagrius, *schol. Prov.* 247; Jerome, *Eccl.* 1.1; Olympiodorus, *Eccl.*, PG 93.477C). The Ecclesiast’s musings on cosmic ‘vanity’ (ματαιότης; *vanitas*) were explained principally as judgements on worldly human striving (Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Eccl.* 1; John Chrysostom, *hom. in Eph.* 12.1) or on the legacy of Adamic sin (Augustine, *ver. rel.* 21.41) rather than on any natural futility of creation itself. Connections were also made with Paul’s teaching on cosmic vanity in Romans 8.19–23, and the Apostle’s eschatological caveat that the Creator had subjected the creation to vanity *in hope* (Origen, *princ.* 1.7.5). Numerous interpreters saw Ecclesiastes as guiding the spiritually diligent away from mundane fetishes to permanent spiritual realities, but Gregory of Nyssa goes further, proposing that, prosopologically, the true ‘Ecclesiast’ speaking about vanity is Christ himself, who became incarnate to put straight the ‘crooked’ things of the world (*Eccl* 1.15) and to restore creation to its original beauty (*hom. in Eccl.* 1–2). Evagrius Ponticus agrees that the Ecclesiast is Christ, but principally in his transcendent role as the Logos who leads creatures back, through knowledge of the true principles (λόγοι) of things, from corporeal vanity to spiritual purity and unity (*schol. Eccl.* 1, 11, 15, 38, 45, 55; cf. *schol. Prov.* 2, 104, 153, 190, 195, 247, 373).

## ‘GROANING’ AND RENEWED CREATION IN PATRISTIC INTERPRETATION

---

Paul’s vivid depiction of creation ‘groaning in travail’ under the weight of its subjection to futility (Rom 8.19–23) inspired rich interpretative traditions in the early Church, particularly regarding the involvement of non-human creation in the economy of human salvation and the prospect of all creation being eschatologically transformed

(Blowers 2012:213–22; Blowers 2013). Origen speculates that the non-human creation here is actually the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars) and the angels, or ‘ministering spirits’ (Heb 1.14), who enlighten the human race, serve the cosmic liturgy of praise for the Creator, and aid human creatures, in their corrupted bodily state, toward progressive redemption of their bodies (cf. *princ.* 1.75; *Cels.* 5.12–13; 7.65; *mart.* 7; *Jo.* 1.17.98–9; *comm. in Rom.* 7.2–3). Jerome reproached this interpretation (*ep.* 124.4), but others, including Gregory of Nyssa (*Eun.* 3.2.49) in the East and Pelagius (*exp. Rom.* 8.19) in the West, sympathized with it. Before Origen, however, Irenaeus had set forth a different reading, centred on the ‘liberation from bondage’ (Rom 8.21) through the incarnate Son, whose taking flesh inaugurates the eschatological transfiguration of all of material and corporeal creation, since the ‘form’ (σχήμα) of the world will pass away (1 Cor 7.31) but not its material substance (*haer.* 5.32.1; 5.36.1–3). While not all exegetes, like Apollinaris of Laodicea (*frag. Ps.* 8.20), shared Irenaeus’ integration of Romans 8.19–23 into millennialist expectations about the ‘new heavens and new earth’ (Rev 21.1), many accepted the implication that the whole of creation would enjoy renewal and transformation, not annihilation (John Chrysostom, *hom. in Rom.* 14.4–5; Theodoret, *Rom.* 8.19–21; Cyril of Alexandria, *Rom.* 8.19). In the West, however, Ambrosiaster and Augustine insisted the ‘groaning’ of creation expressed the travail of humanity itself in its longing for bodily redemption. Animals in their ‘bondage’ also groan aloud, says Ambrosiaster, but only as implicated in humanity’s fallen and sinful state (*comm. in Rom.*, CSEL 81.1:279–83). Augustine agrees to an extent, but cannot allow that non-human creation consciously ‘groans’. The truly groaning creatures are individual sinners who have yet to come to faith but who will do so in due course (*Rom.* 53.1–6, 13–21; see also Alfeche 1984). In the end, however, Augustine adds to a fairly hardened consensus of patristic interpreters confirming the solidarity of all creation in the experience of a futility that is only provisional and has a hopeful outcome.

Early Christian interpreters certainly recognized that the NT as a whole gives significant witness to the ‘history’ and destiny of creation. Given the strong repercussions of Gnostic, Marcionite, and Manichaean caricatures of the creator-deity, with their varied attempts to drive a wedge between the workings of the creator and the true God, patristic exegetes endeavoured to accentuate the continuities between creation and redemption in a single divine *oikonomia*. One interpretative strategy, already touched on, was to set in relief the Trinitarian dimension of creation, the cooperative work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at every stage in the *oikonomia*, from the inception of creation to its consummation. A whole set of texts enunciating, with prepositional catchphrases, the regal status of the Son (Jesus Christ)—who was ‘before all things’ (Col 1.17), and ‘through’ whom (John 1.3, 10; 1 Cor 8.6; Col 1.16; Heb 1.2), ‘for’ whom (Col 1.16), and ‘in’ whom (Col 1.15, 16) all things exist or were created—helped in defending the original role of the Son, as Word and Wisdom of God, in the formation and preservation of the cosmos (see Blowers 2012:222–41). These texts too proved controversial nonetheless. Origen, for example, insisted that if God creates ‘through’ the Son (John 1.3; Heb 1.2), the Father is absolutely the primary subject of creating (*Jo.* 2.10.70–2; 2.14.102–4). Origen doubtless did not believe he was reducing the Son’s dignity as an instrumental agent of creation, but later

exponents of the Nicene faith, discouraging any hint of subordinationism, insisted on the Son's own primacy in creation by virtue of his consubstantiality (*ὁμοουσία*) with the Father (e.g. Athanasius, *decr.* 3.13; 4.17; *ep. Aeg. Lib.* 13, 15). They hardened their position all the more since Arians too, confessing the Son as 'firstborn of creation' (Col 1.15), maintained that all other creatures were made 'through' the *created* Son (Eunomius, *apol.* 15.13–16; 21.20–1).

Another crucial interpretative strategy for maintaining the unity of the revelatory economy of creation and salvation, and for vindicating the continuity between 'old' creation and 'new', was to hold up the incarnation of the Son as itself the linchpin of the whole economy. Early on Irenaeus drew from Paul's principle of the 'recapitulation' (*ἀνακεφαλαίωσις*) of all things (Eph 1.10) in Jesus Christ (*haer.* 1.10.1; 3.16.6–7; 5.20.2; 5.21.1). He asserted a fortiori that the incarnation and cross of Christ were intrinsic to God's original plan for creation, since the purpose for creating was precisely to reveal the Creator's ultimate sacrificial love for the creation (cf. *haer.* 3.22.3; 4.20.2–4). Much later, Maximus the Confessor reaffirms Irenaeus' perspective, basing his argument on 1 Peter 1.19–20, the fact that the 'lamb without spot or blemish' was the one predestined even before the foundation of the world to be revealed in the last times (*qu. Thal.* 60).

In this same vein, patristic interpreters readily built on Paul's Adam-Christology (Rom 5.12–21; 1 Cor 15.22, 45–52; 2 Cor 5.1–4, 17). The New Adam, in his incarnation, did not nullify the Old Adam, but redeemed him from sin and realized the eschatological transformation of his humanity. His work in the incarnation also confirms and fulfils his original work as co-Creator of the world. As Athanasius expresses it, the one 'through whom' all things were made (John 1.3) is the same one 'in whom' (Eph 1.10) all things are set aright (*hom. in Mt.* 11.27); and Gregory of Nyssa strongly emphasizes that 'the Creator of human nature *at first* and *afterward* is exactly the same': *at first* using the dust of the ground to form humanity and *afterward* taking dust from the Virgin and forming a man around himself, *at first* creating flesh and *afterward* assuming it for the sake of a new creation of humanity (*Eun.* 3.2.53–4). The same interpretative logic induced patristic exegetes, in turn, to look for signs of 'new creation' in every aspect of Christ's earthly work and in the attending roles of the Holy Spirit (see Blowers 2012:245–312).

As for the properly eschatological outworking of the 'new creation' inaugurated in Christ (cf. Gal 6.15; 2 Cor 5.17; 2 Pet 3.12–13; Rev 21.1, etc.), ancient Christian commentators varied on its concrete implications. Millennialists like Justin (*dial.* 80–1), Irenaeus (*haer.* 5.35.1–5.36.3), and Tertullian (*an.* 55), the latter two of whom were among the earliest Christian interpreters to take serious account of John's Apocalypse, were convinced that the new creation must include an earthly reign of Christ, a paradise regained. Others focused more on the NT's (especially Paul's) 'realized' eschatology, sometimes in the context of baptism, where the neophyte was considered already to be enjoying a new creaturehood (cf. 2 Cor 5.17) that would only be fully consummated in the age to come (cf. Basil, *ep.* 8.11; John Chrysostom, *catech.* 1.3; Theodore of Mopsuestia, *catech.* 4–5; Maximus, *qu. Thal.* 6). Augustine, commenting on 2 Corinthians 5.17, observes that, since the advent of Christ, the whole world is caught between a transformation just beginning and a 'new world' that is 'already ours in hope' since 'the earth is filled

with your creative work' (Ps 103[104].24) (*Psal.* 103, *serm.* 4.3). The overwhelming inclination of patristic exegesis, meanwhile, was to confirm that the 'new' creation, while greater than the original, was not its displacement but its elevation and transfiguration (see Daley 1991:218–19; Blowers 2012:234–41).

## CONCLUSION

---

How may we broadly characterize early Christian interpretation of the Genesis creation narratives and other relevant biblical texts regarding divine creation and the unfolding relation between Creator and creation? The pattern of pre-Nicene exegesis—especially in the face of rival Platonic, Valentinian, Sethian-Gnostic, and Marcionite views of cosmic origins—was to extrapolate a *logos*, a well-reasoned exposition of divine creation, from out of the primarily narrative, mythopoeic, doxological, and confessional discourse of creation within Genesis. The challenge, however, did not end there. That *logos* had to be reinvested in a theologically enriched Christian *mythos* that not only filled out the creation story in Trinitarian and Christocentric terms but also engrafted the Church into the denouement of the still-unfolding 'cosmic drama.' Pre- and post-Nicene interpreters alike made abundant use of OT and NT texts to dramatize 'creation' not just as the beginning of the world but as a sustained labour of the Creator, as an *oikonomia* revealing the divine providence and judgement, and the power of the Creator to do a 'new thing' (Isa 43.18–19; cf. Rev 21.5). Creation and salvation thus hung seamlessly together in a grand meta-drama extending from the primeval history to the final consummation.

Methodologically, Theophilus of Antioch set a strong precedent for later patristic exegetes generously to employ 'historical', figural, and allegorical interpretations of Genesis 1 and other relevant texts in order to carry forward this cultivation of the Christian *mythos* of Creator and creation. After Origen, the pursuit of multiple and interwoven senses became ever more standard, though some exegetes sought to impose cautions (e.g. Basil, *hex.* 3.9). In retrospect, Augustine's *Commentary on the Literal Meaning of Genesis* exemplifies the full fruition of a model of interpretation interweaving different senses, albeit in the name of a *theologically* 'literal' interpretation. Holding together the respective purposes of *logos* and *mythos* ultimately demanded exactly such an approach.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- Ambrose of Milan, *Hexaemeron*. Latin text: C. Schenkl (ed.), *Sancti Ambrosii Opera*, CSEL 32: 1–261 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1896).  
 Augustine, *Confessiones*. Latin text: L. Verheijen (ed.), CCSL 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981).  
 Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*. Latin text: D. Weber (ed.), CSEL 91 (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998).

- Augustine, *Enarratio in psalmos*. Latin text: E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont (eds), *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CCSL 38–40 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956).
- Basil of Caesarea, *Homiliae in hexaëmeron*. Greek text: E. Amand de Mendieta and S. Rudberg (eds), *Homilien zum Hexaëmeron*, GCS Neue Folge 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997).
- Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentarius in Genesim*. Syriac text: R. M. Tonneau (ed.), *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum commentarii*, CSCO 152–3 (Louvain: Durbecq, 1955).
- Eunomius of Cyzicus, *Apologia*. Greek text: R. Vaggione (ed.), *Eunomius: The Extant Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poemata arcana*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: C. Moreschini (ed.), *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: Poemata Arcana*, trans. D. A. Sykes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Apologia in hexaëmeron*. Greek text: H. Drobner (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 4/1 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, Books 2 and 3. Greek text: W. Jaeger (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 1–2 (Leiden: Brill, 1960).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*. Greek text: PG 44.123–256.
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio catechetica*. Greek text: E. Mühlenberg (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 3/4 (Leiden: Brill, 1996).
- Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses*. Greek and Latin text with French trans.: A. Rousseau, B. Hemmerdinger, C. Mercier, and L. Doutreleau (eds), *Contre les hérésies, Livre 1–5*, SC 100, 151, 152, 210, 211, 263, 264, 293, 294 (Paris: Cerf, 1965–82).
- Origen, *Commentarius in Canticum Canticorum*. Latin text: W. Baehrens (ed.), GCS 8 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrich, 1925).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Greek and Latin text and French trans.: H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti (eds), *Traité des principes*, SC 252, 253, 268, 269, 312 (Paris: Cerf, 1978–84).
- Origen, *Fragmenta ex commentarii in Genesim*. Greek text and French trans.: M. Harl (ed.), *Philocalie 1–20 et Lettre à Africanus*, SC 302 (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 162–468.
- Origen, *Homiliae in Genesim*. Latin text and French trans.: H. de Lubac and L. Doutreleau (eds), *Homélie sur la Genèse*, SC 7bis (Paris: Cerf, 1976).
- Philo, *De opificio mundi*. Greek text: L. Cohn (ed.), *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt* 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1962).
- Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: R. Grant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

## Scholarship

- Alfeche, M. (1984). ‘Groaning Creation in the Theology of Augustine’, *Augustiniana* 34: 5–52.
- Blowers, P. (2012). *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Blowers, P. (2013). ‘The Groaning and Longing of Creation: Variant Patterns of Patristic Interpretation of Romans 8:19–23’, in Markus Vinzent (ed.), *Studia Patristica* 63: 45–54.
- Centre d’Études des Religions du Livre (1973) (ed.). *In principio: Interprétations des premiers versets de la Genèse* (collected essays) (Paris: Études augustiniennes).
- Daley, B. (1991). *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Köckert, C. (2009). *Christliche Kosmologie und kaiserzeitliche Philosophie: Die Auslegung des Schöpfungsberichtes bei Origenes, Basilius und Gregor von Nyssa vor dem Hintergrund kaiserzeitlicher Timaeus-Interpretationen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).

- Winden, J. C. M. van (1997). 'The Early Christian Interpretation of "Heaven and Earth" in Genesis 1:1,' in J. den Boeft and D. Runia (eds), *Arche: A Collection of Patristic Studies by J. C. M. van Winden* (Leiden: Brill), 94–106.
- Young, F. (2004). 'Proverbs 8 in Interpretation: Wisdom Personified. Fourth-Century Christian Readings: Assumptions and Debates,' in David Ford and Graham Stanton (eds), *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology* (London: SCM), 102–15.

### Suggested Reading

- Balthasar, H. U. von (2003). *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press).
- Blowers, P. (2016). 'Beauty, Tragedy, and New Creation: Theology and Contemplation in Cappadocian Cosmology,' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18: 7–29.
- Bouteneff, P. (2008). *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic).
- Cox, R. (2007). *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter).
- Gunton, C. (1998). *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Lebeau, P. (1970). 'L'Interprétation origénienne de Rm. 8.19–22,' in P. Granfield and J. Jungmann (eds), *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (Münster: Aschendorff), 1:336–45.
- May, G. (2004). *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (London: T & T Clark).
- Norris, R. (1965). *God and World in Early Christian Theology: A Study in Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen* (New York: Seabury Press).
- Steenberg, M. (2008). *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* (Leiden: Brill).
- Torchia, N. J. (1999). *Creatio ex nihilo and the Theology of St Augustine* (New York: Peter Lang).

## CHAPTER 33

---

# ADAM AND EVE

---

PETER C. BOUTENEFF

GIVEN their prevalence in contemporary theological and popular discourse, it is worth noting that Adam and Eve receive less attention in early Christian biblical interpretation than other figures from the Hebrew Bible, such as Moses and the prophets. The rise of Adam and Eve in prominence and their role as first sinners and antitypes of Christ and Mary, although presaged or even inaugurated in the Pauline writings, is relatively gradual. Furthermore, when Adam—and far less frequently, Eve—are subjects of attention in Late Antique Christian writing there is a sharply delimited set of themes which they evoke, or are invoked to address. These have largely to do with aetiology (their role in the origins of sin), genealogy (their location at the initiation of the human race), and typology (their roles and identities vis-à-vis Jesus Christ and Mary, respectively).

## HEBREW BIBLE

---

Adam and Eve emerge as human characters in the second chapter of Genesis, through a process whose significance is felt differently in Hebrew and in Greek, and is virtually lost in translation into most other languages. The Hebrew *'Adam* and its cognates etymologically stem from *'adamah*, the ground, earth: *'Adam* is taken from the *'adamah* (Gen 2.7) which in turn is cursed because of *'Adam* (Gen 3.17, 4.11–12, 5.29). *'Adam* at first means 'humanity' or 'man',<sup>1</sup> but gradually, almost imperceptibly, comes to serve as the personal name of a particular man. Beginning with Genesis 1.26, the Hebrew *'Adam* is deployed indiscriminately whether referring to humanity or the man Adam.

<sup>1</sup> The name 'man' is problematic as it is understood in a gender-specific way, but has certain advantages in rendering the Hebrew *'Adam* and the Greek *ἄνθρωπος* in a concrete, personal sense that is potentially lost in the abstract term 'humanity'.

In the Septuagint Greek, the transition from *ἄνθρωπος* to *Ἀδάμ* takes place in Genesis 2.16, where God first addresses Adam. ‘Humanity’ becomes, in this narrative, a man, who is then joined by a woman who is named Eve. Origen, through his linguistic study of Scripture that produced the *Hexapla*, would have been among the few early Christian interpreters who takes note of this issue of terminology, and the naming and identity of Adam, contrasting his formation (*πλάσις*) and the creation (*ποίησις*) of humanity (*hom. in Gen.* 1.13; *hom. in Jer.* 1.10; on *ἄνθρωπος* and *Ἀδάμ* see *Cels.* 4.40). Philo is intrigued by the shift between the general and specific *Adam* (*leg.* 1.90).

After Genesis 5, references to Adam and/or Eve are few in the Hebrew Bible, where Adam plays a genealogical role in 1 Chronicles 1, and is otherwise almost non-existent, except by rare allusion. Renewed interest in Adam and Eve arises in some of the inter-testamental literature, where their identities and narrative or theological functions vary greatly in character, as does their grounding in the actual Genesis text (Levison 1988:89–110).

## NEW TESTAMENT

---

The Hebrew Scriptures indicate that the understanding of Adam and Eve as the originators of sin and death, and thus at the heart of ‘the fall’, is foreign to ancient Judaism where, if anything, Cain’s sin is more grievous and cataclysmic than Adam’s (e.g. *Wis* 10.3–4). The word ‘sin’ first occurs in reference to Cain (*Gen* 4.7; see also *Jude* 1.11). It is Paul who, uniquely in the entire Bible, establishes Adam in the role of inaugurator of sin/death, though exclusively in the context of Christ as vehicle of grace/life. In verses that establish the universal effects of a particular person’s actions, Adam’s role at the origin of sin and death is set forth as antitypical to Christ’s free gift of righteousness and eternal life (*Rom* 5.12–21). This relationship is explored again in 1 Corinthians 15.21–49, regarding death and life, earth and heaven, and physical and spiritual bodies. And apart from other allusions to Adam and Eve, having to do with genealogy (*Luke* 3.38, *Jude* 1.14), or comments about male and female roles (*1 Cor* 11.8, *1 Tim* 2.13f.), it is the Pauline Adam–Christ counterposition that sets the stage for the majority of early Christian reflection on Adam and Eve.

There are patristic texts driven by the Paradise narrative as a whole, for primarily paraenetic purposes (e.g. Ambrose, *hex.*), as well as meditations that imagine Adam’s or Eve’s words of lament on their expulsion from Paradise (e.g. Ephrem, *comm. in Gen.*; cf. Wickes 2008). Yet most reflection on Adam and Eve is driven by other thematic concerns having to do with human nature and its condition, sin and salvation, and in particular with Jesus Christ. Questions concerning the historicity of Adam and Eve are not foreign to early Christian reflection, as we shall see, but they are naturally less urgent than those of our era. In any event ‘Adam’, and to a lesser extent, ‘Eve’, are more than the names of two characters in a biblical narrative; albeit within a delimited set of concerns, their symbolic valence in early Christian interpretation is vast.

## ADAM AS HUMANITY

---

Eve has her name as ‘the mother of all living’ (Gen 3.20). Yet it is Adam who, as first created and therefore the top of the human genealogy, is commonly cited within early Christian reflection as the point of origin of all of humanity. This is one of the factors that allow ‘Adam’ to serve as functional representative, or even equivalent, of ‘humanity’ or ‘human nature’. Of the two NT genealogies of Christ, the Matthean goes back only as far as Abraham (Matt 1.1–2). The Lucan one goes all the way back to Adam (Luke 3.38). Frances Young (1997:286–8) observes that, while Matthew sought to identify Christ with the Hebrew patriarchs, Luke sought to identify Christ with humanity, and Adam—as genealogical point of origin—effectively *is* humanity (see likewise the genealogies at Gen 5.1–32 and 1 Chr 1.1–6.30). Whatever proceeds from a human, from Adam onwards, is a human of the same nature. This means that ‘Adam’, functionally, means ‘human nature’ (Justin Martyr, *dial.* 100; Augustine, *ciu.* 14.1).

Adam’s position at the beginning of the human genealogical line, specifically in view of his act of rebellion (we will discuss Eve’s role below), means that early biblical interpreters frequently identify him with the existential or ‘fallen’ humanity, the old dispensation. This is the case whether we hear specifically of ‘the Old Adam’ (in contrast with the New, as in Rom 5.12–21; see also Gen 5.1–3, where the divine likeness is contrasted to Adam’s likeness), or whether we are being shown that Adam and Eve’s high calling and their compromised actions are effectively our own. Gregory of Nazianzus regularly uses the first-person plural when referring to the citizens of the primordial paradise: ‘We were entrusted with Paradise . . . We received a commandment . . . We were deceived because we were the objects of envy. We were cast out because we transgressed’ (*or.* 45.28).

## ADAM, EVE, AND SIN

---

Adam, as we have just seen, is a symbol of fallen humanity, the Old Man that is put off and recreated in the New Man Jesus Christ. In early Christian biblical interpretation he fulfils these functions by virtue of being first formed, and—together with Eve—first sinning. As to the precise effects of that sin on the rest of humanity, the data are varied. Many of the early fathers draw on precedents from some of the Second Temple literature which concluded that the fault for sin lies with those who propagate it over the ages (2 Esd 7.118; 2 Bar 48.42), a sensibility reinforced by the identification of Adam with oneself—such as where Gregory of Nazianzus repeatedly uses the first person when describing the Paradise narrative (‘I came to know my nakedness and clothed myself in a garment of skin [Gen 3.21], and fell from the garden’ [*or.* 19.14]). Elsewhere, the legacy of the Adamic transgression is identified as early (untimely) death (2 Bar 54.15; 56.6).

Paul's conclusion that *death* spread to all men, because all men sinned (Rom 5.12), follows directly on that thinking.

Justin Martyr explains the propagation of sin as our personal and collective responsibility: 'each is to be judged and convicted, as were Adam and Eve' (*dial.* 124). For Melito of Sardis, Adam (whom he calls simply ὁ ἄνθρωπος) leaves a disastrous legacy, a tarnishing of the divine image, whose main salient feature is that death now divides body and soul (*pass.* 55–6). Irenaeus of Lyons has one of the most searching and nuanced understandings of the nature and legacy of the fall (or 'apostasy', as he calls it). On the one hand, the sin in Paradise was a tragic event. On the other hand, it is allowed by God, for several reasons: the knowledge of good and evil is intended as part of the divine image (*haer.* 4.38.4), and it is part of the 'weaker state' within which the human person is deliberately created, so that we may be instructed by it and participate in our being brought to perfection (*haer.* 4.37.7).

Irenaeus (*haer.* 4.38.1; *dem.* 12; 14) takes his place among a considerable number of early Christian writers (Clement [*prot.* 11.111.1; *str.* 3.17.103]; Theophilus [*Autol.* 2.25]; Gregory of Nazianzus [*or.* 38.12]; Ephrem [*nat.* 7.2–11]) who considered Adam and Eve to be like children, not fully formed. That means that their sin, although tragic, was not considered the rebellion of the fully realized and fully cognizant human person, but the untimely seizure of things that were always intended for people. They sought contemplation (*θεωρία*, cf. Nazianzen, *or.* 38.12), and ultimately deification:

The Most High knew that Adam had wanted to become a god,  
so he sent his Son who put him on in order to grant him his desire.

(Ephrem, *Nisib.* 69.12)

This interpretation of Adam and Eve as children, seeking good things before their time, underscored the tendency to de-emphasize any sense of universal guilt for sin *in Adam* and see it in terms of the personal responsibility of his descendants. Irenaeus is eager to exonerate Adam, seeing his transferral of blame to Eve (Gen 3.12), and the fig leaves God bestows, as signs of Adam's repentance; after all, the serpent was really to blame, and also Cain's sin was worse (*haer.* 3.23.4–5). Augustine's teachings on original sin are not fully consistent, and have sometimes been portrayed in an unequivocally negative light (Romanides 1998 *passim*). Yet Augustine did base himself on a far more exalted, perfected portraiture of 'pre-fallen Adam' than drawn by Irenaeus and the others cited above, and also drew on a mistranslation of Romans 5.12 in the Latin Vulgate; perhaps as a result, he understood the Adamic sin to have had far more devastating and pervasive consequences on the state of human beings before God. True, the bondage of infants to Adam's sin is released through Christ (*ciu.* 13.3), but the infants' sin is, as it were, voluntary by virtue of being hereditary, deriving from the first-formed man (*retract.* 1.13.5), thus constituting an original guilt that must be removed through baptism (*peccat. merit.* 2.11). By contrast, John Chrysostom (commenting on Rom 5.12) understands that death results from Adam's sin, but explicitly refutes the logic that the sin of a forebear would make the offspring into a sinner; the responsibility for sin resides exclusively with the person himself (*hom. in Rom.* 10).

## ADAM AND CHRIST

---

What modern scholars have called ‘typology’ is not merely a poetic trope for the early Christian interpreters of the Bible. It rests in the conviction that Jesus Christ is the key to understanding the Scriptures—i.e. the OT—(1 Cor 3.14), and that the primary subject of the OT is Jesus Christ. Christ is prefigured by Adam, but also by the rock smitten by Moses (1 Cor 10.1–4), and in the early fathers, by Moses’ staff and his outstretched hands, and by every kingly figure in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets (see Luke 24.44). After Paul identified Adam as ‘a type of the one to come’ (Rom 5.14), other early Christian writers commonly understood Adam in relation to Christ. Irenaeus (*haer.* 3.22.4) and Tertullian (*Marc.* 2.4) added Eve into the picture, as antitype of Mary. From there, typological relationships continued to propagate: Adam/Christ, Eve/Mary, Paradise/the Church, the Tree of Life/the Cross, etc.

Irenaeus, through the all-encompassing rubric of recapitulation, espoused one of the most thorough and original visions of the divine economy in all Christian reflection. Understanding Adam as the ‘Old Man’, and Christ as the ‘New Man’, does not imply a chronological relationship. Rather, the crucified Christ stands at the centre, and thus forms the underlying sense of the fallen–redeemed trajectory of human personhood. Christ’s becoming human is the recapitulation of Adam’s formation, at every stage, from infancy to adulthood (see Bouteneff 2008:82; Behr 2001:128). Jesus Christ—not as ‘pre-existing Logos’ but as the crucified and risen Lord—is first, and Adam is made in reference to him: ‘it was necessary that one who would be saved [Adam] should also come into existence in order that the One who saves should not exist in vain’ (*haer.* 3.22.3). A longer citation:

This is why the Lord said that the first should indeed be last, and the last first (Matt 19.30)... For the Lord, having been born ‘the first-born of the dead’ (Rev 1.5) and receiving into his bosom the ancient fathers, has regenerated them into the life of God, having been made the beginning of the living, as Adam became the beginning of those who die. This is also why Luke, commencing the genealogy with the Lord, carried it back to Adam, indicating that it was he who regenerated them into the Gospel of life, and not they him. (*haer.* 3.22.4)

The incarnation is the recapitulation of Adam’s nature by the Son of God, or put another way, Adam is made in the image of the incarnate Christ (*haer.* 3.18.1; 4.33.4; *dem.* 32).

For his part, Gregory of Nazianzus sets out his comprehensive vision—not as original or systematic as Irenaeus, but similarly holistic—across several orations, but most thoroughly in his oration *On Theophany* (*or.* 38). There he describes humanity’s re-formation (*ἀνάπλασις*) by first setting out its formation (*πλάσις*). As do the first three chapters of Genesis, Gregory begins by describing *ἄνθρωπος* in general—a mixture of the sensible and the intelligible, the material and the immaterial, a creature destined for divinization—moving on to a particular (though unnamed) Adam. But this particular

man is himself universalized, as we have seen, because his predicament and his actions are in effect everyone's: they are *ours*. All this takes place in Paradise, a *topos* whose interpretation Gregory is careful not to over-define. His description of the place and its flora and fauna is full of provisional qualifiers: 'whatever that was,' 'perhaps,' 'in my interpretation.' The man and woman in the garden partake of the fruit—Gregory proposes that it may be contemplation (*θεωρία*)—ahead of its proper time.

The story told by Gregory, which began with the creation of humanity (the mixture of the spiritual and material), proceeds through the transgression onwards towards Christ (the new mixture, of divine and human). From that point on, the characters in the garden are narrated in the first person: 'I had a share in the image and I did not preserve it; he took on a share in my flesh, so that he might both save the image and make the flesh immortal' (*or.* 38.13). In another context—against a similar backdrop of describing human nature, Paradise, and Christ in turn—Gregory spells out all the elements of Paradise which foreshadow their respective fulfilment in the redemptive work of Christ. He contrasts the tree of the cross with the tree in the garden, the hands of Christ—stretched out in generosity and fixed by nails—with the hand of Adam, stretched out in self-indulgence, unrestrained. Christ is lifted up to atone for the fall, is given gall instead of Adam's fruit, he dies for Adam's death, and is raised so that Adam may be raised (*or.* 2.25). That Adam, here as elsewhere, is 'us'. Gregory summarizes in another homily:

All of us . . . partake of the same Adam, and were led astray by the serpent and slain by sin, and are saved by the heavenly Adam [1 Cor 15.47] and brought back by the tree of [the cross] to the tree of life from which we had fallen. (*or.* 33.9)

Here again, we are shown that what is commonly and perhaps simplistically called the 'Adam–Christ typology' comes from a deeply rooted conviction among the early Christian interpreters of Scripture: that nothing in Scripture is haphazard, that it all finds its source and aim in Jesus Christ, and that it pertains universally to the human race, as symbolized by its progenitor, Adam.

## EVE AND HER SEX

---

The first-formed couple, Adam and Eve, fulfil their roles as first parents of the human race, and first sinners, *together*. Yet as we have seen, the early Christian writers frequently let Adam alone speak for both these roles, partly owing to his direct antitype relationship with Christ, and partly perhaps because these writers were less interested in women. When Eve is singled out for mention it is primarily for two reasons that are in potential opposition to each other. One is to highlight *her* as the problem. In the scriptural account, the first to blame Eve for the sin in Paradise was of course Adam (Gen 3.12). Later on, Sirach set the stage for a disparaging portrayal of womanhood in general (Sir 42.13) and Eve—unnamed—in particular. She is the 'beginning of sin' and 'because of her we all die' (Sir 25.24). The author of the Pastoral Epistles follows the logic

that Adam was deceived by Eve, which is why women should not teach in the Church (1 Tim 2.13f.). Ephrem, who generally pairs Adam and Eve as equivalents in his recounting of the Paradise narrative, also blames Eve for seeking to act beyond her station, lording it over the one who preceded her in creation and who therefore was to command her (*comm. in Gen.* 2.20.3). His approach—both in treating Adam and Eve as an equal (and equally culpable) pair, and in periodically lamenting the sin of Eve and her seduction of Adam—is similar to Augustine’s (*ciu.* 14.11), and Ambrose’s (*hex.* 5.7.18).

Perhaps aware of other trends to the contrary, Gregory of Nazianzus is emphatic that Eve (and with her, the rest of womankind) is not the root of sin or evil. Immediately after a passage that decries the sexist character of the legal system of his day, he goes on to chide his male listeners for their own moral double standards, wherein chastity is expected of women and not men. His recourse is to Eve and Adam: both sinned equally, and Christ saves both women and men equally (*or.* 37.7).

But the other context of Eve’s mention in early Christian writing is to indicate her complete identity with Adam, in essence and nature. Rather than seeing her derivation from Adam as a sign of female subordination, Justin Martyr, for example, used it to explain how Christ could be derived from a Virgin (*dial.* 84). Others show how the ‘bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’ (Gen 2.23) is the functional equivalent of the creedal ‘light from light, true God from true God’: they testify to common nature or substance. Gregory of Nazianzus uses Adam to explain Trinitarian consubstantiality. Adam has ‘generated’ both Eve and Seth, though in different ways, one as ‘a portion (*τμήμα*)’ of him, the other as his offspring. Yet both share his nature. Likewise, the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit from the Father yield an identity of natures through different modes of generation (*or.* 31.11).

## ADAM AND EVE AS HISTORIC PERSONS

---

Modern questions about whether Adam and Eve existed historically, influenced by developments in science and exegetical methods and philosophies, are commonly said to be foreign to the ancients. Yet several of the early Christian writers either addressed these questions or at least showed themselves to be aware of them. Justin Martyr (*apol.* 1.44; 1.59f.) and Theophilus of Antioch (*Autol.* 2) were committed to showing how the Genesis creation narratives, as historic truth, pre-date (and therefore are more legitimate than) pagan accounts. Eusebius, for his part—and notably as a historian—was keenly interested in chronicling humanity from its origins in Eden, with strict attention to dating, using the ages and reigns narrated in Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius’ *Chronicle*, lost in its original form, was a popular text in Late Antiquity and was partly translated by Jerome. By the fifth century, Byzantine calendars—based in part on Eusebius’ calculations—were in place, dating the creation of the world 5,509 years before Christ. Note, however, that the date of the world’s origins varies depending on whether one is calculating on the basis of the Hebrew text or the LXX (Bouteneff 2008:172).

Augustine is aware of the importance of the allegorical interpretation of Genesis and its *dramatis personae*—and he emphasized this especially in his anti-Manichaean writing on the subject—but not at the cost of a literal understanding (*ciu.* 13.21, 14.11). He also realizes that there are discrepancies in the scriptural accounts (which themselves vary between the Hebrew text and the LXX), such that, for instance, if all the ages of Adam and his legacy are totted up then Methuselah would have lived after the flood (*ciu.* 15.11). He thus acknowledges that there has to be some fluidity in interpreting the ages (and sizes) of the first humans. Yet Adam and Eve are real human beings. He maintained this balance of spiritual and literal reading—neither of which threatened the other—through his later writings.

That balance may not be dissimilar from what we find in Origen, for whom the question of historicity—whether of biblical or Greek-classical events and persons—was a living one. He was not a ‘biblical literalist’; he saw Scripture as an interweaving of things that happened, may have happened, and could not have happened as written, all of this by God’s design in order to lead the reader towards deeper meanings (*princ.* 4.2.1–9). On the one hand, he casts doubt (to the point of ridicule) on the purely literal understanding of Adam and Eve in a garden planted by God ‘like some farmer’, with physical trees and fruits which, if masticated, produced life and knowledge respectively. ‘Surely, I think no one doubts that these statements are made by Scripture in the form of a figure by which they point toward certain mysteries’ (*princ.* 4.3.1). In the Greek text we read: ‘I do not think anyone will doubt that these are figurative expressions which indicate certain mysteries through a semblance of history and not through actual events.’ That passage does not mention Adam or Eve. In most cases, where Origen does refer to them, their existence could equally be historical or spiritual, or a combination thereof. He often reminds his readers that ‘Adam’ means ‘humanity’ (*ἄνθρωπος*) (*Cels.* 4.40; 7.50). And yet, there are contexts in which he seems to rely on a historic Adam and Eve, and these have primarily to do with their genealogical function (*princ.* 4.3.7).

Gregory of Nazianzus and Basil of Caesarea, who transcribed these very passages as part of their *Philocalia* of Origen, did not insist on Adam and Eve’s hypostatic historicity, nor did they explicitly deny it; Origen was already coming under condemnation by their day, specifically for the over-allegorization of the Genesis creation accounts in his (fragmentarily extant) *Commentary on Genesis* (Dechow 1987:116f.; Bouteneff 2010:142f). We saw above how Gregory de-emphasized the personal identity of Adam in favour of a universalized one that placed all of humanity in the garden of Paradise, ‘whatever that Paradise was’ (*or.* 38.12).

The Antiochenes Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia employed typology and certain kinds of allegory, but never lost sight of the veracity and historicity of the OT on its own terms. Typology and metaphor for them required the concrete existence of both ‘ends’ of the relationship, otherwise it lost its coherence. The serpent cannot represent Satan if it is not a real serpent; likewise for the tree of life and the cross, Adam and Christ. Frances Young qualifies this point usefully: ‘It is not the “historical event” as such which makes typology what it is; it is the sense of recapitulation, the “impress” of one narrative or symbol on another, “fulfilling” it and so giving it meaning’ (Young 1997:152).

The belief in a historical Adam and Eve was generally left unquestioned in early Christian biblical interpretation. We find little doubt among these writers that what the Bible reports in these cases is simply true, and not many of them were interested in dissecting the different levels of truth involved. Yet some, like Origen and Augustine, were attuned to those deeper questions, and others, such as Nazianzen, drew on his erstwhile discipleship of Origen to think openly about questions of historicity, prioritizing the paraenetic and soteriological significance of Adam and Eve's identity and story. The common conviction in Adam and Eve's historical existence was supported by (a) the innate sense of Scripture as history, sometimes coupled with a particular interest in history as such, (b) the identity of Adam (and sometimes Eve) with human nature by virtue of being its genealogical starting point, and (c) in some understandings of the Adam–Christ typology (and the parallel types within Paradise), both sides of the typological equation required substantive, concrete existence for the relationship to have integrity and meaning.

## CONCLUSION

---

Early Christian authors reckoned that the human genealogy needed a clear starting point. The Scriptures identified Adam and Eve as that beginning. And since filiation entails identity in nature, Adam, usually named in this context without Eve, served as the single named representative for all humanity, all human nature. Moreover, since Paul identified him as the antitype of Christ—the single point of origin of the sin which Christ's righteousness overturns—Adam also became the stand-in for the proto-sinner, a role he did not play in Jewish exegesis. The Adam–Christ typology came to be expanded to include the other figures and trees in the garden. Adam's role as proto-sinner, however, did not by and large mean for early Christians, especially in the East, that the Adamic sin imposed guilt upon his legacy. Rather, insofar as Adam's descendants have repeated his sin, they have found themselves in the same predicament of a mortal modality of being, with the need for salvation. Many of the early writers thus universalized the Paradise narrative, even using the first-person plural to describe its events: we were in the garden, we sinned, we were expelled. And we were redeemed by Christ.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei*. Latin text: B. Dombart and A. Kalb (eds), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini: De Civitate Dei Libri I–X*, CCL 47 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955).
- Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentarius in Genesim*. Syriac text: R. M. Tonneau (ed.), *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum commentarii*, CSCO 152–3 (Louvain: Durbecq, 1955).
- Ephrem the Syrian, *Carmina Nisibena*. Syriac text: E. Beck (ed.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena*, CSCO 218–19 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1961–3).

- Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes*. Greek text: PG 35; PG 36.624–64. Greek text and French trans.: P. Gallay and C. Moreschini (eds), *Grégoire de Nazianze: Discours 27–31, Discours 32–37, Discours 38–41*, SC 250, 318, 358 (Paris: Cerf, 1985, 1990).
- Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses*. Greek and Latin text with French trans.: A. Rousseau, B. Hemmerdinger, C. Mercier, and L. Doutreleau (eds), *Contre les hérésies, Livre I–V*, SC 100, 151–2, 210–11, 263–264, 293–4 (Paris: Cerf, 1965–82).
- Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*. Greek text: E. J. Goodspeed (ed.), *Die ältesten Apologeten: Texte mit kurzen Einleitungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914; 1984).
- Origen, *Contra Celsum*. Greek text with French trans.: M. Borret (ed.), *Contre Celse*, SC 132, 136, 147, 150, 227 (Paris: Cerf, 1967–76).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Greek and Latin text with French trans.: H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti (eds), *Traité de principes*, SC 252, 253, 268, 269, 312 (Paris: Cerf, 1978–84).

### Scholarship

- Behr, J. (2001). *The Way to Nicea. The Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press).
- Bouteneff, P. (2008). *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic).
- Bouteneff, P. (2010). 'Whatever That Was! Paradise According to Gregory of Nazianzus', *SP* 47: 141–6.
- Dechow, J. F. (1987). 'The Heresy Charges Against Origen', in L. Lies (ed.), *Origeniana Quarta* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia), 112–22.
- Levison, J. R. (1988). *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch*. Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic).
- Romanides, J. (1998). *The Ancestral Sin*, trans. George S. Gabriel (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr).
- Wickes, J. (2008). 'Ephrem's Interpretation of Genesis', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52: 45–65.
- Young, F. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Anderson, G. A. (2001). *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox).
- Bammel, C. P. (1989). 'Adam in Origen', in R. Williams, *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 62–93.

## CHAPTER 34

---

# COVENANTS

---

EVERETT FERGUSON

## DEFINITIONS AND BIBLICAL USAGE

---

COVENANT in biblical usage may be defined as a relationship based on promises or sworn oaths. The Hebrew word *berith* was used most often of God's covenants with human beings, the background of which seems to be the treaties of the ancient Near East, initiated by a superior and accepted by the weaker partner. Some of God's covenants constituted unconditional promises (Gen 9.1–7; 12.1–3). His covenant with the nation of Israel was based on his deliverance of the people from Egypt and included stipulations laid on them (Exod 19.1–8; 20.3–17; Deut 7.7–9).

The Greek translation employed the word *diathēkē*, 'disposition', in order to bring out that God laid down the conditions of the covenant, rather than the word *synthēkē*, which referred to an agreement between equals. *Diathēkē* had as one of its important usages in Hellenistic Greek a 'last will and testament' (Gal 3.15; Heb 9.17).

The Apostle Paul and the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews laid the basis for later Christian thought about the covenant by elaborating on the promise of a 'new covenant' in Jeremiah 31.31–4 (also Matt 26.28; Luke 22.20). They argued that circumcision and other requirements of the Mosaic law did not apply to Gentile converts to Jesus, because the covenant mediated by Moses was for Jews only and there was a new covenant in Christ (Rom 7.1–7; 2 Cor 3.1–16; Gal 3.23–5; Eph 2.11–17; Heb 7–10).

## COVENANT IN THE EPISTLE OF BARNABAS

---

The first Christian author outside the canon for whom covenant was an important category was the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*. The author states his concerns in a passage that reflects a discussion between (presumably) Jewish Christians and either Gentile Christians or non-Christian Jews (*Barn.* 4.6–8). He affirmed that when Moses

threw down the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments and broke them because of the people's idolatry (Deut 9.9–17), God's covenant with the Jews was broken so that the covenant of Jesus might be sealed in the heart. Returning to this episode later, the author apparently included as part of the biblical text, 'And the tablets of the covenant of the Lord were broken' (*Barn.* 14.3).

In insisting that the things characteristic of Judaism were not to be kept literally but had a spiritual counterpart in Christianity, the author raised the question: 'Let us see if this people [believers in Christ] or the first people [Israel] receive the inheritance, and if the covenant is ours or theirs' (13.1). The association of inheritance with covenant reflects the Hellenistic meaning of 'testament'. *Barnabas* made the contrast between the servant Moses receiving the covenant and Christians receiving the covenant through the Lord Jesus, who establishes it by his word (14.4–5). The writer quotes Isaiah 42.6–7 as addressed to Christ, so Christ was both the giver of the covenant and the covenant itself.

The question, 'Whose is the covenant?' was really the question, 'Who are God's people?', reflecting the OT idea of a relationship. The author concludes the discussion of the eschatological promises: 'If then this [the promise] does not happen at present, he has told us the time when it will: when we ourselves are perfected to be the heirs of the covenant of the Lord' (6.19).

The consequence of *Barnabas*' position was that the OT was wholly a Christian book and was to be interpreted in terms of Christian institutions and practices. The covenant of Jesus and the covenant of Moses are essentially identical in their meaning. Thus *Barnabas* did not speak of a 'new covenant' but of a 'new people' (5.7). For *Barnabas* the covenant has not changed but its recipients have become different. The author's understanding of covenant accounts for his full appropriation of the Jewish scriptural heritage yet his full rejection of Jewish religious practices and institutions. As far as we know, *Barnabas*' approach to the covenant gained no following.

## COVENANT IN JUSTIN MARTYR

---

The Greek apologists of the second century, ostensibly addressing pagans, made little use of the covenant, and this is true for Justin Martyr in his two apologies. The situation is different, however, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, where he engages in polemic with a Jew. Here covenant is a central concern. Trypho reproached Christians for not observing circumcision and other requirements of the law: 'But you [plural], rashly despising this covenant [circumcision], do not care for the consequent duties' (*dial.* 10.4). Justin's reply appealed to OT prophecies of a new covenant as pointing to the cessation of the law, passages in the prophets indicating that God did not really desire observance of the ritual law, and the patriarchs who were justified without keeping the law given later. He declared, 'The law given on Horeb is already old and is yours [Jews'] alone', and he appealed to Isaiah 42.6; 51.4–5; 55.3–5; and Jeremiah 31.31–32.17 for a new and eternal

covenant (*dial.* 11.2; cf. 67.9), which involved a new law. Note his combining ‘new law and new covenant’ (*dial.* 34.1; 24.1).

Justin shared with *Barnabas* an emphasis on the spiritual counterparts of the literal observances of the law (*dial.* 14–22), the claim that the Scriptures were ‘not yours but ours’ (*dial.* 29.2), and the concern for the covenant as regarding ‘people’ and ‘relationships’. He was unlike *Barnabas* in recognizing that the literal observance of the law was valid for a time and expressly speaking of an ‘old’ law and covenant and a ‘new’ and eternal law and covenant. He explained that the temporary laws of the Mosaic covenant were given because of the transgressions and hardness of heart of the Jews (*dial.* 18.2; 27.2) in order to keep them from idolatry (*dial.* 67.8) and to keep God ever before them (*dial.* 46.5). Justin approximates the classification of the laws as ceremonial, moral, prophetic, and judicial (*dial.* 44.2). The old covenant was limited to the Jews and was temporary: its religious practices ceased in Christ (*dial.* 43.1). Whereas Trypho associated the covenant with its sign, circumcision, Justin identified the new covenant with ‘Christ himself’ (*dial.* 51.3; 122.6), a ‘new holy covenant’ (*dial.* 12.2), a covenant that is ‘eternal and suited to every race’ (*dial.* 67.10; 118.3; 122.5–6).

The identification of the covenant with Christ showed the association of covenant with God’s promises, and this covenant was for the ‘true spiritual Israel’ (*dial.* 11.5). Justin implicitly has a fourfold periodization of history (Luneau 1964:34, 45ff., 95ff.): before the law and Mosaic covenant, under the law of Moses, under Christ’s eternal covenant, and eschatological glory at Christ’s second coming (including a millennial reign on earth).

## THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH COVENANT IN GROUPS OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM OF THE CHURCH

---

Marcion took a position opposite to that of *Barnabas*, accepting with the Jews a literal reading of their Scripture and denying its relevance for the Church. Tertullian described Marcion’s *Antitheses* as ‘making such a division between the law and the Gospel as thereby to make two separate gods, opposite to each other, one belonging to one instrument (or, as it is more usual to say, testament), one to the other’ (*Marc.* 4.1; trans. Evans 1972; cf. *praescr.* 30). Tertullian adds that the *Antitheses* had ‘the one purpose of setting up opposition between the OT and the New’ (*Marc.* 4.6; trans. Evans 1972). The terminology of *testamentum* (the Latin equivalent of ‘covenant’) for the two parts of Scripture may be Tertullian’s, but it may reflect Marcion’s own usage, anticipating the development of a two-part Bible.

Ptolemy, a Valentinian, did a piece of source criticism on the Pentateuch. Part of the Pentateuch comes from the elders, part from Moses, and part from God himself. The part from God was further subdivided into the pure law of God (the Decalogue), which Christ came to perfect, laws concerning retribution, which Christ took away, and laws

regarding ceremonies (sacrifice, circumcision, sabbath, fasting), which Christ transformed into spiritual realities (*Letter to Flora* in Epiphanius, *haer.* 33.3–7). Ptolemy presented this view as a middle ground between those who said the law came from the Perfect Father (Jews?) and those who said it came from the devil (a slander against Marcionites?).

Certain Jewish Christians responsible for some of the sources of the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* and *Recognitions* also distinguished between true parts of Scripture and ‘false pericopes’ that had been introduced into it (*hom. Clem.* 2.38 and 39). These invalid parts had an inferior view of God and attributed sins to the patriarchs. A major thrust was the rejection of the whole sacrificial *cultus*, replaced by baptism for the remission of sins. Moses and Christ really taught the same doctrine (*hom. Clem.* 8.6). Hebrews are not condemned if they do the things commanded by Moses and do not hate Jesus, and Gentiles are not condemned if they do not know Moses but do the things spoken by Jesus (*hom. Clem.* 8.7). There seems to be a view anticipating some modern thought that there is a covenant for Jews through Moses and a covenant for Gentiles through Jesus, both covenants parallel to each other but essentially the same in content (Schoeps 1969:67–8, 127).

From within orthodox circles distinctions were made in regard to the contents of the law. The Syriac *Didascalia* affirmed that the ‘Ten Words [Commandments] and Judgments’ were permanent, but the *deuterosis* (the ‘Second Legislation’) given after the episode of the golden calf—including distinctions of meats, sacrifices, circumcisions, washings—was temporary and abolished by Christ (*didas.* 2, 26). There was an inconsistency in application, for the sabbath command of the Ten Commandments was treated as part of the *deuterosis*.

## COVENANT IN IRENAEUS

---

Irenaeus’ home church of Lyons characterized him as ‘zealous for the covenant of Christ’ (Eusebius, *h.e.* 5.4.2), and he may indeed be described as a covenant theologian (Benoit 1960:74–102). The covenant scheme of the interpretation of sacred history based on Paul and Hebrews and developed by Justin for anti-Jewish purposes was elaborated by Irenaeus in his anti-Gnostic polemic. He emphasized the continuity of the biblical covenants as coming from one and the same God.

Irenaeus included an understanding of the covenants as part of the foundation of the Christian faith. Learned teachers of the past ‘reveal why several covenants came to humanity and teach what is the character of each of the covenants’ (*haer.* 1.10.3). Irenaeus laid out ‘four general covenants given to humanity’ (*haer.* 3.11.8). There is a textual problem about what comes next. The later Greek quotations (the original Greek is lost) of the passage say, ‘One [covenant] was from the flood of Noah with the rainbow; the second was from Abraham with the sign of circumcision; the third was the giving of the law by Moses; the fourth was the covenant of the gospel through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ The early Latin version reads, ‘One was before the flood, under Adam; the second, then, after

the flood, under Noah; the third, the law, under Moses; and the fourth, then, that which renews humanity and sums up all things in itself by means of the gospel.' In favour of the Greek reading is the fact that the Bible uses the word covenant in connection with the four named; in favour of the Latin is Irenaeus' overall view of salvation history as proceeding from Adam.

More frequently Irenaeus wrote of two covenants, that of Moses and of Christ. He interpreted Matthew 13.52 accordingly: 'Now those things new and old which are brought forth from his treasure certainly mean two covenants. The old would be that previous giving of the law, and the new points out that manner of life according to the gospel' (*haer.* 4.9.1). He continued by affirming that one makes progress 'to the attainment of salvation through the covenants', yet 'there is one salvation and one God' (*haer.* 4.9.3). Irenaeus' characteristic emphases were two successive covenants, one for Jews and the other for all; the old law replaced by the gospel of liberty; the different covenants suited to the state of human development and contributing to human maturity; the whole process presided over by one God.

The two covenants were foreshadowed in Abraham, who received the covenant of circumcision in anticipation of 'the law of works', but who had previously been justified by faith, in anticipation of the 'uncircumcision' living faithfully after the coming of the Lord (*haer.* 4.25.1). Irenaeus saw the contrast between the old and the new as that between bondage (law) and liberty (the gospel). 'The new covenant of liberty' was a favourite description (*haer.* 3.12.14; 4.16.5; 4.33.14; 4.34.3). One passage states that the law ended with John the Baptist, when the new covenant was manifested (*haer.* 4.4.2), but elsewhere the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2 was the 'opening of the new covenant' (*haer.* 3.17.2; cf. *dem.* 8; 91).

In the *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* Irenaeus traced the history of salvation—mentioning the covenants with Noah (§22), Abraham (§24), David (§64), and the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah (§90)—stressing the termination of the Mosaic covenant when the promises of the earlier covenants were inherited by the calling of the Gentiles in the new covenant (§91; cf. 93–6 and 87; 89). Nevertheless, 'both the Mosaic law and the grace of the new covenant were adapted to the times and given for the benefit of the human race by one and the same God' (*haer.* 3.12.11). Whereas Justin had emphasized the punitive aspect of the stipulations in the covenant with Jews, Irenaeus emphasized the immaturity of humanity and so the pedagogical aspect of the OT (*haer.* 4.14.3; 4.16.1, 5; 4.26.1).

Against the Gnostic separation of Jesus from the Creator and Marcion's two gods, Irenaeus argued that although there were two covenants with particular laws for two peoples, there was only one God and pointed to the continuities between the two covenants, containing the same fundamental laws of loving God and one's neighbour (*haer.* 4.12.3). He claimed that the two covenants coming from the one and same God was traditional teaching: 'All the apostles taught that there were two covenants for the two peoples but one and the same God who ordered both for the good of those to whom the covenants were given' (*haer.* 4.32.2). The purposes of the old covenant were these: 'It subdues those to whom it was given to the service of God for their good... exhibited

a type of heavenly things... prefigured the things which are now in the church... and contained a prophecy of future things' (*haer.* 4.32.2). Irenaeus integrated the various covenants as progressive and ordered phases in a sweeping, organic history of salvation.

## COVENANT IN CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

---

The term 'covenant' occurs in Clement with great frequency and often apart from a polemical context. He associated covenants with five figures: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ (*ecl.* 51–2). He posited a periodization of history as before the law, under the law, and under Christ (*str.* 1.9.44). Like Irenaeus, most often Clement spoke of two covenants, and the two covenants had the corollary of two peoples. 'Formerly the older people had an old covenant, and the law disciplined the people with fear... but to the fresh and new people has also been given a new covenant' (*paed.* 1.7.59). Since the same Logos was the instructor in both, one can find many of the teachings of the 'new covenant written in the old letter' (*paed.* 1.7.59). Clement could describe philosophy as 'given to the Greeks as a covenant peculiar to them' (*str.* 6.8.67; trans. ANF), although elsewhere he denies there being a proper covenant with pagans (*ecl.* 43). The new covenant brought by Christ in fulfilment of Jeremiah 31.31–4 made both the Jewish law and Greek philosophy old, and provided a new spiritual form of worship (*str.* 6.5.41).

Since the covenants came from the same God (*str.* 6.5.42), they were in harmony: 'The ecclesiastical rule is the concord and harmony of law and prophets with the covenant delivered at the coming of the Lord' (*str.* 6.15.125; trans. ANF). Clement sounds like Irenaeus: 'Since these—the old and the new—are two in name and time, given by economy in accordance with the degree of development and advancement, but are one in power, they are administered through the Son by one God' (*str.* 2.6.29).

Since the Lord is himself the covenant (*str.* 1.29.182), Clement could go further than others in affirming that the different covenants were in reality one. 'The covenant of salvation, reaching down to us from the foundation of the world... is one, though conceived as different in respect of gift. For it follows that there is one gift of salvation given by one God, through one Lord, benefitting in many ways' (*str.* 6.13.106; trans. ANF; cf. 7.17.107). The true Christian 'Gnostic' 'advances in the gospel, using the law not only as a step but comprehending it as the Lord who gave the covenants delivered it to the apostles' (*str.* 4.21.130; cf. 134). This viewpoint prepared for the distinctive Alexandrian way of using the OT as a Christian book, without the peculiarities of *Barnabas'* approach.

Clement offered several statements on the purposes served by the law. The law 'trains in piety, prescribes what is to be done, and restrains each one from sins' (*str.* 1.27.171; trans. ANF; cf. 2.7.32–5). The law had educative and prophetic purposes: 'The sense of the law is to be taken in three ways—either as exhibiting a symbol, or laying down a precept for right conduct, or as uttering a prophecy' (*str.* 1.28.179; trans. ANF; cf. 6.15.126ff.).

Since law and gospel were also titles of written documents, it was only natural that the descriptions 'old testament' and 'new testament' should become titles of writings

(Kinzig 1994). And such seems to be the case in Clement of Alexandria (*str.* 1.5). ‘Covenant’ meant or referred to written documents in several statements (*str.* 5.6.38; 5.13.85; 3.6.54; 3.11.71; *q.d.s.* 3). About the same time, Melito of Sardis reported that he went to Palestine to ‘learn accurately the books of the old covenant’ (Eusebius, *h.e.* 4.26.14), and an anonymous anti-Montanist author wrote of ‘the word of the new covenant of the gospel’ (Eusebius, *h.e.* 5.16.3).

## COVENANT IN TERTULLIAN

---

Tertullian recognized that the usual translation of *diathēkē* in Latin was *testamentum* (‘testament’), but his preference was for *instrumentum* (an authorization, hence a legal document—*Marc* 4.1; 4.6; *praescr.* 30; Braun 1962:463–73). Tertullian also wrote of two ‘dispensations’ to express the covenant idea (*apol.* 21; *Marc.* 3.20; 4.1 and 6; 5.4; *virg.* 1).

The use of ‘covenant’ for anti-Judaic and anti-Gnostic purposes continued in Tertullian. In his treatise *Against the Jews* he began with the Christian interpretation of two peoples and developed the periodization of a general unwritten law from Adam to Moses, the law of Moses, which prophesied, finally, a new covenant and new law. He summarized what was superseded from the old law as including circumcision, sabbath, sacrifices, ancient ceremonies, and physical kingdom (*Iud.* 6). Tertullian frequently affirmed that the law of Moses was temporary, ending with John the Baptist (e.g. *Marc.* 4.33; *pud.* 6; *Prax.* 31; *or.* 1).

*Against Marcion* books 4–5 continued the use of covenant to refute Marcion. Jeremiah’s prophecy of a new covenant (Jer 31.31–4) ‘indicates that the original testament was temporary, since he declares it changeable, at the same time as he promises an eternal testament for the future [Isa 55.3]’ (*Marc.* 4.1; trans. Evans 1972). Marcion derives no advantage from the supposed diversity of the covenants, for the Creator himself predicted ‘a new law and a new word and a new testament’ (*Marc.* 4.9). On 2 Corinthians 3.6ff. Tertullian affirmed that ‘if...the brightness of the New Testament, which remains in glory, is greater than the glory of the OT, which was to be done away, this too is in agreement with my faith, which sets the gospel above the law’ (*Marc.* 5.11; trans. Evans 1972).

Tertullian used ‘covenant’ to refer to the documents that contained and witnessed to the covenant. ‘The documents of the gospel [*evangelicum instrumentum*] have apostles for authors’ (*Marc.* 4.2; trans. Evans 1972). He acknowledged ‘a difference in documents [*documenta*] of things spoken [in the two dispensations (*dispositiones*)]’ (*Marc.* 4.1; trans. Evans 1972, altered). Indeed Tertullian appears to use ‘Old Testament’ and ‘New Testament’ as titles for books. Marcion’s *Antitheses* had ‘the one purpose of setting up opposition between the Old Testament and the New’ (*Marc.* 4.6). ‘For the New Testament is made very concise, and is disentangled from the intricate burdens of the law’ (*Marc.* 4.1; trans. Evans 1972). *Testamentum* is a title for Scripture in Tertullian’s other writings: ‘old Scripture and New Testament’ (*Prax.* 15; cf. *pud.* 1.5; 6.5).

## COVENANT IN ORIGEN

For Origen ‘Old and New Covenants’ were established names for the two parts of the Bible. Thus he says heretics ‘hunt out passages from the Old Testament’ about the cruelty of the Creator, but ‘With the New Testament they do not deal in a similar way’ (*princ.* 3.1.16; trans. Butterworth 1936). These titles were strange to his philological sensitivity, so he qualified them, saying, ‘the divine Scriptures of the so-called Old and New Covenant’ (*princ.* 4.1.1; see the same qualification in *Jo.* 5.8 and for the OT in *or.* 22.1). Perhaps because of the common usage of *diathēkē* for ‘testament’ Origen makes the same qualification when using the word in the biblical sense of agreements and relationships: ‘We have received the so-called covenants of God on conditions, set forth in the agreements which we made with him when we first took upon ourselves to live the Christian life’ (*mart.* 12).

Origen made the traditional distinction between the Mosaic and Christian covenants. The beginning of the law was in the time of Moses, ‘while the beginning of our legislation and second covenant’ came with Jesus (*Cels.* 2.75). ‘Christ on the cross caused the fountains of the new covenant to flow’ (*hom. in Ex.* 11.2).

Characteristic of Origen, however, was to collapse the OT into the NT, not in the same way as *Barnabas* but using a similar spiritual exegesis. Paul taught the Galatians (4.21–33) to allegorize lest the Church ‘run risk in using a strange covenant’ (*hom. in Ex.* 5.1), so Christians when they read the OT do not become disciples of the Jews. Origen’s *Commentary on Romans* stresses the unity of Scripture. In book 2 he denied that historical events were the primary means of revelation. The prophets spoke by the Logos of direct spiritual reality. Moses’ breaking the tablets of stone signifies ‘that the glory and power of the law was not contained in the letters but in the Spirit’ (*comm. in Rom.* 2.14.12; trans. Scheck 2001:170). With the allegorical method, temporal distinctions disappear. ‘[N]or do I even give the name “Old Testament” to the law, if I understand it spiritually. The law becomes an “Old Testament” only for those who want to understand it in a fleshly way’ (*hom. in Num.* 9.4.1–2; trans. Scheck 2009:39). ‘When one begins to understand the law spiritually then he passes from Old Testament to New’ (*hom. in Ex.* 7.3).

## COVENANT IN JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

John Chrysostom’s comments on the NT passages containing the word ‘covenant’ stress the newness of the covenant in Christ and its superiority over the old covenant. In preaching on Matthew 26.26–28.1, ‘the blood of a New Testament’, he makes the distinction: ‘the promise, the new law’; ‘the Testament that is in the new law’; ‘as the Old Testament had sheep and bulls, so this has the Lord’s blood’ (*hom. in Mt.* 82.1).

His *Homilies on 2 Corinthians* point out that the old law was done away in Christ (7.3 on 2 Cor 3.13–14). The rewards of the old covenant had to do with this life

(*hom. in 2 Cor.* 2.10 on 2 Cor 1.6–7); in contrast, ‘The New Covenant not only gave life but supplied also the Spirit’ (7.1 on 2 Cor 3.9; trans. NPNF). The superiority of the new ‘does not disparage the old covenant’, but rather commends it, for comparisons are made of ‘things which are of the same kind’ (7.2 on 2 Cor 3.9). Thus, there is ‘superiority, not enmity or contradiction, of the New Covenant in comparison to the Old’ (7.5 on 2 Cor 3.16; trans. NPNF). The old and new covenants have the same divine source: ‘As the old covenant was given not by the Father only, but also by the Son, so the covenant of grace comes from the Father as well as the Son’ (*comm. in Gal.* 1.6; trans. NPNF).

Something is ‘new’ when it ‘is different and shows some advantage over the old’ (*hom. in Heb.* 14.6 on Heb 8.11–12; trans. NPNF). The old covenant ‘vanishes away’, and the new caused the old to cease because ‘it had become aged’ and no longer ‘useful’ (14.7 on Heb 8.11–12). This circumstance is not as though the old was ‘obnoxious to any charges, but as being insufficient’. It was not ‘evil, but only [had] some fault and deficiency’ (14.7 on Heb 8.18–19; trans. NPNF).

With Chrysostom, the main lines of the Greek Church’s view of the relation of OT and NT and the framework this provided for biblical interpretation were now well established.

## COVENANT IN AUGUSTINE

---

The voluminous writings of Augustine contain frequent mention of covenant but reflect a few basic ideas. He defines covenant as a conjunction or agreement between two parties, as in the covenant between God and his people. The ‘allotted inheritances symbolize the two Testaments’; ‘these two Testaments . . . are in mutual accord’ and do not contradict each other (*Psal.* 67.19; trans. Rotelle et al. 2001:341). Augustine notes the parallelism in the Psalms of God’s covenant and God’s law (*Psal.* 77.10). He observes that ‘Many covenants [*testamenta*] are called God’s covenants, quite apart from the two great ones, the Old and the New, as anyone may learn by reading them’ (*ciu.* 16.27; trans. Rotelle et al. 2012:218; cf. 16.31).

Augustine affirms that the promises of the Old Covenant were earthly and temporal whereas those of the New Covenant are heavenly and eternal (*ciu.* 10.25; *Psal.* 73.23; 149.1). He uses 2 Corinthians 3.3 to point out ‘the enormous difference between the old and the new covenants or testaments’ (*serm.* 155.6; trans. Rotelle et al. 1992:87). Augustine nuances the distinction with the balancing statement, ‘The commandments [of the Old and New Testaments] are the same, then; but the sacred signs [*sacramenta*] are not the same, neither are the promises’ (*Psal.* 73.2; trans. Rotelle et al. 2002:15).

Augustine used the two sons of Abraham by Hagar and Sarah, according to Galatians 4.22–4, to represent two covenants, the old and the new (*serm.* 89.6; 152.7; also *Psal.* 33.3; *Psal.* 119.7). Hence, the Old covenant is superseded by the New (*Psal.* 104.6–7). This was prophesied in Jeremiah 31.31–2, ‘The testament (or covenant) is promised there . . . promised through the prophet, delivered through the Lord of the prophets’.

The Lord's 'grace was prefigured in the Old Testament, revealed in the New' (*serm.* 25.1; trans. Rotelle et al. 1990:82).

Augustine expressed the relationship between the old and new covenants in three interrelated ways. 'This is the mystery of the Old Testament, where the New Testament was hidden' (*ciu.* 4.33; trans. Rotelle et al. 2012:141). 'The New Testament was revealing what lay hidden in the Old'—namely that one true God is to be worshipped not for earthly and temporal goods but for the sake of eternal life and everlasting gifts (*ciu.* 5.18; trans. Rotelle et al. 2012:171). And finally, the Mediator and his Apostles revealed 'the grace of the New Testament [and] disclosed more openly what had, in earlier times, been signified more obscurely' (*ciu.* 10.32; trans. Rotelle et al. 2012:346). Put most memorably, 'In the Old Testament there is a veiling of the New, and in the New Testament there is a revealing of the Old' (*catech.* 4.8; trans. NPNF).

Christ is central to the New Covenant. 'Because of Christ the covenant is trustworthy; in him is the covenant established; he is the mediator of the covenant; he is the one who puts his seal to it, who guarantees it and witnesses it. He is the inheritance that God's testament pledges to us, and he is our co-heir' (*Psal.* 88.28, trans. Rotelle et al. 2002:287).

## CONCLUSION

---

Various viewpoints on the OT were expressed in the early Christian centuries: it was a Christian book but not to be kept literally; it belonged to the Jews alone and not to Christians; parts of it (variously determined) were still valid for Christians but not all of it. The position on the covenant articulated by the majority in the Church, but with different nuances in individual authors, prevailed in subsequent centuries. According to this approach, God's covenant with Israel mediated by Moses was intended for Jews and was kept by them until the coming of Christ, but was not applicable to non-Jews (unless they became proselytes). The OT was part of the Christian Bible and offered spiritual lessons for Christians. Its institutions, however, were superseded by apostolic ordinances. The 'New Covenant' mediated by Christ, in contrast to the 'old covenant', was for all peoples and everlasting.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Barnabae Epistula*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 380–441.
- Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*. Latin text: I. B. Bauer and G. Madec (eds), *La Première Catéchèse* (Cahors: Études Augustiniennes, 1991). Eng. trans.: S. D. F. Salmond (trans.), *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed*, in *St Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, NPNF 3 (repr.: Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

- Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei*. Latin text: B. Dombart and A. Kalb (eds), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini De ciuitate Dei*, CCL 47–8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955). Eng. trans.: J. E. Rotelle et al. (eds), *The Works of Saint Augustine: An English Translation for the 21st Century*, 1: 6–7 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1990–).
- Augustine, *Enarratio in psalmos*. Latin text: E. Dekkekras and J. Fraipont (eds), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CCSL 38–40 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954–6). Eng. trans.: J. E. Rotelle et al. (eds), *The Works of Saint Augustine: An English Translation for the 21st Century*, 3: 15–20 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1990–).
- Augustine, *Sermones*. Latin text: M. Pellegrino, et al. (eds), *Discorsi*, 6 vols (Rome: Città Nuova, 1979–90). Eng. trans.: J. E. Rotelle et al. (eds), *The Works of Saint Augustine: An English Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1990–), 3: 1–14.
- Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*. Greek text: H. I. Marrou and M. Harl (eds), *Paedagogus*, SC 70, 108, 158 (Paris: Cerf, 1960–70).
- Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*. Greek text: C. Mondésert et al. (eds), *Stromateis*, SC 30, 38, 278–9, 428, 446, 463 (Paris: Cerf, 1951–2001). Eng. trans.: A. C. Coxe, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*, ANF 2, repr. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 163–605.
- Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*. Latin text and French trans.: A. Rousseau et al. (eds), *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les heresies*, SC 100, 152–3, 210–11, 263–4, 293–4 (Paris: Cerf, 1965–82).
- John Chrysostom, *Commentarium in Epistolam ad Galatas*. Greek text: PG 61.611–80. Eng. trans.: G. Alexander, et al., *Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, NPNF, First Series, vol. 13, repr. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995).
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Epistolam ad Hebraeos*. Greek text: PG 63.9–236. Eng. trans.: P. Schaff and F. Gardiner, *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of John and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, NPNF, First Series, vol. 14, repr. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995).
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaëum*. Greek text: PG 57.13–472.
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in 2 Corinthios*. Greek text: PG 61.381–610. Eng. trans.: T. W. Chambers, *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles Paul to the Corinthians*, NPNF, First Series, vol. 12, repr. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995).
- Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo*. Greek text: M. Marcovich (ed.), *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 47 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997).
- Origen, *Commentarii in Romanos*. Eng. trans.: T. Scheck, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Book 1–5*, FC 103 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001).
- Origen, *Contra Celsum*. Greek text: P. Koetschau, et al. (eds), *Origenes Werke*, GCS 2 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Latin text: P. Koetschau, et al. (eds), *Origenes Werke*, GCS 22 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913). Eng. trans.: G. W. Butterworth, *Origen on First Principles* (London: SPCK, 1936).
- Origen, *Exhortatio ad martyrium*. Greek text: P. Koetschau, et al. (eds), *Origenes Werke*, GCS 2 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899).
- Origen, *Homiliae in Exodum*. Latin text: W. A. Baehrens (ed.), *Origenes Werke*, GCS 29 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1920).
- Origen, *Homiliae in Numeros*. Eng. trans.: T. Scheck, *Homilies on Numbers*, *Ancient Christian Texts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).
- Pseudo-Clement, *Homiliae Clementinae*. Greek text: J. N. Bremmer (ed.), *Pseudo-Clementines* (Louvain: Peeters, 2010).

Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*. Latin text: J. W. P. Borleffs et al. (eds), *Q. S. Fl. Tertullianus Opera: Opera catholica. Adversus Marcionem*, CCL 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954). Latin text with Eng. trans.: E. Evans (ed. and trans.), *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

## Scholarship

- Benoit, A. (1960). *Saint Irénée: Introduction à l'étude de sa théologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France).
- Braun, R. (1962). *Deus Christianorum* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France).
- Kinzig, W. (1994). 'Kainē diathēkē: The Title of the New Testament in the Second and Third Century', *JTS* (NS) 45: 519–44; repr. in E. Ferguson (ed.), *Norms of Faith and Life*, Recent Studies in Early Christianity 3 (New York: Garland [Taylor & Francis], 1999), 59–84.
- Luneau, A. (1964). *L'Histoire de salut chez les Pères de l'Église: La Doctrine des âges du monde*. Théologie Historique 2 (Paris: Beauchesne).
- Schoeps, H. J. (1969). *Jewish Christianity*, trans. D. R. A. Hare (Philadelphia: Fortress).

## Suggested Reading

- Bacq, P. (1978). *De l'ancienne à la nouvelle alliance selon S. Irénée: Unité du livre IV de l'Adversus Haereses* (Paris: Lethielleux).
- Campenhansen, H. von (1972). *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress).
- Ferguson, E. (1980). 'The Covenant Idea in the Second Century', in W. Eugene March (ed.), *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers* (San Antonio, CA: Trinity University Press), 135–62; repr. in E. Ferguson, *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, vol. 1 (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 173–200.
- Ferguson, E. (1993). 'Justin Martyr on Jews, Christians, and the Covenant', in F. Manns and E. Alliata (eds), *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents* (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum), 395–405; repr. in E. Ferguson, *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, vol. 1 (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 201–17.
- Ferguson, E. (1996). *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Freund, W. H. C. (1973). 'The Old Testament in the Age of the Greek Apologists A. D. 130–180', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26: 129–50.
- Gräbe, P. J. (2001). *Der Neue Bund in der frühchristlichen Literatur: Unter Berücksichtigung der alttestamentlich-jüdischen Voraussetzungen*. Forschung zur Bibel 96 (Würzburg: Echter).
- Horbury, W. (1998). *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark).
- Hvalvik, R. (1996). *The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant: The Purpose of the Epistle of Barnabas and Jewish-Christian Competition in the Second Century*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/82 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck).
- McCarthy, D. J. (1972). *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions* (Richmond, VA: John Knox).
- Skarsaune, O. (1987). *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study of Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition* NovTSup 56 (Leiden: Brill).
- Stylianopoulos, T. (1975). *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law*. SBL Dissertation Series 20 (Missoula: Scholars).

## CHAPTER 35

---

# EXODUS

---

MICHAEL GRAVES

## INTRODUCTION

---

THE figurative use of the Exodus motif began within the Hebrew Bible/OT itself and received specifically Christian application in the NT. Christians in the second and early third centuries appropriated the NT's symbolic interpretations of the Exodus, adding more figurative connections and theological reflections. Origen of Alexandria provided the first systematic Christian exposition of the Exodus account, beginning with the call of Moses and the plagues on Egypt, leading up to the Passover ceremony and deliverance through the sea, and culminating in God's care for Israel in the wilderness. Origen extended traditional Christian figures throughout the entire narrative, generating even more symbolic equivalencies for later Christians to employ. Important figural readings included the Exodus as deliverance from sin to virtue and passing through the sea as baptism. Despite differences in emphasis, a standard reading emerged among early Christian interpreters in the fourth century: the Exodus symbolized salvation out of spiritual captivity into freedom and life in Christ.

## THE EXODUS MOTIF IN SCRIPTURE

---

Numerous OT texts define Yahweh's relationship to Israel by pointing to the Exodus from Egypt (e.g. Lev 11.45; Num 15.41; Deut 5:6). Prophetic passages envision return from exile and future restoration as a new and even greater Exodus through the sea (Isa 11.15; 43.2, 16–21; 51.10; Jer 16.14–15; 23.7–8; Zech 10.10–11). God's judgements against Assyria will be like the plagues on Egypt (e.g. Isa 10.26; Nah 1.4), and God will care for future Israel as when he made springs of water flow in the desert (Isa 48.20–21; 49.10; cf. Hos 2.14–15).

NT texts see Jesus as embodying Exodus motifs. In Matthew, Jesus was brought out of Egypt (Matt 2.15), baptized through water (Matt 3.13–17), and tested in the wilderness, resisting temptation where Israel had failed (Matt 4.1–3). The Gospel of John presents Jesus as the Passover lamb (John 1.29, 13.1, 19.36), manna (John 6.31–5), a source for flowing water like the rock in the desert (John 7.37–9; cf. Ps 78.20; 105.41), and a light to be followed like the pillar of fire (John 8.12; cf. Exod 13.21–2). The same Moses who led Israel out of Egypt testified to Jesus (Acts 7.20–37; cf. Deut 18.18). The salvation history that began with the Exodus led to Jesus (Acts 13.17–23). In 1 Peter, since redemption comes through the blood of Jesus the Passover lamb (1 Pet 1.18–20), Christians should gird the figurative ‘loins’ of their mind (1 Pet 1.13; cf. Exod 12.11) and become ‘a royal priesthood and holy nation’ in the spiritual sense (1 Pet 2.9; cf. Exod 19.4–6). The author of Hebrews states that Moses, as if seeing the Invisible, chose the eternal riches of Christ as his reward rather than the temporary sinful pleasures of Egypt (Heb 11.24–9). The judgments released by the Lamb in Revelation against the wicked of the earth are depicted as recapitulations of the plagues on Egypt (fiery hail, Rev 8.7; sea to blood, Rev 8.8; 11.6; 16.3–4; darkness, 8.12; and locusts, 9.3; see also Rev 15.2–3).

The two most significant NT passages touching on the Exodus are in 1 Corinthians. According to 1 Corinthians 5.7–8, Christ the Passover lamb has been sacrificed, and so Christians should observe the festival by removing the leaven of pride, evil, and wickedness, and celebrate with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. In 1 Corinthians 10.1–12, Paul asserts that the events recorded in the book of Exodus were written down for the instruction of the Church. Israel in Moses’ day experienced the same benefits as the Christians in Corinth: Israel was baptized into Moses under the cloud and through the sea. They ate spiritual food (manna), and they drank spiritual drink from the spiritual rock, who was Christ; and yet they perished, as will the Corinthians if they act similarly (cf. Jude 5). This text served as a figurative key for patristic interpretation of the Exodus.

In sum, both the OT and NT suggest that new acts of salvation recapitulate God’s rescue of Israel out of Egypt. Moreover, the NT points to a spiritual interpretation of the Exodus, the real presence of Christ in the Exodus story, and a moral application of the narrative to Christian life.

## THE EXODUS MOTIF IN THE WAKE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

---

In the second and early third centuries, Christian readers affirmed and expanded the deposit of figural and moral readings of the Exodus found in the NT. In the earliest period, the *Epistle of Barnabas* (early 2nd century) elaborates on the symbolic interpretation of ‘Joshua’ (= ‘Jesus’ in Greek) as the Lord Jesus, as is already hinted at within the NT (*Barn.* 12.8–10; cf. Heb 4.8), and it also expresses a new typology: the outstretched arms of Moses that caused Israel to defeat the Amalekites (Exod 17.8–16) is a figure of the

cross, showing that we cannot be saved from conflict unless we put our trust in Jesus (*Barn.* 12.2–3; see also *Orac. Sib.* 8.251–254, 2nd–3rd century CE). In the late first or early second century, 1 *Clement* offers moral admonitions based on the Exodus account: we should imitate Moses' humility (citing Exod 3.11; 4.10) and avoid jealousy (citing Exod 2.14) and the stubborn disbelief exhibited by Pharaoh's army (1 *Clem.* 17.5; 4.10; 51.1–5).

Further typological interpretations connecting the Exodus narrative to Christ appear throughout the second and third centuries. Christological types include Moses' raised hands prefiguring the crucifixion, with Joshua as a figure of Jesus (Justin, *dial.* 90.4–91.4; 97.1; 111.1–112.2; 131.4–5; Irenaeus, *dem.* 46; Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.18; *Iud.* 10.10; Cyprian, *test.* 2.21; *ad Fort.* 8); Moses' staff signifying the cross or Christ's rule (Justin, *dial.* 86.1; Irenaeus, *dem.* 59); Christ as the Passover lamb (Justin, *dial.* 111.3); the restoration of Moses' leprous hand foretelling the resurrection (Tertullian, *res.* 28.1–2); the wood that sweetened the bitter waters (Exod 15.25) standing for the cross (Justin, *dial.* 86.1; Tertullian, *bapt.* 9.2); the pillar of fire that led Israel (Exod 13.21–2) symbolizing God's unchanging, unfathomable light that passed from earth to heaven by the cross (Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 1.24.163–4); and the twelve springs and seventy palm trees of Elim (Exod 15.27) as the twelve apostles and the seventy sent by Jesus (Luke 10.1), representing apostolic teaching (Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.13, 24; Irenaeus, *dem.* 46; Justin, *dial.* 86.5).

Most of these figural identifications are applied only to isolated elements within the Exodus story, but we also encounter in this period brief symbolic interpretations of the Exodus event as a whole. In Irenaeus, for example, God rescued his people from the power of the Egyptians, that is, from impiety and idolatry, and brought them out of the Red Sea, that is, out of the confusion and blasphemy of the nations (*dem.* 46). Tertullian offers a similar symbolic explanation, seeing in the Exodus event a representation of baptism. Israel was rescued from the power of the Egyptian king through the sea, showing how God rescues his people from the power of the devil through the sacrament of baptism (*quae figura manifestior in baptismi sacramento; bapt.* 9.1). If Christ is the rock that produced water (1 Cor 10.4), then water in the surrounding narrative may be understood as baptismal water (*bapt.* 9.1–4). In view of the link between the Exodus/Passover and Easter, it is not surprising that Tertullian is also our earliest source expressing a preference for administering baptism at Easter (Tertullian, *bapt.* 19.1–3; see Bradshaw and Johnson 2011:76–9).

Several works were written on the Christian significance of the Passover, the earliest full account being that of Melito of Sardis, *On the Passover*, c.165 CE (see Melito of Sardis, trans. Hall 1979; Origen, trans. Daly 1992; Nautin 2003a; 2003b; Nautin and Floëri 2004). Some early Christian writers employed an artificial etymology connecting the word 'Passover' (Greek: *πάσχα*) to the Greek word *πάσχειν*, 'to suffer' (e.g. Melito, *pass.* 46; Irenaeus, *haer.* 4.10.1; Tertullian, *Iud.* 10.18; see Nautin 2003a: 52–4). Origen wrote his *Treatise on the Passover* in part to correct this false etymology. For Origen, the Passover is about the 'passage' (Hebrew: *פסח*) of Christ to the Father, and the passage that each Christian makes to God through Christ.

Early Christians also continued looking to the Exodus story for moral lessons and guidance for the community. Clement of Alexandria explains that the 'horse and rider'

thrown into the sea (Exod 15.1) are the cruel affection of lust and the rider who gives the reins to pleasure (*str.* 5.8.52–3). For Cyprian, that the Passover was eaten in one house (Exod 12.46) shows that there is no home for believers but the one Church (*unit. eccl.* 8; cf. *ep.* 75.4), and the equal falling of manna shows that God gives the Spirit to all equally (*ep.* 75.14).

## THE EXODUS NARRATIVE IN ORIGEN

---

Origen created a coherent symbolic interpretation of the entire Exodus narrative by assigning figurative meanings to various elements throughout the story based on clues in the NT, starting from 1 Corinthians 10.1–12. For Origen, the biblical account of the Exodus speaks of redemption from sin and the devil, a journey in the ‘wilderness’ aimed at growth in virtue, and eternal salvation by passage into the spiritual Promised Land (*hom. in Ex.* 5.1; 9.1; *hom. in Num.* 27.2–5; *Jo.* 6.227–32). A notable feature of Origen’s exegesis is its *Logos* focus, not only the *Logos* as Christ but also the *Logos* (Word) as revealed in the spiritual sense of Scripture.

As Origen explains the Exodus journey, God told Moses that the people should go a ‘way’ of three days in the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord, which indicates that we are called to leave behind the world (= Egypt) with its evil ways (1 John 2.15–16) and believe in Jesus, the ‘way’ (John 14.6) who was raised on the third day. Of course, the devil (= Pharaoh) does not want us to leave sin behind. We must turn our ‘rational, natural, moral wisdom’ to the divine laws, and if we understand the laws of Moses spiritually, then we too can have Moses as our guide (Luke 16.29) and Moses will lead us out of the moral mud of Egypt and into the place of rest (*hom. in Ex.* 3.3; trans. Heine 1982:253–4). Moses and Aaron, the prophetic and priestly word, stir up our souls against Pharaoh, the devil, who responds by afflicting us more. This is the struggle between virtue and vice.

Origen likewise sees Christian symbolism in the plague sequence. Moses (= God’s law) afflicts Pharaoh (= the devil) with ten plagues (= the Ten Commandments). The waters of the Nile are the errant teachings of philosophy; the plague of frogs strikes at the vain songs of the poets; the mosquitoes stand for dialectic; and the flies are like Cynics who see pleasure as the highest good. Origen expounds all of the plagues in this manner, showing how each plague (divine teaching) undercuts the pride, deception, malice, and irrationality of worldly humanity. Still, in the end it is Moses’ staff (= the cross of Christ) that overcomes Egypt (= the world), becoming a serpent (= prudence) and consuming Pharaoh’s serpents just as the wisdom of the cross overcame the wisdom of the world (1 Cor 1–4) (*hom. in Ex.* 4.6–8).

In his *Homilies on Exodus* and elsewhere Origen takes up the question of whether God acted unjustly in hardening Pharaoh’s heart. In his homilies Origen merely hints at an answer, suggesting that Paul himself did not see fit to provide a full explanation of this mystery to those not yet ready to receive it (*hom. in Ex.* 4.2, citing Rom 9). Elsewhere

Origen defends Pharaoh's free will and insists that God acted to benefit Pharaoh, explaining the 'hardening' as a kind of medicine whose side effects may at first seem negative (e.g. *philoc.* 21; 27; *princ.* 3.1.7; 3.1.9; 3.1.11; *or.* 29.16). Origen's solutions were influential on later Christian theologians who attempted to address this problem (cf. brief comments earlier in Irenaeus, *haer.* 4.29.1–2; Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 1.9.88).

In the tenth plague, God destroys the firstborn of Egypt, who are the 'principalities and powers', the 'leaders of this world of darkness' (Col 2.15; Eph 6.12), defeated by the cross of Christ (*hom. in Ex.* 4.7; trans. Heine 1982:270). Following 1 Corinthians 10, Origen identifies the Red Sea as baptismal waters that wash away the Egyptians (= sins), even as they attempt to follow. Origen also offers a second explanation: when we leave dark ignorance behind to follow God's law, and the waves of contradiction rush against us, we should dispute with our adversaries by striking the waters with the staff of the Law and scriptural vigilance. By advancing in the Word of doctrine through faith and proper reasoning, we will enable those whom we instruct not only to escape from Egypt but also to rise up like the sea and overcome the Egyptians (*hom. in Ex.* 5.5). Thus, the Exodus depicts baptism, but it also finds practical application in Scripture, through which the Word of God conquers sin. Christ, the Word, is the lamb, and Scripture is his flesh. We must not eat the flesh raw, that is, we must not interpret Scripture literally; rather, we should roast it with the fire of the Spirit (Exod 12.8–9; Deut 4.24; Rom 12.11) to find the spiritual meaning (*Peri Pascha* 26–8; *Jo.* 10.103–5).

Israel celebrated when horse and rider were cast into the sea (Exod 15.1), that is, when Christ defeated the demons and those who persecute Christians. Christians take the tambourine in hand (Exod 15.20) by crucifying the flesh and putting their members to death (Gal 5.24; Col 3.5). The Lord triumphed gloriously (Exod 15.1)—glorious in the manger, and triumphant in his second coming. The rest of the 'Song at the Sea' (Exod 15.1–18) is expounded similarly (*hom. in Ex.* 6).

After crossing the sea, God showed Moses a tree to make bitter waters sweet (Exod 15.25). The tree points to God's wisdom (tree of life, Prov 3.18), Christ, who reveals to us how to interpret the law spiritually, thereby making the bitter letter of the law into sweet spiritual understanding. The journey to Elim (Exod 15.27) represents the crossing from the OT to the NT, where Israel encounters the twelve apostles and the seventy sent by Jesus to preach (*hom. in Ex.* 7.1–3). Manna is subtle and spiritual, like the Word of God. Storing up manna for the seventh day shows us to store up good works in this life (days 1–6) for eternal life (7th day). When Israel eats flesh and bread (Exod 16.12), it is the flesh of Jesus and the bread of Jesus, which represent different levels of teaching. Origen's discussion of manna, like his discussion of John 6, is primarily about the Word of God preached in the Church and not about the Eucharist (*hom. in Ex.* 7.5–8; cf. *Jo.* 10.13(11)–19.14; Origen, trans. Daly 1992:88).

In concluding his treatment of the Exodus Origen makes standard connections between Christ and the rock that gives water, Moses' outstretched arms and the cross, and Joshua and Jesus. Yet, Origen has gone far beyond any earlier writer in his treatment of the Exodus by filling out the entire story and making it into a coherent Christian allegory.

## FOURTH-CENTURY TREATISES ON EXODUS: EPHREM THE SYRIAN AND GREGORY OF NYSSA

---

Deserving special treatment are two treatises from the second half of the fourth century that deal systematically with the book of Exodus: the *Explanation of Exodus* written by Ephrem the Syrian c.370, and Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* composed c.390.

Ephrem identified his work on Exodus as a *tûrgāmâ* ('explanation'), the Syriac cognate of the Jewish Aramaic *targûm*, or 'paraphrase'. Ephrem's work is similar to a Jewish Targum in its practice of explaining through interpretative restatement, although it also resembles the biblical retellings of Philo and Josephus (trans. Salvesen 2011:2). Ephrem begins with a brief summary of the whole book and then moves into his more detailed treatment, consisting of paraphrase and brief explanations, through which he resolves plot problems, presents Moses as an ethical example, defends freewill and God's judgement against the Egyptians, and makes occasional typological connections to Jesus. Distinctively Christian exegesis is minimal, and many parallels with Jewish exegesis have been identified (see Féghali 1984–5:92; trans. Mathews and Amar 1994:224, 225, 228, 249; and the notes in trans. Salvesen 2011).

Ephrem sees Moses as a model of justice, compassion, patience, and faith. For example, in Exodus 2.11 Moses went out specifically to see if God might deliver Israel through him, and before he killed the Egyptian taskmaster Moses repeatedly warned him (*comm. in Ex.* 2.4). Moses fled to Midian not out of fear, but to spare his adopted parents grief; in Midian Moses showed his justice by driving away the herdsmen and his compassion by drawing water for the maidens (*comm. in Ex.* 2.6). Moses' son was not circumcised (Exod 4.24–6) only because his strong-willed wife Sephora (Zipporah) would not let him do it (*comm. in Ex.* 2.8; 4.4). Moses did not object to his call from God (Exod 3–4) but simply asked God to loosen his tongue (*comm. in Ex.* 4.2). Moses demonstrated his humility in that he bowed down to Jethro (Exod 18.7) even after performing all his miraculous signs (*comm. in Ex.* 18.1).

Ephrem emphasizes throughout that it was the sinful pride of Pharaoh and the Egyptians that compelled God to plague them (e.g. *comm. in Ex.* 3.4; 5.1; 14.1). Starting with the staff changing into a serpent, God warned Pharaoh numerous times to change his ways as he was unwilling to strike Egypt, but the Egyptian leader refused (*comm. in Ex.* 6.1; 7.1; 9.2; 14.4–5; cf. 17.3 on God's warning the Amalekites). Passages are highlighted where it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (*comm. in Ex.* 7.1–3); and when it says that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart (e.g. Exod 10.1), Ephrem explains that God 'hardens' by showing patience to the stubborn (*comm. in Ex.* 10.1–5).

In terms of Christological exegesis, Ephrem generally restricts himself in the *Explanation of Exodus* to a few traditional types. Thus, Moses' serpent/staff, the staff held in hand at the Passover (Exod 12.11), Moses lifting up his hands at the sea and in the battle with the Amalekites, and the wood that sweetened the waters are types of the cross

(*comm. in Ex.* 7.4; 12.2–3; 13.3; 16.1; 17.2). Still, Ephrem occasionally makes brief but interesting theological comments. Not only is the Passover lamb a type of the Lord, but roasting the lamb in fire (Exod 12.8–9) indicates the eucharistic bread which is baked in fire. Also, no stranger eats the Passover (Exod 12.45) because no one eats the Body who is not baptized (*comm. in Ex.* 12.3). Moreover, Ephrem strikes broader theological notes in his *Hymns on the Unleavened Bread*; for example, he describes the Exodus as a journey through which the true lamb brings those held captive by the devil out of error and Sheol (*Azym.* 3.7–8, 15).

Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* follows the tradition of Origen in providing a coherent figurative reading of the Exodus story with emphasis on the virtuous life. For Gregory, however, Israel's journey teaches a never-ending progress toward the Good, with the destination being Sinai, which symbolizes the mystical experience of the incomprehensible God. Gregory's goal in his *Life of Moses* is to offer counsel on the perfect life, which is an eternal journey toward divine perfection pursued by imitating the virtues depicted in the biblical narrative (*v. Mos.* 1.1–15; 2.48–50). Moses, for example, displays virtue by living in poverty and caring for sheep away from the turmoil of the marketplace (*v. Mos.* 1.19). We can imitate Moses' birth by choosing to be born for virtue, showing ourselves austere and rational (*v. Mos.* 2.1–7). When Moses sides with the Israelite against the Egyptian, he is taking a stand for virtue, righteousness, humility, and true religion (*v. Mos.* 2.14–15). Gregory recommends virtues and cautions against vice throughout the treatise.

Christian symbols are identified regularly, both traditional types and also figures reflecting greater doctrinal refinement. Thus, Moses' outstretched arms typify the cross (*v. Mos.* 2.78); the burning bush teaches God in the flesh, the mystery of the Virgin (*v. Mos.* 2.19–21); and Moses' leprous-restored hand and his staff/serpent reveal Christ's incarnation and return to the Father (*v. Mos.* 2.27–33). When Moses lives with Jethro and takes his daughter as a bride, this illustrates the Christian who lives with pagan education and accepts parts of it when giving birth to virtue (*v. Mos.* 2.17, 37–41). Following Origen, Gregory sees Israel despoiling the Egyptians (Exod 3.22; 11.2–3; 12.35–6) as a model for Christians appropriating pagan learning, such as natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, and dialectic (*v. Mos.* 2.115–16; see Origen, *philoc.* 13.2). Along similar lines, Ambrose takes the despoiling of Egypt to represent the Christian's resurrected body as plunder taken from this present world (*Abr.* 2.9.63), or else the spiritual spoils Christians receive from Jews, such as the resurrection and justice (*Psal.* 118.21.12). Alternatively, other interpreters merely justified the despoiling of Egypt by arguing that Israel was receiving fair wages for its service (e.g. Philo, *Mos.* 1.141; Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 1.23.157; Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.20.1–3; 4.24.4; and Irenaeus, *haer.* 4.30.1–4; Theodoret, *qu. in Ex.* 23; see Allen 2008).

Gregory likens the plagues to true doctrine. Although 'the word presents to everyone equally what is good and bad', true doctrine 'conforms to the disposition of those receiving the word'. This is why the plagues struck the Egyptians but not the Hebrews (*v. Mos.* 2.64–8; trans. Malherbe and Ferguson 1978:69). God sends light to all, but it is darkness to the Egyptians because they were insensitive to it (*v. Mos.* 2.81, 86). The individual plagues on the Egyptians reflect their vices. For example, frogs are ugly, noisy, and have a foul smell, and so the breed of frogs is the offspring of evil arising from a sordid

heart (*v. Mos.* 2.68). Gregory also insists that Pharaoh rejected God not by divine constraint but by his own free choice flowing from his impassioned and disreputable life (*v. Mos.* 2.73–5).

The killing of the firstborn of Egypt is not historical, but represents the killing of the first impulses toward evil, such as lust and anger. Only a non-literal interpretation presents a picture worthy of God (*v. Mos.* 2.89–95). The instructions for what to eat at Passover are also figurative, since it matters not to virtue whether one eats this or that food (*v. Mos.* 2.105). The lamb roasted with fire points to warm faith. Similarly, the shoes which the Hebrews are to wear at the Passover protect from thorns, which are sins (*v. Mos.* 2.107–9).

Gregory's exposition of the journey through the sea takes its cues from the baptismal typology. The waters of the sea represent a mystical baptism, and the Egyptian army that is drowned stands for the passions of the soul that enslave us in sin. Gregory points out that it makes no sense to pass through the waters of baptism and bring some of the Egyptian army (our previous sins) with us (*v. Mos.* 2.122–7). If the oppressor is sin, and the saving waters are baptism, naturally the pillar of cloud that guides the Christian across the sea is the Holy Spirit (*v. Mos.* 2.121). The rock that gives water is Christ, as in 1 Corinthians 10.4. The twelve springs (Apostles) and seventy palm trees (the seventy sent by Jesus) are the gospel, and the campsites are the virtues. The wood that sweetens the bitter water is the cross, since life without Egyptian pleasure often seems bitter at first to the newly baptized (*v. Mos.* 2.132–6). The corporeal manna shows the mystery of the Virgin. In terms of community life, the equal falling of manna teaches us to share material goods. Moses holding up his arms against the Amalekites symbolizes the cross, as well as lofty contemplations of the Law (*v. Mos.* 2.140–1, 148–9). Like Origen, Gregory fills out the typological scheme found in 1 Corinthians 10.

Unlike Origen, however, Gregory's treatment of the Exodus has as its focal point Moses' ascent up the mountain of God, to higher levels of virtue and ultimately to the ineffable knowledge of God (*v. Mos.* 2.152–3; cf. 1.47–9, 75). No irrational creatures were allowed to touch Mt Sinai (Exod 19.13), in order to show that 'in the contemplation of the intelligibles we surpass the knowledge which originates with the senses' (*v. Mos.* 2.156; trans. Malherbe and Ferguson 1978:93). Finally, Moses ascends into the dark cloud (Exod 19.16), beyond what the senses see or even what the mind thinks it sees, and at last he meets God in darkness (*v. Mos.* 2.162–166).

## THE EXODUS: A COMMON FOURTH-CENTURY READING

---

As presupposed in Ephrem and articulated in greater detail by Gregory of Nyssa, a standard Christian interpretation of the Exodus had emerged by the fourth century.

Humanity was enslaved to sin and the devil, but Jesus saves humanity from this captivity, putting evil to death in the waters of baptism. Believers are called to leave the vices of the world (Egypt) through the grace given in baptism, the preaching of the cross, and faith. Baptized Christians are then led by the Holy Spirit and apostolic teaching toward virtue and eternal salvation. Most fourth- and fifth-century Christian writers who discuss some part of the Exodus story reflect a version of this grand narrative of spiritual salvation, following in Origen's tracks but giving more emphasis to baptism as the Red Sea that destroys the devil, demons, or sin (e.g. Eusebius, *d.e.* 3.2; Hilary, *Psal.* 134.15–19; Didymus, *Trin.* 2.14; Cyril of Jerusalem, *catech.* 19.2–3; Ambrose, *myst.* 3.12–14; *Is.* 6.56; *De sacramentis* 1.4.12; 1.6.20–2; Basil, *Spir.* 14.31–3; Zeno of Verona, *tract.* 54–65; Cassian, *coll.* 3.7.5–7; Jerome, *tract. psal. II* 90; Methodius, *symp.* 4.2; Cyril of Alexandria, *glaph. Ex.* 1).

Typological connections with Jesus remain integral to the fourth-century interpretation of the Exodus. Traditional types continue to be invoked, for example, Moses' raised arms and the water-sweetening wood pointing to Christ, the pillar of cloud depicting the Holy Spirit, and the twelve springs at Elim as the Apostles (e.g. Hilary, *myst.* 1.31–2, 37–42; Cyril of Jerusalem, *catech.* 12.1; 13.20; Ambrose, *off.* 3.15.94–5; Jerome, *tract. psal. II* 91; *ep.* 69.6; John Chrysostom, *catecheses baptismales* 3.13–15, 23–7; *hom. in Jo.* 14.3–4; Cyril of Alexandria, *glaph. Ex.* 2 [PG 69.469–86]). In some cases these types receive theological amplification. Thus, Didymus compares the bitter waters made sweet to the pool of Bethesda (John 5.1–13), which had no power to heal apart from faith in the wood/cross (*Trin.* 2.14). John Chrysostom explains that, after baptism through the sea, Christians come to the eucharistic bread of manna and to the cup of salvation in the water flowing from the Rock (*hom. in dictum Pauli: nolo vos ignorare* [PG 51.247–8]). Miriam can be understood as a type of the Church, a virgin with unstained spirit who gathers the people in divine song (Ambrose, *virgin.* 1.3.12; Zeno of Verona, *tract.* 54 [PL 11.510]). For Cassiodorus the river becomes blood to illustrate the harmfulness of the fleshly sense of Scripture as opposed to the spiritual sense (*Psal.* 77.44; cf. 80.6; 104.40). And in Isidore of Seville we find a vivid exposition of the worldly targets of each plague, for example, the plague of frogs rebukes the croaking of the classical poets, the gnats stand for heretics, and the flies represent carnal lust (*in uet. test. Ex.* 14.1–17 [PL 83.292–4]).

As in earlier centuries, Christian interpreters of the fourth and fifth centuries devoted special attention to the Passover ritual (e.g. Athanasius, *ep. fest.* 14.3). Despite Origen's treatise correcting this confusion, some Christians continued to associate the word for 'Passover' (πάσχα) with the suffering (Greek: πάσχειν) of Christ (e.g. Ambrose, *Cain* 1.8.31). Subtle theological points were sometimes derived from the details of the Passover. For example, the lamb may be taken from the sheep or from the goats (Exod 12.5) to show that Jesus died both for the just (the lamb) and for sinners (the goat) (Jerome, *tract. psal. II* 91); and the lamb was set apart on the tenth day and eaten on the fourteenth (Exod 12.3–6) to show that Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world (Cyril of Alexandria, *glaph. Ex.* 2 [PG 69.424]; cf. 1 Pet 1.18–20).

## QUESTIONS ON EXODUS IN THE FIFTH CENTURY: THEODORET AND AUGUSTINE

---

Two important treatments of the Exodus are preserved from the early fifth century as part of *Quaestiones* treatises, exegetical works addressing specific problems on select passages (see Perrone 1996). In Greek we have Theodoret's *Questions on the Octateuch*, and in Latin Augustine's *Questions on the Heptateuch*. Both assume the main contours of the standard Christian reading of the Exodus. At the same time, each has its own distinctive features.

Theodoret interprets the Exodus as Christ saving the Church from the devil through baptism and providing nourishment in the Eucharist. Standard typological readings are presented throughout, including types of Jesus, the cross, the Church, salvation, and the Holy Spirit (*qu. in Ex.* 4, 6, 26–8, 34). At the same time, Theodoret often begins by explaining what the text would have meant for an OT audience; for example, the burning bush shows God's power and kindness in preserving Israel in the midst of plagues (afterwards he says it depicts the incarnation); God commands Moses to remove his sandals so as to communicate reverence; Moses' staff becomes a serpent to illustrate how Pharaoh turned his God-given rationality into cruel savagery; and the manna spoiled after one day to teach Israel to live by faith, free from daily worries (*qu. in Ex.* 6, 7, 9, 31).

Theodoret highlights God's kindness, goodness, and justice wherever possible. God could have judged Pharaoh based on his foreknowledge of how Pharaoh would respond, but God's kindness and justice required him to wait until Pharaoh actually did wrong (*qu. in Ex.* 8). Through the plagues God patiently warned Pharaoh, but of his own free will Pharaoh rebelled. This may be compared to God's good sunlight, which melts wax but dries mud—the cause is good, but it can have a bad effect on base objects (*qu. in Ex.* 12). God told the Egyptians to bring in their cattle (Exod 9.19) because he is merciful and good, and wanted them to repent (*qu. in Ex.* 21). Consistently throughout the Exodus story Theodoret sees God as benevolent in contrast to Pharaoh's hostility and pride.

In his treatment of the Passover Theodoret makes explicit connections to Jesus, the Church, and the Eucharist. Yet, he also gives special attention to moral lessons at the historical level. For example, the command to leave nothing for the next day is taken as an exhortation to invite the poor to share in the meal (*qu. in Ex.* 24). This illustrates Theodoret's openness to including diverse exegetical approaches (e.g. Christological and moral). Theodoret agrees with Origen and others that to roast the lamb in fire means to go beyond the bare letter and investigate Scripture's sense with the divine fire of the Spirit's grace; but he also cautions that we should not add human arguments to divine prophecies—an Antiochene warning against excessive exegetical speculation (*qu. in Ex.* 24). On several occasions Theodoret reports views and then expresses scepticism about their accuracy, relying on the principle 'we should adhere to the facts of holy Scripture' (*qu. in Ex.* 25; trans. Hill 2007:271).

Overall, Theodoret gives a traditional Christian reading of the Exodus, with some features of special note, such as his interest in the original ‘Old Testament’ meaning, his emphasis on God’s goodness, and his occasional critical evaluations of previous interpretations.

Augustine discusses the Exodus motif numerous times in his works. In *Against Faustus* 12.29–30 Augustine provides an overview of the Christian figurative reading of the Exodus narrative as a story of spiritual salvation. Like many before him, Augustine mentions 1 Corinthians 10 as his starting point, arguing that the clues suggested by the Apostle Paul unlock the rest of the symbolic interpretation: ‘By explaining one figure, he introduced an understanding of the others. For, if the rock was Christ on account of its firmness, why is the manna not Christ, who comes down from heaven as the living bread?’ (*Faust.* 12.29; trans. Teske 2007:144). Augustine often employs Christological symbols taken from the Exodus story, such as Moses’ serpent/staff as Christ, the Red Sea as baptism, and the Egyptian army as sin (e.g. *tract. Io.* 45.9; 55.1; *Trin.* 3.10.20; 4.15.20; *Psal.* 106.3; *serm.* 223E.2). Other important dimensions of Augustine’s theological interpretation of the Exodus are his comments on Romans 9 defending God’s justice in condemning Pharaoh and the great mass of humanity (*enchir.* 25.98–9), and also his interpretation of the despoiling of the Egyptians as the Christian appropriation of useful elements of pagan learning (*doct. chr.* 2.40.61), or as warranted because the Egyptians deserved to be deceived (*quaest.* 53.2), or else as justified on the grounds that God’s decrees should be obeyed, not evaluated (*hept.* 6).

In addition to comments such as these scattered throughout his writings, Augustine offers a series of connected interpretations of the Exodus narrative in his *Questions on the Heptateuch*. Numerous questions in this work address problems in the plot, basic issues of language, or historical difficulties. For example, Augustine asks why God told Moses to ‘take the staff with which you struck the river’ (Exod 17.5), when it was Aaron who actually struck the river (Exod 7.19). According to Augustine, this reflects the fact that Aaron acted under Moses’ authority (*hept.* 64). The solution is reached at the literal level and does not open out to a figurative interpretation. Augustine similarly treats the issues of why God says to Moses, ‘Why did you call me?’ (Exod 14.15) when Moses had said nothing (Answer: Moses called in his heart; *hept.* 52), and how Aaron could set the jar of manna ‘before God’ (Exod 16.33–4) when the ark had not yet been built (Answer: he was speaking proleptically; *hept.* 61–2). Question 47 contains an extensive discussion of the chronology of the Exodus, again focusing on history and the literal sense.

A recurring topic in the Exodus portion of *Questions on the Heptateuch* is the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. Augustine’s overall argument is that God did in fact cause Pharaoh’s hard to become hard, but the actual ‘hardening’ effect came about because of the quality of Pharaoh’s own heart (*hept.* 18; 24; 29). Christ is a ‘good fragrance’ both for those being saved and for those perishing (*hept.* 24; see 2 Cor 2.15). But the impact of God’s goodness and patience on Pharaoh’s unrepentant heart was to harden it (*hept.* 33; 36). For example, on one occasion God ‘hardened’ Pharaoh’s heart by graciously

removing the plague of locusts (*hept.* 37; Exod 10.19–20). Of course, God had a purpose in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, namely, to announce God's name through both vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy (*hept.* 32; see Rom 9.22–3). But in the end, God's actions merely caused the quality of Pharaoh's heart to become evident. When it says, 'I (God) will harden Pharaoh's heart', it means 'I will demonstrate how hard it is' (*hept.* 18).

Occasional comments appear in this work that relate the Exodus story directly to Christ. Augustine gives Christological readings of Exodus 12.5 (the Passover animal 'from the sheep or from the goats', i.e. from the just and from sinners; *hept.* 42; see also *Faust.* 22.64), Exodus 13.9 ('it will be a sign upon your hand'—we are first redeemed by the blood of the lamb, and then works follow, signified by the 'hand', citing Gal 3; *hept.* 48), and Exodus 15.25 (the stick that sweetens the water as the cross; *hept.* 57). On Exodus 12.14, Augustine asks whether the Passover ritual as described in Exodus is really an 'eternal statute' (*legitimum aeternum*), since Christians do not practise it literally. Augustine gives two answers: first, perhaps it is 'eternal' in the sense that they should not presume to cease from celebrating it of their own accord (i.e. but God can alter it later because of Christ); second, just as we say that *Deus* ('God') is eternal, yet we do not mean the two-syllable word *Deus* but what the word signifies, so also the Passover ritual is not eternal as a set of signs representing realities (*signa rerum*), but the realities signified by the signs (*res quae his significantur*) are eternal (*hept.* 43). Still, despite discussions of this kind here and there, Augustine's overall approach in the *Questions on the Heptateuch* is historical and linguistic.

## CONCLUSION

---

Figurative appropriations of the Exodus motif began in the NT, including moral admonitions based on the Passover (1 Cor 5.7–8) and a Christological interpretation of the Exodus event itself (1 Cor 10.1–12). In the second and third centuries Christians identified a few more Christological types, such as the outstretched arms of Moses (Exod 17.8–16) as the cross. Tertullian picked up the theme of the Exodus as baptism within a broader discussion of various examples of water in Scripture that point to baptism (*bapt.* 9). It was Origen who wove previous Christian readings of details in the Exodus narrative into a systematic figural interpretation of the story as a whole. Origen created the paradigm for later interpreters, although his particular emphasis on the Word of God as the primary agent of salvation was not repeated. Instead, by the fourth century a common reading existed among Christian writers that placed greater emphasis on baptism. According to this reading, the biblical Exodus account depicts the spiritual salvation of the Christian from sin and the devil, toward virtue and some form of communion with God.

---

**REFERENCES**


---

**Ancient Sources**

- Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*. Latin Text: J. Zycha (ed.), *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, CSEL 25.1 (Leipzig: G. Freytag, 1891). Eng. trans. R. Teske, *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, The Works of Saint Augustine 20 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007).
- Augustine, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*. Latin Text: J. Fraipont and D. de Bruyne (eds), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Quaestionum in Heptateuchum Libri VII*, CCL 33 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1958).
- Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentarius in Exodum*. Syriac text: R.-M. Tonneau (ed.), *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii*, CSCO 152 (Louvain: Durbecq, 1955). Eng. trans.: A. Salvesen, *The Exodus Commentary of St Ephrem*, Moran Etho (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgas, 2011); E. G. Mathews, Jr and J. P. Amar, *St Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, ed. K. McVey, FC 91 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Mosis*. Greek text: J. Daniélou (ed.), *Grégoire de Nysse: La Vie de Moïse*, SC 1 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007). Eng. trans.: A. J. Malherbe and E. Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, CWS (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).
- Melito of Sardis, *Peri Pascha*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha and Fragments*, OECT (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979).
- Origen, *Peri Pascha*. Greek text: O. Guéraud and P. Nautin (eds), *Origène: Sur la Pâque*, Christianisme antique 2 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979). Eng. trans.: R. J. Daly, *Origen: Treatise on the Passover and Dialogue of Origen with Heraclides and His Fellow Bishops on the Father, the Son, and the Soul*, ACW 54 (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992).
- Origen, *Homiliae in Exodum*. Latin text: W. A. Baehrens (ed.), *Origenes Werke: Homilien zum Hexateuch in Rufins Übersetzung*, GCS 29 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1920). Eng. trans.: R. E. Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, FC 71 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982).
- Tertullian, *De baptismo*. Latin text and Eng. trans.: E. Evans, *Q. Septimii Florentis Tertulliani De Baptismo Liber: Tertullian's Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1964).
- Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Exodum*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: R. C. Hill, *Theodoret of Cyrus: The Questions on the Octateuch: Volume 1, On Genesis and Exodus*, Library of Early Christianity 1 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

**Scholarship**

- Allen, J. S. (2008). *The Despoliation of Egypt in Pre-Rabbinic, Rabbinic and Patristic Traditions* (Leiden: Brill).
- Bradshaw, P. F., and Johnson, M. E. (2011). *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press).
- Féghali, P. (1984–5). 'Commentaire de l'exode par Saint Ephrem', *Parole de l'Orient* 12: 91–131.
- Nautin, P. (2003a) (ed.). *Homélie pascales, I: Une homélie inspirée du traité sur la pâque d'Hippolyte*, SC 27 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf).
- Nautin, P. (2003b) (ed.). *Homélie pascales, II: Trois homélie dans la tradition d'Origène*, SC 36 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf).

- Nautin, P., and Floëri, F. (2004) (eds). *Homélie pascales, III: Une homélie anatolienne sur la date de pâques en l'an 387*, SC 48 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf).
- Perrone, L. (1996). 'Il genere delle *Quaestiones et Responsiones* nella letteratura cristiana antica fino ad Agostino', in L. Perrone, J. Pépin, et al. (eds), *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus, De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum, di Agostino d'Ippona* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice), 11–44.

### **Suggested Reading**

- Daniélou, J. (1960). *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. W. Hibberd (London: Burns & Oates).
- Lienhard, J. T. (2001) (ed.). *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity).

## CHAPTER 36

---

# LAW

---

B. LEE BLACKBURN, JR

WHEN the reader of early Christian texts encounters the term ‘law’, little can be taken for granted. Early Christian writers themselves often faced the same hermeneutical challenge when commenting on the biblical text. In his *Commentary on Romans*, Origen reminds the reader that the term law (*nomos*) in Paul’s epistle can sometimes denote the law of Moses, at other times the law of nature with which the Mosaic law agrees if understood spiritually and not literally, and on still other occasions it can refer to the evangelical law of Christ, which is congruent with the natural law and hence, in a qualified sense, with the law of Moses as well (2.9.1; see Roukema 1988). For Origen, then, not only was the term ‘law’ multivalent, but the different laws to which it can refer were related to each other in close but complicated ways.

This chapter is primarily devoted to how early Christian authors interpreted the law of Moses. Of the three laws mentioned by Origen, the law of Moses proved to be the most vexing, both theologically and exegetically, to early Christian writers. Despite this chapter’s focus on the law of Moses, at several junctures it will note how early Christian writers sought to relate it to the law of nature and the evangelical law. Indeed, for many patristic authors, measuring the Mosaic law vis-à-vis these other two laws was one of the primary means by which Christians could properly gauge its strengths and limitations.

At this juncture we must ask, given the title of this volume, what it means to *interpret* the law of Moses. One must take into view both the way in which early Christians conceived of the purpose and function of the law in the history of salvation, and the hermeneutical approaches they took toward the vast number of regulations that constituted that law. How any given Christian author interpreted a particular Mosaic precept was affected by that author’s broader theological account of the law, and vice versa. For this reason this chapter will canvass both early Christian conceptions of the place of the Mosaic law in the divine economy of salvation, as well as early Christian approaches to interpreting the discrete laws it contained.

Just as it is difficult to find an early Christian text that does not mention Jews or Judaism, it is not easy to find many early Christian writings that do not directly or indirectly bear

on the law. Conversely, it is perhaps even more challenging to locate early Christian texts that are exclusively or primarily devoted to an interpretation of the law of Moses (Cyril of Alexandria's *De adoratione et cultu* is a rare example). Frequently the most concentrated treatments of the Mosaic law can be found in scriptural commentaries and in homilies, particularly those that treat the books of the Pentateuch (Lienhard 2002) and the Pauline epistles (Galatians and Romans especially). My observations herein will be based largely, though not exclusively, on such sources.

One should not expect to find a typology of approaches to the interpretation of the law of Moses that breaks down along geographical lines. One cannot speak of a Greek or Latin or even a Syriac approach to the law. Even the conventional contrast between Antiochene and Alexandrian styles of exegesis is of limited utility. Indeed, we will discover not a taxonomy of clearly demarcated hermeneutical approaches to the law, but rather a continuum on which significant but subtle differences are accommodated.

This last point is true, however, only if one is speaking of orthodox authors, that is to say, authors who opposed dualistic renditions of Christianity that did not identify the creator god with the Father of Jesus Christ (e.g. Marcionism, Valentinianism, Manichaeism). Indeed, the rise of these dualistic versions of Christianity was one reason why the Mosaic law received such ample attention from early Christian authors, and why their various ways of handling it were, while certainly not uniform, relatively homogeneous. Almost every patristic author covered in this chapter wrote in a context in which one or more of these heretical brands of Christianity was either a real or a notional rival to mainline Christianity. While this polemical context certainly did not entirely suppress the individual sensibilities of early Christian authors who expounded the law of Moses, it did intensify the pressure to mount a theological and exegetical valorization of that law, and there was a limited number of basic shapes that valorization could take.

Of course, most early Christian exegetes did not read the law of Moses in one polemical context, but in two. From the NT period onward, Christian treatments of the law were coloured by the Church's growing estrangement from and animus toward the synagogue (Schreckenberg 1990). While this polemical context still allowed for distinctive hermeneutical styles, it too had a certain standardizing effect. Many NT authors, Paul especially, took an approach to the law that was already ambivalent and dialectical, and the rise of dualist heresies in the second century and the continued existence of law-observant Judaism ensured that most patristic treatments of the Mosaic law would be no less ambivalent and dialectical. None of the foregoing is meant to suggest that all positive evaluations of the law by early Christian authors were motivated primarily by opposition to dualist sects, or that all negative judgements on the law were animated principally by antipathy toward Judaism. But for all patristic writers from Justin Martyr onward, both of these polemical contexts conditioned their construal of the law of Moses at both a global theological level and at a local exegetical one. Hence this chapter will give an overview of early Christian interpretation of the law by way of an examination of the ways in which both polemical contexts shaped early Christian treatments of the law.

## ANTI-JUDAISM AND EARLY CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW

---

For most early Christians from the NT era onward, the law of Moses was in some respects obsolete, and hence no longer binding, at least not in the same manner as it was before the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ (Melito, *pass.* 37). To read the vast sweep of Torah regulations as if they were all still to be carried out literally was to commit a—or perhaps even *the*—capital hermeneutical error, inasmuch as to do so would be a failure to grasp the pivotal significance of the paschal event, and its aftershock, the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, for the divine economy of salvation. Of course, this Christian consensus emerged not in a socio-religious vacuum, but in a setting in which Torah-observant Judaism remained a live option. The challenge for many scholars has been to determine whether early Christian anti-Jewish polemics in general, and its relativization, or even degradation, of the Mosaic law in particular, were fuelled principally by socio-religious rivalry, or whether such polemics functioned mainly as a kind of heuristic device, in which Judaism acted as a foil by throwing the themes of Christian theology into higher relief (Harnack 1883; Simon 1986; Wilken 1971; Taylor 1995). This question need not be resolved for the purposes of this chapter. More apposite is the fact that a preponderance of patristic authors worked out their views on the proper interpretation of the law of Moses against the background of Jewish observance of that law and Jewish criticism of Christians for their non-observance. So regardless of the extent to which patristic anti-Jewish polemic was sociologically or theologically motivated, that polemic deeply informed the early Christian treatment of the law of Moses.

To be sure, it is too simplistic to say that most early Christians rejected the literal interpretation and implementation of the Mosaic law *tout court*. Virtually all patristic authors implicitly or explicitly classified the individual precepts of the law, despite the fact that the Torah itself provides no such classification system. As we will see, all orthodox authors were happy to concede that certain ordinances of the law, even in their literal sense, were binding on Christians. But for many early Christian authors, the term ‘law’ was often shorthand for all those copious Mosaic regulations that ought not, or at least need not, be obeyed in literal fashion.

So how did early Christian authors go about building their case that the law of Moses, a few exceptions notwithstanding, no longer needed to be obeyed *ad litteram*? For one, many early Christian authors stressed that the Mosaic law was given by God to the Israelites alone on account of their peculiar obstinacy and wickedness (John of Damascus, *f.o.* 4.23). For these authors, the law was thus a contingent strategy by God to rectify a particular problem with a particular people (Justin Martyr, *dial.* 11; Jacob of Sarug, *Iud.* 7.159–68). Accordingly, patristic authors at times pointed up the ways in which Mosaic precepts were tailored to the perverse inclinations of the Israelites (John of Damascus, *f.o.* 4.23). For instance, the law required the Israelites to offer sacrifices to God, not because those sacrifices were at all pleasing to God, but because the Israelites were

accustomed to offering sacrifices to pagan gods and were not yet ready to abandon such practices entirely (Justin, *dial.* 19–20; Theodoret, *qu. 60 in Ex.*). Moreover, the Israelites' attachment to paganism left them morally depraved, and the law was crafted to effect their ethical amelioration. According to some patristic authors, the law was designed to lead the Israelites out of sin precisely by exposing the depths of sin into which they had fallen and hence their need of God's grace (Chrysostom, *hom. 10 in Rom.*). Some early Christian authors pointed out how Mosaic regulations that might not *prima facie* appear to bear on moral matters, such as dietary requirements or laws concerning the restitution of property, were in fact part of the law's ethical pedagogy in that they kept the Israelites mindful of God and disposed them to value the welfare of their neighbours (Aphrahat, *dem.* 15.3; Ephrem, *comm. Ex.* 20.2; Theodoret, *qu. 42 in Ex.*; for an approach that limits the moral precepts of the law to the Decalogue, see Ambrosiaster, *comm. in Gal.* 3.12).

Patristic authors were also inclined to underline both the limited aims and the limited efficacy of the law's pedagogy. With respect to its aims, the morality promoted by the law was imperfect when compared to that required by the law of Christ (Ambrose, *Luc.* 7.186). For instance, Tertullian notes how the Mosaic law allowed for vengeance while the new law of Christ promotes peace (*Iud.* 3). The law of Moses' aims were also soteriologically limited. God did not give the law in order to justify (Augustine, *ep.* 196) or to foster faith (Ambrosiaster, *comm. in Gal.* 3.12). Cyril of Alexandria offers one of the most thorough patristic accounts of the manifold salvific goods that the law could not pretend to provide (Blackburn 2009): true knowledge and vision of God (*ador.*; PG 68.489A–B), intimate access to God's presence (*glaph. Ex.*; PG 69.509B), and sanctification (*ador.*; PG 68.236A–B).

According to most patristic authors, even the modest goals of the law were not achieved. They often point to the law's failure to bring about a permanent reform of Israelite worship and ethics (Hilary of Poitiers, *Mat.* 19.5). Indeed some authors, such as Ambrose, suggest that the law only exacerbated the Israelites' condition because of its susceptibility to overly literal interpretation (*Luc.* 3.27). As an admittedly extreme instance of patristic pessimism, Justin Martyr claimed that God, foreseeing the failure of the Jews to profit from the law, prescribed circumcision in order to mark out the Jews for future destruction (*dial.* 16). It was not uncommon for patristic writers to attribute the inefficacy of the law to the fact that it did not impart the grace that was required to obey it (Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Gal.* 51; Augustine, *ep.* 196).

The patristic conception of the limited nature of the audience, aims, and success of the law was pregnant with implications. If the Mosaic law was tailored to the particular deficiencies of the Israelites, was never intended to effect plenary salvation, and even failed to meet its own limited goals (though that failure may be more properly attributed to the Israelites than to the law itself), then it stands to reason that the law would not remain in effect forever. Indeed, God intended for the law's literal implementation to have a limited duration from the very start, and if that limited duration commenced at Sinai, it concluded at Jerusalem, first with the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, but also, and perhaps even more preemptorily, with the destruction of the temple several decades later.

Early Christian authors supported their claim that Christ brought an end to the literal observance of the law in a variety of ways. Some argued that the literal precepts of the law need no longer be obeyed because Christ has revealed the true meaning of the law (Ambrose, *Luc.* 7.70). A cognate tactic was to assert that the law is no longer binding because Christ fulfilled the types embedded therein; this fulfilment occurred both during the life of Jesus (Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.7.11) and in his passion, death, and resurrection (Melito, *pass.* 37; Jacob of Sarug, *Iud.* 7.140–4). Augustine maintained that actions, such as those required by the Mosaic law, have a tense, just as verbs do, and that the actions prescribed by the law should no longer be carried out after the death and resurrection of Christ, since that would suggest that the paschal mystery is a future, rather than past, event (*Faust.* 19.16; see also *Iud.* 3.4). Some authors took the position that the law no longer has a claim on human beings because Christ paid the debt to the law that humanity owed, but could not satisfy (Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Gal.* 62). One can also find assertions that the old law was necessarily supplanted by the new law of Christ (Tertullian, *Iud.* 6; Ambrosiaster, *comm. in Gal.* 1.21–4).

If the life, death, and resurrection of Christ necessarily entailed the annulment of the law, then the destruction of the temple by Titus was widely viewed by patristic theologians as the divine exclamation point on that annulment. John Chrysostom pressed this point in his *Homilies against Judaizing Christians*, wherein he contended that the plain sense of the law forbids its present practice, inasmuch as a significant number of its precepts were commanded to be carried out in Jerusalem, which was impossible for Jews in Chrysostom's day (3.3.7; 4.4.3; see also Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 6.12.2; Jerome, *Gal.* 2.3.24–6; Augustine, *Iud.* 9.12; *Aphrahat, dem.* 12.3; and Jacob of Sarug, *Iud.* 7.60). Nevertheless, early Christian thinkers did not always agree on the precise moment at which literal adherence to the law became inappropriate. Justin Martyr was even willing to tolerate law observance (such as circumcision and resting on the sabbath) in his own time on the part of 'weak-minded' Christians (*dial.* 47). And we hear reports in patristic literature about groups of Christians, such as the so-called Nazarenes, who, as late as the fourth century, observed some of the ritual requirements of the Torah (Jerome, *ep.* 75.13). But such Christians have no literary remains, and Justin's concession is anomalous. Even Augustine, who contra Jerome defended the propriety of law observance by the earliest Christians, and even suggested that ongoing Jewish adherence to the law possessed a kind of unwitting theological value (Fredriksen 2008), made it clear that in his own day even converted Jews should not be permitted to dig up the 'dead ashes' of the law by obeying its ordinances literally (*ep.* 82).

Thus far we have mainly examined the negative side of the patristic treatment of the law of Moses. But the law was also seen by mainstream patristic authors as both a relative and an absolute good. Although all first-century Christian writers affirmed to some extent the law's goodness and value, the stakes were raised dramatically in the second century, when dualist variants of Christianity, which severed the link between the law of Moses and the God of Jesus Christ, began to proliferate. The treatments of the law by early Christian authors from Justin Martyr onward were tintured by the resultant polemics, which provided a significant impetus for mainstream Christians

not only to avow the goodness of the law at the macroscopic level of theology, but also to demonstrate that goodness at the microscopic level of exegesis.

## INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW OF MOSES IN THE TEETH OF DUALIST FORMS OF CHRISTIANITY

---

When it comes to patristic polemics against dualist strains of Christianity, we are faced with a problem similar to the one we have already noted regarding patristic critiques of Jews and Judaism. That question is whether in any given instance early Christian critiques of these groups can be attributed to actual socio-religious contact and rivalry, or to the theological instruction to be gained from shadowboxing with those groups. For our purposes, however, the question is irrelevant and in any event it cannot be gainsaid that these heretical groups at least in some times and in some places constituted a formidable alternative to conventional Christianity.

According to Tertullian, Marcion taught that the Mosaic law was enacted not by the supreme God, but by a petty creator god, and that the law itself furnishes proof of that god's authorship. Certain laws, such as the *lex talionis* and precepts regarding clean and unclean animals, are distasteful and not worthy of the true God revealed by Jesus (*Marc.* 2.18). Marcion was also keen to point out inconsistencies in the law that bespoke its inferior provenance (*Marc.* 2.21), and he contended that Christ himself violated the law precisely in order to prove that it was not the law of his Father (*Marc.* 4.9–12).

Some of Marcion's dualist contemporaries took a more complex view of the law of Moses. For instance, in his *Letter to Flora* Ptolemy, a disciple of Valentinus, affirmed that the god responsible for the Mosaic law was just (though some of the law's precepts originate not from that god but directly from Moses himself), and that the law contains precepts, such as those of the Decalogue, that are not morally compromised (5). But even some of the law's requirements that have a divine pedigree, such as the *lex talionis*, are not perfectly just and hence unworthy of the supreme God. Ptolemy went on to say that other regulations, including those respecting the sabbath, circumcision, and sacrifices, were given by the creator god in order to serve as types of spiritual realities. On the one hand, the case of Ptolemy shows just how closely a dualist take on the law can veer toward a mainstream one; orthodox authors will make many of the same hermeneutical moves, such as classifying the laws according to non-biblically derived categories, and underlining the typological dimension of a large number of the law's commands. But on the other hand, accounts of the law such as Ptolemy's threw down the gauntlet for Christian authors of a more conventional stripe, inasmuch as they ultimately alienated the Mosaic law altogether from the Father of Jesus Christ.

Orthodox authors rose to the challenge posed by dualist treatments of the law through a variety of means. Most basically, they asserted the divine origin of the entire

raft of Mosaic precepts, whose shortcomings stemmed not from its author but from the debased condition of its original audience, whether that audience was taken to be fallen humanity in general and/or the Israelites in particular (Irenaeus, *haer.* 4.1–19; Ephrem, *ref.* 3.127–8). In order to corroborate this claim, patristic theologians attempted to demonstrate how the particular ordinances of the law were animated by benevolent intentions. Though, as we have seen, patristic authors often stressed the restraining function of the law, they could also strike a more positive tone, pointing up how the law's intention was to prepare the Israelites for the advent of Christ, not simply to curb their wickedness (Ambrosiaster, *comm. in Gal.* 3.19; John Chrysostom, *comm. in Gal.* 3.22). Irenaeus was perhaps the most emphatic on this point. Even those laws ordained to curb the depravity of the Israelites were deployed by God to initiate them into the service of God, and to induce them to 'swallow the fishhook of the Decalogue' (*haer.* 4.13–15). Indeed, Irenaeus took the Israelites to be synecdochic of the whole human race, which was mysteriously prepared for Christ through the dispensation of the law (4.14–19).

Dualist critiques of the law impelled even those early Christian thinkers who were less sanguine than Irenaeus concerning the propaedeutic value of the law to rebut the notion that God established the law in order to effect or exacerbate human sin. Apparently such a charge was a stock one among dualist Christians, and was based principally on select Pauline texts. Some orthodox authors maintained that while the *result* of the law may have been an intensification of sin, such an outcome was neither the intention of the lawgiver nor the fault of the law itself (Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 5.6.3; John Chrysostom, *hom. 10, 12 in Rom.*; Jerome, *Gal.* 2.3.121–3). Even Augustine, who in his polemic against Manichaeism granted that the increase of sin was a feature and not a flaw of the Mosaic law's design, considered that outcome subservient to the law's primary purpose, which was to benefit its recipients by humbling them and teaching them their need for grace (*Faust.* 19.7).

Although it is true that some ancient Christian writers consigned some precepts of the law exclusively to the category of concessions to Israelite perversity, many insisted that a significant swathe of them were at least edifying, if not normative, for Christians. Virtually all averred that at least some of the precepts of the law were coextensive with the natural law and/or the law of Christ, and hence remained binding on Christians (Justin, *dial.* 45; Irenaeus, *haer.* 4.16; Tertullian, *Iud.* 2; Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Gal.* 30). Although some authors seemed to reduce such precepts to the Decalogue (Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 2.9.1), others took pains to show the way in which certain regulations that might seem extraneous to the law of nature were given precisely in order to foster a disposition of compliance with that law. For instance, according to Theodoret of Cyrus, the proscription against eating the flesh of an animal killed by wild animals was intended to 'teach [the Israelites] a more rational life and to eschew the savagery of animals' (*qu. 52 in Ex.*; trans. Hill 2007:305).

But perhaps above all, mainstream early Christian theologians located the permanent value of the law in its figural dimension, wherein its divine fingerprints are most visible. It is not unusual to find in early Christian literature sweeping statements to the effect that the law of Moses was typological through and through. A wide array of patristic

writers, such as Justin Martyr (*dial.* 42), Clement of Alexandria (*str.* 5), and Origen (*hom.* 5 in *Lev.* 12), contended that the vast majority of the ordinances of the law could be interpreted typologically, and that it was primarily at the typological level that the law had abiding value. Of course, early Christian biblical interpreters did not all agree on how frequently and in what manner figural interpretation of the law ought to be employed. But here the textbook distinction between Alexandrian and Antiochene exegesis, for instance, is of limited usefulness. Despite the significant differences between them as theologians and exegetes, the approaches of Origen and Theodoret, representatives of the Alexandrian and Antiochene styles respectively, to the interpretation of the law differed in degree, not kind. While Theodoret was certainly more apt to try to ascertain the divine pedagogy behind the precepts literally understood, his *Questions on the Octateuch* are studied with figural interpretations of Mosaic regulations similar to those of Origen (*qu.* 15–18, 61 in *Ex.*).

Unsurprisingly, patristic exegetes, like many NT writers, found figures related to Christ in the law. But in addition, they discovered types foreshadowing the Church's liturgical practices, such as the Eucharist (Justin, *dial.* 41), and the eschatological consummation of salvation that Christians still awaited (Hilary, *Psal.* 118). Just as frequently, early Christian interpreters deemed many of the types of the law to be morally instructive (*Barn.* 9–15; Justin, *dial.* 14; Gregory of Nyssa, *v. Mos.* 1.15; Origen, *hom.* 3 in *Lev.* 3). Cyril of Alexandria went so far as to say that in the law of Moses one found a mirror of the evangelical way of life, and that the way of life in Christ was not far removed from what was mandated in the Mosaic law, provided that law was understood spiritually (*ador.*; PG 68.141c).

To be sure, the first Christians to employ a figural approach to the law, namely, the writers of the NT, probably pre-dated dualistic forms of Christianity, and these writers themselves were in turn preceded by Jewish exegetes, most notably Philo, who interpreted the law allegorically (Runia 1990). But the rise of the dualist groups of the second century provided an additional incentive for orthodox Christian writers to highlight the figural texture of the law. While it is true that some Christians of a dualist bent employed the methods of allegorical exegesis, methods famously rejected by Marcion, they often did so in ways that served their own dualist ends (e.g. *Apocryphon of John*). In contrast, for orthodox authors spiritual interpretation demonstrated the divine provenance of the law, inasmuch as it uncovered arcane correspondences, and hence continuity, between the law of Moses and the revelation of Christ. For most orthodox Christian authors, the law's figural density both vouched for the law's divine origin and guaranteed its ongoing capacity to edify the Christian community.

The figural interpretation of the law brings this chapter full circle, because some early Christian exegetes discovered in that hermeneutical technique a potent polemical tool that could be wielded against not only dualist Christians, but also Jews. It is not unusual to find patristic authors criticizing Jews for not grasping that some laws were never divinely intended to be literally discharged in the first place, but only to be spiritually understood. For instance, Origen finds a number of Mosaic precepts to be absurd when taken literally, and hence valuable only when understood allegorically

(*hom. 3 in Lev. 3; comm. in Rom. 6.12.2*; see also Jacob of Sarug, *Iud. 7.259–68*). Though Ambrose, a polished practitioner of figural interpretation, stops just short of asserting that the Israelites were wrong to obey the literal demands of the law, his attitude toward literal observance could hardly be more disdainful; while the law is good for those who understand that it is spiritual, it is not good for those who do not so understand (*Luc. 3.29*). Although some early Christian authors granted that a privileged few among the Israelites espied the spiritual horizon of the law, many maintained that it was primarily, if not exclusively, Christians who were able to do so (Origen, *comm. in Rom. 2.14.7*).

Furthermore, some early Christian interpreters deployed figural readings of the law in service to their theological critique of the law and of Jewish literal obedience thereto. For instance, Cyril of Alexandria builds a case that the law of Moses, when properly understood (that is to say, understood spiritually), exposes both its own soteriological limitations and the debased moral and spiritual character of the Jewish people, both ante and post Christum (*ador.*; PG 68.616c). For Cyril, then, figural exegesis not only funds the vindication of the law of Moses over against dualist dismissals, but also the discrediting of Judaism, which clings to a law that, correctly construed, relativizes its own importance and indicts those who submit to its letter after the advent of Christ. So while early Christian allegorical approaches to the law cannot be reduced to mere arts of war, neither can the popularity of such approaches across time and space during the patristic period be adequately explained apart from their twofold polemical value.

## CONCLUSION

---

The NT certainly established some general principles for the interpretation of the law, but it left theological and exegetical work to be done, and tensions to be resolved. For early Christians, properly understanding the law of Moses was crucial because the stakes were so high. The careless or misguided reader of the law was liable to be devoured by the Scylla of Judaism or sucked into the Charybdis of Marcionism or related dualist heresies. Therefore orthodox theologians committed themselves to walking a dialectical tightrope. They emphasized the divine authorship of the law while also underscoring its manifold limitations; they sought to find overlap between the law of Moses and the law of Christ while also consigning the majority of Mosaic precepts, literally understood, to the dustbin of history; and they highlighted the figural complexion of the law in order both to secure the law's permanent value and to demonstrate its built-in obsolescence.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- Augustine, *Epistulae*. Latin text: A. Goldbacher (ed.), *Epistulae*, CSEL 34, 44, 57, 58 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1895–1923). Eng. trans.: R. Teske, *Letters* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001–5).  
 Cyril of Alexandria, *De Adoratione et Cultu in Spiritu et Veritate*. Greek text: PG 68.133–1126.

- Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*. Latin and Greek text: A. Rousseau et al. (eds), *Contre les Hérésies*, SC 100, 152–3, 210–11, 263–4, 293–4 (Paris: Cerf, 1969–2008). Eng. trans.: A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, ANF 1 (repr.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).
- John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*. Greek text: PG 48.813–842. Eng. trans.: Paul W. Harkins, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, FC 68 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988).
- Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*. Greek text: M. Marcovich (ed.), *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, PTS 47 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997). Eng. trans.: Lukyn Williams, *The Dialogue with Trypho* (London: SPCK, 1930).
- Origen, *Commentarii in Romanos*. Latin text: C. P. H. Bammel (ed.), *Der Römerbriefkommentar des Origenes*, Vetus Latina 16, 33, 34 (Freiburg: Herder, 1990–8). Eng. trans.: T. P. Scheck, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, FC 103–4 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001–2).
- Ptolemy, *Epistula ad Florum*. Greek text: G. Quispel (ed.), *Lettre à Flora*, SC 24 (Paris: Cerf, 1996). Eng. trans.: K. Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).
- Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*. Latin text and Eng. trans.: E. Evans (ed.), *Adversus Marcionem*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).
- Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Exodum*. Greek text: N. Fernández Marcos and A. Sáenz-Badillos, *Quaestiones in Octateuchum: Theodoreti Cyrensis Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, Textos y estudios Cardinal Cisneros 17 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1979). Eng. trans.: R. C. Hill, *The Questions on the Octateuch*, Library of Early Christianity 1–2 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

## Scholarship

- Blackburn, B. L. (2009). *The Mystery of the Synagogue: Cyril of Alexandria on the Law of Moses*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Notre Dame.
- Fredriksen, P. (2008). *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday).
- Harnack, A. V. (1883). *Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophili Christiani: Nebst Untersuchungen über die antijüdische Polemik in der alten Kirche; und Die Acta Archelai und das Diatessarion Tatians* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs).
- Lienhard, J. T. (2002). ‘The Christian Reception of the Pentateuch: Patristic Commentaries on the Books of Moses’, *J ECS* 10: 373–88.
- Roukema, R. (1988). *The Diversity of Laws in Origen’s Commentary on Romans* (Amsterdam: Free University Press).
- Runia, D. T. (1990). *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (Aldershot: Variorum).
- Schreckenbergh, H. (1990). *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.–11. Jh.)* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang).
- Simon, M. (1986). *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135–435)*, trans. H. McKeating (New York: Littman Library).
- Taylor, M. (1995). *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* (Leiden: Brill).
- Wilken, R. L. (1971). *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria’s Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

---

## Suggested Reading

- Blumenkranz, B. (1946). *Die Judenpredigt Augustins: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der jüdisch-christlichen Beziehungen in den ersten Jahrhunderten* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn).
- Daniélou, J. (1960). *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. Wulstan Hibberd (London: Burnes & Oates).
- De Lange, N. R. M. (1976). *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- De Lubac, H. (1950). *Histoire et Esprit: L'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène* (Paris: Aubier).
- Hahn, V. (1969). *Das wahre Gesetz: Eine Untersuchung der Auffassung des Ambrosius von Mailand vom Verhältnis der beiden Testamente* (Münster: Aschendorff).
- Kerrigan, A. (1952). *St Cyril of Alexandria: Interpreter of the Old Testament* (Rome: Analecta Biblica).
- Lehto, A. (2006). 'Moral, Ascetic, and Ritual Dimensions to Law-Observance in Aphrahat's Demonstrations,' *J ECS* 14(2): 157–81.
- Stewart-Sykes, A. (1997). 'Melito's Anti-Judaism,' *J ECS* 5: 271–83.
- Wilken, R. L. (1983). *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Young, F. M. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

## CHAPTER 37

---

# PSALMS

---

MICHAEL CAMERON

## INTRODUCTION

---

HISTORICALLY speaking it was scarcely predictable that the predominantly Gentile Christian communities of Late Antiquity should be drawn to a book of ancient Jewish prayers, much less ascribe divine authority to it and incessantly mine it for essential teachings. Yet early Christianity adopted Israel's book of Psalms unchanged and *in toto* from the Hebrew Bible, mediated by the Septuagint, as part of its treasury of sacred Scripture (Law 2013). A simple reason for this interest quickly emerges: these ancient prayers taught them either openly or obscurely of Christ the Lord and of vibrant Christian faith. Christians shared with Jews a perception that the Psalms interwove the Bible's great themes of creation, history, law, prophecy, and wisdom, mapping God's providential design for creation in a way that also tapped into the seething tumult of fragile human lives in God's presence. But Christians' radical Christological orientation heard within the texts not only the story but even the very voice of the living Christ. The Psalms therefore were not only a cache of prayers and a training ground for spiritual practice; they were also a treasury of Christian prophecy that opened a window onto teaching about Christ and even the movements of his inner life as he wrought redemption. As a result, the Psalter became the most commented on book of the Bible by far among early Christian writers (Grünbeck 1994:5), a constant presence in early Christian liturgy, a handbook of spiritual discipline, a road map for spiritual advancement, and a charter for doctrinal discussion. Basil of Caesarea captured the Christian spirit of reading the Psalms when he exulted, 'A psalm is the work of angels—[a sample of] the heavenly way of being and spiritual incense' (*hom. in Pss.* 1.2; PG 29.213).

### A New Way of Reading

Right understanding of the way early Christians read the Psalms requires imaginatively reorienting oneself to their perspective and practices (Rondeau 1982–85, I:12). Even the

word ‘interpretation’ proves problematic if used in the conventional academic sense of performing an analytical operation that seeks to establish a text’s *Ursprünglichkeit* in order to excavate meaning only from its historical setting and authorial intention. Early Christian readers attended to language and history as they understood them; but something more and different was going on. The radical disorientation of Jesus’ death and his resurrection opened up a previously unimaginable new world that created a different reading perspective on the Jewish Scriptures. ‘Christian faith has its beginnings in an experience of profound contradictoriness, an experience which so questioned the religious categories of the time that the resulting reorganization of religious language was a centuries-long task’ (Williams 2000:1). The early Christian reading patterns that emerged from the generation of the Apostles show that this ‘reorganization’ was especially dramatic for reading the Psalter. It became the pre-eminent Book of Christ.

The curtain rises on the drama of early Christian reading of the Psalms with Luke’s account of the first Easter day. That whole day it seems the chief activity of the risen Jesus was to read Scripture to the disciples. Luke describes him walking incognito with two distraught disciples on the road to the village of Emmaus as he ‘interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures’ (Luke 24.27); later they marvelled that ‘as he was opening the Scriptures’ their hearts were ‘burning’ within them (24.32). That evening Jesus appeared to the Apostles, and immediately ‘opened their minds’ concerning ‘all things written about me in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms’ (24.44–5). For Luke, Jesus himself initiated this Christian way of reading the Psalms based on a new way of seeing that he himself imparted. The disciples learn to read the Psalms, as it were, through the eyes of the risen Lord. The flurry of quotes and allusions from the Psalms in the Acts of the Apostles shows how quickly the Psalter lodged in the early Christian mind as a treasury for proclaiming Christ. The book of Psalms framed the Church’s self-understanding as a divinely guided community (Acts 1.20 = Ps 68.26 [69.25] and 108.8 [109.8]; 4.25–26 = Ps 2.1–2).<sup>1</sup> It anchored the preaching of Peter (Acts 2.25–8 = Ps 15.8–11 [16.8–11]; 2.34–5 = Ps 109.1 [110.1]; 4.11 = Ps 117.22 [118.22]), and then that of Paul (Acts 13.33 = Ps 2.7; 13.35–7 = Ps 15.10). The letters of the NT carried through these readings in myriad ways (among dozens of examples, see Rom 15.3 = Ps 68.10 [69.9]; 1 Cor 15.27 = Ps 8.7 [8.6]; Heb 10.5–7 = Ps 39.7–9 [40.6–8]). Ultimately the book of Psalms became the most quoted OT source in the NT.

For NT writers shaping the story of Jesus, the paschal mystery of Christ crucified and risen did not merely reveal some hidden message of the Psalms; it also added to them new messianic depths. NT writers and the early Christian tradition generally saw the Psalms’ ‘fulfilment’ disclosed in the Lord’s dying moments on the cross. Texts of the Psalms prophesied events surrounding the crucifixion: casting lots for Jesus’ clothing (Ps 21.19 [22.18]); offering Jesus wine mixed with vinegar (Ps 68.22 [69.21]); leaving Jesus’ bones left unbroken (Ps 33.21 [34.20]). Fulfilment occurred above all when Jesus prayed the Psalms from the cross, whether in bewildered suffering (‘My God, my God, why have

<sup>1</sup> References to the Psalms use the Septuagint enumeration of Pietersma and Wright (2007), followed in parentheses by versification from the NRSV.

you forsaken me?’ Matt 27.46; Mark 15.34 = Ps 21.2 [22.1]) or in trusting surrender (‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit’; Luke 23.46 = Ps 30.6 [31.5]). In this way Christ revamped the meaning of these Jewish prayers for all future Christian readers. Christ virtually retraced the letters of the ancient Psalter and infused his Spirit in them using the stylus of his cross and the ink of his grace. This ‘transfigured’ text of the Psalms is the one that early Christians read, prayed, studied, and taught, and not the Scriptures of Israel *per se*.

This affects our imagination of how the earliest Christians conducted the work of ‘interpretation.’ Their altered way of reading was grounded in, but was not reducible to, the texts of ancient Israel. For example, Origen played on the Greek equation of the name Jesus and Joshua to read the story of the ancient Israelite commander reading the covenant to the people of Israel (Josh 8.34–5). Christians accept the Torah, Origen wrote, ‘if Jesus reads it to us’ for ‘as he reads, we may grasp his “mind” and understanding’—alluding to Paul’s assertion that Christians have ‘the mind of Christ’ in 1 Corinthians 2.16 (*hom. in Jos.* 9.8; trans. Heine 1997:142). Elsewhere Origen wrote with equal boldness that the ancient texts of Israel now preached the Christian gospel because through his incarnation Christ had ‘made them all into gospel by the gospel’ (*Jo.* 1.33–4, trans. Trigg 1998:111; Dawson 2002:127–37). Such retroactive transposition of the OT into NT is not fully explained by words that moderns typically use to describe these new Christian readings: *interpret, use, refer, allude, evoke, and reread*. Such language misconstrues the NT’s relationship to the OT, as James Barr noted. ‘The business of the New Testament is not primarily to tell what the Old Testament really means, but to declare a new substance which for the Old was *not yet there* . . . It is more correct to say that the OT was used to interpret the situations and events of the New’ (Barr 1983:70, emphasis added). That ‘new substance’, of course, was the effect of Christ’s death and resurrection—as willed by the God who also inspired the writing of the Psalms. NT writers panted to keep up with the unfolding implications of the burgeoning new reality, re-envisioning text after text now aglow with the strange new incandescence of Christ. Christians ever after made the Psalms an encyclopedic resource, indeed a thesaurus, for articulating the implications of the incarnation and redemptive work of Christ (Behr 2001:27–8). In short, it is truer to say that the Psalms interpreted Christ than that Christians interpreted the Psalms.

## CHARACTERIZING THE EARLY CHRISTIAN READING OF THE PSALMS

---

Early Christianity’s reading of the Psalms was deeply grounded in a perception of the unity of the OT and NT (Rondeau 1982–5, I:11). Interpreters came to view the Psalms not only as an important biblical book, but as a Bible-in-miniature. Athanasius wrote that while the rest of the Bible conveys stories of faith, commands to obedience, exhortations

to repentance, and teachings of wisdom, the book of Psalms is 'like a garden that contains things of all these kinds', as well as a sort of full-length mirror reflecting the whole range of human emotions (*ep. Marcell. 2*; trans. Gregg 1980:102).

All the great lights of early Christianity, and many lesser ones, commented on the Psalms. Origen of Alexandria treated the whole Psalter over his career in a commentary, in homilies, and in detached notes, although precious little of this work survives (Torjesen 1982; Perrone 2013). Origen influenced many Psalms commentators who followed in the East, including Eusebius of Caesarea, Didymus the Blind, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor, and others. Writers from the exegetical circle of Antioch commented extensively on the Psalms, while opposing Origenian *allegoria* with an alternative emphasis on historically framed spiritual discernment (*theoria*). The group included Diodore of Tarsus, his students John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia, and later their (not uncritical) follower, Theodoret of Cyrus (O'Keefe 2000). Many extracts and otherwise unknown fragments of comments upon the Psalms survived in early medieval catenae ('chains'), jumbled collections of remnants from the vast body of early Christian exegetical literature lost during contentious times. In the fourth-century West, Hilary of Poitiers commented on dozens of Psalms, as did Jerome and Ambrose of Milan. Surpassing them all, Augustine of Hippo treated all 150 psalms in a sprawling and diverse work, twice the length of *City of God*, that contained more than 200 dictated and preached expositions collectively known as the *Enarrationes in psalmos*, or *Expositions of the Psalms*. In its wake many monastic and pastoral treatments of the Psalms appeared, including works by John Cassian (fifth century), Gregory the Great (sixth century), and later the Venerable Bede and Alcuin (eighth century). From a quite different, proto-scholastic atmosphere, an extensive commentary on the Psalms came from the pen of Cassiodorus (sixth century).

## HOW THE PSALMS FUNCTIONED

---

The Psalms appear everywhere in early Christian literature's vast intertextual nervous system of biblical quotes, allusions, and images. What follows presents a panoramic sequence of snapshots by looking for *how the Psalms functioned as Christian texts*. At least seven categories emerge, though undoubtedly more might be suggested.

### Liturgy and Worship

Early Christians continued the apostolic practice of singing psalms along with freely composed musical poetry (Col 3.16). (The following relies upon Daley 2002:185–7.) The earliest reference to singing psalms in Christian liturgy appears in the late second century. A Greek fragment of the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* describes a community

singing psalms. About the same time, Tertullian speaks of a North African congregation that mixed songs with psalms (*apol.* 39). The Marcionite and the Gnostic crises of the second century bolted the 'Great Church' more strongly to its Jewish biblical roots, and reined in the imitation of Gnosticism's freely composed hymns and songs that were suspected of encoding heterodox belief and disdain for the OT; this nagging threat led to a greater insistence on using words from Scripture in worship. The earliest fragment of a commentary on the Psalms seems to come from Hippolytus of Rome in an early third-century homily that offered a basic orientation to the Psalms and their titles. Meanwhile from early third-century Egypt survives Clement of Alexandria's encouragement to believers to sing psalms before meals (*paed.* 2.4).

## Hermeneutics and Interpretation

Early Christian writers continually reflected on how to explain Scripture according to Christ in order to clarify the new approach to themselves, to oppose it to some, and to defend it to others. Their analysis often appeared in conjunction with interpretations of the Psalms, which demonstrated with unusual clarity the complexity of Christian hermeneutical practices. The context of prayer made the Psalms especially suited to offer lessons for learning how to approach the deep mystery of God's presence. A surviving fragment from the start of Origen's Psalms commentary suggests this outlook.

As we are about to begin the interpretation of the Psalms, we shall disclose a very beautiful tradition handed on to us. . . The whole divinely inspired Scripture may be likened, because of its obscurity, to many locked rooms in one house. By each room is placed a key, but not the one that corresponds to it, so that the keys are scattered about beside the rooms, none of them matching the room by which it is placed. It is a difficult task to find the keys and match them to the rooms that they can open. We therefore know the scriptures that are obscure only by taking the points of departure for understanding them from another place because they have their interpretative principle scattered among them.

(Origen, *Ps.*, fragment from Preface; trans. Trigg 1998:70–1)

For Origen the Psalms' mysteriousness was the design of David, their primary prophetic author. Origen recalled the vision of John of Patmos, who wept when he saw a heavenly book sealed with seven seals that no one was worthy to open, 'locked and sealed by the key of David' (Rev 5.1–4). An elder told John, 'The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed so as to open the book and its seven seals' (Rev 5.5). For Origen Christ alone could satisfactorily open the book of Psalms, for its key was in the possession of him alone 'who opens and no one shuts, who shuts and no one opens' (Rev 3.7; Isa 22.22; *Ps.* Preface 1; Heine 2010:117). According to Origen, the Lord used this key of David when he 'opened the Scriptures' to the disciples on the first Easter, explaining everything about himself in them, including the Psalms (Luke 24.32, 45). Likewise, for Augustine the cross of Christ revealed not only the redemptive exchange of divine life

for human death, but also the hermeneutic key to the Christian reading of the Psalms, and indeed the entire OT. Commenting on the enigmatic phrase ‘hidden things’ in the title of Psalm 45 (46), Augustine encouraged puzzled readers to remain undaunted: ‘he who was crucified on Calvary rent the veil asunder so that the secret places of the temple were exposed to view. Our Lord’s cross was like a key for opening what was locked away: so let us be confident that he will be with us now, that these hidden things may be unveiled’ (*Psal.* 45.1, trans. Boulding 2000–4, WSA III/16:310; de Lubac 1998:237–9). Augustine used that key, for example, for opening the title of Psalm 33 to reveal the exact correspondence between the story of David feigning madness before the high priest (1 Sam 21) and the details of Christ’s passion (*Psal.* 33.1–11).

Concern for grounding the Psalms in history grew in the fourth century. Many writers took literally the traditional view of David as author of the Psalms, as well as the historical truth of the superscriptions that linked them to his life. These superscriptions became interpretative keys that linked understanding of the Psalms to other biblical narratives. Such was a practice of Eusebius of Caesarea, the church historian and chronicler of Constantine, who wrote a vast commentary on the Psalms that is now being studied anew. Though an admirer of Origen’s spiritual exegesis, he grounded his reading of the Psalms in biblical narratives about David that he accepted at face value. He often used this narrative context to determine a psalm’s main interpretative theme, or ‘hypothesis’.

Others thought mere spiritual intuitions about history were inadequate. Antiochene hermeneutics looked for a stable historical and grammatical sense in the texts while rejecting Origenian allegory because of its pagan literary roots. Diodore of Tarsus promised that his *Commentary on the Psalms* would hew closely to each text’s ‘truth’ by expounding each one ‘according to the narrative sense (*historia*) and literal sense (*lexis*)’. The Psalms were not without deeper meanings, however; one might discern a valid contemplative sense (*theoria*), he said, if it arose naturally from the narrative. ‘*Historia* is not opposed to *theoria*,’ wrote Diodore. ‘On the contrary, it proves to be the foundation and the basis of the higher senses . . . [But] *theoria* must never be understood as doing away with the underlying sense; it is then no longer *theoria* but allegory’ (*Ps.* prologue; trans. Froehlich 1983:85, modified). Diodore’s ‘middle-of-the-road’ interpretations drew theological and moral teaching from the Psalms even as they cut back the growth of prophetic-Christological readings. The Antiochene approach increased sensitivity to the Bible’s historical and literary dimensions even as it lessened the sense of its overarching unity as Christian Scripture (Nassif 1996).

## Apologetic Prophecy and Fulfilment

Some writers read the Psalms after the pattern of Matthew’s Gospel, which drew direct connections between prophecies of the OT and their literal fulfilment in Christ. Others followed the more indirect pattern of allusion preferred by Luke’s Gospel that evoked broad patterns of prophetic fulfilment. (The infancy narratives of both Gospels show these patterns clearly.) Either way, the Psalms were used as ‘proofs’ against Jewish and

pagan critics when Christian claims were built upon ancient Israelite prophecy. Justin Martyr's (staged) debate with Trypho the Jew over rights to the ancient Scriptures asserted flatly that the texts are 'not yours but ours' (*dial.* 29; trans. Reith 1885:123). He even accused Jews of altering prophecies that putatively anticipated Christianity, for example claiming that they had tampered with the crucifixion image embedded in Psalm 95.10 (96.10), 'The Lord reigned from the tree' (i.e. the cross) (*dial.* 73). The claim turned out to be false, but Justin's lawyerly approach revealed the strain of brittle and litigious defensiveness in early Christian apologetic. Origen's defence of Christianity in the *Contra Celsum* invoked the Psalms more than any other part of the OT. Augustine took the title of his magnum opus, *On the City of God*, from Psalm 86.3 (87.3) ('Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God'), and took inventory of the arsenal of Christian prophecies from psalms concerning Christ's kingship (Ps 44 [45]), priesthood (Ps 109 [110]), death (Ps 21 [22]), and resurrection (Ps 15 [16]), as well as Jewish unbelief (Ps 68 [69]) (*ciu.* 17.14–19). A hallowed prophecy-fulfilment schema framed Christianity's recent appearance in history within an ancient providential design.

## Theological Instruction

The Psalms supplied the early Church with seminal imagery and critical clarifications of staple Christian teachings, particularly Christology. The image of Christ 'at the right hand of God' from Psalm 109.1 (110.1) was traditional already by the mid-first century (Rom 8.34; Mark 11.36; Acts 2.34; Heb 1.13), and eventually passed into the Church's creeds, where it remains to this day. The Letter to the Hebrews used the Psalms plentifully to articulate its high Christology (Attridge 2004). Its way of reading the royal Psalm 44 (45) catalysed later exegetical debates over how to construe the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation. Many early Christian writers put their rhetorical training on display while identifying the speaker in many Psalms. This was especially true of Psalm 44, perhaps the most frequently treated of all the Psalms. All agreed that its reference to the writer bringing forth 'the good word' (44.1a) referred to the presentation of Christ, but opinions differed about who was doing the presenting. For Origen, the prophet himself spoke the good word by singing the praise of Christ. By contrast, Cyril of Alexandria thought that the Father was speaking (Crawford 2014:25–6). Indeed, the Father having 'belched forth the *logos*' generated the eternal Son from within, 'as a word from a mind'. Cyril thought the expression taught a theology of triune revelation. Meanwhile, the phrase that followed, 'the pen of a stenographer' (44.1c), metaphorically pictured the Son's exact revelatory transcription of the Father. 'The Only-Begotten Word of God', wrote Cyril, 'does the same thing [as the pen] by intellectually inscribing on the hearts of those who believe the great and wise and true will of the Father' (Ps. 44.2; trans. Crawford 2014:26).

Doctrinal discussions about Christ percolated over the reading of Psalm 44.7–8 (45.6–7): 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever . . . Therefore God, your God, anointed you with oil of rejoicing beyond your partners.' Arius and his followers lit upon the word

‘therefore’ to suggest that Christ received anointing at a particular point in time; the implied temporal sequence proved that he could not be equal to the Father or a partaker of his eternal nature. Furthermore, Arians used the words of Psalm 44.8 (45.7), ‘God has anointed you’, to indicate the changeability of the Logos, for if he *became* anointed it meant that at one time he was not, and was therefore inferior to the Father. Finally, they asserted that if the Logos had had ‘partners’ it meant that he was merely one among many. However, Athanasius’ *Discourses against the Arians* (1.12.46–52; trans. Rusch 1980:109–17) rhetorically raked his opponents over grammatical coals by insisting that the vocative case in Psalm 44.7 (45.6) (‘Your throne, O God’) assigned divinity to Christ. For that reason, he continued, the term ‘partners’ must be referred to those who participate in the Logos, which indicates that he belongs to a different order of reality from them. The term ‘anointing’, he continued, thus described the act of the Logos conferring ‘the oil of gladness’ upon his own humanity, which he planned to share with his people. Athanasius’ exegesis both contested the Arian claims and freshly restated orthodox teaching about the incarnation (Williams 2011:24–8).

While Diodore of Tarsus strongly disparaged Origenian spiritual exegesis, he still found wide scope for theological interpretation of the Psalms via his perspective on *pro-noia*, the providence of God as Creator (Wayman 2014: chap. 6). This grounded his sense of God’s management of the historical process governing prophecy and fulfilment. Diodore’s strong interest in understanding the Psalms according to their place in Israel’s historical narrative limited their traditional Christological import. But theological interpretation remained important when he combined the realism of the historical sense with his concern for *theoria*. Diodore’s philosophically conceived outlook on God’s overarching presence and care in Israel’s story (for instance, relating the punishment for sin in Psalm 50 [51] to the historical Babylonian captivity of Judah), presupposed a certain diachronic sense of biblical unity.

As early medieval Christian culture took hold, the Psalms replaced pagan literature as tools of elementary instruction. Writers used the Psalms not only to give training in doctrine and spirituality, but also to teach language and grammar. Cassiodorus’ massive sixth-century Psalms commentary used the texts both for religious instruction and for training in logic (Walsh 1998). A parallel example appears in the Springmount Bog Tablets, discovered last century in an Irish peat bog and dating to c.600. Inscribed with Psalms 30–2, they were probably used by an aspiring cleric who was studying to become *psalteratus*, that is, a person able to recite Psalms by heart (Brown 2007:179).

## Moral Instruction

Early Christian teachers like Clement of Rome (late first century), like their Jewish counterparts, spontaneously turned to the Psalms to commend good conduct (1 *Clem.* 15, 22, 28, etc.). But for others, the Psalms’ moral dimension went even deeper. For Athanasius, ‘The entire holy Scripture is a teacher of virtues and of the truths of faith, while the Book of Psalms possesses somehow the perfect image for the soul’s course of

life' (*ep. Marcell.* 14; trans. Gregg 1980:112). Purity of heart being the prerequisite for seeing God (Ps 50.12; Matt 5.8), many writers drew on the Psalms for pursuing the life of spiritual virtue. In the spirit of Origen, Gregory of Nyssa made the attainment of virtue a major theme of his *On the Inscriptions of the Psalms*. 'The goal of the virtuous life is blessedness,' he wrote; 'the divine Scripture in the Psalter' points us toward 'likeness to God' by its 'skilful and natural sequence in teaching' that moves readers toward 'separation from evil and turning to what is better' (*Pss. tit.* 1.5–8; trans. Heine 1995:84–5). The Origenian tradition generally was less concerned with ticking off specific prescriptions than with developing the perspective of wisdom within which such prescriptions made sense. Augustine similarly often set his wisdom teaching within the framework of the futility of earthly loves or the illusion of being able to control time and stave off death (*Psal.* 76.3).

In line with Antiochene exegesis, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia restrained the mystical-spiritual scope of the Psalms and their Christological dimension. Chrysostom tended to stress the moral instruction he found in the Psalms (Hill 1997). Theodore found prophecies of Christ only in Psalms 2, 8, 44 (45), and 109 (110). Yet by reading the Psalms as genuine human prayers, Theodore stressed their display of strenuous human striving and so strongly brought out their moral implications (Wayman 2014: chap. 5). For example, Theodore thought that when Jesus prayed from the cross using the words of Psalm 30.6 (31.5), 'Into your hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23.46), the Lord's purpose was not to show the fulfilment of prophecy but rather to commend his exemplary likeness to the psalmist's righteous suffering (*Ps.* 30.6). And when Theodore treated Psalm 15.9–10 (16.9–10), 'My flesh will rest in hope because you will not abandon my soul in Hades,' while not contesting Peter's Christological reading of the text as prophecy in the canonical Acts of the Apostles (2.25–8), he rather stressed the psalm's picture of David's gratitude for protection from bloodshed and idolatry (*Ps.* 15.5, 9–10).

## Spiritual Diagnosis, Therapy, and Exercise

Christian interpreters mined the Psalms for their extraordinary potential to diagnose and treat maladies of the spirit. Psalms played a central role in monasticism's spiritual-athletic campaign to conquer evil powers lurking within the soul. Athanasius' *Letter to Marcellinus* especially stresses this (Kolbet 2015). While some spoke prophetically of Christ, wrote the bishop of Alexandria, all the Psalms luminously reveal the soul's emotions (*ep. Marcell.* 10). Their words have a therapeutic effect; reading them stirs and modulates the soul, opens it to correction and reshapes it according to the perfect image coming through the text. The Psalms display a unique pedagogy of the spirit: while other parts of the Bible teach *that* we must subdue our passions, Athanasius contended, the Psalter alone shows *how* to subdue them by giving strong models to study and precise words to pray. Refracting the Psalms through personal prayer makes their words one's own; reading and singing the Psalms makes them tools of self-analysis (§11). The Spirit implants harmony in the soul that sings the Psalms, which promote the soul's recovery,

smooth its roughness, assuage its grief, and lead it 'from disproportion to proportion' (§29; trans. Gregg 1980:126). Christ bestows on the soul power for attaining virtue through the words of the Psalms, for he not only spoke and taught them but also lived and accomplished what they say; all who heard his teaching received not only commands but also a model for acting (§13). The words of the Psalms terrorize demons because 'the Lord is in the phrases of the Scriptures' (§33; trans. Gregg 1980:129).

Augustine followed and enlarged upon the Athanasian model of intimate self-discovery through the words of the Psalms. The *Confessions* have been called 'an amplified Psalter' (Fiedrowicz 1997:47). Indeed, its numerous allusions to the Psalms not only quilt the story and carry it forward, but even structure the work (Knauer 1955). As Augustine later commented about reading the Psalms, 'Everything here is our mirror.' A psalm describes and also prescribes; it informs and also performs. Therefore, Augustine counsels, 'If the psalm prays, then you pray; if it grieves, then you grieve; if it exults, then you rejoice; if it hopes then you hope; and if it fears, then you fear' (Ps. 30[2].3.1; trans. Boulding 2000-4, WSA III/15:347).

Augustine was only one of Christian multitudes who became devoted to the Psalms in that era. The rising monastic movement especially helped to generate a 'psalmodic movement' (McKinnon 1994), that is, 'that great wave of enthusiasm for the Old Testament Psalms which swept from East to West in the second half of the fourth century. Nothing quite like it has been observed either before or after in the history of Christianity or of Judaism' (McKinnon 1987:98). Evagrius Ponticus, it is said, sang psalms followed by silent prayer up to a hundred times each day; thus his own spiritual practice included the nearly continuous use of Psalm-inspired words and images of the most varied and vivid kind (Dysinger 2005:6). Ascetics were convinced that the words of the Psalms had power to deliver them from evil and from the power of temptation (Burton-Christie 1993:199-201). Amma Syncletica, for example, once commended to her charges a whole string of Psalms for the strength and encouragement they gave in severe temptation. Then she added, 'Rejoice that God visits you, and keep this blessed saying on your lips, "The Lord has chastened me sorely but he has not given me over unto death" (Ps 117.18 [118.18]). You were iron, but fire has burnt the rust off you... Are you being tried by fever? Are you being taught by cold?... So open your mouth wider to be taught by these exercises of the soul' (*apophth. patr.*; trans. Ward 1984:232). Syncletica's instruction recalls the ancient appreciation for the oral dimension of such spiritual exercises, for which *speaking* the words of Scripture enlists their power.

John Cassian boiled down his instruction in the practice of contemplative prayer to a single verse: 'God, come to my assistance; Lord, hasten to my aid' (Ps 69.1 [70.1]). This verse, he wrote, protects the soul because it is 'sufficiently and suitably adapted to any state and to all assaults' (*coll.* 10.10.3; quoted in Driver 2002:114). It addresses vices, recalls the soul's frailty, focuses the mind's attention, and asserts its continual need for God. But the Psalms did more for Cassian than encourage self-understanding; they led to *theoria*, that is, to the deep knowledge of spiritual mysteries derived from the whole of Scripture. Thus do we bridge the distance between the psalmists and ourselves; we anticipate the meaning of their words as if we ourselves were composing them (Driver 2002:114).

## Mystical Ascent

Origen heads all discussions about spiritual ascent in the Church's mystical tradition for the way he yoked the eschatological thrust of Christianity to the drive for personal spiritual formation. To this end he divided the Psalter into a three-group sequence of fifty psalms that each mirrored the Christian's growing desire for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Torjesen 1982; Torjesen 1985:24–34; Heintz 2007). Didymus the Blind's exegesis of Psalm 22 (23) followed Origen by seeing the logic of the psalm's imagery that pictures the soul's progress from simplicity to maturity: moving from sojourn to settlement, beginners who once ate mere foliage become adepts who eat solid food; they change from living as mere sheep to practising virtue as full-fledged disciples (Layton 2004:39–43). Hilary of Poitiers similarly marked out a threefold division of Psalms as a map of the complete Christian journey; in three stages the soul begins life with repentance and baptism, moves into a lifelong practice of confession and forgiveness, and finally attains to the resurrection and transformed life in heaven (*Psal.* 150.1). Hilary avers that this threefold division derives not from the Hebrew Psalms, but from 'the spiritual understanding of the [Septuagint] translators' (Burns 2012:39). Ambrose, like his mentor Origen, often commented on how the Psalms unite individual and ecclesial concerns, most importantly in his large group of homilies in the *Exposition of Psalm 118*.

Ambrose bequeathed this outlook to his protégé Augustine, who typified spiritual progress through reading the Psalms. His *Exposition of Psalm 41* (42), 'justly famous as one of Augustine's greatest mystical texts' (McGinn 1991:238), saw the psalm's deer panting for water as an image of the soul burning with thirst for God (*Ps.* 41.1). This is an exegetical version of the famous Augustinian 'restless heart' that rests only in God (*conf.* 1.1.1). The words of Psalm 41.5 (LXX), 'I meditated on these things, and poured out my soul above myself,' described the soul's passage into the heavenly house of God by self-emptying love. This love finds its source in Christ, who, in the remarkable phrase that Augustine found in the Latinized Paul of 1 Corinthians 4.6, 'transfigured us into himself' (Rondeau 1982–85, II:380–8). As he suffered in Gethsemane and on Golgotha Christ transposed his past and future members into himself, into his body, an exchange revealed on the cross when he took up the voice of sinful humanity as his own in the words of Psalm 21.2 (22.1), 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' This 'astounding exchange' (*Ps.* 30[2].1.3) disclosed in the psalm anchored Augustine's profound teaching on *totus Christus*, 'the whole Christ,' his phrase for the union of Christ and the Church, one so deep that it enabled each to speak in the name of the other (e.g. *Ps.* 37.6; Cameron 2012:chap. 6; Cameron 2015a). This was the entry point for understanding the Psalms' continual evocation of the mystery of Christ and Church ('the mystery underlying all the Scriptures,' *Ps.* 79.1). Augustine's Christo-ecclesial paradigm of spiritual ascent appears prominently in his *Expositions on the Psalms*, where treatment of the fifteen 'Step-Songs' of Psalms 119–33 (120–34) arguably forms the heart of his engagement with the Psalter (McCarthy 2010; McLarney 2014). In the style of Origen's scriptural 'house with many keys,' Augustine found the key to the 'Step-Songs' elsewhere, in Psalm 83.6–7 (84.5–6): 'God arranged his ascents in his heart, in the valley of weeping, to the

place he has appointed.' The crucified Christ leads his people from 'the valley of weeping,' his humble crucifixion, to the undreamt spiritual heights to which he has ascended, the 'place that God appointed,' which, as Paul wrote, 'eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it risen (*ascendit*) in the human heart' (1 Cor 2.9). If this vision has not yet 'ascended' within the human heart, Augustine said, then by means of these Psalms we must 'let the human heart ascend to it instead' (*Ps.* 119.1; trans. Boulding 2000–4, WSA III/19:497; Cameron 2015b:13–55).

Two centuries later Maximus the Confessor's brief treatment of Psalm 59 (60) fused present and future by drawing out the Christological and eschatological implications from the psalm's superscription, 'Unto the end, for those who shall be changed.' The incarnational economy initiated at Christ's first coming, Maximus thought, enabled the human will to conquer its irrational obsession with earthly things, and instilled hope that death and corruption will disappear. For Maximus, this 'eschatological psalm par excellence' (Blowers 2015:269) harnessed the tension between the 'already' of gospel grace received in faith and the 'not yet' of heaven's reward claimed in hope. For example, Maximus captured the tension embedded in the name 'Ephraim' (interpreted as 'widening'), while commenting on the psalm fragment, 'Ephraim is the strength of my head' (*Ps.* 59.9 [60.7]). 'By this hope,' he wrote, 'contemplating future things as [already] present, we "widen" ourselves amid afflictions and remain indestructible in the face of tribulations' (*exp. Ps.* 59 9a; trans. Blowers 2015:275).

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Apophthegmata Patrum*. Eng. trans.: *The Saying of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward, SLG, 2nd edn (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984).
- Athanasius, *Epistula ad Marcellinum*. Eng. trans.: R. C. Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, CWS (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).
- Athanasius, *Orationes tres adversus Arianos*. Eng. trans.: W. G. Rusch, 'Orations Against the Arians: Book 1', in *The Trinitarian Controversy*, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 63–129.
- Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalmos*. Eng. trans.: M. Boulding, OSB, *The Expositions of the Psalms*, 6 vols, Works of Saint Augustine III/15–20 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000–4).
- Cyril of Alexandria, *Explanatio in Psalmos*. Eng. trans.: M. R. Crawford, *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Basil of Caesarea, *Homiliae in Psalmos*. Greek text: PG 29.209–494.
- Diodore of Tarsus, *Fragmenta in Psalmos*. Eng. trans.: K. Froehlich, 'Diodore of Tarsus: Commentary on the Psalms, Prologue', in *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 82–6.
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Psalmorum tituli*. Eng. trans.: R. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

- Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo*. Eng. trans.: G. Reith, 'Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew', in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), 85–278.
- Origen, *Commentarii in Johannem*. Eng. trans.: J. W. Trigg, 'Commentary on John: Book 1', in *Origen, The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- Origen, *Fragmenta in Psalmos 1–25*. Eng. trans.: J. W. Trigg, 'Commentary on Psalms 1–25, fragment from preface', in *Origen, The Early Church Fathers* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- Origen, *Homiliae in Josuam*. Eng. trans.: R. Heine, 'Reading the Bible with Origen', in P. M. Blowers (ed.), *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

## Scholarship

- Attridge, H. W. (2004). 'The Psalms in Hebrews', in S. Moyise and M. J. J. Menken (eds), *The Psalms in the New Testament* (London: T. & T. Clark International), 197–212.
- Barr, J. (1983). *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press).
- Behr, J. (2001). *The Way to Nicaea: The Formation of Christian Theology*. vol. 1 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Blowers, P. M. (2015). 'A Psalm "Unto the End": Eschatology and Anthropology in Maximus the Confessor's Commentary on Psalm 59', in B. E. Daley, SJ, and P. R. Kolbet (eds), *The Harp of Prophecy: Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 257–83.
- Brown, M. P. (2007). 'The Triumph of the Codex: The Manuscript Book Before 1100', in S. Eliot and J. Rose (eds), *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), 179–93.
- Burns, P. C. (2012). *A Model for the Christian Life: Hilary of Poitiers' Commentary on the Psalms* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press).
- Burton-Christie, D. (1993). *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Cameron, M. (2012). *Christ Meets Me Everywhere: Augustine's Early Figurative Exegesis*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford).
- Cameron, M. (2015a). 'The Emergence of *Totus Christus* as Hermeneutical Center in Augustine's *Enarrationes in psalmos*', in B. E. Daley, SJ, and P. R. Kolbet (eds), *The Harp of Prophecy: Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 205–26.
- Cameron, M. (2015b). 'General Introduction', in *The Essential Expositions of the Psalms by Saint Augustine* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press), 13–55.
- Copeland, R. (2016). 'Cassiodorus' Hermeneutics: The Psalms and the Arts of Language', in T. Toom (ed.), *Patristic Theories of Biblical Interpretation: The Latin Fathers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 160–82.
- Crawford, M. R. (2014). *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Daley, B. E., SJ (2002). 'Training for the "Good Ascent": Gregory of Nyssa's Homily on the Sixth Psalm', in P. M. Blowers et al. (eds), *In Domino Eloquio: In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 185–217.

- Daley, B. E., SJ, and Kolbet, P. R. (2015) (eds). *The Harp of Prophecy: Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Dawson, J. D. (2002). *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- de Lubac, H. (1998). *Medieval Exegesis I: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Marc Seban (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Driver, S. D. (2002). *John Cassian and the Reading of Egyptian Monastic Culture* (New York: Routledge).
- Dysinger, L., OSB (2005). *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Fiedrowicz, M. (1997). *Psalmus Vox Totius Christi: Studien zu Augustins Enarrationes in Psalmos* (Freiburg: Herder).
- Grünbeck, E. (1994). *Christologische Schriftargumentation und Bildersprache: Zum Konflikt zwischen Metapherninterpretation und dogmatischen Schriftbeweistraditionen in der patristischen Auslegung des 44. (45.) Psalms* (Leiden: Brill).
- Heine, R. (2010). *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Heintz, M. (2007). 'The Pedagogy of the Soul: Origen's *Homilies on the Psalms*' (Diss., University of Notre Dame).
- Hill, R. C. (1997). 'The Spirituality of Chrysostom's *Commentary on the Psalms*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5: 569–79.
- Knauer, G. N. (1955). *Psalmenzitate in Augustins Konfessionen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht).
- Kolbet, P. R. (2015). 'Athanasius, the Psalms, and the Reformation of the Self', in B. E. Daley, SJ, and P. R. Kolbet (eds), *The Harp of Prophecy: Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 75–96.
- Law, T. M. (2013). *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Layton, R. (2004). *Didymus the Blind and his Circle in Late Antique Alexandria: Virtue and Narrative in Biblical Scholarship* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press).
- McCarthy, M. (2010). 'The Psalms of Ascent as Word of God in Augustine's *Enarrationes in psalmos*', *Augustinian Studies* 41: 109–20.
- McGinn, B. (1991). *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*. The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad).
- McKinnon, J. W. (1987). 'The Fourth Century Origin of the Gradual', in I. Fenlon (ed.), *Early Music History: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 91–106.
- McKinnon, J. W. (1994). 'Desert Monasticism and the Later Fourth Century Psalmic Movement', *Music and Letters* 75: 505–21.
- McLarney, G. (2014). *St. Augustine's Interpretation of the Psalms of Ascent* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press).
- Nassif, B. (1996). 'Spiritual Exegesis in the School of Antioch', in *Perspectives on Historical Theology; Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 343–77.
- O'Keefe, J. (2000). "'A Letter that Killeth': Toward a Reassessment of Antiochene Exegesis, or Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret on the Psalms', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8: 83–103.
- Olsen, D. (2017). *The Honey of Souls: Cassiodorus and the Interpretation of the Psalms in the Early Medieval West* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press).

- Perrone, L. (2013). 'Rediscovering Origen Today: First Impressions of the New Collection of Homilies on the Psalms in the *Codex monacensis Graecus* 314,' *Studia Patristica* 56: 103–22.
- Pietersma, A., and Wright, B. G. (2007). *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Rondeau, M.-J. (1982–5). *Les Commentaires patristiques du Psautier (IIIe–Ve siècles). I: Les Travaux des Pères Grecs et Latins sur le Psautier. Recherches et bilan. II: Exégèse prosopologique et Théologie.* OCA 219–20 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium).
- Torjesen, K. J. (1982). 'Origen's Interpretation of the Psalms,' *Studia Patristica* 17: 944–58.
- Torjesen, K. J. (1985). *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin: DeGruyter).
- Walsh, P. G. (1998). 'Cassiodorus Teaches Logic through the Psalms,' in J. Petruccione (ed.), *Nova et Vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press), 226–34.
- Wayman, B. D. (2014). *Diodore the Theologian: Πρόνοια in his Commentary on Psalms 1–50* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Williams, R. (2000). *The Wound of Knowledge: A Theological History from the New Testament to Luther and St. John of the Cross* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock).
- Williams, R. (2011). 'Christological Exegesis of Psalm 45,' in A. Andreopoulos, A. Casiday, and C. Harrison (eds), *Meditations of the Heart: The Psalms in Early Christian Thought and Practice: Essays in Honour of Andrew Louth* (Turnhout: Brepols), 17–32.

### Suggested Reading

An extensive listing of primary sources of early church writers and commentators on the Psalms, with available English translations, appears in the bibliography of Daley and Kolbet (2015:287–91). To this may be added Origen's newly discovered homilies on the Psalms, which have now appeared in a critical edition: *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte (GCS); Origenes Werke XIII: Die Neuen Psalmenhomilien, Eine kritische Edition des Codex monacensis Graecus 314*, ed. L. Perrone et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015). An English translation by J. W. Trigg is in preparation for the *Fathers of the Church* series of The Catholic University of America Press.

For Augustine's *Enarrationes in psalmos*, Daley and Kolbet (2015:288) mention the standard text of Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (CCL), vols 38–40, which mostly reproduce the Maurist text copied by Migne's *Patrologia Latina* 36–7. Recent new critical editions of portions of the *Enarrationes* have appeared in Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (CSEL) for Psalms 1–32 (expositions) (CSEL 93/1A [2003]); 18–32 (sermons) (CSEL 931B [2011]; 51–60 (CSEL 94/1 [2004]); 101–9 (CSEL 95/1 [2011]; 110–18 (CSEL 95/2 [2015]; 119–33 (CSEL 95/3 [2001]); 134–41 (CSEL 95/4 [2002]); 141–50 (CSEL 95/5 [2005]). Volumes of the *Enarrationes* for the Bibliothèque Augustinienne (BA) have also begun to appear, with Latin and facing French translations, introductions, and notes; to date volumes are available for Psalms 1–16 (BA 57A [2009]), 17–25 (BA 57B [2009]), 26–31 (BA 58A [2011]), 32–6 (BA 58B [2014]), 37–44 (BA 59A [2017]), 108–17 (BA 66 [2014]), and 118, Sermons 1–14 (BA 67A [2016]), Sermons 15–32 (BA 67B [2017]).

Volumes in English that display the reception of the Psalms in early Christianity have appeared in the series Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, ed. T. Oden (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press [2000–]): *ACC Old Testament VII, Psalms 1–50*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Carmen S. Harden (2007), and *ACC Old Testament VIII, Psalms 50–150*, ed.

Quentin S. Wesselschmidt (2008). A volume on the Psalms is forthcoming in the series *The Church's Bible*, ed. R. L. Wilken (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).

Daley and Kolbet (2015:291–314) offer a rich bibliography of secondary literature, to which may be added: M. Fiedrowicz and H. Müller, 'Enarrationes in psalmos', in C. P. Mayer (ed.), *Augustinus-Lexikon* 2 (Basel: Schwabe, 1996–2002), cols 804–57; A. Davril, 'La Psalmodie chez les Pères du desert', *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 49 (2013): 132–9; S. Gillingham, *The Psalms through the Centuries*, vol. 1, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); S. Gillingham, *A Journey of Two Psalms: The Reception of Psalms 1 and 2 in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); M. McNamara, *The Psalms in the Early Irish Church* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); M. McNamara, 'A Recently Discovered Irish Book of Psalms in its Setting', *SBL Forum*, online: <<http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=568>> (2006); *Le Psautier chez les Pères*, Cahiers de biblia patristica 4 (Strasbourg: Centre d'Analyse et de Documentation Patristiques, 1994).

An article that surveys how the Psalms have been read in the histories of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, literature, and the arts is forthcoming in a volume of *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–).

Andreopoulos, A., Casiday, A., and Harrison, C. (2011) (eds). *Meditations of the Heart: The Psalms in Early Christian Thought and Practice: Essays in Honour of Andrew Louth* (Turnhout: Brepols).

Fiedrowicz, M. (2000). 'General Introduction', in *The Expositions of the Psalms 1–32; Works of Saint Augustine III/15* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press), 13–66.

Stead, G. C. (1985). 'St. Athanasius on the Psalms', *VC* 39: 65–78.

## CHAPTER 38

---

# SERMON ON THE MOUNT

---

MARK ELLIOTT

### EARLY FOUNDATIONS OF INTERPRETATION

---

THE Sermon on the Mount was apparently first interpreted as a textual unit by Justin Martyr, who quoted it as Scripture, following the introductory formula: *γέγραπται* (Massaux 1993:193). This served to reinforce the higher righteousness inaugurated by Jesus (Matt 5.20 in *dial.* 105.6; Matt 7.19–21 in *1 apol.* 16.9–13; Matt 5.28 in *1 apol.* 15.1–3; in all, 37 times). However, Justin does not seem to have known the Beatitudes (nor, in fact, Matt 5.10–15; see Massaux 1993:102–9, following W. D. Köhler). One might compare how the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6.9–13) seems to have been unfamiliar to Clement of Alexandria, even while crucial for the *Didache*. Hence the Sermon in its final form, not to mention Matthew’s Gospel as a whole, might not have been known everywhere during much of the second century, perhaps especially among more clearly Hellenized Christians.

More importantly, the evidence from Justin seems to suggest that originally the parts of Matthew 5–7 were known separately. Moreover, Justin was not averse to changing a few words for emphasis, and Massaux (1993:223) admits to those same peculiar readings appearing also in Tertullian, Clement, and Origen. In *De principiis* (2.4), referring to Matthew 5.48, Origen established that Jesus reminds his followers of the providential kindness of the Father, the God of the OT. Unfortunately the extant fragments of his Matthew commentary do not cover chapters 5–7. It is only at the end of the fourth century, with Hilary, Chrysostom, and Augustine, that full treatments of Matthew 5–7 are to be found, in the former two cases as part of their larger treatments of Matthew. The point is that by then Jesus was seen to be giving instruction that *all* Christians need to hear from their preachers, although ascetical readings posed more exacting interpretations of Jesus’ demands.

## BEATITUDES

---

In their original setting and from the internal evidence of the text, the Beatitudes seem to be intended for a persecuted minority within a larger religious grouping, and they are followed by exhortation to distinctiveness. If Matthew 5.3 was the gateway to the Beatitudes, then the Beatitudes as a whole could serve as the gateway to Jesus' ethical instruction that followed. The Alexandrian ascetical tradition from Clement to Gregory of Nyssa related Matthew 5.3 ('pure in heart') to the *advanced Christian* or Christian Gnostic. Clement wrote (*str.* 4.6.41) that the Christian Gnostic has learned to despise death, as per Matthew 5.10, but that comes as the peak of growing in virtue. For first there is repentance and mourning one's past life (4.6.37); then second, there is mercy, which is active rather than passive towards the misfortune of others; then third, Gnosis is the purification of the directing faculty of the soul, if good action is going to be likely; and then finally comes a state of peace in the soul, one of contentment with circumstances (*str.* 4.6.40 on Matt 5:9). Already a sequence of moral progress is traced through the list of Beatitudes.

By the fourth century the growing tendency to view the virtues described in the opening part of the Sermon as pertaining to a *special group within the Church* coincided with the rise of the monastic movement, even if the term 'counsel' (*consilium*), as expecting a higher morality for monks, over and above the more basic moral law, was not standard until Rupert of Deutz in the twelfth century. Yet this did not quite ring true for John Chrysostom's literalist approach to the meaning of texts. For Chrysostom the Sermon claimed all Christians and even non-Christians (George 1991:255); his Antiochene hearers, the vast majority of whom were neither rich nor poor, were too keen on instant happiness. The teaching did not concern individual salvation, since one had to rest on divine mercy for that, but rather the issue of peace in community, whereby justice should be sought and one should allow oneself to be rebuked by one's social inferiors. According to the (Pseudo-Chrysostomic) *Opus imperfectum*, the audience is called to ascend the fertile mountain, but that audience was composed of humble people; that is why, explains the commentary, the text has 'poor in spirit', those who do not think great things about themselves, since their faith is an antidote to arrogance. Thus, 'he aptly made humility the beginning of the beatitudes' (*op. imp.*; trans. Kellerman 2010:84).

Gregory of Nyssa likewise saw that progress as leading from penance to perfection, from the foot to the top of the mountain, although 'he is clearly embarrassed by the fact that the first and last beatitudes offer the same reward (GNO VII/2,162.20)' (Meredith 2000:109). As Stuart Hall (2000:18) notes, the circumstances are likely to have been those where persecution of orthodox believers by the Emperor Valens was still a reality (hence, mid-370s). However, the earth (5.3) which comes after 'heaven' in 5.2 is to be understood as the celestial land: it is the same as Psalm 27.19's 'land of the living'. The meek are those who restrain their passion and are tranquil, and it follows from humility like the next highest rung. The blessed sorrowful are those who mourn

their sin and have regard for the true good in God: yet comfort (5.4), seen as a partaking in the Comforter, seems to belong to the life to come (*beat.* 3; trans. Hall 2000:46). In his *Commentary on Matthew* 5.3 Hilary of Poitiers makes it clear that ‘the earth’ that the meek—i.e. those in whose minds Christ now indwells—will inherit, is in fact the *future* resurrected body, which Christ assumed (*Mat.* 5.3; ed. Doignon 1979:124). For Pseudo-Chrysostom, that unknown but somewhat Arian, even somewhat Pelagian commentator,<sup>1</sup> the earth that the meek shall inherit is not the present land of the dead, but ‘the land of the living’ (Ps 27.13), which is the lower part of heaven, or perhaps the resurrected body as one’s dwelling.

John Chrysostom does not believe that this inheritance has to wait until after death, and so comments on ‘earth’ in Matthew 5.5 as follows:

‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.’ Tell me, what kind of earth? Some say a figurative earth, but it is not this, for nowhere in Scripture do we find any mention of an earth that is merely figurative. But what can the saying mean? He holds out a sensible prize; even as Paul also does, in that when he had said, ‘Honor thy father and thy mother’, he added, ‘For so shalt thou live long upon the earth’. And He Himself unto the thief again, ‘Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise’. Thus He does not incite us by means of the future blessings only, but of the present also, for the sake of the grosser sort of His hearers, and such as before the future seek those others. (trans. Prevost 1893:202).

Chrysostom will not have ‘earth’ spiritualized into ‘eternal life’, whereas, as with Hilary, Augustine is quite supportive of this idea (George 1991:253). Nevertheless, Augustine is reluctant to give any spatial dimensions to heaven (in his comment on 5.12; *serm. Dom.* 1.4; trans. Jepson 1948:21). For Augustine what may be expected in this life is that those who mourn are comforted once they come to love ‘the eternal’ and no longer feel the temporal loss, hence on this side of death.

It is often the case that exegetical decisions on points of detail can have implications for the interpretation of the whole, not least on the question of the voluntary nature of ‘poverty’. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ (5.2) can be understood as poor in intention, hence ‘voluntarily poor’. If there was a will, then there was a way, and the early Church thought that one could indeed become more like the poor. Yet Gregory of Nyssa also made the distinction that would catch on in Western spirituality, namely of the superiority of those who choose poverty to those who have no say in their being poor, since the former are ‘the poor in spirit’ (*poor by spirit*, i.e. intentionally seems to be the nuance). Those wishing to be like God cannot imitate him except in his poverty in spirit, that is, his voluntary humility, and that is the way to come closer to him (trans. Hall 2000:26). They are set on their way by works of righteousness and chaste purity towards the goal of the vision of God. Chrysostom’s application is considerably more corporate and practical than

<sup>1</sup> This figure had ties to Constantinople, writing around 420, and had translated many of Chrysostom’s homilies; see Mail (1991) and van Banning (1990).

Nyssa's: the voluntary poverty of the rich should lead to redistribution of wealth and restoration of justice; one does this gradually, by giving up half; yet total poverty remains the goal, and how one gives—in *agape*—matters (*hom. in Mt.* 19.4; trans. Prevost 1893:290). Thus, by radically altering the economy, Christians help make earth into heaven, and there is also an earthly reward of happiness in 'lacking nothing'. For the Apostles have demonstrated a wholly other way of life, even grieving over the sins of others (*hom. in Mt.* 25.3–4; trans. Prevost 1893:300). The radical conversion of individuals or families, and not church coffers, are appealed to as the key societal change. One might want to call this 'expanded, inclusive asceticism'. To repeat, Chrysostom is one who sees the Sermon addressed to all and sundry believers. A few paragraphs later in the sermon he develops this:

Thus accordingly Christ also with the things spiritual hath mingled the sensible. For whereas the meek man is thought to lose all his own, He promises the contrary, saying, 'Nay, but this is he who possesses his goods in safety, namely, he who is not rash, nor boastful: while that sort of man shall often lose his patrimony, and his very life'. And besides, since in the Old Testament the prophet used to say continually, 'The meek shall inherit the earth'; He thus weaves into His discourse the words to which they were accustomed, so as not everywhere to speak a strange language.

(*hom. in Mt.* 25.5; trans. Prevost 1893:203).

This is hence where the cooler waters of the OT faith are preserved, not so much in tempering the warmer water of NT spirituality, but like two taps providing two different currents.

True to his 'priority of grace' perspective, Augustine argues that there could not be seven beatitudes without the grace of the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit: meekness builds on the gift of godliness mentioned in Isaiah 11, with Romans 5.5 as key (*serm. Dom.* 1.4; trans. Jepson 1948:18–20). Growing up to be like the Father in heaven as a true son means acting like him in love, beginning with a child-like need to be forgiven, and being satisfied (5.6) (*serm. Dom.* 1.2; trans. Jepson 1948:14–16. Cf. *serm. Dom.* 53.4, which speaks of like having a wound healed in relation to 5.6; cf. Wilken 2007). As for those who mourn (5.4), the author of the *Opus imperfectum* has: 'more blessed are those who grieve over other people's sins, because those who grieve over other people's sins certainly do not have sins of their own over which to grieve' (*op. imp.*; trans. Kellerman 2010:85). Their pastoral concern for their brother is a sign of personal holiness. Thus they will put this grief aside in the coming age. For his part Nyssa comments that 'the pure of heart' (5.8) 'always see God according to the measure of their strength, receiving in the knowledge of their soul as much as it can understand' (*hom. in Cant.* 8). Perfection for humans is about being on the road, not the stasis of 'state Christianity', and so the teaching of Matthew 5.48 should not cause despair (cf. *v. Mos.* 1.10). Purity of heart turns one into a mirror; one can know God's attributes manifested in the works of creatures perfected in Him (Mateo-Seco 2010:525). Gregory describes a moral route towards ontic likeness to God. The way to achieve this is by rooting out pride, which feeds on earthly vanities

(Meredith 2000:108). It could be that whereas the first three beatitudes are about purification, with 'hunger and thirst' Gregory sees the soul as now making real progress. Jesus himself in John 4.34 gave additional information: 'My food is to do the will of my Father', which is 'that all people be saved' (1 Tim 2.4). Hence 'we should hunger for our own salvation' (*beat.* 4; trans. Hall 2000:52). All other virtues are implied in 'justice'. Being filled serves only to intensify the appetite; there is no temporal sequence with such spiritual things (trans. Hall 2000:54–5), and the satiation of *epektasis* is very different from that of human desire: 'we are assimilated to the Blessed by way of the Beatitudes... so to participate in the Beatitudes is nothing less than sharing in deity' (*beat.* 5.1; trans. Hall 2000:57). Being caught up in God's saving economy is a sign of spiritual progress.

On Matthew 5.8 ('pure in heart') Gregory observes that human beings are born into passion and that each needs to rid the will of evil, realizing how wretched vice is: 'if you go right back to the grace of the image which was built into you from the first, you possess in yourself what you seek' (*beat.* 5.8; trans. Hall 2000:66). Contemplating the inner man as a reflection of divine glory (which is impossible to behold directly) will make one blessed. There is no eschatological reserve here (*beat.* 6; trans. Hall 2000:71). Apollinarius put it more in terms of seeing 'in the *logos*' (Reuss 1957:5); that is, believers can see his creative wisdom. According to the *Opus imperfectum in Matthaëum*, those hungering and thirsting for righteousness 'shall be satisfied, namely with the generosity of God's reward, for greater are the rewards of God than the wildest desires of the saints' (*op. imp.*; trans. Kellerman 2010:86). In contrast to Nyssa, this seems to mean results in the present, and in 'everyday' life. Purity in heart means intentionally doing good deeds and thinking of God and seeing him in the good deed. Here it seems that some reward is given in the here and now, and there is a sense of that also in what is said about peacemakers being called 'sons of God'. The call to be 'salt' that preserves others is one addressed to Christian leaders. The contrast with the *epektasis* ('perpetual striving') of Gregory's eschatology is marked here.

Chrysostom's preaching emphasizes a present earthly reward of happiness through one's ascetical discovery that one really lacks nothing: this is not the optimism of 'virtue ethics', for happiness means looking backwards to creation. The human race is in a state of putrefaction and the virtue that disciples are called to pursue is attentive diligence (*ἀρητῆς ἐπιμέλωμενον*) (*hom. in Mt.* 15.12; trans. Prevost 1893:216; PG 57.234D). As already noticed, Christians are radically to alter the socio-political economy, even to make earth into heaven. This lies towards the 'utopian' end of the spectrum of interpretations of the Sermon. Nyssa's vision, by contrast, is highly mystical, and while the potential is there for all bearing (now redeemed) human nature, it takes individual persons to actualize such virtue: on Matthew 5.14, the 'city on the hill' is said to be Christ's flesh in which there is a congregation of every race of people, as in every *cosmopolis* (Hall 2000:130). The impure in heart do not look for the vision of God, but those in whom the Spirit dwells have the power to see the immortal. On Matthew 5.13's 'salt of the earth': salt is not of the earth but of fire and water, which is a preached word of witness to the baptisms of water and Spirit (Hall 2000:129).

## THE LORD'S PRAYER AND PRAYER

---

It is a happy fact that Origen *did* leave extended commentary on the Lord's Prayer in his *On Prayer*. In *On Prayer* 12–19 he asserts that the Matthean context is Jesus' warnings against self-glorification—the Lucan teaching at 6.7 comes from a different occasion—and that believers need to be 'sons' in truth if they are to utter this prayer, such that their whole lives become constant 'Our Fathers'. Origen did not cover the whole of the Sermon, but he is typical of the first three Christian centuries in seeing the Lord's Prayer, along with the Beatitudes, as the core of the rest of the Sermon. Cyprian understood the Lord's Prayer to be of the genre of instruction (*instruere et docere*, cf. Luke 11.1), in a way that was binding for all Christians, to help the believer stay on course. Severe persecution for those who identified with Christ is the clear North African context and with it comes a strong sense of ecclesial boundaries. Christ has authority, and hence his words command a 'legal' tone.

At the start of his second *Sermon* on the Lord's Prayer, Gregory of Nyssa makes it clear that heaven is accessible by virtue through a share in the divine power: '*euche* is the promise of a thank offering; whereas *proseuche* signifies our approaching God after the fulfillment of the promise... there can be no confidence in relationship with God unless we have prepared our approach to Him by vow and the offering of gifts, *euche* must precede *proseuche*' (Gregory of Nyssa, *or. dom.* 2; trans. Graef 1954:37). The conscience needs to achieve purity, turning from wickedness, before calling God 'Father'. Also, to pray 'hallowed be thy name' means that God should be glorified and shown to be king through the life of the praying person (*or. dom.* 3; trans. Graef 1954:50–3), even as the Holy Spirit 'may come upon us and purify us'. Augustine, the first to call it 'the Lord's Prayer', stood more in the tradition of Tertullian: in praying to the Father one must not forget the Church as mother (Tertullian, *or.*; trans. Evans 1953:29). Maximus the Confessor declared that in the Lord's Prayer one finds seven mysteries: 'theology, adoption in grace, equality of honor with the angels, participation in eternal life, the restoration of nature inclining toward itself to a tranquil state, the abolition of the law of sin, and the overthrowing of the tyranny of evil which has dominated us by trickery'. Scripture calls this teaching a prayer 'because it makes requests for the gifts which God gives to men by grace' (Maximus, *or. dom.*; trans. Berthold 1985:105).

On Matthew 6.10 ('on earth as it is in heaven') Origen preferred an eschatological reading: 'This is because what is in heaven was enlightened even before by the Word, while it is "at the close of the age" that what is on earth will be established as heaven by imitating what the Savior has already taken through the authority given the Son of God. Therefore, we may infer that through prayers He wishes to take His disciples as His fellow workers with the Father' (Origen, *or.* 26.4; trans. Greer 1979:135). Yet there is a sense that certain contemplatives can begin to experience this resolution: 'And I think that the kingdom of God may be understood to be the blessed condition of the governing mind and the right ordering of wise thoughts, while the kingdom of Christ is

the saving words that go forth to those who hear and the deeds of righteousness and the other virtues that are accomplished' (Origen, *or.* 25.1; trans. Greer 1979:132). So Christ's kingdom is preliminary to God's kingdom, to be realized in the future.

For Origen's near-contemporary Cyprian of Carthage, praying for the Kingdom to come really means 'that it will come *to us*; not that it is not here [at present]' (*dom. orat.* 13; trans. Bonin 1983:229–33). Yet 'on earth as it is in heaven' means 'in soul as in body', or maybe in believers and in non-believers (trans. Bonin 1983:17). The accent then is on a semi-realized form of eschatology. Nyssa would simplify this further, in commenting that God's will being done (*or. dom.* 4) is simply God's salvation in its full extension; as God's powerful Word conquers the enemy city, souls become free. In Augustine's explanation, 'Kingdom come' is seen as explained by the phrase that follows: 'will be done' (*serm. Dom.* 2.5; trans. Jepson 1948:110). So, as with Tertullian, 'the kingdom is the result of doing the will' (*or.*; trans. Evans 1953:30), although Tertullian had made this more fully Christocentric in scope, with allusion to Gethsemane: 'He himself was the will and the power of the Father, and yet, so as to exemplify the endurance that was due, he surrendered himself to the Father's will' (*or.*; trans. Evans 1953:9). Maximus appears to innovate here: if the name of God the Father is the Son, then when it says 'kingdom come' it means the Holy Spirit, if one remembers the Lucan equivalent (11.13) (trans. Berthold 1985:106). Thus we are called to honour the consubstantial Trinity. We are to call him Father by grace who is our Creator by nature, and the Trinity overcomes various divisions: as for 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven', Maximus refers this to the ascetic who has done the work preparatory for heavenly citizenship—this echoes Origen's interpretation.

Once more Origen is at his pioneering best when in Chapter 27 of *On Prayer*, which treats 'daily bread', he comments:

[T]he expression 'daily' [*epiousion*]... seems to have been invented by the evangelists... with reference to 'being' (*ousia*)... pointing out bread that has come together for 'being' (*ousia*)... [T]he bread for which we should ask is spiritual. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the being in the same sense as the bread, so that just as corporeal bread distributed to the body of the person to be nourished goes into his being, so also 'the living bread which came down from heaven' and is distributed to the mind and the soul gives a share in its own power to the person who provides himself food from it.' (Origen, *or.* 27.7–9; trans. Greer 1979:140–1)

In keeping with his comment on the previous verse, one is to pray for it as the bread proper to the coming age, which allows him to expound his staged eschatology. Like his North African predecessor Tertullian (trans. Evans 1953:111), Cyprian regarded 'daily bread' unequivocally as the Eucharist, 'which ensures non-separation from Christ's body' (trans. Bonin 1983:18). Apollinarius (Reuss 1957:9) spiritualized 6.11 to mean asking for a foretaste of tomorrow's life-giving substance through the Holy Spirit's foretaste (*arrabon*). According to a surprisingly literal interpretation, Gregory of Nyssa concludes that all our bodily requirements are thus meant by 'bread', but not luxury where lusts can breed. Believers should ask God to give sufficient bread and no more, so as not to

be distracted. Origen's eucharistic interpretation is not followed. 'The word *today* in Gregory, contrary to Origen (*Or. Dom.* 27.13) must be understood as the individual day—and therefore in the sense of Mt 6.34' (Kiria 2010:552).

For Chrysostom, the 'daily bread' of Matthew 6.11 is not 'Christ' as it had been for Origen: it simply stood for earthly, daily needs which one looked to divine providence to meet. According to Augustine (*serm. Dom.* 2.6: trans. Jepson 1948:112–15), there is no 'either/or': one prays as one body—the Church—for bread, thinking to help others with supply of both spiritual and physical bread, and there is a 'moral' fusing of earthly and heavenly petitions. As in the previous petition, Origen's rather heavenly minded interpretation is avoided, even at the expense of any reference to the Eucharist. What becomes stronger as time goes on is the need to affirm (with Jesus) the all-round care of the Father. With Maximus there is a sense that the desire for physical sustenance can be upgraded into seeking a spiritual satisfaction: 'And through the great David: "What exists for me in heaven, and beside you what did I wish for on earth?"' (Ps 73.25). The disciple is to turn everything to God; even desire and hunger are turned to seek and hold on to him. One is then rewarded with bread today as a supersubstantial bread, that is food for heaven' (Maximus, *or. dom.*; trans. Berthold 1985:112–13). There seems to be a relationship of exchange between the two.

The other dominant theme running through the treatments of the Lord's Prayer is penitence. Origen then (*or.* 28.7; trans. Greer 1979:150) tells us that forgiveness is not automatic; 'Surely, those who have sinned against us must be forgiven when they say they repent, even if our debtor does this many times.' This is extended in what follows, where the whole human life on earth is a test. Jesus' meaning is: 'Lead us not into sin,' for 'I suppose that the person defeated in temptation enters *into* temptation, since he is caught fast in its meshes' (Origen, *or.* 29.9; trans. Greer 1979:155). As Origen goes on, he indicates that the prayer is that God not let the heart be *hardened* in sin.

Thus, since a quick and too brief healing causes some to think lightly of the diseases into which they have fallen, as though they were easy to heal, and since this results in their falling into the same diseases a second time after they have been healed, God in such cases will reasonably overlook the evil as it increases to a certain point, even disregarding it when it progresses so far in them as to be incurable. His purpose is that they may become satiated by long exposure to evil, and by being filled with the sin they desire may so perceive the harm they have taken.

(Origen, *or.* 29.13; trans. Greer 1979:157)

Tertullian (*or.*; trans. Evans 1953:115) is clear: 'Lead us not': that is, suffer us not to be led. Likewise Cyprian observes that it was to be prayed daily (*dom. orat.* 12), since 'we' sin daily. Temptation comes when we don't realize our weakness. This is a communal prayer, with each one's brother's keeper (trans. Bonin 1983:8). Famously Cyprian believed that outside the community there was no salvation and so here he insists that the Church is necessary for salvation, as it is a community where forgiveness is to be practised and hate sacrificed (trans. Bonin 1983:23). Likewise, good works raise the chance of prayer being heard (Hofmann 2012). Gregory of Nyssa tends to agree with Origen

(trans. Graef 1954:30–1) that temptation and evil are the same thing or are related on a continuum, and that one should face East when praying, too (*or. dom.* 5, trans. Graef 1954:77). Sermon 5 includes: ‘By the disposition you show to him who is under obligation to you, you pronounce the judgement of heaven on yourself’ (*or. dom.* 5; trans. Graef 1954:80). A believer should ask that she or he be far from temptation, i.e. be separate from the world. However, Augustine insisted that the petitions about temptation and evil should be kept separate. God permits temptation for our good; we are only to pray that we are not engulfed by it (*serm. Dom.* 2.9; trans. Jepsen 1948:122–3). Maximus (trans. Berthold 1985:118) emphasizes that the one who refuses to forgive his brother will lose the grace that leads to deification, and will hence be led into temptation, more vulnerable to bodily pleasures and pains which the devil uses.

The discussion of the Prayer less concerns prayer than it does distractions and dispositions surrounding the Christian life and community. It seems not the case for these writers that the Lord’s Prayer was the heart of the sermon, as Karl Barth thought. If anything it is almost a continuation of the Beatitudes. It was detachable from the Sermon and could form a unit for preachers to teach, not so much on prayer but on the Christian life.

## ANTITHESES (MATTHEW 5.21–48)

---

The third great grouping of verses has often been called ‘the Antitheses’, where Jesus offers a Jewish teaching and links this with his own teaching that follows, by the words, ‘But I say unto you’. According to Ulrich Luz, it was the Augustinian and Western tradition that was responsible for regarding the ‘Antitheses’ as promoting a higher moral righteousness which could only be fulfilled by those with a special calling and empowerment, i.e. regarding these as ‘evangelical counsels’. This of course comes up against the Pauline notion that salvation is by ‘grace alone’. The instinct to bring Paul into dialogue with Jesus here can be seen as early as the beneficiaries of a Pauline ‘renaissance’ in the late fourth century. Hilary shows his Christocentric focus: ‘the law of works’ also includes all teachings which were to be revealed in Christ, ‘whose teaching and passion was a tall and deep choosing of the paternal will’ (Hilary, *Mat.*; ed. Doignon 1979:132). Here the ‘faith that was to be revealed’ of Galatians 3.23 is ‘spun’ in the direction of obedience to the Father’s will. Jesus went about fulfilling the law’s words in *deeds*. The righteousness demanded is of a greater degree (*perfectu*), not kind, and hence that is to be required of believers. Hilary interprets the plucking out of the eye in an ecclesiological way, that is, about disciplining a member (Hilary, *Mat.*; ed. Doignon 1979:140).

The Western tradition should not be seen as so markedly different from the Eastern at this stage as Luz tends to make it. Augustine saw the key to be submission to the contradictions given by One with authority (Pelikan 2001:105) and to *all* in the Church, as ‘soldiers’ (2001:121). Yet the ‘Eastern’ John Chrysostom too had an agenda of

‘democratizing monastic virtues,’ and he would apply the Sermon, not least the instruction of the Beatitudes, to all Christians, seeing them as part of ongoing divine providential care. In his Homilies 15–24 on Matthew, Chrysostom brought the Sermon into dialogue with Pauline teaching, thereby addressing the question of the law–grace dialectic. Fifty times we find *kai ho Paulos* (Mitchell 2007), as if to say: Paul agrees here. Clearly Christian virtue starts with humility (*hom. in Mt.* 15; trans. Prevost 1893:188). Christ was healer of bodies and corrector of souls (uniting what was divided between Asclepius and Plato in Antiquity) (Mitchell 2007). There was a consensus that the Sermon spoke of demands, but now with the power of grace added, with expectation of sober achievement, albeit not utter perfection, as Christ accommodated himself to them, using the Beatitudes to encourage them (Pelikan 2001:125–7). ‘Origen compared the development from the old law to the new with the development of a child into an adult; the child is changed but not destroyed’ (Martin 2001:124). As early as the Syriac *Didascalia* 26 it became clear that the ceremonial law of the OT was no longer binding—that was how Jesus had fulfilled that part of the law. ‘What is added to the law is grace’ (Luz 2007:215, citing Chrysostom, *hom. in Mt.* 16.2). Chrysostom emphasized that the genre of the Sermon was instruction, no less than that of Moses. Jesus’ teaching was different from that of Moses, but it was no less than Torah. Hence the sense of Matthew 5.17–48 is continuity with Moses’ teaching, but with novelty. Jesus was not an interpreter of Moses but a new legislator: adding, not recasting (Luz 2007:203–5). He offered instruction for a heavenly polity, and in the manner of providence accommodated his words to his hearers (*hom. in Mt.* 15; trans. Prevost 1893:184) in order to lead them to higher realities of a moral universe (*hom. in Mt.* 15; trans. Prevost 1893:184–93), a consistent lifestyle close to that of the angels (*hom. in Mt.* 19; trans. Prevost 1893:252) and marked by *akribeia* (diligence) though not yet *apatheia* (imperturbability) (Mitchell 2007).

The author of the *Opus imperfectum* taught that example is more important than words: hence the works of the law still matter. In *Homily* 10 the prophecies are first seen as fulfilled, and the law was also fulfilled inwardly when (e.g.) Christ healed on the sabbath, in working righteousness for the sake of the soul’s freedom. He explains that it is much more difficult to stop being angry, which must mean that this (sabbath command) is the least of one of the commandments (unlike a large commandment such as ‘do not commit adultery’). Anger with due cause is proper judgement, but there can be an inner anger of the soul that does not show itself, but secretly schemes. Hence it is clear that judicial ‘anger’ is not included in the purview of Jesus’ strict teaching here. But long before that, the text’s detail ‘hate *without cause*’ had already served to make righteous anger of any kind an exception among less strict Christians such as the writer here; the more rigorist writers such as Tertullian, Jerome, and Augustine doubted the authenticity of the reading. It is surely significant that the Greek catena fragments gathered by Reuss deliver considerable volume on the question of ‘Raka’ in 5.22: Theodore says it is fine for Jesus alone to call people ‘fools’ (as in 7.26; Reuss 1957:106). On 5.20, ‘you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’, the anonymous writer comments: ‘See how to be least in the kingdom of heaven is the same thing as not entering the kingdom. For someone to be in the kingdom

is not the same as reigning with Christ, but is only to be in the people of Christ' (*op. imp.* 11; Reuss 1957:95). In other words, Christ will rule over that person in a pejorative sense of 'rule', over one who will *not* share in the glory above. Similarly for the *Opus imperfectum* 12, the concupiscence of the soul is permissible in a way that full-blown lust or concupiscence of the flesh is not (Luz 2007:243). Another route, that of allegory, was taken in the case of the eye or limb offending: for Origen (on Matt 19.12) Jesus here meant 'wrong ideas'; for Chrysostom he meant false friends. Augustine seems to have taken it more in the sense of anything loved as much as one's right eye. And spiritual adultery takes place where one intentionally consents to lust: Augustine shows the power of habit which, when indulged, only quenches the flame for a moment (*serm. Dom.* 1.12; trans. Jepson 1948:43).

One of the key antitheses was that on marriage (5.32). Luz applauds the Catholic tradition (*de facto* separation allowed; *de iure* the bond indissoluble), with the East originating a permission for remarriage on the grounds that adultery had already dissolved the marriage (Cyril of Alexandria, *fr. Mat.* 61; Reuss 1957:172), an idea borrowed in turn by Erasmus (Luz 2007:257). Augustine was less rigorist and tells the story—sympathetically—where the wife gave her body in order to save her husband's life: this was like giving herself to him (*serm. Dom.* 1.16; trans. Jepson 1948:59–61). John Chrysostom (*hom. in Mt.* 17.5–7) made it clear that there was no dodging the full literal force of the command not to swear oaths, with Cyprian's rigorism (*test.* 3.12) on this matter being rather exceptional in the West. For Augustine they were a necessary concession to the weakness of human nature (*serm. Dom.* 1.17; trans. Jepson 1948:63); however, for the religious more was expected and so oaths should not be demanded of the better sort of people (cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *or.* 53.8). An inner righteousness was required: there are grades of sins (5.21–2) and grades of punishment. We might well need forgiveness from someone far away: hence the 'altar' must mean one's own faith on which reparation is grounded, primarily as a movement of the soul, and the adversary that one will have to settle with is, for Augustine, God himself. Chrysostom was aware of the dangers of a dualistic cosmology that would ascribe 'the accuser' of 5.25 to the devil (Pelikan 2001:75).

Luz claims that taking Jesus at his word here is more in the spirit of Matthew's piety of obedience, and it took the Anabaptists to rediscover this approach, one which was not just an interpretation (*Auslegung*), but meant transformative power for living (*Wirkung*). This appears to be a false evaluation. For Chrysostom allowed grace to have the form of law, largely because in the Sermon 'God is discoursing' (*hom. in Mt.* 6:14; Pelikan 2001:98). To be saved one has to be like Jesus. On 5.48: 'The first thing one notices is that it was simply taken for granted in the ancient church that his "basic law" of faith is practicable and is practised', as in 2 *Clement* 13–14 (Luz 2007:290). Cyril of Alexandria (Reuss 1957:167–8) is clear that if one has to choose between confession (or *logos*) and deeds, the latter should be favoured: Christianity concerns both. It does seem that Augustine is no different here. Whatever his putting the spirit of the 'new' against the letter of the 'old', when it came to the 'new' of Jesus' instruction, there was no recourse to 'faith alone'.

## CONCLUSION

---

Origen had described Jesus' teaching as a human, not a divine morality (*princ.* 3.1.6), commenting that one does not have to love one's *enemies* as much as oneself (unlike in the case of love for neighbour: cf. *hom. in Cant.* 2.8). Jerome was happy to allegorize Matthew 5.39, in that offering the right cheek to the enemy meant to offer the heretic the orthodox teaching, and thus avoid the challenge of the ethical demand, but that was not Augustine's way. Matthew 5.8's 'pure in heart seeing God' was a heuristic for his understanding of the Sermon. God would not order something impossible, and the demands are not a yoke but a gift. For Augustine, although he would allow exceptions, as a good pastor might, given that grace was widely and freely available in the Church, perfect love of enemies was something one should strive for (cf. *enchir.* 19).

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *Opus imperfectum*. Eng. trans.: J. A. Kellerman (ed.), *Incomplete Commentary on Matthew (Opus imperfectum)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).
- Augustine, *De sermone Domini in monte*. Eng. trans.: J. J. Jepsen, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Newman Press, 1948).
- Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*. Eng. trans.: J. Ferguson, *Stromateis: Books One to Three* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991).
- Cyprian, *De Dominica oratione*. Eng. trans.: E. Bonin, *The Lord's Prayer: A Commentary* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1983).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Homiliae in Canticum Canticorum*. Greek text: W. Jaeger (ed.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, vol. 6, *In Canticum canticorum* (Leiden: Brill, 1960).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Homiliae in orationem dominicam*. Eng. trans.: H. C. Graef, *The Lord's Prayer; The Beatitudes*, ACW 18 (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1954).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Orationes de beatudinibus*. Eng. trans.: S. G. Hall, 'Gregory of Nyssa: On the Beatitudes', in H. R. Drobner and A. Viciano (eds), *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes. An English Version with Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14–18 September 1998)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 21–90.
- Hilary of Poitiers, *In euangelium Matthaei*. Latin text: J. Doignon (ed.), *Hilaire de Poitiers: Sur Matthieu, Chap. 1–13*, SC 254 (Paris: Cerf, 1979).
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaenum*. Eng. trans.: G. Prevost, *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople: On the Gospel of Matthew, Part I (Hom. I–XXV)* (Oxford: Parker, 1893).
- Maximus the Confessor, *Expositio orationis dominicae*. Eng. trans.: G. C. Berthold, *Maximus Confessor: Selected writings*, CWS (New York: Paulist, 1985).
- Origen, *De oratione*. Eng. trans.: R. A. Greer, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, CWS (New York: Paulist, 1979).
- Tertullian, *De oratione*. Latin text and Eng. trans.: E. Evans, *Tertullian's Tract on the Prayer* (London: SPCK, 1953).

## Scholarship

- George, M. (1991). 'Die Heilige Schrift als Quelle der gesellschaftlichen Reform: Chrysostomos und die Bergpredigt', in H. H. Schmid and J. Mehlhausen (eds), *Sola scriptura: Das reformatorische Schriftprinzip in der säkularen Welt* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn), 251–61.
- Hall, S. G. (2000). 'Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*: An Introduction to the Text and Translation', in H. R. Drobner and A. Viciano (eds), *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes. An English Version with Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14–18 September 1998)* (Leiden: Brill), 3–20.
- Hofmann, A. (2012). 'Cyprian von Karthago "Über das Herrengebet". Aneignung des Vaterunsers in schwieriger Zeit', in H.-U. Weidemann (ed.), *Er stieg auf den Berg... und lehrte sie (Mt 5,1f.). Exegetische und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Studien zur Bergpredigt*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 226 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk), 115–41.
- Kiria, E. (2010). 'De Oratione Dominica', in L. F. Mateo Seco and G. Maspero (eds), *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa* (Leiden and New York: Brill), 550–53.
- Luz, U. (2007). *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, trans. J. E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress).
- Mail, F. (1991). *Das Opus imperfectum in Matthaëum und sein Verhältnis zu den Matthäuskommentaren von Origenes und Hieronymus* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia).
- Martin, B. L. (2001). *Christ and the Law in Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock).
- Massaux, E. (1993). *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature Before Saint Irenaeus*, Book 3, *The Apologists and the Didache*, trans. N. J. Belval and S. Hecht (Leuven: Peeters; Macon, GA: Mercer).
- Mateo-Seco, L. (2010). 'Mysticism', in L. F. Mateo-Seco and G. Maspero, *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. S. Cherney (Leiden; Boston, Mass.: Brill), 519–30.
- Meredith, A. (2000). 'Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, Oratio I: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5,3)', in H. R. Drobner and A. Viciano (eds), *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes. An English Version with Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14–18 September 1998)* (Leiden: Brill), 93–110.
- Mitchell, M. (2007). 'John Chrysostom', in J. P. Greenman, T. Larsen, and S. R. Spencer (eds), *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries: From the Early Church to John Paul I* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos), 19–42.
- Pelikan, J. (2001). *Divine Rhetoric: The Sermon on the Mount as Message and as Model in Augustine, Chrysostom, and Luther* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Reuss, J. (1957). *Matthäus-Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag).
- van Banning, J. (1990). 'Il Padre Nostro nell' "Opus Imperfectum in Matthaëum"', *Gregorianum* 71: 293–313.
- Wilken, R. (2007). 'Augustine', in J. P. Greenman, T. Larsen, and S. R. Spencer (eds), *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries: From the Early Church to John Paul I* (Grand Rapids: Brazos), 43–58.

## Suggested Reading

- Betz, H. D. (1995). *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).

- Kissinger, W. S. (1975). *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press).
- Lilla, S. R. C. (2004). *Neuplatonisches Gedankengut in den 'Homilien über die Seligpreisungen' Gregors von Nyssa* (Leiden; Boston: Brill).
- Meredith, A. (2002). 'Origen and Gregory of Nyssa on the Lord's Prayer', *Heythrop Journal* 43: 344–56.
- Stevenson, K. W. (2004). *The Lord's Prayer: A Text in Tradition* (London: SCM Press).
- Stewart-Sykes, A. (2004) (trans.). *On the Lord's Prayer: Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen*, Popular Patristic Series 29 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).

## CHAPTER 39

---

# THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

---

C. E. HILL

### INTRODUCTION: THE UNIQUE ATTRACTION AND INFLUENCE OF JOHN

---

IN some of the earliest, explicit historical references to the Gospel according to John, the peculiar attraction of its portrait of Jesus Christ comes to the fore. Clement of Alexandria's famous appraisal of John as 'a spiritual Gospel' (Clement, hyp.; Eusebius, h.e. 6.14.7) is no isolated example. Origen, who called the Gospels the first fruits of all the Scriptures, claimed that 'the first fruits of the Gospels is that according to John' (Jo. 1.23). Even if John was not always the Gospel most consulted (even in the work of Irenaeus, Matthew is cited more often), John probably surpasses all in the capacity it has shown to animate the theological and imaginative worlds of both scholars and lay Christian readers. Its powerful prologue asserts the pre-existent deity of the Logos, his creatorship, and his glory-bearing incarnation in a clarity that is without parallel in other Gospel accounts. John's distinctive dramatic scenes, such as the wedding at Cana, the encounters with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman, and the raising of Lazarus, to mention only a few, and its simple but provocative theological vocabulary, imprinted themselves on the Christian mind from an early stage. Johannine elements left traces in some of the earliest post-canonical Christian reflection and would be among the first to be memorialized in liturgical objects, catacomb paintings, hymns, and other forms of Christian art.

While the determinative role played by John in formative Christological and Trinitarian controversies, particularly in the fourth and fifth centuries, is readily apparent and fairly well recognized, debate and misunderstanding have surrounded the period prior to Irenaeus and even into the third century. For much of the past century, a great deal of scholarship was conducted according to a paradigm that had predetermined John to have been a marginal and highly controversial player in the life of the early Church. Though useful to generations of scholars, this paradigm of research has

ultimately proved faulty and has obscured the real impact of the fourth Gospel in the early period, on biblical interpretation and much else besides.

## SURVEY OF MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

---

Walter Bauer's 1934 *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* has been hailed as setting the stage for much of subsequent scholarship on early Christianity in the twentieth century and up to the present (e.g. Robinson and Koester 1971). In Bauer's view, 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' were relatively late constructs of Christianity, and both the emergence and the definitions of these constructs bore the unmistakable fingerprints of the Church of Rome. Earliest Christianity was robust and diverse, and the first forms of it to take root in many geographical regions were forms that would later be called heretical. Some aspects of Bauer's work have been justly criticized, yet his problematizing of any notion of a primitive consensus of Christian belief has been widely accepted and has remained a fixture in scholarship. And even though Bauer's views on the reception of John took up only a relatively small portion of his book, they too proved to have a huge influence on subsequent research.

Bauer concluded that the Gospel of John was either unknown to the writers now known as the 'apostolic fathers' and to Justin, or was positively rejected by them. It was in fact the Valentinians Ptolemy and Heracleon, the Marcionites, and the Montanists who 'especially treasured' this Gospel, and who introduced it to other Christians. The orthodox hierarchy in Rome, however, remained deeply suspicious of this Gospel—tainted with heresy as it was—even despite the efforts of Irenaeus of Lyons to interpret it in an orthodox way and shepherd it into the fold. Bauer's views on John entered the embrace of anglophone scholarship through an 81-page monograph published in 1943 by J. N. Sanders. Substantiating the German scholar's scepticism about the early use of John among the orthodox, Sanders concluded that Irenaeus in the 180s was 'the first Catholic writer to overcome the prejudice which appears to have been felt against the fourth Gospel, at least in Rome, in the latter half of the second century and to make it a weapon in the controversy *adversus haereses*' (Sanders 1943:66).

The perception of a deep kinship between John and Gnosticism (however precisely understood) appeared to be fully validated when the Nag Hammadi codices came to light and many were found to have clear links to Johannine words or ideas. John's relationship with Gnosticism was developed in various ways by prominent NT scholars. Rudolf Bultmann imagined John as written in the face of a developed Gnosticism, but as opposing it from a half-step away (Bultmann 1950). More radically, Ernst Käsemann, one of Bultmann's students, believed John presented a Jesus who strode a foot above the earth, and charged that the Church committed a historical blunder when it accepted John into its canon (Käsemann 1968). Another of Bultmann's students, Helmut Koester, through a long tenure at Harvard, would guide the work of a number of scholars in this tradition.

The perception of Gnostic affinity even affected scholarship on the archaeology of the Gospel. Outnumbering even the fragmentary papyri of Matthew dug up from the Egyptian sands in the twentieth century were the many fragments of the Gospel of John. Kurt Aland, the famous textual critic, attributed this relative abundance to the popularity John enjoyed among the Gnostics, who, in keeping with Bauer's theory, were thought to have been the first Christians in Egypt and the majority there throughout the second century (Aland 1967).

A learned attempt by F. Braun (1959) to re-establish John's influence in the mainstream of the early Church was viewed by many as too maximalist in its methodology. An often-cited but never published 1966 Harvard Th.D. thesis by Melvyn Hillmer (Hillmer 1966), one of Koester's students, tightened the criteria for recognizing quotations or allusions to John among the orthodox. The work of another of Koester's students, Elaine Pagels, elaborated on John's place in Valentinianism (Pagels 1973).

Meanwhile, a resurgence of interest in John's Jewish background in the 1960s began to correct the one-sidedness of a predominant Hellenistic approach to the interpretation of John. Dissenting from the Bultmannian legacy, J. Louis Martyn saw John as emanating from a community of Jesus-followers that had only recently been severed from its long but contentious relationship with Judaism (Martyn 1968). Some scholars began to reckon with a more detailed and nuanced 'history' of the Johannine community that could somehow account for a genuine Jewish origin but also an early Gnostic proprietorship over the Gospel.

The most successful of these was that of Raymond Brown, who not only produced large commentaries and studies on the Johannine writings, but, important to our purpose here, set forth an integrated view of the origins and afterlife of the Gospel and Epistles well into the second century (Brown 1966; 1970; 1979; 1982). Brown acknowledged John's solidly Jewish pedigree, but saw the Johannine community as passing through several stages before the Gospel was written, each involving a sort of crisis that left lasting marks on the community. The last crisis, reflected in 1 and 2 John, ended with a rupture that left two mutually antagonistic parties competing for the Johannine mantle. The larger party seceded, taking the Johannine Gospel with it, and in ensuing years formed into various factions that became docetist, Gnostic, Cerinthian, and Montanist. Writing on behalf of what Brown considered the minority of the fractured Johannine community was the author of 1 John. This conventicle of believers only survived by finally being absorbed into the 'Great Church', which accepted the new Gospel only with difficulty. Such a reading enabled Brown to affirm John's Jewish origins but also to account for the assumed hegemony that heterodox groups exercised over the Gospel throughout much of the second century and the 'catalytic' effect it was thought to have in Gnostic thought (Brown 1979).

Both Brown's proposal and the entire paradigm of alleged orthodox 'Johannophobia' on which it rested had not yet come to terms with increasingly obvious problems. In terms of method, just as Braun could be accused of maximizing the affinities between John and the early orthodox tradition, the perception of Gnostic affection for John predisposed some scholars to relax standards for affirming heterodox use. But a more

fundamental issue loomed, namely, the tendency to construe almost any indication of heterodox acquaintance with John as a sign of agreement or even of socio-religious kinship. As scholarship progressed past an initial fascination with Johannine parallels, some scholars began to note that the use of John in Gnostic treatises such as *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Second Apocalypse of James*, the *Apocryphon of James*, the *Acts of John*, and the *Gospel of Truth* was anything but uniformly congenial, and in fact was better described as predominantly polemical (e.g. Janssens 1983; Lalleman 1998). Martin Hengel (1989; 1993) determined that ‘The Fourth Gospel played no major role in Gnosticism before the school of Valentinus, e.g. 140/150’ (1989:9). Moreover, monographs by W. Rohl (1991), T. Nagel (2000), and C. E. Hill (2004) documented in detail the sometimes conflicted relationship between John and the docetic/Gnostic thinkers, while also showing that John’s influence among representatives of the ‘great Church’ was much more pervasive than had been allowed. The old paradigm has not disappeared overnight (e.g. Watson 2013), but the long-ensconced principle that John was avoided by the orthodox and treasured by the heterodox can no longer be sustained.

It is often claimed that Irenaeus had to ‘defend’ the fourth Gospel to his generation of Christians, and to advocate for its use. Irenaeus defends an *interpretation* of John against the interpretations of his Valentinian opponents; he does not defend the *acceptability* of John to those who are otherwise too traditional or too orthodox to admit any appeal to it. To construe Irenaeus as defending a suspect Gospel, and conservative Rome as stoutly holding an anti-Johannine line into the third century, also leaves no historical precedent for the positive role John indisputably played in the monarchian controversies of the early third century in Rome, North Africa, and elsewhere (see ‘Monarchianism’ herein). Nor can it account for the scenes from John’s Gospel depicted on liturgical objects and Roman catacomb walls and at about the same time (see ‘Iconography’ herein).

Nor do the relative abundance of Johannine papyri support or even suggest a Gnostic fixation on John in second-century Egypt. If Gnostic predilection accounts for the seventeen early copies of John, what accounts for the sixteen copies of Matthew? A promising field of research has opened up through the study of early manuscripts ‘as artefacts’. Building on earlier work by Eric Turner (1977), Larry Hurtado (2006) and others have been at the forefront of an effort to appreciate manuscripts not simply for the text they contain but also for what their scribal and codicological characteristics can tell us. It is now apparent that early Christian papyri sometimes show significant differentiations (for this, and the remainder of the paragraph, see Hurtado 2006; 2009; Charlesworth 2012; Hill 2013). Copies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are extant only in codex form (or, rarely, were written on the backs of repurposed scrolls). Currently, about half of our extant copies of other Gospels were written onto unused scrolls. Other characteristics of manuscript production, such as codex size, formality of script, standardization of *nomina sacra* abbreviations, and use of sense division, show that our copies of John belong in a group alongside the Synoptics, and not with the alternative Gospels, which typically do not share the same characteristics.

Rather than reiterate the positive evidence for the knowledge and use of John among the earliest writers, the following will seek instead to exemplify the wide influence of

John's Gospel by briefly highlighting some of the roles it played in the life and work of the Church in the early period. As such, this sketch will also serve as an outline for suggested avenues for future research with regard to John in the early Church, because most of these areas are relatively unexplored.

## THE MULTIFARIOUS INFLUENCE OF JOHN IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

---

### In Scriptural Interpretation

John was used in intra-scriptural interpretation in a variety of ways. Many early sources treat John as part of a corpus of works, consisting of the Gospel, 1 John, and the Revelation, and sometimes 2 and 3 John, all attributed to John the son of Zebedee. Irenaeus in one paragraph uses four texts from three Johannine works (John, 1 John, 2 John) as from the same source, in order to establish that Jesus Christ was one person (*haer.* 3.16.8), and uses the Beloved Disciple's experience as recorded in the Gospel to exposit John the Seer's experience in Revelation (*haer.* 4.20.11).

The practice of reading the four Gospels together as interdependent and mutually interpreting also began at an early time. Details from John's narrative, along with several of its distinctive expressions, soon became intertwined with the common narrative of Jesus' life and teaching (e.g. Ignatius, *Eph.* 17.1; *Smyrn.* 1.1; Aristides, *apol.* 2 [Syr.]; *ep. apost.*; the Long Ending of Mark, 16.9–20; Justin [see below]). Similarly, writers often combined Gospel accounts in secondary literary appropriations, as when, for instance, John 3.3–5 is conflated with Matthew 18.3 (Justin, *1 apol.* 61.4; Hippolytus, *haer.* 8.10.8; *hom. Clem.* 11.26; *Clem. recogn.* 6.9, etc.), or when John 1.13–14 is interpreted with Luke 1.35 (Justin, *dial.* 105.1, cf. 10.5). This assumption of narratological and hermeneutical compatibility between the Gospels was epitomized in two new and distinctive publishing enterprises in the second century.

First, beginning at least with Tatian the Syrian and at about the same time with Theophilus of Antioch (c.165–75), there is the 'Diatessaronic' impulse of constructing a harmonized Gospel from the four (if elements from other sources were occasionally incorporated, it was not on the programmatic scale of the four). This impulse is reflected as well in the production of new Gospels in the second century, several of which show that we are not simply dealing with a continuing 'tradition of Gospel writing' but with a recognition that the essential Gospel narrative had already been laid out and could now be retold in various ways, according to varying interests. In particular, the so-called *Egerton Gospel* and the *Gospel of Peter* freely blend Johannine and Synoptic materials into new synthetic rewritings.

Second is the practice of binding two or more Gospels together in the same codex (none of the four has yet been found conjoined to a non-canonical Gospel). This had

probably begun by at least the end of the second century, and is evidenced by P75 (Luke and John) from the third century and probably in P4, 64, and 67 (Matthew and Luke, late second or early third). We have one third-century example of all four together (P45, though possibly others such as P53 were originally four-Gospel codices), and Eusebius refers casually to four-Gospel codices in third-century narratives (*h.e.* 7.15.4). In both of these publishing programmes the Gospel according to John figured as an integral component.

Intertextual reading extended to other authoritative writings, to Paul (e.g. John 1.13–14 with Col 1.15 in Justin, *1 apol.* 23.2; Tatian, *orat.* 5.1; Athenagoras, *leg.* 10.3), and the OT in particular. The identical openings of John and Genesis ('In the beginning...') were not lost on early writers. That 'All things were made through' the Word (John 1.3) became a key to unlock the full meaning of God's creative speech acts in Genesis 1.3, 6, 9, etc., as well as the statement in Psalm 32.6, 'By the word of the LORD the heavens were made...' (Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.22.1; 2.2.5; Tertullian, *Prax.* 5, 7.). John's presentation of 'him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote' (1.45) authorized early Christians to find the Johannine Christ in the Law and the Prophets, and this they did in many ways.

## In Preaching and Liturgy

Some of the greatest homiletical works of Christian Antiquity were devoted to the exposition of John, in particular Chrysostom's 88 homilies preached before 398 CE and Augustine's 124 tractates on John, written between 408 and 420. Already in the late second century John was used in Melito's sermon, *On the Passover*. Even prior to this, Justin had reported that Christian preaching in weekly gatherings in Rome c.150 was based on the prophets or on 'the memoirs of the apostles', another name for a set of Gospels which included John (Hill 2007).

Justin also appropriated Jesus' words to Nicodemus (John 3.3, 5) as a dominical authority for his baptismal theology (*1 apol.* 61.4; echoed in Tatian, *orat.* 5.3). Clement of Alexandria (*Chron. Pasch.*) sought to harmonize John's and Matthew's accounts of Jesus' last days in an effort to correct what he saw as aberrant Easter practices. There are probable allusions to John in Clement's *Hymn to Christ the Saviour* (*paed.* 3.12.101.4).

## In Outreach: Evangelism, Apologetic, Protrepic

The Gospel of John both suited and stimulated the Church's public proclamation of the faith to outsiders. Texts from John often lie just below the surface in the second-century *Ad Diognetum*, addressed to a pagan enquirer, as when the author declares, 'For God loved man... to them he sent his one and only Son' (10.2, cf. John 3.16). In apologetic dialogue with both Jews and Greeks Justin draws on the first chapter of John for his presentation of the Logos as the Creator of all things, as the only begotten of the Father, and as God worthy of worship (*1 apol.* 21.1; 22.2; 23.2; *dial.* 105.1) (see below).

In his address to a sceptic named Autolycus, Theophilus of Antioch uses John's testimony and refers to its author as 'inspired' (*Autol.* 2.22). The first verse of the Gospel provides a foundation for Clement of Alexandria's proclamation of the 'Word, who alone is both God and man, the cause of all our good' in his protreptic *Exhortation to the Greeks*, written before 190 (*prot.* 1).

## Development of Doctrine: Christology and Trinitarianism

Certainly among the most momentous contributions of this Gospel in the early centuries were those it made to the discourse about Jesus Christ's relation to God. While teachers most readily turned to the synoptic Gospels for examples of Jesus' ethical teaching, it was John's remarkable Christological complexion and focus that became the more constitutive source for Christological and Trinitarian reflection, debate, and formulation. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' As stunning in simplicity as in the profundity of its message, John 1.1–5 provided a blueprint for all subsequent developments in Christology. From at least the second half of the second century on, this and a number of other Johannine texts would play a part in all the main Christological developments and controversies.

### *John, Judaism, and Docetism*

Jewish-Christian debates over the claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Jewish Messiah, the prophet like Moses and the son of David, were still much a part of the intellectual and spiritual environment in which John's first readers lived. Yet even by the time of the Gospel's publication, the docetic idea had also entered the Christian community (almost certainly in Asia Minor). The denial of the Christ's real, human, 'fleshly,' nature was not only a departure from earlier Jewish Christian belief but was also most likely a reaction to ongoing Jewish objections to Christianity. The views of those called 'antichrists' in 1 and 2 John have long been an object of debate. The reading taken here is that these Christians seem to have conceded to non-Christian Jews their argument that the messiah promised in their Scriptures had not yet come. The Christ who had come was instead a heavenly being that descended temporarily upon a righteous man named Jesus and then left him at the cross. This view has strong associations with the name of Cerinthus, whom Irenaeus regarded as John's foil in the Gospel and epistles (*haer.* 1.26.1; 3.11.1). The author of 1 and 2 John employs the Gospel's incarnational Christology to establish that 'Jesus is the Christ' (cf. John 20:31) the divine Son of God, who has come 'in the flesh' (cf. John 1:14), by 'water and blood,' as one who could be seen, heard, and touched—who bled.

The Johannine emphasis on Jesus Christ coming in the flesh is cited only a few years later by Polycarp (*ep.* 7.1), who is also opposing a separationist docetism. The anti-docetic pseudepigraphon known as the *Epistula Apostolorum* leans heavily on John 1.14,

(3.2; 14.5; 39.16, cf. 21.2), and indeed on the entire Johannine Gospel. While familiarity with the fourth Gospel is widespread among both orthodox and docetic/Gnostic Christians, the presence of John 1.14 and other passages in the Gospel that assumed or emphasized Christ's humanity presented particular challenges for the latter. The *Trimorphic Protennoia* uses a strategy of indirection to engage the Gospel in a polemical way (Poirer 2010). The Valentinian answer to John's incarnational Christology was to view the 'flesh' of John 1.14 as a 'psychic' (i.e. non-material) substance constructed with special skill by the combined efforts of the Pleroma (Irenaeus, *haer.* 1.6.1; 1.7.2; 1.9.2). It was the achievement of Ptolemy in particular (accepting the attribution to him in the Latin text of *haer.* 1.8.5), to neutralize the first fourteen verses of John by viewing them as an allegory about the production of the first eight aeons (the Ogdoad) of the Valentinian Pleroma. (On the secondary nature of Ptolemy's exegesis, see Rasimus 2010.) It is this Valentinian interpretation that Irenaeus counters in *Against Heresies* 1.8.5ff., focusing on John 1.14, 'And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.'

The apparently slightly later commentary of Heracleon (170–200) muted the pleromatic focus of Ptolemy's reading of John's initial verses, perhaps in response to Irenaeus' criticisms, and offered interpretations of other selected passages of the Gospel. While not an extensive treatment of the whole Gospel, Heracleon's work drew the attention of one of the Church's greatest minds, Origen, who in the 230s and 240s devoted parts of his monumental, 32+ volume commentary on John to refuting Heracleon's exegesis.

### *Logos Christology in the Apologists*

In the Apologists we begin to see more self-conscious, systematic delineations of Christology, often expressed in terms taken or adapted from John. In his eternal being, the Logos is uncreated and 'begotten by God in a peculiar manner' (Justin, *1 apol.* 21.1; 22.2; 23.2; cf. Tatian, *orat.* 5.1–3). For Justin, John's *Monogenes* (1.14, 18; 3.16, 18) means not merely 'one-of-a-kind' but 'only-begotten', signifying the Logos' essential deity (Pendrick 1995); he is not creature but Creator; all things came into being through him (Athenagoras, *leg.* 10.2; John 1.3). The *Ad Diognetum* 7.2 speaks of the Logos' role as 'the very artificer and Creator of the universe'. Justin's language of incarnation is also indebted to John. The divine Logos 'took shape and became man' (*1 apol.* 5.4), 'was made flesh and became man' (*1 apol.* 32.10; cf. 66.2; 87.2) all paraphrasing the presentation in John 1.14.

### *Pneumatology/Montanism*

The New Prophecy controversy erupted in the last third of the second century. Its initial claim that the Paraclete was at work in Montanus and the prophetesses Priscilla and Maximilla was evidently related to the Johannine promise of the Paraclete (in favour of this proposition, see Trevett 1996; Seim 2010; against it Heine 1987). Yet, beyond the Paraclete passages, 'specific references to the Gospel of John are remarkably scant and almost absent in what is left of Montanist sources' (Seim 2010:363). The Gospel maintains a consistent authority throughout the conflict, as it is used on both sides of the debate.

### *Monarchianism*

A popular understanding of the full deity of both the Son and the Spirit obviously lies behind the movement known as monarchianism, which arose near the turn of the third century. Noetus in Smyrna and Praxeas in Rome, and later Carthage, taught that Father, Son, and Spirit were different modes by which the one God chose to manifest himself, making Christ simply the incarnate form of the Father. In support of his position, Praxeas laid hold of three particular sayings of Jesus from the Gospel of John: 'I and the Father are one' (10.30), 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (14.9), and 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' (14.10) (Tertullian, *Prax.* 20). It was, however, relatively easy work for Tertullian (*Prax.* 21–5) to deploy the breadth of the Gospel's testimony to demonstrate that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit/Paraclete were indeed one divine essence, but not one person, even from the very first verse: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. Hippolytus pointedly observed that Jesus did not say 'I and the Father am one' but 'I and the Father are one' (*Noët.* 7); Tertullian added that the word 'one' in 10.30 is neuter, not masculine (*Prax.* 22). Other third-century writers (Origen, Cyprian, Dionysius of Rome) increasingly took for granted the anti-monarchian exegesis established by Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Novatian (DelCogliano 2012).

Because of the monarchian challenge, however, John's presentation of Jesus was interpreted throughout the theological and controversial writings of the third century as alternating its focus between Christ's divine and human natures. This alternation became a 'methodological principle in the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel' (Wiles 1960:117), and one that would be recognized by all sides in the Arian controversy, but used to different ends.

### *Arianism*

In the Arian crisis the current of controversy ran in the opposite direction. The Arian position rested upon the third-century, anti-monarchian exegesis of John and thus emphasized the Father and the Son as distinct persons. Instead of labouring to define John's statements of the unity of Father and Son by means of those passages that stressed their individuation, Athanasius and his colleagues were now compelled to interpret the plurality of the persons by setting it in the context of their common deity.

One key text for the later Arians (though Arius himself gave it scant attention) was John 14.28, 'My Father is greater than I.' This saying was increasingly used by Arians in support of their position and, according to Wiles (1960:122–4), the orthodox response came in two forms. One was to concede a certain priority within the Godhead, in that the son was 'generate' and only the Father was 'ingenerate' (Athanasius, Evagrius, Isidore). This view had already been taken by Tertullian and Origen in the anti-monarchian debates, with Origen's language landing him waist deep in subordinationist waters. Without completely denying this first approach, later anti-Arian writers increasingly came to prefer a second one, which argued from the Gospel context that Jesus' words pertained to the state of his incarnation and did not touch his essential relation to the Father (Didymus, Theodore, Cyril of Alexandria).

## Iconography

Elements from the fourth Gospel are memorialized in the work of ecclesiastical artists and artisans. Tertullian mentions embossed ‘good shepherd’ images on liturgical chalices (*pud.* 7.4). Scenes from John such as the raising of Lazarus, the healing at the pool at Bethesda, the encounter with the Samaritan woman, and Christ as the Good Shepherd are depicted on Roman catacomb walls and in the wall paintings at Dura Europos (Hill 2004:155–66). The ‘exegetical’ aspect of early Christian iconography, particularly as it relates to texts from John, is a subject in need of greater exploration.

## CONCLUSION

---

It did not take long for the Gospel according to John to capture the Christian imagination and to begin its long shaping of Christian theology and piety. The use of this distinctive Gospel on all sides of Christian controversy reflects the central place it soon came to hold in Christian literary consciousness, a place it has never relinquished.

## REFERENCES

---

### Ancient Sources

- The Apostolic Fathers. Greek text and Eng. trans.: M. Holmes (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008).
- Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*. Greek text: A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau (eds.), *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les Hérésies Livre III, i: Introduction, notes justificatives et tables; ii Texte et traduction*, SC 210, 211 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1974). Eng. trans.: M. C. Steenberg, *St Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies* (Book 3), ACW (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012).
- Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*. Greek Text: M. Marcovich (ed.), *Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone*, Patristische Texte und Studien 47 (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1997). Eng. trans.: T. Falls, T. P. Halton, and M. Slusser, *St Justin Martyr: Dialogue with Trypho* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003).
- Justin Martyr, *Apologiae*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: D. Minns and P. Parvis (eds), *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- Origen, *Commentarii in Johannem*. Greek text: E. Preuschen (ed.), *Origenes Werke 4: Der Johanneskommentar*, GCS 10 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1903). Eng. trans.: R. E. Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, FC 80 and 89 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989, 1993).

### Scholarship

- Aland, K. (1967). *Studien zur Überlieferung des Neues Testaments und seines Texts* (Berlin: de Gruyter).

- Bauer, W. (1934). *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck). Eng. trans.: *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).
- Braun, F.-M. (1959). *Jean le Théologien et son Évangile dans l'église ancienne* (Paris: Gabalda).
- Brown, R. E. (1966). *The Gospel according to John (i-xii)*, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday).
- Brown, R. E. (1970). *The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi)*, Anchor Bible 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday).
- Brown, R. E. (1979). *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press).
- Brown, R. E. (1982). *The Epistles of John*. Anchor Bible 30 (New York et al.: Doubleday).
- Bultmann, R. K. (1950). *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Charlesworth, S. (2012). 'Indicators of "Catholicity" in Early Gospel Manuscripts', in C. E. Hill and M. J. Kruger (eds), *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 37-48.
- DelCogliano, M. (2012). 'The Interpretation of John 10:30 in the Third Century: Antimonarchian Polemics and the Rise of Grammatical Reading Techniques', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6: 117-38.
- Heine, R. E. (1987). 'The Role of the Gospel of John in the Montanist Controversy', *SCe* 6: 1-19.
- Hengel, M. (1989). *The Johannine Question* (London: SPCK).
- Hengel, M. (1993). *Die johanneische Frage: Ein Lösungsversuch*, with a contribution on the Apocalypse by Jörg Frey, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Hill, C. E. (2004). *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Hill, C. E. (2007). 'Was John's Gospel among Justin's Apostolic Memoirs?' in S. Parvis and P. Foster (eds), *Justin Martyr and his Worlds* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 88-94.
- Hill, C. E. (2013). 'A Four-Gospel Canon in the Second Century? Artifact and Arti-fiction', *Early Christianity* 4: 310-34.
- Hillmer, M. R. (1966). 'The Gospel of John in the Second Century', Th.D. dissertation, Harvard University.
- Hurtado, L. (2006). *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Hurtado, L. (2009). 'Early Christian Manuscripts as Artifacts', in C. A. Evans and H. D. Zacharias (eds), *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (Leiden: Brill), 66-80.
- Janssens, Y. (1983). 'The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Fourth Gospel', in A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn (eds), *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honor of Robert McL. Wilson* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), 229-43.
- Käsemann, E. (1968). *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (Eng. trans.: Philadelphia: SCM).
- Lalleman, P. J. (1998). *The Acts of John: A Two-Stage Initiation into Johannine Gnosticism*. Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles 4 (Leuven: Peeters).
- Martyn, J. L. (1968). *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row).
- Nagel, T. (2000). *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums im 2. Jahrhundert: Studien zu vorirenäischen Auslegung des vierten Evangeliums in christlicher und christlich gnostischer Literatur*, Arbeit zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 2 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt).

- Pagels, E. H. (1973). *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John*, SBL Monograph Series 17 (Nashville: Abingdon).
- Pendrick, G. (1995). 'MONOGENHS', *NTS* 41: 587–600.
- Poirer, P.-H. (2010). 'The Trimorphic Protennoia (NHC XIII,1) and the Johannine Prologue: A Reconsideration', in T. Rasimus (ed.), *The Legacy of John. Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel*, *Novum Testamentum, Supplements* 132 (Leiden/Boston: Brill), 84–103.
- Rasimus, T. (2010). *The Legacy of John. Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel*, *Novum Testamentum, Supplements* 132 (Leiden/Boston: Brill).
- Robinson, J. M., and Koester, H. (1971). *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press).
- Rohl, W. G. (1991). *Die Rezeption des Johannesevangeliums in christlich-gnostischen Schriften aus Nag Hammadi* (Frankfurt an Main/New York: Peter Lang).
- Sanders, J. N. (1943). *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church: Its Origin and Influence on Christian Theology up to Irenaeus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Seim, T. K. (2010). 'Johannine Echoes in Early Montanism', in T. Rasimus (ed.), *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel*, *Novum Testamentum, Supplements* 132 (Leiden/Boston: Brill), 345–64.
- Trevett, C. (1996). *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Turner, E. (1977). *The Typology of the Early Codex* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania).
- Watson, F. (2013). *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans).
- Wiles, M. F. (1960). *The Spiritual Gospel: The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Hill, C. E. (1998). 'What Papias Said about John (and Luke). A "New" Papias Fragment', *JTS* (NS) 49: 582–629.
- Mutschler, B. (2004). *Irenäus als johanneischer Theologe* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Rasimus, T. (2010). *The Legacy of John: Second-Century Reception of the Fourth Gospel*, *Novum Testamentum, Supplements* 132 (Leiden/Boston: Brill).
- Zelyck, L. R. (2013). *John among the Other Gospels*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 2.347 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).

## CHAPTER 40

---

# PAUL THE APOSTLE

---

JUDITH L. KOVACS

IN his classic study, *The Divine Apostle* (1967), Maurice Wiles organizes patristic interpretations of Paul by theological topics: the nature of man, the law, the person of Christ, grace and faith, and faith and works. This chapter takes a different approach. After an introduction to Paul and his legacy and a discussion of controversies surrounding Paul and his teaching, it will sketch out five profiles of Paul, highlighting what a few influential interpreters most emphasize about his person and teaching and paying particular attention to specific sections of Paul's letters that inspired their portraits.

## INTRODUCTION: PAUL AND HIS LEGACY

---

Paul of Tarsus, after Jesus the most prominent figure in the NT, contributed much to the establishment of the gospel of Jesus Christ as a new religion separate from Judaism. During his lifetime he was important for several reasons. First, as the Acts of the Apostles reports, his missionary labours contributed much to the quick spread of the gospel. Over half of this book is devoted to a lively narrative of Paul's tireless work to spread the good news of Jesus Christ as widely as possible. Second, the letters he wrote to a number of fledgling Christian communities in the 50s CE are the earliest Christian writings we possess, forming the largest subdivision of the NT. Third, Paul was a pioneering theologian, one of the first to reflect deeply on the significance of the earthly advent, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is both consistency and variety in the theology expressed in Paul's letters. In 1 Corinthians 1.17 he summarizes his preaching as 'the word of the cross', and—consistently across all his letters—he presents the cross and resurrection of Christ as the centre of his teaching. His letters, written to specific Christian communities to bolster their faith and combat false interpretations of the gospel, explicate the meaning of these two events in several different ways. The cross is interpreted variously as the power of God that defeats Satan and the powers of evil, a sacrifice that atones for human sin, the

revelation of God's wisdom, and the demonstration of his righteousness. The last interpretation is prominent in Galatians and in Romans, where Paul argues that the death and resurrection of Christ is God's plan to redeem all of humanity, Gentiles as well as Jews. All are to be justified—or made righteous in God's sight—by divine grace through faith in Christ; but they will be judged on the basis of their works, when Christ returns on the 'last day'. The new revelation in Christ abolishes the requirement to observe the Jewish Law, though the 'Law of Moses' continues to have authority as part of sacred Scripture. In 1 Corinthians, Paul describes the cross of Christ as God's judgement on all human wisdom and counsels his hearers to pursue perfection and prepare for the *eschaton*, when God's kingdom will be completed.

Paul's influence continues strong in the patristic period. Early in the second century his epistles are referred to as 'Scripture' (2 Pet 3.15–16). Clement of Alexandria, writing around 200 CE, calls him 'the divine apostle' and 'the apostle', descriptions that are shared by many fathers. It is important to keep in mind that when the fathers interpret Paul they have in view a larger corpus of writings than that of twenty-first-century academics, who usually assume that Paul composed only seven of the letters later attributed to him (Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon). Soon after their composition these were collected and circulated; in addition, admirers carried on Paul's legacy in pseudonymous additions to the corpus. Several different versions of the Pauline corpus circulated in the early Church. The earliest extant collection, in manuscript P 46 (c.200 CE) contains ten Pauline letters: Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, and Hebrews. Other early manuscripts include these plus four letters addressed to individuals: 1–2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. From the third century on, most patristic writers assume a corpus of thirteen or fourteen letters. Some disagreement continued about the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, as noted in Jerome's *On Illustrious Men*, which mentions three other suggested authors.

Reception of Paul's letters began soon after the Apostle's death, e.g. in Deutero-Pauline epistles such as Ephesians and the Pastorals that enlist Paul's name to authorize teaching addressed to later situations (Lindemann 1979). In the late first century and first half of the second century there are numerous direct or indirect references to Pauline verses in Christian writings, including Polycarp, Ignatius, 2 Peter, James (which opposes a version of Paul's teaching about justification; Jas 2.14–26), and 1 Clement, whose author, writing from Rome to the Christian community in Corinth, alludes to several parts of 1 Corinthians and explicitly asks his addressees to read Paul's letter as an antidote to divisions in their community (1 Clem 47.2; Lindemann 1979:177–99). One notable exception is the apologist Justin Martyr (Lindemann 1979:350–67).

From the late second century on, the fathers quote, paraphrase, and interpret Paul's words so frequently that it is difficult to find any theological or moral treatise, sermon, or commentary in which he is not cited as an authority. Detailed comment makes its appearance in the mid-third century, with Origen of Alexandria (c.185–c.254), who wrote commentaries or series of homilies on at least ten of them. The fourth and fifth centuries saw the flowering of this tradition, much of it issuing from the two great

centres of Christian learning in Alexandria and Antioch. There is a noticeable difference between the approaches of these two ‘schools’ of exegesis to OT books, with Alexandrian exegetes known more for allegorical interpretation and Antiochenes for a stronger emphasis on rhetorical analysis (Young 1997). But the differences are by no means absolute, and they are less evident in commentary on the letters of Paul.

Commentaries or extended series of homilies on some or all of the Pauline letters composed in Greek are extant from: John Chrysostom (c.347–407), Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.350–428; in a Latin translation), Theodoret of Cyrus (c.393–c.460), John of Damascus (c.655–c.750), and Oecumenius (tenth century). Fragments survive from Didymus the Blind (c.313–98), Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), Severian of Gabala (fl. c.400), Gennadius of Constantinople (d. 471), and Photius (c.810–c.895). In Latin we have commentaries by Marius Victorinus (fl. fourth century), an anonymous commentator referred to as Ambrosiaster (probably fourth century), Pelagius (born c.354), Jerome (c.345–420), Augustine (354–430), and Cassiodorus (485/90–c.580). Commentaries by Ephrem (c.306–73), written in Syriac, survive in an Armenian translation. Much ancient commentary has been lost.

## PAUL IN CONTROVERSY

---

In his own time, Paul was a figure of controversy, as can be seen especially in Galatians and 1 and 2 Corinthians. Marcion (c.85–c.160), an early champion of Paul, interpreted his teaching about the Jewish Law as implying a rejection of the whole OT, which, Marcion claimed, speaks of a god inferior to the Father of Christ. This interpretation was sharply disputed by second-century fathers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, in whose writings passages from Paul’s letters bulk large. These fathers also argued against the followers of a Gnostic teacher named Valentinus, who especially emphasized Paul’s teaching about grace and election. Clement, for example, argues repeatedly that divine grace must be accompanied by virtuous works, and claims that Paul’s references to the ‘elect’ and the ‘perfect’ refer to members of his own Christian group, not to a Valentinian elite (Kovacs 2013a).

The apocryphal *Acts of Paul* supplements canonical Acts with additional narratives of the Apostle’s missionary work, in the company of a celibate female disciple named Thecla, and describes Paul’s martyrdom in Rome under Nero. It celebrates Paul as an ascetic miracle-worker who opposes the Roman Empire. In the Jewish-Christian Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions*, on the other hand, Paul appears under the code name ‘Simon Magus’ (see Acts 8.9–29) and is vilified as an enemy of the Jewish Law and the main antagonist of Peter.

As the fathers sought to clarify the Church’s Christology, Trinitarian theology, and eschatology, passages from Paul’s letters occasioned exegetical debates. For example, in *Against the Arians* 1.37 Athanasius disputes an Arian interpretation of Philippians 2.6–11 which speaks of Christ’s abasement in the form of a servant. Other texts considered in

debates about the nature of Christ leading up to and following the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE include Colossians 1.15–20 and 1 Corinthians 1.24, 8.6, and 15.28 (Wiles 1967:73–93). Verses from 1 and 2 Corinthians were used by the Cappadocians to argue for the divinity of the Holy Spirit (e.g. Basil’s comments on 1 Corinthians 12.3 in *On the Holy Spirit* 11.27 and 18.47). Paul’s extended discussion of the general resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15 sparked disputes about the nature of the resurrection body and the scope of Christ’s final victory. In verse 28 Paul says that Christ, after his final victory over evil and death, will surrender the kingdom to the Father, so that ‘God may be all in all.’<sup>1</sup> This was understood by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa to imply universal salvation—a view disputed by Augustine and others. Exegetical debates relevant to other issues, including sexual ethics and the relation of divine grace and human freedom, will be considered in the rest of this chapter.

## PAUL AS MODEL ASCETIC

An example of Paul’s influence on patristic moral teaching is the importance of 1 Corinthians 7 in debates about marriage and sexual relations. Some verses from this chapter—the most extensive treatment of marriage in the NT—seem to recommend marriage, while others imply that the celibate life is better. Disagreements among Christians on this subject begin early; the author of 1 Timothy denounces people who ‘forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods’ (4.3); his own positive view of marriage is reflected in his counsel that a bishop is to be ‘the husband of one wife’ (3.1). Clement of Alexandria devotes book 3 of his *Miscellanies* to a discussion of marriage which provides glimpses into lively debates in the second century (Kovacs 2013b). He takes strong exception to certain Gnostics who use texts from Paul (especially 1 Cor 7) to denounce marriage, sexual relations, and the body. On the other hand, he argues against teachers who cite other verses from Paul as licence for sexual promiscuity. In support of marriage, Clement points out that the Apostles Peter and Philip were married and suggests—on the basis of Paul’s reference to his ‘consort’ (or ‘yokefellow’) in Philippians 4.3—that Paul was himself a married man (*str.* 3.6.53.1).

Origen views marriage as a ‘concession’ (1 Cor 7.5) to those who are weak, but admits that marriage is a ‘special gift’ (1 Cor 7.7) that can foster the virtue of ‘harmony’ (*comm. in 1 Cor.*, *JTS* 9 [1908] 500). Later commentary on 1 Corinthians 7 reflects the wide appeal of an ascetic ideal, evident for example in treatises on virginity by Athanasius, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nyssa; by the fourth century the superiority of celibacy to marriage becomes the dominant view (Hunter 2008). One dissenting voice in favour of marriage, the Roman monk Jovinian, survives only in quotations from an opponent. Jovinian aroused the ire of Jerome by arguing that married and celibate Christians have equal merit, a position he supports by quoting 1 Corinthians 7.39

<sup>1</sup> Biblical quotations are cited from the NRSV.

(‘If the husband dies, [a wife] is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord’), along with passages from 1 Timothy. In response, Jerome stresses 1 Corinthians 7:1: ‘It is well for a man not to touch a woman,’ concluding ‘if is good not to touch a woman, it is bad to touch one’ (*Iou.* 1). In *On the Good of Marriage* Augustine agrees with Jerome about the merit of celibacy but argues that according to 1 Corinthians 7:38 marriage is still a ‘good,’ not only the lesser of two evils.

## PAUL AS GUIDE ON THE ROAD TO PERFECTION: ORIGEN

---

A creative theologian who had a deep knowledge of Scripture, Origen was the most influential exegete of the patristic period. Known especially for his allegorical exegesis, he was also a trained philologist who paid careful attention to the letter of the text, including apparent contradictions between different verses. Of his commentaries on Paul only the *Commentary on Romans* survives, in an abridged Latin translation, along with substantial fragments on Ephesians, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians. Origen’s other surviving works, including his pioneering theology *On First Principles*, refer often to Pauline texts. His interpretations were often transmitted without attribution in the works of later fathers, especially those of Jerome.

Origen, like Clement of Alexandria before him, understands the Christian life as a journey to perfection in virtue and knowledge of God, and he views Paul as an accomplished guide on this path. The final goal is seeing God ‘face to face,’ as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12 (*comm. in Rom.* 7.4.5). Another favourite Pauline verse is the eschatological promise in 1 Corinthians 15:28, ‘so that God may be all in all,’ which Origen takes to refer to the final return of all rational beings to God. For the individual this means that ‘whatever [the rational mind] can feel or understand, or think will be God: henceforth, besides God it will feel nothing, think nothing, see nothing, possess nothing’ (*princ.* 3.6.3; trans. Kovacs 2005:254).

Knowledge of God comes through Christ who is the ‘wisdom and power of God’ (1 Cor 1.24) and through Scripture, which is the locus of a complex divine pedagogy, in which the divine Word addresses individual souls and gradually leads them to perfection. Important for this journey is coming to understand the spiritual meaning behind the letter of Scripture. Paul was himself a pioneer on this path. In Philippians 3:10–12 he speaks of his determination to ‘press on’ towards more complete knowledge (cited in *comm. in Rom.* Pref. 3). Origen interprets the sequence of Paul’s letters as reflecting Paul’s own spiritual progress, as well as the care with which he dispenses his teaching (Kovacs 2002). Compared with 1 Corinthians, which contains much elementary moral instruction for those who are still ‘babes’ in Christ (1 Cor 3.1–3), Paul discloses more advanced teaching in Ephesians (*princ.* 3.2.4; *comm. in 1 Cor.*, *JTS* 9 [1908] 354). The confession in Romans 8:35–9.1, which begins: ‘Who can separate us from the love of Christ?’

suggests to Origen that Paul is himself ‘more perfect’ when he writes Romans (*comm. in Rom.* Pref. 3–7).

Particularly important for this reading of Paul is 1 Corinthians 2–3—where Paul contrasts teaching for immature ‘babes’ with God’s ‘hidden wisdom’ (2.7) imparted to ‘the perfect’—and Hebrews 5.12–14, which counsels moving on from ‘elementary lessons’ to pursue ‘perfection.’ Further, in Romans Origen discerns a parallel between the transformation of religion from the OT to the NT and the gradual perfection of the believer (Heither 1990). He summarizes the central theme of Romans 1–9 as the transfer ‘from the Jews to the Gentiles, from circumcision to faith, from the letter to the Spirit, from shadow to truth, from fleshly observance to spiritual observance’ (*comm. in Rom.* 9.1.1). In the life of the individual this is paralleled by turning from ‘flesh’ to ‘spirit’ (Rom 7.14–25) and from ‘slavery’ to the freedom of ‘adoption’ (Rom 8.15; *comm. in Rom.* 1.10.2; 1.1.1).

Paul leads his readers to be conformed to Christ in virtue and wisdom and united with him in love, the greatest of the virtues (1 Cor 13.13; *comm. in Rom.* 5.10.15). Christ is not only God’s ‘wisdom’ but also his ‘righteousness’ (1 Cor 1.30) ‘through whom all become righteous’; he is all the other virtues as well (*comm. in Rom.* 3.65; 6.11.2; Wiles 1967:114). Thus ‘justification by faith’ (Rom 3.21) means having Christ as righteousness in oneself. Following Paul, the believer is to progress to having ‘the mind of Christ’ (1 Cor 2.16) and being able to say with Paul: ‘It is no longer I who live but Christ in me’ (Gal 2.20; *comm. in Rom.* 5.10.7; 4.12.4).

## PAUL AS CHAMPION OF FREE WILL: PELAGIUS

---

Passages from Romans, especially chapters 5, 7, and 9–11, figure prominently in debates between Pelagius and Augustine and their associates. Both taught that a person was saved by God’s grace revealed in Jesus Christ, but they differed sharply in their understandings of grace, human nature, and salvation (Bonner 1986). Born in Britain, Pelagius led an ascetic movement in Rome from 384 to 410. His *Exposition of 13 Letters of Paul* (all except Hebrews) was written in 406–9. As one of the first commentaries in Latin, it reflects the increased interest in Pauline theology in the Latin West in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Continuing an emphasis of Origen and other Greek fathers, Pelagius stresses the role of human free will in salvation, the importance of good works, and the power of good examples, including that of Paul himself (De Bruyn 1993). He advocates a moderate form of asceticism in sexual relations, food, and drink.

Pelagius takes Paul’s argument about the sinfulness of all human beings in Romans 1–4 to refer to the time before the advent of Christ, not the state of Christians after the forgiveness bestowed in baptism. A key point of disagreement with Augustine concerns the exegesis of the Adam–Christ typology in Romans 5.12–21, which begins: ‘Therefore,

just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because [Latin: in whom] all have sinned.' On Pelagius' reading, Paul means that Adam set a bad example, not that Adam's guilt was passed down to all his descendants. God created people with free will and the real possibility of living a sinless life. The grace conveyed by Jesus Christ consists primarily in his teaching and the example he provides for virtuous living.

In Romans 7 Paul describes an intense inner conflict between will and action: 'For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?' (7.13–14). In his comments on this text, Pelagius insists that the root of sin is a person's free choice—being *sold* in sin (verse 14) means *resolving* to sin. Even habitual sinning never totally obscures the will. Paul has been set free by the grace of Christ. So the dilemma he describes cannot be his own; he is speaking in another *persona*, that of the 'fleshly person' (verse 18) who has not experienced this liberating grace (verse 25).

In Romans 9–11 Paul, wrestling with the painful fact that most of God's chosen people did not believe in his messiah, poses an urgent question: what does this mean for God's faithfulness to his promises? Among several possible answers is an appeal to the stories of God's choice of Jacob over Esau (Gen 25.23) and his hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exod 4.21), on which Paul comments:

Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion' (Exod 33.19). So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. (Rom 9.14–16)

Pelagius explains these verses as a quotation of the views of Paul's opponents and argues further that it is on the basis of God's foreknowledge of their faith that he 'elects' people. To show that Paul does not discount the role of the human will in salvation he quotes Romans 2.4 ('God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance'). A similar exegesis of Romans 9 as implying the freedom of the human will is found in an anonymous work *On the Hardness of Pharaoh's Heart*, which is variously ascribed to Pelagius or another Pelagian author.

## PAUL AS HERALD OF SALVATION BY DIVINE GRACE ALONE: AUGUSTINE

---

Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa, was the pre-eminent theologian of the patristic period and a churchman with enormous influence, especially in the Latin-speaking West. Trained as a teacher of rhetoric, he spent many years as a Manichaean before being baptized by Ambrose, bishop of Milan. Seeking to build up the one, universal

catholic Church, he vigorously opposed Manichaeans, Donatists, and Pelagians. His extensive works include only one commentary on a Pauline letter (Galatians) and an unfinished commentary on Romans that ends after the seventh verse, but Pauline texts figure prominently in his other works. As Bright (2005:71) notes: ‘The Epistle to the Romans was a constant companion of his intellectual and spiritual journey.’

The history of theological disputes between Pelagius and Augustine is complex, involving a series of responses to each other’s ideas and a significant change in the position of Augustine (Bonner 1986). In early works such as *On the Freedom of the Will*, Augustine’s interpretation of Paul agreed with that of Pelagius on many points. The précis of his Pauline exegesis given in this chapter considers only his mature view, represented for example in his *To Simplician* written in 396. In book 1 of this work he considers the interpretation of Romans 7 and 9. Here Augustine takes Romans 9 to mean that God’s choice of Jacob over Esau did not issue from his foreknowledge of Jacob’s faith and good works but solely from his sovereign grace. Humanity’s salvation—and even its faith—are entirely the work of God, in which human merit plays no role (*Simpl.* 1.2.13–15).

Augustine’s interpretation of Romans 5 has had enormous influence in the Western Church, especially his readings of verses 5 and 12. In verse 5 Paul speaks of ‘the love God poured into our hearts.’ Grammatically, ‘love of God’ can refer either to God’s love for humans or human love for God. In *On the Spirit and the Letter* 2.4–3.5 (composed in 412) Augustine argues for the latter, strongly opposing the view that humans can make any progress towards righteousness without help from God. Even the desire for God comes as a gift. Augustine also differs sharply from Pelagius in interpreting Romans 5.12 (cited above). In the original Greek the end of this verse could mean either ‘because all sinned,’ or ‘in whom [Adam] all sinned.’ The Old Latin translation (*in quo*) can only mean ‘in whom.’ In *Against Julian* (written 421/2) Augustine concludes it must mean that *in Adam* all subsequent human beings have sinned (*Iul.* 2.63). This verse was an important support for Augustine’s teaching of ‘original sin,’ inherited by all Adam’s descendants before any deliberate sins on their part.

Another key text for Augustine’s understanding of human nature and divine grace was Paul’s powerful depiction in Romans 7 of the inner battle between God’s law and (a personified) sin: ‘For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate’ (verse 15). In contrast to Pelagius, Augustine interprets this as a portrait of *all* human beings, including baptized Christians such as Paul. In his *Confessions*, where he describes the long spiritual quest that brought him from Manichaeism and Platonism to Christianity, Augustine quotes from this chapter, along with other Pauline verses, to describe a crucial moment in his journey: ‘With avid intensity,’ he writes, ‘I seized the sacred writing of your Spirit and especially the apostle Paul’ (*Conf.* 7.21.27; trans. Chadwick 1991:130). Shortly after this he tells about his reading of Paul’s exhortation to spurn debauchery and ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ’ in Romans 13.13–14—chosen at random after he overheard a child say, ‘Pick up and read’—and how this led directly to his accepting Christian baptism (*Conf.* 8.12.29).

Augustine finds similar teaching about divine grace in other Pauline letters. In a sermon he crafts a lively dialogue based on Paul’s autobiographical descriptions in

1 Corinthians 15.9–10—challenging the Apostle with questions and employing Paul’s own words as answers:

‘I am unfit to be called an apostle’: well said, well said. ‘By his grace I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain’: all very good. But ‘I worked harder than any of them’—this sounds as if you have begun to attribute to yourself what just now you ascribed to God. But see what follows: ‘though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.’ Well done, weak man. You will be most highly exalted because you are not ungrateful. (*serm.* 76.7; trans. Kovacs 2005:247)

## IN PRAISE OF PAUL AS EMBODIMENT OF ALL VIRTUE: JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

---

The quotation from Augustine’s sermon illustrates how the fathers engaged with Paul as a person, as well as with his theology. This is particularly striking in the writings of John Chrysostom, who wrote a commentary on Galatians and delivered series of homilies on all fourteen of the Pauline epistles. Chrysostom studied rhetoric under the famous pagan orator Libanius and theology under Diodore of Tarsus, head of a Christian school in Antioch. As a priest in Antioch and later bishop in Constantinople, Chrysostom was known especially for his high moral tone, his courage in difficult political circumstances, and his eloquence. His honorific title ‘Chrysostom’ means ‘golden-tongued’, reflecting his great fame as a preacher.

In agreement with other Greek fathers and with Pelagius, Chrysostom insists that divine grace and human freedom work together (Hall 2005). In a comment on Romans 1.11 he warns his hearers not to become apathetic because Paul calls their salvation ‘a gift of grace’ (*hom. in Rom.* 2). In contrast to Augustine, he does not interpret Romans 5 to mean that Adam’s sin corrupted human nature in a fundamental way (*hom. in Rom.* 11), and he argues that Paul’s discussion of Jacob and Esau in Romans 9 is not intended to do away with human freedom (*hom. in Rom.* 16). Paul’s point in this passage is to warn against questioning God’s all-wise judgements (Rom 11.33). Chrysostom’s homilies on the Pauline letters constantly stress the importance of performing works of charity, especially care for the poor.

What stands out in Chrysostom’s interpretation of Paul is not his explication of Paul’s theology but rather his close attention to the rhetoric of Paul’s letters and his preoccupation with Paul as a person. Himself a skilled orator, Chrysostom views Paul as the ideal pastor and a master of the art of persuasion (Mitchell 2000). His homilies on each letter begin with a section that summarizes the situation the letter presupposes and the structure of Paul’s argument, and he comments frequently on the psychologically astute nature of Paul’s rhetoric.

Throughout his works Chrysostom presents vivid portraits of the person of Paul, most extensively in his seven homilies *In Praise of Saint Paul*, which were probably

preached on successive feast days of St Paul (28 December). The first of these begins with extravagant praise:

We would not miss the mark if we were to call Paul's soul a field of virtues and a spiritual paradise: so richly does it blossom with grace and so worthy of that grace is the discipline it exhibits. . . . For whatever noble qualities prophets or patriarchs or righteous ones or apostles or martyrs manifested, Paul has joined them all together and possessed them to a greater degree than any of the others possessed even a single virtue. (*laud. Paul.* 1.1–2; trans. Kovacs 2005:5)

Chrysostom makes elaborate use of *synkrisis* (comparison), a device prominent in classical speeches praising athletic or political heroes. Running through a long series of OT figures—including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Job—he uses verses from Paul's letters to show how Paul surpasses all of them in virtue. For example: he cites 2 Corinthians 11.23–9, to show that Paul's sufferings were even greater than those of Job. Homily 2 begins with the statement that Paul shows 'what a human being is', i.e. the virtue of which human nature is capable.

The fourth homily is especially powerful. Here Chrysostom paints a picture of Paul's life as exemplifying the 'word of the cross' at the heart of his preaching, citing 1 Corinthians 1–2, which presents the cross of Christ as God's power and wisdom revealed in apparent weakness and foolishness. Classical handbooks of rhetoric list appropriate topics for an encomium including: the subject's noble birth, parents, illustrious city and nation, education, profession, friendships, wealth, reputation, and illustrious deeds. In a brilliant inversion of these topics, Chrysostom uses signs of Paul's weakness—his humble origins, his low status as a leatherworker and 'frequenter of the marketplace [Acts 17:17], who stood in his workshop wielding his knife', and also the sufferings and opposition he faced—as demonstrating his greatness (*laud. Paul.* 4.10, trans. Kovacs 2005:6). Further, the phenomenal results of the missionary endeavours of this humble Apostle are evidence of the divine origin of his gospel.

Chrysostom's seven homilies *In Praise of Paul* illustrate a common assumption of patristic readings of Paul, evident already in the commentaries of Origen (Martens 2012:6): that understanding Paul's letters requires not only the intellect but the whole self of the interpreter. His fourth homily ends, as do the others, with a call to imitate Paul:

God so valued the human race that he thought it right that one man be worthy of accomplishing so many virtuous deeds. Therefore let us imitate Paul. . . . For 'God shows no partiality' (Acts 10.34). The same God who formed Paul also created you, and just as he is Paul's master, so is he yours. Just as God proclaimed Paul the victor, so he wants to crown you as well. Let us then dedicate and purify ourselves, so that we too, like Paul, may receive God's grace in abundance and obtain the same blessings as Paul did, by the grace and beneficence of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. (*laud. Paul.* 4.21; translation mine)

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Augustine, *Confessiones*. Latin text: L. Verheijen (ed.), CCSL 27. Eng. trans.: H. Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- Augustine, *Sermo* 76. Latin text: PL 38.479–83.
- Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*. Greek text: O. Stählin, L. Früchtel, and U. Treu (eds), *Stromata Buch I-VI*, GCS (Berlin: Akademie, 1985).
- Jerome, *Aduersus Iouinianum libri II*. Latin text: PL 23.183–338.
- John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Romanos*. Greek text: PG 60.13–384.
- John Chrysostom, *De laudibus Pauli*. Greek text and French trans.: A. Piédagnel, *Jean Chrysostome, Panégyriques de S. Paul*, SC 300 (Paris: Du Cerf, 1982). Eng. trans. (selections): Kovacs 2005.
- Kovacs, J. (2005) (ed. and trans.). *1 Corinthians Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators*, The Church's Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Greek text and French trans.: H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti (eds), *Origène Traité des principes III* (Livres III et IV), SC 268 (Paris: Du Cerf, 1980). Eng. trans. (selections): Kovacs 2005.
- Origen, *Fragmenta ex commentariis in 1 ad Corinthios*. Greek text: C. Jenkins (ed.), 'Documents: Origen on 1 Corinthians', *JTS* 9 (1908): 231–47, 500–14; 10; (1909): 29–51. Eng. trans. (selections): Kovacs 2005.
- Origen, *Commentarii in Romanos*. Latin text and French trans.: C. P. Hammond Bammel (ed.), L. Brésard and M. Fédou (trans.), *Commentaire sur l'épître aux Romains I-II*, SC 532 (Paris: Du Cerf, 2009).

### Scholarship

- Bonner, G. (1986). 'Augustine, the Bible and the Pelagians', in P. Bright (ed.), *Augustine and the Bible* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame), 227–42.
- Bright, P. (2005). 'Augustine', in J. P. Greenman and T. Larsen (eds), *Reading Romans through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos), 59–80.
- De Bruyn, T. (1993). 'Introduction', in T. De Bruyn (trans.), *Pelagius's Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Clarendon), 1–58.
- Hall, C. (2005). 'John Chrysostom', in J. Greenman and T. Larsen (eds), *Reading Romans through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos), 39–57.
- Heither, T. (1990). *Translatio Religionis: Die Paulusdeutung des Origenes* (Vienna: Böhlig).
- Hunter, D. (2008). 'The Reception and Interpretation of Paul in Late Antiquity: 1 Corinthians 7 and the Ascetic Debates', in L. di Tommaso and L. Turesscu (eds), *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity* (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill), 163–91.
- Kovacs, J. (2002). "'Servant of Christ" and "Steward of the Mysteries of God": The Purpose of a Pauline Letter according to Origen's *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*', in P. Blowers et al. (eds), *In Dominico Eloquio/In Lordly Eloquence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 147–71.
- Kovacs, J. (2013a). 'Grace and Works: Clement of Alexandria's Response to Valentinian Exegesis of Paul', in T. Nicklas, A. Merkt, and J. Verheyden (eds), *Ancient and New Perspectives on Paul* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 191–210.

- Kovacs, J. (2013b). 'Was Paul an Antinomian, an Ascetic, or a Sober Married Man? Exegetical Debates in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* 3', in H. Weidemann (ed.), *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity* (Leuven: Brepols), 186–202.
- Lindemann, A. (1979). *Paulus im ältesten Christentum: Das Bild des Apostels und die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Marcion*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 58 (Tübingen: Mohr).
- Martens, P. (2012). *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (New York: Oxford).
- Mitchell, M. (2000). *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Young, F. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Wiles, M. (1967). *The Divine Apostle* (London: Cambridge University).

### Suggested Reading

- Babcock, W. (1990) (ed.). *Paul and the Legacies of Paul* (Dallas: Southern Methodist).
- Blowers, P. (1997) (ed.). *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame).
- Bochet, I., and Fédou, M. (2014) (eds). *L'Exégèse patristique de l'épître aux Galates* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes).
- Bright, P. (1986) (ed.). *Augustine and the Bible* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame).
- Cocchini, F. (1992). *Il Paolo di Origene: Contributo alla storia della recezione delle epistole Paoline nel III secolo* (Roma: Edizioni Studium).
- Gorday, P. (1983). *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9–11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press).
- Kannengiesser, C. (2002). *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 2 vols (Leiden, Brill).
- Meiser, M. (2007). *Galater* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
- Pervo, R. I. (2010). *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress).

## CHAPTER 41

---

# THE CROSS

---

JOHN BEHR

THE cross, and the saving passion of Christ upon the cross, holds a unique and significant place in the world of early Christian scriptural interpretation, for not only does it provide an extremely fertile locus for scriptural interpretation, but it is what in fact makes such scriptural interpretation possible. Neither the Scriptures, nor the work of Christ, nor even Christ himself were understood by his disciples until after this event: as John says of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, 'His disciples did not understand this at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered [by way of a passage from Zechariah] that this had been written of him and had been done to him' (John 12.16; Zech 9.9). From the first, then, the gospel is proclaimed by reference to the Scriptures, what we now call, somewhat misleadingly, the OT. So important was this scriptural context, that, in one of the earliest proclamations of the gospel that we have, the Apostle Paul appeals to it twice in one sentence: 'I delivered to you, as of first importance, what I also received, that Christ died in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried and rose on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures' (1 Cor 15.3-4). This appeal remains fundamental even in the creeds of later centuries; when the Creed of Nicaea specifies that Christ 'rose in accordance with the Scriptures', it is to the same 'Old Testament', not the Gospels, that reference is made. To treat the place of the cross, then, in early Christian scriptural interpretation requires us to consider both the significance of the cross for our understanding of Scripture itself as well as the various ways in which the cross was expounded.

## THE APOCALYPSE OF THE CROSS

---

The only other occasion where Paul appeals to what he has received and now delivers or 'traditions', besides the proclamation of the gospel itself (1 Cor 15.3-4), is the celebration of the Lord's meal, where he specifies that what he traditions is what he received from the Lord himself (1 Cor 11.23). Luke, the disciple of Paul, brings these together in his account of the encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus. It is only when

Christ ‘interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself’, specifically that ‘Moses and all the prophets’ had spoken of how ‘it was necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory’, that the disciples’ hearts were set on fire, so that they were able to recognize him ‘in the breaking of bread’ (Luke 24.25–35). The books were closed, that is, with a ‘veil’ lying over them, as Moses had placed it upon himself (2 Cor 3.12–18), so that their content was not yet known, even if they had been repeatedly read, until Christ himself opens them to show how they speak about him and his passion. That Christ is only known in this way is shown in reverse by the one exception, which proves the rule, when one of the disciples makes a confession of faith before the Passion: after his confession, Peter is told by Christ that this was not revealed (‘apocalypsed’) by flesh and blood, but by the Father; but then when Christ reveals that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer, Peter’s response, that this should not happen, gets the sharpest rebuke possible: ‘Get behind me Satan!’ (Matt 16.13–23).

This is a fundamental point for early scriptural interpretation, which is reflected upon abundantly in early Christian literature. Irenaeus of Lyons, in the latter part of the second century, makes this point forcefully (*haer.* 4.26.1). Christ, he says, is the treasure hidden in the field of the Scriptures (Matt 13.38, 44), ‘indicated by means of types and parables, which could not be understood by human beings prior to the consummation of those things which had been predicted, that is, the advent of the Lord’. For this reason, Irenaeus continues, it was said to Daniel the prophet, ‘Shut up the words, and seal the book, until the time of the consummation, until many learn and knowledge abounds. For, when the dispersion shall be accomplished, they shall know all these things’ (Dan 12.4, 7), and likewise by Jeremiah, ‘In the last days they shall understand these things’ (Jer 23.20). So, Irenaeus concludes:

Every prophecy, before its fulfilment, is nothing but an enigma and ambiguity to human beings; but when the time has arrived, and the prediction has come to pass, then it has an exact exposition [*ἐξήγησις*]. And for this reason, when at this present time the Law is read by the Jews, it is like a myth, for they do not possess the explanation [*ἐξήγησις*] of all things which pertain to the human advent of the Son of God; but when it is read by Christians, it is a treasure, hid in a field, but brought to light by the cross of Christ. (*haer.* 4.26.1)

When read in this apocalyptic fashion, with the veil being lifted at the end of times, he continues, Scripture glorifies the reader ‘to such an extent, that others will not be able to behold his glorious countenance’ (cf. Exod 34.30–33; 2 Cor 3.7–18). The books are sealed, and what they speak about, the treasure they contain—Christ himself—cannot be understood until they are opened by the cross; if they are not read in this apocalyptic manner, they will be read as nothing more than myths and fables (even if they are historically true). What the books contain cannot be understood until the last days, when the time of their accomplishment is present and the book unsealed. And now unveiled, those who read the same Scriptures through a proper exegesis are themselves transfigured, to become like Moses in his descent from the mountain after his encounter with God, themselves shining with the glory of God.

That the Scriptures are unveiled by the cross has significant implications for how early Christians read and understood the Scriptures themselves. Scripture read in this way is, to use Irenaeus' image, like a mosaic depicting the face of the king, which the heretics have rearranged to form the image of a dog or fox (*haer.* 1.8.1). Scripture is a 'thesaurus', a treasury of images and words used to proclaim Christ in the gospel, or, in the analogy used by Joel Marcus, drawing from E. Gässer, it is a 'paint-box' used by the evangelists in their depiction of Christ (Marcus 1992:2). Richard Hays comes to very much the same conclusion in reflecting on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3.12–4.6, regarding the unveiling of Moses, now a text, for those who turn to the Lord to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. In Hays's words, this means that 'Scripture becomes—in Paul's reading—a metaphor, a vast trope that signifies and illuminates the gospel of Jesus Christ' (Hays 1989:149). The proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ is not straightforwardly derivable from Scripture; rather, the death and resurrection of Christ acts as a catalyst. Because God has acted in Christ in a definitive, and unexpected, manner, making everything new, Scripture itself must be read anew. The 'word of the cross', the preaching of 'Christ crucified' may be a scandal for the Jews and folly for the Gentiles, but it alone is the 'power of God' making known 'the wisdom of God' (1 Cor 1.18–25). This preaching, the *kerygma*, provides what Hays describes as 'the eschatological *apokalypsis* of the cross', a hermeneutical lens, through which Scripture can now be refracted with 'a profound new symbolic coherence' (Hays 1989:169).

This is a way of reading Scripture very different from what has become customary over recent centuries, when theological reflection, both scriptural exegesis and systematic exposition, has worked in a historical key, rather than within an apocalyptic framework. The primary horizon has been that of *Heilsgeschichte*, a 'salvation history' that moves from the narratives of the OT to those of the NT, where the Gospels are primarily read as biographies of Jesus followed by the acts of the Apostles and their epistles. In this overarching narrative, one begins with God and his act of creation; the falling away of human beings; and then the long, slow, and patient work of God through the messiness of human history, in a gradually unfolding plan, preparing the way for the advent of Christ, the Incarnation of the Word. However, as J. Louis Martyn points out, the link between the Scriptures and the gospel for John—so important that Christ, in his gospel, can affirm that, for instance, Isaiah saw the day of Jesus and beheld his glory (John 8.56 and 12.41)—is *not* understood as a linear movement from the Scriptures to the gospel:

the fundamental arrow in the link joining scripture and gospel points from the gospel story to scripture and not from scripture to the gospel story. In a word, with Jesus' glorification, belief in Scripture *comes into being*, by acquiring an indelible link to belief in Jesus' words and deeds. . . . we have simply to note in the Gospel of John the absence of a linear sacred history that flows out of Scripture into the gospel story. Indeed the redemptive-historical perspective is more than absent; it is a perspective against which John is waging a battle. (Martyn 1997b:216–17)

The cross constitutes the writings of Moses and the prophets *as Scripture*. Martyn makes a similar point for Paul: 'Paul did not make his way *from* Isaiah's words about God

destroying the discernment of the discerning *to* the foolish word of the crucified Messiah. His hermeneutic worked exactly the other way around, from the previously unknown and foolish gospel of the cross to the previously known and previously misunderstood scripture' (Martyn 1997b:221). What brought Paul to be a zealous Apostle of the gospel was not his former studies of the Scripture, but rather when God revealed (or 'apocalypsed') his Son to him, or rather, in him (Gal 2.16). It is, in fact, Paul's opponents in Galatia, the 'teachers', who, as with John's opponents, moved from the Law to the gospel (in the manner of our 'salvation history') rather than from the gospel to the Scriptures in an apocalyptic unveiling of previously unknown depths (Martyn 1997a:117–26). Martyn is not quite right when he asserts: 'When the emerging great church identified Marcion's theology as heretical, it did so, in part, by adopting a view of the relationship between scripture and gospel that, in general terms, looks rather similar to the view of the simple exegetical theologians against whom Paul and John struggled in the first century (see Justin Martyr; Rhodo; Irenaeus)' (Martyn 1997b:225). Irenaeus did not understand the 'economy' of God as our modern 'salvation history', but, as we have seen, understood the 'economy' more in terms of an 'arrangement', such as the way the tiles in a mosaic are arranged to depict Christ, so that Scripture, from beginning to end, speaks of Christ, whose face is discerned in Scripture when the books are opened by the right key, the cross. The gospel is not simply the culminating point of a 'salvation history', as Martyn rightly argues, but neither is it a proclamation separable from Scripture, as Martyn implies: it is always bound up with the apocalyptic unveiling of Scripture to reveal 'the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the likeness of God' (2 Cor 4:4), with Scripture providing the words and images through which the gospel is, from the first, proclaimed (cf. Marcus 1992:108).

There is one further epistemological point to be drawn from this relationship between the cross and Scripture. When Paul says that we no longer know Christ, as we once did, 'according to the flesh' (2 Cor 15.16–17), that is, knowing Christ on the basis of sense perception, the contrast to this is not a 'spiritual perception', as might be supposed from his earlier words (cf. 1 Cor 2.6–16). As Martyn points out, it is his opponents, the spiritual enthusiasts in Corinth, who were claiming a 'spiritual perception' by which they have seen God, perhaps even face to face. Paul had resorted to such an appeal in his first letter to the Corinthians, but now realized that he could not do so again. He appeals to the new creation, but, as Martyn points out, 'he is careful . . . to imply that the opposite of the old-age way of knowing is not that of the new age—this point must be emphasized—but rather the way of knowing which is granted at the juncture of the ages' (Martyn 1997b:107). He does not speak of seeing the face of God, nor of knowing by the Spirit, for he, as everyone else, does not yet live in the new age. As Martyn puts it, 'the implied opposite of knowing by the norm of the flesh is not knowing by the norm of the Spirit, but rather knowing *kata stauron* ("by the cross")' (Martyn 1997b:108). Until we are, in actuality, raised with Christ in the new age, 'knowing by the Spirit can occur only in the form of knowing by the power of the cross. For until the parousia, the cross is and remains the epistemological crisis, and thus the norm by which one knows that the Spirit is none other than the Spirit of the crucified Christ. . . . The cross is the epistemological crisis for the simple reason that while it is in one sense followed by the resurrection, it is not

replaced by the resurrection' (Martyn 1997b:108–9). The old has indeed passed away, and the new has indeed come, but this is only seen through the faith, the new eyes, of those standing at the juncture of the ages. A new community is being formed, not by knowledge but by active love, as the body of Christ. '*Christ* defines the difference between the two ways of knowing, doing that precisely in his cross' (Martyn 1997b:110).

## IMAGES OF THE CROSS

---

Fleshing out the cross and Christ himself on the basis of an apocalyptic reading of Scripture, the evangelists, and Christian writers following them in the early centuries, appealed to a plethora of imagery from the 'thesaurus' of Scripture. Within the Gospels, this is sometimes done explicitly, and occasionally Christ himself is presented as using the words of Scripture to explain who he is and what work he has come to fulfil. For instance, in the Gospel of John, Christ himself says: 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life' (John 3.14–15). The reference here is to the book of Numbers, where the Israelites were complaining to Moses that it was folly to remain in the desert: that is, the wisdom of the world was arguing that it is preferable to go back to Egypt, where, even if they were slaves, at least they had food and shelter (Num 21.4–9). In return, God punished them and their murmuring tongues by inflicting a plague of serpents with equally poisonous tongues, and simultaneously provided a remedy, the bronze serpent which, when lifted up upon a pole, enabled the people to regain life. The play of imagery here also recalls Paul's words to those in his Corinthian community who were seduced by the wisdom of the world, that the folly of God (Christ lifted on the cross, as the bronze snake was lifted on the pole) overcomes the wisdom of the world, and, as such, Christ is the true power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1.22–5). This imagery, moreover, harks further back to that other snake on the tree, in the opening chapters of Genesis, promising life, yet unable to deliver it, but who instead brings death upon those who tasted of its fruit (Gen 3): Christ, upon the tree of the cross, is the true wisdom of God, contrasted with the wisdom of the world offered by the snake upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

This interplay of imagery also comes to be depicted visually. The earliest representations of the crucifixion, such as in the sixth-century Rabbula Gospels, depict Christ upright and with his eyes open, not because of any shame in depicting him dead, but because this is the Living One, conquering death by his death. When, in the following centuries, the unity of this paschal Christ was refracted into an image of a dead Christ upon the cross and an image of the resurrected Christ, separately, the dead Christ is depicted with his body in a slumped, serpentine, posture. It is also striking how this image, at the heart of the gospel and its most distinctive proclamation, is in fact an image that was widely and readily known in the ancient world, for it is none other than the image of Asklepios, the god of medicine and healing; his distinctive symbol, a snake wound round a pole, continues

even to the present day in the red and white striped pole of modern barbers, whose forebears were the blood-letters, the doctors of times past.

The connection between the tree of paradise and the tree of the cross provides fertile ground for the fourth-century Syrian poet and theologian Ephrem. In his *Hymns on Paradise*, he differentiates between the tree of knowledge and the tree of life: the first corresponds to the sanctuary veil, the latter to the Holy of Holies, so that the tree of knowledge is a 'gate' to the tree of life, and its fruit the 'veil' hiding the hidden tabernacle (*par.* 3.13; trans. Brock 1990:95). God had arranged the trees in this way, so that Adam might prove himself to be 'pleasing in his service of that outer tabernacle', like a priest with fragrant incense, his virtues as his censer, so that he might enter the hidden tabernacle (*par.* 3.16; trans. Brock 1990:96). The 'symbol of paradise' thus corresponds to the two sanctuaries constructed by Moses, the outer one, into which entrance was permitted, and the inner one, where entrance was permitted only once a year (*par.* 3.17; trans. Brock 1990:96; cf. Lev 16; Heb 9.7). Not knowing this, however, when Adam snatched the fruit, disobeying the commandment, and saw the divine glory it contained, he ran off, taking refuge in the more modest trees (*par.* 3.13); daring to touch the fruit within, he was smitten like Uzziah, becoming leprous like him, and so fled, hiding himself in shame of his body (cf. *par.* 3.14; trans. Brock 1990:95; cf. 2 Chr 26.16). And while all the trees of paradise are clothed with their own glory, 'each veils itself at the Glory, the Seraphs with their wings, and the trees with their branches, all cover their faces so as not to behold the Lord'; yet 'they all blush at Adam who was suddenly found naked', for the serpent had stolen his garments and in turn was deprived of its feet (*par.* 3.15; trans. Brock 1990:96). The tree of life remained invisible thereafter, hidden in the earth, until it arose at the passion of Christ. As Ephrem strikingly puts it:

Very sad was the Tree of Life  
that saw Adam hidden from him.  
Into the virgin earth he sank and was buried,  
but he arose and shone forth from Golgotha.  
Humankind, like a bird pursued,  
took refuge on it so it would arrive at its home.  
The persecutor is persecuted,  
and the persecuted doves rejoice in paradise.  
(*virg.* 16.10; trans. McVey 1989:332)

The tree of life *is* the Cross, having been placed in the depth of the earth to rise again with the living Christ. So close is this association between the Cross, the tree of life, and Christ himself, that Ephrem can simply say 'the Tree of Life is the symbol of the Son of the Living One,' whose fruit is picked daily in the Church as the eucharistic gifts (*eccl.* 49.16, cited in Brock 1990:61).

There is, as noted earlier, an abundance of imagery drawn from the Scriptures by early Christians to understand and proclaim the cross. Sometimes many different texts are

brought together, as for instance in the following passage from Irenaeus of Lyons' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. In the latter parts of this work, he narrates the life of Christ almost exclusively with passages from the OT, for, as we have seen, it is through its medium that even the evangelists themselves provide their accounts. When coming to the passion of Christ, Irenaeus comments:

Concerning his cross, Isaiah speaks thus, 'I stretched out my hands all the day to a disbelieving and contrary people' [Isa 65.2] for this is a sign of the cross. And, yet more clearly, David says, 'Many dogs have encircled me, the assembly of evil-doers has surrounded me; they have pierced my hands and feet' [Ps 21.17]. And again he says, 'My heart is become like wax, melting in the midst of my bowels; and they have scattered my bones' [Ps 21.15]. And again he says, 'Spare my soul from the sword and nail my flesh, for the assembly of evil-doers has risen against me' [cf. Ps 21.21; 118.120; 21.17; 85.14]. In this he clearly signifies his crucifixion. Moreover, Moses says the same thing to the people, in this way, 'Your life will hang before your eyes, and you will fear day and night, and will not trust in your life.'

[Deut 28:66] (*dem.* 79; trans. Behr 1997:89–90).

Moses and the prophets, for Irenaeus, clearly speak of the same reality. Elsewhere, Irenaeus takes a passage about Elisha's actions and interprets it by means of the words of John the Baptist and Jeremiah, with an important conclusion:

When [Elisha's] fellow-prophets were hewing wood for the construction of a tabernacle, and when the iron [head], shaken loose from the axe, had fallen into the Jordan and could not be found by them, upon Elisha's coming to the place, and learning what had happened, he threw some wood into the water. Then, when he had done this, the iron part of the axe floated up, and they took up from the surface of the water what they had previously lost [2 Kgs 6.1–7]. By this action the prophet pointed out that the sure word of God, which we had negligently lost by means of a tree, and were not able to find again, we should receive anew by the economy of the tree. For that the word of God is likened to an axe, John the Baptist declares [when he says] in reference to it, 'But now also is the axe laid to the root of the trees' [Matt 3.10]. Jeremiah also says to the same effect: 'The word of God cleaves the rock as an axe' [23.29]. This word, then, which was hidden from us, did the economy of the tree make manifest, as I have already remarked. For as we lost it by means of a tree, by means of a tree again was it made manifest to all, showing the height, the length, the breadth, the depth in itself; and, as a one of our predecessors observed, 'Through the extension of the hands, gathering together the two peoples to one God'. For there were two hands, because there were two peoples scattered to the ends of the earth; but there was one head in the middle, as there is but one God, who is above all, and through all, and in us all. (*haer.* 5.17.4)

Through an intertextual reading of Scripture, centred upon the cross, the Scriptures are seen not only to speak about Christ and his passion upon the cross, but open out from this into a broader ecclesial perspective (cf. Hays 1989:164).

Besides finding the cross throughout the Scriptures, early Christians were prepared to see the cross throughout the other ‘book’ of God, that is, the cosmos. Justin Martyr, for instance, noting that the cross is ‘the greatest symbol of God’s strength and rule’, sees its form in many things that we can see around us: ‘For consider all the things that are in the world, if, without this pattern, they are administered or are able to have cohesion. For the sea is not cleaved unless the mast, fixed in this way in the keel, remains secure in the ship, and the earth is not ploughed without it. Diggers do not do their work, nor craftsmen likewise, unless by means of tools having this pattern’ (1 *apol.* 55; trans. Minns and Parvis 2009:225). It is moreover evident in the very shape of the human face, with the horizontal line formed by the eyebrows intersected by the vertical line of the nose, the means of respiration, for, as the prophet said ‘the breath before our face is the Lord Christ’ (Lam 4.20 LXX). It is even demonstrated by the symbols on the banners and trophies of the Roman soldiers, through which peace has been brought into the world. Moreover, the form of the cross can in fact be found, for Justin, in the very structure of the universe, a teaching that he claims Plato derived from Moses, when Plato in the *Timaeus* said of God and his Son, that God ‘arranged’ the Son ‘as an X in the whole’ (1 *apol.* 60; trans. Minns and Parvis 2009:235). And not only is the cross—its height and depths, length and breadth—that by which the whole universe is structured, but the natural functioning of life within the world comes under the power of the cross. As Ephrem noted:

But if the bird gathers in its wings,  
thus denying the extended symbol of the cross,  
then the air too will deny the bird;  
the air will not carry the bird  
unless its wings confess the cross.

(*fid.* 18.6; trans. Brock 1985:43)

Unless we abide in the form of the cross structuring the universe and life within it, we will find ourselves out of joint and so will lose our life: ‘Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it’ (Matt 16.25), for life comes through the cross.

Finally, as we saw earlier, it is not only the opening of the Scriptures in the light of the cross, but this combined with the breaking of the bread, that enabled the disciples to know Christ. So also, it is in the celebration of the mystery of the cross, that we have some of the most beautiful poetry, abounding with scriptural imagery. The earliest expression of this that we have is the work by Melito of Sardis, written in the 170s, which is a kind of Christian haggadah for the Quartodeciman celebration of Pascha, that is, the celebration of Pascha on the fourteenth of Nisan, whatever day of the week it might fall, most likely before others even began to have an annual Sunday commemoration of Pascha (cf. Hainsworth 2002; Bradshaw and Johnson 2011:39–60). Towards the end of the work, Melito says:

He who hung the earth is hanging.  
He who fixed the heavens in place has been fixed in place.

He who laid the foundations of the universe has been laid on a tree.  
 The master has been profaned.  
 God has been murdered.  
 The King of Israel has been destroyed by an Israelite right hand.

(*pass.* 96; trans. Stewart-Sykes 2001:64)

Although this text of Melito was only rediscovered in the mid-twentieth century, its rhythm, movement, and imagery seem to be behind, indirectly if not directly, a hymn from the Byzantine celebration of Holy Friday:

Today he who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the cross.  
 He who is the King of the angels is arrayed in a crown of thorns.  
 He who wraps the heavens in clouds is wrapped in the purple of mockery.  
 He who in the Jordan set Adam free receives blows upon his face.  
 The Bridegroom of the Church is transfixed with nails.  
 The Son of the Virgin is pierced with a spear.  
 We venerate your passion, O Christ.  
 Show us also your glorious resurrection.

(trans. Mary and Ware 1978:587)

The Quartodecimans traced their paschal celebrations back to the evangelist John, whom they claimed wore the ‘petalon’ in Jerusalem, that is, whom they identified as the High Priest of the Temple (Eusebius, *h.e.* 5.24.2–7). Although, as a historical claim, this is not plausible, the idea behind it perhaps goes back to the fact that in the Gospel of John Christ’s body is identified as the Temple (cf. John 2.21) and only in the Gospel of John is Christ not abandoned at the cross, but rather has the beloved disciple standing at its foot, hearing from Christ words again found only in this Gospel. For the interpretation of this passage, we should turn, finally, to the scriptural exegete par excellence of the ancient world, Origen:

We might dare say, then, that the Gospels are the first-fruits of all Scriptures, but that the first-fruits of the Gospels is that according to John, whose meaning no one can understand who has not leaned on Jesus’ breast nor received Mary from Jesus to be his mother also. But he who would be another John must also become such as John, to be shown to be Jesus, so to speak. For if Mary had no son except Jesus, in accordance with those who hold a sound opinion of her, and Jesus says to his mother, ‘Behold your son’ [John 19.26], and not, ‘Behold, this man also is your son’, he has said equally, ‘Behold, this is Jesus whom you bore’. For indeed everyone who has been perfected ‘no longer lives, but Christ lives in him’ [Gal 2.20], and since ‘Christ lives in him’, it is said of him to Mary, ‘Behold your son’, the Christ.

(*Jo.* 1.23; trans. Heine 1989:38)

Not only does the one reading the Scripture apocalyptically, on the basis of the unveiling effected by the cross, come to shine with the glory of God that Moses had to veil, but one who stands by the cross becomes identified with Christ himself.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- [Anonymous], *The Lenten Triodion*. Eng. trans.: Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1978).
- Ephrem of Syria, *Hymni de Fide*. Eng. trans.: S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem* (Rome: Center for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies, 1985).
- Ephrem of Syria, *Hymni de Virginitate*. Syriac text: E. Beck (ed.), *Hymnen de Virginitate*, CSCO 223 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1962). Eng. trans.: Kathleen McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, CWS (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1989).
- Ephrem of Syria, *Hymni de Paradiso*. Syriac text: E. Beck (ed.), *Hymnen de Paradiso*, CSCO 174 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1957). Eng. trans.: Sebastian Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, Popular Patristics Series 10 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990).
- Irenaeus of Lyons, *Demonstratio*. Armenian text: K. Ter-Mekerttschian and S. G. Wilson, with Prince Maxe of Saxony (eds), and French and Eng. trans. J. Barthoulot, *Εἰς ἐπίδειξιν τοῦ ἀποστολικοῦ κηρύγματος; The Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, with Seven Fragments*, PO 12.5 (Paris, 1917; repr. Turnhout: Brepols, 1989). Eng. trans.: J. Behr, *On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).
- Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus haereses*. Latin text and French trans.: A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau (eds), *Contre les hérésies, Livre I*, SC 263–4 (Paris: Cerf, 1979); *Contre les hérésies, Livre II*, SC 293–4 (Paris: Cerf, 1982); *Contre les hérésies, Livre III*, SC 210–11 (Paris: Cerf, 1974); A. Rousseau, B. Hemmerdinger, L. Doutreleau, and C. Mercier (eds), *Contre les hérésies, Livre IV*, SC 100 (Paris: Cerf, 1965); A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau, and C. Mercier (eds), *Contre les hérésies, Livre V*, SC 152 (Paris: Cerf, 1969).
- Justin Martyr, *Apologiae*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*, OECT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- Melito of Sardis, *Homilia in passionem Christi*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha and Fragments*, OECT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). Eng. trans.: Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha*, Popular Patristics Series 20 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001).
- Origen, *Commentarii in Johannem*. Greek text and French trans.: C. Blanc, *Commentaire sur saint Jean*, SC 120, 157, 222, 290, 385 (Paris: Cerf, 1966, 1970, 1975, 1982, 1992). Eng. trans.: R. E. Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, FC 80, 89 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1989, 1993).

### Scholarship

- Bradshaw, P., and Johnson, M. (2011). *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press).
- Hainsworth, J. (2002). 'The Force of the Mystery: Anamnesis and Exegesis in Melito's *Peri Pascha*', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 46(2): 107–46.
- Hays, R. (1989). *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Marcus, J. (1992). *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (London: T & T Clark).
- Martyn, J. Louis (1997a). *Galatians*, Anchor Bible 33A (New York: Doubleday).
- Martyn, J. Louis (1997b). *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark).

**Suggested Reading**

- Buchinger, H. (2005). *Pascha bei Origenes*, Innsbrucker theologische Studien 64 (Innsbruck–Vienna: Tyrolia).
- Hengel, M. (2012). *The Cross of the Son of God, Hymns Ancient and Modern* (London: SCM Press).
- Karim, C. A. (2004). *Symbols of the Cross in the Writings of the Early Syriac Fathers* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press).
- Longenecker, B. W. (2015). *The Cross before Constantine: The Early Life of a Christian Symbol* (Minneapolis: Fortress).

## CHAPTER 42

---

# HEAVEN AND HELL

---

JEFFREY A. TRUMBOWER

THE relationship between scriptural interpretation and early Christian imaginings of heaven and hell is complex. Afterlife traditions found within those texts that became canonical vary widely, texts that ultimately were not canonized sometimes had a profound influence on the Christian imagination, and envisioning heaven or hell was rarely simply a matter of biblical exegesis. All three of these points may be seen in the visions of the early third-century martyrs Perpetua and Saturus, the account of which provides glimpses of heaven that have been influenced by Scriptures (probably the book of Revelation, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*), but not simply determined by them (Salisbury 1997:101–2; Musurillo 1972:xxv). Sacred Scriptures, variously defined, provided Christians with images, metaphors, and a vocabulary for heaven and hell, but no consistent templates. Underlying all early Christian assertions was the conviction that there would be justice in the afterlife, along with eternal bliss for the faithful.

## RESOURCES IN SCRIPTURE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEAVEN AND HELL

---

The ‘Bible’ for the earliest Christians consisted of writings long considered sacred among Jews (particularly the Torah, Prophets, and Psalms), in their Septuagint translations for Greek-speaking Christians. The Jewish Scriptures do not provide robust depictions of the afterlife, and the concepts of reward and/or punishment after death are sometimes negated (1 Sam 28.15; Job 3.17–19; Ps 6.5, 115.17; Isa 38.18). The neutral Hebrew realm of the dead, ‘Sheol’, is translated ‘Hades’ in the Septuagint, carrying with it numerous cultural associations in Greek. In Psalm 49.15 (48.16 LXX), a righteous man expresses confidence that ‘God will deliver my soul from the hand of Sheol/Hades, when he shall receive me’, and this along with some passages in Job (14.13, 17.13, 19.25) may be seen as expressing a nascent hope for a better fate for the righteous after death. In addition,

some prophetic texts employ a metaphor of bodily resurrection for the reconstitution of Israel (Isa 26.19; Ezek 37.1–14). These traditions crystallize in the very late passage Daniel 12.2–3 (165 BCE), where a differentiation of post-mortem fates for individuals is made explicit in the form of resurrection to ‘shame and everlasting contempt’ for the wicked and ‘everlasting life’ in a star-like existence for the righteous. This is hardly a depiction of heaven and hell, though the essential function of those entities (post-mortem reward and punishment) is encapsulated in the author’s conviction. Some time after Daniel, and based on the same events of persecution in the 160s BCE, 2 Maccabees made explicit the hope for a reconstituted body for martyrs (2 Macc 7.11, 14, 23, 29). It also contains a notion of the efficacy of prayer and sacrifice by the living to help certain sinful dead soldiers to participate in ‘the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness’ (2 Macc 12.39–45). Future generations of Jews, Christians, and eventually Muslims would have the task of elaborating on precisely what that splendid reward would be.

According to Josephus, the NT, and Rabbinic sources, Jews of the post-biblical era debated afterlife issues, and we can locate the Jews who became followers of Jesus within the parameters of those debates. All sides appealed to Scripture and interpreted the texts in accord with their own views. Josephus says the Sadducees believed that ‘the souls perish along with the bodies’, and in the next clause he states that Sadducees hold nothing at all ‘apart from the Laws’ (*AJ* 18.16). This is probably an allusion to their rejection of the Pharisees’ Oral Torah, but it could also indicate that Sadducean rejection of an afterlife was based at least in part on their reading of the written Torah and their acceptance of only certain Scriptures and not others. Mark 12.18–27 recounts an episode of scriptural debate between Jesus and Sadducees over the question of resurrection. To make his argument, Mark’s Jesus chooses a passage from the Torah (Exod 3.6), unquestionably accepted by Sadducees, though interpreted differently by them. The Exodus passage is by no means explicit with respect to resurrection, but this sort of reading places Mark’s Jesus close to the Pharisees according to Josephus (*AJ* 18.14), and in continuity with the later Rabbinic tradition, in which the failure to find resurrection in the Torah disqualifies an Israelite from participating in that resurrection (*m. Sanh.* 10.3).

Paul, a Pharisee who became a follower of the risen Jesus, described a resurrection that will be bodily, but the new body will not be identical with our current body, though there will be some relation to it on the analogy of a seed that brings forth a plant (1 Cor 15.37; Bynum 1995:3–7). It will be made of ‘pneuma’ and be incorruptible (1 Cor 15.44–54). He found a loose scriptural connection to his views not in the Torah, but in the prophetic corpus (Isa 25.8 and Hos 13.14, quoted in 1 Cor 15.54–5). Paul was not clear on his view of the status of the dead during the time between their deaths and the resurrection: in 1 Thessalonians 4.16 and 1 Corinthians 15.52 they are awaiting the final trumpet and resurrection, though in Philippians 1.23 he seemed to think that he would immediately be ‘with Christ’ upon his own death. He also believed that it was possible to visit the ‘third heaven’ and ‘Paradise’ now and return to tell the tale, not sure of whether such a journey was ‘in the body or out of the body’ (2 Cor 12.2–4). He did not elaborate on the content of what could be seen or heard, but this was provided in the *Apocalypse of*

*Paul* (early third or late fourth century, Himmelfarb 1983:16–19) which became influential in the medieval world. Similar to Philippians 1.23, two passages of Luke indicate a reward or punishment immediately upon death: the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16.19–31, and Jesus' assurance to the repentant man crucified with him that 'Today you will be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23.43).

In the Pauline corpus, annihilation is the preferred image for the fate of the non-saved (1 Thess 5.3; 1 Cor 15.25–6; 2 Thess 1.9; Bernstein 1993:207–27). By contrast, Matthew 25.41 gives a clear indication of an eternal fire prepared for the wicked after the final judgement; Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* 4.28 is an early citation of this passage to demonstrate that the punishment is permanent and eternal, and the reward is as well (cf. Mark 9.48). The book of Revelation's author envisioned the souls of martyrs already under the altar in heaven, frustrated by how long it is taking to enact the final culmination (Rev 6.9). This book also describes the 'millennium', or 1,000-year reign of Christ with the saints on a transformed earth before the final filling up of the 'lake of fire and sulphur' with the wicked (Rev 20.4–10; see also 19.20) and the new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem with the righteous (Rev 21.1–2). Because the Scriptures of Israel gave no explicit descriptions of the afterlife, and because the nascent Christian tradition as reflected in the NT was inchoate on these topics, later Christian authors had their interpretative work cut out for them if they wished to ground their views in arguments from Scripture. The variety in scriptural sources is one reason why later Christian speculations about heaven and hell could range over such wide territory. Different exegetes also brought to the table different philosophical presuppositions, and the Scriptures were malleable enough, within certain parameters, to be conformed to those philosophical paradigms.

While the Scriptures lacked consistent depictions of heaven and hell, they did contain powerful imagery that shaped subsequent visions, speculations, and dogmatic assertions. For heaven, the metaphors of garden paradise and holy city were central. The earthly Eden of Genesis 2–3 provided motifs for understanding the heavenly Paradise among many Christian authors, and John's 'heavenly Jerusalem' (Rev 21.9–27) became a standard trope among those who accepted this book as authoritative, echoing prophetic imagery of God's glorious reconstituted city (Isa 51.3, 54.11–12, 60.1–2, 61.10, 65.17–19; Ezek 43.1–5, 47.1, 48.30–5; see McGrath 2003:1–33 and Koester 2014:812). For hell, the prophetic corpus already contained imagery of burning associated with judgement (Isa 5.24, 26.11, 33.10–12, 66.15–16; Zeph 1.18; Mal 3.19; continued in John the Baptist's Q Sermon, Matt 3.7–12 and Luke 3.7–9, 16–17). In addition, the physical Valley of Hinnom (Ge-Hinnom) adjacent to Jerusalem was identified as a place of judgement, probably due to its association with fiery child sacrifice (2 Kgs 23.10; 2 Chr 28.3; Jer 7.31; 19.2–6). These images were extended by the synoptic Gospel authors when they described Gehenna as a place of fire (Mark 9.48; Matt 5.22, 18.9), a place where both body and soul can be destroyed (Matt 10.28), a place where 'the worm never dies' (Mark 9.48), and in general as a place of punishment (Matt 5.29–30; 23.33; Luke 12.5).

Because the extent of the Christian canon was not fixed until late in the fourth century, it is important to acknowledge that texts considered canonical by only some groups had an influence on the wider Christian imagination respecting heaven and hell.

The book of Revelation falls into this category, becoming highly influential and ultimately canonical even though many Christians argued against its inclusion in the canon (Eusebius, *h.e.* 7.24.1–25.27; Koester 2014:29–35). The book of Enoch was cited as authoritative by the NT author of Jude, and its depiction of an ‘accursed valley’ as a place of post-mortem punishment may have influenced the synoptic Gospels in their understandings of Gehenna (1 Enoch 27.1–5; 54.1; 90.26–7; see Bernstein 1993:187). The second-century *Apocalypse of Peter* was considered Scripture by numerous authors, including Clement of Alexandria, Methodius of Olympus, and even Porphyry in his criticism of Christianity (Buchholz 1988:20–42). It provides an elaborate depiction of the torments of hell keyed to the crimes committed by the wicked, along with some attention to rewards for the righteous. Many of its themes were picked up by the *Apocalypse of Paul*, probably known to Dante (Buchholz 1988:66). Therefore, when enquiring into the ‘scriptural’ resources for any particular author, it is important to investigate which books constituted Scripture for the author in question.

## SCRIPTURE INVOKED IN CONTEXTS RELATED TO HEAVEN AND HELL IN PATRISTIC LITERATURE

---

All early Christian authors, including those eventually deemed heretical, accepted a notion of post-mortem existence with some sort of reward for having been a faithful, right-acting member of the privileged group in this life. All of them, even those theologians with universalist leanings, also had a concept of non-reward for others, variously understood as temporary or eternal punishment, alienation from God, or annihilation at some point after death. The main points of discussion with respect to the Scriptures and heaven and hell centred around the following: (a) corporeality in the afterlife and the status of the dead now, treated together here because the issues are intertwined; (b) the millennial reign of Christ; (c) the permanent or temporary nature of hell; (d) the development of purgatory and prayer for the dead; (e) Christ’s sojourn in the underworld; (f) differentiated rewards in heaven; and (g) the nature of punishments and rewards. Scripture was invoked in connection with all of these issues. What follows can only skim the surface with representative examples; for an excellent compendium of patristic thought on all eschatological subjects, including heaven and hell, see Brian Daley 1991.

### Corporeality in the Afterlife and the Status of the Dead Now

Two foundational Christian thinkers with respect to the afterlife and corporeality of the soul were Tertullian and Origen. Despite their differences, they independently came to similar conclusions about the nature of post-mortem existence, largely under the influence

of a similar reading of a few scriptural texts. Tertullian states that he is convinced by Stoic arguments concerning the corporeality of the soul (*an.* 5), and he also believes that the Scriptures inevitably lead to the same conclusion. One key passage is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16.19–31). ‘For whatever is incorporeal is incapable of being kept and guarded in any way; it is also exempt from either punishment or refreshment’ (*an.* 7.3); since the Scripture clearly shows the soul of the rich man guarded and longing for refreshment, and the soul of Lazarus enjoying his reward, these souls must have some sort of corporeal nature. Tertullian combines the parable’s vision of an immediate reward or punishment upon death with the other biblical scenarios of waiting for the general resurrection. What the rich man and Lazarus are experiencing is only anticipatory; they are in a differentiated Hades until the final judgement (*an.* 7.3; 55; 58; *Marc.* 4.34). In the meantime, only Christian martyrs are able to be in ‘paradise’ immediately upon death, a view that Tertullian shares with many other Christian authors, which he derives from Revelation 6.9, but also bolsters by appeal to the visionary testimony of his fellow North African Christian Perpetua (*an.* 55.4).

Origen begins from a different premise, namely, that the soul is *not* corporeal. His focus as a Christian Platonist exegete of Scripture lies in connecting the soul to the vast, eternal, unseen, immaterial universe, both before and after its brief sojourn in its current body. Most of the time Origen seems to present the soul between death and resurrection as without a body, in spite of his frequent statements that only God is without a body (*princ.* 1.6, 2.2, 4.3). But, given the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, as well as the story about the medium of Endor in 1 Samuel 28, Methodius of Olympus reports that Origen acknowledged that in the period between death and the resurrection the soul must be clothed with some sort of envelope made of corporeal *pneuma* in order to be seen and to experience the pains and pleasures described in the texts (Methodius, *res.* 3.19; Crouzel 1989:241). Embodied or not, for Origen, the current time before the resurrection is a boon for the righteous dead, because they are learning about all sorts of past and future mysteries in their ‘school for souls’ (*princ.* 2.11.6). For Origen the scholar, such an existence is tantamount to heaven! But there is more to come: at the resurrection the soul will be clothed with a transformed, angelic body that is related to the body we have now, but far superior to it (Origen, *comm. in Mt.* 17.30; Crouzel 1989:251). For Origen 2 Corinthians 5.4 is a key text in this regard, where Paul speaks of the earthly mortal tent that will be ‘swallowed up by life’ (Crouzel 1989:252).

Thus, even though they wrote in different languages, started from different philosophical presuppositions, and differed on many other issues related to the soul and resurrection, Tertullian and Origen came to similar understandings of the necessity for sensory and corporeal realities in post-mortem life, both now and after the resurrection, largely due to images contained in Scripture. Both warned against applying this bodily conception too crudely: Origen decried those Christians who quoted Scripture to prove that heaven will consist of physical luxuries in a bejewelled Jerusalem with lavish food and drink (*princ.* 2.11.2), and in his view, the future heavenly body will undergo such a great transformation that it will no longer hinder or weigh down the soul (*hom. in Num.* 9.6–7; see Brown 1988:167–8). Tertullian’s vision of the resurrected body included the sex organs,

mouth, and stomach, but without sex, drinking, and eating (*res.* 50–2); Mark 12.25 and 1 Corinthians 15.5–35 were important texts in this regard. Future generations of ascetic Christians would affirm this sort of thinking as they sought to begin the process of transformation already in this life by conforming the current earthly body as much as possible to the future heavenly one (Brown 1988:175–7). Throughout the patristic period, the nature of the resurrected body was a matter of intense debate, particularly during the Origenist controversies of the late fourth century (Bynum 1995:21–114). The debate was clearly shaped, though not determined, by scriptural texts: witness Jerome and Augustine’s discomfort with and reinterpretation of Paul’s seed/plant analogy (Bynum 1995:72, 86–104).

## The Millennial Reign of Christ

One aspect of the biblical scenario associated with afterlife reward was particularly sensual and this-worldly: the ‘millennium’ as described in chapter 20 of the book of Revelation. Most early theologians, accepting the book of Revelation as Scripture, assumed the reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years was a literal prediction, this period preceding the final culmination. Papias (according to Eusebius *h.e.* 3.39), Justin (*dial.* 80–1; 110), Irenaeus (*haer.* 5.28), and Tertullian (*Marc.* 3.25) all propounded a version of the literal reign of Christ with the saints on earth. Origen, however, believed any expectation of worldly power detracted from the deeper meaning of post-mortem reward (*princ.* 2.11.3; Weber 2008:369–71). Anti-millenarian sentiment, among other things, caused many later writers to argue that the book of Revelation should be excluded from the canon (Koester 2014:30–5), but eventually an interpretation emerged that allowed for acceptance of the book while understanding the millennium in a non-literal way. Augustine, following the Donatist author Tyconius, is the great expositor of this interpretation in book 20 of *The City of God* (Fredriksen 1999:52–3). For Augustine, the ‘thousand years’ began with Christ’s first advent, and the rule of the saints with Christ is effective now, albeit imperfect because the Church has not yet been purified and the worldly city still thrives. This interpretation includes the idea of righteous Christian souls (not just martyrs) now already enjoying a heavenly reward in the time period before the resurrection (*ciu.* 20.9). The future resurrection will occur not on a transformed earth, but in heaven, involving a transformed flesh (*ciu.* 22.4–5 and 15). Books 20, 21, and 22 of *The City of God* constitute a masterpiece of biblical interpretation addressing every conceivable question about afterlife. Augustine’s syntheses on these matters had tremendous influence in the Latin-speaking world, such that earlier interpretations came to seem, in Fredriksen’s words, ‘exotic and unfamiliar’ (Fredriksen 1999:52).

## The Permanent or Temporary Nature of Hell

For most early Christian authors, this life is the realm in which a person secures a permanent fate in the afterlife; scenarios of a post-mortem shift in a person’s status are rare.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus was important in drawing a line at death, when Abraham says to the rich man, 'No one can cross from there to us' (Luke 16.26). Matthew 25.46 also implies permanence with respect to both the heavenly reward and the punishment. Another NT tradition, however, was sometimes understood to conflict with eternal punishment: the 'apocatastasis', or 'culmination' of all things. The Greek word appears in Peter's speech in Acts 3.21, but Acts 3.23 makes clear that the concept there includes rejection of some by God. In patristic literature the apocatastasis was often read in conjunction with Paul's depiction of the final act in the drama of salvation, 1 Corinthians 15.24–8. All enemies including death are defeated so that 'God may be all in all' (1 Cor 15.28). Coupled with Paul's suggestion that 'God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all' (Rom 11.32), and combined with philosophical understandings of God's mercy, some Christian thinkers began to postulate that perhaps hell was not eternal (Daley 1991:58). Perhaps for God to be 'all in all', all his rational creatures needed ultimately to be saved. Thanks to the influence of Origen, the idea of an ultimate universal salvation gained a fairly wide acceptance among many Christian intellectuals, up until the Origenist controversies (Clark 1992:99–100 and 125). Origen himself was tentative about his universalist leanings, at times denying them (*hom. in Jer.* 12.5; *hom. in Jos.* 9.7), at other times confessing ignorance on the subject (*Jo.* 28.8). But he also allowed that the biblical word 'eternal' could have a variety of meanings, not always entailing permanence (*comm. in Rom.* 6.5). He opined that a temporary, remedial punishment would be more in line with God's mercy (*comm. in Mt.* 18.24). When refuting his pagan opponent Celsus, he invoked Zephaniah 3.9 ('that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord') when stating that 'the prophecies say much in obscure terms about the total abolition of evils and the correction of every soul' (*Cels.* 8.72). Gregory of Nyssa expanded upon Origen's universalism and was much more confident about it, justifying his views via numerous Scripture passages including Philippians 2.10, Acts 2.21, and 1 Corinthians 15.28 (Tsirpanlis 1982; Ludlow 2000; Trumbower 2001:119–22; Ramelli 2013:372–440). Gregory and his sister Macrina even put forward an ingenious allegorization of the rich man and Lazarus parable that erased the notion of death as a boundary of salvation (*anim. et res.* 46.84; Alexandre 1972). Origen and Gregory both stressed that it is important to put things right in this life; they definitely thought hell would be painful and was better avoided (Trumbower 2001:119–22), but in much of their writing they thought it would not last forever.

## The Development of Purgatory and Prayer for the Dead

Epiphanius, John Chrysostom, Augustine, and many others had a hand in quashing universal salvation in both East and West (Trumbower 2001:123–5 and 130). As the notion of a permanent hell took firm hold, and as the wider society became increasingly Christianized, two related ideas and practices came to the fore: prayer for the Christian dead now, before the final judgement, and tentative notions of an intermediate state, neither heaven nor hell, where Christians with relatively light sins might be purged by fire while waiting for the resurrection or for an expedited entry into heaven. Prayer for the

Christian dead was popular in both East and West, and in the East, in the absence of a development of purgatory, prayer for dead Christians was and is undertaken to help sway God's verdict at the final judgement (see 2 Tim 1.18). Only then will the gates of hell close and consignment to hell become permanent (Ware 1981:190). In the West, consignment to hell at the time of death became clearly permanent, but purgatory developed as an outlet for the Christian impulse to affect God's judgements with prayer, and as a place, unlike hell, where God's mercy could be made manifest for Christian sinners. 1 Corinthians 3.10–15 became a key text, where Paul's analogy of the builder seems to indicate that all Christians will have their works tested by fire, and may be saved through fire (see Augustine's tentative remarks in *enchir.* 18; Daley 1991:141; LeGoff 1984:57–78). Another important text was the flaming sword of Genesis 3.24 that guards the tree of life: both Origen and Ambrose took this to indicate that every Christian would have to pass through a fire of personal judgement before gaining paradise (Origen, *hom. in Lc.* 24.2; *comm. in Mt.* 15.23; Ambrose, *Psal. 118* 3.16; Daley 1991:98). These traditions helped shape what would become purgatory in later generations in the West.

## Christ's Sojourn in the Underworld

Another locus of interface between the Scriptures and heaven/hell traditions lies in Jesus' descent to the underworld during the weekend that he was dead. Later tradition would refer to Christ's activity as the 'harrowing of hell'. Matthew 12.40, Acts 2.24–31, Romans 10.7, and Ephesians 4.9 all presuppose that Christ was in the realm of the dead, but later interpreters would have to go well beyond these bare references to elaborate on precisely what happened there. 1 Peter 3.18–4.6 also came into play for early Christian authors who debated whether Christ preached to the dead, which of the dead responded positively to the message, and whether any memory of Christ's preaching lingered after his departure (see Dalton 1989 for a comprehensive overview of all the issues related to this passage). Had the *Shepherd of Hermas* been ultimately canonized, the NT would have contained the idea that the Apostles, after their own deaths, preached among the dead (*Hermas, sim.* 9.16). Clement of Alexandria cited both 1 Peter and *Hermas* in connection with his musings on Christ's descent (*str.* 2.9 and 6.6). Most interpreters posited that only the ancient worthies of the OT were released from the underworld at Christ's descent (some authors making a distinction between impermanent Hades and permanent Gehenna), but a few authors expanded the concept to include a general offer of salvation to all the dead at that time (Trumbower 2001:91–108).

Augustine wrangles with Christ's descent in *Letter* 164 to Evodius: he wants to be careful to preclude any notion that the memory of Christ's preaching lingers in hell, lest someone think he or she can secure salvation posthumously now by converting there. Evodius had read 1 Peter 4.6 to indicate that such conversion was possible (*ep.* 164.4). Augustine remains vague on precisely who was rescued at Jesus' descent, but he is clear that this was a one-time episode, not repeatable and not available to those who are consigned to hell now. Augustine says that his chief weapon for combating all the

'merciful' who might wish to allow for salvation after death is 'the scriptures, which never deceive' (*ciu.* 21.23). Romans 11.26–32 proved to be particularly difficult for Augustine to interpret within this paradigm; he had to define Paul's 'all' as 'all those from among the Gentiles as well as all those of the Jews whom he predestined, called, justified and glorified' (*ciu.* 21.24).

## Differentiated Rewards in Heaven

Some early Christian authors envisioned a differentiation of heavenly reward based on spiritual achievement, and this differentiation was grounded in Scripture. According to Irenaeus, 'the presbyters' held this view, and Irenaeus concurred (*haer.* 5.36). They based it on a particular interpretation of the phrase 'thirty-, sixty- and one hundred-fold' from the parable of the Sower found in Mark 4.8 and 20 (par. Matt 13.8 and 23). As Jesus explains the parable to his disciples, the seed sown on good soil, representing those who accept Jesus' word and bear fruit, is differentiated by size of yield. The 'presbyters' and Irenaeus take this to mean that there is a differentiated reward in heaven after the judgement, but that progress from one level to the next will still be possible in the afterlife. This also provides an opportunity to harmonize three different scriptural metaphors for the place of the reward: celestial city for those who produce thirtyfold, paradise sixtyfold, and heavens one hundredfold. Further confirmation is adduced from John 14.2, where the 'many mansions' for Jesus' followers are taken to indicate a differentiation of reward. Clement of Alexandria also wrote of a differentiation of reward based on spiritual attainment, with the possibility of posthumous progress, but referring to different Scriptures, notably John 10.16 (*str.* 6.14). All of this speculation reflects an impulse to recognize that some Christians deserve a greater reward, similar to the impulse that led many to assert that only martyrs currently reside in heaven before the final judgement.

## The Nature of Punishments and Rewards

Ultimately, the Christian imagination wanted to know what sort of beatific afterlife awaited it. There was also interest in the precise sufferings to be endured by the wicked, particularly for homiletic purposes. Scripture offered little in the way of specifics for either realm; early Christian authors elaborated on both based upon other cultural inputs and their own most fervent desires. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is a martyr account where the pains of hell are invoked as an incentive for the martyr to remain steadfast (*m. Polyc.* 2.3). The *Acts of Thomas* contains a scene in which a recently murdered woman, brought back to life by Thomas, recounts the horrors of hell she has seen, resulting in her own conversion along with many others (*a. Thom.* 6; Himmelfarb 1983:11–13). John Chrysostom is well known for his vivid sermonic depictions of the torments of hell that await the wicked (Daley 1991:107).

On the flip side, the ‘family reunion’ motif, so important in Graeco-Roman scenarios of the afterlife, began to appear in Christian writings in the third century (McGrath 2003:139–41). Between persecutions, but in the midst of a plague decimating his community, Cyprian wrote about the joys of heaven awaiting the faithful, which included meeting patriarchs and Apostles, but also reunion with parents, siblings, children, and Christian heroes like martyrs and virgins (*ad Demetr.* 26). Cyprian was also an early proponent of the idea that righteous Christian non-martyrs might also go to heaven immediately upon death (*ad Fort.* 12–13; Daley 1991:41). At times Christians sought to overturn popular ideas about the afterlife: Lactantius held that, unlike pagan scenarios in which the dead forget their former lives, Christianity teaches that the resurrected person remembers everything, and this will be a benefit for those who reside in heaven (Lactantius, *inst.* 7.22–3). A post-Augustinian compendium, probably by Quodvultdeus, provides a scriptural basis for all sorts of details about heaven, such as the ideal age for the resurrected body (about 30), how the just will shine like the sun, how the new Jerusalem will be free of pain, etc. (Daley 1991:153). The primary heavenly boon for many authors had to do with the faithful dead person’s relationship with God. Heaven will be a place or a state of enjoyment of God, communion with God, knowing God, basking in the presence of God, even divinization of the believer. In their attempts to contemplate the future heavenly life, Christian writers had the poetic language of the Psalms, the visionary language of the prophets, 1 Corinthians 13.12 (‘then we will see face to face... then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known’), and Revelation 22.4 (‘they will see God’s face’). As Augustine puts it in *The City of God*, ‘The reward of virtue will be God himself, who gave the virtue, together with the promise of himself, the best and greatest of all possible promises’ (*ciu.* 22.30).

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Augustine, *Epistulae*. Latin text: A. Goldbacher, *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi Epistulae*, CSEL 44 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1904).
- Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei*. Latin text: B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCL 47–8 (Brepols: Turnhout, 1955). Eng. trans.: Henry Bettenson, *St. Augustine Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans* (London: Penguin, 1984).
- Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione*. Greek text: PG 46.11–160.
- Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*. Greek, Latin, and Armenian texts and French trans.: A. Rousseau, L. Doutreleau, and C. Mercier, *Contre les hérésies, Livre V*, SC 153 (Paris: Cerf, 1969).
- Josephus Flavius, *Antiquitates Judaicae*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: L. H. Feldman, *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities: Books XVIII–XIX*, LCL 433 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).
- Methodius of Olympus, *De resurrectione mortuorum*. Greek and Slavonic texts: G. N. Bonwetsch, *Methodius Olympius Werke*, GCS 27 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1917).
- Origen, *Contra Celsum*. Greek text and French trans.: M. Borret, *Contre Celse*, SC 147 (Paris: Cerf, 1969). Eng. trans.: Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

- Origen, *De principiis*. Greek and Latin texts and French trans.: H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti, *Traité des principes*, SC 252–3, 268, 312 (Paris: Cerf, 1978).
- Tertullian, *De anima*. Latin text: J. H. Waszink, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani opera*, CCL 2 (Brepols: Turnhout, 1954).

## Scholarship

- Alexandre, M. (1972). 'L'Interprétation de Luc 16, 19–31, chez Grégoire de Nyssé', in J. Fontaine and C. Kannengiesser (eds), *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris: Beauchesne), 425–41.
- Bernstein, A. E. (1993). *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press).
- Brown, P. (1988). *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Buchholz, D. D. (1988). *Your Eyes Will be Opened: A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press).
- Bynum, C. W. (1995). *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Clark, E. A. (1992). *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Crouzel, H. (1989). *Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian*, trans. A. S. Worrall (San Francisco: Harper & Row).
- Daley, B. (1991). *The Hope of the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Dalton, W. J. (1989). *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18–4:6*, 2nd rev. edn (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico).
- Fredriksen, P. (1999). 'Apocalypticism', in A. D. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 49–53.
- Himmelfarb, M. (1983). *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Koester, C. R. (2014). *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- LeGoff, J. (1984). *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Ludlow, M. (2000). *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- McGrath, A. E. (2003). *A Brief History of Heaven* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Musurillo, H. (1972). *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Ramelli, I. (2013). *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill).
- Salisbury, J. E. (1997). *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (London: Routledge).
- Trumbower, J. A. (2001). *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Tsirpanlis, C. N. (1982). 'The Concept of Universal Salvation in Gregory of Nyssa', *SP* 17(3): 1131–41.
- Ware, K. (1981). 'One Body in Christ: Death and the Communion of Saints', *Sobornost* NS 3(2): 179–91.

Weber, T. P. (2008). 'Millennialism', in J. L. Walls (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press), 365–83.

### Suggested Reading

- Bauckham, R. (1998). *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden: Brill).
- Bremmer, J. (2009). 'Christian Hell: From the Apocalypse of Peter to the Apocalypse of Paul', *Numen* 56: 298–325.
- Dewart, J. M. E. (1986). *Death and Resurrection*, Message of the Fathers of the Church 22 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier).
- Himmelfarb, M. (1993). *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Kyrtatas, D. J. (2009). 'The Origins of Christian Hell', *Numen* 56: 282–97.
- McDannel, C., and Lang, B. (1988). *Heaven: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Moreira, I., and Toscano, M. (2010). *Hell and its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Farnham: Ashgate).
- Papaioannou, K. (2013). *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus: Gehenna, Hades, the Abyss, the Outer Darkness where there is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications).
- Russell, J. B. (1997). *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Segal, A. F. (2004). *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday).
- Walls, J. L. (2008) (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press).

PART VII

---

RETRIEVALS  
AND CRITICISMS

---



## CHAPTER 43

---

# MEDIEVAL LATIN RECEPTION

---

FRANKLIN T. HARKINS

PRODUCING a brief chapter on the medieval Latin reception of early Christian biblical interpretation is a task fraught with difficulty. In fact, given that medieval Christian exegetes, theologians, philosophers, historians, clerics, monks, and mystics made such thoroughgoing and variegated use of the interpretative inheritance of their ancient forebears, it would perhaps be easier to identify and discuss what within medieval Latin exegesis and theology would *not* somehow fall under the rubric of ‘reception’. Indeed, the influence of early Christian biblical interpretation on the literature—leaving aside the music, art, and architecture—of the Latin Middle Ages is all but ubiquitous. This is not to say, of course, that medieval thinkers did not make their own learned and lasting contributions to the exegetical and theological enterprise; they most certainly did. Rather, ancient Christian interpretation generally served as what I will call an ‘omnipresent foundational force’, undergirding and guiding the creative work of medieval thinkers and writers who engaged Sacred Scripture.

In what follows I seek to gesture at how this omnipresent foundational force variously and compellingly manifested itself throughout the medieval West. The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, painting with broad brush strokes, I offer several characteristic examples drawn from the dawn of the Middle Ages to the twelfth century, namely the profound scriptural learning of the Venerable Bede during the Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria, the biblical culture at the heart of the Carolingian Renaissance of the eighth and ninth centuries, the twelfth-century production of the *Glossa ordinaria* at Laon and its scholarly use into the early modern period, and the teaching on Scripture set forth by Hugh of St Victor. In the second part, pointillistic in style, I provide a detailed consideration of how high-medieval university masters-in-training, particularly Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and John Duns Scotus, adopted and adapted patristic exegeses in the readings of 1 Timothy 2.4 that they propounded in their lectures on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*. The words of this verse, ‘[God] Who wills that all humans should be saved’, provided scholastic thinkers with indispensable scriptural fodder

for reflection on such central theological themes as divine predestination, the nature and scope of God's salvific will, the freedom of the human will, and the relationship between divine and human willing vis-à-vis salvation.

## FROM JEROME TO EARLY SCHOLASTICISM

---

The influence of early Christian scriptural engagement in the Middle Ages is perhaps most immediately and profoundly evident in the very text of Sacred Scripture that medieval Western Christians read, heard, and otherwise encountered. The authoritative Latin version of the sacred text used throughout the Christian West for more than a millennium, from the fifth century until the sixteenth (and well beyond for the Roman Catholic Church), was the Vulgate translation produced (largely) by Jerome, an accomplished exegete who was commissioned in 383 by Pope Damasus I to revise the *Vetus Latina*, the various Old Latin versions then in circulation (Brown 2003:356–62; Kelly 1998:86–9, 159–63; de Hamel 2001:12–32). There were probably thousands of copies of Latin books of the Bible, including those containing the *Vetus Latina*, available in the West before the turn of the ninth century, although fewer than 400 have survived and been identified by modern scholars (McGurk 1994:1). One of the most precious of these is Codex Amiatinus, the earliest surviving copy of a single-volume Bible or pandect in the Vulgate version, which was produced by the monks at the twin Northumbrian monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow during the lifetime of Bede (c.673–735) and, more precisely, sometime before 716 (McGurk 1994:2; Brown 2010:11–18; Love 2010:40–1).

Although the great library at Wearmouth-Jarrow—to the establishment of which its founder and first abbot, Benedict Biscop, and his successor, Ceolfrith, devoted great effort—is now nearly completely lost to us, the indirect evidence strongly suggests that it was the largest collection of books assembled in Anglo-Saxon England (Lapidge 2006:34–7). It is primarily from the quotations from and references and allusions to earlier writings, both Christian and pagan, in the works of Bede that we have some sense, however imperfect, of the nature of the library to which he had access. On this basis, Michael Lapidge has estimated that Bede's library held around 250 titles contained in 200 or more individual volumes (Lapidge 2006:34–7, 58–60). Of these volumes, the largest proportion—and therefore the majority of the learned literature that Bede himself read—consisted of the biblical commentaries of the Latin fathers—principally Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome, but also Cassiodorus, Isidore, and Gregory the Great—and, where they had been translated into Latin, those of the Greek fathers, such as Origen, Basil, and John Chrysostom (Love 2010:43–4; for a complete list of works cited by Bede, see Lapidge 2006:191–228). At the end of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede describes the essential pattern of his life at Wearmouth-Jarrow—from the age of 7, when his relatives gave him to be educated by Abbot Benedict and then Ceolfrith—in this way:

I have devoted [my] every effort to contemplating the Scriptures (*omnem meditandis scripturis operam dedi*), and, while observing the discipline of the rule and the daily office of singing in the church, I have always taken delight in learning or teaching or writing. . . . From the time I received priestly orders until the fifty-ninth year of my life, I have given my attention, for my own needs and those of my brothers, to briefly annotating Sacred Scripture based on the works of the venerable Fathers (*ex opusculis uenerabilium patrum breuiter adnotare*), and likewise to adding [more extensive commentary] according to the pattern of their meaning and interpretation.

(*hist.* V.24.2)<sup>1</sup>

Immediately hereafter Bede lists the scriptural books, and parts thereof, on which he has commented in light of patristic works, including Genesis, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Habakkuk, Tobit, Mark, Luke, Acts, and the Apocalypse. Among the patristic sources of which Bede makes use in his Genesis commentary, to cite but one example, are: the *De Abraham*, *De Cain et Abel*, *De paradiso*, and *Exameron* of Ambrose; Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*, *De Genesi ad litteram*, *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber*, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, among many others; Basil's *Homiliae in Hexaameron*; Benedict's *Regula*; John Cassian's *Conlationes*; the *Etymologiae* of Isidore; and Jerome's *Liber quaestionum hebraicarum in Genesim* in addition to his commentaries on Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets (Lapidge 2006:191–228). Bede by no means simply followed such 'venerable fathers' slavishly. Rather, having mastered Christian exegetical conventions as well as his patristic predecessors, he made his own genuine contributions, both in producing commentaries on previously neglected books (e.g. Ezra-Nehemiah, Proverbs, Tobit, Acts, the Catholic Epistles) and in creatively recognizing how Scripture spoke to the ecclesiastical and political circumstances of his own day (DeGregorio 2010:127–41).

In a letter to the monks of Wearmouth-Jarrow in 793, nearly sixty years after Bede's death, Alcuin of York wrote:

Boys should learn the Sacred Scriptures, so that when they come to the perfect age they might be able to teach others. He who does not learn in childhood cannot teach in old age. Consider the most celebrated teacher of our time (*nobilissimum nostri temporis magistrum*), the priest Bede: in his youth he had a zeal for learning as great as the praise he now enjoys among men; but much greater is the glory of his reward in the presence of God. By his example, therefore, rouse your sleeping minds.

(Alcuin, *ep.* 19)

Although intended specifically for the monks at Bede's monastery, Alcuin's words bore much intellectual fruit beyond Northumbria, in the Carolingian empire and lands. Indeed, the many partial and complete copies of patristic exegetical treatises that were produced and used throughout the Carolingian empire attest to the deep desire of the educated elite to understand the sacred text and its interpretative tradition as fully as possible. Such a yearning provided the chief catalyst to the intellectual rebirth of the

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Latin texts are my own.

period (Chazelle and Edwards 2003:5). Furthermore, modern scholars have uncovered—in approximately 1,850 extant manuscripts—130 exegetical treatises composed by thirty-four Carolingian authors of the eighth and ninth centuries, highlighting scriptural study as the most important area of scholarly endeavour in the realm of Charlemagne and his successors (Chazelle and Edwards 2003:1–2). In short, in the words of Beryl Smalley, ‘Bible study [for Carolingian scholars] meant the study of the sacred text together with the Fathers; the two kinds of authority were inseparable’ (Smalley 1964:37).

Carolingian biblical commentaries, which reworked and appropriated patristic sources in exegetically skilful and theologically original ways (see e.g. Fox 2003; Heil 2003), were, in turn, reused in the twelfth century by master Anselm of Laon, his brother Ralph, and other collaborators in the production of the *Glossa ordinaria* (Smith 2009:41–56; Lobrichon 1984:103–7). From the twelfth century onward, the *Ordinary Gloss* became the ‘standard tongue’ in which, or voice with which, Sacred Scripture spoke to generations of medieval masters and students in schools and universities across Western Europe (Smith 2009:1). The foundational force of early Christian scriptural engagement is not only evident in the concept and content of the Glossed Bible; it is also on conspicuous display in the format or layout of the manuscript pages containing its books. Whereas the *Glossa*’s *mise-en-page* varied to some degree, evolving with time, generally in the manuscripts Jerome’s Vulgate text predominates in the central column of each folio while excerpts drawn mostly from patristic commentaries fill the two outer columns and the spaces between the lines of the biblical text (Smith 2009:91–139; Smith 2001:41–4). The ancient and early medieval interpreters on whom the *Glossa* variously draws include Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose (or Ambrosiaster), Gregory, Fulgentius of Ruspe, Prosper of Aquitaine, Vincent of Lérins, Cassiodorus, Isidore, Bede, Rabanus Maurus, Paschasius Radbertus, Haimo and Remigius of Auxerre, Alcuin, and Walafrid Strabo, together with Origen and Hesychius of Alexandria in Latin translation (Smith 2009:41; Woodward 2011:xi). As indicated, the Carolingian authors and their compilations often constituted a secondary stratum that served as a vehicle for the transmission of patristic readings. And Lesley Smith has suggested that the scholars of twelfth-century Laon seem to have preferred using Carolingian reworkings of the ancient sources (where such reworkings were available) rather than excerpting from the originals not only because the former may have been more readily available than the latter, but also (even principally) because the producers of the *Glossa* probably regarded the Carolingian commentaries as ‘a kind of new critical edition of patristic material’ (Smith 2009:43).

At the same time that Anselm and his team were producing the *Glossa* at Laon, the omnipresent foundational force of early Christian biblical interpretation was also readily apparent approximately 85 miles to the south-west, at the Parisian abbey and school of St Victor. Sometime in the 1120s, the school’s most renowned master, Hugh, penned his most extensive and influential treatment of the nature and interpretation of Sacred Scripture, *Didascalicon de studio legendi* (Harkins and Van Liere 2012:32–4; Harkins 2012:63–75). In *Didascalicon* IV.2, and elsewhere in his corpus, Hugh offers a more expansive understanding of Scripture—*sacra scriptura*, sacred writings—than we

moderns have inherited. Here Hugh divides each scriptural Testament into three corresponding ‘orders’ or collections (*ordines*) of books: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings/Hagiographers in the OT; and the Gospels, the Apostles, and the fathers in the NT (trans. Harkins 2012:134–6). Concluding with a pointed injunction to diligence in the study of patristic sources, Hugh describes this third NT collection thus:

Then come the writings of the holy Fathers and the Doctors of the Church: Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, Ambrose, Isidore, Origen, Bede, and many other orthodox writers whose works are so vast that they cannot be counted. From these writings it is certainly clear that they possessed great passion for the Christian faith, for the proclamation of which they left to future generations so many and such great works by which they are remembered. But we are convicted of laziness because we are unable to read everything that they were able to write! (*Did.* IV.2; trans. Harkins 2012:135)

Although some modern scholars have read these words as suggesting Hugh’s daring advocacy of an open NT canon that included the fathers (Ott 1949; Berndt 1988), it appears more likely that the Victorine master was simply reiterating a traditional list of sacred texts without strictly distinguishing between canonical and extra-canonical (see Harkins and Van Liere 2012:39–40). Frans van Liere dates Hugh’s *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris* later than *Didascalicon* in part because the Victorine here clarifies his statement in the *Didascalicon* concerning the inclusion of the fathers among the Scriptures (Van Liere 2012:208 n. 13). Indeed, in *De scripturis* Hugh teaches that the ‘writings of the Fathers are not included in the text of the Sacred Scriptures . . . but are still read’ because they ‘have been joined to these and follow from these [canonical writings]’ (*de script.* 6; trans. Van Liere 2012:219). For Hugh and his Victorine students, then, as for their contemporaries at Laon, although patristic exegesis was distinguishable from the sacred texts that it sought to illumine, it constituted the inseparable and indispensable voice by means of which the Scriptures were received and understood.

## HIGH SCHOLASTIC READINGS OF 1 TIMOTHY 2.4

---

By honing in on the interpretations of 1 Timothy 2.4 set forth in the *Sentences* commentaries of Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus, this section aims to offer one significant and detailed example of how early Christian biblical interpretation served as an ‘omni-present foundational force’ undergirding theology and exegesis in the medieval Latin West. In his discussion of faith in bodily resurrection and life everlasting in the *Enchiridion*, Augustine provides a reading of 1 Timothy 2.4, ‘[God] Who wills that all humans should be saved’, that would establish the basic parameters within which medieval scholastics interpreted this passage and thought about divine and human willing

vis-à-vis human salvation. Affirming the truth of these scriptural words while at the same time denying that limited salvation in any way limits the will of Almighty God, Augustine takes the text to mean that all whom God wills to be saved—and only those—will be saved (*enchr.* 27.103; trans. Harbert 2005:332–3). He explains that ‘all’ (*omnes*) here does not mean every individual human, but rather

the whole race of humankind in all its diversity, kings and private citizens, nobles and commoners, important people and humble ones, the learned and the uneducated, the healthy and the weak, the clever, the slow-witted, the foolish, the rich, the poor and those of moderate means, men and women, infants, children, adolescents, young people, middle-aged people, old people, of all languages and customs, skills and professions, with their innumerable variety of desires and thoughts and everything else which makes human beings different from one another.

(*enchr.* 27.103; trans. Harbert 2005:333)

Whereas Augustine distinguished among such conditions within the human race in an effort to shed light on the meaning of 1 Timothy 2.4, some three centuries later, in the East, John Damascene’s approach was to introduce a distinction pertaining to the divine will itself. In treating providence in *De fide orthodoxa* II.29, John distinguishes between God’s antecedent will and approval, on the one hand, and God’s consequent will and permission, on the other. Whereas God wills antecedently that all should be saved and attain to his kingdom, he also wills consequently—because he is just—to punish sinners, that is, those who will against God’s antecedent will (*f.o.* II.29; trans. Chase 1958:262–63). John notes—somewhat counterintuitively perhaps—that although the cause of God’s antecedent will is God himself, the cause of God’s consequent will is the human (*f.o.* II.29; trans. Chase 1958:263). What John means is that the human is the cause of the outcome or accomplishment of God’s consequent will, whereas the coming to fruition of God’s antecedent will in those who are saved—though undoubtedly attributable in part to their own wills and actions—is ultimately caused by God and his cooperation with these rational creatures (*f.o.* II.29; trans. Chase 1958:262).

John Damascene’s antecedent/consequent will distinction, at the heart of which lay the scriptural and Augustinian assumption that not every human will be saved, became the predominant lens through which medieval scholastic theologians such as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and John Duns Scotus read and understood 1 Timothy 2.4 (see Harkins 2014). Such scholastics inherited the question of how best to interpret this text, together with Augustine’s reading, most immediately from Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, which became the standard ‘textbook’ of theology on which all aspiring university masters of theology were required to comment (Rosemann 2007:60–2; Glorieux 1968). With Augustine’s interpretation as his guide, the Lombard, in distinction (d.) 46 of book I, offers 1 Timothy 2.4 as the first authority (seemingly) against the claim, established in the previous distinction, that the will of God cannot be made void (*sent.* bk I d. 46 chaps 1–2; trans. Silano 1:246–8). Directly quoting Augustine’s *Enchiridion* 27.103, the ‘Master of the *Sentences*’ writes:

And so, 'when we hear and read in the sacred texts that He wills all men to be saved, we must not therefore take anything away from the all-powerful will of God, but we must understand that text thus... as if it said that no man is saved except whom He wills to be saved: not that there is no man whom He does not will to be saved, but that there is none who is saved except whom He wills to be saved'.

(*sent.* bk I d. 46 chap. 2 sect. 3; trans. Silano 1:248)

When Bonaventure, who lectured on the *Sentences* at Paris 1250–2 (Bougerol 1988:128–31, 186–96), comments on d. 46 of bk I, his opening question is 'whether God wills that all humans should be saved by the will of [his] good pleasure?' He begins his answer with a strong affirmation of the authority of the sacred text itself, declaring that because 'the Apostle declares that God wills this, namely that all humans should be saved', it is necessary that we concede that God wills it (*comm. in I sent.* d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con., p. 820). Yet, because not all are saved and because God's will is never frustrated, Bonaventure teaches, 'it is necessary that the force [of 1 Timothy 2.4 and its interpretation] arise according to the mode of distributing or according to the mode of willing' (*necesse est, quod fiat vis in modo distribuendi, vel in modo volendi; comm. in I sent.* d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con., p. 820). These two modes of interpretation correspond to the reading of Augustine and of John Damascene, respectively.

Bonaventure explains that Augustine, in *Enchiridion* 27.103, makes the force of 1 Timothy 2.4 clear by distinguishing between an adapted (*accommoda*) way of distributing, on the one hand, and a common (*communem*) way, on the other (*comm. in I sent.* d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con., p. 820). Where an adapted distribution obtains, what is affirmed is adapted to or suitable for a subset of those to whom it appears, on the surface, to apply more generally. For example, when one says, 'Every human is afraid of the sea', it is ordinarily understood, in an adapted sense, only of those humans who are in the sea: that is, 'Every human who is in the sea is afraid of it'. To take Augustine's second example, when one says, 'That master teaches every boy in that city', the object is adapted, applying only to those boys in the city who are being taught. Just as no boy who formally learns there is taught except by that master, so too—if 1 Timothy 2.4 is read according to an adapted distribution—no human who will, in fact, be saved attains to salvation unless God wills it (*comm. in I sent.* d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con., p. 820). Second, if the text is read according to a common distribution, what is affirmed applies generally to a class or group rather than to each individual of it. Common distribution, then, enables Augustine to affirm, as noted, that the 'all' (*omnes*) in 1 Timothy 2.4 does not signify every individual in the human race, but rather representatives from every group and nation (*comm. in I sent.* d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con., p. 820).

On the other hand, Bonaventure teaches, John Damascene makes the force of 1 Timothy 2.4 known by reading it according to the mode of willing, that is, according to the distinction between the antecedent and consequent will in God. Significantly, Bonaventure notes that the distinction between these two wills lay not in a difference in disposition, love, or the manner of willing that is in God, but rather in the reasoning of humans who think about the divine willing: that is, it is a distinction located in human understanding rather than in God himself (*comm. in I sent.* d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con., p. 821).

The antecedent will of God is, in Bonaventure's words, 'the will of his provision (*voluntas respectu eius*), according to which God makes the human, and it is incontestably good', whereas the consequent will is the will 'that wills certain things according to the foreknowledge of merits' (*comm. in I sent. d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con.*, p. 821). The affirmation, then, that 'God wills the salvation of all'—if read as describing God's antecedent will—signifies 'in all humans a capacity to be ordered (*ordinabilitas*) to salvation, not only on the part of the nature given but also on the part of grace bestowed' (*comm. in I sent. d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con.*, p. 821). Every human is 'ordain-able' to eternal life, Bonaventure explains, according to one's divinely given human nature, whereby the human is able, progressively, to become aware of, seek, find, and cling to the God who created him or her. Beyond this rational nature, God 'similarly has bestowed grace' by sending his Son, 'whose value as a ransom was sufficient for the salvation of all' (*comm. in I sent. d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con.*, p. 821). Additionally, God has given humans the laws and commandments that are necessary for salvation, and he is available for all those who seek him and is near to all those who call upon him. Thus Bonaventure distinguishes between God's antecedent and consequent willing vis-à-vis salvation:

Therefore, to will antecedently to save the human is to order him to salvation (*ordinatum ad salutem facere*) and to not be absent from the one who wills to arrive at it. Hence to will antecedently to save does not signify salvation, but ordain-ability (*ordinabilitatem*) to salvation. However, to will consequently or absolutely to save is to will to give salvation to the one whom he knows is going to arrive at salvation through his own help (*auxilium*) and grace, and it signifies salvation as an outcome (*salutis eventum*). (*comm. in I sent. d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con.*, p. 821)

In light of this distinction, Bonaventure concludes: 'It must be responded that God wills that all humans should be saved insofar as it is in himself (*quantum in se est*) or by his antecedent will, but not by his absolute or consequent will' (*comm. in I sent. d. 46 art. un. q. 1 con.*, p. 821).

John Damascene's distinction, then, is crucial in helping Bonaventure to navigate the potential exegetical and theological perils presented by 1 Timothy 2.4. 'Insofar as it is in himself' and in his generous gifts of human nature, grace, laws and commandments, and his faithful presence to all who desire him, God (antecedently) wills that all humans should be saved by ordaining and orienting them toward their salvific end. On the other hand, where salvation signifies an actual outcome rather than a generic 'ordain-ability', God (consequently) wills that only those whom he foreknows as going to make good use of the conditions of their *ordinabilitas* (namely nature, grace, laws, and divine presence) should be saved. Such an interpretation enables Bonaventure to affirm: 'Our salvation is [determined] not only partly by God, but also partly by us. And since he himself wills that all should be saved and that grace should be bestowed on all, our salvation fails only because of our fault or negligence (*malitia vel negligentia*)' (*comm. in I sent. d. 40 art. 2 q. 2 con.*, p. 713).

For John Duns Scotus a half-century later, readings of 1 Timothy 2.4 like that of Bonaventure begged the question of the basis on which God wills some humans, such as

Peter, to persevere through the good use of God's gifts (e.g. nature or free will, grace) to final salvation, but others, such as Judas, not to persevere. Against Henry of Ghent's view that (God's foreknowledge of) a human's good or bad use of free will is the reason for that one's predestination or reprobation, respectively, Scotus teaches that for God to foreknow that a human will make good use of his free will means nothing other than that God wills him to make good use of it (Scotus, *rep. I-A* d. 41 q. un. contra op. Henrici, n. 44, vol. 2:499). Indeed, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure's Dominican contemporary at Paris, maintained that although God directs himself and his good gifts to all humans equally, not all are equally capable of receiving such graces—and, more importantly, that God is 'the knower and producer' (*cognitor et ordinator*) of this diverse receptivity among humans (Aquinas, *script. I sent.* d. 41 q. 1 a. 1 ad 2:966; Harkins 2014:47). What exactly might Thomas mean here? At least on the face of it, his teaching seems to be in tension with that of his own master, Albert the Great, who held that there is not in God any active reason why a particular human does not have grace (e.g. because God does not will to give it to him) (Albert, *comm. in I sent.* d. 40 a. 23:336; Harkins 2014:48–9). In the divine–human 'equation' of predestination, what then is the precise relationship between God's eternal will or degree concerning the salvation of a particular individual, on the one hand, and the temporally determined execution of that will in terms of that individual's freely performed actions (and of God's foreknowledge of them)? Does God, in fact, bestow his grace on all, and, if so, are all truly free to make good, or bad, use of it? And if God does not offer grace to all, on what basis does he grant or withhold it?

In *Reportatio I-A*, the examined report of his Paris lectures on book I of the *Sentences*, Scotus sheds new light on these intractable speculative questions—and, by extension, on 1 Timothy 2.4—not only by marking off different understandings of the term 'will' and using them to nuance John Damascene's distinction, but also by proposing a natural order or logical schema of God's cognition and volition (Harkins 2014:50–66). First, in commenting on d. 46 in the context of the question 'whether the divine will is always fulfilled', Scotus introduces a basic threefold division of the will, namely: (1) will as potency or power; (2) will as act; and (3) will as expressed in a sign (e.g. commandments). Will as act—that is, to will or willing itself—is further divided into acts of good pleasure (*complacentiae*) and acts of efficacy (*efficaciae*) (*rep. I-A* d. 46 q. 1 resp. ad 1, nn. 7 and 10, vol. 2:560). Whereas God's good-pleasure willing always follows simple intellection and has as its objects God and all other things that reflect God's eternal goodness, his efficacious willing is, by definition, directed outside himself and is contingent on account of the contingent nature of the objects willed. Furthermore, with respect to objects willed, God's efficacious willing is, according to Scotus, characterized by synchronic contingency: that is, if God has willed that state of affairs *x* obtain at some time *t*, God could have willed not-*x* at that same time *t* (see e.g. Normore 1996; Normore 2003; Bok 2000; Honnefelder 2012:80–2). Significantly, synchronic contingency enables Scotus to explain not only how God—in the single, eternal act of his willing—is absolutely free, but also how the human objects willed by God are also characterized by a complete freedom of willing (Harkins 2014:51–2).

Like Bonaventure before him, Scotus affirms that 1 Timothy 2.4 can be read properly through either of two patristic lenses—namely, according to Augustine’s adapted distribution (*distributio accommoda*), or according to John Damascene’s antecedent/consequent will distinction. This second interpretative mode is, in Scotus’ view, ‘better according to the intention of the Apostle’ (*melius secundum intentionem Apostoli*) (*rep. I–A d. 46 q. 1 ad arg.*, n. 17, vol. 2:561). After briefly observing that God wills, by his antecedent will but not by his consequent will, that all should be saved, Scotus explains the traditional distinction thus:

Hence it must be understood that the efficacious will is twofold with respect to two kinds of objects willed: for one is the will with respect to something that comes before or precedes; the other is the will with respect to what follows. Therefore it is called ‘the will with respect to things that precede’ because insofar as it comes from the nature of the one willing that something should be or come to be, it is said that something else follows that which precedes. And according to this, such a will is called antecedent with respect to that which ought to follow. And from the fact that it does follow, the will is called consequent. And each of these wills is called efficacious because each is always fulfilled. (*rep. I–A d. 46 q. 1 ad arg.*, n. 18, vol. 2:562)

Scotus’ earlier threefold division of the ‘will’ (namely, as potency, as act, and as sign) and his making explicit that the categories of antecedent and consequent will pertain to objects willed rather than the singular and eternal will of God itself (or of signs of it) allow him to read Damascene’s distinction in a more conceptually precise and nuanced way than did his scholastic predecessors. He makes clear that ‘antecedent’ and ‘consequent’ properly describe the *efficacious act* of God willing only *with respect to* two categories of objects willed (Harkins 2014:52–3). The antecedent will is called ‘the will with respect to things that precede’ because insofar as the nature of the one who wills—God vis-à-vis human salvation—is concerned, salvation of the human ought to follow. And when whatever follows the will with respect to things that precede, this is called, of course, the will with respect to what follows.

A consideration of Scotus’ reading of 1 Timothy 2.4 (as set forth in *Reportatio I–A d. 46*) against the backdrop of his schema of the natural order of God’s cognition and volition (found in d. 40 of the examined report) reveals how the Subtle Doctor offered innovative and insightful solutions to seemingly impenetrable questions concerning the interplay between divine and human willing vis-à-vis salvation. With his schema of the four ordered ‘instants’ (*instantes*) of divine knowledge and willing (set forth in his comments on d. 40), Scotus aims to explain how human sin or demerit can contingently move God’s eternal will, without attributing such sin to the divine will (Harkins 2014:60–6). Scotus’ ‘instants’ do not constitute a temporal order of divine willing, of course, since God’s one act of will occurs in the single ‘moment’ of the eternal *nunc*. Rather, these ‘instants’ indicate a natural order of non-mutual entailments: that is, they make clear the logical sequence of particular notional and volitional ‘attributes’ that God possesses eternally (Normore 1996:167; Harkins 2014:60–1).

For Scotus, what ‘stands in’ first, in the initial natural instant of God’s willing, is that God wills himself, the first *volitum* and the *telos* of all things. In the second instant, both Peter and Judas occur to God ‘in the being of nature (*esse naturae*), such that God wills that they exist in the manner that is fitting for all who come from Adam by means of generation’ (*rep. I–A d. 41 q. un. resp.*, n. 66, vol. 2:505). God considers Judas and Peter—and, indeed, wills them to exist—in a natural, pristine state, ‘before’ he gives any thought to the fall of humankind into sin. In a second sub-‘moment,’ as it were, of this second instant, God further wills beatitude for Peter, but nothing (yet) for Judas with regard to salvation (*rep. I–A d. 41 q. un. resp.*, n. 67, vol. 2:505). Here in this second stage of the second instant, just as in its first stage (I have dubbed these two sub-‘moments’ of the second instant ‘instant 2a’ and ‘instant 2b’: see Harkins 2014:61–3), God wills with no consideration whatsoever either of the fall into sin of all humans generally (i.e. original sin) or of the particular faults of Peter or Judas (i.e. their actual sins). In the third instant, God foresees the fall of Adam and its consequences, namely that all of his descendants will inherit original sin by means of generation. Adam’s fall is a contingent object of God’s foreknowledge, but an object which—like every act of human sin—God merely permits, neither actively willing it nor actively willing against (i.e. nilling) it (see Frost 2010:30–4; Harkins 2014:58–63). Scotus makes clear God’s passive role in relation to Judas’ sin when he affirms: ‘Therefore it follows (*sequitur*) that finally Judas will be a sinner because God has foreseen (*praevидit*) neither beatitude nor grace for Judas’ (*rep. I–A d. 41 q. un. resp.*, n. 67, vol. 2:505). It simply ‘follows’ from his having inherited original sin that, without the indispensable aid of supernatural grace, Judas will not attain to final beatitude. God wills, then, to give Judas ‘punishment’ (*poenam*), but, Scotus is quick to point out, ‘by negation only’ (*ex sola negatione*), that is, by withholding grace (*rep. I–A d. 41 q. un. resp.*, n. 68, vol. 2:505). Significantly, Scotus carves out even more room for human willing and action in the fourth instant, wherein God ‘has foreseen’ (*praevидit*) unrepentance in Judas, on the one hand, and final justice and grace in Peter, on the other. ‘And so,’ he concludes, ‘damnation follows in the one and beatitude in Peter’ (*rep. I–A d. 41 q. un. resp.*, n. 68, vol. 2:505). On our reading, then, Scotus’ schema may be outlined as follows:

INSTANT OF NATURE	DIVINE COGNITION AND VOLITION
1	God wills himself
2a	God foresees Peter and Judas <i>in esse naturae</i>
2b	God wills beatitude for Peter, nothing for Judas
3	God foresees Adam’s fall and its consequences: Peter and Judas are equals in Adam. God wills grace for Peter, punishment negatively for Judas.
4	God foresees final unrepentance in Judas and so damnation follows. God foresees final justice in Peter and so beatitude follows.

One of the significant corollaries to this schema that Scotus notes is that all those whom God has predestined for salvation would have been saved even if Adam had not sinned (*rep. I–A d. 41 q. un. resp.*, n. 73, vol. 2:506). Indeed, God willed beatitude for them (in instant 2b) ‘before’ he foresaw them as sinning in Adam and thus before they occurred to him as guilty of transgression (in instant 3). Closely related to this is the corollary that the predestined, *as predestined*, are ‘objects of the divine first act’ (*obiecta primi actus divini*) only ‘after’ they have occurred to God in their natural being (*esse naturale*) (*rep. I–A d. 41 q. un. resp.*, n. 70, vol. 2:506). This is seen quite clearly in the two sub-‘moments’ of instant 2, which is precisely where Scotus’ scheme of divine cognition and volition dovetails with his interpretation of 1 Timothy 2.4 according to John Damascene’s antecedent/consequent will distinction. In instant 2a, when God foresees Peter and Judas in their natural state and wills them to exist in the manner befitting all of Adam’s progeny (before any consideration of the fall), what ought to have followed insofar as the nature of the one who wills—namely, God—is concerned is the final salvation of both Peter and Judas. This is God’s antecedent will, namely that all humans should be saved, and all humans are oriented toward it by ‘natural goods, precepts and admonitions, laws and regulations, and all common assistance’ (*rep. I–A d. 46 q. 1 ad arg.*, n. 19, vol. 2:562). It is only at instant 2b, when God wills beatitude for Peter but nothing for Judas—and thus when Peter occurs to him as predestined and Judas occurs to him as not—that God’s will that every human should be saved can be said to obtain no longer. To be sure, beginning at instant 3, when God foresees Adam’s transgression, we can speak of God’s will to save only some consequent to human sin. But it is not until instant 4, when God sees Judas as ultimately unrepentant, that the latter can be said to be among the reprobate, and even then Scotus makes clear that his reprobation merely ‘follows’ from his post-lapsarian, un-graced status.

Scotus’ reading of 1 Timothy 2.4, and his understanding of predestination more broadly, diverges perhaps most sharply from those of his theological predecessors in its denial that God grants grace to all humans (Harkins 2014:67–9). Indeed, whereas Bonaventure taught that God wills ‘that grace should be bestowed on all’ and that ‘our salvation fails only because of our fault or negligence’ (*comm. in I sent. d. 40 art. 2 q. 2 con.*, p. 713), in Scotus’ scheme God’s consequent will for Peter and Judas is largely determined by his positive granting of grace to the former and his intentional withholding of it from the latter. Whereas Bonaventure understands the consequent will as based on God’s foreknowledge of merits (that is, of the use that particular humans will make of the *ordinabilitas* that God has given to all), Scotus decisively shifts the ‘volitional fulcrum’, as it were, away from humans—i.e. away from the willing of each individual in light of universally given grace—and closer toward God—i.e. toward the divine decree to grant grace to a limited number of humans, namely those for whom God has willed beatitude at a naturally prior instant.

Such a shift in no way means that Scotus minimizes human willing and its role in the salvific ‘equation’. To the contrary, whereas Scotus teaches that ‘no other good besides God Himself is the reason for God’s willing’ (*rep. I–A d. 41 q. un. resp.*, n. 55, vol. 2:502),

he acknowledges the indispensable role of human merits in predestination and of demerits in reprobation. In terms of their ‘causal effects’ on predestination and reprobation, respectively, merits and demerits function asymmetrically, according to Scotus. Based on Aristotle’s teaching (in bk VII of *Metaphysics*) that agents acting purposefully proceed by cognition and volition, on the one hand, and by operation and execution, on the other, Scotus distinguishes between two ways of understanding what it means to say something is ordered to and willed because of another, which ways I have characterized as denoting ‘causality in the strong sense’ and ‘causality in the weak sense’ (Harkins 2014:55–8). Causality in the strong sense obtains where *a* is willed ‘because of’ (*propter*) *b* where *b* is the reason for willing and the first intention (i.e. prior to *a* in the order of cognition and volition). Causality in the weak sense obtains where *a* is willed ‘because of’ *b* where *b* is not the reason for willing and the first intention, but rather the means of accomplishing *a* and therefore prior to it in the order of operation and execution. Scotus teaches that, in the case of predestination, there is no cause in the strong sense on the part of the human. That is, the human’s freely willed actions or meritorious works in no way constitute the (or even a) reason for God’s willing to predestine him; they do not, and cannot, have priority in the order of divine cognition and volition (as the above table indicates). Human action and merit can be a cause in the weak sense, however. That is, meritorious actions can and do serve as means of accomplishing predestination, and, as such, they are prior in the order of execution to the outcome that God has willed eternally. In the case of reprobation, on the other hand, Scotus maintains that there is some cause in the strong sense on the part of the human who is damned. Because damnation is a just punishment for ultimate human failing or final unrepentance, and, as such, has a reason in the good insofar as it has a reason in divine justice, there is in the human whose end will be reprobation some strong cause of this reprobation. In the case of ‘foreseen final demerit’, there is, Scotus teaches, ‘some reason contingently moving [God] in the order [of his willing] to the other [alternative, viz., reprobation] according to the law of his wisdom’ (*rep. I–A d. 41 q. un. resp., n. 56, vol. 2:503; Harkins 2014:57–8*).

## CONCLUSION

---

By means of a broad sketch of some key moments in ‘reception history’ from the beginning of the Middle Ages to the twelfth century, on the one hand, and of an in-depth analysis of a single example of high scholastic reception, on the other, I have sought to show how early Christian biblical exegesis served as an ‘omnipresent foundational force’ underlying and determining the nature of medieval Latin engagements—varied though they were—with Sacred Scripture. This force is strikingly conspicuous, for example, in the central authoritative place enjoyed by Jerome’s Vulgate text throughout the Middle Ages, the inescapable debt that Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian exegetes like Bede and Alcuin owed to the fathers, the form and function of the *Glossa ordinaria*, and Hugh of

St Victor's inclusion of patristic works among the sacred writings themselves. Our consideration of high scholastic readings of 1 Timothy 2.4, moreover, has aimed to show not only how early Christian interpretations formed and informed medieval Latin approaches to the scriptural text (even in genres, like that of the *Sentences* commentary, that seem further removed from traditional scriptural ones), but also how readers like Bonaventure and Scotus used this 'omnipresent foundational force' to undergird and enable original contributions to Christian exegesis, theology, and philosophy. Indeed, from Bede to Bonaventure and beyond, medieval Christian thinkers who engaged the scriptural text lent their own consenting voices—each in his or her own way—to the famous words of the twelfth-century theologian and diplomat Peter of Blois: 'We are like dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants; thanks to them, we see farther than they. Busying ourselves with the treatises written by the ancients, we take their choice thoughts, buried by age and the neglect of humans, and raise them, as it were, from death to new life' (*ep.* 92).

## REFERENCES

### Sources

- Albert the Great, *Commentarium in I Sententiarum* (*dist. XXVI–XLVIII*). Latin text: A. Borgnet (ed.), *Opera Omnia* 26 (Paris: Vivès, 1893).
- Alcuin of York, *Epistulae*. Latin text: E. Dümmler (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolarum*, vol. 4: *Karolini Aevi II* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905), 53–6.
- Augustine, *Enchiridion de fide, spe et caritate*. Latin text: E. Evans (ed.), CCSL 46.49–114 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969). Eng. trans.: B. Harbert, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity*, in M. Fiedrowicz (ed.), *Saint Augustine on Christian Belief*, Works of Saint Augustine I/8 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005), 273–343.
- Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. Latin text: A. Crépin, M. Lapidge, P. Monat, and P. Robin (eds), *Bède le Vénérable: Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais*, 3 vols, SC 489–91 (Paris: Cerf, 2005).
- Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *Commentaria in I Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*. Latin text: PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura (eds), *Opera omnia* 1 (Ad Claras Aquas [Quaracchi]: Typ. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882).
- Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon de studio legendi*. Latin text: C. H. Buttimer (ed.), *Hugonis de Sancto Victore Didascalicon de studio legendi: A Critical Text* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press, 1939). Eng. trans.: F. T. Harkins, *Didascalicon on the Study of Reading*, in F. T. Harkins and F. van Liere (eds), *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory*, Victorine Texts in Translation 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 81–201.
- Hugh of St Victor, *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris*. Latin text: PL 175.9–28. Eng. trans.: F. van Liere, *On Sacred Scripture and its Authors*, in F. T. Harkins and F. van Liere (eds), *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory*, Victorine Texts in Translation 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 213–30.
- John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa libri quattuor*. Greek text: B. Kotter, P. Ledrux, V. Kontouma-Coticello, and G.-M. de Durand (eds), *Jean Damascène: La Foi Orthodoxe*, 2 vols, SC 535 and 540 (Paris: Cerf, 2010–11). Eng. trans.: F. H. Chase, Jr, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, in *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, FC 37 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 165–406.

- John Duns Scotus, *Reportatio I–A*. Latin text and Eng. trans.: A. B. Wolter and O. V. Bychkov (eds), *Reportatio I–A: The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture*, 2 vols (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2008).
- Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*. Latin text: I. Brady (ed.), 2 vols (Grottaferrata: Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971–81). Eng. trans.: G. Silano, *The Sentences*, 4 vols (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007–10).
- Peter of Blois, *Epistola 92*. Latin text: PL 207.289B–291B.
- Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super I Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*. Latin text: P. Mandonnet (ed.) (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929).

## Scholarship

- Berndt, R. (1988). ‘Gehören die Kirchenväter zur Heiligen Schrift? Zur Kanontheorie des Hugo von Sankt Viktor’, in I. Baldermann (ed.), *Zum Problem des biblischen Kanons* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag), 191–9.
- Bok, N. den (2000). ‘Freedom in Regard to Opposite Acts and Objects in Scotus: *Lectura I* 39, §§ 45–54’, *Vivarium* 38: 243–54.
- Bougerol, J. G. (1988). *Introduction à saint Bonaventure* (Paris: Vrin).
- Brown, D. (2003). ‘Jerome and the Vulgate’, in A. J. Hauser and D. F. Watson (eds), *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1: *The Ancient Period* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 355–79.
- Brown, M. P. (2010). ‘Bede’s Life in Context’, in S. DeGregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 3–24.
- Chazelle, C., and Edwards, B. V. N. (2003). ‘Introduction: The Study of the Bible and Carolingian Culture’, in C. Chazelle and B. V. N. Edwards (eds), *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era* (Turnhout: Brepols), 1–16.
- De Hamel, C. (2001). *The Book: A History of the Bible* (London: Phaidon).
- DeGregorio, S. (2010). ‘Bede and the Old Testament’, in S. DeGregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 127–41.
- Fox, M. (2003). ‘Alcuin the Exegete: The Evidence of the *Quaestiones in Genesim*’, in C. Chazelle and B. V. N. Edwards (eds), *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era* (Turnhout: Brepols), 39–60.
- Frost, G. (2010). ‘John Duns Scotus on God’s Knowledge of Sins: A Test-Case for God’s Knowledge of Contingents’, *JHP* 48: 15–34.
- Glorieux, P. (1968). ‘L’Enseignement au moyen âge: Techniques et méthodes en usage à la Faculté de Théologie de Paris au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire de moyen âge* 35: 65–186.
- Harkins, F. T. (2012). ‘Introduction’ to *Didascalicon on the Study of Reading*, in F. T. Harkins and F. van Liere (eds), *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory* (Turnhout: Brepols), 63–79.
- Harkins, F. T. (2014). ‘Contingency and Causality in Predestination: 1 Tim. 2:4 in the *Sentences* Commentaries of Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and John Duns Scotus’, *Archa Verbi* 11: 35–72.
- Harkins, F. T., and van Liere, F. (2012). ‘General Introduction’, in F. T. Harkins and F. van Liere (eds), *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory* (Turnhout: Brepols), 31–60.
- Heil, J. (2003). ‘Labourers in the Lord’s Quarry: Carolingian Exegetes, Patristic Authority, and Theological Innovation, a Case Study in the Representation of Jews in Commentaries on Paul’, in C. Chazelle and B. V. N. Edwards (eds), *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era* (Turnhout: Brepols), 75–95.

- Honnefelder, L. (2012). 'John Duns Scotus on God's Intellect and Will', in R. Cross (ed.), *Proceedings of 'The Quadruple Congress' on John Duns Scotus, Part 2: The Opera Theologica of John Duns Scotus* (Münster: Aschendorff), 73–88.
- Kelly, J. N. D. (1998). *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson).
- Lapidge, M. (2006). *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Lobrichon, G. (1984). 'Une nouveauté: Les Gloses de la Bible', in P. Riché and G. Lobrichon (eds), *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible* (Paris: Beauchesne), 95–114.
- Love, R. (2010). 'The World of Latin Learning', in S. DeGregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 40–53.
- McGurk, P. (1994). 'The Oldest Manuscripts of the Latin Bible', in R. Gameson (ed.), *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration, and Use* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1–23.
- Normore, C. G. (1996). 'Scotus, Modality, Instants of Nature and the Contingency of the Present', in L. Honnefelder, R. Wood, and M. Dreyer (eds), *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics* (Leiden: Brill), 161–74.
- Normore, C. G. (2003). 'Duns Scotus's Modal Theory', in T. Williams (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 129–60.
- Ott, L. (1949). 'Hugo von Sankt Viktor und die Kirchenväter', *Divus Thomas: Jahrbuch für Philosophie und spekulative Theologie*, 3rd ser., 27: 180–200, 293–332.
- Rosemann, P. W. (2007). *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard's Sentences* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press).
- Smalley, B. (1964). *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame).
- Smith, L. (2001). *Masters of the Sacred Page: Manuscripts of Theology in the Latin West to 1274* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame).
- Smith, L. (2009). *The Glossa ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary* (Leiden: Brill).
- Van Liere, F. (2012). 'Introduction' to *On Sacred Scripture and its Authors* and *The Diligent Examiner*, in F. T. Harkins and F. van Liere (eds), *Interpretation of Scripture: Theory* (Turnhout: Brepols), 205–11.
- Woodward, M. S. (2011) (trans.). *The Glossa ordinaria on Romans* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University).

### Suggested Reading

- De Lubac, H. (1959–64). *Exégèse médiévale: Les Quatre Sens de l'écriture*, 4 vols (Paris: Éditions Mouton).
- Evans, G. R. (1984). *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Earlier Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Riché, P., and Lobrichon, G. (1984) (eds). *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible* (Paris: Beauchesne).
- Van Liere, F. (2014). *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

## CHAPTER 44

---

# BYZANTINE RECEPTION

---

MARY B. CUNNINGHAM

THE Byzantine reception of early Christian biblical interpretation is characterized both by continuity and development. For Byzantine commentators, the fathers of the first five Christian centuries established an understanding of what Scripture is and how it may be explained, thus setting a precedent that could be elaborated but not fundamentally altered (Kannengiesser 2006; Simonetti 1994). To summarize briefly the patristic approach to Scripture, which has been described from a variety of angles in the preceding chapters, this was based on the principle that the various books that make up the canonical OT and NT present a unified message despite the fact that they were written by different authors, since they were all inspired by the Holy Spirit at various times in history. The Bible as a whole expresses an underlying ‘mind’ (*dianoia*) and purpose (*skopos*), which reflect the unity of the divine Logos (Young 1997:29; Blowers 1991:195). As Paul Blowers puts it, ‘the Logos “incarnates” himself in the flesh of Scripture, while the Holy Spirit authors the text and models its every detail to salvific ends’ (Blowers 2009:173). Patristic exegetes, especially from Origen onwards, nevertheless recognized that multiple meanings could be found in one biblical text; these illumined in different ways the message of salvation that God reveals through Scripture. It was thus the duty of the commentator, preacher, hymnographer, or any other interpreter of the Bible to mediate this message in ways that would facilitate an ongoing and productive relationship with holy Scripture on the part of all Christians (Simonetti 1994:43–4; Cunningham 2016).

The various levels of biblical exegesis, which Origen listed as three (literal, moral, and spiritual) but which both he and later biblical interpreters interpreted quite loosely—often reducing the three to two (literal and spiritual) main methods—continued to influence Byzantine interpreters of Scripture (Origen, *princ.* 4.2; Butterworth 1973:269–87; Lauro 2005; Martens 2012). From the sixth or seventh century onward, liturgical writers, including preachers and hymnographers, employed variations of these exegetical methods in their mediation of the Bible to Eastern Christian congregations (Theokritoff 2005; Cunningham 2016). The interpretation of Scripture was not confined to formal church settings, however. It permeated monastic writing, whether this took

the form of instructive treatises, catechetical homilies, or hagiography. Texts that were clearly intended for the guidance of lay Christians, such as 'questions and answers', polemical treatises, church histories, or chronicles, along with many other literary genres, alluded continually to Scripture or borrowed its language and imagery for inspiration. Nor was biblical exegesis confined to literary contexts: it played a part in the planning of church decoration, iconography, the illustration of manuscripts, and other artistic projects. Byzantine Christians, like their modern counterparts, encountered Scripture, the embodied Logos, in visual as well as verbal ways. The official mediators of this experience, whether belonging to the ordained clergy or not, derived their authority by adhering to a patristic tradition which set the parameters for authentic interpretation of the Bible.

This chapter, in examining the various settings (both literary and material) in which biblical exegesis took place in the Byzantine world, must first establish its own boundaries in both chronological and geographical terms. The main difficulty that confronts us lies in the distinction—which would be unrecognizable to Byzantine and even modern Orthodox Christians—between the 'patristic' and the 'Byzantine' traditions. In one sense, Eastern Christian tradition has always understood the inspiration of certain teachers or spiritual leaders by the Holy Spirit to be continuous; thus, the age of the 'fathers' could be seen as continuing in theoretical terms even into the twenty-first century. More specifically, certain important figures, such as Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, and Gregory Palamas, are viewed as major contributors to the patristic vision; they both absorbed and developed further the exegetical methods that second- to fifth-century fathers first elaborated. For the purposes of this chapter, the 'Byzantine', as opposed to the 'patristic', tradition is defined as beginning in approximately the sixth century. Thus we shall examine the reception of patristic hermeneutical methods beginning with writers such as Dionysius the Areopagite and Romanos the Melodist, moving on through the later Byzantine period to include such exegetes as Gregory of Sinai and Gregory Palamas. As for the geographical boundaries, these follow roughly those of the Eastern Christian, or Byzantine, Empire, which shrank and expanded in the course of the millennium or so of its political existence. Because some territories were conquered (especially during the Islamic invasions of the seventh century) but remained inhabited by Greek-speaking Christians, we include areas such as Palestine, Syria, and Egypt in our discussion.

Since the Byzantine reception of patristic methods of biblical exegesis took place in a variety of forms or settings, this chapter will focus on four main areas: (1) liturgical texts and art, including homiletics, hymnography, monumental art, and icons; (2) exegetical or theological treatises, commentaries, and manuscripts that may have been aimed at a more educated readership; (3) texts that relate in a broader sense to laypersons' experience of life in the Church; and (4) monastic texts, including treatises, catechetical homilies, and artistic representations that can be associated with a monastic background. The boundaries between these various forms of communication, along with the contexts for which they were intended, are porous. Such categorization perhaps even creates a distorted view of the evidence, since Byzantine Christians did not distinguish between

such spheres of ecclesial life to the extent that modern scholars do. However, it will be argued that different methods of exegesis became associated with particular pastoral needs or didactic purposes. For this reason, Byzantine commentators privileged aspects of patristic tradition according to the theological settings in which they found themselves.

## LITURGICAL CONTEXTS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

---

Liturgical celebration in the Byzantine Church, which expanded to fill the hours of each day in the ecclesiastical year especially from about the sixth century onward (Taft 1992; Taft 1984), incorporated and expounded Scripture in a variety of ways. Hymnography, whether sung in the offices or in the eucharistic Divine Liturgy, resembled a tapestry of words and phrases taken from the OT and NT (Lash 2008:35). The same allusive method, described by scholars as ‘intertextuality’ (Young 1997:97–103), was used in homiletics, that is, the exegetical, festal, and occasional homilies which survive in liturgical collections, having first been delivered in church and then used as readings throughout the Byzantine period (Ehrhard 1937–52). Such use of Scripture, which developed in the patristic period and continued to inspire later Eastern Christian liturgical writers, revealed several important hermeneutical preoccupations: first, it provided new texts with authority since they expressed Christian theology in the language of the divine Word of Scripture; second, it revealed the unity of all the books of the OT and NT—to the extent that passages chosen from any section of Scripture could be combined in order to illustrate a theological point; finally, the language of Scripture was consistently evocative and beautiful: it bore witness to the greatness of creation and to God’s immanence within it.

It is likely that iconography (as expressed in monumental painting or in icons) followed liturgical poetry and homiletics, by means of a kind of ‘filtration process’, in its adoption of developing interpretations of Scripture in the Middle Byzantine period (Tsironis 2005). Such interpretation included the ways in which particular events in the lives of Jesus Christ or his mother Mary should be understood in connection with individual feasts or how congregations might be expected to engage with the main themes of these feasts. The depiction of the lamenting Virgin at the foot of the cross, for example, appeared first in a kontakion by Romanos (Maas and Trypanis 1963:142–9), then in liturgical sermons, and only after the end of the ninth century in iconography and other literary genres (Tsironis 1998; *pace* Shoemaker 2012: 24–5).

Liturgical requirements dictated the choice of biblical subject matter in the contexts of preaching or hymnography on particular topics or events in the biblical canon (Rouwhorst 2013; Guy 1966–7). Whereas preachers of the patristic period, such as Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom, delivered homilies in morning and evening services,

as well as in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays throughout the year, the evidence for daily preaching diminishes in the Byzantine period (Antonopoulou 1997:110–12). This means that the biblical pericopes on which sermons were based became more limited: OT readings received little direct attention, either in hymnography or homiletics, while NT passages were limited increasingly to those that adorned the great Dominical and Marian feasts of the Church or to some extent to the ordinary Sundays of the movable and fixed liturgical years. The subject matter of both homilies and hymns may also have been determined by the editorial choices of liturgical compilers; it will never be possible to determine how many liturgical texts were originally produced since many were never copied down (either by the authors or contemporary tachygraphers) and transmitted to posterity (Cunningham 2011).

During the Byzantine period, that is, from about the fifth century onward, certain methods of exegesis became associated with particular liturgical contexts. Feasts, which were added to the calendar especially between the early sixth and eighth centuries, became associated with a focus on an eternal timeframe in which historical events in the life of Christ were re-enacted in the context of liturgical celebration (Krueger 2014:67–105). This concept of liturgical as opposed to historical time, in which the events that are recounted in the OT and NT collapse together in an inaugurated eschaton, could be expressed especially with the help of typology. Such a method of exegesis also revealed the presence of Christ or his mother, the Virgin Mary, in mysteriously veiled but richly allusive passages in the OT (Cunningham 2004). Other liturgical contexts, such as the Sundays in Lent that lead up to Holy Week and Easter, were more suited to other kinds of allegorical interpretation. Typology could feature here, as in Andrew of Crete's famous *Great Canon* (PG 97.1330–85; trans. Mother Mary and Mother Thekla 1997), but the non-literal meaning that was teased out of biblical passages more often alluded to the salvation of the individual human soul. Even as certain forms of biblical exegesis became associated with specific liturgical contexts, however, writers were flexible in their movement between these methods: the same hymn or homily might adopt various hermeneutical approaches for didactic reasons.

To illustrate the more typological form of exegesis that characterizes festal celebration, we may start with homilies and hymns intended for the Nativity of Christ, which had been celebrated in the Eastern Church since about the end of the fourth century (Talley 1986:134–41). The fourth-century father, Gregory of Nazianzus, provided a powerful model for liturgical preaching on this subject in his *Oration* 38 on the Theophany—just a decade or so before the feast of the Nativity was moved to 25 December (Moreschini 1990:104–48; trans. Daley 2006:117–27). Gregory's sermon opens with an evocation of the eternal timeframe of the feast, as the preacher calls on all Christians to celebrate its immediacy *today*. He reminds his audience of the entire dispensation, as related in the OT, that led up to Christ's incarnation, enjoining his hearers to recognize both their innate nobility and their fallen nature, which is redeemed both by God's entrance into creation and by his death on the cross. Although the use of allegory that is found here is not especially typological in nature, the preacher does set a precedent for later liturgical treatment of this subject in his stress on the timeless nature of this

Christological event in the life of the Church. It serves as a reminder of God's purpose for humanity, first in creating us and now in renewing that creation in the person of the second Adam, Christ.

The sixth-century hymnographer Romanos the Melodist, in his famous kontakion on the Nativity of Christ, adopts this method of collapsing historical time into an eternal present by means both of narrative and typological exegesis (Gaydor-Whyte 2017:102–11). Bethlehem, he suggests, is a new Garden of Eden in which a new creation has taken place:

Bethlehem has opened Eden, come, let us see;  
 we have found delight in secret, come, let us receive  
 the joys of paradise within the cave.  
 There the unwatered root whose blossom is forgiveness has appeared.  
 There has been found the undug well from which David once longed to drink.  
 There a virgin has borne a babe  
 and has quenched at once Adam's and David's thirst...

(Romanos, *Kontakia*; trans. Maas and Trypanis 1963:1,  
 strophe 1.1–8; trans. Lash 1995:3).

Typology and intertextuality (with references to Isa 11.1, 2 Sam 23.13–17, and 1 Chr 11.17–19) both feature here as the hymnographer reinforces the sense that events in the OT not only lead up to, but also reveal the meaning of, the entrance of Christ, the God-man, into creation.

Later icons of the nativity scene build on such liturgical treatment of the event, depicting not only the historical narrative (with shepherds, magi, angels, Joseph, and others appearing around the two central figures, the Virgin Mary and Christ), but also the way in which it enables the viewer to look both forwards and backwards in time. The artistic prototypes for such icons can probably be found in early Christian examples such as the fifth- and sixth-century flasks or tokens brought back from the Holy Land, on which simple images of the nativity scene with the adoration of the magi were inscribed (Vikan 1982:32, 40). Like liturgical hymns and homilies, Byzantine iconography emphasizes both the scriptural basis and the eternal meaning of the event. Various elements, such as the ox and the ass, express the fulfilment of prophecy (Isa 1.3), while others reflect the narratives of Luke's and Matthew's Gospels. The dark cave in which the Christ child lies in his manger is based on the second-century apocryphal Gospel that is attributed in Byzantine tradition to James (Elliott 1993:57–67), but also symbolizes either the fallen creation into which Christ has entered or, according to a homily that is attributed to Gregory of Nyssa, the shadow of death that encompasses humanity (Ouspensky and Lossky 1983:157). The iconography of the nativity scene also conveys in various ways the connection between Christ's birth and death—a preoccupation that also appears frequently in homilies and hymns on this subject: Mary's womb (perhaps also symbolized by the darkness of the cave) corresponds to Christ's tomb; the swaddling cloths will become the swathing bands in which he was wrapped after death; and above all, the Virgin's sorrowful expression, as she reclines close to but facing away from the

Christ child, prefigures her lament at the foot of the cross. Time, according to the two-dimensional but vividly narrative expression of Byzantine icons, has collapsed into a moment that vividly reveals the whole dispensation of God.

The feast of the Transfiguration offered Byzantine liturgical writers and iconographers another chance to provide typological interpretation of a historical event in the life of Christ, as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. It is not known exactly when the feast was added to the Byzantine liturgical calendar, but this probably occurred sometime before the beginning of the eighth century (Daley 2013:19–23). Various surviving sermons on the transfiguration comment on the biblical pericopes for the feast, using a combination of literal, moral, typological, and anagogical methods of exegesis. It is striking, however, that preachers including John of Damascus, Andrew of Crete, Gregory the Sinaite, and Gregory Palamas (with the first two flourishing in the eighth century and the last two in the fourteenth) emphasize different theological aspects of this event, ranging from its meaning in the context of the biblical narrative to its implications with regard to human apprehension of divine being in the broadest mystical sense. The emphasis in all of the Byzantine sermons that survive on this subject is, however, typological and anagogical. John of Damascus compares Christ's ascent of Mount Tabor to that of Mount Sinai by Moses; the typological parallel is enriched by the fact that the latter's vision of 'the back-parts' of God (Exod 33.23) was enabled by Christ, who was in fact the rock through whose cleft Moses looked. This OT event is fulfilled in the dazzling vision of Jesus Christ as God, 'the Master of Old and New Testaments' and the Giver of a new Law to God's chosen people (Kotter 1988:437.2.1–15). Five centuries later, Gregory the Sinaite does not neglect the typological implications of the transfiguration scene in his sermon on the same subject, but he stresses more its anagogical meaning (Conticello and Conticello 2002:87–8). The three disciples' ascent of Mount Tabor and the vision that they received of Christ, as God and man, represents the ascent towards mystical contemplation that is open to all who apply themselves to ascetic practice and constant prayer (trans. Balfour 1983:20–57). Gregory Palamas, in his first sermon on the transfiguration (Conticello and Conticello 2002:153–4), provides a considerable amount of the kind of close biblical exegesis that appeared in connection with this subject in patristic homilies and commentaries, examining, for example, the discrepancy between the Gospels of Matthew and Luke on the number of days that elapsed between Jesus' promise of the Kingdom (Matt 16.27–8; Luke 9.26–7) and his ascent of Mount Tabor with three chosen disciples (Matt 17.1, six days; Luke 9.28, eight days). However, the key theme in the story of Christ's transfiguration for Palamas is the 'immaterial, never-setting, pre-eternal light' (expressed alliteratively in Greek) that shone from Christ, displaying to the disciples the glory of the uncreated Godhead. Palamas connects this not only with the spiritual experience of Christians who behold this light 'with eyes transformed by the Holy Spirit', but also with the glory of the eschaton (Gregory Palamas, *hom.* 34.12–13; trans. Veniamin 2009:271–73).

Hymnography composed for the feast of the Transfiguration from the early eighth century onward diverges from patristic commentaries and homilies on this subject in various ways. Abandoning themes such as the literal or allegorical explanation of the six or eight days that preceded the transfiguration, eschatological emphasis on the

promise of the Kingdom, or moral interpretations of the ascent of Mount Tabor, festal hymns focus above all on the Christological implications of the scene. The transfiguration is understood as a revelation of the person of Christ in his divine and human natures; this represents the fulfilment of God's creation of humanity in his image and the manifestation of his ongoing presence in creation. In the fifth ode of his canon on the transfiguration, John of Damascus writes:

You, O Christ, with invisible hands have fashioned man in your image,  
and you have now displayed the original beauty in this same  
human body which you formed,  
revealing it, not as in an image, but as you are in your own self  
according to your essence,  
being both God and man

(John of Damascus, *carm. transfig.*, Ode Five; trans. Mother Mary  
and Ware 1969:487 [with adjustments]).

Typology also plays an important role in hymnography, especially in canons that express in their very structure the fulfilment of the OT in the NT. Moses and Elijah, who both experienced theophanies in the old dispensation, are present on Mount Tabor in order to witness the fulfilment of such visions in this manifestation of the incarnate God.

The iconography of the transfiguration scene appears to have been established early in the Byzantine world, with the sixth-century mosaic in the apse of the monastic church of St Catherine at Sinai being a formative example (Forsyth and Weitzmann 1965–73). Christ, who stands at the centre of the image within a dark blue mandorla, representing the divine nature from which rays of light shine forth, is flanked by Moses and Elijah while the three disciples are depicted in attitudes of awe and reverence below. Surrounding images, depicting Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3.1–6) and receiving the tablets of the Law (Exod 19–20), provide typological meaning to the scene of the transfiguration; it is possible that the planning of this church's decoration also intended the viewer to understand the images anagogically, in terms of the spiritual progress that takes place within a monastery (Cormack 2000:49–52). Later icons adopt the same balanced and symmetrical composition, always focusing on the central figure of Christ, whose white garments and shining mandorla reveal the glory of his divine nature. It is noticeable that some later icons, such as the twelfth-century panel that forms part of the iconostasis at Sinai, introduce a more personal interpretation of the scene, expressed in the physical attitudes and anxious expressions not only of the disciples but also even of the two patriarchs (Weitzmann 1978:86, plate 24).

Homilies and hymns that were delivered during Lent or Holy Week are more often characterized by moral or anagogical forms of biblical exegesis. In contrast to festal liturgical texts, which celebrate the eternal framework of the Christian dispensation, these penitential writings emphasize the growth of the individual human soul towards the spiritual transformation that will be experienced liturgically in Christ's approaching passion and resurrection. Typology may play a part in expounding this process, but

tropological (moral) allegory is more common in this liturgical context. Gregory Palamas provides an eloquent model of biblical instruction in his homily on the story of the blind man healed at Capernaum (Mark 2.1–2), delivered on the second Sunday in Lent:

When did these acts of repentance take place? At the time when Jesus came into his own city, which means, after he came in the flesh to stay in the world which he created and is therefore his own. As the evangelist says of him, ‘He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God . . . (John 1.11–12)’. So when we fall down before him with such faith, our paralysed mind immediately hears him saying ‘Son’, and receives forgiveness and healing. In addition it receives strength to lift up and carry the bed on which it is lying. The bed is to be understood as the body to which the mind which pursues fleshly desires clings, and through which it applies itself to sinful actions.

(Gregory Palamas, *hom.* 10.13; trans. Veniamin 2009:71)

The boundary between Lenten exegesis, with its preference for moral or anagogical exegesis, and festal preoccupations may sometimes fade, as we see in Andrew of Crete’s sermons on Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday. Here the preacher both looks back at Lent, emphasizing the need for moral improvement, and forward towards the approaching passion and resurrection of Christ. Both texts display a mixture of literal, moral, and typological interpretation of the festal pericopes in John 11 and 12 (Andrew of Crete, *Homilies on Lazarus and Palm Sunday*, PG 97.960–1017).

Byzantine methods of biblical exegesis that occur in liturgical contexts thus reflect the didactic or festal requirements of each day or season. Whereas preachers or hymnographers may base their message on a particular passage of the NT, they invariably interweave this with other scriptural examples that help to reveal its moral, typological, or prophetic meaning. Byzantine liturgical writers and iconographers all relied on the patristic foundations of biblical exegesis. However, they adapted this legacy to accord with their didactic purposes and, in some circumstances, developed it further for pastoral or panegyric reasons.

## EXEGETICAL OR THEOLOGICAL TREATISES, COMMENTARIES, AND ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS

---

This category of biblical interpretation is large and, as outlined in the introduction of this chapter, difficult to separate categorically from ‘liturgical’ forms of exegesis. It includes the wide range of theological treatises, biblical commentaries, ‘chains’ or catenae, and any other literary or artistic forms that appear to be intended for a smaller,

more educated audience (Louth 2008; Devreesse 1959; Devreesse 1970). These readers might have encountered such texts in the context of private study rather than in public or ecclesial contexts. While bearing in mind the obvious overlap between ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres of influence—along with the possibility that some texts or iconographical motifs moved between the two in the course of transmission—it is worth exploring whether certain methods of exegesis, influenced by patristic examples, flourished here too.

Byzantine commentaries on Scripture followed precedents that had been established in the patristic period, offering detailed interpretation of the biblical books of the OT and NT in a consecutive, rather than liturgically organized, manner. It is impossible to determine exactly how biblical commentaries were used in the Byzantine context, but it is likely that they provided inspiration for teachers, including preachers, in the Church, devotional reading for clerics, monks, and lay people, and help for bishops involved in conciliar discussions. From the Middle and Late Byzantine periods, we possess a few commentaries on Genesis, the Psalms, and some other books of the OT, along with those on the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul that were produced by figures such as the eleventh-century bishop Theophylact of Ochrid (Beck 1959). Byzantine commentators displayed their reverence for the inspired exegesis of the fathers, often assuming the same methods with regard to biblical passages or even paraphrasing the homilies or commentaries of fourth- and fifth-century patristic writers (Louth 2008:854–5). Nevertheless, they could be innovative in their emphasis on particular themes such as Chalcedonian Christology, as well as in their choice of subject matter. Another important realm of biblical commentary exists in the pictorial illustration of OT books such as the Psalms. Byzantine illustrators often diverged completely from the literal sense of the texts, offering a Christological—and occasionally even topical—interpretation in their choice of images.

Byzantine hermeneutical method, from the sixth century onward, was inspired both by Alexandrian exegetes, such as Cyril of Alexandria, and by the Antiochene tradition, as represented especially by Theodoret of Cyrus, John Chrysostom, and others. With regard to the former, the Christological meaning of both the OT and NT, as revealed by typology, prophecy, and historicity, is paramount. Cyril stressed the unified message of Scripture, with its revelation of Christ’s role as Second Adam (Blowers 2009:183–5). Nevertheless, such an interpretation did not supersede the importance of Christ’s historical hypostasis as God and man in first-century Palestine. In this sense, his miracles, teachings, and moral example represented an important aspect of biblical teaching, which later Byzantine commentators considered with the help of earlier preachers or exegetes such as John Chrysostom. Above all, they remained aware of the polyvalence of biblical texts; Maximus, for example, saw Origen’s levels of meaning as signifying that unity of meaning (*Logos*) may be expressed in diverse ways (*logoi*) (Blowers 1991:185–92; Blowers 2009:191).

Much of Maximus the Confessor’s exegetical work is framed as sets of responses to questions which were posed to him by others, but which may take the form of lengthy comments resembling the classical tradition of *scholia* or, in the monastic context, the

kind of instruction that spiritual fathers gave their disciples. His *Questions and Responses for Thalassius* offer sixty-five questions, all but one on Scripture, while the *Ambigua* deal ostensibly with ‘difficulties’ in the theological orations of Gregory Nazianzen, but also concern the biblical passages on which these are based (Blowers 1991; Louth 1996:20–1; trans. Constan 2014:1:viii–x). In *Ambiguum* 10, Maximus adopts an allegorical approach to the story of Christ’s transfiguration, building on the work of precursors such as Philo, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and others (Malherbe and Ferguson 1978:5–9). While stressing the disciples’ revelation that ‘the wholly blessed radiance that shone with dazzling rays of light from the Lord’s face, completely overwhelming the power of their eyes, was a symbol of his divinity, which transcends intellect, sensation, being, and knowledge’ (Maximus, *ambig.* 10.17; trans. Constan 2014:1:191), Maximus also focuses in this passage on the moral and spiritual qualities that are required for such an encounter. He continues:

From this it follows that whoever wishes blamelessly to walk the straight road to God, stands in need of both the inherent spiritual knowledge of Scripture, and the natural contemplation of beings according to the Spirit. In this way, anyone who desires to become a perfect lover of perfect wisdom will be able to show what is only reasonable, namely, that the two laws—the natural and the written—are of equal value and equal dignity, that both of them reciprocally teach the same things, and that neither is superior or inferior to the other. (trans. Constan 2014:193–5)

In contrast to Maximus, Theophylact of Ochrid, who wrote extensive commentaries on various books of the NT in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, treats the account of Christ’s transfiguration in Matthew 17.1–9 in a mainly literal way. Starting with the reason why Christ chose these three disciples (Peter, John, and James) and what they saw on the mountain, he writes:

When you hear, ‘He was transfigured’, do not think that he had cast off his body at that moment, for his body remained in its own form, as you hear mention of his face and his clothing. But it appeared more resplendent, the divine exhibiting in small part its effulgence as much as they were able to see. This is why he had also previously spoken of the transfiguration as ‘the Kingdom’ of God, for it exhibited the indescribable majesty of his power, it showed that he is the true Son of the Father, and it had the aspect of the Second Coming on account of the ineffable radiance of Jesus’s face.

(Theophylact of Ochrid, *Explanation of Matthew* 17;  
trans. Stade 2008:1:145, with adjustments)

This Christological statement is followed by commentary, verse by verse, which interprets the event on Mount Tabor from an historical perspective, placing it within the context of the Gospel account of Christ’s life. Theophylact stresses the didactic purpose of the transfiguration, arguing that it helped to prepare the disciples for the forthcoming passion. The presence of Moses and Elijah revealed the prophetic foreshadowing of these events in the OT and their witness to God’s dispensation. It is striking that, at least

with regard to this passage, Theophylact's *Explanation of Matthew* shows close similarities with John Chrysostom's homiletic series on the same Gospel (PG 57–8). Theophylact chooses the same themes and exegetical method as the late fourth- and fifth-century preacher, following his structure but also abridging it. Theophylact's treatment of the synoptic accounts of the transfiguration (Mark 9.2–8; Luke 9.28–36) is similar in many ways to his work on Matthew. With regard to Mark, Theophylact provides literal exegesis of the passage, but follows this with a reference to the eschatological meaning of the transfiguration, as we see in the following lines:

We ought also to understand these words in a spiritual manner. After the end of this world, which was created in six days, if we are truly his disciples, Jesus will lead us also up to a high mountain, by which I mean heaven, and he will show himself to us in greater splendour. . . . (Theophylact, *Explanation of Mark* 9; trans. Stade 2008:2:73)

The variety of ways in which the synoptic accounts of Christ's transfiguration may be treated in Byzantine treatises or commentaries on this subject is striking. It is clear that commentators such as Maximus the Confessor and Theophylact of Ochrid felt free to interpret the text from literal, tropological, typological, and anagogical perspectives, depending on which message was most relevant to their audiences or readers. Patristic tradition provided a basis for each of these hermeneutical responses, also affirming that the Evangelists intended their narratives to be understood at various levels.

The surviving Byzantine commentaries on books of the OT display a similar flexibility with regard to exegetical method (Magdalino and Nelson 2010). Niketas David, for example, who produced a Commentary on the Psalms in the early tenth century, is innovative in offering a series of moral exhortations in connection with each text; indeed, such use of *paraenesis* represents a bridge between the genres of commentary and homily (Dorival 1981:254). Liturgical commentaries, which began to be produced from the late fifth century onward, offer another way of interpreting Scripture by means of the eucharistic rite, which represented a literal, moral, or anagogical re-enactment of the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Christ. Whereas Germanus I emphasized the historical basis for the Divine Liturgy even as these events are celebrated within an eternal timeframe (Meyendorff 1984), commentators from Dionysius the Areopagite to Symeon of Thessalonike focused more on its anagogical meaning (Bornert 1966).

One other form of commentary, which is even more original in its approach to the OT, is that of marginal illustration. Byzantine artists decorated many books of the Septuagint, including the Octateuch, the Prophets, and the Psalms, with illustrations that went far beyond merely literal methods of interpretation (Lowden 2010; Lowden 1992; Lowden 1988; Corrigan 1992). A well-known example, which is both Christological and polemical in its didactic intent, is the ninth-century Khludov Psalter, in which Christ being pierced by a spear on the cross is juxtaposed with the destruction of one of his icons—all inferred by the artist in relation to Psalm 68.22ff. (LXX): 'Let their table be a trap for them, a snare for their allies. . . .' Illustrators, like other interpreters of Scripture, read the OT—and especially the Psalms—from a Christological perspective. Miniatures

such as this convey to readers the ways in which God chastises both unfaithful Jews and current heretics who fail to follow his commandments or to recognize the saving incarnation of Christ, the Word.

Both literary and artistic commentaries on Scripture thus reveal a creative approach to exegesis, which involves the multiple senses, as outlined in patristic tradition, chosen in accordance with the didactic or theological purpose of individual interpreters. The freedom with which some exegetes, such as the illustrators of the Middle Byzantine Psalters, approach the Bible exceeds even the most allegorical interpretations of the patristic period. The justification for such creativity perhaps lies in a belief that the grace of the new dispensation allows Christians to engage with Scripture as a dynamic source of revelation that is continuing to work itself out both in history and within an eternal framework. We should qualify this statement, however, by noting the conservatism of monumental church decoration and icons, as opposed to manuscript illustration.

## BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AND THE BYZANTINE LAITY

---

This category is the most difficult to define in terms of literary and artistic genres; it is also impossible to treat it fully in a chapter of this length. It might nevertheless be useful to suggest some avenues for future research, since this is also a field that is in need of definition with regard to both methodology and sources. As we have already seen, Byzantine Christians encountered Scripture primarily in the context of liturgical celebration: they would hear Gospel pericopes read out loud on an annual basis in the offices and Divine Liturgy, along with readings drawn from the OT and the Pauline Epistles (Taft 2006; Cunningham 2016: esp. 193). It is the former, as we have seen, that were most often interpreted, by means of homilies or patristic readings, for the congregation; however, the influence of hymnography, with its intertextual and Christological synthesis of the OT and NT, should not be underestimated.

It is unclear, on the basis of surviving sources, where catechetical teaching of the laity occurred. It is possible that the surviving handbooks and epitomes functioned as private reading; however, some texts, such as the seventh-century *Questions and Answers* (*Erotapokriseis*) that are attributed to Anastasius of Sinai, indicate that such catechesis originated in a church setting—and indeed continued to be read out loud in that context (Volgers and Zamagni 2004; Richard and Munitiz 2006; Munitiz 2011; Munitiz 1988:74). The variety of topics, which relate to theology, the human condition, and pastoral issues involving both men and women, reflect lay concerns with regard to leading a Christian life in accordance with Scripture and ecclesial tradition. The majority of such sources display a fairly unsophisticated, and above all literal, approach to biblical exegesis. Biblical summaries, for example, attempt to elucidate historical chronology on the basis

of the dates that are provided in the various OT books from Genesis onward (Munitiz 1988:76; Finegan 1964).

In answer to pastoral questions relating to human sin and redemption, Anastasius of Sinai offers a combination of doctrine, biblical examples, and common sense in his answers. On being asked, 'If someone commits a great sin against someone else, and then afterwards goes off and as a sinner comes to repentance with the other and receives pardon from that person, has such a sinner been forgiven also by God?', he replies as follows:

If the one forgiving is a spiritual person or a worthy priest, perhaps forgiveness is given to such a person also by God; but if not, the one forgiving will have gained great merit, but the one forgiven is under obligation to repent before God. For Moses himself forgave his own sister, Maria, when she had mocked him, and yet she was struck by leprosy by God and sent into quarantine, and only then received forgiveness (cf. Numbers 12.1–15). Similarly, when the whole people sinned against him, Moses for his part forgave them, but when they failed to repent, God destroyed them (cf. Numbers 14.13–25)...

(Anastasius of Sinai, *qu. et. resp.*; trans. Munitiz 2011:133–4)

Anastasius sometimes engages in a form of historical biblical exegesis for the benefit of his interlocutors. After explaining, for example, that God sometimes works miracles by means of 'unworthy persons,' such as the ventriloquist woman who raised Samuel from the dead (cf. 1 Kgs (LXX)/1 Sam 28.11–12), the abbot goes on to say that this event truly occurred because, according to the Apostle Paul, "Death held sway from Adam until the time of Moses (or until the fullness of the Law) even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the disobedience" (Romans 5.15), (that is, even over the souls of holy men)' (Anastasius of Sinai, *qu. et. resp.*; trans. Munitiz 2011:175).

Such exchanges, if indeed they reflect real dialogue between the laity and dogmatic teachers or spiritual fathers, offer a level of scriptural exegesis that seeks merely to understand the literal meaning of biblical passages. Such an approach also emphasizes the unity of Scripture, with no disjunction admitted between teachings or commandments contained in the OT and NT. Where contradictions or incongruities occur, the teacher attempts to explain these by means of traditional Christian teaching. Above all, there is a recognition that God is entitled to act in any way that he sees fit; divine purpose can be assumed, but not always discerned by Christian commentators.

Further work in the field of lay Christian understanding of Scripture should involve study of catechetical treatises of all kinds, along with consideration of the biblical pericopes, hymns, and homilies which might have been accessible to the faithful in liturgical settings. Hagiography and collections of miracle stories also offer insights into the ways in which the Bible could be used to inspire, explain, or justify Christian behaviour. Byzantine clerics and teachers were adept at adjusting their didactic methods to the circumstances in which they found themselves; it is also clear that they recognized the limitations of Christians who had not benefited from extensive biblical or theological training.

## THE MONASTIC BACKGROUND

---

The Byzantine ascetic tradition, whether based in coenobitic or eremitical settings, owed much to the inspiration of the legendary ‘desert fathers’ who inhabited remote places in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. The treatises and manuals, often arranged into ‘centuries’ of chapters, combined with ‘Sayings’ and ‘Lives’ of early monastic teachers, provided inspiration for Byzantine monks even in the best-regulated communal monasteries (Burton-Christie 1993). Such texts also offered a uniquely monastic form of biblical interpretation, which was characterized by eschatological and existential preoccupations (Blowers 2009:192). Monks were instructed to reflect on their own approaching deaths and ensuing salvation or punishment (Athanasius, *v. Anton.* 15–19; John Climacus, *scal.* 5, Luibheid and Russell 1982:124–6), with both OT and NT passages being used to remind them of the final judgement. Scripture, according to such early ascetic writers, provided not only guidance on how to live a Christian life, but also apocalyptic warnings about the consequences of lax or sinful behaviour.

The Bible also provided ascetics with heroic models to follow, including not only Jesus Christ and his disciples, but also OT figures such as Moses and Elijah, along with many others. The concept of ‘outsiders’ who cut themselves off from the world and occupied a liminal space between creation and the divine world (Brown 1971), nourished by biblical tales of prophets, social outcasts, or persecuted believers, helped to promote the cults of such extreme monastic figures as the ‘stylites’—who continued to occupy isolated columns until as late as the eleventh century (Greenfield 2000). In spite of such respect for the more extreme forms of asceticism, however, Byzantine monasticism from about the sixth century onward was largely coenobitic (although not organized into formal ‘orders’ as in the West). The biblical precedent for this way of life, which had been worked out by fourth-century monastic leaders such as Basil of Caesarea, lay in the NT. Monks were enjoined, both in formal rules and in catechetical homilies, to seek a loving relationship with God and with their fellow monks in accordance with the teachings of the Gospels (Holmes 2000).

Monastic art, as opposed to that found in cathedrals or parish churches, often reflected the spiritual preoccupations of rich patrons and founders. Monastic churches contained the conventional cycle of the twelve main feasts of the Church, but might also provide narrative scenes from the Gospels or Lives of saints. They commemorated local saints, especially the martyrs or ascetics who were associated with the founding of the monastery and who represented role models for the resident monks or nuns. Changes in narrative styles of painting or mosaic design occurred in the course of the Byzantine centuries: late twelfth-century monastic art, as represented for example at the monastery at Nerezi in what is today Macedonia, exhibits an emotional quality that is lacking at earlier monasteries such as Hosios Loukas and Daphni in Greece (Cormack 2000:175). As in the case of texts intended for a monastic audience, monastic church decoration reflects above all an interest in literal or eschatological interpretation of Scripture; monks were expected to profit spiritually from their exposure to pictorial representations of Christ’s life and passion, along with those of his saints.

## CONCLUSION

---

Patristic influence on preachers, hymnographers, exegetes, artists, and many other mediators of biblical revelation to the Christian faithful became dominant in the Byzantine tradition from about the sixth century onward. ‘The holy fathers’, whose theology was recognized as authoritative at councils such as that of Chalcedon (451), could be quoted or summarized in preference to developing new approaches to biblical exegesis. This probably accounts for the fact that direct commentary on Scripture began to be replaced by compilations of patristic extracts, known as ‘chains’ or *catenae*—with a few exceptions such as the commentaries by Theophylact of Ochrid from the Middle Byzantine period (Louth 2008:854). This raises the question whether Byzantine commentators regarded the patristic inheritance as entirely unified in its understanding and interpretation of Scripture. Did this tradition represent a symphonic or a more contrapuntal concert of voices for Byzantine interpreters (Behr 2014:15)? It seems likely that, apart from those theologians who could be classed as ‘heretical’ on the basis of ecclesiastical councils, Byzantine exegetes accepted the variety of patristic styles of exegesis in the same way that they endorsed the multiple meanings that can be discerned in most biblical passages. As this chapter has demonstrated, literal, moral, or allegorical methods of interpretation began to be assigned to particular liturgical or didactic contexts in the course of the Byzantine centuries. Individual fathers, such as Gregory of Nazianzus or John Chrysostom, exerted influence within the ecclesial contexts on which they had focused their own attention. It is also noticeable that major theological preoccupations could shift in the course of the centuries, such that later liturgical writers and iconographers emphasized above all the Christological meaning of Scripture, as opposed to the Trinitarian or anthropological preoccupations that had predominated in earlier centuries.

The various contexts in which Byzantine biblical interpretation took place, including liturgical, scholarly, lay, and monastic settings, reveal differences both in subject matter and emphasis. Scriptural exegesis that took place in church, whether in preaching, hymnography, or art, tended increasingly to focus on the eternal timeframe that is celebrated in the Eucharist or in the major feasts, although penitential periods such as Lent could evoke instead both moral and eschatological reflection. The more literary genres of biblical commentary or theological treatise are characterized by literal, or historical, forms of exegesis, along with some tropological and eschatological reflection. The same is true of lay and monastic examples of exegesis that were produced throughout the Byzantine period; it is noticeable that commentators were keen to apply biblical revelation to daily life, as well as to remind their audiences or readers of the imminence of death and the need to prepare for the final judgement.

The Byzantine approach to Scripture was thus informed by the authoritative voice of patristic tradition. The fathers, guided by the Holy Spirit and by apostolic example, offered a dynamic approach that involved multiple ‘senses’ but recognized one underlying meaning and purpose in Scripture (Young 1997:29). Byzantine exegetes

attempted to preserve this sophisticated understanding of the Bible, even as they adapted its teachings to doctrinal, pastoral, or ascetic needs. Whereas modern Orthodox biblical scholars place great weight on the legacy of the neo-patristic synthesis that took place in the course of the twentieth century, they also owe much to the preservation and interpretation of patristic methods of biblical exegesis throughout the Byzantine period and beyond (Stylianopoulos 2008:29).

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

- Anastasius of Sinai, *Quaestiones et Responsiones*. Greek text: M. Richard and J. A. Munitiz (eds), CCG 59 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006). Eng. trans.: J. A. Munitiz, *Anastasios of Sinai, Questions and Answers*, Corpus Christianorum in Translation 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).
- Andrew of Crete, *Canon magnus*. Greek text: PG 97.1329–85. Eng. trans.: Mother Katherine and Mother Thekla, *The Great Canon of St Andrew and the Life of St Mary of Egypt* (Toronto: Peregrina, 1997).
- Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 38 on the Theophany*. Greek text with Fr. trans.: C. Moreschini (ed.), *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 38–41*, SC 358 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990), 104–48. Eng. trans.: B. E. Daley, SJ, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 117–27.
- Gregory Palamas, *Homiliae*. Greek text: PG 151.9–550. Eng. trans.: C. Veniamin, *St Gregory Palamas: The Homilies* (Waymart, PA: Mt Tabor Publishing, 2009).
- Gregory of Sinai, *Sermon on the Transfiguration*. Greek text with Eng. trans.: D. Balfour, ‘St Gregory the Sinaïte, Discourse on the Transfiguration’, *Theologia* 52.4–54.1 (1981, 1983); (repr. London: Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius).
- John of Damascus, *Carmen in transfigurationem domini*. Eng. trans.: Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, *Canon on the Transfiguration*, in *The Festal Menaion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 482–95.
- Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguorum liber*. Greek text and Eng. trans.: N. Conostas, *Maximus the Confessor, On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2014).
- Origen, *De principiis*. Eng. trans.: G. W. Butterworth, *On First Principles* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973).
- Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakia*. Greek text: P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963). Eng. trans. (Christological kontakia only): Archimandrite E. Lash, *St Romanos, Kontakia on the Life of Christ* (San Francisco, London and Pymble: HarperCollins, 1995).
- Theophylact of Ochrid, *Enarratio in Evangelii*. Greek text: PG 123.143–1348. Eng. trans.: C. Stade, *Blessed Theophylact’s Explanation of the New Testament*, 4 vols (House Springs, MO: Chrysostom Press, 2008).

### Scholarship

- Antonopoulou, T. (1997). *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: Brill).
- Beck, H.-G. (1959). *Kirche und Theologische Literatur im Byzantinischen Reich*. Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaften XII.2.1 (Munich: C. H. Beck).

- Behr, J. (2014). 'Reading the Fathers Today', in J. A. Mihoc and L. Aldea (eds), *A Celebration of Living Theology: A Festschrift in Honour of Andrew Louth* (London: Bloomsbury), 7–19.
- Blowers, P. M. (1991). *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor: An Investigation of the Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Bornert, R. (1966). *Les Commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie du VIIe au XVe siècle* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines).
- Brown, P. (1971). 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *JRS* 61: 80–101.
- Burton-Christie, D. (1993). *The Word in the Desert* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Coticello, C. G., and Coticello, V. (2002) (eds). *La Théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, vol. 2: *XIII<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols).
- Cormack, R. (2000). *Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Corrigan, K. (1992). *Visual Polemics in the Ninth-Century Byzantine Psalters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Cunningham, M. B. (2004). 'The Meeting of the Old and the New: The Typology of Mary the Theotokos in Byzantine Homilies and Hymns', in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *The Church and Mary*, *Studies in Church History* 39 (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer), 52–62.
- Cunningham, M. B. (2011). 'Messages in Context: The Reading of Sermons in Byzantine Churches and Monasteries', in A. Lymberopoulou (ed.), *Byzantium: Visions, Messages and Meanings. Festschrift for Prof Leslie Brubaker on her 60th Birthday* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing), 83–98.
- Cunningham, M. B. (2016). 'The Interpretation of the New Testament in Byzantine Preaching: Mediating an Encounter with the Word', in D. Krueger and R. Nelson (eds), *The New Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection), 189–201.
- Daley, B. E., SJ (2013). *Light on the Mountain: Greek Patristic and Byzantine Homilies on the Transfiguration of the Lord* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Devreesse, R. (1959). *Les Anciens Commentateurs grecs de l'Octateuch et Rois*, ST 201 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana).
- Devreesse, R. (1970). *Les Anciens Commentateurs grecs des Psaumes*, ST 264 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana).
- Dorival, G. (1981). 'Le Commentaire sur les Psaumes de Nicétas David (début du 10<sup>e</sup> siècle)', *REB* 39: 272–300.
- Ehrhard, A. (1937–52). *Überlieferung und Bestand der Hagiographischen und Homiletischen Literatur der Griechischen Kirche von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*, vols 1–3, TU 50–2 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs Verlag).
- Elliott, J. K. (1993) (ed.). *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Finegan, J. (1964). *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Forsyth, G. H., and Weitzmann, K. (1965–73). *The Monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press).
- Gaydor-Whyte, S. (2017). *Theology and Poetry in Early Byzantium: The Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Greenfield, R. P. H. (2000) (trans.). *The Life of Lazaros of Mt Galesion: An Eleventh-Century Pillar Saint* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library).
- Guy, P.-M. (1966–7). 'La Question du système des lectures de la liturgie byzantine', in *Miscellanea liturgica in onore di sua eminenza il Cardinale Giacomo Lercaro, etc.*, 2 vols (Rome, Tournai, Paris, and New York: Desclée), 2:251–61.

- Holmes, A. (2000). *A Life Pleasing to God: The Spirituality of the Rules of St Basil* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd).
- Kannengiesser, C. (2006) (ed.). *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill).
- Kotter, B., OSB (1988) (ed.). *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 3, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 29 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter).
- Lash, Archimandrite E. (2008). 'Biblical Interpretation in Worship', in M. B. Cunningham and E. Theokritoff (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 35–48.
- Lauro, E. A. D. (2005). *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature).
- Louth, A. (1996). *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge).
- Louth, A. (2008). 'Theological Literature', in E. Jeffreys with J. Haldon and R. Cormack (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 853–61.
- Lowden, J. (1988). *Illuminated Prophet Books: A Study of Byzantine Manuscripts of the Major and Minor Prophets* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press).
- Lowden, J. (2010). 'Illustrated Octateuch Manuscripts: A Byzantine Phenomenon', in P. Magdalino and R. Nelson (eds), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks), 107–52.
- Luibheid, C., and Russell, N. (1982) (trans.). *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (London: SPCK).
- Malherbe, A. J., and Ferguson, E. (1978) (trans.). *Gregory of Nyssa. The Life of Moses* (New York, Ramsey, and Toronto: Paulist Press).
- Martens, P. W. (2012). *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Meyendorff, P. (1984) (ed. and trans.). *St Germanus of Constantinople, On the Divine Liturgy* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Ouspensky, L., and Lossky, V. (1983). *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Rouwhorst, G. (2013). 'The Liturgical Reading of the Bible in Early Eastern Christianity: The Protohistory of the Byzantine Lectionary', in K. Spronk, G. Rouwhorst, and S. Royé (eds), *A Catalogue of Byzantine Manuscripts in their Liturgical Context: Challenges and Perspectives. Collected Papers resulting from the Expert Meeting of the Byzantine Manuscripts Programme held at the PthU in Kampen, The Netherlands, on 6th–7th November 2009* (Turnhout: Brepols), 155–72.
- Simonetti, M. (1994). *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh/New York: T. & T. Clark).
- Stylianopoulos, T. (2008). 'Scripture and Tradition in the Church', in M. B. Cunningham and E. Theokritoff (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 21–34.
- Taft, R. F., SJ (1984). *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press).
- Taft, R. F., SJ (1992). *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press).
- Taft, R. F., SJ (2006). *Through their Own Eyes: Liturgy as the Byzantines Saw It* (Berkeley: InterOrthodox Press).
- Talley, T. J. (1986). *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press).

- Tsironis, N. (1998). *The Lament of the Virgin Mary from Romanos the Melode to George of Nicomedia: An Aspect of the Development of the Marian Cult* (Ph.D. Thesis, King's College London).
- Tsironis, N. (2005). 'From Poetry to Liturgy: The Cult of the Virgin in the Middle Byzantine Era', in M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate), 91–9.
- Vikan, G. (1982). *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library).
- Volgers, A., and Zamagni, C. (2004) (eds). *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context. Proceedings of the Utrecht Colloquium, 13–14 October 2003* (Leuven: Peeters).
- Weitzmann, K. (1978). *The Icon* (New York: George Braziller).

### Suggested Reading

- Blowers, P. M. (2009). 'Eastern Orthodox Biblical Interpretation', in A. J. Hauser and D. F. Watson (eds), *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 2: *The Medieval Through the Reformation Periods* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 172–200.
- Krueger, D. (2014). *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Krueger, D., and Nelson, R. (2016) (eds). *The New Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection).
- Lowden, J. (1992). *The Octateuchs: A Study of Illustrated Byzantine Manuscripts* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press).
- Magdalino, P., and Nelson, R. (2010) (eds). *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library).
- Munitiz, J. A. (1988). 'Catechetical Teaching Aids in Byzantium', in J. Chrysostomides (ed.), *Kathegetria: Essays Presented to Joan Hussey for Her 80th Birthday* (Camberley: Porphyrogenitus Press), 69–83.
- Theokritoff, E. (2005). 'Praying the Scriptures in Orthodox Worship', in S. T. Kimbrough, Jr (ed.), *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press), 73–87.
- Young, F. M. (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Zarras, N. (2016). 'Narrating the Sacred Story: New Testament Cycles in Middle and Late Byzantine Church Decoration', in Krueger and Nelson, *The New Testament in Byzantium*, 239–75.

## CHAPTER 45

---

# RECEPTION IN THE RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

---

ESTHER CHUNG-KIM

## INTRODUCTION

---

ONE of the most notable efforts to retrieve early Christian biblical interpretation emerged with the Renaissance and Reformation movements in late medieval and early modern Europe. This impressive retrieval had its roots in the medieval period, but expanded beyond specific treatises and tracts leading to extensive collections of ancient works. These two movements made early biblical interpretation more accessible than ever before and shaped the educational curriculum across European universities. While this retrieval may appear as a monolithic swell in the rediscovery of ancient sources, the reason for this renewed vigour was multifaceted, resulting from dynamic forces of various motivations, ranging from gaining broad literary erudition to initiating criticism of established hierarchies and calling for church reforms. This chapter investigates how the revival of Renaissance learning and the spread of Reformation movements shaped the legacies of patristic exegesis.

Concerning the impact of Renaissance humanism on the Reformation, many scholars recognized that humanism was integral, if not necessary, to the success of the Reformation. In particular, scholars have often noted the contributions that the Renaissance made to the Reformation, prompted by the accepted dictum that ‘without humanism, there would be no Reformation’ (Moeller 1959:46–61). Since then, other scholars have reversed the enquiry, noting the impact of the Reformation movements on Renaissance humanism by recognizing the broader impact of humanism mediated through religious reform (Spitz 1988:403). More recently, Erika Rummel has argued that humanism ‘was coopted, perhaps even exploited’ by Protestant reformers and Catholic reactionaries so that the Reformation truncated the humanist agenda, leading to the confessionalization of

humanism (Rummel 2000:4). Ultimately, they remained distinctive movements because of their different objectives. While Protestant education focused on learning doctrine and languages to produce citizens who would serve God and the state, the humanist education strove toward an encyclopedic knowledge for the 'fulfillment of the individual's potential' (Rummel 2000:6). While the comparison of these twin movements has been explored from many angles, one area that deserves greater examination is their reception of early biblical interpretation.

To that end, Arnoud Visser's *Reading Augustine in the Reformation* explores the reception of Erasmus' edition of Augustine by Reformation leaders (Visser 2011:31). Like Rummel, Visser recognizes a modified, highly selective use of humanist scholarship on the church fathers in the case of Erasmus' edition of Augustine. Visser argues that in the hands of the reformers, Augustine's works are mined for extractions of supporting evidence for confessional goals. However, the confessionalization of humanism does not explain the whole story. In the midst of polemics and debates over highly contested issues, Protestant reformers and Catholic controversialists extricated fragments of humanist scholarship for doctrinal legitimizing, but they also relied on and passed on humanist scholarship.

Unlike Rummel, Visser qualifies the confessionalization of humanism by describing examples where Leuven Catholics genuinely copied Erasmus' words verbatim even though their editions were meant to be a foil to Erasmus' edition of Augustine (Visser 2010:100). In addition, Irena Backus highlights humanism as a cultural influence on Reformed leaders such as Heinrich Bullinger, who saw humanism and reform as complementary and sharing methods of discourse, such as the insistence on the authority of ancient biblical and patristic sources over medieval scholastic authorities, the importance of philology in commenting on authoritative texts, and the rhetorical construction of arguments (Backus 2007:641).

While the extensive interplay between the Renaissance and Reformation thinkers is apparent, a comparison between the early Christian biblical interpretation among Renaissance humanists and Protestant reformers demonstrates that they had different goals from the outset. Occupational priorities as well as political and religious loyalties informed the points of conflict between humanists and Protestant or Catholic churchmen, especially in the area of biblical interpretation. Although religious reformers accepted the humanist evaluation that in order to be recognized as a theologian, knowledge of the ancient commentaries was a prerequisite (Wengert 1998:37), they diverged in their overarching purpose for retrieving patristic exegesis. Humanists saw their role primarily as linguist-scholars, while clergy prioritized their goals primarily as ministers, preachers, and theologians. While this distinction can be misconstrued as mutually exclusive or oppositional, it helps to explain the different objectives in reading the church fathers. In reality, many religious reformers accepted humanism and its contributions, but they disagreed with the philosophical and theological decisions made by humanists in the interpretation of the NT (Wengert 1998:11). Hence they differed on how to understand the contributions of the early Christian writers in their contemporary debates about religious meaning and practice.

The most significant effect of studying the ancient texts of early Christian writers was a deeper appreciation of history and the unavoidable realization of diversity within the Christian tradition. While fifteenth- and sixteenth-century writers knew of the early church fathers from their predecessors, they were becoming more aware of the distinctions between Greek and Latin fathers, as well as variations in ancient texts. Christian humanists and reformers devoted much energy to recovering and reading patristic exegesis for their programmes of reform. With the unfolding of the European Reformations, much of patristic scholarship, especially by the second half of the sixteenth century, took on a Catholic or Protestant flavour in the midst of confessional disagreements. Nevertheless, educated clergy and scholars, Catholic and Protestant, examined humanist editions of patristic writings to highlight areas of continuity and to justify points of discontinuity and disagreement.

## RENAISSANCE HUMANISM

---

Arising in the fourteenth century and gaining momentum in the fifteen and sixteenth centuries, 'humanism' refers to a new kind of scholarship that valued classical sources, both Christian and non-Christian. Humanists exercised diverse approaches in advancing their scholarly programmes through translations, critical editions, commentaries, works on linguistics and grammar, and works of poetry. Favouring ancient sources, expanding historical and literary knowledge, and exuding confidence in human potential, the humanist approach greatly influenced theological study'. Early humanists were active copyists and scribes, and this work of transmission, along with the development of textual criticism, was one of the most notable contributions of the Renaissance humanists (Kristeller 1988:7). The collating, collecting, accruing, and reading of multiple manuscripts led to the comparison of texts, 'where philological analysis and historical contextualization could seriously undermine traditional practices and beliefs' (Visser 2011:30). In the process, humanists tried to emend texts and correct the readings of the manuscripts based on their study of multiple versions and of the historical context, sometimes discovering false attributions. The most noted (or notorious) example was Lorenzo Valla's discovery that the *Donation of Constantine*, which had previously served as the basis for establishing ecclesiastical authority, was a forgery (Valla 2007).

While some Greek patristic writings had been translated during late ancient and medieval times, many more were translated during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Humanists added many non-Aristotelian Greek philosophical texts by Plato, Plotinus, and other Neoplatonists, as well as the Stoics and Sceptics, and continued producing new editions of other well-known Greek authors, including the church fathers, Aristotle, and other ancient sources on astronomy, mathematics, and medicine (Kristeller 1988:13). As a result, most of the classical Greek corpus became available to the West through critical editions of the original texts alongside updated Latin and vernacular translations (Kristeller 1988:14). Because Renaissance biblical scholars and Reformation thinkers

pursued a renewed interest in the history of the Church (Grafton 2012:12), they considered the recorded writings of the ancient Christian tradition as an intellectual gold mine. Yet their findings did not end in purely academic musings, but instead fuelled religious reform.

The recovery work of humanists helped to craft a cultural history by revising the written record of early texts, which had broader ramifications for ethics and spirituality. The Renaissance humanists took their role as transmitters of classical traditions seriously; in doing so, they made sure that history would not be lost, but recovered and made relevant for a new age. In particular, Renaissance biblical scholarship reflected a significant moment in the interpretation of early modern culture because such biblical scholarship was not confined to margins of intellectual circles; rather, scholars created 'a close-knit textual community' built upon a network of personal and professional connections from central Europe to France, the Low Countries, and England (Shuger 1994:13). Hence, biblical erudition proved a common language for international affairs, since Renaissance princes and statesmen shared an interest in sacred knowledge, which fed the appetites of Europe's best and brightest minds (Shuger 1994:17; Grafton 1983:1). The close connection between the renewed study of Graeco-Roman classics and the early church fathers rose from a desire to study early exemplars considered holy teachers and defenders of the faith. Hence, the high level of interest in ancient pagan literature was closely tied to the matching interest in ancient Christian literature (Rice 1988:17). With this enthusiasm to find new role models in history and a firm commitment to Christian values and morality, the humanists attempted to reconcile the pre-existing tensions between Christianity and classical pagan culture by joining piety and wisdom with eloquence.

Building on the earlier work of Italian humanists, two key northern humanists who contributed to the retrieval of early biblical interpretation were Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (also known as Faber Stapulensis) and Desiderius Erasmus. Lefèvre d'Étaples was a French humanist known for his study of patristic thought, philosophy, and medieval spirituality. After publishing on the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Pseudo-Dionysius, and finally Nicholas of Cusa, Lefèvre turned to the study of the Bible as commentator, then as preacher, and finally as translator (Bedouelle 2008:118). For example, his writings included fifty-two weekly sermons on the epistles and Gospels (Lefèvre 1976). Lefèvre has been portrayed as a proto-reformer, an early French reformer, a Catholic humanist, or as a Nicodemite. Perspective makes all the difference in this assessment because Lefèvre's own writings and relationships allowed him to be elusive about his confessional stance in Reformation France.

In the dedicatory epistle to the reader in his edition of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, Lefèvre proposed a 'hierarchy of authority among sacred writings', in which the Gospels took precedence over the rest of the OT and NT, and then the writings of the disciples of the Apostles, which were important for the formation of the Church, such as the works of Pseudo-Dionysius who was assumed to be Paul's convert (Lefèvre 1503:11). Although inclined toward harmony and less toward polemic, Lefèvre saw the basis for moral reform in the study of Scripture. He joined Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros (who compiled the Complutensian Polyglot Bible in Alcalá) and Erasmus in their conviction that a

return to the Scriptures constituted an integral role in reforming both monastic and lay religious practice. His overarching purpose was to emphasize the moral message of Scripture as the building block of Christian devotion (Levi 2002:212).

As a departure from the methods of the scholastics, Lefèvre prioritized the path to greater knowledge as an enlightened growth from sensible knowledge to a mindful contemplation of God (Rice 1962:127). An important part of that ascent was a greater understanding of the church fathers' descriptions of their spiritual experiences. French Renaissance scholars were convinced that their translations and commentaries of the patristic texts would reveal the fathers in a new light since they could boast that the fathers were now being read and understood correctly (Rice 1962:128). Closely linked to this proper knowledge of the early fathers, humanists recognized that classically trained ancient fathers stood as 'the best expositors of the Christian message' (D'Amico 1988:357). The recurring humanist concern for improved moral behaviour led them to strive for logical presentations of Christian theology, not for the sake of being accurate in terminology, but for the sake of motivating change in attitudes and behaviours. For humanists, the goal of theology was to convince hearers to maintain moral standards in the midst of an active life in the world because the asceticism of St Francis of Assisi—'giving all to the poor and serving only God—clashed with the need of a man to feed his family and serve his state.' Consequently, the Franciscan ideal did not fit with workers trying to make a living and could not be a suitable model for 'men with familial and civic responsibilities' (D'Amico 1988:350–1).

The descriptive moniker of 'humanist' did not necessitate a dismissal or rejection of Christianity; rather, it articulated the distinctive concern within this movement for the dignity of humanity. The optimistic view of human capability became a way to coalesce both classical and Christian values that had previously seemed at odds with one another. The humanists were convinced that good Christians would engage in civic duties and thus become a force for good in the world (D'Amico 1988:359). In addition, the writings of the church fathers seemed to support certain classical themes that saw the unique aspects of humanity as 'the subject worthy of salvation' (D'Amico 1988:359). This recognition of human capacity was related to the belief in human authority to interpret divine Scriptures and to challenge other interpretations that required correction. This confidence in one's ability to understand divine things, despite occasional errors and mistakes, coincided with demands for reform, change, and improvement.

For the Renaissance humanists in the fifteenth century and more broadly among reform-minded thinkers in the sixteenth century, the ancient Church remained the common referential model for reform. Erasmus, the premier humanist of northern Europe, demonstrated how a patristic agenda could be both a scholarly exercise and a platform for religious reform. Because Erasmus deemed the fathers neglected models of erudition and ethics, he strove to revive and restore them, starting with Jerome and ending with Origen (Erasmus 1516:5). Erasmus preferred to employ an irenic approach to the fathers, which highlighted the sound teachings rather than the errors (Scheck 2016:101–2). The call for reform embodied two aspects: first, to restore the Church to the image of its ancient holiness, and second, to use the historical model

as the normative standard by which to assess the condition of the contemporary Church, which resulted in critical judgements against the decadence and abuses in the Church, worldliness and ignorance of clergy, and the tepidness of monastic observance (Rice 1988:25). Consequently, Renaissance humanists joined personal piety with moral probity by championing a learned piety that would guide an educated laity (Rice 1988:26). In the process of considering how piety could be practised by educated thinkers, Erasmus admired the fathers—such as Origen, Ambrose, and Augustine—because he believed that the intellectual treasures in the ancient works would incite a desire to study the Holy Scripture (Erasmus 1503:127).

In the early sixteenth century, as the literary humanist movement was reaching its fullest expression in northern Europe, other major events unfolded that would complicate the humanist agenda. The call for religious reform initiated by the humanist scholars was now arising from other corners of Latin Christendom, such as Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon in Wittenberg, Johannes Oecolampadius in Basel, Ulrich Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich, Martin Bucer in Strasbourg, John Calvin in Geneva, and Thomas Cranmer in England. This historical context where humanism coincided with new strands of reform, leading to the establishment of separate religious confessions and boundaries, meant that Renaissance humanists such as Erasmus walked a fine line between Catholic traditionalists and Lutheran critics.

An example of this delicate balance can be seen in the reception of Augustine's works. By the late medieval period, the pre-eminence of Augustine was firmly established, although what scholars meant by 'Augustinian' was up for debate. Augustine's writings dominated the discussion in religious literature around issues such as divine illumination, divine knowledge, just war theory, and the dominion of grace. The question was 'not whether one accepted or rejected Augustine, but how Augustine was to be interpreted' (Saak 1997:372). Sources of rigorous scholarship and intellectual erudition originated not only from university professors but also from religious members of the Augustinian Order—both the *magistri* in the universities and the *lectores* in the Order's schools who epitomized the renaissance of Augustine initiated by Gregory of Rimini (Saak 1997:379, 384). The earlier development of the quotation technique led to a scholarly emphasis on precise quotation as in the works of John of Basel (d. 1392), who added exact references to the original text as opposed to the indirect citations found in Lombard. John of Basel also cited Augustinian texts not found in previously compiled source collections. This historical-critical attitude toward citing Augustine among the fourteenth-century Augustinians produced Bartholomew of Urbino's massive 1345 compilation of the *Milleloquium S. Augustini*, clearly the apex of Augustine scholarship until the later Amerbach edition (Saak 1997:381).

When Johannes Amerbach produced his first translated edition of Augustine's *Opera omnia* in 1506, this work signalled a major shift in the access to the full text of virtually all of Augustine's works (Visser 2011:26). Despite Erasmus' praise for Amerbach's achievement, Erasmus of Rotterdam defended the superiority not of Augustine, but of Jerome as *summus theologus* and as the model for the humanist ideal (Saak 1997:367). Part of the reason for this decision was his awareness of Luther's claims for Augustine

as his champion for reform, since Erasmus clearly opposed Luther on the question of human will. Erasmus advocated the freedom of the will to support his conviction that humans retained, albeit in limited form, the capacity to do good and to choose the morally righteous option, even though he could admit that most did not do this. When Erasmus' edition of Augustine appeared in 1529, it was part of a series in which Erasmus had completed editions of various patristic writers, such as Cyprian, Arnobius, Hilary, Chrysostom, Irenaeus, Ambrose, and Athanasius. Together, these editions were part of a larger purpose to revive the spirituality of Christian Antiquity.

Erasmus' references to Augustine portrayed a mixed response. While Erasmus could laud the church father's pastoral skills, he could also criticize Augustine's doctrinal stance. As an editor and interpreter of Augustine, Erasmus employed a variety of reading strategies, both affirming and criticizing Augustine at different times. Because Erasmus' literary output focused on the work of rehabilitating opponents of Augustine, the humanist found an 'unbridgeable gulf' distancing him from Augustine and indirectly challenging Augustine's long-standing authority with a 'desacralized reading' of Augustine's works (Mellinghoff-Bourgerie 1998:74). Yet this claim cannot be applied universally since Erasmus' grammatical analysis of Augustine unabashedly included ethical, moral, and pastoral concerns (Visser 2011:38).

Through the interchange of ideas via his network of personal contacts, Erasmus' edition of Augustine demonstrated the ongoing interaction between the intellectual culture of Renaissance humanism and the religious climate of the Reformation. Erasmus' edition was technically complicated and politically sensitive because of the 1520s theological debates in which Augustine became the key figure pulled into a fiercely contested space (Visser 2008:67). The curial oversight of religious literature through the *Index of Forbidden Books* affected the editorial decisions by humanist scholars, such as Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives, so that such pressures nudged them to largely avoid or limit controversial topics (Visser 2011:39). For example, the majority of comments that were deleted in Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives's editions dealt with anti-clerical criticisms (Visser 2011:43). Consequently, political circumstances, in addition to cultural norms and personal tastes, helped to define the historical perspectives of humanists (Grafton 1991:12–22).

In the work of translating, editing, and preparing critical editions, Renaissance humanists opened the door to new ways of interpreting old texts. Protestant reformers in their roles as teachers and preachers preferred rhetoric over dialectic, which reflected an element of the humanist anthropology, especially as deliverers of the spoken word to preach, teach, and persuade (Spitz 1988:394). The impact of humanism on the Protestant Reformation is multifaceted, but its influence on the expansion of universal education and rhetoric, especially in the preaching and teaching of the Scriptures, cannot be missed.

On the eve of the Reformation, Scripture and tradition were considered as working in tandem, rather than at odds with one another. According to Thompson, Scripture was the primary measuring stick to decide questions of doctrine, but its authority was not considered oppositional to church teachings nor was revelation 'necessarily confined to its pages' (Thompson 2005:30). While the literary movement of Renaissance thinkers

may seem like a minor event isolated among intellectual elites, it turned out to have surprisingly major consequences. The broader impact of humanist scholarship in its main work of retrieval even proved to have a subversive effect, especially in regards to ecclesiastical authority.

## PROTESTANT RECEPTION IN CONTINENTAL EUROPE

---

The prevailing reason for this renewed concern for the ancient past was the pervading view that the ancients were closer to the origins of Christianity and thus had greater access to pure, pristine forms of religious doctrine and practice. Yet critical studies of ancient writings demonstrated wide variations in doctrine among different schools of thought, Greek and Latin exegesis, and sometimes even within a single writer who changed his mind. As part of this criticism, reformers highlighted certain church fathers as the best representation of the early Church or called for a new interpretation of misunderstood fathers. Some scholars, in their extensive reading of the fathers, began to question the authenticity of authorship based on literary style or historical context. Consequently, Catholics and Protestants exhibited a deep interest in history. The 'omnipresence of history' (Backus 2003:3) would have been palpable among the educated and religious circles as students, scholars, and religious thinkers would regularly come across references to the ancients by studying the ancient sources or reading compilations and anthologies of ancient writings. The value placed on studying the past led to an understanding that the ancients carried a type of authority that would challenge existing authorities. Contemporary critics were able to criticize the dichotomy between how things are now by noticing how things once were.

In the midst of conflicting views, the question of authority was becoming an acute one with challenges arising from new interpretations of Scripture by former Catholics now turned Protestants. Where would the ultimate authority to decide religious matters reside? With Scripture, a general council, the pope, a combination of a general council and the pope, or another outside authority? Establishing Scripture as the primary authority meant that literate people could read and interpret Scripture to determine what Scripture said, thereby in effect creating multiple sources of diffused authorities. In the effort to decide on the best interpretation of Scripture, the work of the early church fathers rose to prominence. Traditional sources of authority supplied by ancient writers became endorsements for minority views on issues of contested doctrine and practice. This does not mean that the reading of ancient texts only served a functional role, that is, only for the purpose of proof-texting without any substantive reconsideration or discovery. Nevertheless, polemical concerns fostered a greater interest in the church fathers, even if selective.

Some early reformers, such as Martin Luther, emphasized the sufficient validity of biblical support while other reformers, including Luther's colleague Melanchthon, were shaped by a humanist heritage that sought to bolster their biblical interpretation with historical evidence from the church fathers. For Melanchthon, the ministers of the Word handed down right doctrine through a lineage of good teachers as interpreters of the gospel (Fraenkel 1961). This meant that the Protestant emphasis on the primacy of scriptural authority did not necessitate indifference toward tradition (Thompson 2005:90). Because they prioritized the work of interpreting Scripture, they sought the wisdom of ancient voices that would help clarify the meaning of the sacred text. Likewise, English use of the fathers, ranging from Thomas More and John Colet to Richard Hooker, reflected a historical perspective that owed its origins to Renaissance humanism. For example, Colet wanted to remind the Church of its ancient religion and urge a return to the ways of 'the church of the Apostles, the church under Roman persecution, the church of the Desert Fathers and the church of Nicene orthodoxy' (Nodes 2014:556). Building on the work of humanists (although not always in agreement with all their conclusions), Protestant reformers utilized the retrieval of early biblical interpretation to augment and guide their understanding of Scripture. For example, Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563), a reformer in the cities of Augsburg and Berne, summarized the common Protestant rationale for reading the fathers when he described the study of the Bible and the study of the fathers as complementary. The fathers were helpful because their biblical scholarship could clarify difficult passages in Scripture, their doctrinal clarity could help recognize false doctrines, and their godly lives could serve as examples of dedication (Farmer 1997:37, 46). Although considered fundamentally less authoritative than the Word and the Spirit, the fathers represented the authority and succession of the Church's teachings along with Scripture. Melanchthon demonstrated his respect for the ancient tradition when he compiled a list of early church fathers to be included in his Romans commentary, and Bucer, and a notable reformer in Strasbourg, repeatedly recognized the sources of Christian knowledge as Holy Scripture and the writings of the holy fathers (Melanchthon 1539:585–642; Bucer 1550:286).

For Luther, exemplary church fathers were valuable because they engaged in the difficult work of expounding Scripture. Luther advocated the inclusion of the ancient fathers into university curricula and urged the extensive study of patristic texts. In his *Lectures on Romans*, he openly drew on Augustine, particularly his anti-Pelagian tracts.

In this contested arena of interpretation, Martin Luther and Andreas Karlstadt embraced the scholarly contributions of Amerbach's edition and identified Augustine as their ancient champion. For Luther and Karlstadt, as well as other Protestants, the anti-Pelagian Augustine became heralded as the best version of the revered church father (Saak 1997:368).

This anti-Pelagian perspective of Augustine became one of the oft-repeated portrayals of Augustine for Protestant reformers, in contrast to Erasmus, who favoured Jerome over Augustine (Schulze 2001:577). Although Luther praised fathers such as Augustine, Hilary, and Cyril for their exposition of the Gospel of John, he judged Jerome, Cyprian, and Origen as teaching poorly or not at all on Christ (Schulze 2001:615). For Luther, the

fathers could err in their theological work of interpreting the Scripture and therefore invited correction. In his *Answer to Latomus* in 1521, Luther recognized the point of contention concerning whether the fathers illuminated or obscured the Scriptures. Even when Luther criticized the conclusions of some of the fathers, he argued that he was indeed following the fathers, since he was following the dictum of using clear places of Scriptures to explain obscure passages (Luther 1521:8:99). In other words, Luther could claim to follow the fathers even when he did not accept their opinions, since they themselves did not consider their opinions as binding articles of faith. Luther's contention with the fathers often mirrored his criticism of contemporary opponents.

While Luther depended on particular sayings of the church fathers, especially anti-Pelagian Augustine, against his Catholic opponents, the use of the fathers increased in the debates among Protestants themselves. In 1525 Ulrich Zwingli challenged Luther's view of how Christ is present in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper with Zwingli's opinion that it is rather a symbolic representation of Christ's presence. In his *Commentary on True and False Religion*, Zwingli incorporates selections from Tertullian, Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Theophylact, Hilary, Jerome, and Origen to challenge Luther's position of real presence (Chung-Kim 2011:18). In the same year, Johannes Oecolampadius, a Protestant reformer in Basel, published *On the Genuine Interpretation of Christ's Words*, in which Oecolampadius included passages of various church fathers as supporting evidence for his position of a figurative interpretation of Christ's body in the bread, against Luther's view. Oecolampadius hoped to win over his former pupils and friends working as pastors and preachers in the Schwabian region, but these church leaders ended up supporting the Lutheran views defended by their colleague, Johannes Brenz, who had compiled and published *Syngramma Suevicum* in response to Oecolampadius. In this work, Brenz included the contributions of fourteen Swabian preachers and questioned Oecolampadius' use of the church fathers as a way to criticize Oecolampadius' figurative interpretation (Brenz 1970:244–5). In his debates against English bishop Stephen Gardiner, Thomas Cranmer highlighted the language of remembering and thanksgiving even as he spoke of a real presence in the Eucharist (Cranmer 1846:136; Cranmer 1548). The divisions over the Eucharist served as the catalyst for a re-evaluation not simply of what the fathers said, but of how the church fathers should be applied to contemporary religious debates.

It soon became apparent that most calls for reforms and arguments advocating for these reforms depended on a particular understanding of history (Cameron 2012:27). The early church fathers were put forth as the pioneering Christian interpreters of Scripture and of the Church's rule of faith in contrast to the later innovations and eventual deviations that sprouted up in subsequent centuries. This common narrative was often repeated to explain the necessity of the Reformations. The reformers elevated the importance of history as a way to progress, and insisted on looking at a particular time in history to interpret the Bible and communicate Protestant emphases of justification, grace, and faith. Despite their criticism of the received medieval tradition, reformers held the earlier traditions of the Church in high esteem. The surge of interest in the patristic period,

initiated by the humanists, now vigorously fuelled the Protestant criticisms aimed at reforming the Church in the sixteenth century. In this context, Protestant reformers not only criticized the fathers, albeit selectively, but also utilized the fathers as tools to criticize their contemporaries.

## Appropriation of Fathers on Polemics

Many Protestants, whether Lutheran, Calvinist, Swiss Reformed, or Anglican, employed the church fathers in their argumentation with other thinkers. This common thread among the leaders of the Reformation revealed the broad application of invoking the church fathers as a source of authority, especially in the context of emerging religious debates. Although citing ancient authorities was the predominant form of medieval argumentation, Protestant reformers reframed what the fathers meant by giving ancient texts immediate applicability in the sixteenth century. In other words, while interest in the ancient Christian writers was not new, their works were being recalled in a new way—to provide ancestral roots for a newly consolidated Lutheran, or Reformed, tradition that could compete with the formation of other churches. For example, the heated debates between Calvin and Joachim Westphal in the 1550s revealed that Calvin, as the leading Genevan reformer, and Westphal, as a spokesperson for Gnesio-Lutherans, called on the fathers for support and also as ‘weapons of attack’ (Chung-Kim 2011:59).

Lutheran and Calvinist reformers followed their medieval predecessors in drawing from earlier traditions to determine religious orthodoxy and ritual. However, unlike medieval scholastics, Protestant reformers demonstrated less of a desire to harmonize the fathers or to simply view them as positive examples. These reformers reserved the right to challenge or correct the early fathers when necessary because the fathers were considered human authorities. However, the fallibility of the fathers did not lead to a dismissal of tradition as a source of authority. In fact, the ancient tradition served as a way to legitimize the alternative tradition of Protestantism by providing a clearly recognizable precedent for the development of new interpretations of Scripture and sacraments (Chung-Kim 2011).

In her examination of patristic reception among Protestant reformers, Irena Backus highlights the processes of ‘neutralization and appropriation’ (Backus 1993:56). The purpose of demonstrating patristic support was to shift the church fathers from supporting the Catholic tradition to make a path for the ‘sovereign authority of the Gospel’ (Thompson 2005:73–4). Hence the fathers were part of the Protestant programme to bolster the faith and confirm the worthy interpretations of the Scriptures.

While the ‘neutralization and appropriation’ method of early Protestant reformers explains the most common purpose for citing the fathers in the midst of polemics and apologetics, these situations were not the only reasons to engage the ancient sources. In addition to validating and confirming specific points, the exercise of reading the works

of the ancient writers had a specific impact on the interpretation of church history. For both Catholics and Protestants, a deeper study of the fathers could bring about 'a sense of historical relativity', which showed that historical changes had prompted new formulations of doctrine or structures in the Church (Thompson 2005:279). The significance of this new concern for historical context is that the reformers developed a clearer sense of comparison by which to evaluate and judge certain practices or beliefs as necessary or beneficial.

In the effort to apply Christ's teachings to the lives of the faithful, diverse interpretations emerged from shifting political, economic, and social circumstances, which meant that apostolic teaching became a complex affair of creative application (Thompson 2005:280). Martin Bucer, proposed a distinction between the principal articles of faith and their actualization in the life of the individual believer and the Church, where the apostolic Church served less as a model of perfection than of the attempt to turn orthodoxy into orthopraxis. Bucer would later describe this attempt as *doctrina vera* into *confessio vera* (Thompson 2005:280). Bucer made his distinction in order to show that all ancient traditions were not equally weighted. Specifically, he distinguished between three kinds of traditions: ones that served the cause of piety (such as infant baptism), which despite the lack of scriptural support or mandate promoted the faith; ones that were temporary expedients in a cultural context (such as the veiling of women); and erroneous ones (such as the mass), which the Church need not preserve (Thompson 2005:280). Therefore, when it came to debunking erroneous traditions, reformers such as Calvin and his followers argued that some innovations were meant to be temporary solutions. They argued that historical contingency allowed the discontinuation of a debated belief or practice. When what was originally created to solve a problem ended up creating another problem, a re-evaluation was in order. In his treatment of Irenaeus, Calvin would not admit to Irenaeus' support for the supremacy of the Roman Church (Backus 1999:43). When Calvin disagreed with Chrysostom in his *Preface to Homilies of Chrysostom*, Calvin highlighted Chrysostom's context of debunking the Arians (Calvin 1870:9:836). Abraham Scultetus, a Heidelberg professor and contemporary of Robert Bellarmine, expanded the notion of historical contingency even further as the compiler of the first Calvinist patristic manual, the *Medullae Theologiae Patrum Syntagma*, which appeared in four parts from 1598 to 1613. Scultetus reiterated the defence that the Protestant Church was as orthodox as the early Church at its best and should not be synonymous with ancient heresies, such as Arianism or Gnosticism (Backus 1999:46). In his rejection of the doctrine of supremacy of the Roman Church and the doctrines of apostolic succession, the sacrifice of the mass, and real presence, Scultetus advanced the specific historical context of the early Church, where the emergence of doctrinal positions, like apostolic succession and the sacrifice of the mass, was a natural response to particular ancient heretics who neither respected tradition nor Scripture (Backus 1999:53). Humanist-trained and highly educated Reformed thinkers often highlighted the historical particularity of religious developments they wished to reject in order to reveal the source of a doctrine or ritual as situational rather than scriptural.

## ENGLISH RECEPTION

---

John Jewel (1522–71) elicited the patristic tradition to support an emerging confessional Church of England, and echoed the common line of defence for the English Church against Catholicism in his assertion that it was reforming itself along the lines of the primitive Church. However, with the resurgence of Catholicism in some circles and the rise of Puritanism, English reformers differed in their vision for the kind and extent of reform needed. In each case, patristic arguments began to be directed against defenders of the Elizabethan settlement (Luoma 1977:45). As a result, the controversy between Anglican reformers, Roman Catholics, and Puritans both ‘drew attention to and illuminated the theological significance of patristic writings’ (Haaugaard 1979:60). As expected, educated churchmen, even when in disagreement, continued to demonstrate a high regard for the ancient church fathers. In fact, such high regard explains why so much ink was spilled in defining and shaping what it meant for the Church of England to be reformed according to the primitive Church. English reformers agreed that the fathers did not operate as an absolute authority, since the fathers sometimes erred. But they disagreed on what kind of authority the fathers should be granted. For Puritans, such as Thomas Cartwright, the fathers could not operate as independent sources of authority because patristic consensus was limited up to the sixth century, and the fathers had ‘weight only so far as [their witness] was grounded in scripture or some reason out of scripture’ (Luoma 1977:50). Meanwhile, for Anglicans like Richard Hooker, the concept of consensus allowed for a broader use of the fathers whenever it could be based on Scripture in some way or was not explicitly against Scripture (Luoma 1977:56). Hooker’s use of the fathers demonstrates a developmental view of history as well as the recognition, if not appreciation, of the process of a ‘continuing consensus’ (Luoma 1977:59). Although reformers appropriated the fathers for polemical purposes, they also demonstrated a degree of respect for and were sometimes deeply shaped by patristic interpretations. Thomas Cranmer drew extensively on Ambrose to argue that the consecration of the host means to set it aside for a special spiritual purpose; hence, like water used for a holy purpose in baptism, consecration of the bread and wine revealed not a shift in substance but a change in purpose (Cranmer 1550:82; Marrs 2015:73).

According to David Manning, the study of patristic reception in the Reformation Church of England has revealed four strategies, which motivated the renewed interest in ancient sources during the emerging English Reformation. First, like the continental reformers, some English reformers sought to reconsider the history of the Church with the intent to rediscover sources that were previously dismissed, misunderstood, or deemed heretical by the Church of Rome. Second, opting for a spiritualized explanation, some explained current events in apocalyptic terms in which the reformers were defenders of Christ ‘doing battle with the Antichrist’ (Manning 2011:160). Third, armed with the principle of *sola scriptura*, reformers employed biblical precedent to legitimize their

choice of ecclesiology. Fourth, many thinkers increasingly resorted to the church fathers as part of the wider intellectual trend shaped by Christian humanism to question established traditions (Manning 2011:160).

In relation to the interpretation of Scripture, reformers recognized the contributions of the early church fathers, such as Augustine, Athanasius, Jerome, and Origen as sources of early biblical interpretation. For instance, Cranmer included the aid of patristic scholarship in his work of expounding on Scriptures as including the aid of patristic scholarship (MacCulloch 1996:339). In the polemical context of Reformation-era debates over the form and content of the emerging Church of England, the principle of *sola scriptura* was interpreted in more than one way. While Jewel elevated Scripture as the prime authority and considered the fathers as mere aids toward the understanding of Scripture, the rise of Puritanism threatened Richard Hooker's main argument of the 'consonance between Scripture and reason in understanding divine truths' (Quantin 2009:32; Manning 2011:169). This shift in emphasis on the reasonable interpretation of Scripture was meant to rebuff the extreme positions of any side, Catholic or Protestant. Meanwhile, some Puritan apologists defined the ancient Church as the earliest primitive Church of the apostolic age against Anglicans who defined the early Church more broadly in time and scope. But if the use of the fathers increased in polemical debates, how did the study of the primitive Church affect the authoritative status of Scripture? While Scripture retained its primacy status, early biblical interpretation played a major role in determining the meaning of the sacred text by shaping the questions with its preoccupation with eliminating heretical opinions, clarifying right doctrine, and promoting moral (sometimes ascetic) values. While humanists focused on the last of these goals, Protestants and Catholics were concerned about the goals of defining correct beliefs and expunging erroneous ones, especially in the context of confessionalization.

As part of its Reformation, the Church of England set about using the early church fathers to defend its position regarding episcopacy, magistracy, and supremacy (Quantin 2009). By setting up the early Church as the best model to emulate, reformers could 'conceptualize a mutually affirming relationship between the primitive Church and the Scriptures', since together they would establish authoritative normativity with respect to doctrine (Manning 2011:170). In the debates over the authority of Scripture, Anglican reformers found that withdrawing from strict adherence to *sola scriptura* helped foster an acceptable ambiguity, even latitude, in regards to approaches to Scripture within the Church of England (Manning 2011:174). In essence, patristic evidence served to bolster the 'rational' principle of Reformation primitivism; if a particular religious practice could be found in the ancient Church, then it would stand as proof of its validity (Manning 2011:178–9). For supporters of the middle way, this form of argumentation revealed the underlying assumption that the primitive Church was the correct model of Christian faith and practice. Hence Church of England apologists sought, on the one hand, to reject the Roman Catholic Church as synonymous with the universal Church, and on the other hand, to refuse the exclusivist calls from Calvinists and Quakers. The Church would now be defined 'by the universality of the primitive, i.e. pre-Roman, Church', which demonstrated irenicism, rationality, and unity (Manning 2011:180).

In this way, the Church of England could claim to uphold the right tradition against other competing interpretations of tradition. Whether in England or on the Continent, it was not unusual for reformers to appeal to the ‘consent of the fathers’, but this was a rhetorical agreement, which had its roots in Aristotle’s definition of ‘generally accepted opinions’ (Quantin 2009:54).

## CATHOLIC RECEPTION

---

Partly in response to humanist education Protestant growth, Catholic reception of the early church fathers was also developing, ranging from Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto in Italy to the theologians at the University of Leuven, Belgium. In the tumultuous period of redefining and determining the source of religious authority, the division between religious parties had drawn a sharp line among the confessional profiles of patristic scholarship (Visser 2010:94). Erasmus’ translation of Augustine was contested by the Catholic theologians of Leuven who had created their own edition of Augustine’s works. The Catholicization of patristic scholarship, prompted by Tridentine reforms, meant upholding the validity and authority of ecclesiastical tradition in an effort to educate a generation of Catholic clergy (Visser 2010:93). Such renewed efforts promoted competition to understand Augustine rightly or more thoroughly. As anthologies of patristic writers in support of confessional polemics increased, so did the market for comprehensive, scholarly editions of Augustine’s works (Visser 2010:90). In particular, the Catholic version produced by the Leuven theologians demonstrated a general reliance on Erasmus (whose edition they presumably set out to correct) by neutralizing his critical tone, omitting scathing remarks and controversial language (Visser 2010:100). Hence the impact of confessionalization in the sixteenth century had the effect in some places like the Low Counties of drawing a moderating response coupled with a genuine desire to produce the best editions that in the long run had a constructive result (Visser 2010:105).

## CONCLUSION

---

In conclusion, humanists, Protestant reformers, and Catholic theologians agreed on the value of ancient sources, but they disagreed on which fathers provided the most clarity on specific issues. The wide-ranging corpus of the ancient Christian writers provided the opportunity to explore diverse ways for determining biblical meaning. In the contestation among a plurality of interpretations over the meaning of Scripture, this renewed vigour for the study and engagement with the ancients, along with the new translations of the Bible, would result in an ongoing retrieval that would display both a deep appreciation and an intense criticism of the ancient past.

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

- Brenz, J. (1970). *Syngramma Suevicum*, in M. Brecht, G. Schäfer, and F. Wolf (eds), *Frühschriften*, vol. 1 (Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr).
- Bucer, M. (1550). *De Regno Christi*, in W. Pauck (ed.), *Melanchthon and Bucer*. Library of Christian Classics 19 (London: SCM Press, 1969), 174–394.
- Calvin, J. (1870). *Preface to Homilies of Chrysostom*. In G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss (eds), *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 9 (Brunswick and Berlin).
- Cranmer, T. (1548). *Catechismus, that is to say, a shorte instruction into Christian religion for the synguler commoditie and profyete of children and yong people* (London: Nyeolas Hyll).
- Cranmer, T. (1550). *A Defence of the True and Catholike Doctrine of the Sacrament of the body and Blood of our Saviour Christ* (London: Reynold Wolfe).
- Cranmer, T. (1846). *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr 1556*, ed. J. E. Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Erasmus, D. (1503). *Enchiridion militis christiani* [The Handbook of the Christian Soldier], *Spiritualia*, in J. W. O'Malley (ed.), *Collected Works of Erasmus*. vol. 66 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1988).
- Erasmus, D. (1516). 'Epistle 396, Erasmus to Warham (April 1, 1516)', in J. F. Brady and J. C. Olin (eds), *Patristic Scholarship: The Edition of St. Jerome*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 61 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).
- Lefèvre, J. (1503) (ed.). *Opera Dionysii: Veteris et noue translationis* (Strasbourg: Georg Husner).
- Lefèvre, J. (1976). *Épistres et Évangiles pour les cinquante et deux dimanches de l'an*, ed. G. Bedouelle and F. Giacone (Leiden: Brill).
- Luther, M. (1521). *Rationis Latomiana confutatio*, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus), *Weimarer Ausgabe* 8:43–128.
- Melanchthon, P. (1539). *De Ecclesia et Autoritate Verbi Dei, Corpus Reformatorum*, in K. Bretschneider and H. Bindseil (eds), *Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia* (Halle: A. Schwetschke & Sons, 1855), CR 23: 585–642.
- Valla, L. (2007). *On the Donation of Constantine*, trans. G. W. Bowersock (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

### Scholarship

- Backus, I. (1993). 'Martin Bucer and the Patristic Tradition', in C. Krieger and M. Lienhard (eds), *Martin Bucer and Sixteenth Century Europe* (Leiden: Brill), 1: 55–69.
- Backus, I. (1999). 'Irenaeus, Calvin and Calvinist Orthodoxy: The Patristic Manual of Abraham Scultetus (1598)', *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 1 (1): 41–53.
- Backus, I. (2003). *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378–1615)* (Leiden: Brill).
- Backus, I. (2007). 'Bullinger and Humanism', in *Heinrich Bullinger: Life, Thought and Influence* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag), 2: 637–59.
- Bedouelle, G. (2008). 'Attacks on the Biblical Humanism of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples', in E. Rummel (ed.), *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* (Leiden: Brill 2008), 117–41.

- Cameron, E. (2012). 'Primitivism, Patristics, and Polemic in Protestant Visions of Early Christianity', in K. Van Liere, S. Ditchfield, and H. Louthan (eds), *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World* (New York: Oxford University Press), 27–51.
- Chung-Kim, E. (2011). *Inventing Authority: The Use of the Church Fathers in Reformation Debates over the Eucharist* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press).
- D'Amico, J. F. (1988). 'Humanism and Pre-Reformation Theology', in A. Rabil Jr (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms and Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 3: 349–79.
- Farmer, C. (1997). *The Gospel of John in the Sixteenth Century: The Johannine Exegesis of Wolfgang Musculus* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Fraenkel, P. (1961). *Testimonia Patrum: The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melancthon* (Geneva: Librairie Droz).
- Grafton, A. (1983). *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*. vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon).
- Grafton, A. (1991). *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Grafton, A. (2012). 'Church History in Early Modern Europe: Tradition and Innovation', in K. Van Liere, S. Ditchfield, and H. Louthan (eds), *Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World* (New York: Oxford University Press), 3–26.
- Haugaard, W. P. (1979). 'Renaissance Patristic Scholarship and Theology in Sixteenth-Century England', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 10 (3): 37–60.
- Kristeller, P. O. (1988). 'Renaissance Humanism and Classical Antiquity', in A. Rabil Jr (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms and Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania), 1: 5–16.
- Levi, A. (2002). *Renaissance and Reformation: The Intellectual Genesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Luoma, J. K. (1977). 'Who Owns the Fathers? Hooker and Cartwright on the Authority of the Primitive Church', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 8 (3): 45–59.
- MacCulloch, D. (1996). *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Manning, D. S. (2011). "'That is best, which was first": Christian Primitivism and the Reformation Church of England, 1548–1722', *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 13 (2): 153–93.
- Marrs, D. (2015). 'Real Presence, Spiritual Presence: Assessing Thomas Cranmer's Appropriation of St. Ambrose's Eucharistic Doctrine', *ATR* 97: 53–74.
- Mellinghoff-Bourgerie V. (1998). 'Erasmus éditeur et interprète de Saint Augustin', in K. Flasch and D. de Courcelle (eds), *Augustinus in der Neuzeit* (Turnhout: Brepols), 53–81.
- Moeller, B. (1959). 'Die deutschen Humanisten und die Anfänge der Reformation', *ZKG* 70: 46–61.
- Nodes, D. J. (2014). 'Personal, Societal and Literary Reform in John Colet's Ecclesiastical Hierarchy', *CH* 83 (3): 547–70.
- Quantin, J. (2009). *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Rice, E. (1962). 'The Humanist Idea of Christian Antiquity: Lefèvre D'Étaples and his Circle', *Studies in the Renaissance* 9: 126–60.
- Rice, E. (1988). 'The Renaissance Idea of Christian Antiquity: Humanist Patristic Scholarship', in A. Rabil Jr (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania), 1:17–28.
- Rummel, E. (2000). *The Confessionalization of Humanism in Reformation Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press).

- Saak, E. L. (1997). 'The Reception of Augustine in the Later Middle Ages', in I. Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West* (Leiden: Brill), 367–404.
- Scheck, T. P. (2016). *Erasmus's Life of Origen: A New Annotated Translation of the Prefaces to Erasmus of Rotterdam's Edition of Origen's Writings (1536)* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press).
- Schulze, M. (2001). 'Martin Luther and the Church Fathers', in I. Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West* (Leiden: Brill), 573–626.
- Shuger, D. K. (1994). *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Spitz, L. W. (1988). 'Humanism and the Protestant Reformation', in A. Rabil Jr (ed.), *Renaissance Humanism: Foundation, Forms and Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania), 3: 380–411.
- Thompson, N. (2005). *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Patristic Tradition in the Theology of Martin Bucer 1534–1546* (Leiden: Brill).
- Visser, A. (2008). 'Reading Augustine through Erasmus' Eyes: Humanist Scholarship and Paratextual Guidance in the Wake of the Reformation', *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 28: 67–90.
- Visser, A. (2010). 'How Catholic was Augustine? Confessional Patristics and the Survival of Erasmus in the Counter-Reformation', *JEH* 61: 86–106.
- Visser, A. (2011). *Reading Augustine in the Reformation: The Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500–1620* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Wengert, T. (1998). *Human Righteousness and Human Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press).

### Suggested Reading

- Backus, I. (1993). 'Martin Bucer and the Patristic Tradition', in C. Krieger and M. Lienhard (eds), *Martin Bucer and Sixteenth Century Europe* (Leiden: Brill), 1: 55–69.
- Bergjan, S. P., and Pollman, K. (2010) (eds). *Patristic Tradition and Intellectual Paradigms in the 17th Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Frank, G., Leinkauf, T., and Wriedt, M. (2006) (eds). *Die Patristik in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog).
- Lane, A. N. S. (1999). *John Calvin and the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark).
- Pabel, H. M. (2009). 'The Authority of Augustine in Erasmus' Biblical Exegesis', *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 29: 61–87.
- Steinmetz, D. (1990). 'Calvin and the Patristic Exegesis of Paul', in D. Steinmetz (ed.), *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).
- Thompson, J. (1996). 'The Survival of Allegorical Argumentation in Peter Martyr Vermigli's Old Testament Exegesis', in R. A. Muller and J. L. Thompson (eds), *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 255–71.
- Wright, D. (2007). 'Heinrich Bullinger and the Early Church Fathers', in E. Campi and P. Optiz (eds), *Heinrich Bullinger: Life, Thought, Influence* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag) 1: 357–78.

## CHAPTER 46

---

# MODERN BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND THE LEGACY OF PRE-MODERN INTERPRETATION

---

MICHAEL C. LEGASPI

SOMEONE riding an overnight train from one country to another awakes in a new and different land. He does not know precisely when a border was crossed; neither is he aware of gradual changes in the terrain that have given way to an altogether different vista. What appeared in the window the night before to be one sort of place seems now, from the same window, to have altered in nearly every possible respect. Yet, because he is an experienced passenger, he is neither alarmed by nor even curious about the change. Given certain assumptions about physical reality, an understanding of the relevant geography, and background knowledge of train journeys, he remains satisfied that the situation is normal and the change in perspective simply a matter of course. When it comes to the history of biblical interpretation, it is tempting to understand the contrasting hermeneutical environments of the early Christian Church and the modern academy in a similar way: as two different contexts connected by a linear, rational progression from what was ‘then and there’ to what is ‘here and now’. The temptation should be resisted: the analogy is Whiggish with respect to history, making the past mere prologue to the present, and it is deterministic with respect to the individual, likening historical actors to passive riders. It should also be resisted because, when it comes to the history of interpretation, the past does not lie *behind* the present but, in a certain sense, *within* it.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the way in which early Christian interpretation of Scripture, though banished by scholars in recent times to other disciplinary realms—patristics, theology, historical theology, or early Christian studies—nevertheless played an important role in the development of modern biblical criticism. To examine this is to trace a complex development of modern critical attitudes toward Scripture and tradition. Though often identified merely with a rejection of tradition in

favour of objective, scientific method, the actual *Nachleben* of patristic commentators in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries is part of a more complicated story. Hans Joachim Kraus, for example, identified the beginnings of historical criticism with the Reformation, pointing both to the rejection of received authority, and also to the Reformers' commitment to *sola scriptura*. For Kraus, the 'breakthrough' came in the Leipzig Disputation of 1519 in which Luther was said to have articulated criticism's first principle (*Schriftprinzip*): 'not the tradition of the church Fathers, not the Pope, not the Councils—Holy Scripture alone is the source and judge in all questions of faith and doctrine' (Kraus 1982:6, 80). For those historians who are inclined, as Kraus is, to locate the beginnings of modern criticism in the principled, programmatic rejection of traditional authority during the Reformation and to identify criticism principally with the ideals of the Enlightenment, early Christian tradition has mainly a negative role to play in the history of modern criticism. On this view, it is the thing against which modern criticism is defined, and over which it triumphed. There is much to commend this view, especially if one looks to German Protestant scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for paragons and paradigms. Nevertheless, as we will see, the conventional understanding of modern criticism simply as an attempt, in Jeremiah's words, to 'break the yoke and burst the bonds' of authority (Jer 5.5) is bound to mislead.

In what follows, then, I will offer a more complex account of the development of critical attitudes toward the church fathers, and, importantly, toward the role of patristic authority in the task of scriptural interpretation. In speaking of 'critics', 'criticism', or things 'critical', I mean to refer to people and practices associated with what, according to common practice, is variously called 'higher criticism', 'historical criticism', 'historical-critical method', or 'biblical criticism'. Because an intrinsic connection of modern criticism to historicism must be argued rather than assumed (see Barton 2007:31–68), and because the term 'higher criticism' has largely fallen out of use, I will speak simply of 'criticism' or 'modern criticism', understanding these terms to refer to interpreters in the early modern period who sought to understand the Bible in light of various political and intellectual interests. Instead of reading the Bible to understand the world, critical interpreters sought new knowledge of the world in order to make sense of the Bible. That is, critical interpreters, whether traditional or anti-traditional, were conscious (to varying degrees) of a responsibility to make the Bible intelligible within new, confessionally non-specific contexts like the Republic of Letters and the modern university. Their actual strategies for appropriation, whether philosophical, historical, cultural, or philological, have less to do with what makes them critical than the larger purpose (the creation of a Bible that enriches modern culture) to which these strategies are put (Sheehan 2005:ix–xvi). By defining criticism formally rather than materially, one is able to see the critical encounter with tradition in fuller terms: as a story of appropriation rather than simple rejection. The story unfolds in phases: among humanists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whose vision of a renovated Christian culture included prominent roles both for philology and an irenic theology; in the pivotal contribution of Richard Simon, who formulated an influential programme for critical study oriented toward the literal sense; at universities, where, in the late eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries, the scope of the literal sense was confined to historical meaning and, at the same time, adjusted decisively to exclude ancient, traditional authorities; and in the rise of modern academic disciplines, when the early Christian Church became a subject of critical study in its own right.

## THE FATHERS, IRENICISM, AND THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

---

Early modern biblical criticism grew up in the Republic of Letters (*respublica litteraria*). To say this is to identify an important historical setting for criticism and to resist thereby a reification of method, according to which criticism is understood merely as a self-evident procedure—detachable, like scientific discoveries, from thorny questions of context. One can learn, for example, how to pasteurize milk effectively without knowing who Louis Pasteur was or why he did what he did. The study of the Bible, however, has everything to do with interpretative aims and interests. Criticism in the early modern period did not crystallize as a theory in the minds of a few brilliant innovators who set off at once to cleanse culture of religious influence. Rather, it developed as a set of scholarly attitudes and practices among a variety of figures who differed from one another in important ways, and yet were identifiable with a distinct social form: the Republic of Letters. At one level, the Republic may be described as an international network of learned individuals who were devoted to the advancement of ‘letters’ (*litterae*), a broad term that referred to the study of languages, literature, history, and antiquities. ‘Letters’ also included, especially in its earlier period, science (‘natural philosophy’) and theology, subjects that would be placed, in time, on separate foundations. It has been customary to identify the roots of the Republic in sixteenth-century humanism and its heyday with the latter half of the seventeenth century. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the phrase ‘Republic of Letters’ had dropped out of use, though it remains an open question whether developments in the eighteenth century—the decline of Latin, the popularization of scholarship, aggressive anti-clericalism, and a shift from criticism to scepticism—marked a final flowering of the Republic or the time of its undoing (Grafton 2009:32–4; Lambe 1988:271–96).

What makes the ‘Republic’ a useful designation throughout the early modern period, though, is the persistence of distinctive practices and institutions connected with a self-conscious association of scholars. Seven of these have been enumerated, helpfully, by Peter Burke: (1) the practice of inviting renowned scholars to take up posts in other countries; (2) use of libraries housed in royal courts, religious orders, or universities by foreign researchers; (3) extensive international correspondence among scholars in Latin; (4) the practice of visiting eminent scholars while travelling abroad; (5) keeping an *album amicorum*, a kind of traveller’s notebook in which one collected greetings, notes, and signatures from friends and acquaintances; (6) the creation of learned societies in

major cities; and (7) the publication of journals for book reviews and scholarly news (Burke 1999:9–11). Despite the fact that the relatively loose, easy-going Republic was eclipsed by the modern university in the nineteenth century—an institution decidedly less polymathic and more nationalistic in character—it is not difficult to appreciate the Republic's legacy, still very evident in the modern academy, and its significance at the time in providing stimulation, support, and solidarity to humanistic study.

More significant even than the outward forms of scholarly interaction, though, was the *idea* of a *respublica litteraria* or, perhaps, the set of ideals that made the Republic at once a community and a movement. The Republic had no formal creed, no official ideology, including, as it did, people of varied ecclesial affiliations who hailed from England in the north-west, Hungary in the south-east, and places in between. It would be more accurate to say that Republicans shared certain goals, convictions, and sensibilities. The first and most obvious was an enthusiasm for humanistic learning, a deep and astonishingly prodigious desire to conserve knowledge. Focusing on information management in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Ann Blair has argued that a sense of 'cultural trauma' among humanists attended the loss of ancient learning in the Middle Ages and yielded, accordingly, an 'info-lust', a desire to 'gather and manage as much information as possible' in reference works and annotation systems (Blair 2010:1–22). A second may be described as a kind of literate sociability, not simply 'letters' in the sense of literature but also in the sense of voluminous written correspondence. Connected by travel and, especially, by missives, Republicans shared a sense of purpose and a certain self-image as an egalitarian, (intermittently) cosmopolitan fellowship of reasonable, high-minded individuals. In pursuing together the 'cause of letters', Republicans, in spite of inevitable intramural conflicts and rivalries, nevertheless aspired to a kind of rational agreeability, the formation of what Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives called the 'consensus of men who are as good as they are learned' (Burke 1999:8). Third, citizens of the Republic were reform-minded, aware that their enterprise was capable of challenging and overturning accepted ideas: for example, the primacy and temporal power of the bishop of Rome (Lorenzo Valla on *The Donation of Constantine*), the legitimacy of a *prisca theologia* joining Christianity and pagan wisdom (Isaac Casaubon on the Hermetic Corpus), and the authenticity of ancient compositions (Richard Bentley on the *Epistles of Phalaris*). Few who identified with the Republic attained the critical notoriety of Valla, Casaubon, or Bentley, but the lives of such famed scholars attested to the power of an ideal: a traditional culture renewed and improved by criticism of its textual sources.

The greatest champion of the early Republic, one whose life and work show most clearly what was involved in this renovation of traditional culture, was Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536). As a figure within early modern biblical criticism, Erasmus looms large. He shared with fellow humanists the conviction that the Bible must be studied in its original languages. Erasmus never mastered Hebrew, and he remained wary of the influence of rabbinic scholarship, but he applied himself diligently to the NT. Valla's *Adnotationes* (written in the 1440s but published posthumously by Erasmus in 1505) convinced him that the Vulgate was an affront both to eloquence and to sound philology, so Erasmus published, over thirty years, editions of the Greek text with new Latin

translations, as well as paraphrases aimed at making the NT more accessible to lay people. Against the authority of the Vulgate and the scholastic theologians who defended it, Erasmus was a staunch opponent (Jenkins and Preston 2007:27–80). To a scholarly reform agenda, Erasmus joined a call for church reform. He challenged, famously and controversially, the identification of monasticism with piety (*monachatus non est pietas*; Rummel 1995:41–55), and levelled withering criticisms against the pedantry of the scholastics and the prevalence of superstition and formalism in the Church (Augustijn 1969:137–9). Seen one way, then, Erasmus looks like a ‘modern’: a scholar using the tools of philology, critically and independently, to criticize the Church and contest the authority of dogmatic interpreters.

A fuller perspective, however, yields a somewhat different portrait. Though his belief in the redemptive powers of philology issued in sharp criticisms of the medieval scholastic tradition, it only reinforced his admiration for the fathers. For Erasmus, the return *ad fontes* was, pre-eminently, a renewal of biblical exegesis, but it also entailed a return to patristic sources. This had, to be sure, a polemical value: commending the wisdom and interpretative skill of the fathers was also a way to show the lifeless logic-chopping of the medievals in a bad light and to contrast the ‘golden stream’ and ‘brilliant garden’ of patristic commentary with the ‘scantly little trickles’ and ‘thorns and thistles’ of the scholastics (Augustijn 1991:106). This, however, should not conceal the fact that Erasmus shared things in common with his medieval predecessors. As H. J. de Jonge has shown, Erasmus, in his own editions of the Greek NT, made use of material from the great medieval *Glossa ordinaria*, the ‘glossed Bible’ that included patristic commentary (and the *postillae* of Nicholas of Lyra) in the margins of the Vulgate and that served as the standard Bible for theologians in the Middle Ages. Though Erasmus found the haphazard compilation of poorly referenced, ill-attributed quotations in the *Glossa* irritating, he was not above using it as a repository for patristic material and a source of support to fend off accusations of theological novelty and mischief (De Jonge 1976:51–77).

Not content, however, with the excerpts reproduced in the *Glossa* (and in other medieval compilations like the *Catena aurea* and the *Decretum* of Gratian), Erasmus devoted considerable energy in the last twenty years of his life to the production of critical editions of numerous Greek and Latin fathers. He may thus be identified with the beginnings of the great effort spanning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to satisfy growing demand for new editions of patristic works and commentaries. The first project, an edition of the works of Jerome, appeared in 1516—significantly, the same year in which Erasmus’ first edition of the NT (*Novum Instrumentum*) was published. With this edition, Erasmus both announced and exemplified the effort to restore theology by imitating the fathers, in this case a gentleman scholar, Jerome, who forged a path for Christian erudition that both drew on and superseded *bonae litterae* as represented in the classical tradition (Vessey 2006:351–75). Next to Jerome in Erasmus’ array of patristic heroes stood Origen. It is not surprising that Erasmus found him a helpful guide in text-critical work, but he also drew inspiration from Origen for his great manual of Christian living, the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* of 1503 (Godin 1982:13–118). An Erasmian edition of Origen’s works appeared posthumously in 1536, as a capstone to an

impressive string of patristic editions: Jerome (1516), Cyprian (1520), Arnobius the Younger (1522), Hilary of Poitiers (1523), John Chrysostom (1525, 1527, 1530), Irenaeus (1526), Ambrose (1527), Athanasius (1527), Augustine (1528–9), Lactantius (1529), and Basil of Caesarea (1532).

Looking specifically at the prefaces to these editions, Irena Backus has produced a helpful synopsis of Erasmus' attitudes toward the early Church. These show that Erasmus was less interested in the fathers' contributions to the history of doctrine than in their character as Christian leaders. Cyprian is commended as an 'eloquent apostle of tolerance'; Irenaeus combats heresies, but in the interest of church concord; Chrysostom and Augustine are model bishops whose classical educations enable them to serve the people with skill and sensitivity. Above all, though, the fathers lived at a time when church dogma was in a fluid state; they are not, therefore, perfect witnesses to timeless truths as much as real-life models of Christian learning and piety. To study the fathers, then, is to see that the Church is a historical reality, fully susceptible to change and development (Backus 1995:95–114). To read the fathers is to appreciate them as great men in Christian history, but as men of their time all the same. Second only in importance to the cause of letters among Erasmus' priorities was the peace of the Church. His appreciation of the fathers included high regard for their eloquence (Jerome), learning (Augustine), and spirituality (Origen). But, as the prefaces show, he saw them, too, as model leaders. More specifically, he identified them with a mode of theological argumentation distinct from and superior to that of the scholastics. Where the scholastics relied upon logical subtleties to defeat opponents in disputes, the fathers adopted what Erika Rummel has called a 'flexible and persuasive *theologia rhetorica*'; that is, they 'did not aim at winning an argument but restoring consensus, which is a defining quality of truth and of the Church in which God has vested the truth' (Rummel 2004:97). Important here is the close correlation of truth with unity and consensus, the idea that consensus is a *defining feature* of truth. For Erasmus, the contribution of the fathers to the cause of truth did not consist narrowly in doctrine but more significantly in their witness to a consensus wrought by Christ himself (Pabel 1995:77–80). They were learned, pious men who, in strengthening the unity of the Church, established the truth.

It is possible, then, to speak of an Erasmian programme: a renewal and unification of Christendom through learned piety. This programme, with its dual emphases on the study of Christian sources and the advancement of culture, did not prevent schism in Erasmus' own lifetime as he had hoped; nor did it prevent later doctrinal disputes or the deepening of confessional divides. But the Erasmian programme did live on in the Republic of Letters. Though the Republic did not have an official creed, many of its most famous representatives shared a theological outlook characterized by irenicism and the desire for unity across confessions. Unity remained a cherished ideal for many in the sixteenth century. Though Martin Bucer is perhaps the most famous example of an irenic reformer, it was Catholic lay theologian George Cassander (1513–66) who became the leading light for irenic Republicans like Jean Hotman, George Calixtus, and John Dury (Meyjes 1984a:86). Given a shared allegiance to Scripture and the essential doctrines of the Christian faith, differences among Catholics and Protestants, Cassander

believed, could be handled charitably and resolved pastorally, as matters of discipline rather than dogma. This, however, requires that the Church distinguish essential doctrines from those that may be held flexibly. It must rely, specifically, on the *consensus patrum*, or consensus of the fathers, to furnish the tradition by which Scripture is ultimately interpreted. Cassander thus drew on the famous formulation of the Gallic bishop Vincent of Lérins (d. c.450), who in his *Commonitorium* stipulated that the rule for separating ‘the truth of catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical distortion’ is to stand by those things that have been believed ‘everywhere, always, by all’ and to uphold that which is marked by ‘universality, antiquity, and consensus’ (Vincent, *comm.* II.5–6). This formulation, then, became, in the medieval period, a *patristic* guide to using patristic writings, a formal principle that collectivized patristic authority for the purposes of argumentation (Schäfer 2012:73–4). But, for Cassander and his irenic brethren, it became, more specifically, a way to formalize tradition for the purpose of creating unity (Backus 2004:119).

Cassander’s formal, consensus-oriented recourse to the fathers complemented the more ethical, exemplaristic appropriation of the fathers discernible in Erasmus’ prefaces to his patristic editions. Taken together, as they often were, they mark out a distinctive role for the fathers within an irenic history of Christendom: the role of venerable, founding figures who skilfully built a structure (the Church) that fell, through discord, into disrepair. The fathers belong, on this view, to a distant golden age, a ‘time of wholeness’ characterized by peace, culture, and the successful creation of a Christian commonwealth (Meyjes 1984a:91; Meyjes 1984b:48). One important irenic aim, then, was to take one’s bearings from Antiquity in order to restore Christendom so that culture and concord might flourish as they once did. It is significant, though, that the *means* developed by irenicists to achieve this did not include a re-appropriation of patristic scriptural exegesis. Once again following Erasmus’ lead, humanists turned instead to the critical study of biblical texts.

## HUGO GROTIUS AND RICHARD SIMON

---

Few exemplify this strategy better than Dutch humanist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). Hugh Trevor-Roper has argued (following Voltaire) that early modern intellectual history was shaped decisively by three generations: the era of Erasmus just prior to the Reformation, the era of Francis Bacon in the earliest decades of the seventeenth century, and the era of Newton, Locke, Leibniz, and Bayle at the close of that century. It is important to note, moreover, that these ‘high points’ of the Republic of Letters did not coincide with ‘the strife of ideological revolution and civil war’ but were, instead, peaceful interludes in which leading figures who identified with the newer philosophies actively pursued ‘theological reconciliation’ (Trevor-Roper 1972:200–3). Grotius belongs, in this schema, to the ‘second’ era as its most distinguished, most articulate representative. An admirer of Erasmus, Grotius sought to deepen and refine the Erasmian programme.

Like Erasmus, Grotius was an admired figure in the Republic of Letters—a luminary if not a celebrity—and an ardent irenicist as well. Once called by Henry IV the ‘miracle of Holland’, Grotius was a child prodigy, classical scholar, legal theorist, statesman, political prisoner, and theologian. Perhaps best known for his treatise on war theory, the *De iure belli ac pacis* of 1625, Grotius also published commentaries on the OT and NT (*Annotata ad Vetus Testamentum* in 1644 and the *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, published between 1641 and 1650) and an apologetic work: the highly influential, oft-translated *De veritate religionis christianae* (1640). As might be expected, though, Grotius’ irenicism took on a form that differed from that of Erasmus. Erasmus knew nothing, of course, of the coming confessionalism; thus, he wrote in his time about mending the ‘peace of the Church’ (*De sarcienda ecclesiae concordiae*; 1533). However, Grotius, living in a time of established divisions, saw peace in rather different terms, staking concord and culture more decisively on state power.

It was not a mended Church that he sought but a ‘path toward churchly peace’, as the title of his 1642 irenic anthology, *Via ad pacem ecclesiam*, indicates. In that work, Grotius drew heavily on Cassander in an effort to show that Catholics and Protestants shared ‘fundamental articles’ (Trapman 1994:94). Grotius held, however, that shared belief and even a robust Christian culture (Erasmus’ *bona causa*) were necessary but not sufficient for peace. Unity could not be left to bickering scholars or theologians. It had to belong to the Church as a public, visible institution subordinate to the state. In fostering the piety of its citizens, governments had the responsibility to protect the Church and the right to intervene in disputes and restore consensus, just as ancient Christian emperors had done in times of theological controversy. The Church, in turn, reinforced public order by promoting true piety among the people. For Grotius, the validity of the state, based on natural law, was also derived from God. There exists, then, between civil order and ecclesial order a certain congruity of aims and, even more than this, a symbiosis that makes it possible to protect the true interests of the Church by aligning them with the common good. Describing Grotius and fellow irenicists, Meyjes notes that ‘it is remarkable that the members of this circle always looked at the Church from the viewpoint of the state and its interests, and never the other way round’ (Meyjes 1984a:91).

As a follower both of Cassander and of Erasmus, Grotius looked to the early Church as a golden age of unity. Lutheran irenicist George Calixtus coined the term *consensus quinquesaecularis* (the consensus of the first five centuries) to mark the importance of early creeds and councils in curbing schism and unifying the churches. Grotius also endorsed this notion of collective authority, arguing that an individual is only a ‘Catholic Christian’ to the extent that he or she adheres to Scripture, eschews private interpretation, and relies on the ‘universal and perpetual consensus of the early churches’ and ‘the Creeds and Conciliar decrees of the truly universal Church prior to the division of the East and the West and approved by all the Emperors and the churches’ (quoted in Knight 1925:258). Grotius goes beyond five centuries, apparently including the first ten, but leaves out scholasticism all the same. With this formula, Grotius identifies Christianity with the ancient Church. It is striking, then, that Grotius is so often seen as a modern, a proponent of profane criticism, and an innovator or precursor in biblical

criticism. Kraus, for example, points to the fact that Grotius, in his *Annotata*, does not allow theories of inspiration, salvation history, or NT Christological readings to interfere with his pursuit of the literal sense. Instead, one finds the philological rigour of Reuchlin, the rationalism of the Socinians, and the textual criticism of Cappel (Kraus 1982:51). Reventlow, more measured in his evaluation, concedes the influential role of Grotius in modelling a form of exegesis oriented toward ancient historical context and moral philosophy and, at the same time, pointed away from doctrine—even as he denies that one who defers to traditional consensus in doctrinal matters as Grotius did can really be considered an ‘exegete in the modern sense’ (Reventlow 1997:224–5).

The relevant question here is not the extent of Grotius’ modernity but rather the way that his high regard for Christian tradition informed his approach to Scripture. Most intramural Christian debates did not interest Grotius and were, for him, obstacles to peace. Far more necessary and constructive was the vindication of Christianity itself. It is telling, for example, that Grotius, in his *De veritate religionis christianae*, refers abstractly to the ‘Christian religion’ and devotes three of the six books to refuting paganism, Judaism, and Islam. In the first three books, he argues that belief in God is rational; emphasizing Jesus’ miracles and superior ethical teaching, he also maintains that Christianity is the true religion. Given Grotius’ concern to defend Christianity from atheists and sceptics, it is not surprising that the Bible figures most importantly for him as a reliable witness to the historical foundations and essential truths of the Christian religion. In opening a new front for theology and exegesis that faced away from Christianity toward sceptics (instead of inward toward Christian opponents), Grotius dispensed with theories of inspiration that sceptics would find circular and unconvincing. Instead, he sought in his biblical annotations to embed the Scriptures in a venerable Antiquity. In doing so, he drew on the Septuagint and the Masoretic text, but he also made critical, well-informed use of the Vulgate (Bultmann 2008:92–106). This required expertise in biblical languages and textual criticism, as well as a command of ancient history, but, as Reventlow points out, his pursuit of the literal sense did not prevent him from recognizing the legitimacy, in certain cases, of allegorical or Christological readings of the OT (Reventlow 1988:186–7). Grotius drew liberally from patristic writings, especially those of Augustine, Jerome, and John Chrysostom, in order to shed light on textual variants and historical context. Though the theological consensus of the early Church mattered deeply to Grotius, he was, in his exegetical writings, more interested in the fathers as sources of commentary on historical, legal, and philosophical matters. One is, therefore, as likely to encounter in Grotius’ writings a quotation from a Greek poet or Roman historian, as one is a citation from a church council or ancient bishop. In this way Grotius opened a space between an older emulation of patristic interpretive method—which figured only marginally in his humanistic exegesis—and respect for the fathers’ material contributions to an antique Christian consensus.

The closing decades of the seventeenth century and the early decades of the eighteenth coincided with a new period in the Republic of Letters. According to Paul Hazard, it was this period (1680–1715) that witnessed a fundamental ‘crisis of European conscience’ and the emergence of a new, combative secularism that pitted the champions of Religion

against the champions of Reason (Hazard 2013:xiv–xv). While it is hard to deny the significance of those decades and the boldness of vision that characterized Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, and a growing cadre of Cartesians, the dramatic dualism portrayed so colourfully by Hazard should not be allowed to obscure the fact that early modern biblical criticism continued in this period along largely Erasmian lines. Erasmus, as we have seen, sought to bring intensive study of a critically repaired text to bear on the renovation of a fractured, Christian culture. For Erasmus, the basis of that culture was the consensus of the early Church. Grotius, for his part, argued that states must take an active role in authorizing and enforcing this consensus while leaving biblical interpreters free to clear up misunderstandings of Scripture arising from ignorance of history and language. What we observe in the generation that followed Grotius—the time of Hazard’s ‘champions of Reason’—is the familiar pairing of ‘lower criticism’ as an essential, even urgent enterprise, on the one hand, with the attempt to identify an interpretive control appropriate to theological peace, on the other.

A central figure in Hazard’s narrative is French Oratorian Richard Simon (1638–1712), the most infamous scholar of his generation and, certainly, the most influential biblical critic of the late seventeenth century. As a philologist, textual critic, and historian of biblical literature, Simon had no equal in his day. His reputation was made, to a great degree, in the controversies that attended the initial approval and publication of his *Histoire critique de Vieux Testament* in 1678, the withdrawal and destruction of the work by Bishop Bossuet in the same year, and, finally, the smuggling of the book to Rotterdam where it was published in 1685 (Lambe 1985:156–8). Simon’s express purpose in the *Histoire critique* was to address the ‘false and pernicious consequences’ arising from Spinoza’s attempt to diminish the authority of Scripture (Simon 1685:unpaginated preface). But if Simon was a better philologist than Spinoza, he was not a better philosopher. Interestingly, in one of the few places where he does venture into philosophical territory, he appears to reproduce a Spinozan distinction between necessary truths of reason and contingent truths of history, arguing that the search for truth in biblical criticism is closer to a fact-finding operation in the latter category (Simon 1685:400). Nevertheless, Simon, in refuting Spinoza, took the opportunity to set forth a clear programme for biblical interpretation. The programme took the form of a three-part critical history: a history of the Hebrew text from its beginnings to the time of the medieval Hebrew grammarians (book I); a guide to ancient versions and modern translations (book II); and an explication of proper critical method against which ancient and modern interpreters are evaluated (book III). Much of the information and scholarly opinions contained in this work were not new. Simon’s actual programme, for example, resembles closely the method of Protestant scholar Louis Cappel (1585–1658) and the programme set forth in his 1650 *Critica sacra*. Simon saw himself as following the example of an ‘author so great’ as Cappel, a man who was—as Simon helpfully reminds the reader—rejected by fellow Protestants and embraced by Catholics (Simon 1685:9). Both Cappel and Simon emphasized the difficulties associated with reconstructing a usable Hebrew text: the prevalence of textual errors, paucity of good manuscripts, unevenness of versional evidence, imperfect knowledge of biblical Hebrew, and the need to make

discriminating use of the Masoretic vowel points. One could not simply use the Masoretic text, Septuagint, or the Vulgate. Each had a claim on textual truth; therefore, none of them could be relied on exclusively. One had to establish the text critically, to ascertain the correct reading through informed judgement.

When Cappel laid bare the corruptions of the Hebrew consonantal text in 1650, it scandalized Cappel's fellow Reformed theologians while receiving warm support from Catholics like Jean Morin. The question, then, is why Simon, advocating a similar critical programme less than thirty years later, was immediately condemned by the Church and expelled so quickly from the Oratory. Patrick Lambe is surely right to point to Simon's political context. At a time when the French crown was trying to solidify its authority and overcome the destabilizing effects associated with the Edict of Nantes, Jansenism, Gallicanism, Ultramontanism, and free thought, print culture was rapidly accelerating the spread of ideas. Simon's work appeared, then, just when the *ancien régime*, in response to these developments, was stepping up censorship (Lambe 1985:150–2). But one should also point to Simon himself and his novel configuration of interpretative authority. Cappel had synthesized more than a century of humanist learning into a clear method for identifying the literal sense of Scripture. Simon, however, attached the humanist programme to an entirely new conception of biblical inspiration while tackling the explosive question of Mosaic authorship in the process. Simon held that Moses may be identified with legal material in the Pentateuch but that the disorder, contradictions, and inconsistencies in style otherwise evident there and in the rest of the OT are best explained by the work of annalists (*écrivains publics*). Whether prophets or scribes, these annalists were inspired by God to record and collect the 'acts' (*les Actes*) pertaining to the Hebrew commonwealth. To the extent that Moses authorized the collection of Pentateuchal material, these five books may be called the Books of Moses. In one fell swoop, Simon denied the traditional conception of Mosaic authorship and redefined biblical inspiration as a divinely superintended editorial process susceptible to human negligence and error.

The emergence of modern criticism is often connected to the abandonment of Mosaic authorship and traditional doctrines of inspiration, so it is not surprising that Simon is recognized as a critical innovator. What is important here, though, is the fact that Simon was also deeply concerned with the legacy of patristic interpretation. In the preface to the *Histoire critique*, Simon takes pains to square his programme with church tradition and the consensus of the fathers. He devotes three chapters in book III specifically to the fathers, and there are references throughout the entire work to their opinions. Simon's 1693 *Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs du Nouveau Testament depuis le commencement du Christianisme jusqu'à nôtre tems* contains twenty-two chapters (out of sixty total) on Clement, Origen, Eusebius, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Hilary, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Isidore, and Theodoret. Whether prudentially or in earnest, Simon takes as his starting point the Tridentine pronouncements that church traditions bear equal weight with Scripture and that no one may interpret the Scripture against the 'uniform sense of the Fathers'. Simon characterizes these traditions as an 'abridgement (*abrégé*) of

the Christian religion' that pre-dates the NT canon, forms the consensus of the first apostolic churches, and endures (in the singular) as church tradition. It is only on this basis that 'the unity of the Religion' can be achieved (Simon 1685:unpaginated preface). Simon is not normally recognized as an irenicist, no doubt because he criticized Protestants, arguing repeatedly throughout the *Histoire critique* that their rejection of tradition was incoherent: in rejecting church tradition as something 'human', Protestant interpreters are left only with their own individual, subjective human judgements. Yet Simon's understanding of tradition as *the basis for unity* closely resembles earlier figures in the Republic of Letters. On this view, tradition serves peace rather than truth. That is, the tradition engenders the theological consensus at the heart of the Christian religion, but, when it comes to actual criticism of the biblical texts, the tradition, as Simon understands it, falls silent.

It must be said at this point that Simon was not concerned with biblical *interpretation*, which the Council of Trent constrained, but with the narrower, more technical enterprise of biblical *criticism*. The latter, for him, consisted in those activities necessary to understand the literal sense of Scripture, namely the resolution of text-critical difficulties, the clarification of linguistic questions, and a basic elucidation of historical context. Put differently, he identified the goal of biblical criticism with the restoration of textual order rather than the exposition of scriptural meaning. Simon judged, then, that the fathers, with only a few exceptions, were not biblical critics. As he notes, it simply did not serve their purposes to undertake an exact, methodical construal of the literal sense. Their concern was to press the claims of the 'idea of the Christian religion' in disputes with heretics, who misunderstood the faith, and against Jews, who already had an understanding of the literal sense (Simon 1685:386). For these purposes, the allegorical, mystical, and moral senses were more appropriate. Those who *were* biblical critics in Simon's sense—Jerome, Origen, and, to a more limited extent, Augustine—exercised considerable freedom in debating the value of the versions (Jerome), collating variants (Origen), and advocating the use of profane learning in biblical study (Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*). Their example, along with the example of recent Catholic critics like Cardinal Cajetan (1469–1534) and Jacques Bonfrère (1572–1642), shows that Catholic regard for tradition in no way precludes biblical criticism, which is open to anyone with the proper skills and knowledge. What counts in criticism, then, is erudition and good sense rather than authority. Therefore, Simon did not scruple to disparage patristic biblical criticism, on the grounds that the fathers did not have the benefits of modern scholarship (what he called 'necessary helps'; *secours nécessaires*) and that they were, with the exception of Origen and Jerome, ignorant of Hebrew (Simon 1685:unpaginated preface).

The freedom with which Simon identified deficiencies in the biblical criticism of the fathers, both in principle and in specific instances, signalled powerfully the newness of his programme. Simon's programme divorced church tradition, identified with the fathers, from an exposition of literal sense based on individual critical judgement. If theology had nothing to fear from biblical criticism, then it did not have anything to gain from it either. Neither, for that matter, did biblical criticism stand to benefit from

theology in Simon's division of labour. Simon's separation of an ancient, authoritative tradition from the exegetical work ultimately necessary to form theological judgements proved to be the most problematic aspect of his programme. Simon's nemesis, Bishop Bossuet, for example, complained that one cannot confine patristic authority to theology and leave interpretative judgement to the critics without defecting from Catholic orthodoxy and becoming a Protestant rationalist, a Socinian (Lambe 1985:172). Yet an actual Protestant with rationalistic and perhaps even Socinian leanings—Arminian biblical critic Jean Le Clerc (1657–1736)—was equally displeased with Simon's division. Le Clerc saw no need to distinguish between a higher-order theology, intelligible only through tradition, and a lower-order criticism, the domain of erudition and good sense. Le Clerc affirmed not only the sufficiency of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) but also the perspicuity of the Bible in theological matters: 'in spite of the obscurities found in scripture, it is quite clear in establishing invincibly the articles necessary to salvation' (quoted in Pitassi 1987:15). He believed that the fathers, as ordinary men, were subject to error and that their writings could be obscure and were less uniform than supporters of tradition often claimed. Le Clerc denied, therefore, that moderns were inferior to the fathers, mere 'brutes' by comparison, blind and ignorant people who need to 'read the Holy Fathers day and night in order to learn how to reason properly, understand scripture, and be instructed in the foundations of the religion' (quoted in Bernier 2008:218–19). In his 1685 refutation of Simon, *Sentimens de quelque theologiens de Hollande*, Le Clerc argued that Simon, despite pretensions of fidelity to tradition, ignored it in practice; neither the fathers nor tradition played any appreciable role in Simon's treatment of the Bible. According to Le Clerc, the sum and substance of Simon's work is the individual application of critical method to the text. Thus, both Bossuet and Le Clerc, men on opposite ends of nearly every possible spectrum, agreed that Simon's bifurcation of authority into separate theological and critical domains was unstable, if not incoherent.

## AFTER SIMON

---

Simon, so often called a founder of modern criticism, was among the last in the line of critical precursors to write extensively on patristic interpretation. To say that his career, therefore, marked the beginning of scientific criticism and the end of traditional interpretation among learned commentators would be an overstatement. It would be more accurate to say that Simon's work affords a clear and dramatic view of the difficulties involved in sustaining a programme that confines itself to the literal sense while forcing a *secondary* choice among three options: to embed the literal sense, identifiable with the Vulgate, in a larger theological synthesis (Council of Trent); to detach investigations of the literal sense from the Vulgate (Erasmus) while affirming the veracity of ancient Christianity (Grotius) or church tradition (Simon) independently of those investigations; or to extend the application of critical principles to theological and religious questions (Le Clerc). While German scholars in subsequent generations

appreciated Simon's work and even revered it (Woodbridge 1988:65–87), their work had a greater affinity for fellow Protestant Le Clerc than it did for Simon.

In the eighteenth century, academic engagement with the literal sense took definitive shape within the context of German universities. The first thing to note about this context, initially, is the importance of Pietism. The Pietist movement in the German territories was a broad social and ecclesial movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with deep roots in German Lutheranism. It provided a new impetus to the study of the Bible—specifically a renewed emphasis on it that would restore spiritual vitality to individuals and congregations that had apparently become stale, arid, and socially disconnected under the direction of the orthodox Lutheran establishment. Thus, when the University of Halle was founded in 1694 and staffed with Pietist professors, it featured an impressive cadre of biblical scholars. The Halle formula included rigorous philology and textual criticism, on the one hand, and an emphasis on the spiritual condition of the interpreter on the other. The goal was to train learned pastors and to engender in them a kind of spiritual earnestness that would direct interpretation toward personal holiness and social action. One sees these objectives clearly in the life and work, for example, of A. H. Francke (1663–1727). For a time, Halle faculty were able to coordinate these two objectives, but, as Halle and its rivals adopted an increasingly statist conception of university education, academic theology moved away from personal religious qualifications and toward disciplinary competence on the model of philosophy, classics, and history. It was at this time that biblical interpretation received clear and decisive shape—in reaction to Pietism—as a sub-field within the larger discipline of hermeneutics. The three most important figures associated with this development in the eighteenth century were J. A. Ernesti (1707–81) at Leipzig, and S. J. Baumgarten (1706–57) and J. S. Semler (1725–91) at Halle.

Baumgarten sought to extend, within biblical studies, the influence and prestige of hermeneutics, or the general science of textual interpretation. In 1745, Baumgarten published the first edition of his lectures on hermeneutics as an *academisches Lesebuch* designed to formalize and transmit his interpretative method. The work begins with a general claim for the indispensability of hermeneutics for interpreters. Several precepts (*Lehrsätze*) follow this general claim: interpretation must be based on the original languages of Scripture; the Reformed doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture does not preclude the need for hermeneutics; and hermeneutical considerations specific to the Bible can be derived from general principles of language, reason, and textuality (Baumgarten 1759: 2–3). Baumgarten's most famous student, and his successor in the fullest sense of the word, was Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91). Semler trained under Baumgarten at Halle and served on the theological faculty there beginning in 1753. He worked to make theology a fully-fledged, free-standing discipline at the university. Semler distinguished sharply between biblical interpretation in earlier times (*vorigen Zeiten*) and in his own time (*unsern Zeiten*). Before the development of a generalized hermeneutic, interpretation, which tended overwhelmingly in Semler's view to arbitrariness and enthusiasm, was essentially esoteric. The great advantage of Baumgartian hermeneutics for Semler was that it identified interpretation with skills and knowledge

that could be transmitted. Interpretation for Semler must not be confined to the insights of a few pious individuals. It consists rather in hermeneutical knowledge that is free, accessible, and open to all. Traditional interpretation, for Semler, yielded only a syllabus of hermeneutical errors. These included, pre-eminently, historical ignorance and allegorization; Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* was a lone exception (Semler 1759:unpaginated preface).

Semler's hero, though, was not Baumgarten, nor even Simon: it was Luther. For Semler, the virtues of Luther's approach to biblical interpretation consisted in his reliance upon reason and his use of grammatical exegesis to assign and fix meaning. What made these things especially attractive were the sociopolitical advantages of an interpretative method that shifted authority from religious criteria to formal, academic ones. For Semler, Luther was not a churchman or a reformer as much as he was a champion of philosophical interpretation. By showing that the fathers and the saints were not infallible in their interpretations, he disengaged piety from exegesis and abolished, thereby, an 'unprofitable' (*untauglich*) interpretative principle that had, for centuries, connected the two. In standing his ground, Luther faced the 'old unreasonable' objection (from followers of Andreas Carlstadt and Caspar Schwenkfeld) that 'an unconverted person who did not have the Spirit or who did not appear to be improving his spiritual life could neither understand the holy Scriptures nor say anything useful about them.' According to Semler, Luther's opponents were mistaken in conflating personal piety with rational authority. Conversion and inner renewal does not make people good teachers and preachers, Semler wrote; it only makes them good Christians (Semler 1759:unpaginated preface). In this way, Semler transformed Luther, subtly altering the theological character of disciplinary criticism while assimilating to it a generalized hermeneutics in which personal piety was irrelevant.

This allowed scholars to remake biblical interpretation as an academic discipline by marginalizing religious criteria within the irenic context of the university. Semler replaced confessional reading with a philosophically robust hermeneutics, and he separated piety from expertise in a way that allowed academic theology to remain Protestant while becoming functionally non-confessional. As Semler's biographer, Gottfried Hornig, has pointed out, one must not make the mistake of thinking that Protestant *Aufklärungstheologie* was merely a churchly reform; rather, it was a scientific elaboration of Luther's insights: theology 'received important impulses from contemporary, scientific developments, especially history, and constitutes a *university theology*, itself a part of contemporary scientific theory, with historical research and efforts toward an improved hermeneutics' (Hornig 1996:ix-x). Semler separated ancient and medieval interpretation—misguided, esoteric, and arbitrary—from the second coming of correct interpretation in the insights of Luther. He reconceived biblical scholarship as part of a new public theology that was to be constantly re-evaluated in terms of social significance. Semler saw clearly that the way for biblical scholarship to thrive in the new order was to reinforce Protestant hermeneutics by adjusting it in light of irenic political ideals and bestowing upon it, in the new study of hermeneutics, the mantle of a scientific discipline.

## CONCLUSION

---

As promising as hermeneutics seemed in the late eighteenth century, it was historical research that gave biblical studies a scientific character in the crucial nineteenth century. The study of Antiquity, *Altertumswissenschaft*, integrated all disciplines necessary to the full contextualization of ancient literature, whether classical or biblical: textual criticism, source criticism, archaeology, comparative linguistics, ethnography, and studies of myth and ritual. Just as academic biblical studies in this period became identified almost exclusively with historical criticism (rather than hermeneutics or poetics, for example), the study of the early Christian world took place increasingly in disciplines oriented toward notions of development. Hegelian philosophy, which described history as the conflictual, progressive, and rational unfolding of Absolute Spirit in the world, made it possible to understand Christian Antiquity in more dynamic terms: not as the site of stable consensus but rather as one stage in the dialectical process by which the Absolute (God) realizes itself in the world. Thus attuned to history as a contest of ideas, a struggle to realize a transcendent truth, scholars influenced by Hegel—figures like D. F. Strauss, F. C. Baur, and followers of the Tübingen School, for example—set a new agenda for theology and biblical studies (Baird 1992:244–94). Their goal was not to elucidate the *consensus patrum* as an aid to exegesis, still less to recover a pristine, golden age of the Church, but rather to re-narrate Christian history as one of development through conflict and not, as some had claimed, a decline from origins. Though scholarship in this period produced new, discomfiting portraits of early Christian figures as ruthless heresy-hunters, of traditional doctrines as derivative philosophical formulations, and of Nicene orthodoxy as a triumphant ideology rather than a victorious truth, this work did not amount, simply, to a deconstruction of patristic authority. At a more profound level, it may be understood as a renegotiation with the past, which was continuous in important ways with the early modern project. Critics in the Republic of Letters, as we have seen, functioned independently of church offices and hierarchies, observing a separation between biblical philology and doctrine. They believed that the former, when governed by erudition, judgement, and good sense, aided in the resolution of interpretative disputes; they believed that the latter, when confined charitably to the essentials, facilitated consensus. The fathers, then, were for Erasmus, Grotius, and Simon witnesses to a particular vision of culture in which the Christian religion was coherent enough to sustain a meaningful tradition, yet capacious enough to accommodate reform. As long as the chief role of the fathers was to mark a theological consensus, there was no great contradiction between loyalty to a scriptural authority rooted in the early Church and a critical, independent investigation of the literal sense within the limits of that consensus. Yet Le Clerc, Baumgarten, and Semler saw in Simon's work a new possibility: to situate the fathers within a different story, one in which the fathers, as fallible forebears, did not so much bequeath a consensus as begin (or continue) a process of development. In this way, patristic interpretation was integrated into a new

academic enterprise characterized by a progressive view of culture. Adolf von Harnack (1850–1931), the great Berlin church historian, held an extremely low view of the fathers, describing their writings as boring and insipid. He nevertheless regarded it as a duty to study their work thoroughly. As an editor for the massive *Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, he wrote in 1911 that the patristics scholar must dig beneath frustrating layers of recycled and borrowed materials (*Plagiaten*) to come to the bottom: ‘But, it is exactly so and not otherwise: in these 400 folios lie the sources of the culture from which we are directly descended’ (quoted in Marksches 2009:538). What was a point of pride for Erasmus and fellow humanists was conceded grudgingly by Harnack, but the central idea is nevertheless clear. To study the fathers is not merely to ‘come to the bottom’ but to decide what it means to bear a culture, a faith, of someone else’s making.

## REFERENCES

### Ancient Sources

Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium*. Latin text: R. Demeulenaere (ed.), *Vincentii Lerinensis*, CCL 64 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985).

### Scholarship

- Augustijn, C. (1969). ‘The Ecclesiology of Erasmus’, in J. Coppens, *Scrinium Erasmianum*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill), 2: 135–55.
- Augustijn, C. (1991). *Erasmus: His Life, Works, and Influence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).
- Backus, I. (1995). ‘Erasmus and the Spirituality of the Early Church’, in H. M. Pabel (ed.), *Erasmus’ Vision of the Church* (Kirkville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers), 95–114.
- Backus, I. (2004). ‘The Early Church as a Model of Religious Unity in the Sixteenth Century: Georg Cassander and Georg Witzel’, in H. P. Louthan and R. C. Zachman (eds), *Conciliation and Confession: The Struggle for Unity in the Age of Reform, 1415–1648* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 106–33.
- Baird, W. (1992). *History of New Testament Research, Volume One: From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis: Fortress).
- Barton, J. (2007). *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, KY, and London: Westminster John Knox).
- Baumgarten, S. J. (1759). *Unterricht von Auslegung der heil: Schrift ehemals für seine Zuhörer ausgefertigt*, rev. edn (Halle: Johann Justinus Gebauer).
- Bernier, J. (2008). ‘Le Problème de la tradition chez Richard Simon et Jean Le Clerc’, *RevSR* 82 (2): 199–223.
- Blair, A. M. (2010). *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Bultmann, C. (2008). ‘Beyond the Vulgate: Hugo Grotius’s Erudite Response to the Biblical Representation of Solomon’, *ZAW* 120: 92–106.
- Burke, P. (1999). ‘Erasmus and the Republic of Letters’, *European Review* 7: 5–17.

- De Jonge, H. J. (1976). 'Erasmus und die Glossa Ordinaria zum Neuen Testament', *Nederlandisch Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 56: 51–77.
- Godin, A. (1982). *Erasmus: Lecteur d'Origène* (Geneva: Droz).
- Grafton, A. (2009). *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press).
- Hazard, P. (2013). *The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680–1715*, originally published in 1935 as *La Crise de la conscience européenne*; Eng. trans. by J. Lewis May originally published in 1953 (New York: New York Review of Books).
- Hornig, G. (1996). *Johann Salomo Semler: Studien zu Leben und Werk des Hallenser Aufklärungstheologen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer).
- Jenkins, A. K., and Preston, P. (2007). *Biblical Scholarship and the Church: A Sixteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Aldershot: Ashgate).
- Knight, W. S. M. (1925). *The Life and Works of Hugo Grotius* (London: Sweet & Maxwell).
- Kraus, H.-J. (1982). *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, 3rd edn (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag).
- Lambe, P. (1985). 'Biblical Criticism and Censorship in Ancien Régime France: The Case of Richard Simon', *HTR* 78 (1/2): 149–77.
- Lambe, P. (1988). 'Critics and Skeptics in the Seventeenth-Century Republic of Letters', *HTR* 81 (3): 271–96.
- Markschies, C. (2009). 'Adolf von Harnack: Vom Großbetrieb der Wissenschaft', in A. Baertschi and C. G. King (eds), *Die Modernen Väter der Antike: Die Entwicklung der Altertumswissenschaften an Akademie und Universität im Berlin des 19. Jahrhunderts*. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter), 529–52.
- Meyjes, G. H. M. (1984a). 'Protestant Irenicism in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in *The End of Strife: Papers Selected from the Proceedings of the Colloquium of the Commission internationale d'histoire ecclésiastique comparée held at the University of Durham, 2 to 9 September 1981* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), 77–93.
- Meyjes, G. H. M. (1984b). 'Hugo Grotius as an Irenicist', in *The World of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645): Proceedings of the International Colloquium, organized by the Grotius Committee of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Rotterdam 6–9 April 1983* (Amsterdam: Holland University Press), 43–63.
- Pabel, H. M. (1995). 'The Peaceful People of Christ: The Irenic Ecclesiology of Erasmus of Rotterdam', in H. M. Pabel (ed.), *Erasmus' Vision of the Church* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers), 57–93.
- Pitassi, M. C. (1987). *Entre croire et savoir: Le Problème de la méthode critique chez Jean Le Clerc* (Leiden: Brill).
- Reventlow, H. G. (1988). 'Humanistic Exegesis: The Famous Hugo Grotius', in B. Uffenheimer and H. G. Reventlow (eds), *Creative Biblical Exegesis: Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics through the Centuries* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press), 175–91.
- Reventlow, H. G. (1997). *Epochen der Bibelauslegung. Band III: Renaissance, Reformation, Humanismus* (Munich: C. H. Beck).
- Rummel, E. (1995). 'Monachatus non est pietas: Interpretations and Misinterpretations of a Dictum', in H. M. Pabel (ed.), *Erasmus' Vision of the Church* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers), 41–55.
- Rummel, E. (2004). *Erasmus* (London and New York: Continuum).
- Schäfer, A.-S. (2012). *Auctoritas patrum? The Reception of the Church Fathers in Puritanism* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang).

- Semler, J. S. (1759). 'Vorrede', in S. J. Baumgarten, *Unterricht von Auslegung der Heil: Schrift ehemals für seine Zuhörer ausgefertigt*, rev. edn (Halle: Johann Justinus Gebauer): unpaginated.
- Sheehan, J. (2005). *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, and Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Simon, R. (1685). *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers).
- Simon, R. (1693). *Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs du Nouveau Testament depuis le commencement du Christianisme jusque à nôtre tems: Avec une dissertation critique sur les principaux actes manuscrits qui ont été citez dans les trois parties de cet ouvrage* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers).
- Trapman, J. (1994). 'Grotius and Erasmus', in H. J. M. Nellen and E. Rabie (eds), *Hugo Grotius: Theologian. Essays in Honour of G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes* (Leiden: Brill), 77–98.
- Trevor-Roper, H. R. (1972). *Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change*. 2nd edn (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan).
- Vessey, M. (2006). "'Vera et Aeterna Monumentae": Jerome's Catalogue of Christian Writers and the Premises of Erasmian Humanism', in G. Frank et al. (eds), *Die Patristik in der frühen Neuzeit: Die Relektüre der Kirchenväter in den Wissenschaften des 15. bis 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Fromman-Holzboog), 351–75.
- Woodbridge, J. D. (1988). 'German Responses to the Biblical Critic Richard Simon: From Leibniz to J. S. Semler', in H. G. Reventlow et al. (eds), *Historische Kritik und biblischer Kanon in der deutschen Aufklärung* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz), 65–87.

### Suggested Reading

- Backus, I. (1997) (ed.). *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill).
- Bergjan, S.-P., and Pollmann, K. (2010) (eds). *Patristic Tradition and Intellectual Paradigms in the 17th Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck).
- Clark, E. (2011). *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia and Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Furey, C. M. (2006). *Erasmus, Contarini, and the Religious Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Grafton, A. (1991). *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press).
- Howard, T. A. (2006). *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Legaspi, M. C. (2010). *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Steinmetz, D. (1999) (ed.). *Die Patristik in der Biblexegese des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz).

## CHAPTER 47

---

# RETRIEVALS IN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

---

MATTHEW LEVERING

How is early Christian biblical interpretation being retrieved in contemporary Christian theology? Let me begin by noting that one could argue that there is no real difference between retrieving patristic biblical exegesis and retrieving patristic theology. A chapter on the retrieval of patristic theology, however, would need to be much lengthier than the present one. I think here of the ways in which contemporary theologians such as David Bentley Hart, Oliver O'Donovan, Sarah Coakley, John Zizioulas, Joseph Ratzinger, Rowan Williams, John Milbank, and Jean-Luc Marion (among many others) have retrieved Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and other fathers. Insofar as patristic theology is inseparable from patristic exegesis, theologians such as these have inevitably contributed much to the retrieval of early Christian biblical interpretation. In addition, the work of patristics scholars such as Lewis Ayres, Paul Blowers, Michael Cameron, Peter Martens, Gerald McLarney, Robert Louis Wilken, and others deliberately retrieves both patristic theology and patristic exegesis in ways that are useful for contemporary Christian theology. Since I lack space to discuss all this scholarship, the present chapter is limited rather arbitrarily.

In what follows, I seek to attend equally to trends within Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism. For each, I go back to the work of seminal mid-twentieth-century figures. My discussion of the retrieval of patristic exegesis in Orthodox theology begins with Georges Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky; my discussion of the retrieval of patristic exegesis in Catholic theology begins with the French Jesuits Jean Daniélou and Henri de Lubac; and my discussion of the retrieval of patristic exegesis in Protestant theology begins with Karl Barth. The figure of Barth here is rather debatable, since his engagement with the fathers (let alone with the fathers' exegesis) is not extensive. I have chosen to engage him, however, because he shifted Protestant theology away from the 'liberalism' in which the theology and exegesis of the fathers had little positive place, even if Adolf von Harnack, for example, knew patristic texts well.

Are the fathers and their exegesis better known among theologians today than in the period prior to these seminal figures? This question has some urgency lest it seem that I am assuming that the great figures of the mid-twentieth century introduced a major retrieval of previously neglected patristic texts. It appears that the answer to the foregoing question is 'no'. The work of the Oxford Movement, the Tübingen School, John Williamson Nevin, Philip Schaff, Matthias Joseph Scheeben, Herman Bavinck, the Russian patristics scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and so forth, demonstrates an extensive knowledge of the fathers across ecumenical lines. A quick glance at Catholic exegetes such as Marie-Joseph Lagrange makes clear that the fathers' exegesis remained well known in Catholic circles in the early twentieth century. Indeed, despite the impressive historical gains contributed by contemporary patristics scholarship, it appears that today's generation of Catholic and Protestant theologians and biblical scholars has less knowledge of patristic theology and exegesis than preceding generations.

## ORTHODOX RETRIEVALS

---

In 1931, Georges Florovsky published *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century*, and two years later he published *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth–Eighth Centuries*. Both books were based upon his patristics lectures at the St Sergius Institute in Paris, France, where he taught in exile from his native Russia. These writings had precedents: as Paul Gavrilyuk has pointed out, the study of patristics flourished in Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and Florovsky drew especially upon the four-volume *Lectures on the History of the Early Church* written by Vasily Bolotov that were published posthumously in the first two decades of the twentieth century (Gavrilyuk 2013:173).

Florovsky's crucial guiding principle is evident already in the introduction to his *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century*, where he says of patristic theology: '[O]nly it opens the right and true way towards a new Christian synthesis, craved and sought after in our time' (Florovsky 1931:5; cited in Gavrilyuk 2013:174). Likewise, in his study of the history of theology in Russia, *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovsky states in his preface: 'The study of the Russian past has convinced me that an Orthodox theologian today can find the true norm and the living spring of creative inspiration only in the heritage of the Holy Fathers. I am convinced that the intellectual separation from patristics and Byzantinism was the main cause of all the interruptions and spiritual failures in Russian development' (Florovsky 1937:xv; cited in Gavrilyuk 2013:176). Florovsky developed the idea of a 'Christian Hellenism' or 'Sacred Hellenism', according to which Greek philosophy as appropriated by the fathers remains, for Christians, 'philosophy' per se. The patristic writings are for Florovsky the definitive determination of the content of true belief about divine revelation. In 1936, Florovsky famously insisted that '*Hellenism is a standing category of the Christian existence. . . . And the creative postulate for the next future would be like this: let us be more Greek to be truly catholic, to be truly Orthodox*'

(Florovsky 1939:242; cited in Gavriilyuk 2013:208). This remained his fundamental thesis throughout his career.

In 1944, Vladimir Lossky published his *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, which appeared in English some years later as *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Lossky proposes that since divine revelation shows forth divine mysteries, all theology must be 'mystical', in the sense of requiring of the true theologian an 'inner transformation of spirit' that enables the theologian to experience the divine mysteries, to taste them from within (Lossky 1976:8). In accord with the tradition of the Eastern Church, Lossky identifies three theologians who are most 'mystical' in this sense, and who are therefore the most deserving of the name 'theologian': St John the Evangelist, St Gregory of Nazianzus, and St Symeon the New Theologian. To these three, Lossky essentially adds all the fathers, especially the Eastern ones. Other than St Gregory Palamas and a few others—such as Palamas's supporters Mark of Ephesus and Nicolas Cabasilas, and more recent Russian figures such as Dimitri of Rostov, Seraphim of Sarov, Prince E. Troubetsky, and Philaret of Moscow—the fathers are the sources for the dogmatic chapters that comprise Lossky's deeply influential book. In contrast to his admiration for the fathers, Lossky is critical of scholastic theology, noting that it is to be expected that from the medieval period onward (in the West), 'souls unable to find adequate nourishment in the theological *summae* should turn to search greedily in the accounts of individual mystical experience in order to reinvigorate themselves in an atmosphere of spirituality' (Lossky 1976:21). Like Florovsky, he is reacting against the legacy of Byzantine scholasticism, which flourished for many centuries, but was no mere Western imposition, as Marcus Plested has recently shown (Plested 2012).

In Lossky's dogmatic chapters—on 'The Divine Darkness,' 'God in Trinity,' 'Uncreated Energies,' 'Created Being,' 'Image and Likeness,' 'The Economy of the Son,' 'The Economy of the Holy Spirit,' 'Two Aspects of the Church,' 'The Way of Union,' and 'The Divine Light'—the central interlocutors are Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Clement of Alexandria, John of Damascus, Leontius of Byzantium, Macarius of Egypt, and Isaac the Syrian. Lossky singles out Origen for criticism more than once, and he identifies the Russian Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944), whose alleged errors he repeatedly points out, with Origen. He mentions Benedict of Nursia and Irenaeus of Lyons positively, but Augustine comes in for criticism regarding his theories of the divine ideas and the psychological analogy of the Trinity. Very occasionally Lossky cites modern authors, such as his teacher Étienne Gilson, or Pavel Florensky and Théodore de Regnon. In working with the fathers, he generally quotes from their dogmatic writings rather than from their explicitly exegetical writings (though there is certainly exegesis in their dogmatic writings as well), and he rarely cites Scripture. In this regard, he emphasizes that rather than encountering Jesus of Nazareth through 'the eyes of alien witnesses,' Eastern Christians see Christ 'through the eyes of the Church' and thus 'in the Holy Spirit' (Lossky 1976:242). There is no sense, then, of patristic theology being 'outdated' by historical research. On the contrary, the holy fathers are precisely the ones who have eyes to see, and therefore

Lossky's exposition of the fathers on these themes is an exposition not merely of patristics (in a historical sense) but of true theology for today.

Lossky's opponent Sergius Bulgakov, too, draws upon the fathers, but in a much more critical way than Lossky or Florovsky, both of whom he esteemed. Thus in his *The Lamb of God*, originally published in Russian in 1933, Bulgakov praises many aspects of the heretic Nestorius' theological synthesis, and he accuses St Cyril of Alexandria of holding to an 'obstinate monism' (Bulgakov 2008:45). Bulgakov also concerns himself directly with the interpretation of Scripture, as for example in his extensive exegesis of Philippians 2.5–11, and he draws heavily upon contemporary Russian and German biblical scholarship. He finds much to praise in the fathers, and yet he identifies in their Christology also the presence of a 'static understanding of the Incarnation' and a 'general lack of clarity... that led to constant deviations toward docetism' (Bulgakov 2008:211). This is obviously not the kind of conclusion that one would find in Lossky or Florovsky. Bulgakov is in dialogue with the fathers, but large sections of *The Lamb of God* strike out in directions of his own, rooted in his own creative exegesis of Scripture and his commitment to Sophiology.

The position of Florovsky and Lossky came to be known as the 'neo-patristic synthesis'. More recent Orthodox theologians, working broadly from within this neo-patristic synthesis, often interact more closely with actual patristic exegesis of Scripture. John Behr, for instance, focuses upon how the first Christians, and the fathers of the Church more generally, arrived at the interpretations of Jesus that they did, such as the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God. Behr argues that the first Christians, under the guidance of the crucified and risen Christ, did so by turning to the 'Old Testament' Scriptures. For Behr, the 'Old Testament' Scriptures thus do far more than simply narrate the historical chronology of salvation history; rather, they teach us how to interpret and proclaim the Christ (see Behr 2001; Behr 2004; Behr 2006; Behr 2013). For example, in his *The Mystery of Christ*, Behr cites Melito of Sardis's interpretation of the Exodus and of the sufferings of Abel, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, David, and the prophets, showing how Melito's mode of interpretation mirrors that practised by the first Christians under Jesus' direction, according to Luke 24. This mode of interpretation, Behr adds, is also that of the liturgy, both as found in the fathers' liturgical writings, and as found in 1 Corinthians 10–11. References to the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, Cyprian, Irenaeus, Athanasius, Clement of Alexandria, and so forth abound in *The Mystery of Christ*, but so too do references to Romans, Acts, John, Luke, and many OT books. Behr reads Scripture alongside the fathers' readings of Scripture, and he makes clear that the fathers bring to bear the exegetical principles found in Scripture itself.

The work of the Orthodox OT scholar Eugen J. Pentiuc also deserves mention here. Though he possesses the full range of historical-critical tools, his commentary on Hosea is no ordinary historical-critical commentary, as can be seen from its title: *Long-Suffering Love: A Commentary on Hosea with Patristic Annotations* (Pentiuc 2002). Pentiuc recently published *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition*, whose ambitious purpose is 'to provide a general overview and a succinct analysis of the primary modes in which the Old Testament has been received, interpreted and conveyed within Eastern

Orthodox tradition' (Pentiu 2014:ix). This book stands alongside such works as Theodore G. Stylianopoulos' *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective*, in which the author aims to integrate historical-critical scholarship with the fathers' exegesis and to introduce a spiritually transformative dimension to scriptural reading (Stylianopoulos 2002). John Breck's *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* equally seeks to retrieve patristic hermeneutics for modern biblical scholarship (Breck 2001).

Many leading contemporary Orthodox theologians follow the basic model of the neo-patristic synthesis. An example is Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev's *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church*, which places the fathers front and centre. The patristic texts that appear in Alfeyev's work make clear the centrality of biblical exegesis in their thought, as can be seen for example in his discussion of marriage. Advocating 'the positive meaning of sexual love in itself' in marriage, he builds upon a lengthy text from the third-century St Methodius of Patara, in which Methodius interprets John 5.17, Genesis 1.28, and Genesis 2.23–4 (Alfeyev 2002:150–1). At the same time, in his *Orthodox Witness Today* and in a recent article, Alfeyev urges that the neo-patristic synthesis, specifically as advocated by Florovsky, needs to be expanded so as not to privilege Greek Christianity and so as to be more open to the historical contextualization of the fathers (see Alfeyev 2006 and Alfeyev 2007).

## CATHOLIC RETRIEVALS

---

In his *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire* (1953), published in English translation under the title *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History* and comprising various seminal essays and lectures, Jean Daniélou includes a study of 'Symbolism and History'. Daniélou's intended audience is not biblical scholars so much as the neo-scholastic theologians of his day, who sought to be 'scientific' (in the sense of seeking knowledge through causes) rather than 'symbolic'. As Daniélou notes, symbols—images drawn from the senses—are at the centre of biblical theology, sacramental theology, and mystical theology. From Scripture, he points to the image of the Spirit hovering over the waters at creation, to the image of the dove descending upon Jesus at his baptism, and to the image of there being no more sea when the new heaven and new earth appear at the end of time. The liturgy, too, is rife with symbolism, as for instance in Christmas being celebrated after the winter solstice, in the Paschal vigil's fire symbolizing the pillar of fire of the Exodus from Egypt, and in baptism exploiting water's symbolic connection with death in the OT. Today, however, those who write and think about the realities of Scripture do so in prose that, insofar as possible, avoids symbolism, other than in reporting on Scripture's own symbolism. This is because symbols today 'are felt to be too imprecise and uncertain to be trustworthy' (Daniélou 1958:132).

Are symbols in fact imprecise? Daniélou argues that the study of the comparative history of religions has suggested the opposite. Comparative religion, he observes,

has tended to focus upon the influence of other near-Eastern religions on the Bible, or equally upon the notion that symbols found in cultures around the world (such as the symbol of a cataclysmic flood) reveal themselves to be based in a primal historical event known to all cultures. For Daniélou, these are false trails. In accord with Mircea Eliade's *Traité de l'histoire des religions*, and drawing also upon Carl Jung's theory of archetypes and upon Rudolf Otto's idea of the 'numinous,' he proposes that the truth of the matter is that 'the existence of a common set of symbols in the various religions is due to the parallelism of mental processes; but this means that the objective reality of the symbols themselves must be common ground as well' (Daniélou 1958:134). Far from being imprecise, therefore, symbols are quite precise with respect to the realities that they communicate: 'We find that the sky is always linked to the notion of divine transcendence; meteorological phenomena reveal God's power to create and to destroy; water symbolizes death and fertility; the moon is also connected with death and with life; trees support a congeries of interpretations—the axis of the world, tree of life, ladder of heaven' (Daniélou 1958:134). It is the actual nature of the things of the world that gives their symbolic use this consistency in meaning.

If religious symbolism is so potent and precise, however, has there ever been such a thing as idolatry? Or have all the religions of the world been communicating equally well via symbols? Daniélou grants that despite the positive place of natural symbolism in the religions of the world, they have also been marked by serious errors. Instead of worshipping the God known through natural symbols, there has been an idolatrous tendency to worship the natural symbols themselves, such as the sun and stars, the bull, and the seasonal cycle. In the Book of Genesis, Daniélou finds a strong critique of the ways in which the Babylonian and Canaanite myths have fallen into just such idolatry. Genesis replaces the universality of nature symbolism with specific historical events. Yet this emphasis on historical particularity does not thereby do away with symbolism. In fact, 'In the gradual unfolding of God's design, there appears a system of analogies between his successive works, for all their distinct self-sufficiency as separate creative acts' (Daniélou 1958:139–40). These analogies or types, Daniélou argues, give rise to a new, unique kind of symbolism, present in biblical religion alone. It is symbolism tied to specific, concrete moments in history. Typological interpretation within Scripture does not do away with the concrete historical existence of the type, even though the type prefigures later persons and events recorded in Scripture. The result is 'a frame of reference for intelligible co-ordination' (Daniélou 1958:140) that involves prophecy and fulfilment, and whose ultimate fulfilment is eschatological.

This insight governs two important books by Daniélou on the fathers' exegesis: *Sacramentum futuri: Études sur les origines de la typologie biblique* (1950; Eng. trans. 1960) and *Bible et liturgie: La Théologie biblique des sacraments et des fêtes d'après les Pères de l'Église* (1951; Eng. trans. 1956). The key point of these books is that the fathers' exegesis is rooted in biblical typology—both that of the OT prophets and that of the NT authors—and thus extends Scripture's own exegetical mode. The fathers' exegesis is carried forward in the Church's liturgy even today. In the typologies that are found in the fathers' exegesis, in the liturgy, and in Scripture, Daniélou observes that

‘we are face to face with something which is part and parcel of the deposit of Revelation’ (Daniélou 1960:288). To neglect or fail to integrate the fathers’ exegesis, in other words, is to fail to engage divine revelation as it demands to be engaged. In the fathers, Daniélou argues, ‘we meet apostolic tradition of which they are the witnesses and the depositories’ (Daniélou 1956:8). If we avoid the fathers’ exegesis or deny its truth, what we are in fact rejecting is the ‘biblical theology’ constitutive of ‘the faith of primitive Christianity’ (Daniélou 1956:8).

Henri de Lubac debated with Daniélou over the status of allegory. Responding to Daniélou in an essay on ‘Typology and Allegorization’ (1947), de Lubac argues that the allegorical sense is fully biblical, although the word ‘allegory’ can be a misleading one. In de Lubac’s view, the relationship between the ‘typological’ and the ‘allegorical’, far from being oppositional as Daniélou thinks, is ‘a relationship between two degrees of depth within the same category’ (de Lubac 1989a:161). Similarly, writing in 1959, de Lubac insists that ‘both the word and idea of Christian allegory come from St. Paul’ (de Lubac 1989b:165–6). Allegory, says de Lubac, belongs to the patristic effort to discern and proclaim the spiritual meaning in history, ‘how biblical history bears witness to Christ and how . . . it takes on an entirely Christian significance’ (de Lubac 1989b:192–3).

Even more significant than this defence of patristic allegory is de Lubac’s multi-volume *Exégèse médiévale* (1959–63), whose roots can be seen in de Lubac’s essay of 1948, ‘On an Old Distich: The Doctrine of the “Fourfold Sense” in Scripture.’ In his essay, de Lubac denies any intention to return to the fourfold sense ‘as a guide for today’s exegesis and theology’ (de Lubac 1989c:124). He aims, instead, at ‘[p]reserving or rediscovering its spirit’ (de Lubac 1989c:124). Historical-critical study of Scripture need not and in fact cannot rule out the spiritual meanings of Scripture, just as dogmatic and moral theology must be fundamentally the knowledge of Scripture (as opposed to a ‘scientific’ dogmatic synthesis that supersedes Scripture). In both cases, a true ‘science’ will recognize that patristic exegesis, carried forward in the medieval period, does for the exegesis of Scripture and for theology itself something irreplaceable: ‘It defines the relationship between historical reality and spiritual reality, between society and the individual, between time and eternity. . . . It organizes all of revelation around a concrete center, which is fixed in time and space by the Cross of Jesus Christ’ (de Lubac 1998:xix). This theology of history cannot be displaced without rejecting the message of Scripture itself, and thus patristic (and medieval) exegesis has a permanent relevance. Even if the particular patristic mode of biblical interpretation need not be imitated today, the spiritual understanding that undergirds patristic biblical interpretation must be retrieved in its fullness.

De Lubac’s *Exégèse médiévale* treats Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, Gregory the Great, John Cassian, Origen, and others, but its main focus is on both well-known and little-known medieval interpreters—although the latter cite numerous fathers. One purpose of the work is to show that scholastic theologians were deeply patristic and symbolic in their thinking, and, thus, that the neo-scholastic ‘scientific’ approach that dominated Catholic dogmatic theology when de Lubac wrote this work, and that disappeared shortly after its publication, was one-sided. In his almost equally significant 1950 book *Histoire et esprit: L’Intelligence de l’Écriture d’après Origène*, de Lubac offers his

fullest treatment of a patristic author, probing Origen's scriptural theology of history according to which Christ and the Church are 'at once wholly old and wholly new' (de Lubac 2007:468). I should also mention his 1967 *L'Écriture dans la tradition*, where he succinctly recapitulates the central insights of *Histoire et esprit* and *Exégèse médiévale* (see de Lubac 2000).

In de Lubac's own constructive theology, the fathers are a ubiquitous presence. Consider for example his 1971 book *Les Églises particulières dans l'Église universelle, suivi de La Maternité de l'église, et d'une interview recueillie par G. Jarczyk* (see de Lubac 1982). This work, both in its treatment of the relationship of the universal Church and particular churches and in its treatment of the 'motherhood' of the Church, contains numerous citations of church fathers. In just a couple of pages, one can find citations from Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, and Augustine. Among the fathers whom de Lubac quotes in order to make his constructive theological points are Irenaeus, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Hippolytus, Ambrose, Optatus of Milevis, and Hilary of Poitiers. Often, too, de Lubac quotes their explicitly exegetical writings. Thus, in de Lubac's constructive theology, we find a thorough integration of the fathers and of their exegesis.

De Lubac's friend Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose theological links to Karl Barth and Sergius Bulgakov are well known, wrote a number of well-regarded books on the fathers, although not surprisingly his perspective colours his historical readings (see Daley 2004). Balthasar's appreciation for patristic exegesis and his integration of it into his own exegetical and theological approach has been fully shown by W. T. Dickens, who concludes that 'Balthasar's views and uses of scripture in the *Theological Aesthetics*, while remaining conversant with historical criticism and generally abiding by its fruits, are compatible with those features of the pre-modern approaches to the Bible that helped sustain the sort of biblical fluency and imagination among Christians that today is in such short supply' (Dickens 2003:237). In my view, volume six of Balthasar's *Theological Aesthetics*, a volume first published in 1967 and devoted entirely to the manifestation of divine glory in the OT, may be read as an imitation of patristic works such as Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*. Just as Gregory reads everything in the narrative of the Exodus as being about Christian spiritual purification and ascent to union with God, so also Balthasar reads the narrative of the whole OT—chronologically arranged through the guidance of historical-critical scholars, with Amos and Hosea coming before Isaiah, and the Book of Job before 'Deutero-Isaiah'—as the image of Jesus' manifestation in Israel and his kenotic obedience, paradigmatically revealed in his falling silent upon the Cross. Along these figurative (though fully historical) lines, Balthasar says of Israel in the post-exilic period: '[N]ow the love of the covenant-God has put his partner to the hardest test by placing him [Israel] in a period empty of history... The fact that "sacred history" ceases in the post-exilic period is one of the most terrible things in the biblical revelation' (Balthasar 1991:370). This 'hardest test', as Balthasar makes clear later in his fifteen-volume Trilogy, figures Jesus' own enduring of alienation and emptiness upon the Cross, although unlike Israel, Jesus does not attempt to fill the divine absence with words.

Balthasar's theological reading of the OT is thoroughly conversant with historical-critical scholarship. Like modern biblical scholars, he is careful to read the OT as a

witness in its own right. Dickens notes, ‘By leaving the Old Testament figures in their Old Testament setting, Balthasar avoided treating them as New Testament figures in Old Testament dress’ (Dickens 2003:153). Biblical scholars who inform Balthasar’s treatment of particular OT texts include H. J. Kraus, F. Horst, W. Eichrodt, G. von Rad, G. Fohrer, W. Zimmerli, S. N. Kramer, O. Kaiser, I. Engnell, H. W. Wolff, H. Braun, R. de Vaux, A. Falkenstein, H. Haag, H. Gunkel, C. Barth, A. J. Weinsinck, C. Westermann, L. Koehler, N. Glueck, H. J. Stoebe, R. Labat, S. Herrmann, M. Noth, A. von Gall, W. Lotz, and numerous others. These historical-critical scholars are not merely cited to uphold readings at which Balthasar has already arrived. Rather, they shape his interpretations, and they appear throughout the work both in the footnotes and in the text itself. Furthermore, in volume six of his *Theological Aesthetics (The Glory of the Lord)*, Balthasar rarely cites the fathers of the Church: other than a very few references to Augustine and Origen, and one or two references each to Hippolytus, Irenaeus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory of Nyssa, Leo the Great, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Ephrem the Syrian, we find no patristic references. This is a surprising lack given the abundant presence of the fathers in many other writings by Balthasar. Yet Balthasar’s spiritual and Christological way of reading the OT—of seeing the form of Christ in the whole OT, and in each part of it—is deeply patristic in inspiration. This integration of historical-critical scholarship and patristic perspective is profoundly impressive, not least since Balthasar’s approach to the OT remains distinctively his own rather than simply reflecting the views of historical-critical scholars or the fathers’ views.

For its part, the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum* (1965), affirms the work of historical-critical scholarship while also acknowledging the value of patristic exegesis, whose contribution lies in helping exegetes to perceive ‘the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith’ (Flannery 1996:758, §12). *Dei verbum* gives a boost to patristic exegesis by stating that the Church ‘strives to reach day by day a more profound understanding of the sacred Scriptures, in order to provide her children with food from the divine words. For this reason also she duly fosters the study of the fathers, both Eastern and Western, and of the sacred liturgies’ (Flannery 1996:763, §23). The impact of Daniélou and de Lubac is apparent here.

Although this combination of scriptural and patristic study has been rare since the Council, the desired combination is on full display in the 1997 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and in the Church’s most recent document on biblical interpretation, Pope Benedict XVI’s 2010 Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*. Citing Jerome and Gregory the Great, *Verbum Domini* argues that ‘[a]pproaches to the sacred text that prescind from faith might suggest interesting elements on the level of textual structure and form, but would inevitably prove merely preliminary and structurally incomplete efforts’ (Pope Benedict XVI 2010:54, §30).

In his *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation*, co-authored with William S. Kurz, the NT scholar Luke Timothy Johnson draws from Augustine the following three lessons for contemporary biblical exegetes: interpreters

should ‘put on the imaginative world of Scripture’, should ‘engage the issue of truth and not simply the issue of meaning’, and should recognize that ‘the true home of biblical interpretation is the church as the gathering of God’s people’ and that ‘the true goal of biblical interpretation is the building up of the church in love’ (Johnson and Kurz 2002:117–18). In his prolific biblical scholarship—for instance in his commentaries on Luke/Acts and in his writings on Jesus—Johnson attempts to put into practice all three of these principles. Yet in his biblical scholarship, so far as I can tell, Johnson does not employ Augustine’s (or other fathers’) assistance in interpreting specific biblical texts. Instead, Johnson relies upon his own historical and literary training, and he dialogues with other contemporary biblical scholars.

Patristic exegesis receives a significant place in the work of some contemporary Catholic biblical scholars, among them Gary Anderson, Walter M. Werbylo, and William M. Wright IV. Anderson’s *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* ranges quite widely and offers an extensive retrieval of patristic exegesis, especially that of Gregory of Nyssa, Ephrem the Syrian, Augustine, and Theodore of Mopsuestia (see Anderson 2001). More recently, Anderson has combined historical-critical scholarship with attention to the fathers in his *Sin: A History*, which examines the long history of biblical and Second-Temple metaphors for sin (as a burden and a debt) and also draws brilliantly on Jacob of Sarug, Augustine, and Irenaeus (see Anderson 2009). Focusing on John 7.37–9, Werbylo’s *Imitating Patristic and Modern Exegesis* compares Bruno Barnhart and Raymond E. Brown with Origen and Augustine. His conclusion is that ‘when modern analysis of the Bible is expanded to include patristic analysis . . . exegesis is thereby guided, first, by a greater use of faith and, second, by consulting a more extensive unity’, that of ‘the whole of Scripture and the whole of Tradition’ (Werbylo 2009:241). Wright’s *Rhetoric and Theology* critiques J. Louis Martyn’s *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* by drawing upon such fathers as Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria, in order to show that ‘[t]he rhetorically argumentative character of John 9 [with its figural dynamic] suggests that it is not necessary to use a reconstructed history of the Johannine community as a hermeneutical key for grasping John’s theology’ (Wright 2009:203). Among the Catholic biblical scholars who, during and after the Second Vatican Council, carried forward the project of de Lubac and Daniélou with particular vigour, Ignace de la Potterie, Denis Farkasfalvy, and Francis Martin deserve special mention.

The Catholic theologian R. R. Reno’s commentary on Genesis makes frequent use of Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa (among other fathers) while drawing numerous insights from historical-critical scholarship, such as the identification of ‘the highly anthropocentric focus of the J material’ (Reno 2010:75). Reno, the editor of the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible series, has also co-authored with the patristics scholar John J. O’Keefe a book on patristic exegesis, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible*, which emphasizes that the ‘goal of exegesis . . . is not worldly knowledge but divine wisdom’ (O’Keefe and Reno 2005:139).

## PROTESTANT RETRIEVALS

---

In 1940, Karl Barth published the first part of the second volume of his *Church Dogmatics*, on the doctrine of God. Here Barth exhibits his approach to the fathers, an approach that is (as might be expected) relatively heavy in the use of Augustine. In addition to Augustine, Barth scatters a few references to various other fathers, including Cyril of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, Irenaeus of Lyons, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers, Ephrem, Justin Martyr, and John Chrysostom. Many of these references to fathers other than Augustine are found in Barth's discussion of the hiddenness of God. In small print, Barth buttresses his own views on the hiddenness of God with patristic quotations. These quotations serve to underscore that we can have real knowledge of God through revelation, and that this knowledge is not merely equivocal even though God is always in a certain sense hidden and beyond our grasp.

Prior to this discussion of God's hiddenness, Barth reflects (again in small print) upon Augustine's ascent to God that he enjoyed at Ostia with his mother Monica (*Conf.* 9.10). Insofar as this is a disembodied ascent that does not depend entirely upon God's descent in Christ—insofar as Augustine and Monica are modelling a neo-Platonic ascent—Augustine has abandoned 'the place where God encounters man in His revelation and where He gives Himself to be heard and seen by man' (Barth 1957:11). But as Barth underscores, Augustine ultimately recognizes that true encounter with God comes through hearing God's objective Word. For the principle that 'through His Word God is actually known and will be known again', Barth refers first to Psalm 127.1, 'Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain' (Barth 1957:4, 9). After this Psalm, however, Barth refers to Augustine, and only then to Calvin, for confirmation of the principle. Here the passage from Augustine's *Confessions* that Barth expositis is filled with Augustine's own biblical interpretation.

Indeed, Barth understands his own approach to be fundamentally that of the early Church: 'When the Early Church confessed: *Credo in Patrem, in eius Filium Jesum Christum, in Spiritum sanctum*, it thought it had nothing further to confess about its faith as such, because with this *in* it thought it had said everything necessary. God speaks; He claims; He promises; He acts; He is angry; He is gracious' (Barth 1957:13). For Barth, the fathers, in summing up their theology, understand themselves to be simply responding to the God who speaks and acts objectively in relationship to particular humans, in such a way that their proper subjectivity is opened up and re-established.

Admittedly, quotations from the fathers comprise only a little of Barth's text. In the main, what one finds in the *Church Dogmatics* is not quotation of any source, but Barth's own profound reflections upon the principles that he considers valid. Among Barth's named sources, there are more references to Luther and Calvin than there are to Augustine, and there are more references to Luther and Calvin than to the other fathers combined. Direct discussion of biblical texts, especially from the NT, are far more frequent and far

more extensive than any other source. Furthermore, Barth almost always interprets these biblical texts directly, without the explicit aid of patristic or Reformation interpreters. But it seems significant that Barth considers that the early Church has the same view that he does of the knowledge of God, who is known through his Word.

In 1969, the Methodist theologian Thomas C. Oden published a short study of Barth, *The Promise of Barth: An Ethics of Freedom*. Previously, Oden had been better known for 'liberal' and demythologizing theology along the lines set forth by Rudolf Bultmann. By the mid-1970s, Oden was fully embarked upon a mission to retrieve the early Church's theology for contemporary Protestantism, on the grounds that the fathers' interpretation of Scripture is a model for those who today fully accept biblical authority, as (evangelical) Protestants do. In his General Introduction to his influential multi-volume series of patristic texts in translation, the Ancient Christian Commentary Series, Oden comments: 'The purpose of exegesis in the patristic period was humbly to seek the revealed truth the Scriptures convey' (Oden 2001:xxvi). Oden differentiates this approach from modern 'fundamentalist' approaches, since the fathers were not 'reacting against modern naturalistic reductionism' and also since the fathers rejected 'a merely literal or plain-sense view of the text' that would neglect 'its spiritual and moral and typological nuances' (Oden 2001:xxvi). Oden addresses various concerns about patristic exegesis, including its often polemical characterization of the Jewish people and its cultural assumptions about women. Although he is sensitive to these problems, Oden is convinced that the fathers' engagement with Scripture has a tremendous amount to offer, due to their 'thoughtful, exegesis of the biblical text' (Oden 2001:xxxii) and the truth of the doctrines that they formulated exegetically (for instance, the doctrines of the Incarnation and of the Trinity).

In Oden's view, the fathers' exegesis should directly impact the preaching of the gospel today: 'One of the practical goals of the ACCS is the renewal of contemporary preaching in the light of the wisdom of ancient Christian preaching' (Oden 2001:xxxii). Clearly, Oden's approach to the fathers is different from Barth's; Oden is much more enamoured of the fathers' exegesis. But Oden and Barth agree that the early Church, in its commitment to responding to God's Word, is exemplary. Likewise, for both Oden and Barth, the fathers' exegesis should be paired with the Reformers' exegesis in pursuing dogmatic theology today, although again the place that Oden gives to the fathers is much greater.

Here might also be the place to note the emerging contemporary emphasis on 'reception history', or on the text's "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) as Markus Bockmuehl puts it (Bockmuehl 2006:67). Bockmuehl states, 'By agreeing to include in our remit the question of how the NT texts have in fact been read and lived, we would at least be engaged in a common exploration that would by definition embrace historical and reader-response concerns alike' (Bockmuehl 2006:67). Anglican scholars are particularly associated with this development, but it goes hand in hand with a renewed sense on the part of many (evangelical) Protestant scholars such as Oden that the fathers' exegesis must be received as a true witness to meaning of the biblical Word. Building upon developments in German biblical scholarship, Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland were pathbreakers in the English-speaking world in offering a commentary on

the Book of Revelation that fully integrates patristic interpretation of this biblical text, along with the reception history of the text in other historical periods as well (see Kovacs and Rowland 2004). A similar project, though undertaken as a comparative and chronological analysis rather than a commentary, appears in one of the final books published by the distinguished Presbyterian exegete Brevard S. Childs. Childs's *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* treats a wide variety of exegetes of the Book of Isaiah, including nine fathers of the Church in some detail. Childs, however, separated the material in this book from his historical-critical commentary on Isaiah (see Childs 2001). Yet Childs's assessment of the patristic reception of Isaiah, and indeed of the reception of Isaiah down through the centuries, is deeply appreciative, and he concludes that 'there has been almost from the beginning, both in oral and in written form, an understanding of the parameters of acceptable Christian interpretation expressed in terms of a rule of faith' (Childs 2004:322).

The Anglican biblical scholar A. K. M. Adam has drawn attention to the way in which contemporary academic biblical interpretation in fact excludes the kind of diversity that one finds in the exegesis of Scripture practised by actual Christian communities: 'Theological interpretation thrives outside the walled precincts of academic biblical theology' (Adam 2006:23). In urging that historical-critical exegesis not claim hegemony over the Bible's meaning, Adam takes his cue from Augustine's sense of Scripture's inexhaustible interpretative abundance: 'If Augustine rightly asks, "what more liberal and more fruitful provision could God have made in regard to the Sacred Scriptures than that the same words might be understood in several senses?" then the biblical theologian's task must . . . involve learning how to flourish that divine abundance' (Adam 2006:24–5). Another leading Anglican (Episcopalian) biblical scholar, Stephen Fowl, turns to Thomas Aquinas in order to similarly highlight the strengths of the patristic 'many-faceted literal sense of Scripture' (Fowl 2006:37). I should also mention the influence of the work of the Yale postliberal theologian Hans Frei, which appears in the Anglican scholar Ben Fulford's 2013 book *Divine Eloquence and Human Transformation: Rethinking Scripture and History through Gregory of Nazianzus and Hans Frei*.

Among evangelical Protestants, the Methodist biblical scholar Joel B. Green affirms that Christian biblical interpretation must recognize that '[t]he Spirit forms us as and within an interpretive community—the people of God continuous through history and across the globe' (Green 2007:98). He recognizes that this disallows any notion of 'individualized reading of the Bible' and that it requires 'that we honor the history of biblical interpretation, the history of the effects of the church's engagement with its Scripture' (Green 2007:98–9). Without seconding Oden's enthusiasm for patristic exegesis, Green mentions with approval Oden's *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* series. Much more enthusiastic is the prolific Reformed theologian and exegete Peter Leithart. Leithart summarizes the argument of his *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* by observing that 'the hermeneutical method offered here is very similar to the fourfold method developed by medieval Bible teachers' (Leithart 2009:207)—which is rooted, of course, in the fathers' biblical interpretation. In a similarly positive vein, the evangelical theologian Gregory Lee brings together the Psalms, Hebrews, Augustine, and Calvin,

and he concludes by strongly endorsing Augustine's 'seven stages in the interpretation of Scripture', stages that give room for historical-critical work but do not privilege it (Lee 2016:268).

## CONCLUSION

---

This chapter has inevitably overlooked many important contributions. But I hope that I have identified a sufficient number of significant contributors to show that there is a profound desire among Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians to learn from the fathers how to read Scripture, without thereby neglecting historical-critical research into the contexts and meanings of Scripture. The fathers' exegetical formulation of the central Christian doctrines, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gives their exegesis an enduring stature for Christians. The fathers' exegesis also recalls us to the triune God's providential (and characteristically figural: see Hays 2016) engagement with his people, who in Christ make manifest the inaugurated, though not yet consummated, kingdom of God. The widespread contemporary desire to retrieve patristic exegesis still requires to be translated more fully into the modern exegetical domain, and it also requires that theologians should receive extensive training in the fathers during graduate studies, something that does not generally take place today among Catholics and Protestants. Furthermore, the reception of patristic exegesis by the pre-eminent figures of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant scholasticism needs itself to be retrieved, not in competition with the fathers, but precisely so as to unite us more deeply with them (see Levering 2008).

## REFERENCES

---

- Adam, A. K. M. (2006). 'Poaching on Zion: Biblical Theology as Signifying Practice', in A. K. M. Adam, S. E. Fowl, K. J. Vanhoozer, and F. Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 17–34.
- Alfeyev, Metropolitan H. (2002). *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd).
- Alfeyev, Metropolitan H. (2006). *Orthodox Witness Today* (Geneva: WCC Publications).
- Alfeyev, Metropolitan H. (2007). 'The Patristic Background of the Orthodox Faith and the Study of the Fathers on the Threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 51: 371–93.
- Anderson, G. (2001). *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox).
- Anderson, G. (2009). *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- Balthasar, H. U. von (1991). *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 6: *Theology: The Old Covenant*, trans. B. McNeil, C. R. V. and E. Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press).

- Barth, K. (1957). *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2: *The Doctrine of God*. Part 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, H. Knight, and J. L. M. Hare (Edinburgh: T & T Clark).
- Behr, J. (2001). *The Way to Nicea* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Behr, J. (2004). *The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Behr, J. (2006). *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Behr, J. (2013). *Becoming Human: Meditations on Christian Anthropology in Word and Image* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Bockmuehl, M. (2006). *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic).
- Breck, J. (2001). *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Bulgakov, S. (2008). *The Lamb of God*, trans. B. Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Childs, B. S. (2001). *Isaiah* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox).
- Childs, B. S. (2004). *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Daley, B. E., SJ (2004). 'Balthasar's Reading of the Church Fathers', in E. T. Oakes SJ and D. Moss (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 187–206.
- Daniélou, J. (1956). *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Daniélou, J. (1958). *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History*, trans. N. Abercrombie (London: Longmans, Green and Co.).
- Daniélou, J. (1960). *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (London: Burns & Oates).
- de Lubac, H., SJ (1982). *The Motherhood of the Church, followed by Particular Churches in the Universal Church, and an Interview Conducted by Gwendoline Jarczyk*, trans. S. Englund, OCD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press).
- de Lubac, H., SJ (1989a). 'Typology and Allegorization', in H. de Lubac, *Theological Fragments*, trans. R. H. Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 129–64.
- de Lubac, H., SJ (1989b). 'Hellenistic Allegory and Christian Allegory', in H. de Lubac, *Theological Fragments*, trans. R. H. Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 165–96.
- de Lubac, H., SJ (1989c). 'On an Old Distich: The Doctrine of the "Fourfold Sense" in Scripture', in H. de Lubac, *Theological Fragments*, trans. R. H. Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 109–27.
- de Lubac, H., SJ (1998). *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 1: *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. M. Seban (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- de Lubac, H., SJ (2000). *Scripture in the Tradition*, trans. L. O'Neill (New York: Crossroad).
- de Lubac, H., SJ (2007). *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. A. E. Nash with J. Merriell (San Francisco: Ignatius).
- Dickens, W. T. (2003). *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics: A Model for Post-Critical Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Flannery, A., OP (1996) (ed.). *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1: *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company).
- Florovsky, G. (1931). *Vostochnye ottsy IV veka [The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century]* (Paris: YMCA Press).
- Florovsky, G. (1937). *Puti russkogo bogosloviia [The Ways of Russian Theology]* (Paris: YMCA Press).

- Florovsky, G. (1939). 'Patristics and Modern Theology', in H. S. Alivisatos (ed.), *Procès-verbaux du premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes, 29 Novembre–6 Décembre 1936* (Athens: Pirsos), 238–42.
- Fowl, S. E. (2006). 'The Importance of a Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture: The Example of Thomas Aquinas', in A. K. M. Adam, S. E. Fowl, K. J. Vanhoozer, and F. Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 35–50.
- Fulford, B. (2013). *Divine Eloquence and Human Transformation: Rethinking Scripture and History through Gregory of Nazianzus and Hans Frei* (Minneapolis: Fortress).
- Gavrilyuk, P. L. (2013). *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Green, J. B. (2007). *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press).
- Hays, R. B. (2016). *Echoes of the Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press).
- Johnson, L. T., and Kurz, W. S., SJ (2002). *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Kovacs, J., and Rowland, C. (2004). *Revelation* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Lee, G. W. (2016). *Today When You Hear his Voice: Scripture, the Covenants, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Leithart, P. (2009). *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press).
- Levering, M. (2008). *Participatory Biblical Exegesis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press).
- Lossky, V. (1976). *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Oden, T. C. (2001). 'General Introduction', in A. Louth (ed.), *Genesis 1–11* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), xi–xxxvi.
- O'Keefe, J. J., and Reno, R. R. (2005). *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).
- Pentti, E. J. (2002). *Long-Suffering Love: A Commentary on Hosea with Patristic Annotations* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press).
- Pentti, E. J. (2014). *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Plested, M. (2012). *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Pope Benedict XVI (2010). Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana).
- Reno, R. R. (2010). *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press).
- Stylianopoulos, T. G. (2002). *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective*, vol. 1: *Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press).
- Werbylo, W. M., C.S.B. (2009). *Imitating Patristic and Modern Exegesis of Scripture: Theory and an Application to John 7:37–39* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press).
- Wright, W. M., IV (2009). *Rhetoric and Theology: Figural Reading of John 9* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter).

### Suggested Reading

- Anderson, Gary (2001). *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox).

- Breck, John (2001). *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press).
- Childs, Brevard (2004). *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Daniélou, Jean, SJ (1960). *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (London: Burns & Oates).
- Johnson, L. T., and Kurz, W. S., SJ (2002). *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Lubac, Henri de (1988). *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 1: *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Lubac, Henri de (2000). *Scripture in the Tradition*, trans. L. O'Neill (New York: Crossroad).
- Pentiuc, E. J. (2014). *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).



## AUTHOR INDEX

---

### A

- Abraham (patriarch) 66, 77, 82, 214, 235,  
315–25, 342, 374–5, 475, 493, 495, 498, 500,  
503, 527, 538–40, 543, 623; *see also* Isaac,  
binding of
- Abulfeda 355–6
- Acacius, bishop of Caesarea 201–2, 204
- Acacius, bishop of Melitene  
(Scythopolis) 315–16
- Adam 64, 78–9, 129, 132–3, 341, 359–60, 377,  
383–5, 387–8, 401, 427, 482–3, 495, 501–2,  
504, 521, 525–33, 538–41, 619–22, 631, 634,  
661–2, 679
- Adda (Adimantus) 409–10
- Adrian 40, 120–1, 156–7, 160
- Albert the Great 656, 659
- Alcuin of York 575, 653–4, 663
- Alexander, bishop of Alexandria 26, 442
- Alexander of Aphrodisias 173, 175
- Alexander Polyhistor 349
- Ambrose, bishop of Milan 22, 183, 308, 337,  
434, 488, 495, 500, 515–17, 526, 531, 553, 555,  
564–5, 569, 575, 582, 617, 620, 644, 652–5,  
691–2, 695, 698, 709, 730
- Ambrosiaster 111, 116, 203, 499–500, 520,  
564–5, 567, 616, 654
- Amelius Gentilianus 349, 358
- Amerbach, Johannes 691–2
- Ammonius of Alexandria 111
- Ammonius Saccas 17
- Ammonius the Grammarian 175–6
- Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium 65, 250
- Anastasius of Sinai 678–9
- Andrew, bishop of Caesarea 161
- Andrew, bishop of Crete 670, 672, 674
- Anselm of Laon 654
- Antony (Anthony) 304–8, 311
- Aphrahat 289, 333, 481–2, 501, 564–5
- Apollinaris, bishop of Laodicea 177, 179, 214,  
224–5, 255, 465, 520, 592, 594
- Apollonius of Tyana 359
- Aquila 42–4, 47, 58, 110, 177, 212, 332, 334–5,  
339, 351, 515
- Aquinas, Thomas 221, 656, 659, 735
- Arator 215
- Aristarchus of Samothrace 100, 171, 378
- Aristides 606
- Aristoboulos 337
- Aristotle 94, 98–101, 103, 107, 173, 175, 198,  
201, 216, 444, 469, 663, 688, 700
- Arius, Arians, *see* General Subject Index
- Arnobius of Sicca 361
- Arnobius the Younger 692, 709
- Artapanus 354–5
- Asterius, bishop of Amasea 420, 426, 428
- Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria 25–7, 38, 55,  
59, 65, 83, 85, 110, 154, 161, 177, 305–6, 308,  
334, 342, 429, 431, 441–6, 456, 461–2, 467,  
483, 499, 515, 521, 555, 574–5, 579–80, 610,  
616–17, 680, 692, 699, 709, 714, 726, 730
- Athenagoras 607, 609
- Augustine, bishop of Hippo 17, 22, 24–5,  
45–6, 56, 60, 65, 67–8, 109, 111–12, 116–19,  
127–9, 138–40, 145–6, 150, 154–7, 159–61,  
180–3, 199, 204–5, 211, 245, 247, 249–51, 304,  
308, 311, 316–17, 319, 336, 344, 358, 399–411,  
425–7, 431–5, 450–1, 479–81, 484–5, 487–8,  
494–7, 499–500, 502, 515–22, 527–28,  
531–32, 543–4, 556–8, 564–5, 567, 575–8,  
580–3, 588, 590–1, 593–9, 607, 616–22,  
642–6, 652–7, 660, 687, 691–2, 694–5,  
699–700, 709, 712, 714–15, 718, 723, 725,  
729–33, 735–6
- Ausonius 214

**B**

Balai 260  
 Bardaisan (Bardesanes) 258–9, 298, 402  
 Barsanuphius 203  
 Basilides 172, 385, 392  
 Basil, bishop of Caesarea 24, 141, 154, 156, 177, 183, 232, 271–8, 280, 308, 337, 424, 428–9, 488, 497, 515–17, 519, 521–2, 532, 555, 572, 575, 617, 652–3, 669, 680, 709, 714, 725, 733  
 Baumgarten, Siegmund 717–19  
 Bede, the Venerable 112, 119, 575, 651–5, 663–4  
 Bellarmine, Robert 697  
 Benedict of Nursia 653, 725  
 Bentley, Richard 707  
 Bonaventure 651, 655–60, 662, 664  
 Bonfrère, Jacques 715  
 Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne 716  
 Brenz, Johannes 695  
 Bucer, Martin 691, 694, 697, 709  
 Bullinger, Heinrich 687, 691

**C**

Cabasilas, Nicolas 725  
 Cain and Abel 77, 175, 261, 265–6, 298, 526, 528  
 Cajetan, Thomas 715  
 Calcidius 179, 515  
 Calixtus, George 709, 711  
 Callinicus 309  
 Calvin, John 691, 696–7, 733  
 Cappel, Louis 712–14  
 Cartwright, Thomas 689  
 Casaubon, Isaac 707  
 Cassander, George 709–11  
 Cassiodorus 21, 109–10, 112, 120, 153, 157, 159–61, 199, 518, 555, 575, 579, 616, 652, 654  
 Celsus 82, 94, 199, 331–2, 343–4, 349, 352–5, 357, 359, 361–2, 370, 428, 643  
 Chrysippus 101, 112  
 Cicero 13, 20, 24, 101–3, 112, 173, 179–80, 187, 212  
 de Cisneros, Jiménez 689  
 Clement, bishop of Alexandria 8, 39, 56, 66, 79–80, 172, 174, 245, 337, 351, 367, 390, 392, 401, 430, 439–40, 499–500, 514–16, 528, 540–1, 549, 551, 553, 568, 576, 579, 588–9, 602, 607–8, 615–18, 640, 644–5, 714, 725–6, 729

Colet, John 694  
 Constans I, emperor 26  
 Constans II, emperor 310, 459  
 Constantine I, emperor 14, 26, 344, 357–8, 473–8, 480–3, 486, 577  
 Cornutus 104  
 Cranmer, Thomas 691, 695, 698–9  
 Crates of Mallos (Mallus) 100–1  
 Cyprian, bishop of Carthage 16, 25, 45, 179, 278–80, 304, 308, 339–40, 418, 420–3, 425, 433, 550, 593–5, 598, 610, 646, 692, 694, 709, 726, 730  
 Cyrillona (Cyrillonas) 260  
 Cyril, bishop of Alexandria 39, 154, 160–1, 216, 225, 261, 308, 315–17, 319, 357, 359–60, 456, 461–8, 495, 518, 520, 555, 562, 564, 568–9, 575, 578, 598, 610, 616, 675, 694, 714, 726, 732–3  
 Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem 22, 65, 243, 247, 250, 276, 308, 334, 342, 555, 733

**D**

Damasus I, bishop of Rome 46, 203, 652  
 David 73, 77, 161, 216, 258, 411, 434, 502, 539, 576–7, 580, 595, 608, 632, 671, 726  
 Demosthenes 210  
 Didymus the Blind 160–1, 179, 224, 337, 429, 518, 555, 575, 582, 610, 616  
 Diodore, bishop of Tarsus 142, 153, 160, 177–9, 182, 202, 222, 224, 518, 532, 575, 577, 579, 622  
 Diodorus Siculus 349–50  
 Diocletian, emperor 20, 24, 431–2  
 Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria 25, 201, 431, 475  
 Dionysius of Halicarnassus 103  
 Dionysius, bishop of Rome 610  
 Dionysius Thrax 156  
 Donatus, Donatism, *see* General Subject Index  
 Dury, John 709

**E**

Egeria 255  
 Elijah 234, 237–8, 264, 304, 306, 311, 455, 495, 673, 676, 680  
 Ephrem the Syrian 15, 85, 213, 256, 258–64, 289, 405, 407, 481–3, 502–3, 515–16, 526, 528, 531, 552–4, 564, 567, 616, 631, 633, 731–3

Epicurus 356, 367  
 Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis 22, 24, 58,  
 64–5, 110, 113, 115, 120, 187, 191–2, 297, 334–5,  
 343, 367, 373, 375, 538, 643  
 Erasmus, Desiderius (of Rotterdam) 182, 598,  
 687, 689–92, 694, 700, 707–11, 713, 716,  
 719–20  
 Eratosthenes 100  
 Ernesti, Johann 717  
 Eucherius, bishop of Lyons 119–20,  
 160, 205  
 Eunapius of Sardis 359  
 Eunomius, bishop of Cyzicus 448, 521  
 Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea 13, 17, 19–20,  
 22–7, 58–9, 65–6, 74, 110–13, 120, 154, 172,  
 174, 177, 179, 187, 193–5, 198, 200–2, 204, 297,  
 334, 337, 351–2, 355, 357, 359, 401, 429, 431,  
 473–81, 486–7, 518, 531, 538, 541, 555, 575,  
 602, 607, 634, 640, 642, 714  
 Eusebius, bishop of Emesa 160  
 Euthalius, bishop of Sulca 110  
 Eutyches 226  
 Euzoius, bishop of Antioch 24  
 Evagrius of Ponticus 187, 190–2, 222, 230,  
 232–8, 494, 503–4, 519, 581, 610  
 Eve 129, 359–60, 427, 482–3, 495,  
 497, 525–33  
 Evodius, bishop of Uzala 644

## F

Fabian of Antioch 25  
 Faustus, bishop of Milevis 317, 402, 404, 407,  
 410–11, 488, 495, 497, 557  
 Flora 390–1, 538, 566  
 Fortunatianus, bishop of Aquileia 180  
 Francis of Assisi 690  
 Fulgentius, bishop of Ruspe 654

## G

Galen 101, 349, 355–6, 362  
 Gardiner, Stephen 695  
 Gaudentius, bishop of Timgad 484  
 Gennadius I, bishop of Constantinople 111,  
 116, 119, 616  
 George the Arab 183  
 Germanus I, bishop of  
 Constantinople 677  
 Gratian 708

Gregory, bishop of Nazianzus 24, 65, 109–10,  
 177, 214, 232, 245, 255, 359, 424–5, 448–9,  
 456, 458, 462, 516, 527–32, 598, 670, 676,  
 681, 714, 725, 735  
 Gregory, bishop of Nyssa 84–5, 113, 154, 158,  
 160, 177, 183, 213, 304, 307–8, 317–19, 321,  
 420, 424, 426, 428, 448, 459, 464, 466–9,  
 496–7, 515–21, 552–4, 568, 575, 580, 589–95,  
 617, 643, 671, 676, 714, 723, 725–6, 730–3  
 Gregory of Rimini 691  
 Gregory of Sinai 668, 672  
 Gregory of Thaumaturgus 113, 213, 519  
 Gregory Palamas 668, 672, 674, 725  
 Gregory I, bishop of Rome (the Great) 308,  
 316, 575, 652, 654–5, 729, 731  
 Grotius, Hugo 710–13, 716, 719

## H

Haimo of Auxerre 654  
 Hecataeus of Abdera 349–50  
 Henry of Ghent 659  
 Heracleon 173–5, 374, 385, 390, 392–4,  
 603, 609  
 Heraclitus the Allegorist 104–5, 156, 354  
 Heraclius, emperor 310, 458  
 Hesiod 96, 98, 101, 104, 106, 513  
 Hesychius of Alexandria 654  
 Hesychius of Jerusalem 111, 225  
 Hierocles the Stoic 349  
 Hilary, bishop of Poitiers 22, 59, 180, 335,  
 449–51, 519, 555, 564, 568, 575, 582, 588, 590,  
 596, 692, 694–5, 709, 714, 730, 733  
 Hippolytus, bishop of Rome 16, 173–4, 297,  
 423, 576, 606, 610, 730–1  
 Homer 72, 76, 93, 95–8, 100–1, 103–7, 143, 149,  
 156, 172–3, 176, 178, 188–9, 198, 211, 214, 230,  
 337, 476  
 Hooker, Richard 694, 698–9  
 Horace 13, 103, 212  
 Horsiesius 497  
 Hoshaiiah, Rabbi 341–2  
 Hotman, Jean 709  
 Hugh of St. Victor 651, 654–5, 663–4

## I

Ibas, bishop of Edessa 465  
 Ignatius, bishop of Antioch 25, 61, 63, 74, 201,  
 278, 418–19, 423, 606, 615

- Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons 11, 16, 19, 22, 25, 56, 58, 62-4, 66-7, 75-9, 81, 84, 129, 132-5, 137, 141-5, 154, 201, 279, 335, 340, 367-8, 373-4, 376, 384-7, 391-3, 410, 439-40, 475, 516, 519-21, 528-9, 538-40, 549, 551, 553, 567, 602-3, 605-9, 616, 627-9, 632, 639, 642, 645, 692, 697, 709, 725-6, 730-3
- Isaac (patriarch) 83, 214, 375, 503, 623, 726  
binding (sacrifice of) 315-25, 342
- Isidore of Pelusium 610
- Isidore, bishop of Seville 110-12, 555, 652-5, 714
- J**
- Jacob (patriarch) 160, 203, 375, 500, 620-3
- Jacob of Sarug 260-1, 502, 516, 563, 565, 569, 732
- Jerome 9, 16, 22, 24, 27, 34, 46-7, 53, 59-60, 65, 109-12, 115, 120, 157, 178-83, 187, 192, 199, 201-4, 212, 215, 226, 231, 248, 332, 335-8, 342, 344-5, 434, 473, 481, 494-502, 516, 519-20, 531, 555, 565, 567, 575, 597, 599, 615-18, 642, 652-5, 663, 690-1, 694-5, 699, 708-9, 712, 714-15, 730-1, 733
- Jewel, John 698
- John Cassian 154-5, 158, 519, 555, 575, 581, 653, 729
- John Chrysostom, bishop of  
Constantinople 22, 24, 38, 85-6, 110, 141-2, 144, 177-9, 182-3, 213, 216, 225, 227, 245, 247-51, 259, 308, 322, 339, 344, 351, 424, 474, 492-3, 496-7, 499-500, 515, 518-21, 528, 542-3, 555, 564-5, 567, 575, 580, 588-92, 595-8, 607, 616-17, 622-3, 643, 645, 652, 669, 675, 677, 681, 692, 695, 697, 709, 712, 714, 732-3
- John Climacus 680
- John Duns Scotus 651, 655-6, 659-64
- John, bishop of Antioch 464
- John of Basel 691
- John of Damascus 458, 468-9, 517-18, 563, 616, 656-60, 662, 668, 672-3, 725
- John of Gaza 203
- John Philoponus (the Grammarian) 176-7, 181, 183
- John the Apostle 62, 383, 385-7, 391, 676
- John the Baptist 48, 298, 311, 425, 455, 487-8, 539, 541, 632, 639
- Joseph (patriarch) 260, 427, 504, 726
- Josephus 58, 332, 334, 423, 552, 638
- Jovinian 499, 617
- Judas Iscariot 386, 388-9, 483, 659, 661-2
- Julian, bishop of Aeclanum (Eclanum) 177-9, 181
- Julian, bishop of Toledo 111
- Julian, emperor 199, 214, 260, 264, 349, 352, 357, 359-60, 482-3, 486, 621
- Julius Africanus (Sextus) 201
- Julius Cassianus 172
- Junillus (Junilius) Africanus 110, 160, 200, 205
- Justin Martyr 16, 19, 27, 34, 58, 62-3, 73-5, 77, 79, 131, 154, 200, 202, 277-9, 298, 334-5, 338-40, 366-7, 376, 390, 521, 527-8, 531, 536-9, 549, 562-5, 567-8, 578, 588, 603, 606-7, 609, 615, 629, 633, 642, 733
- Justinian I, emperor 205, 224, 227, 324, 335, 456, 465
- Juvenal 13
- Juvencus 214-15
- K**
- Karlstadt, Andreas 692
- L**
- Lactantius 52, 111, 357-9, 646, 709
- LeClerc, Jean 716-17, 719
- Lefèvre d'Étaples, Jacques 689-90
- Leo I, bishop of Rome (the Great) 467, 516, 731
- Leontius of Byzantium 458, 466, 725
- Libanius 177, 359, 622
- Liberius, bishop of Rome 483
- Locke, John 710, 713
- Lombard, Peter 651, 656, 691
- Lucian of Antioch 40-1
- Lucian of Samosata 13, 16, 20, 40, 171-2, 176, 183, 349, 352-3
- Lucifer, bishop of Cagliari 483
- Lucretius 516
- Luther, Martin 691-2, 694-5, 705-6, 718, 733
- M**
- Mani, Manichaean, *see* General Subject  
Index
- Macarius Magnes (of Magnesia) 349, 359-62
- Marcellinus, Comes 112

- Marcion, Marcionism, Marcionites,  
*see* General Subject Index
- Mark, bishop of Ephesus 725
- Martin I, bishop of Rome 309–10
- Maxentius, John 466
- Maximus of Tyre 201
- Maximus the Confessor 112, 203, 230, 236–8,  
 309, 311, 458, 466–8, 516–17, 521, 575, 583,  
 593–6, 668, 675–7, 725
- Melanchthon, Philip 691, 694
- Melito, bishop of Sardis 59, 174, 212, 257–8, 334,  
 342, 528, 541, 549, 563, 565, 607, 633–4, 726
- Methodius, bishop of Olympus 497, 500,  
 555, 640–1
- Metrodorus of Lampsacus (the Elder) 95–6
- Minucius Felix 361
- Montanus, Montanism, *see* General  
 Subject Index
- More, Thomas 694
- Morin, Jean 714
- Moses 56, 64, 66, 73, 77, 80, 114, 130–1, 137,  
 143, 234, 237–8, 272, 298, 304, 311, 321,  
 324–5, 335, 349–52, 355–7, 383, 387, 391–2,  
 407, 425, 477–8, 482, 486–7, 502, 525, 529,  
 535–42, 544, 547–58, 561–9, 573, 597, 607–8,  
 615, 620, 623, 627–9, 630–4, 672–3, 676,  
 679–80, 714, 726
- Musculus, Wolfgang 694
- N**
- Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople 456, 461,  
 463, 465, 726
- Nicolas of Cusa 689
- Nicolaus of Damascus 349
- Nicholas of Lyra 708
- Noah 64, 77, 129, 141, 325, 384, 387, 401–2, 433,  
 495, 498, 538–40
- Nonnus of Panopolis 214–16, 255
- Novatian 610
- Numenius of Apamea 349, 351–2, 357, 369
- O**
- Oecolampadius, Johannes 691, 695
- Oecumenius 153, 160
- Oecumenius, bishop of Triikka 616
- Olympiodorus 519
- Optatus, bishop of Milevis 483–4, 730
- Origen of Alexandria 22–4, 27, 43–7, 49, 59,  
 64–5, 80–4, 86, 94, 110–17, 120, 128, 135–8,  
 141, 143–5, 150, 153–62, 173–9, 181–3, 187,  
 191–5, 199–205, 215, 218, 222, 224–6, 231,  
 233, 236, 245, 250–1, 331–2, 334–8, 341–3,  
 345, 351–4, 357, 370, 390, 392–4, 401, 418,  
 423, 425, 428–9, 431, 439–40, 448, 458–9,  
 475, 487, 493–5, 497–500, 503, 514–20, 522,  
 526, 532–3, 542, 547, 549–51, 553–6, 558, 561,  
 565–9, 574–9, 582, 588, 593–5, 597–9, 602,  
 609–10, 615, 617–19, 623, 634, 641–4, 652,  
 654–5, 667, 675–6, 690–1, 694–5, 699, 709,  
 714–15, 725, 729–32
- Orpheus 96, 106
- Orosius 426
- Ovid 310
- P**
- Palladius, bishop of Helenopolis 25, 261, 308
- Pamphilus of Caesarea 23–4, 193–5
- Pantaenus 337
- Paphlagon, Niketas David 677
- Papias, bishop of Hierapolis 63, 74, 172, 374,  
 475, 642
- Paul the Persian 110
- Paul of Tarsus (Apostle), *see* General Subject  
 Index
- Paul of Tella 43, 49
- Paulinus of Milan 308
- Paulinus of Nola 65, 214, 216
- Pelagius and Pelagianism, *see* General  
 Subject Index
- Peregrinus the Cynic 171, 352
- Peter, bishop of Alexandria 431
- Peter of Blois 664
- Peter of Laodicea 225
- Peter the Apostle, *see* General Subject Index
- Petronius 16
- Pherecydes of Syros 93–5
- Philo of Alexandria 37–8, 58, 73, 112, 120, 136,  
 160, 172, 174, 178, 200–1, 212, 332, 337, 341,  
 351, 378, 387, 487, 498, 515, 517, 526, 552,  
 568, 676
- Philo the Elder 214
- Philoxenus of Mabbug 49, 183, 503–4
- Photius, bishop of Constantinople 120, 223,  
 225, 616

- Plato 72, 74, 80, 94–100, 102, 105–7, 112, 115, 118, 152, 156–8, 175, 179, 199, 230, 304, 352, 354, 367, 385, 387, 417, 514, 597, 633, 688
- Plotinus 105–6, 304, 311, 357–8, 688
- Plutarch 24, 72, 95, 101, 104, 115, 210
- Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna 61, 63, 608, 615
- Polychronius, bishop of Apamea 160
- Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus 66
- Pontius the deacon 304, 308
- Porphyry 105–6, 173, 175, 199, 201, 304, 349, 351–2, 356–8, 360, 362, 640
- Possidius 199
- Potamius of Lisbon 250
- Priscillian 112
- Proclus 106–7
- Procopius of Gaza 160, 189, 194, 223–4
- Pseudo-Athanasius 518
- Pseudo-Caesarius 202–3
- Pseudo-Chrysostom 110, 589–90
- Pseudo-Clement (Pseudo-Clementine) 295–300, 496, 538, 616
- Pseudo-Dionysius, the Areopagite 107, 668, 677, 689, 725, 731
- Pseudo-Epiphanius 113
- Pseudo-Longinus 104, 349–51, 353
- Pseudo-Melito 113
- Pseudo-Oecumenius 225
- Pseudo-Philo 287
- Ptolemy the Gnostic 115, 385, 390–3, 537–8, 566, 603, 609
- Pythagoras 80, 106, 230, 233
- Q**
- Quintillian 104, 210, 212
- Quodvultdeus 113, 646
- R**
- Rabanus (Rhabanus) Maurus 47, 654
- Radbertus, Paschasius 654
- Ralph of Laon 654
- Remigius of Auxerre 654
- Rhodo 172, 200, 629
- Romanos the Melodist 258, 261–5, 668–9, 671
- Rufinus of Aquileia 24–5, 65, 231–2, 296, 334
- S**
- Sadoletto, Jacopo 700
- Satan (the Devil) 81, 142, 272, 299, 306, 310–11, 367, 390–1, 393, 403, 407, 420–1, 424, 460, 476, 480, 484–5, 503–4, 532, 538, 549–50, 614, 627
- Scultetus, Abraham 697
- Sedulius 215
- Semler, Johann 717–19
- Seneca 101, 180
- Serapion, bishop of Thmuis 24, 278
- Severian, bishop of Gabala 160, 250, 357, 514–15, 616
- Severus of Alexandria 308–9
- Severus, bishop of Antioch 225, 465
- Simon, Richard 705, 713–17, 719
- Sixtus I, bishop of Rome 25
- Socrates 97, 158, 417
- Socrates of Constantinople (Scholasticus) 22, 24, 214, 356
- Sossianus Hierocles 111, 358–9
- Sozomen 177, 214, 258–9, 359, 483
- Spinoza, Baruch 713
- Stephen the Protomartyr 305, 419, 422, 425–7, 431
- Strabo, Walafrid 654
- Suetonius 308
- Sulpicius Severus 488
- Symeon the New Theologian 725
- Symeon, bishop of Thessalonike 677
- Symmachus the Ebionite 42–3, 47, 58, 110, 177, 332, 335
- T**
- Tacitus 103
- Tatian 10, 48, 62, 111, 172, 200, 287, 606–7, 609
- Tertullian 16, 22, 45, 56, 66–8, 129–32, 140, 179–80, 305, 334–5, 338–40, 343, 366–7, 371–7, 418, 422, 425, 433, 439, 495–6, 499–501, 515–16, 518–19, 521, 529, 537, 541, 549, 553, 558, 564–7, 576, 588, 593–5, 597, 607, 610–11, 616, 640–2, 695, 730
- Theagenes of Rhegium 95
- Theodore the Martyr 428
- Theodore bar Koni 112
- Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia 49, 59, 120, 142, 153, 160, 177–9, 182, 205, 213, 224, 247, 461, 465, 521, 532, 564–7, 575, 580, 597, 610, 616, 731–2
- Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus 43, 112, 120, 153, 155, 158, 160–2, 177–8, 202, 224–5, 227, 456, 464–5, 473, 483, 518, 520, 553, 556–7, 564, 567–8, 575, 616, 675, 714

Theodotion 42–4, 47, 58, 110, 177, 332, 335  
Theodotus the Gnostic 385  
Theon of Alexandria 172  
Theophilus, bishop of Antioch 111, 172,  
513–16, 522, 528, 531, 606, 608  
Theophylact, bishop of Ochrid 357–8, 675–77,  
681, 695  
Theophrastus 101  
Thomas of Harkel 49  
Titus, bishop of Bostra 409  
Tosefta 332, 341, 343  
Tyconius 116–17, 160, 481, 484–5, 642

**V**

Valentinus, Valentinians, *see* General Subject  
Index  
Valla, Lorenzo 688, 707

Victor of Antioch 225  
Victor, bishop of Capua 111  
Victorinus, Gaius Marius 110, 179–80, 213, 616  
Victorinus, bishop of Pettau 174, 180  
Victor I, bishop of Rome 66  
Vincent of Lérins 710  
Virgil 149, 156, 211, 214  
Vives, Juan Luis 692, 707

**W**

Westphal, Joachim 696

**Z**

Zeno, emperor 458  
Zenodotus of Ephesus 100  
Zeno of Verona 555  
Zwingli, Ulrich 691, 695

# GENERAL SUBJECT INDEX

---

## A

- Acta conciliorum Oecumenicorum* 463–4  
*Acta Martyrum Saturnia Presbyteri, Felicis, Davivi, Ampelii et Aliorum* 432  
*Acts of John* 257, 605  
*Acts of Judas* 501  
*Acts of Paul* 289–90, 575, 616  
*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 288–9  
*Acts of Peter* 288, 290, 298  
*Acts of Scillitan Martyrs* 9, 418  
*Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* 342, 434  
*Acts of Thomas* 257, 501, 645  
allegorical sense, *see* interpretation of  
    Scripture: allegorical  
*Apocalypse of Adam* 387  
*Apocalypse of James* 605  
*Apocalypse of James, Second* 605  
*Apocalypse of Paul* 291, 638–40  
*Apocalypse of Peter* 64, 291,  
    637, 640  
apocrypha 59–60, 110, 334  
apocrypha, Christian 38, 52, 62–3, 257,  
    285–92, 296–8, 303, 307, 575–6,  
    616, 671  
*Apocryphon of James* 605  
*Apocryphon of John (Secret Book according to John)* 383–8, 391, 517, 568  
*Apophthegmata Patrum*, *see* *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*  
*Apostolic Constitutions* 274, 428  
Aquila, translation of 42–4, 47, 58, 110, 177,  
    212, 332, 335, 351, 515  
*Archelai episcopi liber disputationis aduersus Manichaeum* 399, 401, 403, 407, 409  
Arius, Arians 26, 83, 259, 357, 441, 443, 450,  
    452, 461–2, 467, 481, 521, 578–9, 590, 610,  
    616, 697  
Armenian translations 9, 75

- artistic representation, *see* interpretation  
    of Scripture: in visual art and  
    iconography  
*Ascension of Isaiah* 248, 288

## B

- baptism 56, 61, 66–8, 76, 136, 139, 142, 231,  
    243, 246–50, 272, 274, 276–7, 298–9, 318,  
    425, 501, 504, 521, 528, 538, 547–9, 551,  
    554–8, 582, 592, 619, 621, 697–8, 727;  
    *see also* Jesus Christ, baptism of  
Beatitudes, *see* Sermon on  
    the Mount  
*Book of Mormon* 286  
*Book of Zoroaster* 387

## C

- Canons of Hippolytus* 488  
canon of Scripture 38–9, 55–69, 110,  
    172, 457  
    Alexandrian 36, 38  
    Eastern Orthodox 60  
    Marcion's 372–5  
    Muratorian Fragment 19, 62,  
    64, 334  
    New Testament 61–5, 172, 715  
    Old Testament 58–60; *see also* Hebrew  
    Bible; Septuagint  
    Protestant 60  
    Roman Catholic 60  
*Catena Aurea* 221, 708  
*Catena on the Octateuch* 160  
Chaldean Oracles 106  
Codex Alexandrinus 16, 59  
Codex Amiatinus 652  
Codex Sinaiticus 8, 10, 16–17, 21–3, 59  
Codex Vaticanus 10, 16–17, 21, 34, 59  
Cologne Mani Codex 401

council(s) 60, 65, 83, 259, 456–7, 461–8, 681,  
693, 705, 711–12  
Nicaea I (325 CE) 56, 357, 461, 463, 475–6, 617  
Ephesus (431 CE) 202, 461, 463  
Chalcedon (451 CE) 202, 469, 681  
Constantinople III (680–681 CE) 467  
Trent (1545–1563) 60, 715–16  
covenants 59, 64, 77, 339, 392, 442, 497,  
535–44, 574  
creation 36, 66–8, 77–8, 84, 132–5, 138–41, 146,  
356, 401, 403, 408, 461–2, 497, 513–22, 673  
Hexaemeron (Genesis 1), interpretation  
of 138–40, 177, 181, 350–1, 353, 402, 408,  
513–17, 673  
cross, *see* Jesus Christ: cross (passion) of

## D

Dead Sea Scrolls 13, 17, 73, 257  
*De castitate* 496, 499–500  
*De Universa natura* 350  
*Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus* 339  
*Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* 339  
*Diatessaron* 48, 62, 111, 287, 399, 402, 405,  
410, 606  
*Didache* 7, 61, 63, 66, 230, 274, 278, 588  
*Didascalia* 538, 597  
Donatus, Donatism 116, 248, 417, 431–4, 479,  
481, 483–7, 621, 642

## E

economy (*oikonomia*; *dispensatio*) 71, 75, 77,  
80, 83–4, 86–7, 114, 132–4, 136, 140, 145,  
249, 271, 280, 431, 444–6, 461–3, 514–15,  
517–19, 521, 529, 540, 561, 563, 583, 592,  
629, 632, 725  
*Edict of Nantes* 714  
*Epistula Apostolorum* 608  
*Epistle of Aristeas* 35, 58, 335  
*Epistle of Barnabas* 63, 230, 391, 535–7, 540,  
542, 548  
*Epistle of Clement, 1* 55, 61, 63, 419,  
549, 615  
*Epistle of Clement, 2* 63, 598  
*Epistle to Alexandrians* 64  
*Epistle to Laodiceans* 289–91  
*Epistle to Menoch* 403, 406  
*Essene Gospel of Peace* 286

Eucharist 68, 134–5, 249–50, 275, 277–9, 325,  
389, 403, 500, 695  
Eusebian Canons 17  
Exodus narrative 77, 201, 214, 258, 274, 477,  
547–58, 726

## G

*Genesis Apocryphon* 264, 287  
*Gesta apud Zenophilum* 24  
*Glossa ordinaria* 651, 654, 663, 708  
Gnosticism 66–7, 75, 133–4, 141, 159, 201,  
259, 289, 298, 353, 368–9, 383–94, 401,  
514, 517, 520, 522, 539–40, 576, 603–5,  
609, 616–17, 697  
Valentinian 143–4, 146, 172, 201, 368–9,  
374, 378–9, 384–5, 389–94, 522, 537, 562,  
566, 603–5, 609, 616  
'gospel', concept of 115, 135–7, 629  
*Gospel of Judas* 384, 386, 388–9  
*Gospel of Peter* 287, 606  
*Gospel of Ps.-Matthew* 292  
*Gospel of Thomas* 287–8, 291, 307,  
399, 402  
*Gospel of Truth* 76, 389, 605  
gospels:  
dispute over 62–4  
harmonization of 48, 62, 111,  
402, 606–7  
*see also* John, Gospel of

## H

heaven(s) 67, 77–8, 104, 128, 132, 273, 291, 305,  
324, 341, 386, 401, 403, 405, 420, 425,  
430, 443, 516, 518, 520, 549, 557, 582,  
590–6, 607, 633–4, 638–9, 641–2, 645–6,  
677, 727–8  
'heaven and earth' 67, 408, 514–15, 518, 589  
heaven and hell 637–46  
'kingdom of heaven' 139, 301, 307, 434, 477,  
488, 597  
Hebrew/Jewish Bible 36–8, 48, 56–7, 60, 104,  
130, 287, 298–300, 310, 316, 332, 334–6,  
339, 344, 368, 371, 383, 385, 390–2, 407–9,  
439, 455–6, 517, 525–6, 573, 637  
hell, *see* heaven(s): heaven and hell  
Hexapla of Origen 23, 43–4, 46–7, 49, 53, 59,  
110–11, 174, 177, 191, 193–4, 335, 337, 526

Holy Spirit, *see* Scripture: divine  
 authorship of; inspiration of  
 Humanism (Humanist Scholars) 688–93  
*Hymns on Mary* 501  
*Hypatius, Life of* 309  
*Hypomnesticon* 310

**I**  
*Index of Forbidden Books* 692  
 interpretation of Scripture:  
 allegorical 82–3, 120–1, 127, 151, 160, 178–9,  
 181–2, 200–1, 212, 233–4, 250, 278, 303–4,  
 336–7, 339–40, 351, 357, 370, 392, 401, 487,  
 493–4, 497–8, 501, 522, 532, 542, 551, 568,  
 575, 577, 598–9, 616, 618, 670, 672, 678,  
 681, 712, 729  
 ascetical 305–7, 404, 492–504, 617–18,  
 642, 680  
 catechetical and homiletic 40, 190, 243–51,  
 668, 679  
 in Christian response to the Roman  
 Empire 473–88  
 in the Christological  
 controversies 455–69  
 figural 127–8, 370, 379, 522, 547–9, 558,  
 567–9  
 figurative 114–16, 118–21, 126–41, 178,  
 277, 401, 493, 498, 518, 547–8, 550–1,  
 557–8, 695  
 genres of, *see* Scripture  
 in hagiography 303, 305–11, 668, 679  
 handbooks of 80, 109–21, 199–200, 205,  
 484–5  
 ‘history’ (*ιστορία*; *historia*) 137, 140–6, 178,  
 447, 493, 522, 526, 531–3, 556–8, 573, 577,  
 579, 675, 728–30  
 intertextual 126, 243, 249, 303, 324, 344,  
 494–6, 498, 501, 575, 607, 632, 669,  
 671, 678  
 Jewish (and Rabbinic) 36–7, 160, 331–4,  
 336–43  
 lexical aids to 16–19, 27, 141  
 literal 81, 115–16, 118, 127–8, 141–6, 181,  
 200–1, 250, 339–40, 407, 493–4, 501, 514,  
 522, 532, 537, 544, 551, 557, 563–5, 568–9,  
 589, 594, 642, 667, 672, 678, 681, 712,  
 715–16, 734–5

in liturgy 155, 243–7, 250–1, 255–7, 262,  
 271–80, 575–6, 607, 669–74, 677–8,  
 681, 726–9  
 Manichaean 140–1, 181–2, 317, 399–411,  
 488, 495, 497, 517, 519–20, 532  
 Marcionite, *see* Marcion and Marcionism  
 moral (tropological) 115, 143, 236, 548–50,  
 556, 564, 568, 579–80, 589, 591–2, 596–7,  
 618–19, 622–3, 667, 672–4, 677, 681,  
 715, 734  
 in novels 295–301  
 onomastic (etymological) 112, 120, 177,  
 193, 549  
 performative 243, 249–51, 271–80, 318  
 ‘plain sense’ 141–3, 145, 493, 565, 734  
 poetic and hymnographic 255–67, 667, 669,  
 672–4, 678, 681  
 principles or rules of 80–3, 113–19  
 ‘scholastic’ 456–60, 463–9  
 ‘spiritual’ (noetic) 81, 115–16, 127, 516, 537,  
 542, 544, 551, 568, 667, 734  
 theological 83–6, 117–18, 439–53, 455–69,  
 522, 578–9, 735–6  
 as *theōria* (contemplation, spiritual  
 vision) 87, 142, 178, 440, 530, 575, 577,  
 579, 581  
 in the Trinitarian controversies 83–5,  
 439–53, 610  
 typological 48, 130, 250–1, 279, 322, 325,  
 342, 476–7, 487, 493–4, 501–2, 529–30,  
 532–3, 548–50, 558, 566–8, 619–20, 670–5,  
 728, 734  
 in visual art and iconography 40, 315–26,  
 611, 668–9, 671–3, 680  
*see also* literary criticism

**J**

Jesus Christ:  
 baptism of 48, 136–7, 462, 504, 548,  
 634, 727  
 in Christological exegesis 455–69  
 cross (passion) of 61, 64–7, 78–9, 127–8,  
 131, 134, 138, 140, 274, 278, 305, 316, 318,  
 325, 349, 359, 362, 405, 419, 425, 427, 457,  
 460, 469, 517, 530, 549, 564–5, 573–4,  
 576–7, 582, 614–15, 623–34, 670, 673–4, 677  
 descent to the dead 644–5

- imitation of (*imitatio Christi*) 303–4,  
417–20, 424, 426–7, 429, 431, 433  
miracles of 61, 73, 349, 359, 362, 675  
nativity of 64, 67, 263–4, 288, 292, 374–5,  
377, 404, 670–2  
as New Adam 517, 521, 527, 529–30, 671, 675  
as ‘recapitulation’ of all things 76, 78–9,  
134, 136–7, 521, 529–30  
resurrection of 61, 64, 67, 74, 111, 127–8,  
140, 201, 204, 216, 235, 273–4, 278, 305,  
325, 349, 352, 360–2, 429, 457, 469, 563–5,  
573–4, 578, 614–15, 626, 628–30, 634,  
673–4, 677  
in the ‘rule of faith’ 65–7  
sayings of 61, 63, 231–2, 249, 287, 297–301,  
409–11, 463, 610  
transfiguration of 215–16, 234, 237–8,  
672–3, 676–7  
*see also* Scripture: Jesus Christ as key  
to; Sermon on the Mount; Word of God  
John, Gospel of (John the Evangelist) 8–11,  
13, 61–4, 80, 128, 173, 182, 248, 343, 358,  
386–9, 391–3, 602–11, 628–9, 634, 725  
early Christian interpretation of 80,  
214–16, 602–11  
Gnostic interpretation of 383–9, 391–3  
Manichaean use of 401, 403, 405–6,  
408, 409  
Trinitarian controversy, use of in 443–4,  
448–51
- K**  
*Kephalaion, 1* 400–3, 406–7, 410  
*Kephalaion, 2* 402  
*Khludov Psalter* 677
- L**  
Latin Bible (Old Latin) 44–7, 53, 248, 621,  
652; *see also* Vulgate  
Law (Torah; Pentateuch) 35–7, 56–7, 73, 77,  
80–1, 83, 114, 133, 135, 142, 155, 159, 172,  
191, 194, 244, 336, 339–42, 344, 349–50,  
356, 371, 374, 376, 391, 400, 407, 419, 422,  
425, 455, 496, 529, 535–42, 550, 561–9,  
572–4, 597, 607, 615, 629, 637–8, 655, 679  
debated between Jews and  
Christians 339–42
- Lenten Triodion* 634  
*Liber Graduum (Book of Steps)* 502–4  
*Liber pontificalis* 309  
*Life of Maximus* 310  
literal sense, *see* interpretation of Scripture  
literary criticism 93–107, 156–7, 171–2, 174,  
176–7, 179, 181–2, 369–79, 439–41, 444–6,  
448, 451, 514, 577  
allegorical reading 94–6, 101, 104–7, 114–15  
*kritikoi* and *grammatikoi* 100–1, 369  
poetic and mimetic criticism 96–100  
rhetorical criticism 101–4, 180, 616, 692  
Lord’s Prayer, *see* Sermon on the Mount  
Lucianic Text/Recension 40, 53
- M**  
Maccabean Martyrs 422–5  
Mani, Manichaeism 140–1, 181–2, 259, 267,  
317, 399–411, 487–8, 495, 497, 499, 517,  
519–20, 532, 562, 567, 620–1; *see also*  
Interpretation of Scripture:  
Manichaean; John, Gospel of  
Marcion, Marcionism 62, 66, 74–5, 130–3,  
141, 143–4, 172, 191, 200–1, 259, 289–90,  
297–8, 366–79, 385, 390–2, 399, 407,  
409–10, 494–5, 518–20, 522, 537–9, 541,  
562, 566, 568–9, 576, 603, 616, 629  
*Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius* 419,  
423, 432  
*Martyrdom of Marian and James* 423  
*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 418–19, 423,  
430, 645  
Mary (Virgin) 48, 67–8, 78, 138, 255, 263, 288,  
291–2, 343, 374, 461, 501–2, 521, 525, 529,  
531, 634, 669–71  
Masoretic Text 712, 714  
*Metaphrasis Psalmorum* 216–17  
Midrash, Midrashim 244–5, 331–3  
Mishnah 57, 73, 332, 338, 341  
Montanus, Montanism 75, 305, 394,  
603–4, 609  
*Muratorian Fragment* 19, 62, 64, 334
- N**  
*Narrationes de exilio sancti papae  
Martini* 309–10  
*Nativity of Mary* 292

'New Testament' 135, 540–4; *see also* canon:  
New Testament  
*nomina sacra* 18–19, 27, 605

## O

*Odes of Solomon* 257, 259–60, 288

'Old Testament' 540–4; *see also* canon: Old  
Testament; Hebrew Bible; Septuagint

*On the Origin of the World* 385

*Opus imperfectum in Matthaëum* 589,  
591–2, 597–8

*Oxyrhynchus papyri* 9, 11–12, 21, 25–6, 31

## P

*Passion of Forty Martyrs of Sebaste* 424

*Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* 305

Passover 36, 278, 501, 547–53, 548–9, 554–6,  
558, 607; *see also* Exodus narrative

Paul of Tarsus (Apostle) 34, 65, 73–4, 80, 107,  
114–15, 121, 131, 133, 139, 144, 153, 159–60,  
178, 191, 213, 249, 275, 278, 288–91, 298,  
305–6, 310, 312, 318, 336, 340, 353–4, 361–2,  
370, 372–4, 388, 391, 401–6, 408–9, 411, 419,  
426, 431, 445, 455–6, 460, 474, 479, 487,  
494, 496, 498–9, 503, 517, 519–21, 526,  
528–9, 533, 535, 538, 542, 548, 550, 557, 561–2,  
573–4, 582–3, 590, 596–7, 607, 614–23, 626,  
628–30, 638–9, 641–5, 679, 689, 729

epistolary corpus of 8, 13, 25, 61–4, 74, 86,  
96, 110, 112, 116, 130, 172, 180–2, 200, 202,  
206, 213, 225, 248–9, 277, 289–90, 298,  
370, 372–3, 375–6, 389, 399, 402, 409, 411,  
417–18, 525, 562, 675, 678

Pelagius, Pelagianism 182, 434, 520, 590, 616,  
619–22

*Periodoi Petrou* 296

Peter the Apostle 62, 64, 237, 297–300, 361–2,  
373–4, 388, 392, 403, 419, 426, 431, 455,  
458, 460, 469, 481, 487, 573, 580, 616–17,  
627, 643, 659, 661–2, 676

*Philocalia* 114, 192, 337, 514, 516, 532, 551, 553

preaching, *see* interpretation of Scripture:  
catechetical and homiletic

prophecy 55, 57, 72–4, 79–81, 83, 96, 131–2,  
176, 212, 244–5, 326, 458, 477, 514, 572,  
627, 643, 728

prophetic testimonies to Christ and  
Christianity 40, 73–7, 79, 81, 145, 154,

279, 316, 321–2, 336, 339–40, 342, 375–6,  
421–2, 475–9, 516–18, 536–7, 539–41, 543,  
550, 573–4, 577–8, 580, 591, 632, 638

prophets 34, 42, 44, 56–9, 65, 67–8, 73–4, 77,  
80, 114, 133, 135–7, 142, 159, 172, 206, 224,  
244, 277, 304, 306, 335–6, 344, 351, 371,  
374, 409, 425, 484, 529, 540, 542, 573, 607,  
627–8, 632, 637, 646, 653, 655, 714, 726

*Protevangelium of James* 257, 288, 292

*Psalm-book*, Manichaean 399, 403

Psalms, interpretation of the 34, 47, 80, 83,  
128, 138, 142, 213–18, 224–5, 232, 234,  
427–9, 433, 455, 468, 478, 518, 543,  
572–83, 637, 677, 733

Pseudo-Clementine literature 295–300, 496,  
538, 616; *see also* interpretation: in novels

## R

Rabbula Gospels 630

*Reality of the Rulers* 384, 387

reception of patristic biblical interpretation:

in the Byzantine tradition 667–82

in contemporary Christian

theology 723–36

in the Latin Middle Ages 651–64

in modern biblical criticism 704–20

in the Renaissance and Reformation

686–700, 707–10

resurrection 67–8, 136, 142, 289, 361, 375, 424,  
496, 500, 549, 553, 578, 582, 590, 617,  
638–9, 641–3, 646, 655; *see also* Jesus  
Christ: resurrection of

*Revelation of Adam* 384, 387–8

*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 102

'rule of faith' (*regula fidei*) 56, 65–9, 76–7,

79–81, 113–14, 117–18, 142–3, 145–6, 154,

159, 391–3, 442, 446, 457, 695, 735

## S

*Śābuhragān* 400, 402

*Sayings of the Desert Fathers (Apophthegmata  
Patrum)* 235–6, 303, 306–7, 309

scribes 1, 20–5, 40, 43, 73, 375, 422–3, 688, 714

Scripture:

accommodation to human understanding  
82–5, 133

'body', 'soul' and 'spirit' of 115–16, 119,

143–4, 153

- canon of, *see* canon  
 catenae (exegetical 'chains') on 40, 183,  
 188–9, 191, 194, 198, 202, 221–8, 236,  
 674, 681  
 as commending a 'way of life' 152–5,  
 248–9, 251, 618–19  
 commentaries on 40, 149, 171–83, 654, 675  
 in disputation between Jews and  
 Christians 331–45, 473–4, 608  
 in disputation between pagans and  
 Christians 349–62  
 divine authorship of 81, 83–4, 114, 117, 154  
 as 'divine discourse' 71–87  
 exempla in 86, 309, 418–20, 422–7, 431,  
 476–7, 483, 493, 495, 502–4, 619–20  
 hidden and enigmatic meanings of 79–83,  
 114–15, 119, 132–4, 144, 153, 161, 176, 357,  
 445–6, 627  
 holistic reading of 75–9, 126  
*hypothesis* ('plot', 'argument') of 75, 79, 84,  
 110, 128, 143–4, 176, 297, 387, 389, 392,  
 447, 557, 577; *see also* economy  
 the ideal interpreter of 149–62, 176  
 inspiration of 37–8, 46, 59, 80–1, 87, 128,  
 141, 153–4, 357, 712, 714  
 interpretation of, *see* interpretation of  
 Scripture  
 Jesus Christ as key to 79, 83, 128–9, 133–4,  
 137, 573–4, 576–7, 627  
 language of 39–40, 52, 83–6, 119  
 manuscript transmission of 13–27, 222–3  
 in the martyr traditions and  
 literature 417–35  
 material copies and fragments of 7–25,  
 27, 605  
 paraphrase and metaphrase of 210, 212–18  
 'mind' of 83, 667  
 public reading of 16, 18, 24, 27, 63–4, 87,  
 277, 343  
 'questions and responses' on 40, 172,  
 198–206, 235–6, 668, 675–6, 678–9  
 'rewritten' 190, 250, 264–6, 287, 385–6  
 scholia on 172, 182, 187–8, 190–5, 232,  
 236, 675  
 sentences on 230–8  
 Septuagint (LXX) 8, 14, 33–49, 55, 57–8, 60–1,  
 68, 110, 177, 194, 204, 212–17, 248, 298,  
 332, 334–6, 344, 349–53, 357, 362, 383, 385,  
 388, 390, 441, 448, 478, 515–16, 526,  
 531–2, 572–3, 582, 633, 637, 677, 679,  
 712, 714  
 Sermon on the Mount 404, 588–99  
 Sextus, *Sentences of Sextus* (*Sextou*  
*Gnomai*) 230–3, 235–6, 238  
*Shepherd of Hermas* 11, 14, 20, 22, 25, 55, 59,  
 64, 248, 458, 637, 644, 689  
 Symmachus, translation of 42–3, 47, 58, 110,  
 177, 332, 335  
 Sybils 72–3  
 Syriac Bible (Peshitta) 9, 44, 48–9, 53, 248,  
 289, 336
- T**  
 Talmud, Talmudim 58, 73, 332, 338, 343  
 Targum, Targumim 48, 190, 212, 215,  
 332, 552  
*Tebessa Codex* 405  
 temple 57, 80, 136, 264, 310, 340, 391, 473–5,  
 483, 486, 563–5, 577, 634  
 Ten Commandments (Decalogue) 175, 338,  
 340, 391, 536–8, 550, 564, 566–7  
*Testimony of Truth* 298  
 Theodotion, translation of 42–4, 47, 58, 177,  
 332, 335  
*Third Corinthians* 65, 289–90  
 tradition and traditions:  
 apocryphal and parabiblical 249, 288,  
 290–2, 295–301, 401  
 apostolic 76, 80–1, 84, 143, 272, 274–5, 278,  
 336, 626, 729  
 ecclesiastical 2, 59, 62, 65, 69, 76, 128, 174,  
 273, 463, 467, 469, 604, 678, 693–4,  
 704–6, 714–16, 719, 731–2  
 hermeneutical 118, 120, 128–9, 141, 144,  
 159–60, 172, 177–80, 183, 194, 200, 205,  
 214–16, 218, 221, 226–7, 267, 338, 411,  
 443–4, 457, 515, 519, 653, 675, 710  
 Jewish 43, 73–4, 86, 172, 174, 212, 331,  
 333, 335–9, 343–4, 350–2, 354, 368,  
 402, 638  
 oral 61–3, 278  
 'patristic' 668  
 translation 42–4, 47, 49  
 unwritten 272–3, 280, 399, 457, 467;  
*see also* Scripture: manuscript  
 transmission

*Treatise on Resurrection* 385, 390  
*Trimorphic Protennoia* 605, 609  
*Tripartite Tractate* 385

**V**

Valentinus, Valentinians 143-4, 146, 172, 201,  
368-9, 374, 378-9, 384-5, 389-94, 522,  
537, 562, 566, 603-5, 609, 616  
*Vetus Latina* 46, 248, 652  
Vulgate 9, 34, 45, 47, 49, 111, 248,  
289, 528, 652, 654, 663, 707-8, 712,  
714, 716

**W**

will, divine and human 651-2, 655-64  
Word of God (Logos; Son) 71-2, 77, 114,  
393-4, 441, 443-4, 450, 461, 477, 513, 515,  
551, 579, 607, 609, 632, 734  
incarnation of 65, 67, 71, 77-80, 84, 128-32,  
134, 136-9, 143, 274, 442, 444-5, 455-69,  
515, 517, 521, 564, 574, 583, 602, 608-9, 670  
inscribed or embodied in Scripture 77,  
82-3, 114, 667-8  
as Wisdom of God 441-2, 445, 461, 513,  
515, 519