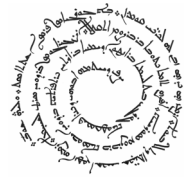
Syriac and Antiochian Exegesis and Biblical Theology for the 3rd Millennium



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INTRODUCTION

On June 15, 2004, a one-day symposium on Syriac and Antiochene exegesis and biblical interpretation in the Church was held at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The present volume contains the expanded versions of all of the symposium's papers, as well as an additional essay by Edward Mathews.

This symposium was built on three premises. The first premise was that Christian biblical scholarship today, particularly Catholic scholarship, has come to an at least apparent impasse. The nature of serious scholarly work on the Bible is of little use to practicing theologians; theologians are unable to utilize the kind of exegesis produced today, and exegetes show little interest in a theological, as opposed to homiletic, appropriation of their work. Yet a rejection of the historical-critical methods altogether is neither acceptable to exegetes nor is it the mandate of the Church.

The second premise is that there exists a distinct tradition of biblical interpretation that has its roots in both the patristic School of Antioch and in the Syriac Fathers, such as Ephrem and Jacob of Sarug, and that this tradition has survived and developed in the Churches of the Antiochene Patrimony, such as the Maronite and Syriac. The final premise is that this Antiochene/Syriac exegetical tradition has much to contribute to the apparent impasse in biblical scholarship between historical criticism and a desire for theological relevance.

The first five essays herein have a patristic focus. Each explores the nature of Syriac and Antiochian biblical interpretation, with an eye to what about it might be useful for interpreters today. Going chronologically, these essays treat Aphrahat (Craig Morrison), Ephrem (Sidney Griffith), the 4th-century *Book of Steps* (Robert Kitchen), and John Chrysostom (Paul Tarazi). Edward Mathews covers a number of Syriac fathers.

The sixth through ninth chapters tackle the issue of the modern historical-critical method more directly. While Angela Harkins high-

lights weaknesses in this method that the Syriac and Antiochian fathers might overcome, Stephen Ryan applies Syriac patristic exegesis to particular biblical texts in an attempt to make exegesis theologically relevant. Anthony Salim illustrates the extent to which the Syriac and Antiochian methods have perdured and developed in the Syriac Churches and the value of these methods in contemporary theology. John O'Keefe questions the premises of the preceding authors by challenging the existence of an Antiochian School.

The final three chapters represent responses to the earlier essays. Paul Russell surveys the landscape of Syriac and Antiochian patristics in the light of these essays. I evaluate the challenges put to the historical-critical method and the merit of Syro-Antiochian exegesis in overcoming them. Ronald Beshara addresses whether a theologian would find biblical interpretation done "with Antioch" relevant for the Church today.

Robert D. Miller

THE BIBLE IN THE HANDS OF APHRAHAT THE PERSIAN SAGE

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INTRODUCTION

Aphrahat, the Persian Sage, wrote his discourses in response to a letter he had received from a beloved inquirer. In that missive, the inquirer implored the Sage (col. 1.5–8):[1]

ܦܬܰܚ ܠܝ ܥܝܢܝ ܕܪܥܝܳܢ̈ܟ ܡܢ ܗܳܠܶܝܢ ܕܩܢܝܬ ܡܢ ܟܬܒ̈ܶܐ ܩܕܝܫ̈ܶܐ ܚܘܝ ܠܝ ܕܬܫܬܠܡ ܒܟ ܡܬܠܝ ܒܥܝܬܝ

Open for me the spiritual insights of your mind. Those things that you have attained from the Holy Scriptures show me so that my need might be filled by you.

The Sage responded (col. 5.1–3):

ܫܠܡ ܚܒܝܒܝ ܕܩܒܠܬ ܐܓܪܟ ܘܟܕ ܩܪܝܬ ܒܗ ܫܓܝ ܠܝ ܒܝ ܫܓܝܐ ܕܫܕܝܬ ܪܥܝܢܟ ܒܗܠܝܢ ܒܥܝ̈ܢ̈ܐ

I have received your letter, my friend. Upon reading it, it brought me much happiness that you have cast your mind upon such inquiries.

I share Aphrahat's sentiment as we cast our minds on the nature of biblical exegesis in the Syriac speaking world. In Aphrahat, we encounter the earliest of Syriac exegetes, one who had little contact with the

[1] References to the *Demonstrations* follow the paragraph and/or column and line number from I. Parisot (ed.), *Aphraatis Demonstrationes*, PS 1–2 (Paris, 1894–1907). Citations from the Peshitta and the sigla for Peshitta MSS are taken from the Leiden edition.

Greek world of biblical interpretation. We meet a theologian whose primary goal was to make the Bible alive and understandable for the Syriac Christian audience that lived in the Sasanian empire. Though today our exegetical methods are more varied than Aphrahat's approach, most exegetes would share with the Persian Sage the same objective—interpreting the Bible's message for our own historical context. The inquirer's letter, which stands at the beginning of the Twenty-three *Demonstrations*, provides an overture to the symphony that lies ahead: an appropriation of the Bible in order to "demonstrate" (√ܚܘܝ) the character of an exemplary Christian lifestyle.[2] It is no surprise, then, that the *Demonstrations* have the Bible at their heart. This paper will consider two aspects of Aphrahat's handling of the Bible. First, the term *taḥwithā,* "demonstration," is considered in order to uncover what it reveals about the nature of Aphrahat's writing and his appropriation of the Bible. Second, Aphrahat's way of citing the Bible is discussed in order to expose one of his techniques of biblical interpretation.

A brief word about Aphrahat for those who are meeting him for the first time. He wrote twenty-three discourses or homilies, known as "Demonstrations." The first ten were written around the year 337 and the following twelve were written around 343 and the last one in 345. Demonstrations 1–10 and 23 treat issues of Christian life, Demonstrations 11–22 focus on particular disputes between Christians and Jews. Robert Murray dates Aphrahat's life between 270 and 345 or later.[3] A Persian, perhaps pagan by birth, Aphrahat was probably a member of the *bnay qyāmā*, "the sons of the covenant,"[4] a group that appears to

[2] The letter is, perhaps, a literary device by which Aphrahat introduces his implied reader.

[3] R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 29. See also Kuriakose Valavanolickal's *Aphrahat Demonstrations I* (Catholic Theological Studies of India 3; Changanassery, Kerala: HIRS Publications, 1999) and S. P. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Moran Etho Series 9; St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute: Kottayam, Kerala, 1991), 19–22.

[4] In the *Sixth Demonstration*, "On the *bnay qyāmā*," Aphrahat begins with a lengthy series of cohortatives ("let us..."), thus including himself as a *bnay qyāmā* in his exhortation.

have enjoyed special status within the Christian community.[5] A section of Aphrahat's *Eleventh Demonstration*, "On Circumcision," is read in the Latin West in the Liturgy of the Hours (Wednesday, the first week of Lent).

THE TERM *TAḤWITHĀ*, "DEMONSTRATION"

Aphrahat labels each discourse a *taḥwithā*, "demonstration," and he refers to them with this title within his discourses. For example, in the *Eighth Demonstration*, "On the Resurrection of the Dead," he refers back to the *Sixth Demonstration:* "in the Demonstration regarding the solitaries" (col. 404.6: ܒܬܚܘܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܝ̈ܕܝܐ). In the *Eighteenth Demonstration* he again refers to the *Sixth Demonstration* as a "Demonstration": "in the Demonstration regarding the sons of the covenant" (col. 841.13: ܒܬܚܘܝܬܐ ܕܒܢ̈ܝ ܩܝܡܐ).[6] Since Aphrahat himself uses the term *taḥwithā*, "Demonstration," to refer to his discourses, we can safely assume that the Sage himself gave this title to his writing and that it is not an addition by later scribes. What then does his title tell us about the character of his work and his use of the Bible?[7]

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[5] S. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in *Asceticism* (eds. V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 233–234. See also G. Nedungatt, "The Covenanters of the Early Syriac-Speaking Church," *OCP* 39 (1973), 191–215, 419–444.

[6] He can refer to his writings with other terms as well. At the beginning of the *Fourth Demonstration*, "On Prayer," he refers to the *Third Demonstration* as a "*memrā*" ܡܐܡܪܐ, (col. 137.20), meaning "discourse" or "homily." At the end of the *Sixth Demonstration* he refers to his discourse as an ܐܓܪܬܐ (col. 312.18), *egartā*, "letter," or "epistle," in the sense of a public letter. He also refers to them as ܬܪ̈ܥܡ ("essays, arguments") at the end of the *Tenth Demonstration* (col. 464.16).

[7] In the Bible, the term *taḥwithā* occurs most often in the Pauline letters. In Rom 3:26; 2 Cor 8:24; and Phil 1:28 it translates ἔνδειξις, ("proof" or "demonstration" of an argument, see H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1968], 558). The word *taḥwithā* does not appear in the Peshitta OT. In the Peshitta Gospels it appears only once: see Luke 1:80 where it translates ἀνάδειξις ("appearance").

The word *taḥwithā* appears for the first time within a discourse (i.e., not as a title) in the *Second Demonstration*, "On Love," (col. 80.11). Aphrahat is commenting on the section of the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." He then points out that because the believer has prayed these words on many occasions, God, "the one who receives prayers," (col. 80.8–9) will quote them back to any Christian who is unforgiving. To make his point, he retells the parable of the unforgiving servant from Matt 18:23–35 (col. 80.11–13):

ܟ ܡܬܠܐ ܚܕ ܠܡܚܙ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܬܚܘܐ ܥܡ ܥܒܕܘܗܝ ܒܝܘ ܕܫܪܝ ܠܡܚܫܒ ܡܢ ܥܒܕܘܗܝ

Again, Our Lord showed us the example [*taḥwithā*] of the man who began to take an accounting from his servants.

Aphrahat knows well that he is working with a parable (elsewhere he uses the word ܡܬܠܐ [*matlā*] when a parable is introduced[8]), but here he prefers the word *taḥwithā* to describe this biblical passage since the parable of the unforgiving servant provides an "example" that *demonstrates* the validity of his argument on "forgiveness." And "forgiveness" is the central theme of the *Second Demonstration*, "On Love." And more than just confirming his argument, the biblical *taḥwithā*, the servant who was forgiven but refused to forgive others, illustrates (√ܚܘܝ) for his audience how Christians ought to conduct their daily lives.

In the *Fourth Demonstration*, "On Prayer," the term *taḥwithā* appears at the climax of the discourse. In the first nine sections of this discourse Aphrahat discusses how several events and individuals in the Old Testament illustrate the "power of prayer" (col. 149.25: ܚܝܠ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ). He then turns to Christ's teaching on prayer as he draws his audience into the core of his argument (col. 169.18–23):

ܟܬܒ ܐܚܪܢ ܟܝܦܠܗ ܫܡ ܠ ܡܕܡ ܕܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܠܟܘܢ ܕܠܐ ܟܠ ܟܡ ܠܐ ܕܬܬܚܫܒ ܥܡ ܟܠ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܟܡ ܕܐܢ ܠܐ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܚܛܝܬܐ ܕܐܢ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܚܛܝܬܐ ܐܦ ܐܢ ܠܐ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܚܛܝܬܐ ܐܦ

[8] See, for example, the *First Demonstration*, "On Faith," col. 16.9: "Again in that parable (ܡܬܠܐ) that Our Lord spoke: a man of noble birth went..." (Luke 19:13–14).

> You have no need [to say], "Forgive me." Give rest to the weary, visit the sick, and care for the poor. This is prayer! I will convince you, my friend, about this, that whenever a person accomplishes the "rest of God" [i.e., giving rest to the weary], it is prayer.

Aphrahat argues that the most sublime expression of prayer is an act of mercy. Then, coming to the heart of his discourse, he offers a *taḥwithā*, an example drawn from the parable of the last judgment in Matt 25:31–46 (col.172.18–173.14):

> ܐܢ ܢܬܓܕܫ ܠܟ ܕܬܐܙܠ ܒܐܘܪܚܐ ܪܚܝܩܬܐ ܘܢܬܓܕܫ ܠܟ ܨܗܝܐ
> ܒܚܘܡܐ ܘܠܘܬ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܐܚ̈ܐ ܘܬܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܐܢܝܚܢܝ ܡܢ
> ܛܘܪܦܗ ܕܨܗܝܐ ܘܢܐܡܪ ܠܟ ܕܥܕܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܐܨܠܐ ܘܗܝܕܝܢ
> ܐܬܐ ܠܘܬܟ ܘܥܕ ܡܨܠܐ ܘܐܬܐ ܠܘܬܟ ܐܢܬ ܬܡܘܬ ܠܨܗܝܐ
> ܐܝܕܐ ܡܬܚܙܝܐ ܠܟ ܕܡܝܬܪܐ ܕܢܐܙܠ ܢܨܠܐ ܐܘ ܕܢܢܝܚ ܠܛܘܪܦܟ ܘܐܢ
> ܬܘܒ ܬܐܙܠ ܒܐܘܪܚܐ ܒܥܕܢܐ ܕܣܬܘܐ ܘܢܗܘܐ ܥܠܝܟ ܡܛܪܐ ܘܬܠܓܐ
> ܘܠܒܪܝܟ ܬܗܘܐ ܒܛܘܪܦܐ ܘܬܘܒ ܒܥܕܢܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܬܪܥ ܥܠ
> ܚܒܝܒܟ ܘܐܝܟ ܗܢܐ ܦܬܓܡܐ ܢܥܢܝܟ ܘܐܢܬ ܠܩܪܝܢ ܬܡܘܬ ܡܢܘ
> ܗܢܝܐ ܕܨܠܘܬܗ ܕܠܛܪܝܦܐ ܠܐ ܐܢܝܚ ܡܪܢ ܓܝܪ ܟܕ ܚܘܝ ܬܚܘܝܬܐ
> ܕܥܕܢܐ ܕܕܝܢܐ ܟܕ ܦܪܫ ܘܐܩܝܡ ܡܢ ܝܡܝܢܗ ܘܡܢ ܣܡܠܗ ܗܟܢܐ ܐܡܪ
> ܠܕܡܢ ܝܡܝܢܗ ܕܟܦܢܬ ܘܝܗܒܬܘܢ ܠܝ ܠܡܐܟܠ ܘܨܗܐ ܗܘܝܬ
> ܘܐܫܩܝܬܘܢܝ ܘܐܬܪܗܬ ܘܣܥܪܬܘܢܝ ܘܟܪܝܗܐ ܗܘܝܬ ܘܡܫܡܫܬܘܢܝ ܘܐܝܟ
> ܗܠܝܢ ܐܡܪ ܠܕܡܢ ܣܡܠܗ ܘܟܠ ܕܠܐ ܥܒܕܘ ܗܠܝܢ ܥܒܪ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܬܫܢܝܩܐ
> ܘܒܢ̈ܝ ܝܡܝܢܐ ܥܒܪ ܐܢܘܢ ܠܡܠܟܘܬܐ

> If you happen to be traveling along a distant road and in the heat you find yourself thirsty and then you happen upon one of the brethren, you can say to him, relieve me from the exhaustion of thirst. Now he will say to you, "It is the hour of prayer. I must pray, then I will come to you." But while praying and making his way to you, you die of thirst. What seems better to you, that he should go and pray or that he should relieve your suffering?
>
> And again, if you are traveling in the wintertime and it's raining and snowing on you and you are in distress because of the cold and again in the hour of prayer you happen upon your friend and he answers you just as in the previous scene and you die of cold, what good is his prayer when he did not give relief to the one suffering?
>
> For Our Lord, when he gave the example [*taḥwithā*] of the time of judgment, when he separated and established those on his right and left, he said to those on his right, "I was hungry and you gave me to

> eat. I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. I was sick and you visited me. I was a foreigner and you took me in." And accordingly, he said to those on his left. And because they did not do the same, he sent them to torment, but the children on the right he sent to the kingdom.

Again, Aphrahat refers to a parable as a *taḥwithā*. But first, he describes two concrete moments from daily life. In each case, he positions the reader as the one in need. He then poses a question to the reader (who died in the story!) that he leaves unanswered: "What seems better to you…?" and "What good is his prayer…?" With these two questions in abeyance, Aphrahat presents the *taḥwithā*, the parable of the Last Judgment. The *taḥwithā*, illustrates the proper response to the questions he has posed and confirms the main argument of the *Fourth Demonstration* that prayer is essentially linked to works of mercy. At the same time, the *taḥwithā* illuminates the course of action that befits a Christian lifestyle.

Returning to the *Second Demonstration*, "On Love," Aphrahat holds up David as an example for his audience to consider (col. 84.25–85.23):

> ܬܘܒ ܐܚܘܝܟ ܚܒܝܒܝ ܕܡܝܬܪ ܗܘ ܚܘܒܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܘܒܗ
> ܐܬܓܡܪܘ ܟܐ̈ܢܐ ܩܕ̈ܡܝܐ ܡܚܘܐ ܓܝܪ ܥܠ ܡܘܫܐ ܕܥܠ ܐܦ̈ܝ ܒܢ̈ܝ
> ܥܡܗ ܢܦܫܗ ܝܗܒ ܘܨܒܐ ܕܢܬܠܚܐ ܡܢ ܣܦܪܐ ܕܚ̈ܝܐ ܘܚܠܘܦܝܗܘܢ ܥܡܐ
> ܠܐ ܢܬܠܚܐ ܘܐܦ ܟܕ ܨܒܘ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܠܡܪܓܡܗ ܗܘ ܐܬܟܫܦ ܩܪܒ
> ܩܕܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܚܠܦܝܗܘܢ ܕܢܚܘܢ
>
> ܘܐܦ ܕܘܝܕ ܚܘܝ ܬܫܒܘܚܬܗ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܟܕ ܡܢ ܫܐܘܠ ܡܬܪܕܦ ܗܘܐ
> ܘܟܠܝܘܡ ܢܦܫܗ ܡܣܝܕ ܗܘܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܢܩܛܠܝܘܗܝ ܘܗܘ ܕܘܝܕ ܒܝܕ ܪ̈ܚܡܐ
> ܒܚܘܒܐ ܫܘܒܩܢܐ ܥܠ ܫܐܘܠ ܒܥܠܕܒܒܗ ܘܒܥܐ ܢܦܫܗ ܘܐܫܬܠܡ
> ܒܐܝ̈ܕܘܗܝ ܕܕܘܝܕ ܬܪ̈ܬܝܢ ܙܒ̈ܢܝܢ ܘܠܐ ܩܛܠܗ ܘܦܪܥ ܛܒܬܐ ܚܠܦ ܒܝܫܬܐ
> ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܠܐ ܥܢܕܬ ܛܒܬܐ ܡܢ ܒܝܬܗ ܘܕܫܒܩ ܐܫܬܒܩ ܠܗ
> ܘܫܐܘܠ ܕܦܪܥ ܒܝܫܬܐ ܚܠܦ ܛܒܬܐ ܠܐ ܥܢܕܬ ܒܝܫܬܐ ܡܢ ܒܝܬܗ
> ܘܩܪܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܘܠܐ ܚܣܝܗܝ ܘܢܦܠ ܒܚܪܒܐ ܕܦܠܫ̈ܬܝܐ ܘܒܟܐ ܥܠܘܗܝ
> ܕܘܝܕ ܡܪܝܪܐܝܬ ܘܩܕܡ ܥܠܡ ܕܘܝܕ ܦܘܩܕܢܗ ܕܦܘܪܩܢ ܕܐܡܪ ܕܢܣܒܘ
> ܒܥܠܕܒ̈ܒܘܗܝ ܘܫܒܘܩܘ ܠܗܘܢ ܗܟܢܐ ܐܡܪ ܕܘܝܕ ܘܐܬܪܚܡ
> ܘܫܒܩ ܘܐܫܬܒܩ ܠܗ

> Now I will show you, my friend, that love is the most excellent of all things. By it, the ancient just ones were perfected. For it [the Bible] shows concerning Moses that on behalf of his people, he gave himself. He wanted to be blotted out from the book of the living,

> only that the people might not be blotted out. And also, when they rose up against him to stone him, he interceded before God on their behalf, so that they might be saved.
>
> So also David showed his example [*taḥwithā*] of love when he was being pursued by Saul. He was continually hunting for David to kill him. But David acted mercifully with overflowing love toward Saul, his enemy. He [Saul] sought his [David's] life but he was delivered into David's hands twice and he [David] did not kill him. He repaid goodness for evil. Because of this, evil did not depart from his house. The one who forgave was forgiven. As for Saul, who repaid evil for goodness, evil did not depart from his house. He called on God, but God did not answer him. He fell by the sword of the Philistines and David wept bitterly for him. Thus David accomplished in advance the commandment of our Savior who said, "Love your enemies, forgive and it will be forgiven you." Thus, David loved and was loved, he forgave and was forgiven.

Aphrahat sees in David's treatment of Saul a *taḥwithā*, an example of love, for his audience to imitate. In the double account of the sparing of Saul's life (1 Sam 24:1–7 and 1 Sam 26:6–12), David illustrates the forgiveness of enemies. His lamentation over Saul (2 Sam 1:17–27) further demonstrates this love. Aphrahat closes with high praise for David since in this *taḥwithā* he anticipated Christ's teaching on the love of enemies.

In the above passage there are, in fact, two examples, two *taḥwᵉyātā*, that Aphrahat wants his listeners to consider. The first belongs to Moses, the second to David. But only David's example is explicitly referred to as a *taḥwithā*. Moses' example is introduced with the expression ܡܚܘܝܐ ܓܝܪ ܥܠ ܡܘܫܐ ("for it [the Bible] shows concerning Moses"). Aphrahat often employs the verb ܚܘܝ ("to show," "to demonstrate") with the Bible as the implied subject ("it [the Bible] shows...) to introduce a biblical citation or allusion into his argument and only a few times in all the *Demonstrations* does the word *taḥwithā* appear. For example, to begin the discourse "On Fasting" (*Third Demonstration*), he writes: "It is not from my own mind that I speak, but rather, from holy scriptures that have already shown us (ܕܩܕܡܘ ܚܘܝܘܢ) that fasting was always a help to those who truly fast" (col.

97.4–7).[9] Thus, whether on fasting, repentance, or any other question he raises in the *Demonstrations*, Aphrahat adduces from the Bible concrete examples that sustain his argument and illustrate (ܗܠ) proper Christian conduct. Sometimes he labels a particular example a *taḥwithā*, but most of the time he does not.

The term *taḥwithā* appears in the *Third Demonstration*, "On Fasting," where it crosses between its function as a title and as a term to introduce a series of examples (100.25–101.1):

ܫܡܥ ܗܠ ܐܚܝ ܚܒܝܒܝ ܡܐ ܕܨܘܡܐ ܕܟܝܐ ܕܚܕ ܒܫܘܡ ܗܒܠ ܨܘܡ ܕܟܝ ܐܝܟ ܕܗܘܐ ܪܥܝ ܩܕܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܚܢܘܟ ܕܗܘܐ ܫܠܡ ܒܕܪ ܡܒܝܫ ܢܘܚ ܕܢܛܪ ܫܠܡܘܬܐ ܒܕܪ ܟܝܫ ܐܒܪܗܡ ܕܗܘܐ ܫܦܝܪ ܒܗܝܡܢܘܬܗ ܐܝܣܚܩ ܒܓܠܠ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܐܒܪܗܡ ܝܥܩܘܒ ܒܓܠܠ ܡܘܡܬܐ ܕܐܝܣܚܩ ܘܒܓܠܠ ܕܝܕܥ ܐܠܗܐ ܝܘܣܦ ܒܓܠܠ ܪܚܡܘܗܝ ܘܒܓܠܠ ܕܐܬܦܩܕ ܟܠ ܐܠܝܢ ܗܘܬ ܠܗܘܢ ܨܘܡܐ ܫܠܡ ܩܕܡ ܐܠܗܐ

Hear, then, my friend, the demonstration on pure fasting. For, first of all, Abel demonstrated pure fasting by his offering; Enoch, because he was pleasing before God; Noah, who preserved integrity in a corrupt generation; Abraham, because he was excellent in his faith; Isaac, because of Abraham's covenant; Jacob, because of Isaac's oath and because he knew God; and Joseph, because of his mercy and his stewardship. The purity of all of these became for them a perfect fasting before God.

After a brief introduction to the question of fasting, it seems that Aphrahat repeats his title ("Hear the demonstration on pure fasting") just as his argument gets underway. But what follows this phrase is a sequence of biblical characters who offer examples that illustrate (ܗܠ) authentic fasting.[10]

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[9] He regularly reminds his audience that his argument derives from scripture (see, for example, the *Seventh Demonstration* [col. 352.2]: ܡܢ ܟܬܒܝ ܩܘܫܛܐ ܐܡܪ ܠܟܘܢ; "I have convinced you from the Scriptures of God").

[10] One of Aphrahat's favorite ways of reading the Bible is to run through a sequence of biblical characters and events that illustrate his argument. Robert Murray has described this literary genre as an "exemplary sequence" (see "Some Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature," in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus: Studies in Early Christian Literature and Its Environment, Pri-*

These are all the instances where the word *taḥwithā*, "example," appears within Aphrahat's discourses. In two instances, the *taḥwithā* is a NT parable and in two others, David and Moses each provide a *taḥwithā*, though the word *taḥwithā* is only used with reference to David's example. These instances reveal that in Aphrahat's writings a *taḥwithā* is an illustration taken from the Bible. It functions to sustain the argument at stake and, at the same time, it teaches the inquirer about a proper Christian lifestyle. Recognizing Aphrahat's particular use of this term helps explain why he titled his discourses "*Demonstrations*," *taḥwᵉyātā*. Whatever the question (fasting, prayer, resurrection, or unclean and clean foods), he shows how the Bible "demonstrates" (ܚܘܝ) or confirms his argument, and from the Bible he takes examples, *taḥwᵉyātā*, that illustrate the proper approach to concrete issues in daily life.[11]

Borrowing language from the 1994 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Aphrahat's *Demonstrations* can be categorized as an example of the "actualization" of the biblical text. The fourth section of this document, titled the "Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church," addresses the question of "actualization":

> The church, indeed, does not regard the Bible simply as a collection of historical documents dealing with its own origins; it receives the Bible as word of God, addressed both to itself and to the entire world at the present time. This conviction, stemming from the faith, leads in turn to the work of actualizing and inculturating the biblical message.[12]

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marily in the Syrian East [ed. R. H. Fischer; Chicago: The Lutheran school of Theology, 1977], 109–131.)

[11] On the basis of his citations, Aphrahat knows the entire Hebrew Bible and 1 and 2 Maccabees and most of the New Testament (he never cites the letters of Peter or Revelation). For a thorough evaluation of the contents of Aphrahat's Bible on the basis of his citations, see M.-J. Pierre, *Aphraate le sage persan. Les Exposés I: Exposés I-X* (Sources chrétiennes 349; Paris: Cerf, 1988), 135–143.

[12] *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1993), 117.

Indeed, Aphrahat is such a "receiver" of the biblical text, as he believes that the Bible is addressed to his ecclesial community within its fourth century Persian world. It is also Aphrahat's conviction that what he has to say stems from faith as he explains in his *First Demonstration*, "On Faith" (col.8.7–8): "The entire edifice rises on faith until it is finished."[13] Faith, Aphrahat's first topic, is the foundation upon which his discourses rest. The Biblical Commission's document goes on to define "actualization" more specifically:

> Actualization, therefore, cannot mean manipulation of the text. It is not a matter of projecting novel opinions or ideologies upon the biblical writings, but of sincerely seeking to discover what the text has to say at the present time.[14]
>
> By virtue of actualization, the Bible can shed light upon many current issues: for example, the question of various forms of ministry, the sense of the church as communion, the preferential option for the poor, liberation theology, the situation of women. Actualization can also attend to values of which the modern world is more and more conscious, such as the rights of the human person, the protection of human life, the preservation of nature, the longing for world peace.[15]

Aphrahat turns to the Bible to "shed light" on his current issues that, though different from those today, are nonetheless pressing for his time. His interpretation of the Bible in the *Demonstrations* can be characterized as an actualized biblical theology. Though modern readers must be attentive to instances where he may manipulate the text for the sake of his own argument, his thorough knowledge of the Bible often acts as a corrective to an interpretation that might be contrary to his understanding of the biblical economy of salvation. Modern exegetes, when they focus on the "actualization" of a particular biblical passage, often echo Aphrahat's interpretation. For example, regarding the actualization of the parable of the Last Judgment, M. Eugene Boring has recently written: "What counts [in this text] is whether one has

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[13] ܘܥܠ ܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܣܠܩ ܟܠܗ ܒܢܝܢܐ ܥܕܡܐ ܕܡܫܬܠܡ

[14] *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 118.

[15] *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 120.

acted with loving care for needy people."[16] Our fourth century Sage, as we have seen, would agree wholeheartedly! His approach to the Bible can be summed up by a phrase from his fierce exhortation in the *Fourteenth Demonstration*, (col. 653.14–16):

> ܚܒܝ̈ܒܝ ܠܟܬܒܘ̈ܗܝ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܣܦܩܐ ܕܢܐܠܦ ܕܢܩܪܐ ܐܢܘܢ
> ܐܠܐ ܐܦ ܕܢܥܒܕ.
>
> My friends, it is not sufficient that we learn to read the books of God [i.e. the Bible]. We must do them!

APHRAHAT'S BIBLICAL CITATIONS

The *Demonstrations* offer a glance into the reception of the Bible in the Syriac speaking Christian world in the early fourth century. Aphrahat had an extraordinary knowledge of the biblical text; perhaps he had committed large sections of it to memory. In his discourses, he overwhelms his audience with over 1500 biblical references. Robert Owens notes that on average there are about four biblical citations per column of Parisot's text.[17] Moreover, his language and rhetoric is so thoroughly biblical that the lines between citation, allusion, and Aphrahat's own argumentation become utterly blurred.

Biblical allusions come without warning and can be quite subtle. When Aphrahat recounts David sparing Saul's life (discussed above) he writes, ܘܕܫܒܩ ܐܫܬܒܩ ܠܗ; "he [David] who forgave was forgiven," an allusion to the confrontation between David and Nathan in 2 Sam 12:13.[18] In the *Seventh Demonstration*, "On Penitents," Aphrahat draws on the image of someone wounded in battle to describe those "wounded" by Satan. The wounded, he writes, must seek the physician "who has received the two denarii with which he heals the wounded"

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[16] M. Eugene Boring, *Matthew* (New Interpreter's Bible 8; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 455.

[17] R. J. Owens, *The Genesis and Exodus Citations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage* (Monographs of the Peshitta Institute 3; Leiden: Brill, 1983), 17. He reviews the results of several authors who have enumerated the biblical citations in the *Demonstrations*.

[18] Aphrahat discusses this scene more fully in the *Seventh Demonstration* (§14).

(col. 317.20–21).[19] This is a subtle allusion to the innkeeper from the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:35) in a discourse in which no other allusion is made to this parable. Such subtleties can send his modern readers scurrying to their Bibles. Aphrahat would be pleased. He presumes that the reader knows the Bible as well as he does. In the *Seventh Demonstration*, "On the Penitents," he writes (col. 324.11–13):

ܗܟܢ ܐܦ ܩܝܢ ܕܡܠܝ ܗܘܐ ܒܪܡܝܐ ܘܠܐ ܩܒܠ ܩܘܪܒܢܗ ܡܢܗ

> So also Cain, who was filled with deceit and he did not accept his offering from him.

This is the only reference to Cain in this Demonstration. Aphrahat provides no explanation about the offering, nor does he identify the subject of ܩܒܠ as God. He hints at a biblical event and his audience is expected to be able to fill in the details. Of course, everyone knows the story of Cain. But consider the *Fifth Demonstration*, "On Wars" (192.24–26):

ܬܪܝܨ ܘܬܩܝܦ ܘܬܒܪ ܐܦ ܠܡܥܪܒ ܘܠܨܦܘܢ ܘܠܬܝܡܢ ܘܡܟܟ ܚܝܘܬܐ ܣܓܝܐܬ

> Now the ram was arrogant and haughty and it charged to the west, to the north, and to the south, and it humbled many beasts.

In §5 of his discourse, "On Wars," Aphrahat flashes the symbol of the ram from Dan 8:4, his first allusion to the Book of Daniel that will become the focus of this Demonstration. His listeners were supposed to recognize its source.

Aphrahat's audience needed to be well catechized, otherwise much of his rhetoric would have fallen flat. Hence, at the end of the *Tenth Demonstration*, "On Pastors," he exhorts his audience: "Strive to read the Bible!" (col. 464.21–24):

ܟܠ ܙܒܢ ܕܐܢ ܟܬܒ ܠܟܘܢ ܥܠ ܡܕܡ ܕܬܬܪܥܘ ܠܡܩܪܐ ܒܣܦܪ̈ܐ ܕܡܬܩܪܝܢ ܒܥܕܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ

> Think about what I have written to you all the time. You should strive to read the books that are read in the Church of God.

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[19] ܒܣܦܪ̈ܐ ܩܢܘܢܝ̈ܐ ܕܥܕܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܗܘܢ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܫܩܪ

The expression, ܘܗܘܝܬ ܥܡܠ ܠܩܪܝܢܐ, is quite forceful: you should toil, or weary yourself, with reading the Bible. He is only encouraging his disciples to do what he himself has done so that they might be able to appreciate his discourses.

HOW APHRAHAT CITES THE BIBLE

Owens' careful text critical work on Aphrahat's citations of Genesis and Exodus has demonstrated that Aphrahat knew the Bible in Syriac and was not consulting a Hebrew or Greek text.[20] Thus, when the Peshitta disagrees with the Hebrew text, Aphrahat's citation will follow the Peshitta.[21] However, the attentive reader will also note that quite often his biblical citations diverge from the Peshitta as well. Various reasons have been suggested to explain this phenomenon. Goshen-Gottstein writes that early Syriac writers "often quoted from memory, omitted parts of verses, and, of course, changed verses to fit their homiletic needs."[22] However, as I have shown recently, Aphrahat's citations of the Book of Daniel in the *Fifth Demonstration*, "On Wars," strongly suggests that he has a manuscript of the Syriac Bible under his eyes as he writes.[23] This is a more than reasonable presupposition given that he is so well versed in the Bible. He must have had access to a Syriac Bible, the emerging Peshitta text that we have today.

This presupposition impacts on how scholars interpret Aphrahat's biblical citations. If he has a biblical text under his eyes, then the ad-

[20] Owens, *The Genesis and Exodus Citations*, 247.

[21] For example, 2 Sam 24,17 and 1 Chr 21,17 reads ואלה הצא מה עשו "And these sheep, what have they done?" The Peshitta adds ܠܬܡܝܡܬܐ after הצא reading, "These innocent sheep, what have they done?" When Aphrahat cites this verse in the *Tenth Demonstration*, "On Pastors" (Col. 448.23–24), his citation includes the addition ܠܬܡܝܡܬܐ.

[22] M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, "Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Peshitta," in *Text and Language in Bible and Qumran* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Orient, 1960), 197.

[23] C. Morrison, "The Reception of the Book of Daniel in Aphrahat's Fifth Demonstration, 'On Wars,'" *Journal of Syriac Studies* 7 (2003), 69–99. M.-J. Pierre is of the same opinion writing, "Mais le Sage Persan connaît si bien la Bible que ses citations semblent aussi fidèles que s'il avait consulté un texte écrit." (*Aphraate le sage persan. Les Exposés I: Exposés I-X*, Sources chrétiennes 349 [Paris: Cerf, 1988], 132).

justments he makes when citing the Bible become conscious changes not mere memory lapses or adaptations to his homiletic needs. Instead, these adjustments witness to Aphrahat's interpretation of the biblical passage in question. A few examples will make this clear.

APHRAHAT CITES JER 18:7–10

In the *Second Demonstration*, "On Love," Aphrahat treats the question of divine patience and human repentance, arguing that God can change the length of time allowed for repentance. In §8 he takes up the apparent contradiction between God's declaration to Abraham in Gen 15:13 regarding the number of years Abraham's descendents would be in Egypt (four hundred years) with the actual time spent there according to Exod 12:40–41 (four hundred and thirty years). The additional thirty years can be explained by the fact that Moses had to flee unexpectedly to Midian. The event illustrates divine patience: God could wait until the Israelites recognized Moses' role in the divine plan. Thus, the Bible demonstrates that God can delay or hasten punishment. All this, Aphrahat underscores, occurs with divine knowledge.[24]

Then Aphrahat turns to the question of Isaiah's words to Ahaz that after sixty-five years Ephraim would be destroyed (*Second Demonstration* §9; Isa 7:8). With acute attention to the biblical text, he notes that Ahaz reigned sixteen years (col. 68.17; 2 Kings 16:2) and that Shalmaneser attacked Israel in the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign (col. 68.13–15; 2 Kings 18:9). Thus only twenty, not sixty-five, years intervened between Isaiah's words and the destruction of Ephraim. Why, he asks, was Isaiah's original prediction reduced by forty-five years?[25] The sixty-five years, he explains, witness to God's long-suffering spirit in favor of human repentance. But the extended period of sixty-five years only resulted in arrogance on the part of the Israelites who (Aphrahat quotes Ezekiel) responded: "that which the prophets are saying is prophesied for a distant time" (Ezek 12:27). Their reaction

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[24] Col. 68.20–22: "It is not like someone unknowledgeable that [God] promised concerning them that thus it would be and then years were subtracted or added, but rather as someone knowledgeable."

[25] Again Aphrahat insists that God acted with full knowledge (col. 68.20: ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܐܝܟ ܠܐ ܝܕܘܥܐ).

prompted God to "declare erroneous" Isaiah's original statement of sixty-five years (col. 69.16–18):

ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܫܩܪ ܗܘ ܕܐܬܚܫܒ ܠܗ ܘܕܐܬܩܢܝ ܠܗܘܢ

Indeed, he [God] declared erroneous the time that he had set and decreed for them.

Aphrahat introduces the word ܐܬܚܫܒ to express the divine change of plans.[26] He then cites Isa 33:1 (col. 69.19–22):

ܘܝ ܠܡܢ ܕܫܘܐ ܠܐ ܫܘܝܬ ܐܢ ܬܐܬܚܫܒ ܠܐ ܢܬܚܫܒ ܠܟ ܡܬܝ ܕܨܒܝܬ ܠܡܫܘܐ ܐܢ ܠܡܬܚܫܒ ܐܢ ܐܬܚܫܒ ܠܟ ܐܢ ܨܒܝܬ ܠܡܬܚܫܒ ܐܢ ܐܬܚܫܒ ܠܟ

Woe to the one who plunders, you will not plunder and the liar shall not deceive you. For when you want to plunder, you will be plundered. When you want to deceive, you will be deceived.

Thus, it is from this near exact citation of Isa 33:1 that Aphrahat has appropriated the term √ܚܫܒ. It becomes the operative term as he develops his explanation for why the sixty-five years became twenty years. He then produces a lengthy citation from Jeremiah to demonstrate that God can change previously announced plans (col. 69.23–col. 72.6):

ܠܡܬܝ ܫܡܥܢܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܒܝܪܡܝܐ ܕܐܢ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ ܘܥܠ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܠܡܬܪ ܘܠܡܚܪܒ ܘܠܡܗܪܣ ܘܠܡܬܒܪ ܘܥܠ ܥܡܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܗܦܟ ܡܢ ܒܝܫܬܗ ܘܐܢܐ ܐܬܚܫܒ ܠܒܝ ܥܠ ܡܠܬܝ ܘܐܬܟܢܫ ܡܢ ܥܠܝܗܘܢ ܠܡܒܝܫܬܐ ܕܐܡܠܠ ܥܠܝܗܘܢ ܐܡܪ ܒܝܪܡܝܐ ܕܐܢ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ ܘܥܠ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܠܡܬܪ ܘܠܡܚܪܒ ܘܠܡܗܪܣ ܘܠܡܬܒܪ ܘܥܠ ܥܡܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܗܦܟ ܡܢ ܒܝܫܬܗ ܘܐܢܐ ܐܬܚܫܒ ܠܒܝ ܥܠ ܡܠܬܝ ܕܐܬܟܢܫ ܡܢ ܥܠܝܗܘܢ ܠܡܒܝܫܬܐ ܕܐܡܠܠ ܥܠܝܗܘܢ

Again, it is written in Jeremiah: "If I say with regard to a people and a kingdom to uproot, to ruin, to pull down, and to destroy and that people turns from its iniquity, *then I too will abrogate my word* and I will withdraw from them that which I spoke against them." Again, Jeremiah said: "If I say with regard to a people or a kingdom

[26] C. Brockelmann (*Lexicon Syriacum* [Editio secunda aucta et emendata; Halis Saxonum: Max Niemeyer, 1928], 137) suggests *putavit mendacem*. R. Payne Smith (*Thesaurus Syriacus* [Oxford, 1879], 821) suggests *abrogare*.

> to build and plant and that people acts corruptly before me, *then I too will abrogate my word* and I will withdraw from them the good that I spoke for their benefit."

The Peshitta text of Jer 18:7–10 (7a1, Codex Ambrosianus) reads as follows:

> ܐܝܟܡܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܡܚܪܒ ܘܠܡܬܬܪ ܘܠܡܐܒܕ ܐܢ ܗܘ ܥܡܐ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܒܝܫܬܗ ܕܥܒܕ ܒܝܫ ܩܕܡܝ ܕܠܐ ܢܫܡܥ ܒܩܠܝ ܘܐܢܚܡ ܥܠ ܛܒܬܐ ܕܐܡܪܬ ܠܡܥܒܕ ܠܗܘܢ[27] ܘܐܦ ܒܥܡܐ ܘܒܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܡܒܢܝ ܘܠܡܢܨܒ ܐܢ ܥܒܕ ܒܝܫ ܩܕܡܝ ܘܠܐ ܫܡܥ ܒܩܠܝ ܐܢܚܡ ܥܠ ܛܒܬܐ ܕܐܡܪܬ ܠܡܥܒܕ ܠܗܘܢ

> If suddenly I say with regard to a people and a kingdom to uproot, to ruin, to pull down, and to destroy[28] and that people turns from its iniquity, then I too will withdraw the punishment that I had planned to do to them. But if I say with regard to a people or a kingdom to build and plant and they act corruptly before me and do not listen to my voice, then I will withdraw from them the good that I spoke for their benefit.

Aphrahat introduces this citation telling his audience that he is citing Jeremiah. The following minor differences between Aphrahat's citation and the Peshitta text can be observed:

1. The Peshitta reads ܦܬܐܡ ܕܝ, "suddenly," absent in Aphrahat. Its removal renders the two phrases in the Peshitta ܐܝܟ ܕܝ ܦܬܐܡ ܐܡܪ and ܐܝܟ ܐܡܪ: identical in Aphrahat ܐܡܪ ܐܝܟ
2. The Peshitta reads ܡܢ where Aphrahat reads ܥܡ. This minor difference depends on how one views the grammatical number of ܥܡܐ.
3. Aphrahat reads ܥܡ ܒܝܫܬܗ ܕܥܒܕ instead of ܕܥܒܕ ܒܝܫ ܩܕܡܝ and ܥܡ ܗܘ ܥܡܐ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܒܝܫܬܗ instead

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[27] Walton's *Polyglotta* reads ܠܗܘܢ.

[28] The MT here has only three infinitives, לנתוש ולהאביד. Peshitta MS 7a1 reads ܠܡܚܪܒ ܠܡܬܬܪ ܠܡܒܢܝ ܠܡܢܨܒ whereas Peshitta MS 9a1 reads ܠܡܢܨܒ ܠܡܒܢܝ ܠܡܬܬܪ ܠܡܚܪܒ (see G. Greenberg, *Translation Technique in the Peshitta to Jeremiah* [Monographs of the Peshitta Institute 13; Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 2002], 133). Aphrahat reads with 7a1 against the MT and 9a1.

of ܠܡ ܐܥܒܕ ܐܢܐ ܡܕܡ ܕܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܠܟܘܢ. These two adjustments are for literary reasons. In Aphrahat's appropriation of the Jeremiah text, the protasis is more parallel with the apodosis ("if I say...that which I said") than in the Peshitta. for

Literary reasons can explain these minor changes. But the significant change to the Peshitta text is the introduction (twice) of the phrase ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܐܫܪܝ ܠܡܠܬܝ ("then I too will abrogate my word") in which Aphrahat exploits the term √ܫܪܝ he appropriated from Isa 33:1. In the Isaiah citation, God announced that when Israel sought to deceive, it would be deceived. Now, citing Jeremiah, Aphrahat reminds his audience that God, depending upon the reaction of the people, can "withdraw" (ܐܬܚܪܛ) his intentions. All this is in the Peshitta text of Jeremiah. But Aphrahat's addition ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܐܫܪܝ ܠܡܠܬܝ expresses his interpretation of the Jeremiah passage in light of Isa 33:1. He signals his audience that it is precisely at this point in the Jeremiah citation that the Bible confirms his argument that God can do the "deceiving" by abrogating his previously declared word, thus reducing the sixty-five years to twenty years.

A question remains. Did Aphrahat's audience know the Peshitta text of Jeremiah well enough to be able to identify his addition? If so, his rhetoric would have had a much greater impact on them. As they heard his alteration to the Jeremiah text, they would have grasped his interpretation: God lengthened the number of years Israel was in Egypt and reduced the years before Shalmaneser's attack against Israel, because *God can abrogate his word* as announced in Isaiah 33:1 and confirmed in Jer 18:7–10.

APHRAHAT CITES DAN 2:44

In the *Fifth Demonstration*, "On Wars," Aphrahat retrieves in Daniel 2, 7, and 8 a reassuring message to the Christians threatened by Sasanian rule. According to Aphrahat, the four kingdoms that Daniel sees (Daniel 2) will pass away and Christ's kingdom will prevail. The Sage cites Dan 2:44 (209.25–212.3):

ܗܟܢܐ ܡܠ ܒܝܡ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܐܢ ܐܠܗ ܫܡܝܐ ܡܩܝܡ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܠܥܠܡ ܠܐ ܬܬܚܒܠ ܘܡܠܟܘܬܗ ܠܥܡ ܐܚܪܢ ܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܘܗܝ ܬܫܝܘ ܠܟܠ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܘܗܝ ܬܩܘܡ ܠܥܠܡ

It [the Bible] declared: "In the days of those kings who are in the kingdom, the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that will

> never be destroyed and will not pass away." This is the kingdom of Christ the King that will bring the fourth kingdom to an end.

Dan 2:44 reads as follows:

> ܘܒܝܘ̈ܡܬܗܘܢ ܕܡ̈ܠܟܐ ܗܢܘܢ ܢܩܝܡ ܐܠܗ ܫܡܝܐ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܝܢ
> ܠܐ ܬܬܚܒܠ ܘܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܐܚܪܢܐ ܠܐ ܬܫܬܒܩ ܐܠܐ ܬܕܘܩ
> ܘܬܣܝܦ ܟܠܗܝܢ ܡܠܟܘ̈ܬܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܘܗܝ ܬܩܘܡ ܠܥܠܡܝܢ

> In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that will never be destroyed. The kingdom will not be left for another people, rather, it [the eternal kingdom] will crush and bring to an end all these kingdoms. It will endure forever.

Aphrahat introduces the biblical citation with the word ܚܘܝ, "it showed" (the Bible is the implied subject). The citation is nearly identical with the Peshitta text except for the addition of ܘܠܐ ܬܥܒܪ ("it will not pass away"). But a careful examination of this addition within its context reveals that ܘܠܐ ܬܥܒܪ has been added to the biblical text in order to contrast with Aphrahat's interpretation: ܡܥܒܪܐ, "he will bring to an end." The addition stresses that Christ's kingdom *will not pass away* (ܘܠܐ ܬܥܒܪ), while, at the same time, Christ's kingdom *will bring to an end* (ܡܥܒܪܐ) the "fourth kingdom" in Daniel 2:40–43. His interpretation plays on √ܥܒܪ. Thus, as with Jeremiah, so with Daniel, when Aphrahat adjusts the biblical text, his adjustment exposes his interpretation of the passage.

APHRAHAT CITES GEN 1:29–30 AND 9:3–4

In the *Fifteenth Demonstration*, "On the Separation of Foods," Aphrahat focuses on the instructions God gave to Adam and to Noah with respect to food. He writes (col. 733.26–col. 736.14):

> ܡܢ ܩܕܝܡ ܓܝܪ ܟܕ ܒܕܗ ܠܒܪ ܐܢܫܐ ܗܟܢܐ ܦܩܕܗ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܐܕܡ
> ܘܠܬܘ̈ܠܕܬܗ ܘܠܢܘܚ ܘܠܕ̈ܚܬܗ ܕܗܐ ܝܗܒܬ ܠܗܘܢ ܚܝܘܬܐ ܘܦܪܚܬܐ
> ܘܟܠ ܒܣܪ ܢܦܫ ܕܒܗ ܟܠ ܐܪܒܥܐ ܘܐܟܘܠ ܘܐܝܟ ܝܘܪܩܐ ܬܚܫܒ ܠܟ
> ܒܠܚܘܕ ܕܡܐ ܠܐ ܬܐܟܠܘܢ ܐܠܐ ܟܠ ܐܪܒܥܐ ܐܫܘܕܝܗܝ ܐܝܟ ܡܢ̈ܐ
> ܡܛܠ ܕܕܡܐ ܢܦܫܐ ܗܘ ܗܠܝܢ ܦܩܕ ܐܠܗܐ ܠܗܠܝܢ ܕܪ̈ܐ ܩܕܡ̈ܝܐ
> ܘܡܐܟܠ̈ܬܐ ܠܐ ܦܪܫ ܠܗܘܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܐܠܐ ܡܕܡ ܚܠܡܐ ܘܟܒܪ
> ܢܡܘܣܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܗܘܢ ܒܡܐܟܠ̈ܬܐ ܡܢ ܩܕܝܡ ܠܐܕܡ ܘܠܢܘܚ ܡܦܪܫ
> ܗܘܐ ܠܛܐ̈ܬܐ ܡܢ ܕܒܬܪ ܐܝܟ ܐܢܘܢ ܘܐܡܪ ܠܗܘܢ ܕܕܡܐ
> ܠܐ ܬܐܟܠܘܢ ܐܠܐ ܟܠ ܒܣܪ ܘܐܟܘܠ ܘܐܝܟ ܝܘܪܩܐ ܥܣܒܐ
> ܢܬܚܫܒ ܠܗܘܢ

> For in ancient times, when he made the person, thus God commanded Adam and his generations and Noah and his descendents, "See, I have given you the beasts and the birds and all flesh. Pour their blood on the ground and eat. You should consider them as vegetables. But the blood you shall not eat. Rather pour it out on the ground like water, because the blood is the life." God commanded these things to the first generations, but he did not distinguish foods for them. Because, if there was something sinful or contrary to the law in foods, then he would have already separated the unclean from the clean for Adam and Noah just as he warned them saying to them, "you shall not eat the blood, but all flesh, slaughter and eat. Thus you shall consider them as vegetables."

Owens has presented a careful text critical study of this citation.[29] He notes that Aphrahat has combined elements from Gen 1:29–30; 9:3–4; Deut 12:16, 23, 27; and 15:23. These texts are presented below.

Gen 1:29–30

ܐܡܪ ܐܠܗܐ ܗܐ ܝܗܒ ܐܢܐ ܠܟܘܢ ܟܠ ܥܣܒ ܙܪܥ ܒܪ ܥܠ ܐܦ ܥܠ ܟܠ ܐܝܠܢ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܦܪܝ ܙܪܥ ܒܙܪ ܠܟܘܢ ܢܗܘܐ ܠܡܐܟܠ ܘܠܟܠ ܚܝܬܐ ܕܒܪ ܘܠܟܠ ܥܦܬܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܘܠܟܠ ܕܪܡܫ ܥܠ ܐܪܥܐ ܕܒܗ ܢܦܫ ܚܝܐ ܠܟܠ ܥܣܒ ܝܪܩ ܠܡܐܟܠ ܘܗܟܢܐ ܗܘܐ

Then God said, "See, I have given to you all the plants that produce seeds on the surface of the earth and the trees which have fruit that produces the seed. They will be your food. And to all the beasts of the field, and to all the birds of the heavens and to all the things creeping on the earth that has the breath of life in them, and all the vegetables from plants [I have given] for food. And so it was.

Gen 9:2–4

ܘܐܝܬ ܕܚܬܬ ܘܕܗܠ ܟܠ ܚܝܬ ܒܪ ܐܪܥܐ ܘܟܠ ܥܦ ܫܡܝܐ ܘܟܠ ܕܪܡܫ ܥܠ ܐܪܥܐ ܘܟܠ ܢܘܢܐ ܕܒܝܡܐ ܐܫܠܡ ܢܬܬܘ ܒܝܕܟܘܢ ܟܠ ܕܪܡܫ ܕܚܝ ܗܘ ܠܟܘܢ ܠܡܐܟܠ ܐܦ ܐܝܟ ܥܣܒ ܝܪܩ ܢܬܬ ܠܟܘܢ ܟܠ

[29] Owens, *The Genesis and Exodus Citations*, 50–55.

ܟܠ ܚܝܬܐ ܕܒܐܪܥܐ ܘܟܠ ܥܘܦܐ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܘܟܠ ܕܪܡܫ ܥܠ ܐܪܥܐ ܒܝܕܟ ܢܗܘܝܢ ܘܟܠ ܢܘܢܐ ܕܒܝܡܐ ܢܬܠܟ ܠܟ ܗܘ ܠܡܐܟܠ ܐܝܟ ܥܣܒܐ ܕܝܪܩܐ ܢܬܠ ܠܟ ܟܠ ܗܠܝܢ ܒܠܚܘܕ ܒܣܪܐ ܕܒܗ ܢܦܫܐ ܕܡܗ ܠܐ ܬܐܟܠ

Fear and dread of you will be on all the beasts of the land and all the birds of the heavens and on all the things that creep on the earth. All the fish of the sea are given into your hands. Everything that creeps, that is alive, will be food for you. Like the vegetables from plants [I gave you], I have given you all things. Only, the flesh with its life, its blood, you shall not eat.

Deut 12:16 (=Deut 15:23)

ܒܪ ܡܢ ,ܬܫܕܘܢ ܐܝܢ ܥܠ ܐܪܥܐ ܟܡܝܐ ܠܐ ܬܐܟܠ

Only, the blood you shall not eat. Rather pour it out on the ground like water.

Deut 12:23

ܠܐ ܐܡ ܬܚܕ ܬܕܥ ܠܟܝ ܕܬܐ ܕܕܡܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܠܐ ܬܐܟܠ ܥܡ ܒܣܪܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܗܘ

Only, be sure that you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life. Do not eat the life with the flesh.

Deut 12:27

ܥܠܘܬܟ ܒܣܪܐ ܘܕܡܐ ܬܥܒܕ ܥܠ ܡܕܒܚܐ ܕܝܗܘܐ ܐܠܗܟ ܕܕܡ ܕܒܚܝܟ ܢܬܟܒ ܥܠ ܡܕܒܚܐ ܕܝܗܘܐ ܐܠܗܟ ܒܣܪܐ ܘܕܡܐ ܬܐܟܠ

Make your whole burnt offering, flesh and blood, on the altar of the Lord your God and the blood of your sacrifices should be poured out on the altar of the Lord your God. Eat the flesh.

The presentation of the biblical texts demonstrates that the phrases ܠܐ ܬܫܥܘܢ ܐܝܢ ܥܒܕ and ܠܚܝ ܬܫܥܘܢ ܐܬܘܢ ܐܝܢ ܥܒܕ find no correspondence in the Bible. Owens noted this as well and suggested that Aphrahat had borrowed the expression ... ܠܚܝ ܬܫܥܘܢ ܥܒܕ from Lev 7:18; 17:4, 18; 25:31 and Num 18:27. Indeed, an *ethpaal* form of √ܫܥܬ appears in these verses but nowhere in the Bible does the phrase "You should consider them as vegetables" appear. The rest of Aphrahat's citation, as Owens shows, can be retrieved from the various biblical citations noted above.

Thus, the additions ܠܐ ܬܥܒܕ ܟܠܝܐ ܡܝܪܥ and ܟܠܝܐ ܡܝܪܥ ܠܟܘ ܬܥܒܕ ܟܬܘ are Aphrahat's own inventions and they reveal his interpretation of the biblical text. He, in a rather polemical interpretation, has God speak directly to Adam, Noah and to his audience: "you should consider them [all meats] like vegetables." Hence, the Bible, as cited by Aphrahat, confirms that there is to be no distinction between clean and unclean foods. His addition, made twice as in the Jeremiah citation, serves to make this explicit.

APHRAHAT CITES 2 KINGS 2:11

In the *Sixth Demonstration*, "On the *bnay qyāmā*," Aphrahat describes the way of life proper to the *bnay qyāmā*. His discourse opens with a sequence of rhythmic cohortatives, one of which is (col. 249.5):

ܡܢ ܕܣܒܪ ܠܗ ܒܥܢܢܐ ܢܬܚܛܦ ܘܠܐ ܢܥܒܕ ܠܗ ܟܪܟܐ ܕܡܫܟܚܐ

Whoever is expecting to be snatched up in the clouds,
let him not make for himself ornate chariots.

In this cohortative, Aphrahat expresses the hope of the *bnay qyāmā* that they too will be snatched up in the clouds.

As he develops his argument, Aphrahat proposes the OT prophet Elijah as an example for the *bnay qyāmā* to imitate. Biblical citations from the Elijah Cycle (1 Kings 17–19, 21 and 2 Kings 1–2) are introduced with the phrase (col. 264.1–2): ܗܟܢܐ ܕܟܬܝܒ ܒܗ ܐܦ ܗܘ ,ܐܠܝܐ; "So also it is written about Elijah." When Aphrahat comes to describing Elijah's departure, he writes (col. 264.10–12):

ܡܛܠ ܕܫܕܪ ܟܠ ܗܘܝܬܗ ܒܫܡܝܐ ܢܬܚܛܦ ܒܪܟܒܐ ܕܢܘܪ

And because he [Elijah] set all his cares in heaven,
he was snatched up to heaven in a fiery chariot.

The verb ܢܬܚܛܦ jumps off the page to anyone who knows the biblical text of 2 Kings 2:11:

ܘܗܘܐ ܟܕ ܗܘܘ ܡܬܟܠܡܝܢ ܘܗܠܟܝܢ ܗܐ ܓܒ ܗܐ ܘܪܟܒܐ ܕܢܘܪ ܘܣܘܣܝܐ ܕܢܘܪ ܦܪܫ ܒܝܢ ܬܪܝܗܘܢ ܘܐܠܝܐ ܣܠܩ ܒܣܥܪܬܐ ܠܫܡܝܐ

While they [Elijah and Elisha] were talking and walking along, a fiery chariot and a fiery horse separated the two of them and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind to heaven.

According to the Peshitta, Elijah "went up" (ܐܠܨ) in the fiery chariot, he was not "snatched up" as Aphrahat describes. That Aphrahat knew the Peshitta text is indicated by a later reference to Elijah's departure in the *Sixth Demonstration* that agrees with the Peshitta (col. 289.15–16):

ܐܠܨ ܘܦܬܚ ܫܡܝܐ ܕܐܠܝܐ

Elijah opened the heavens and ascended.[30]

Thus, Aphrahat knew the Peshitta reading in 2 Kings 2:11 but he did not want that text. He wanted his audience to think of Elijah as having been "snatched up."

As the Demonstration is drawing to a close Aphrahat teaches the *bnay qyāmā* that they too will be raised and "snatched up" to heaven (col. 309.13–16):

ܗܝܕܝܢ ܫܡܝܐ ܢܬܚܛܦܘܢ ܠܥܠܡ ܒܥܠܡ ܕܠܒܫ ܒܗ ܢܛܝܪܘܢ ܠܗܘ ܠܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܛܝܐ ܠܗܘ ܡܢ ܫܪܝܪܐ

Then the heavenly ones will be snatched up to heaven;
the spirit with which they are clothed will make them fly up. They will inherit the kingdom that was prepared for them from the beginning.

Aphrahat borrows this imagery from the apocalyptic eschatology in 1 Thess 4:17 (Peshitta text):

ܗܫܐ ܐܢܚܢܢ ܕܫܠܡܝܢ ܕܩܐܡܝܢ ܢܬܚܛܦ ܥܡܗܘܢ ܒܥܢܢܐ ܠܩܒܠ ܡܪܢ ܒܐܘܝܪ

Then we who are remaining, who are living, will be snatched up with them together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

Thus, Aphrahat configures Elijah's departure in the fiery chariot to the Pauline eschatology in 1 Thess 4:17. And what seems like a minor adjustment to the Peshitta's description of Elijah's fiery exit actually looks to the conclusion of the *Sixth Demonstration* when Aphrahat

[30] Also in the *First Demonstration*, "On Faith," Aphrahat describes Elijah's ascent with ܐܠܨ, the language of the Peshitta text (col. 32.7–10):

ܕܠܒܪ ܕܐܬܘ ܠܛܘܪܐ ܕܐܠܝܐ ܕܐܠܨ ܒܪܬܟܒܬܐ ܕܢܘܪܐ ܕܗܘ ܒܬܪ ܡܫܟܢ

Because they approached the mountain where Elijah, who went up to heaven in a fiery chariot, was dwelling.

reminds the *bnay qyāmā* that they too will be snatched up. By writing ܚܛܦܝܢ ("snatched up") instead of Peshitta ܣܠܩ ("go up"), Aphrahat has the Old Testament prophet become a proleptic witness to Paul's promise to the Thessalonians. And what could be passed over as an insignificant adjustment of the Peshitta, reveals Aphrahat's interpretation of Elijah's departure and its application to the lives of the *bnay qyāmā*.

CONCLUSION: APHRAHAT'S BIBLICAL CITATIONS

The point of this discussion is to suggest a new approach to Aphrahat's treatment of the Bible. His changes to the biblical text should not be interpreted as mistakes or traces of a fatigued memory or reduced to mere homiletic interventions. Rather, they are crucial to perceiving the Sage's biblical interpretation of the passage he cites. Each biblical citation along with its deviations must be considered in the context of the Demonstration in which it appears. The seemingly minor change in describing Elijah's departure in the *Sixth Demonstration* waits until near to the end of his discourse for an explanation. This approach moves the study of Aphrahat's citations from "Did he get it right?" to "What is he trying to say?" because, when Aphrahat deviates from the Peshitta, he offers his disciples his interpretation of the biblical passage in question.

APHRAHAT'S REFLECTIONS ON BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

A few times in the *Demonstrations* Aphrahat pauses to reflect on his work as an exegete. When he undertakes a particular question, he often acknowledges that his response is limited by his own abilities at biblical interpretation ("as much as I am able"; ܐܝܟ ܕܡܫܟܚ ܠܝ cols. 140.9; 541.13–14; 728.10; 733.3; 785.13–14). His modesty toward his own exegesis finds fuller expression on two occasions in the *Demonstrations*. The *Fifth Demonstration*, "On Wars," is an exegesis of the Book of Daniel. After he concludes his argument, he reflects for a moment on his own life as a biblical scholar (col 236.7–col. 237.6).

ܐܝܟ ܕܡܢ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܕܒܝܬ ܒܝܬ ܕܚܟܡܬ ܒܪ ܫܒܥ ܒܝܬ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܫܠܝܡܘܢ
ܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܝ ܚܟܡܬ ܐܠܐ ܡܢ ܡܪܝ ܗܘ ܕܝܗܒ ܠܝ ܚܟܡܬ ܘܡܕܥ ܐܢܐ
ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܐܠܐ ܡܥܛ ܡܥܛ ܒܟܠ ܫܥܬܐ ܕܐܬ ܠܝ ܡܢ ܡܪܝ ܗܘ ܕܝܗܒ
ܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܝ ܚܟܡܬ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܫܠܝܡܘܢ ܒܟܠ ܚܟܡܬܗ ܘܒܟܠ ܒܢܝܬ
ܒܝܬܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܐܫܪܐ ܠܗ ܫܠܝܡܘܢ ܐܦ ܒܟܠ ܗܢܐ ܐܡܪ ܕܐܢ ܐܫܬܡܥ ܠܝ ܡܢ ܡܪܝ
ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܐ ܐܫܬܡܥ ܠܝ ܐܠܐ ܡܢ ܡܪܝ ܗܘ ܕܝܗܒ ܠܝ ܚܟܡܬ ܐܦ ܗܟܢ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ

> ܝܡܐ ܠܐ ܡܬܝܕܥ ܚܘܣܪܢܗ ܘܐܢ ܬܫܩܘܠ ܚܠܐ ܡܢ ܣܦܬܗ ܠܐ ܒܨܪ ܡܢܝܢܗ ܘܐܢ ܬܡܢܐ ܟܘܟ̈ܒܝ ܫܡܝܐ ܠܐ ܬܣܦܩ ܥܠ ܣܟܗܘܢ ܘܐܢ ܬܕܠܩ ܢܘܪܐ ܡܢ ܫܒܝܒܐ ܡܕܡ ܠܐ ܡܬܒܨܪ ܘܐܢ ܬܣܒ ܡܢ ܪܘܚܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܕܡ ܠܐ ܚܣܪ ܘܐܢ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܥܡܪ ܒܟ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܟ ܗܘ ܫܠܡ ܠܗ ܘܐܢ ܬܥܘܠ ܫܡܫܐ ܒܟܘܐ ܕܒܝܬܟ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܟܠܗ ܫܡܫܐ ܠܟ ܡܛܐ ܘܗܠܝܢ ܟܠܗܝܢ ܕܫܥܝܬ ܠܟ ܒܡܠܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܬܒܪܝ, ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܗܘܝܬ ܝܕܥ ܕܠܡܠܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܠܐ ܐܢܫ ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܗܘܝܬ ܝܕܥ ܕܠܡܠܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܠܐ ܐܢܫ ܡܛܐ ܐܘ ܡܛܐ ܠܣܟܗ̇ ܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܠܟ ܚܪܝܢܐ ܥܠ ܗܠܝܢ ܘܬܐܡܪ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܐܢܝܢ ܘܣܦܩ

> These things that I have written to you, my friend (that which is written in Daniel), I have not brought to a conclusion, but rather to this point from a conclusion. If someone wants to quarrel with them, speak to him thus: "these words are not ended [i.e., this is not the final word] because the word of God is limitless and, indeed, without end." For the foolish one says: "To this point the words [i.e. scripture] arrive, there is nothing more to be added to it or subtracted from it." But the wealth of God cannot be reckoned or comprehended. If you take some water from the sea, its loss goes unnoticed. If you lift out sand from the seashore, its quantity is not diminished. If you try to count the stars of heaven, you will not live to the end of it. If, from a blaze, you set a fire, the blaze is not lessened. If you take part of Christ's spirit, Christ does not come to lack something. Even though Christ dwells in you, Christ is not fully in you. Even though the sun enters in the windows of your house, the entire sun does not come inside. These things that I have recounted to you are created in the word of God. Because of this, you should know that no one has arrived at the word of God; no one arrives at its end. Therefore, have no quarrel concerning this by saying, "this is it," or "it is sufficient."

This reflection on biblical interpretation plays on two Syriac roots, √ܣܘܦ, "to end" and √ܡܛܐ, "to arrive." Aphrahat develops the metaphor of a journey to describe his approach to biblical interpretation. He has not brought his reader to the end of the journey (i.e., to the limits of the exegesis of Daniel), but rather he has concluded his argument at this point "from the end." His word is not the final word on the meaning of the Bible and it is absurd to think that it could be, since God's word is without end. Only a fool would think to have written the final word on the boundless word of God. No quarrelling

about his interpretation, Aphrahat insists—the Word of God towers over the words of human commentators. Anyone who has watched sunlight streaming through a window or walked along the seashore knows this. The exegete may intend to count all the stars of heaven, but will die long before his task is accomplished. Aphrahat offers a final word: no exegesis should ever claim "to be sufficient."

At the end of the *Twenty-second Demonstration*, "On Death and the Last Times," Aphrahat again reflects on the work of an exegete (col. 1045.17–col. 1048.6), playing with the word ܐ̈ܦܐ. His words require no further comment.

> ܟܠ ܡܢ ܕܩܪܐ ܒܟܬܒ̈ܐ ܩܕ̈ܡܝܐ ܘܐܚܪ̈ܢܐ ܒܬܪܬܝܗܘܢ ܕܝܬܩ̈ܐ
> ܘܒܦܘܣܐ ܩܪܐ ܝܠܦ ܘܡܠܦ ܘܐܢ ܢܬܚܪܐ ܥܠ ܡܕܡ ܕܠܐ ܡܕܪܟ
> ܘܠܝܘܠܦܢܐ ܪܥܝܢܗ ܠܐ ܡܩܒܠ ܐܠܐ ܐܢ ܢܚܙܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܡܢܗ
> ܘܣܘܟܠܗܝܢ ܠܐ ܡܕܪܟ ܗܟܢܐ ܢܐܡܪ ܕܡܕܡ ܕܟܬܝܒ ܫܦܝܪ ܟܬܝܒ ܐܠܐ
> ܐܢܐ ܠܐ ܐܕܪܟܬ ܠܡܕܥ ܘܐܢ ܢܫܐܠ ܥܠ ܡ̈ܠܐ ܕܥܫܝܢ ܡܢܗ
> ܠܚܟܝ̈ܡܐ ܦܫܘ̈ܩܐ ܕܕܪܫܝܢ ܒܝܘܠܦܢܐ ܟܕ ܥܠ ܚܕܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܢܐܡܪܘܢ ܠܗ
> ܥܣܪܐ ܚܟܝܡܝܢ ܥܣܪ ܐܦܝ̈ܢ ܕܡܒܣܡܐ ܠܗ ܢܩܒܠ ܘܕܠܐ ܒܣܡܐ ܠܗ
> ܠܐ ܢܒܙܚ ܒܚܟܝܡ̈ܐ ܡܛܠ ܕܡܠܬܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܠܡܪܓܢܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܐ ܕܠܟܠ
> ܐܦܝ̈ܗ ܕܬܗܦܟܝ̈ܗ ܫܘܐ ܫܦܝܪܐ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ̇

> Anyone who reads the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, reading with persuasion, learns and teaches. And if he will contend with something that he cannot understand, then his mind does not receive instruction. If he finds that the words are too difficult for him and he cannot understand their import, then he should say, "What is written, is well written, but I have not attained knowledge." And if he asks wise interpreters who instruct in doctrine about the words that are too difficult for him and, over one word, ten sages give him ten perspectives, let him accept that which pleases him. But let him not deride the sages regarding the one that does not please him because the word of God is like a pearl, to whatever perspective you turn it, its appearance remains beautiful.

SYRIAC/ANTIOCHENE EXEGESIS IN SAINT EPHREM'S TEACHING SONGS *DE PARADISO*: THE 'TYPES OF PARADISE' IN THE 'TREASURY OF REVELATIONS'*

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Saint Ephrem's hymns, or teaching songs,[1] *De Paradiso* are nowadays easily available in an excellent English translation by Sebastian Brock.[2] This happy circumstance offers those of us in the English-speaking worlds who are interested in Syriac/Antiochene exegesis an easy opportunity to hear St. Ephrem's personal testimony about his reading in the *Torah*. For, as Robert Murray has written of St. Ephrem, "Doch stellt seine exegetische Haltung vielleicht die schönste Ausprägung der antiochenischen Richtung dar."[3] And the teaching songs *De Paradiso*, as we shall see, are among the most personal ones St. Ephrem ever composed. In them, he very often speaks in the first person and he takes the occasion in the course of these sung meditations on the second and third chapters of the book of Genesis to express his thoughts about the experience of reading the scriptures. His testimony ranges from the description of his personal, religious sentiments as he takes up

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* St. Ephrem speaks of the Torah as "the treasury of revelations" and of the church, earthly and sublime, as depicted in "the types of Paradise" which he explores in his teaching songs *De Paradiso*. See Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen De Paradiso und Contra Julianum* (CSCO, vols. 174 & 175; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1957), I:1 & II:13.

[1] The term 'hymn' is not really an apt equivalent for the Syriac *madrāshâ*, as has been clearly shown by Michael Lattke, "Sind Ephrems *Madrāšê* Hymnen?" *Oriens Christianus* 73 (1989), pp. 38–43. I have borrowed the term 'teaching song' from Andrew Palmer, "A Lyre without a Voice, the Poetics and the Politics of Ephrem the Syrian," *ARAM* 5 (1993), pp. 371–399.

[2] Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* (Intro. & trans. By Sebastian Brock; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990).

[3] R. Murray, "Der Dichter als Exeget: der hl. Ephräm und die heutige Exegese," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 100 (1978), p. 486.

the text to read, to observations about how one should interpret the scriptures generally, and finally, from a moral point of view, how the Torah's presentation of the story of Adam and Eve in the garden on the mountain of paradise can offer one who has the gift of spiritual discernment a paradigm for his own life's Christian journey. In this respect, St. Ephrem's work actually bears some comparison with such classics of the Christian spiritual life as St. Gregory of Nyssa's *De Vita Moysis* and St. John of the Cross' *Ascent of Mt. Carmel*.

The purpose of the present essay is to put forward what St. Ephrem says in the teaching songs *On Paradise* about his approach to the first chapters of the book of Genesis, and to highlight the exegetical methodologies he employs in his readings. For the sake of putting the discussion into the context of what St. Ephrem says about biblical exegesis in other works, one begins with a brief overview of his remarks on the subject in other compositions. Then, against this background, after a survey of the structure and contents of *On Paradise*, one comes to the exposition of the major themes of these beautiful teaching songs.

ST. EPHREM THE EXEGETE

Saint Ephrem has always been known as an exegete. Even in the Syriac *Vita Ephraemi*, which circulated in the Graeco-Syrian monastic milieu of the fifth and sixth centuries, in which St. Ephrem is portrayed as one of the fathers of monasticism, the text makes much of the fact that he is also remembered to have written a commentary on the Torah, full of theological insight and spiritual perspicacity.[4] In fact, for St. Ephrem, the scriptures, and particularly the Gospel, are the ultimate measure of religious truth. In one of his 'teaching songs' *On Faith,* he wrote:

> The scriptures are set up
> like a mirror;
> One whose eye is clear
> sees there

[4] See Joseph P. Amer, "The Syriac *Vita* Tradition of Ephraem the Syrian," (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, 1988), pp. 102–103; 238–240.

> The very image of the truth.[5]

Truthfully, one may say that all of St. Ephrem's works are in some sense commentaries on the scriptures, and many of them have been intensively studied by students of Patristic, biblical exegesis. There are the prose commentaries, which were written primarily for purposes of Bible study; and the verse compositions, the 'homilies' (*mêmrê*) and 'teaching songs' (*madrāshê*), which for the most part had a didactic purpose within a liturgical setting. The Roman edition of St. Ephrem's *Opera Omnia* actually contains prose commentaries attributed to him on most of the books of the Old Testament *Peshitta*, and the searches of subsequent scholars have uncovered even more texts purporting to contain such commentaries. But few of them can in fact be considered authentic; of the Old Testament books, only the Syriac commentaries on Genesis and Exodus are generally considered by many scholars to be in large part genuine works of St. Ephrem.

There is some evidence that St. Ephrem himself thought of his metrical homilies and teaching songs as the principal vehicles of his scriptural commentary, particularly in the case of the subject matter of his teaching songs *De Paradiso*. In this connection, consider the remark he made at the beginning of his *Commentary on Genesis*. He says,

> I had not wanted to write a commentary on the first book of Creation, lest we should now repeat what we had set down in the metrical homilies and 'teaching songs'. Nevertheless, compelled by the love of friends, we have written briefly of those things of which we wrote at length in the metrical homilies and in the 'teaching songs'.[6]

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[5] Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide* (CSCO, vols. 154 & 155; Louvain: Peeters, 1955), LXVII:8.

[6] R. M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephrem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii* (CSCO, vols. 152 & 153; Louvain: Peeters, 1955), p. 3. English translation adapted from Edward G. Mathews Jr. & Joseph P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian; Selected Prose Works; Commentary on Genesis, Commentary on Exodus, Homily on our Lord, Letter to Publius* (Kathleen McVey, ed., The Fathers of the Church, vol. 91; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), p. 67.

This remark indicates St. Ephrem's own realization that the heart of his scriptural commentary is to be found in his liturgical compositions, where he pursues more intensively than he does in his prose commentaries what the Bible means spiritually (*rûḥāna'ît*) in terms of what it says literally (*su'rāna'ît*).[7] Indeed St. Ephrem is amazed at the manifold senses of the scriptures. In an often-quoted passage from the prose commentary on the *Diatessaron*, which surely comes from St. Ephrem's circle of disciples if not from his own pen,[8] one finds the following passage, which actually features a number of images that are prominent in the teaching songs *De Paradiso*. Here St. Ephrem says:

> Many are the perspectives of his word, just as many are the perspectives of those who study it. [God] has fashioned his word with many beautiful forms, so that each one who studies it may consider what he likes. He has hidden in His word all kinds of treasures so that each one of us, wherever we meditate in it, may be enriched by it. His utterance is a tree of life, which offers you blessed fruit from every side. It is like that rock which burst forth in the desert, becoming spiritual drink to everyone from all places. [They ate] spiritual food and drank spiritual drink. (1 Cor. 10:3–4). Therefore, whoever comes upon one of its riches must not think that that alone which he has found is all that is in it, but [rather] that it is this alone that he is capable of finding from the many things that are in it. Enriched by it, let him not think that he has impoverished it. But rather let him give thanks for its greatness, he that is unequal to it. Rejoice that it is richer than you. . . . Give thanks for what you have taken away, and do not murmur over what remains and is in excess. That which you have taken and gone away with is your portion and that which is left over is

[7] St. Ephrem evokes this distinction in his *Commentary on Genesis*, in the course of his remarks on Jacob's blessings for his sons (Gen. 49:2–27). See Tonneau, *Sancti Ephrem Syri in Genesim*, p. 118.

[8] This is the judgment of Dom Edmund Beck, "Ephräm und der Diatessaronkommentar im Abschnitt über die Wunder beim Tode Jesu am Kreuz," *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993), p. 119.

also your heritage.[9]

St. Ephrem teaches that Nature and Scripture together are the twin sources of revelation. For example, in a teaching song in which he had been reviewing some ways in which Nature reveals its Creator he says,

Look and see how Nature and Scripture
    are yoked together for the Husbandman:
Nature abhors adulterers,
    practitioners of magic and murderers;
    Scripture abhors them too.
Once Nature and Scripture had cleared the land,
    they sowed in it new commandments,
    in the land of the heart, so that it might bear fruit,
    praise for the Lord of Nature
    glory for the Lord of Scripture.[10]

For St. Ephrem, Scripture is the rule of faith that even Nature confirms. And he means the integral Scripture, the Old and New Testaments together—the Christian Bible, which has Christ as its focal point. For the Old Testament reveals the types and symbols[11] in terms of which in the New Testament our Lord unfolds for us the Way of Life. St. Ephrem puts it this way, he says,

In the Torah Moses trod
the Way of the types and symbols before that People
who used to wander every which way.
But our Lord, in his testaments,
definitively established the path of Truth

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[9] Lightly adapted from Carmen McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron; an English Translation of Chester Beatty MS709 with Introduction and Notes* (Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement, 2; Oxford: Oxford University Press on Behalf of the University of Manchester, 1993), pp. 49–50.

[10] Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen contra Haereses* (CSCO, vols. 169 & 170; Louvain: Peeters, 1957), XXVIII:11.

[11] The Syriac term behind this expression is *raze* (sing., *râzâ*), which will be discussed below. It includes the senses of the Greek terms 'type' and 'mystery' in similar contexts, but extends well beyond their reach in Syriac usage.

for the Peoples who came to the Way of Life.[12]
All the types and symbols thus traveled
on that Way which Moses trod
and were brought to fulfillment in the Way of the Son.
Let our mind then become
cleared land for that Way.
Let us, my brothers, in our souls,
tread along the Way of Life
and not just along the ground.[13]

In St. Ephrem's parlance, the Prophets and the Apostles, that is to say the records of their teachings in the Bible, are the milestones and the inns respectively along the Way of Life and they all lead to Christ, who alone reveals his Father.[14] According to St. Ephrem, as Sebastian Brock has put it, "What is 'hidden' in the symbols of Nature and of Scripture is revealed in Christ at the Incarnation."[15] Furthermore, according to St. Ephrem's teaching, the lines of writing in the scriptures function as a bridge over the ontological chasm that separates creatures from their Creator, bringing the human mind, by way of the incarnate Son of God, to the Godhead itself.[16] For just as in the Son, God

[12] On the People/Peoples, or Nation/Nations (*'ammâ/'ammê*) motif in early Syriac literature, i.e., Jews/Gentiles, see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom; a Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 41–68.

[13] Beck, *Hymnen contra Haereses*, XXV:3.

[14] See Beck, *Hymnen de Fide*, LXV:1. See also Beck, *Hymnen contra Haereses*, XXV:1 & XXVII:3. Ephrem develops the image of the Way quite extensively at a number of places in his works. See Edmund Beck, "Das Bild vom Weg mit Meilensteinen und Herbergen bei Ephräm," *Oriens Christianus* 65 (1981), pp. 1–39.

[15] Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye; the Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Cistercian Studies Series, 124; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), pp. 28–29.

[16] On the significance of Ephrem's conception of the ontological chasm that separates human beings from God, which only love, but not knowledge, can cross, see Thomas Koonammakkal, "Divine Names and Theological Language in Ephrem," in E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica* (vol. XXV; Leuven: Peeters, 1993), pp. 318–323; *idem*, "The Self-Revealing God and Man in Ephrem," *The Harp* 6 (1993), pp. 233–248. On St. Ephrem's bridge imagery

clothed himself in flesh, in the scriptures, one might say, God clothed himself in human words which appeal to the mind. In one of the teaching songs *On Paradise* St. Ephrem speaks of reading the account of Paradise in the book of Genesis in this way. He says,

> The eye and the mind
> travel over the lines,
> as over a bridge, and enter together
> the story of Paradise.
> The eye as it reads
> transports the mind;
> in return, the mind
> gives the eye rest
> From its reading.
> For when the book is read
> the eye has rest,
> but the mind is engaged.
> Both the bridge and the gate
> of Paradise
> do I find in this scripture.
> I cross over and enter;
> my eye remains outside,
> but my mind enters within.
> I begin to wander
> amid things unwritten.[17]

Here St. Ephrem teaches that when one reads the scriptures the eye remains outside the mystery, but the mind enters within and wanders among "things unwritten (*dlâ ktîb*)." These "things unwritten" then offer the mind the opportunity to contemplate the divine beauty, as St. Ephrem explains in another place. In his *Prose Refutations* he says,

> Moses testifies that while it was granted to him to do
> everything like God, at last he abandoned everything

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in this context see Edmund Beck, "Zwei ephrämische Bilder," *Oriens Christianus* 71 (1987), pp. 1–9.

[17] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, V:4–5.

> and prayed to see the Lord of all. For if the creatures
> of the Creator are so pleasant to look upon, how much
> more pleasant is their Creator to look upon; but because
> we do not have an eye which is able to look upon his
> splendor, a mind (*tar'îtâ*) was given us which is able
> to contemplate his beauty (*shuprâ*).[18]

Beauty then, according to St. Ephrem, provides the perceptible horizon within which the power and presence, indeed the love of the Creator God is revealed to the created human being. God's majesty is the source of the beauty that the human mind perceives. For this reason St. Ephrem likens the mind to a mirror (*maḥzîtâ*) in which the human being may see the hidden things of God. So, Ephrem says, the scriptures too are like a mirror, which God has set up for the human mind's eye, in which one sees the images of the truth.[19] He says,

> The scriptures are set up
> like a mirror;
> the person whose eye is clear
> will see there
> the image of the truth.[20]

According to St. Ephrem, what one finds in Scripture, as in Nature, are the types and symbols, the names and titles, in terms of which the invisible God reveals himself to the eyes and minds of persons of good faith. These types and symbols then prepare one to recognize the incarnate Word of God in Jesus of Nazareth. St. Ephrem says,

> In every place, if you look, his symbol is there,

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[18] J. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae Episcopi Eddesseni Balaei Aliorumque Opera Selecta* (Oxford, 1865), p. 25. English translation adapted from C. W. Mitchell, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan* (2 vols.; London & Oxford: Williams and Norgate, 1912 & 1921), vol. I, p. iv. See Edmund Beck, "Ephrems Brief an Hypatios; übersetzt und erklärt," *Oriens Christianus* 58 (1974), p. 85, n. 22 & p. 95, n. 60, for a discussion of the sense of the Syriac term *tar'îtâ* in Ephrem's works.

[19] On the significance of the image of the mirror in St. Ephrem's thought see Edmund Beck, "Das Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephräm," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 19 (1953), pp. 5–24, esp. 5–10.

[20] Beck, *Hymnen de Fide*, LXVII:8.

and wherever you read, you will find his types.
For in him all creatures were created and he
traced his symbols on his property. When he
was creating the world, he looked to adorn it
with icons of himself. The springs of his symbols
were opened up to run down and pour forth his
symbols into his members.[21]

In another teaching song, Ephrem speaks similarly of the symbols and types of God's Son and Messiah to be found in the scriptures. He says,

See, the Law carries
all the likenesses of him.
See, the Prophets, like deacons,
carry the icons
of the Messiah.

Nature and the scriptures
together carry
the symbols of his humanity
and of his divinity.[22]

In divine revelation, according to St. Ephrem, what comes to one's attention are the types and symbols God has put there to focus the searching minds of human beings attracted by their beauty. He most often calls them *râzê* (sing. *râzâ*) in Syriac, manifest symbols, which in turn, by God's grace, disclose to inquiring minds those aspects of the hidden reality or truth (*shrārâ*, *qushtâ*) which are within the range of the capacities of human intelligence. To pry further than this into the essence of God, for example, is to fall into the chasm that separates the creature from the Creator, and to wander in error. Religious thought or 'theology' then rightfully consists in the contempla-

[21] Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate* (CSCO, vols. 223 & 224: Louvain: Peeters, 1962), XX:12.

[22] Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Paschahymnen*; (de Azymis, de Crucifixione, de Resurrectione) (CSCO, vols. 248 & 249; Louvain: Peeters, 1964), *De Azymis*, IV:22–24.

tion of the *râzê*, the 'mystery symbols,' in which God reveals the truth about himself and the world to human beings.

St. Ephrem and other Syriac writers speak of the *râzê* as symbols that are not so much mysterious in their function as they are indicative; they disclose to human minds according to their capacities what in its essence is hidden from human knowledge, such as the being of God and the course of the economy of salvation. While *râzâ* is often synonymous with 'type' (*typos*, *ṭupsâ*) in St. Ephrem's works, his use of the term goes well beyond what one normally thinks of as the typological sense of the scriptures, i.e., words, actions, facts, and narratives in the Old Testament which foreshadow their models in the New Testament. For St. Ephrem, biblical typologies are indeed *râzê*, but so are many things in nature, and also in the apostolic kerygma and the life of the church, like sacraments. For him, the *râzê* all point to the incarnate Christ, who is, says Ephrem, "the Lord of the *râzê*, who fulfills all *râzê* in his crucifixion."[23] So they may point forward from Nature and Scripture to Christ, who in turn reveals his Father to the eye of faith, or they point from the church's life and liturgy back to Christ, who in turn reveals to the faithful believer the events of the eschaton, the ultimate fulfillment of all creation in the economy of salvation.[24]

As was mentioned above, in St. Ephrem's thought the quality of 'beauty' (*shuprâ*) inherent in the *râzê* in Nature and Scripture provides the perceptible horizon within which one achieves an awareness of the power and presence of God. And it is in the context of this beauty that the revealed *râzê* disclose the mysteries of salvation. Perhaps it is for this reason that St. Ephrem often portrays the God who reveals him-

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[23] Beck, *Paschahymnen*, *De Azymis*, III:1, *'unîtâ*.

[24] For further guidance on this aspect of St. Ephrem's exegetical thought see in particular Tanios Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique de saint Ephrem le Syrien* (Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit, 16; Kaslik: L'Université Saint-Esprit, 1988); Edmund Beck, "Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephräm," *Oriens Christianus* 42 (1958), pp. 19–40; *idem*, "Zur Terminologie von Ephräms Bildtheologie," in M. Schmidt (ed.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Eichstätter Beiträge, 4; Eichstatt, 1982), pp. 239–277; Robert Murray, "The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology, " *Parole de l'Orient* 6 & 7 (1975–1976), pp. 1–20; Seely Joseph Beggiani, "The Typological Approach of Syriac Sacramental Theology," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003), pp. 543–557.

self in Nature and Scripture as a divine artist. As a matter of fact, the image of the image-maker, or artist, is one of St. Ephrem's own favorite figures of speech.[25] He uses it to advantage in two stanzas of the teaching songs *On Virginity* to provide an impressive summary of how the *râzê* function in his exegetical thought. In these stanzas, St. Ephrem addresses Christ, "the painter of his own *raze*."[26] Ephrem says:

You have gathered up the scattered *râzê*
    from the Torah, which point to your comeliness.
You have published the models (*tapenkê*)
    which are in your Gospel,
    along with the prodigies and signs of Nature.
You have mixed them together as the paints for
    your portrait; you have looked at yourself,
    and painted your own portrait.
Here is the painter, who in himself has painted
    his Father's portrait;
    two portrayed, the one in the other.
The prophets, the kings, and the priests,
    who were creatures, all of them painted
    your portrait, but they themselves bore no resemblance.
Created beings are not capable;
    you alone are capable of painting the portrait.
They indeed drew the lines for your portrait;
    you in your coming brought it to completion.
The lines then disappeared due to the power of the paints,
    the most brilliant of all colors.[27]

St. Ephrem the exegete canvassed the scriptures in search of the *râzê* that in the ensemble, according to his view, would disclose the whole economy of salvation, as it found its focus in the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. In his teaching songs *On Paradise* he meditatively explored the scriptural accounts of the garden of Paradise in

[25] See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Image of the Image Maker in the Poetry of St. Ephraem the Syrian," in E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica* (vol. XXV; Leuven: Peeters, 1993), pp. 258–269.

[26] Beck, *Paschahymnen*, *de Crucivixione*, II:5.

[27] Beck, *Hymnen de Virginitate*, XXVIII:2–3.

Genesis 2 and 3, and in other books of the Bible, with a view to showing how the "types of Paradise,"[28] as he called the tropes of the narratives, when they are read within the interpretive horizon of the whole economy of salvation, depict the church both earthly and sublime, and mystically point forward to the home of the faithful Christian in Paradise restored.

THE COLLECTION OF THE 'TEACHING SONGS' *DE PARADISO* AND THEIR SETTING IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Dom Edmund Beck OSB, the modern editor of the critical edition of St. Ephrem's teaching songs *De Paradiso*, used the most ancient of the five manuscripts that contain these *madrāshê* in whole or in part as the base text for his edition. It was written by a scribe named Julian, in Edessa, in the year 519 AD, so almost a century and a half after St. Ephrem's death in 373.[29] Already in this manuscript the fifteen *madrāshê* are collected in the prosodic arrangement we have in Beck's critical edition of them, all of them presented in the same meter-melody, consistently employed in all two hundred and sixty seven stanzas of the fifteen compositions. *Madrāshê* XIII and XIV, by way of exception, appear in a continuous, alphabetical, acrostic pattern of stanzas, a feature that binds these two pieces together, somewhat out of step with the presentation of the other *madrāshê* in the collection. This arrangement suggests that in spite of the fact that they are now presented as separate *madrāshê*, numbers XIII and XIV must once have circulated as a single composition.[30]

Apart from their thematic unity, the meter-melody of all fifteen *madrāshê* is the one formal characteristic that binds them all together. It is indicated at the beginning of the first composition in most manuscripts and thereafter each of the fourteen following songs are said to

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[28] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, II:13.

[29] See Beck's discussions of British Library MS add. 14571 in Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, vol. 174, p. III and in Beck, *Hymnen de Fide*, vol. 154, p. III.

[30] See now the study of Andrew Palmer, "Restoring the ABC in Ephraim's Cycles On Faith and Paradise," *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55 (2003), pp. 147–194.

be according to the same melody.[31] Interestingly, another composition which is included in the earliest manuscript, but which is not part of the collection *De Paradiso*, is said to be "according to the melody of Paradise."[32] One recognizes therefore that for the compiler of St. Ephrem's *madrāshê* the 'melodies' (*qālê*) provided an important organizational criterion for their grouping in the same collection.

The overall uniformity of the editorial presentation not withstanding, one need not conclude that St. Ephrem composed these *madrāshê* all at once, or even that he was responsible for their collection in the form in which we have them from the sixth century scribe. It seems that most of his metrical works were in fact occasional in character. That is to say, he composed them for particular liturgical moments in the life of the congregations he served. In later years, disciples and scribes collected and arranged them, both according to their themes and their melodies, into the traditional nine volumes of St. Ephrem's *madrāshê* as we know them already from as early as the sixth century.[33]

The practical conclusion for the present purpose which one should draw from the recognition of how the *madrāshê* were in all likelihood collected into formal and thematic groupings is that the order of their presentation in even the earliest manuscript exercises no immediate contextual imperative for their interpretation. In other words, since the songs were occasional in their composition and performance, and they were collected in an arrangement that was considered practical for those who would use them in liturgical settings, the order of

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[31] At the beginning of the first song the notice is given that it is "according to the melody of 'The Judgment of the Tribes,' *'al qālâ ddînâ dsharbātâ*'." Succeeding songs are each said to be "of the same melody, *bar qāleh*."

[32] *Tûb 'al qālâ dpardaysâ*. Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, vol. 174, pp. 67–70. This is the song Beck titled *De Ecclesia*. The first hemistich of this song in turn is used to designate the metre-melody of the following songs *Against Julian*. See Beck's discussion of these matters in *Hymnen de Paradiso*, vol. 174, pp. I & II.

[33] See André De Halleux, "La transmission des Hymnes d'Éphrem d'après le MS Sinai Syr. 10, f. 165v-178r," in *Symposium Syriacum 1972* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 197; Rome, 1974), pp. 21–36; *idem*, "Un clé pour les hymnes d'Éphrem dans le MS Sinai Syr. 10," *Le Muséon* 85 (1972), pp. 171–199.

their appearance in the collection does not impose a necessary template for their interpretation. The commentator is free to discern the unity and coherence of St. Ephrem's thought in the terms in which he expressed it, in these and other compositions, independently of the order of the presentation of the teaching songs *De Paradiso* in this collection.

Dom Edmund Beck, René Lavenant, and François Graffin, the modern scholars who, in addition to Sebastian Brock, have provided commented translations of all the teaching songs *De Paradiso* into Latin, German, and French respectively, considered them to derive from the period of St. Ephrem's Nisibene ministry, before his move to Edessa in the year 363.[34] They cite in support of this opinion the doctrinal and verbal parallels to be discerned in word and phrase between the songs in the *De Paradiso* and the *madrāshê* in others of St. Ephrem's teaching songs which, on doctrinal grounds, are also considered by the same scholars to be products of the saint's career in Nisibis, such as those in the collections called *De Fide* and *De Haeresibus*. Beck even uses the coincidence of word and thought between the compositions of the Nisibene period, and their disagreement with positions adopted in the prose *Commentary on Genesis* to support his doubts about the authenticity of the latter work.[35]

However all this may be it seems clear that what motivated both St. Ephrem's original composition of the teaching songs *De Paradiso*, as well as their systematic collection by later disciples and churchmen into a handy compendium, was their usefulness in unfolding the teachings embedded in the passages from the scriptures read in the church's liturgy. In other words, they are not only examples of applied scriptural exegesis but they are first order instances of the liturgical dimension of St. Ephrem's broader hermeneutical horizon.

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[34] In addition to Beck, *Hymnen de* Paradiso, which contains German versions of the *madrāshê*, see the earlier publication by Edmund Beck, *Ephrems Hymnen über das Paradies* (Studia Anselmiana, 26; Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi & "Orbis Catholicus"/Herder, 1951), which provides German commentary on Latin versions. See also René Lavenant (trans.) & François Graffin (intro. & notes), *Éphrem de Nisibe: Hymnes sur le paradis* (Sources Chrétiennes, no. 137; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968).

[35] See Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, vol. 175, p. I.

THE SETTING OF THE TEACHING SONGS *DE PARADISO*

Unlike the case in the prose commentaries on the Bible which are attributed to St. Ephrem, where he concentrated on elucidating the difficulties and puzzles of particular passages as they occur in the sequence of the scriptural narratives, in the teaching songs his primary concern was to bring the understanding of the pericopes used in the liturgical readings into congruity with the full range of what Nature and Scripture together have to teach the Christian on a particular occasion. Here their meanings are sought from the point of view of the types and symbols, names and titles, which, according to St. Ephrem, all go together, when considered from the Gospel's point of view, to present a full colored, scriptural icon of Christ's saving action in a particular register. In the teaching songs on Paradise, the point of departure seems to have been a passage from the Gospel according to Luke (23:39–43) which St. Ephrem says he heard proclaimed, presumably in the liturgy in church. He put it this way at the beginning of one of the songs:

A statement which delighted me
    shone forth in my ears
from the text that was read
    about the story of the robber.
It gave consolation to my soul,
    due to the multitude of her faults,
that the One pitying the robber
    would lead her
to the very garden whose name
    I had heard and was overjoyed.
My mind (*re'yāny*) cut loose its reins
    and proceeded to meditate on it.[36]

It appears in the next stanza of the same song that the name of the garden, "named in the text that was read" in the liturgy (Luke 23:43), the name on which St. Ephrem's mind was meditating in the teaching songs *De Paradiso*, is both the name and the reality, 'Paradise' (*pardaysâ*) itself.

[36] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VIII:1.

St. Ephrem described the manner of his meditation on Paradise in other songs in the collection. In the very first one, he spoke of his reading about Paradise in the Torah, "the treasury of revelations," as he styled it, in which "the story of the garden is revealed." Here, according to St. Ephrem, Moses, "who teaches all men his celestial texts, the master of the Hebrews taught us his doctrine (*yûlpāneh*)" on Paradise.[37] St. Ephrem said,

Gladly did I come to
the story of Paradise,
which is short to read
but rich to investigate.
My tongue read the stories,
clear in the account of it,
and my mind (*mada'y*) flew up to soar
in awe.
It searched out its glory,
not indeed as it is,
but as it is given,
to mankind to apprehend.
In my mind's (*re'yānâ*) eye
I saw Paradise.[38]

In yet another song in the collection, rich in its description of the exercise which we in the west would call *lectio divina*, St. Ephrem very evocatively described his first-person experience in reading the beginning chapters of the book of Genesis as his mind contemplatively meditated on the story of Paradise. He spoke of what "Moses wrote in his text,"

V:3 I read the opening of this book
and was filled with joy,
for its verses and lines
spread out their arms to welcome me;
the first rushed out and kissed me,
and led me on to its companion;

[37] See Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, I:1.
[38] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, I:3–4.1.

and when I reached that verse
wherein is written
the story of Paradise,
it lifted me up and transported me
from the bosom of the book
to the very bosom of Paradise.
V:4 The eye and the mind (*tar'îtâ*)
traveled over the lines
as over a bridge, and entered together
the story of Paradise.
The eye as it read
transported the mind;
in return the mind, too,
gave the eye rest
from its reading,
for when the book had been read
the eye had rest,
but the mind (*tar'îtâ*) was engaged.
V:5 Both the bridge and the gate
of Paradise
did I find in this book.
I crossed over and entered;
my eye indeed remained outside
but my mind (*tar'îty*) entered within.
I began to wander
amid things not described.
This is a luminous height,
clear, lofty and fair:
Scripture named it Eden,
the summit of all blessings.[39]

One cannot miss the first-person testimony in these passages in which St. Ephrem expresses how he conducted his meditation on Paradise beginning with his reading of the texts in the first three chapters of Genesis. As we shall see, in the course of his reflections he will

[39] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, V:3–5 in the English translation of Brock, from Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, pp. 103–104.

continually refer to other scenes in the scriptures, in both the Old and the New Testaments, as his reading evokes them, with the Gospel always furnishing the interpretive lens. Then from his meditation on the story of Paradise in the Bible St. Ephrem conjures up in his teaching songs a verbal icon of human destiny from the very beginnings in the garden of Eden, which he envisions as embodying a typological sketch of Paradise in the end-time, with "the children of light dwelling on the heights of Paradise,"[40] newly opened to human occupancy by means of the salvation won for them by Christ on the cross. Or, to quote what Dom Edmund Beck so tersely said about St. Ephrem's subject matter in these teaching songs, "So umfasst das Thema *de Paradiso* 'Primordiologie' und Eschatologie zugleich."[41]

St. Ephrem addressed his meditations in the first person both in prayer to God and to an audience, presumably gathered in church to hear the scriptural readings. In the course of the teaching songs, a number of passages suggest that the assembly at various times included a cross section of the whole community. Given the immediacy of the first person voice and the direct appeal to the audience in such phrases as "my brothers," or "my beloved,"[42] it is easy to imagine St. Ephrem poised with his cithara in hand, leading the men and women singers in their renditions of his *madrāshê*.[43] He was convinced that in their musical cadences the singers in the liturgical ceremonies were giving voice to the divine wisdom of the scriptures just proclaimed.[44] And it was wisdom with a message for persons at every level of ecclesiastical life. In one song in particular, *Madrāshâ* VII, St. Ephrem lists the many classes of individuals in the congregation. He speaks of the 'mourners,' who were a special order of ascetic hermits,[45] the poor, baptized men

[40] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, I:12.

[41] Beck, *Ephrems Hymnen über das Paradies*, p. ix.

[42] See, e.g., Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, III:1; V:9; VII:24; IX:29; XV:1.

[43] See Sidney H. Griffith, *'Faith Adoring the Mystery': Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian* (The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology, 1997; Milwaukee: Maquette University Press, 1997), pp. 12–13.

[44] St. Ephrem taught that the human body, with the soul breathed into it by God, was the lyre God created to sing the words of wisdom. See Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, 8:8.

[45] For the sense of the term see Sidney H. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in Vincent

and women, virgins, youth, married people, children, the elderly, the lame, those who fast, the saints who abstain from wine and from marriage, and finally the martyrs.[46] And as if to recognize that most people in the congregation were married, in one stanza he likens the perennial fruit of the trees of Paradise restored to the extended human family, and to the perennial productivity of the institution of marriage in human society. He says,

> That cornucopia full of fruits
> in all stages of development
> resembles the course
> of human marriage;
> it contains the old,
> young and middle-aged,
> children who have already been born,
> and babies still unborn;
> its fruits follow one another
> and appear
> like the continuous succession
> of humankind.[47]

According to St. Ephrem, all of these members of the human community are natural heirs to the promise implicit in the story of Paradise which he has been unfolding for them in the teaching songs *De Paradiso*. It remains for our part to call attention to the several elements of doctrine which he develops in these *madrāshê*, in order to show that in St. Ephrem's hands the songs really are instances of scriptural exegesis in action, interpretations which frame the teaching of the church for mind and heart, and which offered the congregants who heard them a biblical catechesis uttered in the iconic idiom of scriptural images and types for the mysterious goal of human life in Paradise restored.

L. Wimbush & Richard Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 220–245.

[46] See Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VII:3–19.

[47] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, X:12, in the English translation of Brock, from Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 152.

THE TEACHING OF THE 'TEACHING SONGS' *DE PARADISO*

Taking his cue from Christ's statement to the Good Thief as recorded in the Gospel, "Today you will be with me in Paradise," (Luke 23:43) St. Ephrem went to the Torah, the 'Treasury of Revelations,' in search of the 'Types of Paradise'. In the teaching songs *De Paradiso*, he explored the types and symbols, names and titles he found there in a way that held before his audience the vision of the ultimate beatitude of their own entry into Paradise. He presented the biblical teaching in a display of exegesis in poetry and song that evoked a Christian understanding of the scriptural texts within the context of the larger parameters of church teaching, which was itself more a particular way of reading the Bible than it was truly a set of doctrines. A number of special themes emerge in these teaching songs; among the most prominent of them are the spiritual geography of Paradise and its meaning for the struggling believer, and ideas about how to read the images and types of the scriptural narratives. Many other themes and motifs also emerge along the way, most of them already thoroughly explored by Dom Edmund Beck and François Graffin long ago. But heretofore commentators have not lingered over the riches of the two most prominent themes.

A. Reading the Bible's Images and Types of Paradise

In the teaching songs *De Paradiso*, St. Ephrem wrote more about the exegetical method he employed than he did in almost any other work. Method in itself, of course, would not have been a topic that would have attracted his attention, for in this matter he simply followed the lead of the New Testament writers, especially the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. For St. Ephrem, to search out the cryptic images and types in the Torah and the Prophets, which he believed encoded foreknowledge of what God would openly accomplish in Christ His Son's economy of salvation, was simply the Christian way of reading the Bible, accepting the testimony of the prophets and the apostles as he often expressed it.[48] What controlled the reading for him, the "key" (*qlîdâ*), as he called it, which would unlock the truth hidden in the book of Genesis, for example, was adherence to the Gospel truth as

[48] See, e.g., Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, I:7; I: 14; VII:15.

expressed in an orthodox, Nicene confession of faith.[49] St. Ephrem called it "**the doctrine**" (*yûlpānâ*), which he regularly contrasted with "the erroneous doctrines," or simply "the doctrines" (*yûlpānê*), in the plural, of the schismatics and heretics, or the 'insider' and 'outsider' adversaries, as he styled them.[50] We can see this line of thinking expressed in what St. Ephrem says about his recourse to the book of Genesis in search of the 'types of Paradise'. He wrote,

> The keys of doctrine (*yûlpānâ*)
> which unlock all of Scripture's books,
> have opened up before my eyes
> the book of creation,

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[49] St. Ephrem clearly gives voice to his Nicene confession of faith in the teaching songs *De Paradiso*, in terms reminiscent of the language in his songs *De Fide*. He says:

> "I have not made bold to speak
> of your generation, hidden from all;
> in silence
> I have bounded the Word.
> Yet because I have honored Your birth,
> allow me to dwell in Your Paradise."

Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, IV:11, in the English translation of Brock, from Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 101. Similarly in the songs *De Paradiso*, St. Ephrem expresses his belief that God's glory (*shûbḥâ*), which he conceives as dwelling on the very top of the mountain of Paradise, is such that "no way in thought, can its type be depicted." Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, III:1. These are the truths that are 'the doctrine' (*yûlpānâ*), the Nicene faith, which is the key that unlocks the doors of the scriptural types and symbols.

[50] For more on these matters see Sidney H. Griffith, "Faith Seeking Understanding in the Thought of St. Ephraem the Syrian," in George C. Berthold (ed.), *Faith Seeking Understanding: Learning and the Catholic Tradition* (Manchester, NH: Saint Anselm College Press, 1991); *idem*, "Setting Right the Church of Syria: Saint Ephrem's Hymns against Heresies," in W. E. Klingshirn & M. Vessey (eds), *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 97–114; *idem*, "The Marks of the 'True Church' according to Ephrem's *Hymns against Heresies*," in G. J. Reinink & A. C. Klugkist (eds.), *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 89; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), pp. 125–140.

the treasure house of the Ark,
the crown of the Law.
This is a book which, above its companions,
has in its narrative
made the Creator perceptible
and transmitted His actions;
it has envisioned all His craftsmanship,
made manifest His works of art.
Response: Blessed is He who through His Cross
Has flung open Paradise.
Scripture brought me
to the gate of Paradise,
and the mind (*hawnâ*), which is spiritual,
stood in amazement and wonder as it entered,
the intellect (*mad'â*) grew dizzy and weak
as the senses were no longer able
to contain its treasures—
so magnificent they were—
or to discern its savors
and find any comparison for its colors,
or take in its beauties
so as to describe them in words.[51]

Saint Ephrem had a great respect for the inquiring mind, as long as the mind inquired into matters within the range of its comprehension, using "**the doctrine**," as we mentioned above, as the key to true understanding. He expressed his appreciation in the following stanza:

Intelligence (*hûyānâ*) is
like a treasurer
who carries on his shoulder
the keys of **the doctrine**,
fitting a key
to each locked door,
opening with ease
even the most difficult—

[51] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VI:1&2, in the English translation of Brock, from Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, pp. 108–109.

skilled in what is manifest,
    well instructed in what is hidden,
training souls
    and enriching creation.[52]

It was this human intelligence, fortified by **the doctrine**, which St. Ephrem brought to his reading of the types and symbols of Paradise in the scriptures. With it, he discerned a form, or a pattern in the geography of the garden of Paradise, a paradigm which he would then find redeployed in the architecture and ceremonial of the Temple. These in turn were for him the types of the church. Church, Temple, and the garden called Paradise altogether then, as St. Ephrem intuited the message, served to carry the well tutored mind into that Paradise which Christ promised to the Good Thief on the cross, the eschatological Paradise into which the 'children of the light' would enter, body and soul, at the end of time.

B. The Spiritual Geography of Paradise and Paradise Restored

The first step in biblical exegesis for St. Ephrem was to read the text accurately and literally, to discern exactly what it says. But this was just the first step. To remain on this first step would be to stay with what he called "the story's outward narrative" (*sharbê glayâ dtash'îtâ*). His meditation on Paradise required that he give free rein to his mind to follow where the texts would lead him. He said,

Joyfully did I embark
    on the tale of Paradise—
a tale that is short to read
    but rich to explore.
My tongue read the story's[53]
    outward narrative,
while my intellect took wing
    and soared upward in awe
as it perceived the splendor of Paradise—

[52] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, XV:6, altered slightly from the English translation of Brock, from Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 184.

[53] The language here, *leshāny qrâ sharbê*, indicates that the verb 'read' is meant to signify reading aloud, as in a liturgical proclamation of the narrative.

not indeed as it really is,
but insofar as humanity
is granted to comprehend it.[54]

As his "intellect took wing," Ephrem said that the story of Paradise "lifted me up and transported me from the inner recesses of the book to the inner recesses of Paradise."[55] He explained about the text of the story that "I asked about what is not written, but it taught me by means of what was written."[56] And one had to learn, St. Ephrem said, that "what was written" were very often what he called "borrowed names" (*shmāhê sh'îlê*) and we call 'metaphors'. If one in an overly literal mood would restrict himself simply to the immediate sense of the names, he would miss the whole point of the revelation. St. Ephrem put it this way:

If someone concentrates his attention solely
on the metaphors used of God's majesty,
he abuses and misrepresents that majesty
and thus errs
by means of those metaphors
with which God clothed Himself for his benefit.
. . .
Do not let your intellect
be disturbed by mere names (*kûnāyê*),
for Paradise has simply clothed itself
in names (*shmāhê*) which are your kindred.[57]

It is with these thoughts in mind then that St. Ephrem sings of the mountain on which the garden of Paradise was planted, of its levels, slopes and foothills, its fence and its guardian, of its rivers and trees, their bowers and flowers and fruits. Here is the setting for the story of Adam and Eve, their glory, their fall, and the promise of their return.

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[54] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, I:3, in Brock's English translation, from Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 78.

[55] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, V:3.

[56] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, V:7.

[57] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, XI:6, in Brock's English translation, from Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, XI:6.

It anticipates and frames the story of their redemption by Christ on the tree of the cross, from whose pierced side rivers of water and blood flow to nourish the church, which is Paradise on earth, fore-drawing, as it were, Paradise restored at the end of time.[58] Here is how St. Ephrem correlates Paradise with the church:

> The assembly of saints
> bears resemblance to Paradise:
> in it each day is plucked
> the fruit of Him who gives life to all;
> in it, my brethren, is trodden
> the cluster of grapes, to be the Medicine of Life.[59]
> The serpent is crippled and bound
> by the curse,
> while Eve's mouth is sealed
> with a silence that is beneficial
> but it also serves once again
> as a harp to sing the praises of her Creator.[60]

Exegesis for Saint Ephrem the Syrian was always a discourse in the course of the life of the church, and almost always in the service of the Divine Liturgy. This was clearly the case with his teaching songs *De Paradiso*. There is no more fitting way to bring this reading of these songs to a close than by making our own a prayer he composed as the final stanza for one of them. He wrote,

> With love and 'the teaching' (*yûlpānâ*),
> in which the truth is blended,

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[58] See the remarkable study by Andrew Palmer, "Paradise Restored," *Oriens Christianus* 87 (2003), pp. 1–46.

[59] On the Eucharist in the thought of St. Ephrem see Sidney H. Griffith, "Spirit in the Bread; Fire in the Wine: the Eucharist as Living Medicine in the Thought of Ephraem the Syrian," *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), pp. 225–246.

[60] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VI:8, in Brock's English translation, from Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 111. One must remember in connection with this stanza, Jacob of Sarug's encomium of Ephrem as "a second Moses for women." See Joseph P. Amar, "A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephraem by Mar Jacob of Sarug; Critical Edition of the Syriac Text, Translation and Introduction," *Patrologia Orientalis* (tome, 47, fasc. 1, no. 209; Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), ##40–44, pp. 34–35.

the intellect can grow
and become rich with new things,
as it meditates with discernment
on the treasure store of cryptic things.
For my part, I have loved, and so learned (*yelpet*),
and become assured
that Paradise possesses
the haven of the victorious.
As I have been held worthy to perceive it,
So make me worthy to enter it.[61]

[61] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VI:25. The English translation of Brock, from Saint Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 118, is slightly altered here.

SLOUCHING TOWARDS ANTIOCH: BIBLICAL EXPOSITION IN THE SYRIAC BOOK OF STEPS

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The origins of the Syriac Book of Steps (*ktābā dmasqātā*) remain enigmatic.[1] The consensus for the date of the composition of its 30 *mēmrē* is the mid-to-late-fourth century, possibly in the classical Adiabene region of present-day northwest Iraq, and well within the not always hospitable Persian Empire. The author's anonymity is intentional and no plausible suggestions for his identity have surfaced.[2] Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the Book of Steps is the collected works of a single author. Diverse in subject matter and genre, it is difficult to ascertain whether the order of the *mēmrē* found in the most complete manuscripts follows a chronological trajectory.

The practical context out of which the author reads the Scriptures is the organization of his Christian community into two levels: the Upright (*kēnē*) and the Perfect (*gmīrē*). In the era prior to the establishment of monasticism proper, these are not monks. This ascetically

[1] For a general introduction to the Book of Steps, cf. *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum*, translation and introduction by Robert A. Kitchen and Martien F. G. Parmentier (Cistercian Studies 196; Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2004).

[2] Less than plausible suggestions were: "Philo," noted in the margin of Kmosko's Ms R, St. Mark's Monastery, Jerusalem; and "Evagrius," noted in British Library Additional 17193.

directed faith community to which the author belongs is on the edge, if not interspersed in the midst, of a town or village.

The Upright ones are people who live in the material world, hold down jobs and have disposable income, are married and have families. These are the Christians who perform the actual ministries of charity—feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the poor, heal the sick, and visit the imprisoned. The Perfect ones, on the other hand, have transcended such ministries and live a wandering life of teaching, mediating conflicts, unceasing prayer, and—being like the angels—are celibate and without family ties.

The author of the Book of Steps persistently engages the Scriptures, reading into and extracting out of the Biblical text narratives and details that legitimize the institution and perspectives of the Upright and Perfect, a strategy of ascetical exegesis. Every Biblical character is interpreted as either a Perfect one, an Upright one, or a derelict sinner who has fallen below Uprightness and is going nowhere fast—a demonstration of the "uniting of the times" strategy outlined by Elizabeth Clark.[3] While the Book of Steps engages in some ingenuous and intriguing interpretations, the author is consistently faithful to the narrative, employing a wide variety of reading strategies towards these texts.

Law and Gospel structure the ascetical Christian life, as the author perceives no salvation outside Uprightness and Perfection.

> Therefore, after the first commandment, Adam and all the former Upright ones abided by that Uprightness that God had commanded Adam after he had transgressed against the first word and became an earthly being. But if the remainder of the people had continued in this Uprightness that is written, in which Adam and the Upright ones journeyed, another law would not have been given to them until the Lord came and gave this Gospel for now. For the Apostle said, "the law was added to on account of error, this [law] which was given through Moses" (*Mēmrā* 26.4; columns 761:19–764:7).

[3] Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1999) 153–162, in which the author perceives no moral or ethical gap in the time between Biblical characters and contemporary Christians.

> Now this Gospel which Jesus gave is the same one which Adam transgressed and [from which he] fell. That Uprightness that Moses and the prophets gave is the same one that was established for Adam after he had transgressed against the first commandment. So the first law became the latter law and the latter [law became] the first one, just as the last became the first and the first [became] the last. Whoever seeks Perfection and loves holiness, out of these things will come the holiness of the heart: he will give everything he has to the needy and ascend above whatever is visible. (26.5; 764:23–765:13)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the original way of Perfection (*gmīrūtā*), established in Eden; while the law associated with Moses and Sinai is the way of Uprightness (*kēnūtā*), first offered to Adam and Eve following their encounter at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Gospel, as a consequence, is a way of life attainable only by a few ascetically oriented people. The law of Sinai and Uprightness can result in exceedingly good people who will be rewarded at the last, though to a lesser degree than the Perfect ones.

The number of Biblical citations in the nearly 400 page Book of Steps exceeds 1200, too many to analyze systematically now. Although the Book of Steps is too early to be perceived as a source of the Antiochene method, it does seem prescient of the direction of the Antiochene trajectory. But is this Antiochene trajectory reconstructed by modern scholarship tangible? The Book of Steps exhibits certain characteristics of Antiochene interpretation, but not others. It is more important to understand how the author of the Book of Steps encountered Scripture in his own ascetical context, rather than through a methodical straitjacket some scholars do not think existed in its reputed uniformity.[4] Slouching towards Antioch may be the mode.

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[4] Cf. John J. O'Keefe, "'A Letter that Killeth': Toward a Reassessment of Antiochene Exegesis, or Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret on the Psalms," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8.1 (2000): 83–104; and also idem., "Impassible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997):39–60. The benefit of a conference on a common theme is the opportunity to be introduced to different perspectives and reminded of older principles. O'Keefe's conference paper, "Rejecting one's Masters: Theodoret of Cyrus, Antiochene exegesis, and the Patristic mainstream," and ear-

Frances Young reminds us that Antiochene Biblical exegesis is not endowed with a single method[5]—and that will be evident below in the Book of Steps' interpretation of Simon's revelation in Acts 10. It is literally not literal, and from a modern historical perspective, not historical. What Antioch does do, particularly in contrast to Alexandria, is to honor the integrity of the narrative. In other words, the stories do mean something, and the *theōria* of the passage, its higher understanding, is contained in the unfolding of the story, not through attributing deeper significance to individual words while isolating them from the narrative sequence. Consistently, the Book of Steps sticks to its story, even if the author strains to make the Biblical characters fulfill the aspirations of Perfection.

The purpose of the Book of Steps is not to be a Biblical commentary: it is nothing more or less than an exhortation to the Perfect and sometimes Upright way of life, with all its problems included. There is no "academic" commentary on passages of Scripture; all analysis is driven by the purposes of asceticism.

The author is not remiss to utilizing a single verse or phrase as an intertextual interpretive device. His favorite is Philippians 2: 3, "Consider everyone better than yourself," employed 10 times in a variety of settings.[6] However, the author seemed to prefer dealing with events and characters taken out of narrative passages. A series of these longer expositions will be examined to demonstrate the different approaches and strategies towards Scripture used by the author.

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lier articles provided leaven for my location of Biblical interpretation in the Book of Steps relative to the tradition of Antiochene interpretation.

[5] cf. Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997); also "Alexandrian and Antiochene Exegesis" in *A History of Biblical Interpretation, Vol. 1*, A. Hauser & D. Watson, eds., (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003): 334–354.

[6] Cf. *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum*, columns 37, 100, 105, 120, 200, 277, 284, 469, 865, 897.

PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST (MATTHEW 22:2–13; LUKE 14:15–24)

Mēmrā 19, "On the Discernment of the Way of Perfection" (columns 445–525), and *Mēmrā* 20, "On the Difficult Steps which are on the Road to the City of Our Lord" (cols. 528–581), are the only discourses in which the title words *masqātā*, "steps," are used in the Book of Steps. The image presented is a long steep narrow road to the City of Our Lord that one must ascend on the way to Perfection. Those who have to go off the road to the less steep paths on its sides find it extremely difficult to get back on the main road. Not quite a "stairway to heaven," but an equivalent.

There are three specific steps the aspiring Perfect one must attain. First, one needs to meet and reconcile with one's enemies. Second, one should not work at all (shades of Messalianism[7]) in order to divest oneself of all possessions. Third, one should become pure in heart from sin, anger, and evil thoughts, imitating the purity of Adam before he had transgressed against the commandment of God.

The intent of this *mēmrā* is to continue the construction of an elite ascetical ethos and institution. The long steep narrow road necessitates an inclusion/exclusion dynamic, so the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:2–13; Luke 14:15–24) is one of the most appropriate for this situation.

The author waits until he embarks on the third step to employ the parable. He cautions that unless one is afflicted through arduous prayer, the deliverer will not come, sin will not be redeemed, evil thoughts will not be removed, and the heart will not be purified. Such a person will not be able to enter with our Lord into his bridal cham-

[7] For issues concerning the position of the Book of Steps and the condemned heresy of Messalianism, see the following recent examinations: Columba Stewart, OSB, *'Working the Earth of the Heart': The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to AD 431* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1991), esp. 86–92, 162–163, 165–166, 198–203, 216–223, 227–233; Robert A. Kitchen, "Becoming Perfect: The Making of Asceticism in the *Liber Graduum*," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 2 (2002): 30–45; Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 33; University of California Press: Berkeley, 2002), esp. 102, 106–112.

ber. The climax to the parable is cited (Matthew 22:11–13) in which the improperly attired guest is bound up and thrown into the outer darkness. Such is the ill-dressed one's fate "because he had dared to enter while his heart was not pure" (20.14; 568:19).

The author then identifies the wedding garments: "But the wedding garments of the Lord's feast are the purity of a perfect heart" (568:20–21). The bridal chamber (*gnōnā*) is the glorious light-filled "place [that] he chose and prepared for them [pure-hearted guests who have suffered with Jesus], which is better than all the [other] places of the house of life" (569:6–8). Not an unusual or surprising employment of the bridal chamber for much of patristic literature.

Two sections later in the same *mēmrā*, the author returns to the parable of the feast intending to offer a more systematic interpretation of its symbolism (20.16; 573:10–576:29). The king is God, and his son is Jesus, while the guests are the company of all the apostles and prophets—a rather exclusive, elite gathering. The feast represents the kingdom of Our Lord. The king's invitation is governed by God's desire to reconcile all people through his son, while the arrival of the guests shows that whoever repents will be received (573:17–19). The author emphasizes that "our invitation is the one that summons them in this world with plenty of time to get dressed with fine garments, which are excellent actions, and to go to that feast, which is the kingdom of our Lord" (573:19–24).

Even though this is merely a few breaths after the author designated the wedding garments as the symbol of a pure heart, the shift to another connotation—wedding garments as excellent actions or good deeds—is not that radical, yet significant for the profiles of the author's different levels of Uprightness and Perfection. In the following paragraph, the author adds another nuance: "These who entered and were received wearing fine wedding garments are the ones who believed in our Lord and kept his commandments and did all of his acceptable and perfect will" (573:26–576:4). A few sentences later he summarizes, "Let us prepare good works that are the wedding garments received as [proper] garments at the house of our Lord" (20.17; 576:21–23). Obviously, the author was not concerned about a tight, consistent interpretation, though to be sure performing good works and keeping the commandments may give evidence of a pure heart.

The guests who excused themselves from the feast "are the people who excused themselves from the arrival of our Lord and did not desire to believe in him" (573:24–26). The fellow cast outside "represents

these who believed in our Lord, but did not keep all the commandments, and carried his body and blood to condemnation" (576:4–11).

The author does not reconcile the initial identification of the guests as apostles and prophets, an elite ascetical group, with those who wear the wedding garments as a symbol of doing good works, presumably a less rigorous calling. Who are the well-dressed guests except the Perfect ones? Yet, the author consistently denies that the Perfect perform good deeds or good works—indeed are beyond such lower tasks—leaving good works to the Upright. The commandments here must refer to the major commandments of the Gospel that only the Perfect are able to attain in order to perform all of God's acceptable and perfect will. While the Upright are faithful and good, their shortcoming is that they can do only part of the will of God, that is, the minor commandments.[8]

It is noteworthy that he does not find useful any of the material regarding the mistreatment and murder of the king's son and the subsequent revenge of the king's troops upon the perpetrators (Matthew 22:6–7). The wedding feast alone is the focus as the realization of the kingdom of God. There is a hint that some Perfect ones attempt to gain entrance, although they do not possess a pure heart and have not fulfilled all the appropriate commandments. That hint will be spoken more loudly in the latter *mēmrē* of the Book of Steps as the author expresses his disappointment in the deterioration of some of the Perfect ones—and the corresponding ascendance of exemplary Upright ones whom the author urges to take the seats at the wedding feast.

ZACCHAEUS (LUKE 19:1–10)

The issue of whether the *mēmrē* are ordered chronologically comes into play with the placement of the example of Zacchaeus at the very end of the last *mēmrā* of the Book of Steps. If *Mēmrā* 30, "On the Commandments of Faith and the Love of the Solitaries" (cols. 860–

[8] For a fuller description of the major and minor commandments identified by the author of *The Book of Steps*, see *Mēmrā* Two, "About Those Who Want to Become Perfect" (cols. 24–44), *Mēmrā* Four, "On the Vegetables for the Sick" (cols. 84–97), and *Mēmrā* Five, "On the Milk of the Children" (cols. 100–137). Also cf. *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum*, op.cit., xxxviii-xliv.

932), were intended by the author to be the final chapter, the exegesis of the Zacchaeus incident would be an emphatic statement regarding the status of the Upright and the Perfect.

The author has spilled a lot of ink constructing the statuses of Perfection and Uprightness, with the latter consistently deemed a barely adequate second to the former. Here, the author engages in a counterpoint to his own theories and structures. It is not that he has simply changed his mind, but that he finds it necessary to reexamine and reevaluate the character of the lower ascetical status. Uprightness and the Upright ones have been gaining respect in the last four *mēmrē*, starting with *Mēmrā* 25.

The author's strategy lies in the change of "tone" towards Uprightness.[9] Uprightness in the earlier *mēmrē* was considered barely above the state of sinfulness. Now Uprightness is portrayed barely below Perfection due to the virtuous and reliable behavior of the Upright ones in the community.

This creates a dilemma, for the author has insisted that the standards for Perfection require the renunciation of worldly possessions, as well as celibacy, both of which the Upright do not do by definition. The author, however, perceives that some of the Upright ones have obeyed their commandments faithfully and have progressed spiritually as a consequence. He wants to encourage them to take the extra step of renunciation, but needs to find a way of undoing the harshness of his earlier stratification. Zacchaeus is the starting point for a new perception of the Upright.

> Understand from this that people are saved if they do as they were commanded: [following] that precept that is lower than that perfect and superior precept, [even] while they are married and possessing wealth. [This is clear] by that demonstration when our Lord entered the house of Zacchaeus, a sinner and an extortioner and doer of evil things, and, admonishing him made him a disciple with these commandments, which are inferior to Perfection.
>
> [Jesus] did not say to him, "Unless you leave your wife and your house and your children and empty yourself from everything you

[9] Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation,* 141–145, regarding the use of "voice" and "tone" to differentiate competing levels of ascetic behaviour.

> own, you will not be saved." Look, the response of Zacchaeus makes it clear that our Lord admonished him in such a way that he need not empty himself, because he knew that he could not reach the power of that great portion. Zacchaeus said, "Everyone whom I have cheated I will repay four-fold, and half of my wealth only I will give to the poor." (Luke 19:8) See, while he did not say to our Lord, "I will abandon everything I have," our Lord did say the following to him, "Today salvation has come into this house." (Luke 19:9) Zacchaeus shall be called a son of Abraham, he who when he promised to repay their lords what he had extorted had said, "Half of my wealth only I will give." (Luke 19:9) But whoever gives to the poor half of his wealth while not defrauding anyone, look, is he not greater than Zacchaeus, who was called righteous? When he gave two portions of his wealth, look, does not he grow greater still? Whoever gives all he possesses to the poor and the strangers, look, is [that person] not better and greater?
>
> Therefore, let no one say that whoever does not empty everything he has and follow our Lord is not saved. If people then desire to become sons of Abraham while being wealthy, as Zacchaeus had become, they will grow in abundance and receive whatever is better in the kingdom, as our Lord said to the Jews, "But if you had been sons of Abraham, you would have done the deeds of Abraham (John 8:39), and you would become the sons of Abraham through the deeds of Abraham, while you are with your wives and your children and your wealth as when Abraham was with his wife and children, with his servants and all of his possession." (30.27–28; 924:13–928:3)

The author commences by emphasizing what Jesus did not require of Zacchaeus: "Unless you leave your wife and your house and your children and empty yourself from everything you own, you will not be saved." Jesus apparently accepted the limitations of one like Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus responds positively, "Everyone whom I have cheated I will repay four-fold, and half of my wealth only I will give to the poor." Again, the author makes clear what is not happening: "See, while he did not say to our Lord, 'I will abandon everything I have,' our Lord did say the following to him, 'Today salvation has come into this house.'" "Half of my wealth only I will give" is repeated. Indeed, if one can do the same as Zacchaeus without defrauding people, one is a lot better than he is, the author draws his conclusion.

The solitary word "only" (*balḫūd*) is not to be found in the Peshitta text. The author believed that Zacchaeus' declaration implied "only" and makes certain that the reader gets the implication. Despite this blatant example of eisegesis to under gird his ascetical move, the author does not violate the narrative or flow of the story—an example of "close reading" of an ascetical text.[10] Zacchaeus' words and promises did not represent or point to something else. The author emends the text in order to make explicit the implicit in the plain meaning. Ironically, this move works to lower the ascetic rigor of the text set by the author himself.

HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART (EXODUS 5–11)

No theological system can accommodate everything that is in the Bible. The author finds himself pressed to solve a number of Biblical conundrums, lest the practical discipline of the Upright and Perfect ones proves to have fatal flaws. *Mēmrā* Nine, "On Uprightness and the Love of the Upright and the Prophets" (cols. 201–248), and *Mēmrā* 23, "On Satan and Pharaoh and the Israelites" (cols. 692–712), do not treat ascetical matters directly, but deal primarily with one critical question. How does a loving, justice-creating God permit, commit, or condone violent and hateful actions and events? The Biblical personalities and lives are rehearsed continually in the Book of Steps as types and models for contemporary patterns of behavior. If some of the primary figures have clearly violated the lower standards of Uprightness, what can be expected of a contemporary Upright one or even Perfect one?

Mēmrā Nine is devoted to the explanation of the violence that a number of Old Testament prophets commit, while *Mēmrā* 23 centers on God's reputed hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the Book of Exodus.

Very little of the Biblical narrative concerning the contest of wills between Pharaoh, Moses, and God is cited; the author assumes the reader knows the details. The focus of the passage is on the apparent injustice of a God who would predestine a person to commit evil and then turn around and punish severely this same one for committing

[10] ibid., *Reading Renunciation*, 118–122. A "close reading" wades through difficult passages by focusing intently upon a single word, phrase, idea, in order to justify and reconcile a preferred ascetical interpretation with the Biblical text.

this preordained evil. For the author, God is the actor, not Pharaoh. Moses is mentioned but once, almost as an after thought, an extra.

Pharaoh is an odd, unorthodox choice to represent humanity's struggle for free will. The author gives no evidence of wavering from the historical character portrayed in Exodus. In his exegesis, he shrewdly observes that God answered faithfully and consistently Pharaoh's prayers for relief from the various plagues. God has, therefore, fulfilled the traditional obligations of an attentive and just God.

Human behavior and inclination are the keys to interpret Pharaoh's fall. During a crisis we respond humbly when our own personal power is inadequate, but when things go well for us, our pride assumes the arrogance of virtual divinity. In *Mēmrā* Nine, the author had identified the impertinence of the Pharaoh who was not willing to acknowledge the existence and power of the God of Israel.

> For he sent [the prophets] during that era when there was enmity between God and human beings in order to go kill his enemies because they had defied the Lord, saying, "What is the message of the Lord?" just as the Pharaoh had said, "What is this king to me, the Lord of Moses and Aaron his messengers?" (Exodus 5:2) (9.2; 205:10–17)

The Pharaoh's heart was hardened in an all-too-human response to God's kindness and respect, not by the unjust machinations of divine predestination. In *Mēmrā* 23, the author mentions the probability of the agency and interference of Satan in the mind of Pharaoh, but returning to the Biblical text—where no such Satanic agency is mentioned—he explains how simple human folly is at the root of his hardness of heart. God killed him with kindness.

> This is how the Lord hardened him: in that [God] had heard everything [Pharaoh] had called upon him through Moses, and He had healed the land from wounds; thus, the listening ear and tolerance of the Lord hardened Pharaoh. For when the suffering arrived [Pharaoh] was humbled; but when respite came, he was hardened. In misfortune, he was humbled and in health, he was hardened. As if someone might say, "I have raised up the head of this one who was sick and healed him; he was naked and I dressed him; he was poor and I made him rich; and look, today he opposes me." In this way, the Lord hardened Pharaoh through the good things he did to him and was compassionate upon him and by this gave him an op-

> portunity for repentance. Because of this it was written, "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh—so that he would not obey." (Exodus 11:10) That is, by means of compassion and [good] health Pharaoh was hardened (23.9; 705:21–708:12).

The author interprets his way out of this problem by listening intently and insightfully to the narrative, not by sidestepping the conundrum and attempting to make it symbolic of some other reality.

ON THE REAL MEANING OF KILL AND EAT

There is one passage the author finds necessary to translate the original Biblical meaning into terms more suitable to the ascetical situation of the Perfect. In the 5th *Mēmrā*, "On the Milk of the Children" (cols. 100–137), the author demonstrates how young believers need to be cautious in dealing with sinful people lest they be drawn astray. As they mature, they no longer need to isolate themselves from or disdain pagans and sinners. The paradigm is the revelation to Simon concerning unclean animals (Acts 10:13–27). When Simon objected to the command, "Kill and eat," the Lord declared, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common" (5.16; 128:23–129:2).

The problem for the author is that this really cannot be about eating real animals and meat, clean or unclean—for the apostles "ate no meat at all," fasting until the ninth hour, and eating just bread, salt, herbs, and olives (5.17; 129:3–7). The real meaning of 'Kill and Eat,' the author goes on, is "seek the company of pagans and unclean people and teach them" (129:7–9)! The other pagans who would come to fetch Simon to aid Cornelius were then identified: "These are the animals about whom the Lord has said to you, 'Kill and eat'" (129:12–15). This kind of cipher for the plain meaning of the revelation or dream veers dramatically away from the usual Antiochene approach, transforming incongruously both original verbs into very different kinds of actions. In the author's mind, the actions of the continuing apostles—especially the Perfect of his community—have been changed into a different narrative sequence. Teaching non-Jewish people, moreover, is not considered to be "work" as would the activities of food preparation—"kill and eat." The commandment—to teach even the unclean and pagans and not be afraid of spiritual contamination—is one of the major commandments that the Perfect must follow, surpassing the minor commandment that the "children" of the faith need to obey: "Do not mix with sinners."

The author's interpretation reaches its resolution when Simon returned to Jerusalem and was confronted by the "circumcision party" or those who advocated obedience to Jewish ritual and law. It is a matter of by which level of commandments one operates.

> Then everything became clear to Simon; he felt heartened, went out, and began to make the pagans disciples by teaching them what they had to do in order to be saved. "So, when he entered Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him: 'Why do you go to uncircumcised and unclean people, and eat and drink with them, although this is unlawful?'" (Act 11:2–3)

> But they criticized him on the basis of the minor commandments, "You should not mix with sinners." Thereupon, he drew them on towards the major commandments, that is, towards the solid food, saying, "God has given me the command that I should not call any person pagan or unclean" (Acts 10:28). Thus, he himself showed patience until the "children" should grow strong. Then, once they had become "adults," he gave them the "solid food" through the Paraclete and disclosed to them the whole truth. So they could now build up each other, because they had come to know the commandments which are superior to the others. (5.17; 129:20–132:16)

"The difference in times"[11] between the Biblical world and contemporary ascetical standards governs the author's direction here. The command has to be translated so that its actions are ascetically acceptable for the author and his community. The larger point of the story, that Simon (and the Christian Church) should be able to deal with all kinds of people, is never lost. It is just that one of the means to the end had to be adapted (allegorized?) in order that the story remains true, even though the author remains faithful to the structure and content of the narrative. Once again, the matter of "tone" emerges in the qualitative distinction between the minor and major commandments of the Gospel.

[11] ibid., *Reading Renunciation*, 145–152.

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON (LUKE 15:11–32)

The 15th *Mēmrā*, "On Adam's Marital Desire" (cols. 336–385), investigates the origins of sexuality, sexual lust, and the necessity of marriage. Preferring celibacy, the author works hard to demonstrate that there is no natural urge in human beings for sexual desire: it has been planted in them by Satan. Therefore, the renunciation of sexuality (= celibacy) is a refutation of explicitly evil actions. Grudgingly, marriage is granted a place in the human spiritual economy.

The author then switches directions and wanders other places, principally to the parable of the Prodigal Son. Two subtle references to the parable were already made in the 10th *Mēmrā* concerning a particular group of people imbedded in the religious and civil community. The *bnay bēt abbā*, "sons of the household of the father" (10.6; 260:9–21) are the local denizens who belong to the patriarchal establishment of the community—their presence is not only implied in the parable, but most likely intended to point to a group in the author's own town.

Like the prodigal's older brother, they have never left, treating strangers and outcasts with suspicion and lack of status. These "lifelong residents" are placed by the author in the "have" category and are tempted by the "have-nots" to see if they demonstrate appropriate compassion, care, and hospitality for those worse off than themselves.

In the 15th *Mēmrā*, the author adopts a different strategy towards the parable. The parable becomes a narrative typology for the pilgrim who journeys on the righteous road to the house of our Lord, the same road the aspirant to Perfection must walk—a different part of the journey from that depicted in the Wedding Feast.

God no longer finds it necessary to speak directly with any one except under extraordinary circumstances, the author observes. The road and way of life already is trodden and written down for us to follow and imitate, as the author has outlined in preceding *mēmrē*. When the pilgrim arrives, he is like that son who had squandered his wealth. God, the father, goes out to meet and receive the pilgrim like the kind father who received his penitent son.

The typology does not exactly fit, for the pilgrim on the road is not the moral equivalent of the prodigal son. According to the author's standards, he needs to be celibate on the higher stretches of the road—and so does not get involved with any harlots back in any foreign land. Moreover, if the pilgrim arrives according to the author's scheme, he is now a Perfect one and cannot really be penitent, for a Perfect one has no sins to repent.

In *Mēmrā* 15.18, the author rehearses the parable in detail, transforming it into the scriptural model for the ascetical journey through the levels of Uprightness and Perfection.

> Just as the son had departed to that place where he had fed hogs, and then when he reached his father's house, his father came out to meet and receive him (Luke 15:15ff); so when a person has abandoned the earth by his mind, which is the place in which a person feeds evil with the lusts which he commits, he then hungers for Uprightness and for holiness. No one can give [them] to him unless his mind keeps on ascending to heaven, the peaceful place of his father's house where the servants abound in Uprightness and virtuous things. So when the penitent one has traveled and arrived there by his mind, mercy goes out to meet him and says, "this [is] my son [who] left me and [who] has tasted death, but now has come back alive." (Luke 15:24) Then he fills him with the holiness for which he was hungry and clothes him with Perfection, the best garment of the higher level. While he is standing physically on the earth, his mind lives everyday in the spirit in heaven and our Lord speaks with him there as the father [had spoken] with his son. He becomes a distributor to others of the heavenly wealth, the food of the Spirit, instead of having wasted away here from his hunger while he was made of flesh, regarding the earth without the knowledge and truth with which he had sought to fill his stomach here with life. "And no one gave it to him." (Luke 15:16) That is, he had sought to know at least the integrity of this world or how he was created and why he was created, and why he was made a slave to sin, but no one revealed it to him. He who then had been hungry and had nothing, that is, he had not known a thing, see him, he [now] teaches others the thing which they have not perceived and he turns them toward the house of life. (15.8; 380:22–384:1)

Again, the author's typology begins a little clumsily, if not inaccurately. The parallel of the son heading off for hogs and harlots is not really the best image for a potential Perfect one abandoning and departing from earthly matters in his mind. However, the author gets back on track around the theme of eating. Starving in that foreign unkosher land as a consequence of his indiscretions, the son was forced to seek out the hog slop. The author notes that an ordinary person feeds evil with the lusts he commits, and then hungers for Uprightness and holiness or celibacy.

No one is able to give the son these spiritual things unless his mind keeps on ascending heavenwards. Implicit here is Jesus' observation regarding the availability of food for the starving prodigal, "And no one gave it to him" (Luke 15:16). The security of home that the prodigal remembered "when he came to himself" is transformed into the peaceful place of his father's heavenly house in which the servants "abound in Uprightness and virtuous things." The parable relates that the son realized that the servants had enough bread to eat, but "food" here has become the spiritual feast.

When the "penitent one" arrives spiritually at the father's house, mercy comes out to meet him as the personification of the father's actions. The father declares that the son "has tasted death"—a common Syriac ascetical phrase for those who have flirted with the ways of the world. Penance, therefore, is not converting from personal sin, but a turning away from the attractiveness of the world mired in the ways of sin.

The typology resumes as the father feeds, "fills," satiates, the son with "the holiness for which he was hungry," and "clothes him with Perfection, the best garment of the higher level." The Prodigal has become the Perfect one, living mentally and spiritually in the heavenly realm, conversing naturally with God in the way humans easily do with one another. This eschatological conversation reverses the notion at the beginning of the author's discussion of the parable that God no longer finds it necessary to speak directly with any human being. The Perfect one, the author has declared, has become like the angels.

The author continues with the narrative framework of the parable, but now moves beyond the original content. This prodigal-become-Perfect one turns around and becomes a distributor—a teacher—of the heavenly wealth, the food of the Spirit—a fortuitous reversal for one who could have spiritually starved without the knowledge and truth that brings real life. "And no one gave it to him" returns the refrain to note that he had been curious to know about the nature of this world—the how and why of his creation and why he had become a slave to sin—but no one revealed it to him. Now the spiritual transformation of the narrative away from the original drama is apparent. The rejoicing of the father at the recovery of his son is mimicked: isn't it remarkable that this fellow, who was hungry and possessed nothing and had known not a thing, now is able to teach others what they did not know and direct them towards authentic life!

No older brother is explicitly mentioned in the author's typology. However, the mention of the *bnay bēt abbā* does hint at older brother types in the community and this does fit into situations to which the author will later draw attention. Just as the prodigal son and prodigal father are berated by the righteous older brother who has remained in the father's house, the author refers to the sometimes violent conflict between the Perfect ones and others in the community who believe the Perfect have misbehaved, misled them, or hidden spiritual wisdom from them (cf. *Mēmrā* 30.3–4). This being so, the parable of the Prodigal Son may not be a mere literary model, but a vivid reflection of the author's experience of the pilgrim's ascent to Perfection and what happens after arriving.

LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN (LUKE 16:19–31)

One of the favorite stories for asceticism is that of Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, who is sometimes known according to the Latin translation, Dives. The only named character in Jesus' parables easily becomes the model for the triumph of ascetical poverty over against the disdainful opulence of a wealth-ridden personality. The Book of Steps references the parable in three *mēmrē*: the 10th, "On Fasting and the Humility of Body and Soul" (cols. 249–269); the 7th, "On the Commandments of the Upright" (cols. 145–188); and the 30th, "On the Commandments of Faith and the Love of the Solitaries" (cols. 860–932). The author is not particularly systematic in exegeting the text, but in pieces, he does treat most aspects of the story.

The 10th *Mēmrā* is a sermon addressed directly to the congregation or community of the Book of Steps. The author's concern is the apparent development of a spiritualizing-away of all physical ascetical disciplines within his community. Those who falsely believed they had captured the status of perfection felt they could ignore the physical disciplines and those who were physically poor. Among other things, the author brings them back to the essential need for compassion, beginning with the literary motif of taking along adequate provisions for a journey.

Even when Christians do not have compassion upon the less fortunate, the poor are not lost, "for the Lord will provide for the poor according to his mercies and will have pity 'like a poor person' (*mēskēnaīt*) on this world" (10.6; 260:18–20). The only use of this adverb *mēskēnaīt*, awkward to translate, implies that the poor had the reputation of being the compassionate ones simply by virtue of their socio-

economic status. The author immediately notes that "these who have not been compassionate will be without fruits and without righteousness on the Day of Our Lord" (260:25–26).

The author now cites the example of Lazarus. "For Lazarus was ill-treated and lived in this world, but he went to that [other] world and was given rest. But woe to that rich person who has gone without [spiritual] provisions, because his stomach will not be full with the rich food of the new world" (260:26–261:4). The rich man never put away proper provision in this world for the rigors of the next. Lazarus is portrayed as an unintentional ascetic. Ironically, fasting and deprivation of food are no longer necessary in the next world—indeed Lazarus can indulge in what was previously inappropriate for an ascetic in this world.

Abraham appears in the final 30th *Mēmrā* as the example of the wealthy, but just and Upright person who treats all people equally. The author is working to justify a more exalted status for the Upright ones of his community, surpassing at times the spirituality of the Perfect despite their involvement in this worldly economy and familial connections.[12] Intertextual interpretations tie the pieces of his portrait together, implicitly and explicitly. The fundamental view of Abraham is from Paul's assertion, "thus Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Galatians 3:6). How Abraham lives must be reinterpreted ascetically as worthy of the highest status. "Because of this [treating equally good and bad people, Abraham] became great and was glorified and called *the ruler of the feast* (Matthew 8:11) so that all the Upright ones and the righteous *might be comforted in the bosom of his righteousness*" (Luke 16:23) (30.28; 928:11–14).

There is an ambiguity of terms here: is the author referring to a generic group of "upright and righteous ones," or does he intend the Upright (*kēnē*), the specific lower level of his community? If he means the Upright of the Book of Steps, then he implies that they will receive the higher reward in the bosom of Abraham.

The fullest treatment of the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man is found in the 7th *Mēmrā*, "On the Commandments of the Upright." The purpose of Scripture, the author notes, is to provide human beings with ample instruction on how to avoid spiritual destruction, and so is

[12] Cf. section on Zacchaeus in *Mēmrā* 30.27, pp. 7–10 above.

written for our benefit and grace. The author turns to the Lazarus story with Abraham's response to the rich man's plea for mercy for his brothers.

> "'Look, they have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them and go do [what they say]' (Luke 16:29) 'If not, Gehenna will take vengeance from them, as from you,' the Upright one (= Abraham) said to that wicked rich man who did not keep the Law and the Prophets during his life. When he got into deep straits, he realized he would have been able to keep these commandments if he had so desired. His word shows [this], 'Let him send [a message],' he said, 'to my brothers, that if they desire they are able not to enter this torment. I was capable of keeping [these commandments], but I greatly neglected them. But let someone from the dead go and speak to them that this is how I am afflicted, and they will not despise the commandments as I have despised [them], and they will be delivered from Gehenna' (Luke 16:27–28, 30).
>
> "They have this Law, which today we do not even want to really hear and learn. Today's God, is he not the same one as of old? Does he not hate these evil deeds? Or because he is patient and does not kill us as [he did] these, do you not realize that in Gehenna he will remind us about all of them, as in the case of the rich unrighteous man? All his patience is due to the fact that the time for the punishment of our judgment is near." (7.19; 181:25–184:23)

The author has shifted away from an ascetical agenda in the first place to lamentation over the Biblical illiteracy—even open hostility towards the message of the Scriptures—that he sees currently prevalent in the Church. "Today's God, is he not the same one as of old?" (184:16–17) "unifies the times," demonstrating that contemporary Christians prove just as susceptible to the same weakness and arrogance as the more infamous Biblical characters.

Of course, indifference to and ignorance of the Scriptures is a secondary problem to the avoidance and mistreatment of the poor, caricatured perhaps by "the rich unrighteous man." Such injustice is evidence for the author that many Christians have never really comprehended the message of the Gospel, and is particularly grievous for those claiming to the levels of Uprightness and Perfection.

PAUL AND ANANAIS (ACTS 9:11–15)

A short, yet significant exposition of the encounter between Paul and Ananais is drawn into the argument of the 25th *Mēmrā*, "On the Voice of God and of Satan," (733–756) a sermon urging the members of the community to develop proper spiritual discernment. The author's particular concern is that one must rise above previously held biases against individuals and groups in order not to reject the working of God in their lives.

The author offers the classical imperative of all asceticism as he begins this section.

> *For there is no way that a person is able to work for God spiritually while he is bothered by things of the world.* But let him empty himself to please that one [God] who has chosen him (2 Timothy 2:4). With their prayer and good teaching let them approach everyone, the good and the bad, and treat everyone well who is afflicted.
>
> Look, [God] commanded the heavenly ones that they treat every person well with heavenly things. Where did you get the idea that no one should speak with a worthless or deceptive [person], because it may be [the case] that he will become a Perfect or an Upright one? As our Lord said to Ananias, "Go, speak with Paul." (Acts 9:11–15) And Ananias said to our Lord, "My Lord, he is an evil man, and I have heard of the affliction he has laid upon the saints who are in Jerusalem." Our Lord replied to him, "Go speak with him, because he is my chosen instrument, for you do not understand."
>
> Therefore, in this way, [if] you have a word with anyone, speak, and you will not [thereby] sin. (25.6; 745:13–25)

The authentic ascetic is one who has lowered, humbled, and emptied himself of any feelings of superiority so that he/she is equal with the lowest of society. There is no one with whom he cannot talk or from whom he cannot learn. However, the structure of the two levels of Perfect and Upright create the human tendency towards a form of spiritual elitism. Indeed, the author returns to various aspects of this elitist tendency from time to time as one of the contributing factors to the decline of the Perfect in the community. Instead, "the heavenly ones" are called upon to be the distributors of heavenly things to all people, to make all people heavenly rather than reserve the status only for themselves.

The rhetorical lead-in to the Ananais and Paul story—"Where did you get the idea that no one should speak with a worthless or deceptive [person], because it may be [the case] that he will become a Perfect or an Upright one?" (745:14–17)—hints at the possibility of a "fool for Christ" role, a saint who does not appear to be righteous. Paul thus becomes the fool for a wary Ananais to discern.

The author paraphrases the story, and while nothing of consequence is omitted, he does insert a homiletical note at the very end, "...for you do not understand" (745:23). God's very words directed to the congregation, the author concludes that an authentic Upright or Perfect one is able to speak with any person with spiritual impunity. In fact, there is no impurity to acquire, for no one is unholy in God's creation.

Again, asceticism is not the primary hermeneutic at play here. The author is responding directly to behavior in the religious community that discriminates against and excludes certain types of people. Discernment of the true worth of an individual is a fundamental skill of the Perfect Christian, for only in proper discernment can one recognize the veiled God at work among us. Yet, how else does one acquire purity of mind and discernment except through the disciplines of asceticism?

THE UNFORGIVING DEBTOR (MATTHEW 18:23–25)

The actual problems experienced living in Christian community apparently turn the author towards the familiar parable of the Unforgiving Debtor. As in his treatment of Paul and Ananais, the weakness of some leaders in the ascetical community is pride in their own righteousness and moral superiority. The author has observed instances of arrogance and abuse towards other sinners by his elite, so he employs what must have been a pointed, embarrassing parable for his audience. He resorts to the parable in two *mēmrē*: the 4th, "On the Vegetables for the Sick" (cols. 84–97); and the 5th, "On the Milk of the Children" (cols. 100–137). Both deal with the minor commandments intended for the lowest levels of those aspiring to the way of the Perfect.

> When you meet someone who has no mercy on his fellow human beings, then say to him, "Brother, blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7), even if they have committed manifold sins, because they forgive those who offend against them or rob them or do them great injury." As they forgive, so they are

> forgiven by the just judge, and as they demand repayment, so God will require this at their hands. Ten thousand talents of transgression were remitted to the debtor, because he begged his master for it, although it was the rule that he, his wife and his children should be sold. But then he went and demanded repayment from the man who owed [something] to him (Matthew 18:23–35); "so also my Father in heaven will act, unless each of you from the heart forgives his brother his sins (Matthew 18:35), even if they are four hundred ninety in one day" (Matthew 18:22). Let us realize that we too are all guilty before God. But if we forgive others, our Lord forgives us. (4.4; 92:7–26)

The author weaves an intertextual response to this regrettable, if not inevitable, situation in the community.[13] He begins with the fifth Beatitude, but tacks on the fuller theological implications of God's mercy. In brief, he says it all, summarizing the conclusion of the parable to come. Emphasizing the gravity of the debt from which the original debtor was absolved—"although it was the rule that he, his wife and his children should be sold"—the author recites a close paraphrase of the parable. He adds on another homiletical observation from the preceding pericope in Matthew, "even if they are four hundred ninety in one day" (Matthew 18:21–22). This is not an unusual interpretation, focusing on the great immensity of debt from which one is relieved by God's grace, a grace that should impel one towards a reciprocal forgiveness of one's personal debtors. The author's favorite phrase, "Count others better than yourself" (Philippians 2:3), finds a variation, "Let us realize that we too are all guilty before God" (92:24–25).

In the 5th *Mēmrā*, the same perspective that we have all "transgressed" is reiterated, though with a sterner tone towards the fate of the unforgiving debtor (unforgiving Perfect one?).

> There is no way in which anyone can resist the truth, do harm and distress to him who belongs to our Lord, and yet escape our Lord's chastisement. Only if he repents first, makes his supplication, and

[13] ibid., *Reading Renunciation*, 122–128. The use of intertextual Biblical interpretation works to resolve and adapt disparities between ascetical and Biblical issues.

> prays for this transgression to be forgiven, will our Lord have mercy on him and forgive him. But if after our Lord's forgiving him, he goes off to demand satisfaction from someone who has transgressed against him, our Lord will change his mind and demand satisfaction from him. In the case of that debtor who had repented before our Lord, the Lord of the debt forgave him his debts. He forgave him, although it had already been decided that he, his wife, and his children should be sold. But because this man in his turn indicted and sued a fellow-servant of his who was in debt to him (which means, he had transgressed against him) and did not want to forgive him, God retracted and required satisfaction for his former transgressions and did not spare him, as he had not spared his fellow-servant.
>
> So I advise that, as we have transgressed so much ourselves, we do not require satisfaction from anyone else for any transgression against us, but admonish both ourselves and him who transgresses, that until we are beyond transgressing, until we have done away with this ourselves, we should show mercy to our fellow servants. For if we demand satisfaction, God will certainly retract and demand satisfaction for the transgression for which we have done penance and which he has forgiven us initially, just as in the case of the debtor. (5.13; 124:7–125:3)

The author does not imply any secular punishments for the unforgiving debtors in his community. The matter of judgment and punishment is to be left to God, although it is notable that the author does not cite the verses (Matthew 18:32–34) regarding how the lord or king sent the unforgiving one to the jailers or torturers until he had paid his debt. His direction is to disencumber ourselves of the whole system of judgment and punishment. Assuming the author understood the details of the parable in the way modern interpreters do, then the fact that the unforgiving debtor would remain in prison until he had paid off an impossible debt of ten thousand talents would mean he would be there for eternity. The author knows that only God has a clock set to eternity.

WHERE DOES EXEGESIS BEGIN?

In the discussion surrounding Syriac Biblical interpretation, a legitimate question was raised by Paul Tarazi:[14] when the author of the Book of Steps engages in the exegesis of the Bible, does he begin from the Biblical text, discovering cues for the practice of asceticism as he gains insight into the meaning of the text; or does he read the Bible starting from the exigencies ascetical practice place upon him?

The analyses above have demonstrated time and again that the author usually begins his perspective on a Biblical text in the Book of Steps from his principles and practices of asceticism, which is a subtle form of proof-texting. He does not engage in systematic Biblical exegesis, working his way through a particular book or a set of parables, for instance, as a commentary for its own sake. Eisegesis is certainly at play, yet one cannot conclude that the author of the Book of Steps is not a person grounded in the Scriptures.

Scripture not only has primary authority for the author, it is the peculiar language and conceptual world that permeates his speech and thinking. As the author encounters an issue in ascetical practice, he looks and immediately comprehends the situation in the very terms of a Biblical narrative or personality. True, he will adapt the shape of the Biblical narrative to fit accepted ascetical patterns. But the Biblical text was not weighed according to the same categories of canonical Biblical authority as many measure it today. The Biblical world was still dynamically alive for the author, with the Biblical text flexible, yet concrete and unchanging.

The ideal of dispassionate, scientific exegesis of the Bible without presuppositions is a delusion. No one approaches the Bible "as if for the first time" without some intellectual and emotional structures to interpret what one is reading. While many look to the Bible to support their agenda, the author of the Book of Steps sees all the world included in the Bible and where one begins and ends is not that critical. Asceticism provides one set of lenses to make the Biblical world clearer to see and experience.

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[14] Paul Tarazi, "Chrysostom on Isaiah: A Paradigm for Hearing Scripture," in this same volume.

SLOUCHING TOWARDS ANTIOCH

The above examples are a mere taste, not a meal, of the manner in which the author of the Book of Steps interprets the Bible to lay a foundation for the ascetical life of his Christian community.

The Book of Steps is a good laboratory for the Antiochene experiment since it is an anonymous work that we still have difficulty placing historically, geographically, and in terms of personal relationships (who was the author's teacher?). As well, the Book of Steps was seldom quoted by later Syriac writers—the inclusion of one or two *mēmrē* in collections of spiritual literature is the usual acknowledgment. Philoxenus of Mabbug is the only Syriac author who seems to know about the institutions of the Upright and the Perfect—and Philoxenus never cites the Book of Steps directly.[15] In other words, there is no direct connection with Antiochene methods except geographical proximity and language. Does it sound like Antioch? It's getting there, perhaps not slouching, but the generally literal manner in which the author of the Book of Steps interprets Scripture would not sound foreign or inappropriate to the celebrated divines of the Antiochene tradition. However, the Book of Steps does not refer to the so-called historical situation of its texts and it certainly reads the Old and New Testament as one in ways that Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia would not.

An authentic signature of Antiochene exegesis is its respect for the Biblical narrative. The parable of the Wedding Feast is concerned foremost about legitimate entry into the wedding feast, and the wedding garment is the pass. The author is interested in the narrative of a person's spiritual pilgrimage, eventually seeking entry into the kingdom of heaven. Purity of heart and doing good works is signified by the wedding garment, while the kingdom of heaven takes on the form of the feast.

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[15] Cf. a brief discussion regarding Philoxenus' use of the Upright and Perfect in R. A. Kitchen & M. F. G. Parmentier, *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum*, op. cit., lxxxii-lxxxiii. A fuller discussion is in the D.Phil dissertation of R. A. Kitchen, "The Development of the Status of Perfection in Early Syriac Asceticism, with special reference to the Liber Graduum and Philoxenus of Mabbug" (University of Oxford, 1997): 196–261, esp. 259–261.

The author reserves the dialogue in the Zacchaeus story to be the climactic exposition of the Book of the Steps. He "only" wants to make clear where the critical emphasis lies for discerning the ascetical direction of the Upright, and through his insight is willing to emend the text to prove his point. As Craig Morrison has illustrated with Aphrahat, almost certainly his original audience would have picked up readily on his emendation.[16]

We hear the echoes of the conversation between Pharaoh and God, although Pharaoh's voice is barely audible. The original narrative is assumed by the author, his purpose not to change or alter the words or events, but to vindicate the justice of God. The author draws his insight into the divine-human encounter only from the assumed canonical account, and does not attempt to attribute the characters' actions and motives to anything else.

That the focus of Biblical exegesis in the Book of Steps is primarily the ascetical agenda becomes clear in the interpretation of the divine commands to Simon in the revelation received concerning eating unclean animals and food. "Kill and eat" was problematic for the author, not because of purity issues, but due to the fact that he understood the apostles to have abstained from all meat. The command had to be reinterpreted. "Kill and eat" becomes for the author a cipher to follow one of the major commandments to seek out non-Christians and teach them the way of the Gospel. This allegorical move demonstrates that the author's exegesis did not need to be consistently literal, even though otherwise he retains the integrity of the Acts narrative.

The parable of the Prodigal Son receives the most extensive treatment, but once again, the author parallels the imagery of the parabolic narrative by the spiritual progression of an aspirant to Perfection who is ultimately received by the merciful father into the comfortable house of life. The Prodigal Son does not quite work by our standards for the author's ascetical project, but most likely, this was a result of an oral presentation, sermon, or discourse in which he presented an idea he had not carefully worked out in the study.

Three Biblical expositions deal with the insidious effects of social injustice engendered by a social elitism amongst the Perfect and the

[16] Craig Morrison, "The Bible in the Hands of Aphrahat the Persian Sage," in this same volume.

Upright. A parable that the author utilizes in several locations is that of Lazarus and the Rich Man. The parable is used in two ways: to establish the implicit asceticism of Lazarus as a life-style against injustice; and to understand Abraham as the icon of the Upright ones who could be wealthy, yet committed to justice in contrast to Dives. The narrative is retained faithfully in its fragments, interpreting Abraham intertextually from Paul and Matthew. A root cause for injustice is the ignorance and/or arrogance towards the Biblical text and its instruction, a fact that the author believes is still a problem for contemporary Christians.

Justice and respect for all people emerges again in the author's treatment of the encounter between Paul and Ananais following the Damascus Road event. Reacting against a perceived elitism developing among his community, the author uses the famous incident to insist that no one should be considered too lowly or too unholy with whom to associate and talk. Again, a sly emendation of the text—Jesus advocating for Paul directly with Ananais adds, "for you do not understand"—is aimed against the author's congregation bent upon exclusion of certain people from the spiritual journey.

Both the Paul and Ananais narrative and the author's treatment of the parable of the Unforgiving Debtor operate subconsciously, as it were, on the basis of the author's primary ascetical principle, "Count others better than yourself." In the latter parable, the author reminds us that since we all transgress against God, we never need to receive satisfaction from others. Mercy, not retribution, is what is required of an authentically humble Christian.

For the Book of Steps there was no Antiochene school of Biblical exegesis and interpretation, but there was a burgeoning movement of churches and their thinkers who perceived the Christian faith and its Scriptures in a particular manner. They did not want to forget or slight the humanity of Christ, and what is more human than the stories and narratives of human beings wrestling with God? If these stories are only meant as tokens or symbols of some other reality, what reality do our lives, our narratives possess? The Book of Steps is one witness who affirmed these stories and whose readers found themselves living in the midst of the story.

CHRYSOSTOM ON ISAIAH: A PARADIGM FOR HEARING SCRIPTURE

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INTRODUCTION

John Chrysostom is rarely mentioned in discussions of the theology of the fourth and fifth century Christian fathers. Actually, he is rarely a reference in "theological" dogmatic discussions. He is acknowledged in patrologies but virtually absent in the patristic literature that discusses the "thought" of the Fathers. In these studies, he fades in comparison with his contemporaries: Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, and even Ambrose. Actually, Cyril of Alexandria with his uncle, Patriarch Theophilus, attended the "Synod of the Oak" (412 A.D.) that deposed John Chrysostom from the patriarchal see of Constantinople. Yet, and in spite of his exclusion from the dyptichs for a few years by the same Cyril of Alexandria, Chrysostom was finally hailed, together with Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus, as one of the three luminaries of Orthodoxy. How can it be, then, that one of the leading doctors of the Greek Church, especially as he lived in a time in which Christian orthodoxy suffered serious challenges from Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Arianism, Apollinarianism, and the still-strong paganism of the Roman Empire, did not virtually engage in theological discourse? Chrysostom's most famous writings—both homiletical and topical—are principally pastoral. He both understood and practiced, to my mind more than anyone else before or after him, the reality—the real function—of Scripture. For Chrysostom, Scripture, the written, and thus official, word of God, was not handed to us as a "scholarly" source for us to dig out of it "the true God," i.e., to "theologize," thus making of our own mental handiwork a "holy" endeavor. After all, whenever and however we speak "of" God, we are

speaking "about" him, i.e., out of the image we have mentally of him, and are producing in the mind of our hearers and readers a similar image. But an image is nothing else than a form, a chiseled stone, a graven image, a statue—the quintessential abhorrence and blasphemy according to Scripture:

> I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Ex 20:2–6/Deut 5:6–10)[1]

Chrysostom constantly taught and preached that Scripture is rather the word of the God who, according to Scripture, intentionally decided not to speak to us face to face, because we have sinned against him by following not his will, but that of other deities. Scripture refers to these as idols, graven images residing in temples made by human hands, which we must not seek and go after, since they are after all non-functional deities "who have a mouth and yet do not speak." The scriptural God eliminated the statue, the image, the "imaginary" reality and poured himself fully into a word through which he comes to and is near us at all times:

> And you shall again obey the voice of the Lord, and keep all his commandments which I command you this day. The Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground; for the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. "For

[1] See also the long invectives against the idols in the prophetic books.

this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. (Deut 30:8–15)

This is precisely what Chrysostom understood in earnest:

It were indeed meet for us not at all to require the aid of the written Word, but to exhibit a life so pure, that the grace of the Spirit should be instead of books to our souls, and that as these are inscribed with ink, even so should our hearts be with the Spirit. But, since we have utterly put away from us this grace, come, let us at any rate embrace the second best course. For that the former was better, God hath made manifest, both by His words, and by His doings. Since unto Noah, and unto Abraham, and unto his offspring, and unto Job, and unto Moses too, He discoursed not by writings, but Himself by Himself, finding their mind pure. But after the whole people of the Hebrews had fallen into the very pit of wickedness, then and thereafter was a written word, and tables, and the admonition which is given by these. And this one may perceive was the case, not of the saints in the Old Testament only, but also of those in the New. For neither to the apostles did God give anything in writing, but instead of written words, He promised that He would give them the grace of the Spirit: for "He," saith our Lord, "shall bring all things to your remembrance." And that thou mayest learn that this was far better, hear what He saith by the Prophet: "I will make a new covenant with you, putting my laws into their mind, and in their heart I will write them," and, "they shall be all taught of God." And Paul too, pointing out the same superiority, said, that they had received a law "not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."

But since in process of time they made shipwreck, some with regard to doctrines, others as to life and manners, there was again need that they should be put in remembrance by the written word. Reflect then how great an evil it is for us, who ought to live so purely as not even to need written words, but to yield up our hearts, as books, to the Spirit; now that we have lost that honor,

> and are come to have need of these, to fail again in duly employing even this second remedy. For if it be a blame to stand in need of written words, and not to have brought down on ourselves the grace of the Spirit; consider how heavy the charge of not choosing to profit even after this assistance, but rather treating what is written with neglect, as if it were cast forth without purpose, and at random, and so bringing down upon ourselves our punishment with increase. But that no such effect may ensue, let us give strict heed unto the things that are written; and let us learn how the Old Law was given on the one hand, how on the other the New Covenant.[2]

ALEXANDRIA AND ANTIOCH

It has become customary to speak of an Antiochian versus Alexandrian schools of exegesis. This is, to my mind, a far cry from the actual fact. I am not referring here to the classical stand represented by Orthodox Dogmatics and Patristics, as well as by Roman-Catholic theologians. According to them, there is one truthful expression of the faith of the church, which was preserved throughout the ages.[3] Beginning with this assumption, they try to delineate this truth and then read it back into Scripture. Knowing that they must deal with Scripture—and this dealing is imposed upon them by the same church tradition—they usually gloss over it, compressing it into formulas corresponding to their own reading of their church tradition. This is a prime example of begging the question.[4] Consequently, the theologians try to show that those

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[2] Homily I on the Gospel of St. Matthew in P. Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, 1st Series, x 1978).

[3] It is worth noting that the theologians usually criticize the exegetes to come up with different interpretations of Scripture, when they themselves come up with different readings of the one truth. They emulate one another for the correct reading or interpretation of the thought of the fathers and the synods.

[4] It is quite striking that while a theologian goes at length discussing and "proving" the meaning of lengthy patristic discourses in their original languages, the same compresses the entire Scripture—even when without knowledge of Hebrew—in a section of a book, a chapter, a paragraph, and even an all-encompassing formula.

they view as Orthodox fathers had the same view as well as approach, whether they were Alexandrian or Antiochian.

What I am rather referring to is the false premise rampant among the exegetes themselves, namely that one can speak of an "Antiochian" school in the same vein as one speaks of an "Alexandrian" school. In the latter case, the term applies fully given that there was in Alexandria a catechetical school under the auspices of the bishop at least beginning with Origen. The teaching was a "school" teaching in the sense that it was rooted in Neo-Platonic religious philosophy and consequently delved into a discourse about God that ended up forcing its own premises on Scripture.[5] In Antioch, on the other hand, there was, strictly speaking, no "school" either institutionally or philosophically. The "Antiochians" were bound more by methodology rather than a "school" of thought. Theodore and Chrysostom were colleagues and disciples of both Diodore and Libanius, who were contemporaries. As for Theodoret, he was bred on the writings of his three predecessors. The well-known admiration of Libanius for Chrysostom[6] makes it clear that the common denominator between the "Antiochians" was not theology but rhetoric. It is their solid rearing in and love for rhetoric that made them both appreciate the word of Scripture for what it is indeed: a sequence of words within stories that have to be understood on their own grounds and independently from any premise imposed from the outside.[7]

Given Origen's undeniable influence, directly or via Athanasius, on the Cappadocians, the latter's theology followed the same path as

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[5] A prime example is the neo-platonic Jew Philo who exercised an undeniable influence on Origen's methodology in dealing with Scripture. It is under his influence that the forced allegorical reading of Scripture crept into Alexandrian theology and through it into classical theology.

[6] "There was...a certain presbyter named John, a man of noble birth and of exemplary life, and possessed of such wonderful powers of eloquence and persuasion that he was declared by the sophist, Libanius the Syrian, to surpass all the orators of the age. When this sophist was on his death-bed he was asked by his friends who should take his place. 'It would have been John,' replied he, 'had not the Christians taken him from us.'" (Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 8.2, translation NPNF).

[7] As I shall point out later, Chrysostom time and again stressed that Scripture is its own interpreter.

the one that prevailed in Alexandria. Through them, the Alexandrian approach took hold of later Constantinopolitan Byzantine theology, which became the classic voice of Orthodoxy after the rise of Islam. In the meantime, due to the bitter Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries and the link between Nestorius and Eutychius, on the one hand, and Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret, on the other, these three and their teachings were fully marginalized. But, as often happens, the baby was thrown away with the bath water, and blame came to be thrown on the exegetical method itself. The awkwardness of this attitude, if not stand, is revealed in that the same Byzantine tradition that belittled, if not tacitly condemned, the Antiochian exegetical approach did so while honoring John Chrysostom, who was the greatest champion of this approach, and one of the three great luminaries.

THESIS AND PURPOSE OF THIS ESSAY

From the introductory remarks to his *Homily I on the Gospel of St. Matthew* quoted earlier (pp.2–3), one may begin to discern Chrysostom's exegetical agenda. The hearers immediately confront his contention that, although to learn Scripture is the second-best way for the believer to discern God's will, for us there is *no other possible way*. Rather than being a "theological" premise on Chrysostom's part, his stand is rooted in Scripture itself. One of the clearest examples is found in Jeremiah where the word of God is first delivered orally (7:1–2; 26:1–6, 21). Then, in spite of the king's refusal, the same word is consigned upon God's command a few years later into a scroll (36:1–4, 9–10a). Yet again, upon the king's stubborn refusal to accept the written word (vv.21–24) committing it to consumption by fire (vv.25–26), it is this same written word *with underscoring additions* that is consigned in another scroll for the ages to come, i.e., for us the hearers of the Book of Jeremiah:

> Now, after the king had burned the scroll with the words which Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned..." Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll which Jehoiakim king of Judah

had burned in the fire; *and many similar words were added to them*. (vv.27–28, 32) [emphasis added]

It is then precisely the word of God that was refused by its original hearers, which is committed into *writing* as his official and unimpeachable "word" for all upcoming generations. It is to be recited to them for them to "hear"—as the original generations did—and "obey"—as the original generations failed to do.

In adhering closely to the scriptural text, Chrysostom understood more than any in his time, and even until now, that if there is any "theology," it concerns the word *of* God and not words *about/concerning* him. Even if theology considers its task as using the word of God to speak of/about God, it is still not dealing with Scripture. The latter is not a course about God in preparation for a quiz as to whether we got "him" right. Some theologians even base their entire theological quest on a false premise: our major if not sole task is to answer Jesus' question, "What do you say I am?" In Scripture, God and his messiah do not ask questions for us to answer—let alone questions concerning their persons. Rather they issue orders for us to follow, in view of the coming judgment. And their judgment is not about whether we understood them [as being] or their function correctly, but as to whether we understood and implemented their will. In Scripture to study [*daraš*] God (Is 9:12; 31:1) is tantamount/equivalent to studying his torah/will in order to do it.

Instead of submitting to pagan philosophical premises,[8] the consummate pastor Chrysostom used the grammatico-historical method of Antiochian exegesis to preach the word of God. He did this because he respected the integrity of the Scriptures as written communications originating from a particular time and place and carrying a specific purpose. He sought to bring his hearers to understand the original con-

[8] In spite of the efforts of Clement of Alexandria, Scripture does not allow the thesis that Greek philosophy functioned or could function as a propaedeutic master introducing the biblical Christ. It is rather Scripture, which is not only formally but also materially the unique true wisdom (having in the law the embodiment [*μόρφωσιν*] of knowledge and truth; Rom 2.20), that contains the wisdom sought after by the Greeks. Paul Nadim Tarazi, *Old Testament Introduction, Vol.3: Psalms and Wisdom* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press) pp.129–59.

text of the Scriptures as a prerequisite for observing their instructions in their own lives. In so doing, he supplied the church with a model for scriptural interpretation and preaching which not only surpassed those of his contemporaries, but which can clear away the theological obfuscation of centuries and allow us once again to hear God's word of admonishment and grace in all its immediacy and power. Since Chrysostom's dealings with Scripture were usually homilies, it would be valuable to test my thesis on his handling of the first eight chapters of Isaiah, which is his only extant work that was written outright as a textual commentary. We shall see that, for Chrysostom, even a commentary is to reflect the fabric of the text that is commented upon. For him a "written" commentary should not obscure the reality of the text itself, which is and should remain first and foremost the word of God that was written *in order to* be "heard" and "obeyed" as the word—even when harsh—of a caring and loving parent.

DIVINE CONDESCENSION—συγκατάβασις

If, as Chrysostom emphasized, the scriptural God decided to completely withdraw from the scene as a "being" and leave us with his "word," this action should not be construed as the action of a blood hungry judge who is after all of us and will punish everyone of us either here or in the thereafter. This is far from the truth of the matter. For Chrysostom, God is first and foremost the physician whose ultimate as well as immediate intention is to heal, the father whose punishment is corrective and a call to repentance, the one whose intention is that we be saved.[9] That is why in all his dealings with us he "condescends" to our weaknesses, mental as well as physical. That is to say,

[9] "For having made man by taking dust from the earth, and having honored him with Your own image, O God, You placed him in a garden of delight, promising him eternal life and the enjoyment of everlasting blessings *in the observance of Your commandments. But when he disobeyed You*... You, O God, in Your righteous judgment, expelled him from paradise into this world... yet providing for him the salvation of regeneration in Your Christ. For You did not forever reject Your creature whom You made, O Good One, nor did You forget the work of Your hands, *but because of Your tender compassion, You visited him in various ways: You sent forth prophets*..." (Anaphora of the Liturgy of St Basil the Great).

his loving condescension is reflected not only in the content of the message, but also and primarily in its *form*. After all the scriptural revelation of God is a *text*. Chrysostom took so seriously this reality that he refused, as the Alexandrians and later theologians and even exegetes did, to look for the truth of God beyond the text. He knew that any premise beyond the text is an "idol," a presupposition that we take as "real" and then make it "speak." Against common theological practice that, de facto, considers the scriptural metaphors as unworthy of God and to be superseded with theological jargon when speaking of him, he respectfully dealt with the metaphors as the quintessential expression of God's loving condescension not only materially, but also and preeminently formally, and required from the parents to read biblical stories to their children at home:

> Chrysostom teaches parents regarding a child's studies, "But when the boy takes relaxation from his studies—for the soul delights to dwell on stories of old—speak to him, drawing him away from all childish folly; for thou art raising a philosopher and athlete and citizen of heaven. Speak to him and tell him this story..." And Chrysostom begins to teach the parents to tell their children stories from Scripture, starting with Old Testament stories.[10]
>
> "Next, when he has grown older, tell him also more fearful tales; for thou shouldst not impose so great a burden on his understanding while he is still tender, lest thou dismay him. But when he is fifteen years old or more, let him hear of Hell. Nay, when he is ten or eight or even younger, let him hear in full detail the story of the flood, the destruction of Sodom, the descent into Egypt—whatever stories are full of divine punishment. When he is older, let him hear also the deeds of the New Testament—deeds of grace and deeds of hell. With these stories and ten thousand others fortify his hearing, as thou dost offer him also examples drawn from his home."[11]

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[10] Laistner, M. L. W., and John Chrysostom. *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire; Together with an English Translation of John Chrysostom's Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring up Their Children, The James W. Richard Lectures in History ; 1950–1951* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951) p.39.

[11] *Id.* p.52.

For Chrysostom the Greek theoretical[12] philosophical vocabulary was alien to the scriptural language and was functionally tantamount to Baal and the idols whose function was to dislodge the Lord in the mental world of the hearers. For Chrysostom, as for the prophets and the apostles, to "know" God is fully equivalent and co-extensive with knowing his law/commandments *in order to do them*. God is not an eternal entity to be approached mentally, let alone mystically, but indeed a *really* unique and incomparable father, mother, loving husband, caring master and lord...[13] *really so* because he can be communicated through these metaphors to every one of his *children* of any age, and not only to the elite among the mystics or the theologians in a way that requires sometimes an extra set of cerebral circumvolutions!

As a prime example, let us hear Chrysostom's handling of Isaiah's "vision," which has become classical in Orthodox circles to speak not only of seeing God but also of deification, and realize the world of difference between the two approaches:

> "I saw the Lord seated." Christ has indeed said, "No one has seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has explained him." And again: "No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen him." And to Moses he said, "No one can see me my face and live." How then can Isaiah claim to have seen the Lord? He did not actually contradict Christ, but spoke quite in harmony with him. Christ was talking about a precise observation of God, which no one has made.

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[12] I am referring here to mainly Platonic, neo-Platonic, and Plotinic premises rather than Greek "practical" philosophies such as stoicism.

[13] Woe to him who says to a father, "What are you begetting?" or to a woman, "With what are you in travail?" Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands?" (Is 45:10–11); For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. (54:5); As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem (63:13); For thou art our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old is thy name. (63:16)

Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand. (64:8)

> After all, no one has observed bare divinity in its pure essence except the only-begotten. Isaiah, on the other hand, claimed to have seen his power. It is impossible to see God in and of himself. Isaiah saw God in an assumed form, one as much lowered as Isaiah's weakness was elevated. That neither he nor anybody else has seen bare divinity is made very clear by what they claim. For example, Isaiah says, "I saw the Lord seated." But God does not sit. He does not have a bodily form. Not only does he say "Seated," but "Seated on a throne."... *Therefore, it is clear that the vision was an act of condescension.* Another prophet implied the same thing when he spoke of the face of God. I have multiplied visions, that is, he had been seen in many ways. But if God's bare essence had been manifested, it would not have appeared in many ways. When he reveals himself, he condescends, now in one way, now in another way, to the prophets. He alters the visions in ways appropriate to the circumstances... Therefore, why does he now appear seated on a throne among the Seraphim? He is imitating a human custom because his message is to humans... For it was the custom of their judges not to work in secret but while seated on high platforms with curtains drawn while everyone stood. God, in imitation of these things, places the Seraphim about him, sits on a high throne, and pronounces his verdict from there. I will try to make this point from another prophet so that you will not regard my analysis with suspicion but understand that this really is God's way of revealing himself...[14] we can, as I said, deal with the question at hand accurately and explain the genre of each text. Therefore, why did he say, "I saw the Lord seated?" Sitting on a throne is always a symbol of judgment, as David said, "You have sat on the throne to judge righteously." ... His precise language make sit clear that he is not talking about a chair... To sit on the throne is to judge. (pp.123–5) [emphasis added][15]

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[14] Chrysostom then proceeds to speak of the similar setting of Dan 7:9–11.

[15] All quotations from Chrysostom's Commentary on Isaiah are taken from Duane A. Garrett, *An Analysis of the Hermeneutics of John Chrysostom's Commentary on Isaiah 1–8 With An English Translation.* The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992.

Not only does Chrysostom disregard fully the "vision" by pointing to its factual impossibility, but—and this is precisely what is more important—by taking seriously the value of the metaphor his exegesis proves to be correct, since Is 6 is not about the prophet's "vision" but rather about God's judgment of his people.

Magisterially Chrysostom reads correctly the function of the law as being an act of graceful love on God's part. To be sure, it was an act of a God that decided not to communicate face to face with us. However, this was not a punishment. The punishment rather would have been had he continued to do so. The reason is that he is first and foremost a judge. Unlike the rest of us, functionally a judge is neither good nor evil; rather he is either just or unjust. God being just, his presence face to face with us "sinners" would have been catastrophic. That is why Chrysostom urges us to "embrace" God's visual absence and decision to communicate with us exclusively through his word, as a sign of his caring love for us.[16] Instead of striking us for our sins, God sends "before [ahead of] him" his law as a "word" of admonition in order to give us time to correct our behavior so that, when he comes his decision in our favor will be just. In this sense, the law is an expression of God's compassion and mercy toward us; without the law as precursor to his coming, God's face toward us would not be a *panim* (fatherly, loving countenance) but an *'ap* (angry face). Chrysostom, an avid reader of Paul, could not have missed that God's gospel, i.e., good news, is nothing else than what he said "through his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (Rom 1:2) and that "in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed... for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (Rom 1:17–18). Indeed, "This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (3:25b). However, "... do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (2:4); "Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off. And even the others, if

[16] See the full introduction to his first homily on Matthew, quoted fully above.

they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again" (11:22–23); and "Just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received *mercy* because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that by the *mercy* shown to you they also may receive *mercy*. For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have *mercy upon all*" (11:30–32). But, let me give way to Chrysostom himself:

> "They have rejected *me*." It means that they have transgressed his *law* and abandoned his *commands*. (p.43) [emphasis added]
>
> "They have turned away from following him. Why are you still being smitten by adding up lawlessness?" This is the greatest condemnation, that punishments have made them no better. *Chastising is a type of benefit*. No one can say that he has only given rewards and benefits, but has abandoned sinners. He has drawn in some with rewards, he has made some wise by fear of punishment, but despite both means, some remain incurably ill. (p.45) [emphasis added]
>
> "Unless the Lord Sabaoth had left us offspring, we would have become like Sodom, we would be similar to Gomorrah." It is the custom of the prophets not only to announce what the offenders are about to suffer, but also what they deserve to suffer, so that in the time of punishment they will understand *how merciful God is*, in that they do not pay the penalty they deserve to pay, but far less. So he says this here, not because their sins were the same as those described about Sodom, but because he demanded a complete destruction of Sodom, that the whole race be absolutely obliterated—which indeed is what befell Sodom. But the mercy of God did not allow this to happen to Jerusalem and imposed a much less severe penalty for sin. Since the Old Testament is closely related to the New, Paul understandably used this verse. He spoke it with a deeper purpose than the prophet did. Just as, in that time, all would have been taken away unless God's mercy had been great, even so, in the time of coming of Christ, they would have all suffered worse than the Jews of Isaiah's day if God's grace had not appeared. (pp.46–47) [emphasis added]
>
> "With judgment and mercy the captives shall be saved." "With judgment," that is, with justice and correction and the punishment by war. "With mercy," that is, with much love for humanity. He here promises two very great gifts to them: both that those who

> have deserved it pay a penalty, and that the people enjoy much prosperity. Either one of these alone would be a sufficient reason for joy, but when the two come together, it is reason for unspeakable celebration. In addition, he wants to indicate first that after the long captivity they will return to their homeland not because they had paid a sufficient penalty and cut away their sins, but because of his love for humanity, and second that salvation is more a matter of mercy than reward or recompense. Therefore he adds, "and with mercy." (p.58)

> "And I put a hedge around it and dug a trench." "Hedge" refers to either a wall, or the law, or his providence. And after all, the law gave them more security than a wall... His *compassion* did not stop here, but he adds, "And I waited for it to bring forth grapes." He awaited the time of harvest with much *patience*, as "I waited" shows...."What more will I do for my vineyard?"... What more can I do to my vineyard that I have not done?"... "Now I will announce to you what I will do to my vineyard." Since he has won the case and demonstrated their senselessness, there is only one thing left to—announce the verdict. He tells them what he intends to do, not in order to condemn them but so that by frightening them with threats he might make them more reasonable. "I will take away its hedge, and it shall be plundered; I will remove its wall, and it will be trodden under." He in effect says, "I will remove my protection, I will strip away my help, I will put an end to my providential care for you, and will find yourselves among enemies whom you previously repulsed when you are laid out as plunder for all." (pp.107–8) [emphasis added]

THE FUNCTION OF SCRIPTURE

It is this principle, based on the function of the scriptural text, which can be seen as the thread that holds together the Chrysostomian exegesis. It is not about God, nor even about his revelation of himself, but rather the communication of his love for us. In so doing, he does not overwhelm us with expressing this love in divine, mystical jargon, which only the elite, the elect, the initiates can understand and comprehend. Theologians and many Christians approach the Bible as

though one would need a degree in theology in order to understand what God is saying,[17]—whereas the reality of the matter is that God speaks to us in "human" language using "human" imagery as well as terminology. In other words, as a loving parent tries to communicate with and to the child in the latter's lingo, God "condescends" to us. This is not a condescension in the sense of "coming down" from heaven—that would be disastrous since God's coming from heaven implies judgment and possible condemnation, but rather in speaking to us in a way we understand not him—how could we?—but rather what he wants from us for our own good. Put otherwise, God's condescension lies in his concern for us, and not a "condescending" attitude. It is a condescension expressed through his word, which is loving and therefore corrective: "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12). That is why the ευαγγέλιον, which is nothing else but νομον Χριστου, is "the *law* of Christ" (Gal 6:2) and "the *law* of the spirit of life [that gives life]" (Rom 8:2). That is also why the scriptural story of God was recounted in the "words" of the Old Testament, and the story of his eschatological messenger in the "words" of the New Testament. Neither God nor his messenger Jesus the Christ is the subject matter of Scripture, rather Scripture in its entirety remains Scripture: it is the words themselves of the story that conveys each of God and his eschatological messenger according to the rule of divine condescension. Thus metaphors as they stand are of essence, and their intention is to instruct us not about God and his Christ—which means Christology is like theology, a fabrication of the elite that calls themselves "theologians"—but rather in their "way" which will lead us to the kingdom. Hence the centrality of the "hearing" in both senses: hearing (and memorizing) and listening/obeying. Hence also the taking very seriously the fact that Scripture itself is not addressed indirectly to us the hearers, but it is actually originally aimed at us, its hearers of every generation.

Consequently, in Chrysostom's view, Scripture is not, even marginally, a textbook or sourcebook for [correct] theology or [correct] anthropology or [correct] ecclesiology or [correct] Christology. It is an edifying word unto salvation. It is not the correct formulation of a creed that ensures salvation, but the correct abiding by God's will.

[17] Were this the case, there would be no salvation!

And, since Scripture eliminates God's form, and thus, his being as a subject matter,[18] it is not necessary to know God first in order to know his will, but rather the opposite: it is necessary to know his will in order to know him *as* savior and redeemer from the punishment *he* inflicts on us whenever we transgress his commandments.[19] Only then shall we know him as he is: a *loving* father, mother, and husband,[20] and not as we envisaged him, a vengeful autocrat. Only then shall we understand that his punishment was unto correction in order for us to be "whole" [שלם] and enjoy the eschatological "wholeness" [שלום] of his heavenly Jerusalem. For Chrysostom, it would be ludicrous to imagine that Scripture, a "divine word of instruction" conceived unto *producing* God's mercy, be misused as a text for us to manipulate in order to come up with the correct human word about God, which is tantamount to the image, and thus idol, we have of him in our minds. In Scripture, and thus for Chrysostom, God reveals his mercy in the corrective word of the prophets and Jesus. If we follow that word then we will not undergo condemnation at the judgment. It is therefore of utmost importance for Chrysostom that Scripture should contain elements of warning and judgment, that its role is not only informative but also corrective and disciplinary. Consequently, Chrysostom has a double homiletical purpose. First is to humble his hearers with the realization that they may not rely on direct discourse with God—let alone about him!—but must rely on writings that already assume sinfulness on the part of the hearers. Second is to lead them to understand the word of salvation which is offered to them as a last chance, as a final opportunity to avoid divine punishment. Ultimately, the scriptural word, in both the Old as well as the New Testament, is an ευαγγέλιον,[21] the word of good news of God's compassion and mercy. Since the scriptural God is not a crushing statue in need of a stone temple built with the taxes excised from the needy people, but a fatherly word of correction and thus of compassion, and since he is the

[18] See above.

[19] See, e.g., Is 40–55 passim.

[20] See above note 23.

[21] "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for *the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures*, the gospel concerning his Son." (Rom 1:1–3a) [emphasis added]

God of all אדם,[22] Chrysostom understood that the same text addressed to earlier generations is, by the same token and as forcefully, intended and applies, as it stands, to his contemporary listeners:

> For what great nation is there that has a god so near[23] to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children. (Deut 4:8–10)
>
> You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Deut 5:8–10)

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The authoritative aspect of Scripture has virtually disappeared from the purview of contemporary theology, even from that of the common Christian. Christians in general, as well as theologians, view Scripture as an important, even vital text, yet a text to be handled as any other text: something we hold "in our hand," i.e., our power, and consequently under our authority—something "we" interpret.[24] The reality of the matter is that it is Scripture that holds us, not we it:

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[22] "Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since *God is one*; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith." Rom 3.29–30. [emphasis added]

[23] See Deut 30.8–16 quoted at the beginning of the paper.

[24] Adding "according to the teaching of the church" is a cheap cop-out, since individual Christians and theologians understand (sometimes quite) dif-

> And when he [viz. the king] sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, from that which is in the charge of the Levitical priests; and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them; that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left; so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel. (Deut. 17:8–20).
>
> After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, "... No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and of good courage; for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Josh 1:1–9)

Actually, in Chrysostom's as well as biblical times copies of Scripture were extremely rare. It is easy to forget, in this age of near-universal literacy and Bibles in every hotel room, that the majority of the faithful in ancient Israel, first-century Palestine, and fourth-century Antioch and Constantinople depended on the public reading of Scripture for their knowledge of it. Consequently, the expression "holding Scripture in our hand" simply did not hold water. Until the advent of the printing press, from the perspective of the believer, Scripture was

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ferently this "teaching." At any rate, their common expression is "I/we hold" the correct teaching.

virtually always "held in the hand" of the preacher who "sat on Moses' seat" and whose teaching—not way of life—was binding.[25] That is to say, from the perspective of the believers the scriptural text held sway over them. As for the one who administers the word, he is not free to say what he thinks of it, but is bound by it in that he is accountable for what he is preaching.

The text's absolute authority can be seen in Chrysostom's attention to every word in the text. He refers to the meaning of the original Hebrew: *Sorek* in Is 5:2 (p.107), *Seraphim* in 6:2 (p.126), *Yashub* in 7:3 (p.141), and "bee" in 7:18 (p.152). In his discussion of the oracle concerning the sign of Immanuel he deals at length with the definite article before "virgin" and the shift from singular to plural in the address to Ahaz (7:13–17; p.146). Most importantly, he considers Scripture to be its own interpreter, especially in conjunction with metaphors. He considers that each metaphorical occurrence is to be treated on its own grounds taking into consideration each individual context and, more importantly, that Scripture explains its own metaphors:

> There is something we can learn here. What sort of thing is it? It is when it is necessary to allegorize Scripture. We ourselves are not the lords over the rules of interpretation, but must pursue Scripture's understanding of itself, and in that way make sure of the allegorical method. What I mean is this. The Scripture has just now spoken of a vineyard, wall, and wine-vat. The reader is not permitted to become lord of the passage and apply the words to whatever events or people he chooses. The Scripture interprets itself with the words, "And the house of Israel is the vineyard of the Lord Sabaoth."... This everywhere a rule in Scripture: when it wants to allegorize, it tells the interpretation of the allegory, so that the passage will not be interpreted superficially or be met by the undisciplined desire of those who enjoy allegorization to wander about and be carried in every direction. (p.110)

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[25] Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat;

> so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice." (Mt 23:1–3)

> ...He used metaphorical language to describe both the character of the native king and the power of the barbarian. *He does it, as I have always said, to render his message more emphatic.* ... Then he gives the explanation of the metaphor: "The king of Assyria." Do you see how flawlessly the passage shines before us? For Scripture everywhere gives the interpretation of its metaphors, just as it has done here. Having spoken of a river, it did not stick to the metaphor, but told us what it means by river: "The king of Assyria, and all his glory." (pp.160–1) [emphasis added].

For Chrysostom, the text stands on its own. Being the word of God to be consigned *in writing* for the ages, its authority as well as validity does not end with its original and even broader contemporary addressees, but applies with the same power to every hearer throughout the ages:

> "Which he saw against Judah and against Jerusalem." Why has he spoken of the two places distinctly? Because their punishments are distinct from one another and given at different times. God had wisely arranged that they did not all perish at once, but only gradually, so that when some were punished by exile, those left behind would be wiser for it. For if they did not properly use the medicine, the fault belongs not to the physician but to the ill. He always does this in every generation: he does not punish at once all those who together committed the same sins. Perhaps it is because our whole race would have been snatched away long time ago. He demands justice of some here, and those he is preparing for a lighter punishment there, since he has already provided them with a greater motive for making a change for the better. But others, who are not willing to benefit from divine justice, are not punished here. He is storing them up for the inexorable and fearful day of judgment. (p.41)

> His [God's] teaching about salvation conveyed great benefit to his hearers, but he concealed his message with obscure terminology when preaching to the Jews, since they did not heed his words. In that way, these wonderful gifts from him, which contain a great message of salvation *for us*, are often taken away *when the recipients have no desire to bear fruit from them*. (p.81) [emphasis added]

This leads him to introduce passages from the New Testament similar to those he is discussing in Isaiah with the obvious intention of bringing home the message to his own audience:

> "How has Zion, the faithful city, become a harlot?" The perplexity arises from the grief of the speaker, the abundant insensibility of the Jews, and the hopelessness of what has happened. Even Paul is at a loss *about the same sort of things* when he says to the Galatians: "I am amazed that you have deserted so quickly." Although the form of his encouragement is a series of accusations, he is summoning them to virtue... *We do not reproach people who mean nothing to us* and go after someone who is base in the same way that we do those who appear zealous for the right and then manifest sinful qualities. (pp.53–54) [emphasis added]

Sometimes we even hear Chrysostom applying the Old Testament prophetic utterances directly to his own contemporaries not only when they are positive, such as when he understands the vision of Is 2.1–4 as applying to the church of fourth century Roman empire (pp.61 ff.), but more so when they are harshly critical:

> If you want further evidence that God demands punishment for this, and that he appropriately punishes this sin, listen to how, after he has enumerated their punishments, he adds the reason: "These things have happened to you because of your ornamentation." If the Jewish women had to endure so much punishment for their ornamentation... surely it is obvious that we shall fall into worse punishment if we fall into the same sins. For the greater the privileges, the more severe the punishments...
>
> Let me make my meaning more plain. Those who lived in Sodom sinned terribly. They paid the penalty when the lightning bolts fell and the cities and the peoples of the land with their very bodies were all burned up. What do you think: would anyone dare do what they did after that? But many have throughout the world. Why do they not suffer the same fate? Because they are reserved for another worse punishment... What reason would he have for punishing sinners [viz. the Sodomites] so severely before the coming of grace and the law, although they had never heard a prophet or anyone else, but then, after the coming of these things, for allowing people to escape the prescribed penalty, although they indulged in as much folly, became no wiser by the precedent, and committed

> worse sins than the others? Why do they not pay any penalty today? So that you may learn that they are being kept for a much worse penalty. If you want evidence that it is possible to suffer worse than Sodom did, listen to the words of Christ: "It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than it will be for this city."... Therefore if we commit the same sins as some who have already offended and been punished, but do not suffer the same fate, we should not get more confident, but scared. (pp.97–8)

The reason behind the application of the words of the Old Testament directly to the Christians lies in the fact that the Old Testament is no less the word of God than the New Testament, and not merely *via* the latter as is usually assumed by many. Chrysostom takes seriously Paul's authoritative teaching in addressing the Roman Gentiles: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (Rom 1:1–2).[26] But let us listen to Chrysostom himself. Although he reads the text of Is 2:1–5 as "prophecy" concerning the church and applies it to his own time, he nevertheless does not overlook the fact that in his supremacy over the world, God is and remains essentially "judge" *of all*—an aspect rather de facto forgotten or

[26] See also Paul's address to the Corinthian Gentiles: "I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance.' We must not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put the Lord to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents; nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:1–12).

relegated on the back burner among Christians today—and that the judgment is according to God's "law":[27]

> "And he will proclaim his way to us, and we will go in it." Do you see that they are seeking other law? Scripture customarily speaks of God's commandments as "way." But if it had meant the first covenant, it would not have said, "He will proclaim to us," for that was clear, obvious, and known to all... He adds the words, "From Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"... They tell of the New Covenant, as is obvious from the type of law described, the time it is given, who receives it, and the effect the law has on people... Having mentioned the place and time of this law-giving, he also speaks of those who will receive it... Is it the Hebrews and children of the Jews? Not at all, but gentiles. That is why he adds, "And he shall judge among the gentiles." This especially is the function of the law: to sit in judgment over those who fight against it... From this, it is clear that the text deals with the New Covenant, because God will judge in the midst of the nations, as Paul says, "In the day when God judges men's secrets." How will he judge? Tell me. By the Old Covenant? Not at all, but "according to my gospel." Do you see that although the words are different, the ideas are the same? Isaiah says, "He shall judge in the midst of the gentiles." Paul says, "He shall judge according to my gospel." (pp.68–9)

This immediate validity of the Old Testament word for the Christians is linked to its being "written," that is, confined as an official divine statement for the ages. Chrysostom goes so far as to say that sometimes the words of the Old Testament are actually addressed to the Christians since they were written in a cryptic way such as not to be understood by the Jews, who would have otherwise excised them from the text (see his discussion of Is 7:14 where he refers to the burning of Jeremiah's scroll by Jehoiakim the king of Judah; p.147). This direct application of the Old Testament text to the Christians of his

[27] Here again Chrysostom took seriously Paul's teaching that the new covenant is no less "covenant" than the old and, consequently, the gospel is no less "law' then the Mosaic Law: "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2), "the law of the Spirit of life" (Rom 8:2).

time is no passing thought in Chrysostom's mind, but rather a firm stand on his part. This is clear from his virtually systematic use of the contemporary term "barbarian/s" whenever the text is referring to the "nations/Gentiles."[28]

SCRIPTURE IS TO BE "HEARD"

Thus, Scripture—the word of God consigned into writing—was *written* and therefore possesses official authority as a constitutional document which overrides other claims to authenticity and authority, whether oral or written, whether earlier or later.[29] Furthermore, it was *written* to be "read [aloud]" in order for it to be heard in the sense of "hearkened to," "obeyed."[30] That is, it is not simply read by an individual for himself as though he becomes informed of something, but it is "read unto him" by someone else for him *to abide by it*, i.e., as a prophetic, and thus divine, instruction (*torah*):

> The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near... I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to

[28] See e.g. pp.40, 46, 51, 70, 77, 79, 83, 87, 120, 121, 129, 140, 160.

[29] Gal 1:8–9; 6:11; 2 Thess 2:2, 15; 3:6, 17.

[30] Romans, which is an exposition of the Pauline gospel requires first and foremost such obedience (ὑπακοὴ) to it as is clear from the fact that obedience to the gospel forms an *inclusio* to the entire letter: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God... the gospel concerning his Son... Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the* obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations" (Rom 1:1–5); "Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith" (16:25–26) [emphasis added].

> him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Rev 1:1–3; 22:18–19)

Once again, this is what Chrysostom understood perfectly as being the sacred duty of the one dealing with the scriptural word: to be its *minister* in order to *administer* it to its hearers:

> It is not the management of corn and barley, oxen or sheep, that is now under our consideration, nor any such like matters, but the very body of Jesus. For the Church of Christ, according to Saint Paul, is Christ's body, and he who is entrusted with its care ought to train it up to a state of healthiness, and beauty unspeakable, and to look everywhere, lest any spot or wrinkle, or other like blemish should mar its vigor and comeliness. For what is this but to make it appear worthy, so far as human power can, of the incorruptible and ever- blessed head which is set over it? If they who are ambitious of reaching an athletic condition of body need the help of physicians and trainers, and exact diet, and constant exercise, and a thousand other rules (for the omission of the merest trifle upsets and spoils the whole), how shall they to whose lot falls the care of the body, which has its conflict not against flesh and blood, but against powers unseen, be able to keep it sound and healthy, unless they far surpass ordinary human virtue, and are versed in all healing proper for the soul? Pray art thou not aware that that body is subject to more diseases and assaults that this flesh of ours, is more quickly corrupted, and more slow to recover? And by those who have the healing of these bodies, divers medicines have been discovered, and an apparatus of different instruments, and diet suitable for the sick; and often the condition of the atmosphere is of itself enough for the recovery of a sick man; and there are instances of seasonable sleep having saved the physician all further labor. But in the case before us, it is impossible to take any of these things into consideration; nay there is but one method and way of healing appointed, after we have gone wrong, and that is, *the powerful application of the word.*[31]

[31] Some translations have "Word," understanding that Chrysostom was referring to the word of Scripture or the word of the gospel. There is no

> *This is the one instrument the only diet, the finest atmosphere.* This takes the place of physic, cautery and cutting, and if it be needful to sear and amputate, this is the means which we must use, and if this be of no avail, all else is wasted; with this we both rouse the soul when it sleeps, and reduce it when it is inflamed; with this we cut off excesses, and fill up defect, and perform all manner of other operations which are requisite for the soul's health.[32] [emphasis added]

The centrality of hearing goes back to the origin itself of the message communicated. What is consigned in writing is not the product of a "vision," but of a verbal communication. As I indicated in the introduction to this paper, from the standpoint of Scripture, it could not have been otherwise. Chrysostom takes this matter at heart by understanding "vision" as a metaphor for "hearing" and not at face value, as is classically done especially in Orthodox theological circles, to the extent that the "vision of God" has become the crimson thread around which the entire theological endeavor is woven:

> "The vision which Isaiah saw." He calls the prophecy a vision... Perhaps [it was] because, for the prophets, the hearing of a word from God was no less than having seen it, but was just as convincing, although it was not physically possibly for them to see it. For it is the custom of all those who transmit the words of God to establish before everything else that they say nothing of themselves, but declare what words are divine oracles and what letters have come down from heaven... He makes the message credible by calling it a vision, and he excites the hearer and guides him to the one who revealed it. For it is the custom of all those who transmit the

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doubt that he was intending to say that the minister is to administer, through his own word[s], the word[s] of God. Indeed, earlier John alludes to Ephesians when he writes: "For the Church of Christ, according to Saint Paul, is Christ's body, and he who is entrusted with its care ought to train it up to a state of healthiness, and beauty unspeakable, and to look everywhere, lest any spot or wrinkle, or other like blemish should mar its vigor and comeliness." This is directly taken from Ephesians 5 where Paul states clearly that this action of cleansing care of Christ's body is done "by the washing of water with the word" (v.26). In Ephesians the "word" refers to the word of God (6:17) or the gospel (1:13).

[32] *On the Priesthood*, 4.2,3.

> words of God to establish before everything else that they say nothing of themselves, but declare what words are divine oracles and what letters have come down from heaven. (p.39)

Chrysostom actually discards any discussion concerning the "vision" as unnecessary, indeed impossible:

> "Which Isaiah saw." As for how the prophets saw these things, and what they saw, it is not ours to say. For it is not possible to describe verbally the nature of a vision. Only the one who has experienced it knows clearly what it is like. For if, as is often the case, no one can describe verbally natural deeds and experiences, how much more difficult is it to describe the effects of the Spirit? If indistinct images must suffice in the attempt, then they are not able to present a distinct picture, but only present the reader with a hint. (pp.40–1)

He then proceeds to speak *metaphorically*—just as Scripture itself does—when venturing his opinion:

> Now *it seems to me* that this is how it is with the prophets: just as it is the nature of pure water to become illumined when it receives the sun's rays, even so the souls of the prophets, which first of all have been purified by their virtue,[33] and then have received the gift of the Spirit, are made to produce that brilliant light and thus receive knowledge of future events. (p.41) [emphasis added]

The reason behind the superiority of the verbal message over the vision lies in the fact that the latter is subservient to its recipient's interpretation; whereas the expressed word is as clear as a bell, especially when it is handed down as a "command" to be obeyed. Hence the prophetic "call narratives" are usually cast in a way that the prophet is shown to be *forced* in doing something he would rather not do (Is 6:11; Jer 1:6–8; 20:9; 1 Cor 9:16–19) or something apparently to no avail (Ezek 2:3–7; 3.4–9; 1 Cor 9:22b).

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[33] One is entitled to disagree in this matter with Chrysostom who is using here the way of Hellenistic "virtue" and not taking into consideration that the divine choice is done actually regardless of the "worthiness" of the person to receive the spiritual gift (Is 6:5; Jer 6:5; Rom 9:10–12; Gal 1:13–16), "otherwise grace would no longer be grace" in Paul's words (Rom 11:6).

Moreover, the validity of the couple word/hearing as the sole bridge of communication between God and his prophet remains when that bridge is extended to the prophet's addressees. Since the prophetic words are written to be "heard" in order to be obeyed lest one undergo God's wrath, they are written in a way that is easily *understood* and even *remembered*.[34] Regarding the ease for understanding, Chrysostom generally points out the scriptural use of human language as God's way of condescending to the human level of perception:

> Isaiah saw God in an assumed form, one as much lowered as Isaiah's weakness was elevated. That neither he nor anybody else has seen bare divinity is made very clear by what they claim. For example, Isaiah says, "I saw the Lord seated." But God does not sit. He does not have a bodily form. (p.124)
>
> Yet he indicates that he can bring them out with even more ease when he says, "And he shall whistle for them from the ends of the

[34] This correct understanding of what Scripture is all about, was kept in the tradition of Islam whose language is another Semitic language, Arabic. Islam's Scripture is found as a written text in a book called *Qur'an* (something to be read [aloud]) from the same root *qr'* as in Hebrew. Furthermore, the reading [aloud] itself of the *Qur'an* is referred to as *'adhan* (ears; something to be administered through the ear) from the same root *'dhn* as the Hebrew *'zn* (ear)—the Arabic *dh* corresponds to the Hebrew *z*. Finally, the reader [aloud] of the *Qur'an* is called *mu'adhdhin* ("someone who makes others hear," "someone who makes something heard") from the causal form corresponding to the Hebrew Hiphil *he'ezin*, which is profusely used in the Old Testament and often translated "give ear." It often parallels *šm'* (hear) and it is notable that in eight of these instances (Judg 5:3; Job 33:1, 31; 34:2, 16; Is 1:2; 28:23; Hos 5:1) the LXX uses *enōtizomai*, a nominal verb from *ous* (ear) whose genitive is *ōtos*. This verb occurs in Acts 2:14 (But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear (*enōtisasthe*) to my words."). The verb for hearing in the Semitic languages, as in others, carries this connotation of listening/hearkening to something in order to obey it. This is the linguistic foundation of the principle expressed in Deut 30:14: "But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, *so that you can do it.*" Likewise, Deut 27:26 (echoed later in Gal 3:10) makes the "doing" of the words of the law unavoidable: "Cursed be he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them."

> earth." Do not be surprised if, in talking about God, he uses some rather course expressions. He has to adopt his language to the ignorance of his audience since he wants to show by any means one thing, namely, that this is easy for God and they will certainly encounter it. That is why he adds, "And they shall come with great speed." (pp.120–1)

As for the importance of remembering, he has the following interesting comments:

> Well then, why do they make accusations in song? They employ spiritual wisdom out of a desire to implant a great benefit in the souls of those who hear. After all, nothing is as beneficial as always having one's mistakes in one's memory, and nothing makes the memory as permanent as a song. In order that they not shrink away because of the severity of the accusations and avoid remembering their own sins, in part of the song he conceals the shame and makes the unbearable hopelessness less severe. He composes these songs so that, compelled by their love for the melody, they will recite them continually, and continually be reminded of what they contain, and always have some teaching about virtue and a continual reminder of their sins. (pp.105–6)

LOVE FOR THE NEIGHBOR

Remains the question, what is the scriptural authoritative message to be heard and obeyed? If the Law, and thus the gospel, is formally as well as materially the expression of God's condescension and compassionate love, it stands to reason that the heart and soul of its requirements be also an act of condescension and compassionate love—not as a give-back to the one who thus behaved toward us, God forbid! It would be an insult at best, a blasphemy at worst—rather toward our needy neighbor. This does not mean that Chrysostom is reading Paul's teaching (Gal 5:14; Rom 13:9)—one should never forget that, for Paul, "the gospel of God" is uttered "through his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (Rom 1:1–2)—but rather he is extracting this teaching from the Law and the Prophets. That is why he keeps underscoring time and again to his hearers what they are bound to do now that, in his compassion, God is delaying his coming, what they must do in order not to be struck by his just judgment. The same law that bears God's love equally carries his "instruction" including his express commandment to us:

"Give justice to the orphan. Vindicate the widow." God has much to say against making people suffer injustice, but more when, in addition to suffering injustice, they are enwrapped in another misfortune. Both widowhood and orphanhood are of themselves unbearable, but when the victims are abused by other people, the personal calamity is doubled. "'Come, let us reason together,' says the Lord." One must observe that everywhere in the prophets God seeks nothing so much as that they should defend the afflicted. Thus it says elsewhere, in Micah, when the Jews say, "Shall I give my firstborn for my guilt, my own offspring for my soul's guilt?" that he comes back with the words, "I shall proclaim to you, man, what is right, and what the Lord requires of you. What is it but to provide justice, love, and mercy and to be ready to go before the Lord your God?" Again, the prophet David says, "I will sing to you, Lord, of mercy and justice." (p.52)

"They do not bring about justice to orphans." That is, they will not be their protectors and obtain justice for them. "And they do not give heed to the cause of widows." One must be on guard against committing evil; but to fail to do good is also a type of wickedness, as it says in the New Testament. *Those who do not feed the hungry, but who do not steal others' possessions, while still not letting their possessions go to the needy, will be sent to the fire of hell.* So now they are reproached, not for being greedy or oppressive, but because they do not extend a helping hand to the needy. (p.56) [emphasis added]

Nothing is so irritable to God as acts of injustice against the poor. It said, "Woe to the mighty men," not simply to discredit power, but power used for evil. He does not mean physical strength, but power over the affairs of men. "And I will execute judgment on my enemies." "I will chastise my enemies," and *by his enemies he means the enemies of the poor*, because of how they abuse them. He said this so that you may learn the magnitude of injustice. (p.57) [emphasis added]

"But why have you set my vineyard on fire? And plunder from the poor is in your houses." God always shows great concern for the oppressed, no less so than when sins are directly against him. In fact, he is even more provoked by offenses against the lower class... To intensify the charge, he did not say, "Why have you destroyed the lower class," "your neighbors," or "your brothers," but "Why

> have you destroyed and ruined my possessions?" To clarify what he means by "set on fire" he says, "And the plunder from the poor is in your houses." Not even hail does as much damage to a vineyard as injustice does by inflaming the soul of the poor man and day laborer. It pulls that soul down to a despondency worse than any death. Rapaciousness is always evil, but especially when the one who is abused is in terrible poverty. (pp.91–92)

JOHN OF THE GOLDEN MOUTH

In Psalm 19:7–10, the psalmist describes the glorious work of the Lord in creating the sun as a backdrop for praising the Torah. In so doing, he gives us a clue for understanding the real significance of John Chrysostom's sobriquet:

> The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. *More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.* [Emphasis added]

Gold, the most precious substance, is less valuable than the word of God which gives life. John not only preached and taught this word, but he did so in such a way as to unlock the treasure house of God's verbal grace for succeeding generations. If in our own preaching and exhortation of the people entrusted to our care we do any less, we are liable to the charge of hypocrisy each time we utter the honorary name of the greatest preacher of the word of life in our history.

Put otherwise, Chrysostom proved to be the truest disciple of Paul. They both realized that not only did the scriptural God reveal himself through "understandable" words, but also that these words are actually the words that came out of the prophets' mouths; hence the book headings "The words of Jeremiah" and "The words of Amos" and the following metaphor in Ezekiel:

> And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it." Then I

> ate it; and *it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.* And he said to me, "Son of man, go, get you to the house of Israel, and speak with *my words* to them. For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel—(Ezek 3:1–5)

That is why Chrysostom did not differentiate between the Old Testament and the New Testament: they both are Scripture in that they both contain the "written," and thus authoritative, words of God. In other words, he took very seriously that the scriptural word of God is "written words," which he both ate and fed to his people in Antioch. This took so much of his energy that, luckily for us, he did not have time—or rather had the scriptural wisdom not —to engage in the debate about correct and incorrect "human" formulas. The century of this debate was ironically hailed as "golden." Chrysostom, instead, opted for God's ordinances that "are to be desired more than gold, even much fine gold." These human debates about right and wrong formulas and "theologies" filled history with centuries of bloodshed. These debates are still waged today to extol one's "theology" or "orthodoxy," rather than using the scriptural words themselves, as is done in the "Little Entrance" of St John Chrysostom's Liturgy. There, not only are the written words of the four gospels referred to as "God's wisdom" to which we are summoned to be "attentive," but also we are asked to worship and fall down to them as the only valid "icon" of the true Christ. Indeed, the true Christ is the scriptural Christ who, no less than his "God" (Eph 1:3, 17), is revealed exclusively in and through the scriptural words.[35]

That is also why perhaps, above all else, Chrysostom's lasting—if not everlasting value—lies in that he opened and still opens for us a way out of the senseless bloodshed—as often occurred in the past—and out of a tradition of arrogance and belittling of others connected with "theological" debates—as often occurs in the present. He did and still does this through his tirelessly repetitive stress on the love for the neighbor. He reminds us that God's judgment to decide on whether we shall be admitted into his kingdom will not lie in checking whether

[35] This is not to be construed, as often theologians do, as though God and his Christ are "hidden" in the Scriptures and the theologian's task is to extract them out of the text, i.e., as though God's words are mere building blocks for us to construct "him and his Christ" out of these words.

we have mastered the correct "Orthodox" formulation for the true faith as embedded in the Scriptures. Judgment will be implemented according to the Matthean "law of Christ": "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21). That is why the first of the canonical gospels, which has always set the tone for the rest of the New Testament in the same way as the Law sets the tone for the rest of the Old Testament, carries the following teaching:

> Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. (Mt 5:7)
>
> I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. (9:13; 12:7)
>
> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. (23:23)

The teaching culminates where it started, with the judgment of all according to the rule of mercy:

> ... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me... for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me... Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. (25:35–36, 40, 42–43, 45)

"WHAT MANNER OF MAN?":[1] EARLY SYRIAC REFLECTIONS ON ADAM

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> "Many are the wonders, yet none more wonderful than man. He makes himself a path across the stormy sea, wears away with his plow the unwearied earth, snares the beasts of air, land, water, and masters all creatures by his art. Speech and wind-swift thought and state-ordering craft he taught himself, and how to find shelter from the elements. He has resource for all; without resource he meets nothing that is to come. From death alone he has procured no escape, though against irresistible diseases he devised remedies. Wise beyond belief in inventive craft he comes now to evil now to good. Honoring the laws of the land and god-sworn justice, he stands high in the state; boldly dwelling with what is not right he is city-less."[2]

These famous words of Sophocles' *Antigone* resound, in one fashion or another, throughout Classical and Medieval thought. Although Sophocles does not venture into the question of where man came from, one

[1] While the sentiment of this question is found several times in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms, I have 'pilfered' the precise phrasing "What Manner of Man?" from a small collection of sermons of St. Bonaventure, the great thirteenth century Franciscan theologian [Zachary Hayes, tr., *What Manner of Man? Sermons on Christ by St. Bonaventure* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974)]. I have, however, taken the single liberty of applying the phrase to the Biblical Adam, whereas St. Bonaventure was clearly preaching about Christ.

[2] Cf. Sophocles, *Antigone*, 332–371; the paraphrase here is taken from Laszlo Versényi, *Man's Measure: A Study of the Greek Image of Man from Homer to Sophocles* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974) 208.

does no damage either to his thought or to the biblical text to recognize in this passage sentiment that is not at all contradictory to the received biblical account. Nowadays, however, most modern currents of thought regularly eschew the biblical and classical models of the nature of man, contenting themselves to presume the scientific, post-Cartesian, model which sees man as little more than a collection of water, flesh and blood that happens—apparently by pure random accident—to be capable of movement and speech. Biblical scholars, perhaps presuming this modern notion of man as rather unimportant, limit their explications of the creation accounts in Genesis almost entirely to historical, linguistic, or philological comparisons to other Ancient Near Eastern and/or Egyptian texts.[3] Occasionally one does find a commentator who will venture so far as to confront or to reconcile the biblical text with certain scientific notions, such as evolution.[4] Only the more so-called traditionalists ever get themselves entangled in the question of what the Bible tells us about the nature of man or the grandeur of his creation.[5] This scientific understanding of man exerts extraordinary influence today even on modern Biblical exegesis, particularly in regard to the Genesis accounts of creation; there are nonetheless some significant recent publications that attempt to break through this impasse.[6]

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[3] See, for example, the standard commentaries: John Skinner, *Genesis* (International Critical Commentary; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910); Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part One: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961); Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Anchor Bible, 1; New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964); Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1984).

[4] See Bruce Vawter, *A Path Through Genesis* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956); and Zachary Hayes, *What are they saying about Creation?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).

[5] For example, Jean Daniélou, *In the Beginning . . . Genesis I-III* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1965); Joseph Ratzinger, *'In the Beginning . . .': A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

[6] Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man* (Platina: Brother of Hermann Brotherhood, 2000) is an Orthodox response to the western scientific way of thinking. While a bit fundamentalist, it contains many quotations from the Fathers of the Church and attempts to confront the modern scientific notion of man "head on"; Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Read-*

This historical and scientific influence on theological matters has been so pervasive for so long that, already as much as a half century ago, it has forced a number of theologians, such as the Russian Orthodox historian and theologian Fr. George Florovsky to assert that "the first task of the contemporary preacher is the 'reconstruction of belief.'"[7]

With regard to the biblical book of Genesis, it would be no exaggeration to say that in the early church it was the single most popular book in the writings of early Christian theologians and commentators. A great number of homilies and treatises, and not a few commentaries on Genesis also direct the preponderant amount of their attention to the pericopes of the creation of the world, the fall of Adam and Eve, and their subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden.[8] Augustine is, of course, the most remarkable example of this, having commented

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ing Genesis (New York: Free Press, 2003) offers a very interesting reading of Genesis from a "wisdom perspective." A recent collection of patristic texts also testifies to an apparent interest in more traditional interpretations; see Andrew Louth, ed., *Genesis 1–11* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 1; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), and Mark Sheridan, ed., *Genesis 12–50* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament 2; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

[7] George Florovsky, "The Lost Scriptural Mind," in George Florovsky, *The Collected Works, vol. I: Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont: Nordland, 1972) 15, 9–10 [originally appeared as "As the Truth is in Jesus" in *The Christian Century* (December 19, 1951)]. A fuller exposition of Florovsky's thinking on Scripture can be found in his essay, "Revelation and Interpretation," also found in *Bible, Church, Tradition*, 17–36 [originally appeared in A. Richardson and W. Schweitzer, eds., *Biblical Authority for Today* (London, 1951) 163–180].

[8] A comprehensive study is a great *desideratum*, but brief overviews can be found in Gregory T. Armstrong, *Die Genesis in der Alten Kirche. Die Drei Kirchenväter* (Beiträge zur Geschichte ser Biblischen Hermeneutik, 4; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1962), and Emmanuele Testa, *Il Peccato di Adamo nella Patristica (Gen. III)* (Studii Biblici Franciscani Analecta, 3; Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1970). One can now also consult the texts gathered in Louth, *Genesis 1–11*, and Mark Sheridan, *Genesis 12–50*, as well as the commentary of Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, cited above.

on the book in so many of his works,[9] but numerous other authors have also found great inspiration in the pericopes of Genesis 1–3.[10]

The purpose of this paper, however, is not to survey the more common, and fairly well known, Greek and Latin traditions. It is rather to bring to the fore a much less well-known tradition, that of the early Syrian Church, a very rich tradition that still today has not received the consideration and study that it deserves. In particular, it means to highlight the more salient points of how this early Syrian Church interpreted the figure of the protoplast Adam, and particularly his creation and its importance for the world. Since such a paper as this cannot be in any sense comprehensive, our treatment will focus on the writings of a few important authors of the early period of Syriac commentary literature who are representative figures of the various early schools of interpretation in the Syrian Church, but who also happen to be key leaders in their respective Christological traditions: Ephrem (d. 373), Narsai (d.c. 502), Isaac of Antioch (fifth century?), Jacob of Sarug (d. 521), and Jacob of Edessa (d. 708).

Our purpose in this paper is a simple descriptive demonstration of the ideas of these authors on the nature of the biblical figure of Adam before his fall. As already noted Adam, the protoplast, has been the subject of meditation, speculation, and analysis from the time of the very first Christian commentaries right up to the present day. These writings have tended to concentrate on Adam in his relation to Eve, in their subsequent joint fall from grace, and in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden where they had been intended to reside before their

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[9] The books in which Augustine most extensively comments on Genesis are: *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, *Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees*, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, the *Confessions* Books XI-XIII, the *City of God* Books XI-XV, as well as in numerous sermons devoted to themes from Genesis; see also the comments, with bibliographic information, in Angelo di Berardino, *Patrology IV* (Rome: Augustinian Patristic Institute, 1986) 377–378.

[10] The more well known works are, perhaps, Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, Jerome, *Commentary on Genesis*, Basil's *Hexaemeron* with the additions of Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory's own *On the Making of Man*. A fairly complete list of early writers on Genesis can be gleaned from the appendices in Andrew Louth, *Genesis 1–11*, 177–182, and Mark Sheridan, *Genesis 12–50*, 353–356.

revolt from God and punishment. Without downplaying the importance of these themes, I propose here rather to look at how these five Syrian commentators perceived Adam in his pre-lapsarian state and, in particular, how they interpreted both his status and his role in the eyes of God as well as in this newly created world. As we shall see, the Syrian authors we will look at all held Adam—and by inference mankind—to be of much greater importance even than he was held in the classical and medieval worlds.

It is also to be hoped that the following exposition will, at least in some small way, respond to the challenge sounded by Luke Timothy Johnson to bring patristic methods of interpretation back into the discussion of modern biblical interpretation and particularly to introduce to the discussion those less known non-western traditions that have remained unknown in the west until very recently.[11] In fact, with the exception of Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* and *Hymns on Paradise*, and a few lines of Narsai, none of the texts cited below have ever before appeared in English. This fact alone is a bit astonishing. It is hoped that this paper will perhaps help to inspire some redressing of this unfortunate situation; the interpretation of the Bible in the Syrian tradition does not, perhaps, contain any astonishingly new revelations, but its distinctive voice certainly merits to be heard.

EPHREM

Ephrem lived entirely in the fourth century, c. 309–373. His life span was nearly the exact length of the reign of the Persian King Shapur II, in whose kingdom Ephrem spent all but the last ten years of his life. Apart from his being born in Nisibis and having died in Edessa, very little is known of Ephrem's life. What is well known is the vast number of writings that he composed during his lifetime. While he is best

[11] Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, SJ, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) is a well-reasoned corrective for certain contemporary models of interpretation as well as a guide for the direction in which modern biblical studies need to go. Johnson's arguments for reincorporating patristic interpretation are found throughout his first two essays.

known for his poetry, unequalled in the early Church,[12] he also composed a number of prose works, including commentaries, treatises, and anti-heretical tracts. This large corpus of his writings is of such beauty and theological depth that Ephrem was widely known, even well beyond his own Syrian borders, as the "Harp of the Holy Spirit."[13] It was once said of Origen that he "stands out in the third century Church like an oak on the prairie";[14] the same could be said of Ephrem and his place in the history of Syriac literature.

For Ephrem, as well as for his countrymen, Adam is not an accidental product of an orderless or random universe, nor is he even simply a great—or even the greatest—of all God's creation; rather, he is the very focal point—the *raison d'être*—of all creation. As Ephrem states quite clearly in his *Hymns on Paradise* VI.6:

> It was not Paradise
> that gave rise to the creation of mankind;
> rather, it was for Adam alone
> that Paradise had been planted,
> for to its buds Adam's heart is superior

[12] Robert Murray, "Ephrem Syrus, St." in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1967) 2:222, states unreservedly that "Personally, I do not hesitate to evaluate Ephrem not only as the true ancestor of Romanos and therefore of the Byzantine *Kontakion*, but as the greatest poet of the patristic age and, perhaps, the only theologian-poet to rank beside Dante." He reiterated this in his foundational study, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975) 31.

[13] For further on the life and writings of Ephrem, see Sebastian P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (2d ed., Cistercian Study Series 124; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), and our introduction in Edward G. Mathews, Jr. and Joseph P. Amar, *Selected Prose Works of Ephrem the Syrian* (Fathers of the Church 91; Washington: Catholic University Press, 1994) 3–56. A complete bibliography of the writings of, and attributed to, Ephrem as well as of secondary studies can be found in Kees den Biesen, *Bibliography of Ephrem the Syrian* (Giove in Umbria: Kees den Biesen, 2002).

[14] Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Fathers of the Church 71; Washington: Catholic University Press, 1982) 1.

to its fruits his words.[15]

We must remember too that Adam is not only Adam the protoplast, but he is also Adam the model and progenitor of the entire human race. Ephrem, in his *Commentary on Genesis*, thus sums up the six days of creation, by reiterating that it was solely for the purpose of Adam/man, that creation was effected in the first place:

> "Thus, through light and water the earth brought forth everything. While God is able to bring forth everything from the earth without these things, it was His will to show that there was nothing created on earth that was not created for the purpose of [Adam/]mankind or for his service."[16]

This special and particular love and care that God directed to Adam is also an exclusive love. This theme is especially prominent in a number of Ephrem's works.[17] In his *Hymns on Faith*, for example, Ephrem says that "from the very beginning God opened up the treasury of His Mercy when He formed Adam."[18] In another of his hymns, he says even more directly:

> That Adam was the cause [of creation][19] is older
> than the creatures that were established for him.

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[15] Edmund Beck, ed., *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum* (CSCO 174–175; Louvain: Peeters, 1957) 20. English translation in Sebastian P. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 1990) 110.

[16] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, I.10, in Raymond M. Tonneau, ed., *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii* (CSCO 152–153; Louvain: Peeters, 1955) 13–14. English translation in Mathews, *Selected Prose Works of Ephrem the Syrian*, 82.

[17] See general discussions in Tryggve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian* (Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series, 11; Uppsala: CWK Gleerup, 1978) 45–84, and Nabil El-Khoury, *Die Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem dem Syrer: Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte* (Tübinger Theologische Studien, 6; Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 1976) 97–145.

[18] *Hymns on Faith* 67:19, in Edmund Beck, ed., *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide* (CSCO 154–155; Louvain: Peeters, 1955) 208.

[19] Literally, "the cause of Adam".

> For the whole time the Creator was creating
> His regard was for Adam.[20]

Ephrem's conviction that this love of God for Adam was so powerful leads him, alone of all the authors considered in this article, to emphasize that God had still prepared the rest of creation for Adam's benefit, even though He knew beforehand that Adam was going to fall.[21] As Ephrem explains, in two rather lengthy excerpts from his *Commentary on Genesis*, that:

> Although Adam was created and was blessed to rule over the earth and over everything that was created and blessed therein, God had indeed made him to dwell within Paradise. God truly manifested His foreknowledge in His blessing and manifested His grace in the place where He set Adam to dwell. Lest it be said that Paradise was not created for [Adam's] sake, [God] set him there in Paradise to dwell. And lest it be said that God did not know that Adam would sin, He blessed him on this earth. And everything with which God blessed Adam preceded the transgression of the commandment, lest by the transgression of him who had been blessed, the blessings of Him who gave the blessings be withheld and the world be turned back into nothing on account of the folly of that one for whose sake everything had been created.
>
> Therefore, God did not bless Adam in Paradise, because that place and all that is in it is blessed. But God blessed him on the earth first so that by that blessing with which [His] grace blessed beforehand, the curse of the earth, which was about to be cursed by [His] justice, might [thus] be diminished. But even though the blessing was one of promise, in that it was fulfilled after his expulsion from Paradise, His grace, nevertheless, was of actuality, for on that same

[20] *Hymns on Nisibis* 38.9, in Edmund Beck, ed., *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena II* (CSCO 240–241; Louvain: Peeters, 1963) 21.

[21] For a general discussion of God's love for Adam, see Kronholm, *Motifs*, 57–81.

> day, [God] set [Adam] in the garden to dwell, clothed him with glory and made him ruler over all the trees of Paradise.[22]
>
> [God withheld from them the tree of life,] lest this life-giving gift that they would receive through the tree of life become misery, and thus bring worse evil upon them than what they had already obtained from the tree of knowledge. From the latter [tree] they obtained temporal pains, whereas the former [tree] would have made those pains eternal. From the latter they obtained death which would cast off from them the bonds of their pains. The former [tree], however, would have caused them [to live] as if buried alive, leaving them to be tortured eternally by their pains. [God], therefore, withheld from them the tree of life. It was not right either that a life of delights be allowed in the land of curses or that eternal life be found in a transitory world.[23]

It is quite clear from the preceding that, according to Ephrem, God clearly intended from the very beginning to exalt Adam over all the rest of His creation. He brings to the attention of his readers the "glory" of Adam, a glory that is greater than all other creatures. In this way, Ephrem highlights how very special Adam is to God, "the apple of his eye," so to speak. But now it must be asked, just how in fact did God bring this about? Ephrem explains this by simply pointing out that the text of Genesis makes it quite clear that Adam was purposefully created in a different fashion from the rest of creation and was given very special gifts that they did not receive. Ephrem posits that there were three main factors that determined the special nature of Adam; he says, again from his *Commentary on Genesis*, that

> Even though the beasts, the cattle, and the birds were equal [to Adam] in their ability to procreate and in that they had life, God still gave honor to Adam in many ways: first, in that it was said, *God formed him with His own hands and breathed life into him* (Gen 2:7). God then set him as ruler over Paradise and over all that is

[22] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, I.31. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim*, 24–25; Mathews, *Selected Prose Works of Ephrem the Syrian*, 95–96.

[23] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, II.35. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim*, 45–46; Mathews, *Selected Prose Works of Ephrem the Syrian*, 122–123.

> outside of Paradise. [Lastly, God] clothed [Adam] in glory, and gave him His speech and reason so that he might perceive his dignity.[24]

Ephrem mentions in several places that Adam was created by God's own hand, which he usually identifies with Christ, but he does not really develop it any further.[25] With regard to Adam's dominion over the earth, it might be best to turn first to Ephrem's comments on the text of Genesis 1:26, for here Ephrem maintains that this dominion is precisely what the expression "image and likeness of God," means in the case of Adam.[26] As Ephrem says, in his *Commentary on Genesis*:

> *And God said, "Let us make man in our image*." According to what has been the rule until now, namely, if it is pleasing to [God] He will make it known to us, Moses explains in what way we are the image (Syr. *ṣalmâ*) of God, when he said "*Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds, and over the cattle, and over all the earth*." It is the dominion that Adam received over the earth and over all that is in it that constitutes the likeness (Syr. *d'mûthâ*) of God who has dominion over the heavenly things and the earthly things.[27]

Although Ephrem speaks here both in terms of how ***we***, i.e., human beings, are the "image of God," and of how Adam is "the likeness of God," Ephrem nonetheless leaves little doubt of what he understands this phrase "image of God" to mean—it is the ruling authority that God, as ruler of the entire Universe, has bestowed upon Adam: as God rules over the universe, He has given Adam authority over the

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[24] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, II.4. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim*, 27–28; Mathews, *Selected Prose Works of Ephrem the Syrian*, 99.

[25] See Kronholm, *Motifs*, 52, with references to Ephrem's hymns.

[26] As Kronholm, *Motifs*, 45, notes, "the most eminent work in the Creation Adam is [that he is] in an absolutely distinguished way formed the *imago imaginis dei* by God's First-born." This aspect of the phrase "image of God" is primary for Ephrem, as well as for all the other authors still to be treated here; treatment of this theme is, however, beyond the scope of this paper; for Ephrem, see further, Kronholm, *Motifs*, 45–51.

[27] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, I.29. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim*, 23; Mathews, *Selected Prose Works of Ephrem the Syrian*, 94.

earth.[28] From this same passage it is equally clear that Ephrem understands the two terms "image (Syr. *ṣalmâ*)" and "likeness (Syr. *d'mûthâ*) as synonyms; each indicates precisely the rulership that God has granted to Adam over the created world. In this interpretation Ephrem is not offering his own novel or unique interpretation, but is simply following a common interpretation of the phrase "image and likeness of God" found in both Jewish and Antiochian traditions.[29]

One specific aspect of Adam's dominion over the earth that Ephrem highlights in several places is the fact that Adam alone was given the task of bestowing names upon each and every creature that God had made. In fact, this aspect of Adam's dominion even seems to be, for Ephrem, the most significant indication of Adam's rule over the earth and its creatures. Once again, Ephrem sets this out most clearly in his *Commentary on Genesis*:

> Adam thus began his rule over the earth when he became lord over all on that day according to the blessing he was given. The word of the Creator came to pass in actuality and His blessing was indeed fulfilled on the same day that he was made ruler over everything, even though he would soon rebel against the Lord of everything. For God gave Adam not only rule over everything, which had been promised to him, but He also allowed him to bestow names [on the animals], which had not been promised to him. If then God did for Adam even more than he had expected, how could God have deprived Adam of these things unless Adam had sinned? For someone to give a few names to be remembered is not a great thing, but it is too large and too great a thing for any human being to bestow thousands of names in a single moment, without repeating any. It is

[28] For the theme of Adam's lordship in Ephrem, see Kronholm, *Motifs*, 67–81.

[29] See, for example, John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 2.8; Severus of Gabala, *On the Creation of the World*, 5; and Theodoret of Cyr, *Questions on Genesis*, 20; other places are cited in Frederick G. McLeod, "Man as the Image of God: Its Meaning and Theological Significance in Narsai," *Theological Studies* 42 (1981) 459–460, n.13. For a general survey, see Monique Alexandre, *Le commencement du livre Genèse I-V* (Paris, 1988) 175–188; and especially Frederick G. McLeod SJ, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

> possible for someone to bestow many names on many kinds of insects, animals, beasts, and birds, but never to name one kind by the name of another belongs either to God or to someone to whom it has been granted by God.[30]

In Jewish tradition, the fact that Adam could bestow names on all the animals without committing a single repetition was the unique sign of Adam's divine wisdom.[31] Corresponding to this, there is also a Jewish tradition whereby it was by his inability to name any creatures at all that Satan betrayed the fact that he himself had no such wisdom and, as a consequence, found himself cast out of the heavenly court.[32]

Another very distinct aspect of Adam's dominion, in the mind of Ephrem, was the visible splendor, presumably of light, that emanated from Adam and which was manifest to all the other creatures; Ephrem takes particular notice of this at that moment when Adam was bestowing all their names upon them. Again, in a passage taken from his *Commentary on Genesis*, Ephrem recounts that

> Adam, who was set up as ruler and governor over all the animals, was wiser than all the animals. He who set down names for them all is more clever than any of them. Just as Israel, without a veil, was unable to look upon the face of Moses (Exod 34.33–35), neither were the animals able to look upon the splendor of Adam. When the beasts passed before Adam and they received their names from him, they would cast their eyes downwards, for their eyes could not endure the glory of Adam.[33]

Thus, it is clear that for Ephrem the creation of Adam was a deliberate and considered act on the part of God, that Adam was the very zenith of creation upon whom God set all authority over the entire earth and all the creatures that dwelled therein. But even more than

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[30] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, II.10. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim*, 31; Mathews, *Selected Prose Works of Ephrem the Syrian*, 103–104.

[31] See *Genesis Rabbah* 17.4, *Numbers Rabbah* 19.3; and Kronholm, *Motifs*, 80, n. 103, for other references.

[32] See Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909) I:63, V.84, n.34.

[33] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, II.15. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim*, 33–34; Mathews, *Selected Prose Works of Ephrem the Syrian*, 107.

these things—and most importantly—it was very specifically and deliberately because of Adam and for the purpose of Adam that God had decided to create the world in the first place. While Ephrem treats this aspect of the creation of Adam in the greatest detail, we will see that his successors differed only in degree of emphasis and in method of exposition.

NARSAI

Narsai was born around 399 and grew up under the tutelage of his uncle in the monastery of Kfar-Mari in the region of Beth Zabdai. From there he went to the then famous School of Edessa where he studied for a decade or more. Eventually, in 437, Narsai became the director of the School of Edessa, and was still director there when, due to his promotion of the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia he, along with many others were forced to flee Syria. Narsai and a number of companions arrived in Nisibis where he helped to establish a school there in Nisibis. While Narsai may or may not have been its first head, he nonetheless played a significant role in bringing the School of Nisibis to an unrivalled prominence throughout the Mediterranean world. The School of Nisibis served as the main training ground for priests, missionaries and abbots for the Church of the East, also known as the Nestorian Church.[34]

Narsai was one of the great writers in the history of Syriac literature and has left a legacy of numerous poetical works. So far as we know, he did not write any commentaries as such, on Genesis or on any other biblical book. But he did compose a collection of six mêmrê on the creation and constitution of all created beings.[35] This collection

[34] For fuller details of the life and works of Narsai, see Philippe Gignoux, ed., *Homélies de Narsaï sur la Création* (PO 34.3–4; Turnhout: Brepols, 1969) 419–429. For the history of the famous school of Nisibis, see Arthur Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (CSCO 266; Louvain: Peeters, 1965.

[35] Gignoux, ed., *Homélies de Narsaï sur la Création* (with French translation). What 'Ebed-Jeshû'â, *Catalogus Librorum Syrorum*, LII, calls "*meshl'manûth b'rîthâ* (*Exposition on Genesis*)," no doubt refers to these mêmrê; see Joseph S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca-Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana III/I: De scriptoribus Syris Nestorianis* (Romae: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1725) 65 [reprinted, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2000]. I did not have access to Alphonse Mingana, *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et*

constitutes an extended commentary or meditation, on the first chapters of Genesis. It is the fourth of these mêmrê that deals specifically with the constitution of Adam.[36] Narsai is well known as one of the primary figures who abandoned the teaching of Ephrem in favor of the teaching of Theodore of Mopsuestia. In this mêmrâ, however, he seems to follow the teaching of Ephrem very carefully although, as we shall see, he does so in no slavish manner.[37]

In this relatively short mêmrâ Narsai does not specifically say that God brought about all creation solely for the sake of Adam (though he does so elsewhere, see below)—but here he does speak of how God gave glory to Adam His image. He also emphasizes, far more than Ephrem did, how God in turn is glorified in Adam. Narsai begins this fourth mêmrâ by stating that

> A king is honored in his image, whether it is far away or near.[38]

Here, Narsai seems to leave the question of just what constitutes this "honor" a bit vague, but later he does bring a little more precision to the question by attempting to explain it in terms of the fact that Adam had been established as lord and head over all the creatures of the earth:

Carmina (2 vols.; Mosul, 1905), so my comments are limited to the texts found in Gignoux's edition, except for what I was able to glean from the works of Frederick G. McLeod (see below).

[36] Gignoux, ed., *Homélies de Narsaï sur la Création*, 610–637.

[37] There is a certain question here over whether Narsai was still under the exegetical influence of Ephrem, or had abandoned his teaching entirely in favor of that of Theodore of Mopsuestia; see discussion in Gignoux, ed., *Homélies de Narsaï sur la Création*, 459–516, esp., 465–495, and Taeke Jansma, "Narsai and Ephraem: Some Observations on Narsai's *Homilies on Creation* and Ephraem's *Hymns on Faith*," *Parole de l'Orient* 1 (1970) 49–68. On the issue of the creation Adam, Narsai seems to me to be quite conversant with Ephrem, but we have only fragments of Theodore's *Commentary on Genesis*; see Eduard Sachau, *Theodore Mopsuesteni Fragmenta Syriaca* (Leipzig: Sumptibus Guilelmi Engelmann, 1869) 1–21; Raymond M. Tonneau, "Théodore de Mopsueste. Interprétation (du Livre) de la Genèse (Vat. Syr. 120, ff. I-V)," *Le Muséon* 66 (1953) 45–64; and Taeke Jansma, "Théodore de Mopsueste, Interprétation du Livre de la Genèse. Fragments de la version syriaque (B.M. Add. 17,189, fol. 17–21)," *Le Muséon* 75 (1962) 63–92.

[38] Gignoux, ed., *Homélies de Narsaï sur la Création*, 610, l. 1.

> The image of the Creator is as wondrous as his constitution is surpassing,
> for his lordship extends over all and all that exists is subject to him.[39]

Narsai seems to follow Ephrem in maintaining that one aspect of Adam's glory lies in the fact that he, alone of all creation, had been created by God blowing His very own Spirit into him:

> By means of a spiritual soul, [God] made [Adam] kin to the angels,
> while through a structure of limbs He joined him to the mute creatures.
> Our Lord "formed Adam from dust from the ground,
> blew into him, and made him living and able to speak (Gen 2:7)."[40]

This ability to speak which Adam has received by reason of having God's Spirit blown into him is a characteristic of Adam that Narsai seems to introduce into the exegesis of this text. While perhaps it found its way into Syrian exegesis through Targumic traditions,[41] it is clearly something that for Narsai, distinguished Adam from the rest of creation, and an aspect which he certainly considers to be of more significance than did Ephrem, in whose works this notion can only be found in embryonic form.[42]

Narsai again seems to follow the exegesis of Ephrem in alleging that the primary characteristic of the lordship that Adam exercised over all of creation was his being given the authority and power to bestow names upon them all. While Narsai too accords Adam great wisdom by reason of his ability to give names to all the other creatures,

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[39] Gignoux, ed., *Homélies de Narsaï sur la Création*, 616, ll. 91–92.

[40] Gignoux, ed., *Homélies de Narsaï sur la Création*, 610, ll. 7–10.

[41] The three primary Targumic traditions, Onkelos, Ps-Jonathan, and Neofiti, all replace the phrase in Gen 2:7 "he [i.e., Adam] became a living spirit," with "she" (that is, the breath that God blew into Adam) "became in Adam a speaking spirit" (Aram. *rûakh memallâ*, or "a spirit capable of speech").

[42] Ephrem only occasionally notes Adam's speech as a product of the Divine insufflation; see, for example, *Hymns on Nisibis* 49.14, in Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena II*, 67, where Adam receives all the senses, and *Commentary on Genesis*, II.4, cited above.

here too he develops the thought of Ephrem a bit further by pointing out in a bit more detail that in bestowing names upon all creatures, Adam thereby subjects them all to himself:

> His maker gave [Adam] the authority and he bestowed all the names he could;
> In this way [God] taught him that he was lord over all that He had established.
>
> To [Adam] all creatures, rational and irrational, were bound equally,
> and in their kinship to him they extolled him as king.[43]

As one would expect of anyone commenting on the Genesis text, Narsai refers to Adam as "the image of God" on several occasions in *On Adam*, but within this mêmrâ, he never makes explicit exactly what this phrase means for him. Frederick McLeod has spent a great deal of energy on this question and has greatly increased our understanding of this phrase for Narsai.[44] Narsai clearly aligns himself with Ephrem, as well as with the entire Antiochian tradition, in maintaining that the most important aspect of the phrase "image of God" is the dominion that Adam exercises over all the creatures of the earth. In the first of the homilies edited by Alphonse Mingana, Narsai has God utter:

> With the name of a nature not constituted by a maker,
> I have called the image of man when I fashioned him.
> For his sake I have created everything that is invisible and visible,

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[43] Gignoux, ed., *Homélies de Narsaï sur la Création*, 614–616, ll. 89–90, 93–94.

[44] McLeod, "Man as the Image of God," 458–468; my comments here are based on this study. On this subject one should also consult Frederick G. McLeod, "The Antiochene Tradition Regarding the Role of the Body within the 'Image of God,' in Maureen A. Tilley and Susan A. Ross, eds., *Broken and Whole: Essays on Religion and the Body* (Annual Publication of the College Theology Society 1993; Lanham: University Press of America, 1995) 23–53, and his full study, Frederick G. McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

and I have set him as a steward over what I have fashioned.[45]

In a text that is still unpublished, Narsai states even more succinctly that "Adam is the 'Image of God' and the Lord of creatures."[46]

But Narsai also introduces a new and very important notion of the "image of God" that is not to be found in Ephrem, except possibly only in very embryonic form, but which can be found clearly developed already in the thought of Theodore of Mopsuestia.[47] We already saw that for Ephrem, by reason of the fact that Adam shares physical properties with the rest of creation but has also been given speech and has received "the breath of God"; he is a sort of 'middle-man' or mediator between creation and Creator. According to Narsai, however, Adam's being the image of God makes him not simply a mediator, but a true point of unification between God and creation or, better, the unifier himself. As already cited above "all creatures, *in their unity with him*, extol him as king (emphasis added)." In the fourth mêmrâ of a collection of works edited by McLeod, Narsai states:

> [The Creator] has exalted His image with the name of image,
> in order to bind all creatures in him,
> so that they might acquire love
> by knowing Him through knowledge of His image.[48]

From the vantage point of this single subject, Narsai seems to pass down the teaching of Ephrem with all its emphases but, at the same time, inserting elements that he had found developed in the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, which became the standard teaching of the

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[45] Mingana, *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina*, I.17; translation from McLeod, "Man as the Image of God," 459, with slight alteration.

[46] McLeod, "Man as the Image of God," 459.

[47] A surviving fragment of Theodore's *Commentary on Genesis*, reads: "[it is written *in the image of God He created [Adam]* (Gen 1:27), in order to make known that the defining characteristic of [Adam']s constitution is that all creatures are to be united to him, for [all creatures] go through him to God as through an image, and in their service to him they fulfill the laws that were set down for them." See Sachau, *Theodori Mopsuesteni Fragmenta Syriaca*, 24 (Syriac text), 15 (Latin translation).

[48] Frederick G. McLeod, ed., *Narsai's Metrical Homilies on the Nativity, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension* (PO, 40.1; Turnhout: Brepols, 1979) 39; translation from McLeod, "Man as the Image of God," 459.

School of Nisibis.[49] But even with these Theodoran elements, Narsai maintains the teaching of Ephrem on the very special and unique nature of Adam.

ISAAC OF ANTIOCH

When we come to Isaac of Antioch, it must be confessed that at the current stage in Syriac studies we are dealing only with a name that has been traditionally attached to a large, specific corpus of works. While "Isaac" was counted among the greatest of the early Syriac authors (some accounts make him a disciple of Ephrem), it was not until the end of the eleventh century that the Patriarch Michael the Syrian first attempted to gather all his works into a single collection. According to current scholarly consensus, this extensive corpus of poetic works is considered to be the product of three distinct authors named Isaac, about whom nothing is really known beyond the scant information provided in a letter of Jacob of Edessa written to John the Stylite in response to his inquiry about the number and identities of those Syrian writers named Isaac. Although there was a mid-fifth century writer generally known as Isaac of Antioch (Jacob's Isaac II), Jacobs tells us very little about him, and his information is often contradictory with bits of information that can be gleaned from other early Syriac sources.[50] Thus, simply for the purposes of convenience here, we shall refer to the author of this collection simply as Isaac.

The large collection of works of Isaac has never received a proper modern critical edition, and only very little has been translated into a modern language. The only two modern—though not critical—editions have collected barely a third of all the known works attributed to these

[49] See Taeke Jansma, "Investigations into the Early Syrian Fathers on Genesis," in B. Gemser, et al., eds., *Studies on the Book of Genesis* (Oudtestamentische Studien, 12; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958) 127–128.

[50] See Ignatius Aphram Barsoum, *The Scattered Pearls: A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2003) 238, 246–250, for as good an assessment of these various Isaacs as exists. A recent initial attempt to set down criteria for determining different authors in this corpus is Tanios Bou Mansour, "Un clé pour la distinction des écrits des Isaac d'Antioche," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 79 (2003) 365–402.

Isaacs.[51] This corpus is comprised of over two hundred distinct works, most of which are written in the 7 x 7 syllable mêmrâ form. Certain pieces from this collection have received some attention, such as the long mêmrâ on the parrot who squawked out the Trisagion in an Antiochian marketplace, or certain historical texts such as the two mêmrê on the sack of Beth-Hur. But surprisingly little attention has been directed toward the many ascetic texts found therein, and the fact that this corpus contains a large number of works specifically on biblical themes is, for all intents and purposes, entirely unrecognized.[52]

The work that we will look at here, a *Mêmrâ on Adam and Eve*, has never been edited; it is not included in either of the two printed editions. This mêmrâ can be found in only two manuscripts.[53] Clearly, this text does not stem from the "commentary tradition" as do the rest of the pieces discussed in the course of this paper; it is neither a running paraphrase or commentary on the biblical text as was that of Narsai, nor is it even a theological meditation on Adam and Eve, their creation or their fall. But, in consideration of the stature of the corpus, its main theme of Adam, and the fact that even though outside this tradition it still displays some of the same features, it deserves to be considered even if more briefly.

This mêmrâ is a rather long dialogue between Adam and Eve which takes place immediately after they had been cast out of Paradise.[54] This dialogue largely centers around the lament of Adam over

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[51] Paulus Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae S. Isaaci Syri Antiocheni* I (Paris/Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1903), and Gustav Bickell, ed., *Sancti Isaaci Antiochi Doctoris syrorum opera omnia, syriace, arabiceque primus edidit, latine vertit* I-II (Gissae: Sumptibus J. Rickeri, 1873–1877). The most recent list of Isaac's works is Edward G. Mathews, Jr., "The Works attributed to Isaac of Antioch: A[nother] Preliminary Checklist," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 6.1 (2003) 55–87, and on-line at http://www.bethmardutho.org/hugoye.

[52] See Edward G. Mathews, Jr., "The Corpus attributed to Isaac of Antioch: A General Overview of its Contents," forthcoming.

[53] Ms. Vat. Syr. 120, ff. 154r-172v, and Ms. Vat. Syr. 364, ff. 180v-201v. The present writer is preparing a critical edition with English translation and annotation.

[54] Some preliminary observations concerning this mêmrâ can be found in Edward G. Mathews, Jr., "Isaac of Antioch and the Literature of Adam and Eve," in Esther G. Chazon, David Satran, and Ruth A. Clements, eds., *Things*

what he and his spouse had just lost due to their foolishness, and Eve's attempts to convince Adam that maybe their present plight is not only "not so bad," but perhaps was even the one that God had intended for them from the beginning. Despite its non-biblical basis, one can glean a few choice morsels about what Isaac thought of Adam and his place in creation. Just from the depths of Adam's lament, it is clear that for Isaac too Adam was the absolute pinnacle of creation.

Although nowhere does Isaac use the phraseology or images as we have already seen in Ephrem and Narsai, Adam was clearly created expressly for the purpose of being lord and ruler over the rest of creation; and this rule included his authority to give names to all the creatures. Isaac puts the following words into the mouth of Adam:

> I had been made a god upon earth and I was a king in the world;
> I set down names for reptiles, for carnivores, and for birds.
> Even the rich will gaze upon me and not put their trust in wealth,
> For I have trusted in it, and I perished and lost God.[55]
>
> The wealthy will look upon me and remain steadfast in [their] terror,
> For I who had more wealth than anyone fell lower than everyone.[56]
>
> I was a rich man who became poor and a free man who attained the lowland.[57]

Eve then makes her first attempt to convince Adam that he should not lament their loss of Paradise, that the earth is full of beautiful sights and sounds. She seems incapable of understanding Adam's melancholy. Adam responds that while the sights and sounds of earth might appeal to her, they are nothing but agony and torment for him, and in turn chides her for her lack of sensitivity to what is now lost to them, by reminding her again of their former place and those beings with whom they were once in intimate communion:

Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 89; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004) 331–344.

[55] Ms. Vat. Syr. 120, f. 154v.

[56] Ms. Vat. Syr. 120, f. 155r.

[57] Ms. Vat. Syr. 120, f. 156r.

Is the sound of a jackal sweeter to you than the joyful sounds of the seraphim?
Is the song of a demon better to you than the glorious sound of heavenly beings?
Is this earthly habitat so good to you that you hate and despise [the heavenly]?
For with its light there is darkness, and with its joys griefs.[58]

Eve then essays once again to persuade Adam that their expulsion is not necessarily a bad thing; perhaps, it was even intended by God. Therefore, instead of simply sitting about wailing and lamenting, they should make their way down the mountain in order to find a suitable place where they could establish their dwelling place upon the earth. Repulsed even more by this second attempt, Adam is compelled to remind her of the 'fruits' of the previous counsel that he had accepted from her:

You counseled me that I would become a god, but I became a mere worker.
You stirred me to eat and become a king; I ate and I became a vagrant.
You made me forget that I was to become a Lord, and I became an unjust servant.
You nagged me about tasting and a high place, I tasted and I reached the depths.
You provoked me day and night to pluck the fruit and to be glorified,
I plucked and ate, but I discovered I was naked and grabbed some leaves.
You made me turn and come "stretch out your hand to the tree";
you did not let me dwell in peace until I accomplished your bidding.
You taught me that I would become first, but you did not explain how or of what;
if first of sinners, then not of the just or of the good.
You persuaded me by your nagging to chew and that I would tread upon death;

[58] Ms. Vat. Syr. 120, f. 157r-157v.

> because I listened I have now turned back to the earth whence I was taken.[59]

In this mêmrâ, Isaac conveys certain of the more important elements as Ephrem and Narsai did, but he does so not so much by a systematic treatment as much as by what the reader can infer from Adam's wails of lament over what he has lost. Adam greatly laments the loss of his singular status as head and lord over creation, a status that accorded him great wealth, joy, and light. Isaac does mention that Adam's dominion included having "set down names for reptiles, for carnivores, and for birds," but for the most part he lets Adam's grandeur—the same grandeur as taught by Ephrem and Narsai—be conveyed by the laments of him who lost that grandeur.

JACOB OF SARUG

Jacob of Sarug was a member of the West Syrian, also known as the Monophysite, Church. He was born in Kurtam (near the Euphrates River) in the mid-fifth century. He attended the School of the Persians in Edessa, but rejected its teachings on Christ. He became a monk for a time but later began working as a cleric out in the Syriac countryside, where he eventually became a chorbishop. After serving some years in this position, he became the ordinary bishop of Sarug in 519. He remained in this position, preaching and writing, until his death on 29 November 521.[60]

Jacob was a prolific writer and his voluminous output covers nearly every Christian liturgical and theological topic. He was a poet of such quality that he was dubbed the "Flute of the Holy Spirit," presumably to rank him behind only Ephrem as the finest Syriac poet.[61]

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[59] Ms. Vat. Syr. 120, f. 159r.

[60] Little is known of the life of Jacob; see Barsoum, *The Scattered Pearls*, 255–261. For further guidance, see Khalil Alwan, "Bibliographie générale raisonnée de Jacques de Saroug († 521)," *Parole de l'Orient* 13 (1986) 313–383.

[61] A full study of his theology can be found in Tanios Bou Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug. Tome I: Création, Anthropologie, Ecclésiologie et Sacraments* (Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit, 36; Kaslik: Université Saint Esprit, 1993), and Tanios Bou Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug. Tome II: Christologie, Trinité, Eschatologie, Méthode Exégètique et*

Like Isaac, Jacob's works have never been entirely published; the five-volume edition of Bedjan contains only a portion of his total writings.[62] Apart from a collection of letters,[63] Jacob wrote only mêmrê in the 12 x 12 syllable pattern, which became known as the 'meter of Jacob.' The mêmrê that concern us here are those on the *Hexaemeron*, or the six days of creation. In particular, we shall look at the sixth mêmrâ of this collection which deals primarily with the creation of Adam and Eve on the sixth day.[64] We shall also take consideration of another mêmrâ titled *On the Creation of Adam and Eve as Mortals*.[65] It is above all in these two works that Jacob deals most directly with the figure of Adam.

As has already been seen in the authors previously discussed, Jacob too emphasizes the fact that Adam was not a mere creature, but was a very special and singular creature over whom God exercised a very exceptional love and upon whom He bestowed a very unique honor.

> God wished to create Adam a comely image,
> a beloved icon, an image of his Lord, the chief source.[66]
>
> Adam was honored even with a crown in his great beauty
> but among the creatures there was no other beauty like his.
> Springs of light his smith set atop his crown.[67]
>
> Who is this who so painted for Himself an eternal image,
> and filled it with wonder that it became a marvel in the world?

Théologique (Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit, 40; Kaslik: Université Saint Esprit, 2000).

[62] Paulus Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (5 vols.; Paris-Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1905–1910).

[63] Gunnar Olinder, ed., *Iacobi Sarugensis Epistulae quotquot Supersunt* (CSCO 110; Louvain: Peeters, 1965). A French translation recently appeared in Micheline Albert, *Les Lettres de Jacques de Saroug* (Patrimoine Syriaque, 3; Kaslik: Parole de l'Orient, 2004).

[64] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.97–129. See also Taeke Jansma, "L'Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarug," *L'Orient Syrien* 4 (1959) 3–42, 129–162, 253–284.

[65] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.152–175.

[66] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.108.

[67] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.157.

> The image is honored and marvelous things are proclaimed about its creator:
> How wise! How was it possible? How great a ruler!
> Wisdom painted a great image full of wonder, brought it in
> and set it in the middle of the world that [creation] could look upon it.
> It heaped adornments upon him that all creatures might be seen in him.[68]

Again, as it was with the previous authors, the significant aspect of Adam's honor was that he, alone of all creation, was created by the direct action of the hands of God:

> [God] fashioned, marked, adorned, painted, constructed, and framed [Adam],
> and when he was completed He blew into him a life-giving spirit.[69]

> By saying "Let us make man" [God] humbled Himself
> to make, with His own hands, [His] image greater than all creation
> —creatures with a gesture, Adam with the hands of Divinity—
> so that by His creation the Image of God would be honored.[70]

In addition to Adam's having been created by God's own hands, Jacob goes on at great length to point out that unlike the rest of creation that was brought into being by God's saying "let it come to be . . .," the creation of Adam, on the other hand, was brought about only when God said, "Let us make . . ."

> [God] said, "Let us make man in our image and likeness,"
> a new creation of which there is no like in the world.[71]

> He said of everything, "Let it come into being," and it came into being,
> but He did not wish to say "Let Adam come into being," like everything else.
> For the sake of Adam He did not say, "Let Adam come into being,"

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[68] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.154–155.
[69] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.113.
[70] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.109.
[71] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.109.

but rather "Let us make man in Our image and our likeness."[72]

Jacob, following the biblical text, makes Adam the ruler over all of creation, though here he does not connect this ruling authority with the fact that Adam is the "image of God."

> From nothing the Creator made something great,
> that in wisdom it might be lord over everything.[73]

> On his sides [God] fashioned hands and on them ten fingers that with them
> [Adam] might take hold of the sea, the dry land and the whole world.[74]

Jacob also builds on this idea, more so than Ephrem or Narsai, to create a more vivid description of Adam's dominion over creation. Adam's status as ruler was such that every created thing—the firmament with its lights, the sea with its fish, the earth with its animals—bowed down before him and, with joy, offered him their services.

> Adam, who was a statue to the Son, was a new anointed one,
> he stood in the world and the entire world blessed and worshipped him.
> Light desired him, for the image of light was depicted on His face,
> the firmament rejoiced and its lights hastened to minister to him.
> The sea and its fish rejoiced in him and readied to be presented to him,
> The earth exulted and with its trees blessed and worshipped [him].
> The sun and the moon offered to him their rays,
> and at their appearance they would please the new Lord.
> Water creatures and the birds that fly in the air
> came in unison and worshipped him and swelled with pride at him.[75]

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[72] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.109, reading with the variant.

[73] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.159.

[74] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.158.

[75] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.117–118.

> They came to worship and were filled with peace and love in his presence,
> and he bent down the head of the land animals to be subservient to him.
> The great image of Divinity was depicted in Adam.
> As soon as the world saw him it was completely subservient to him,
> every species of domestic animal as well as of wild animal.

It is in this context of the animals being his servants that Jacob introduces Adam's bestowal of all their names. This 'divine' act also served to ensure their willing and joyful servitude to him. It is in this context too that Jacob refers to Adam as the "image of God," suggesting that, for him, it may have more to do specifically with his naming the creatures than with his dominion generally.[76]

> [Adam] called them by their names and by their names he made them servants
> so that they might be his for his Lord had granted him to possess them.
> It was fitting that because [Adam] was the "image of God"
> he should stretch forth his hand over all that the Lord, his Lord, had made.
> Although he was unable to create anything he set down the names
> and [thus] became a companion in that divine fashioning.[77]

> And so that he might be a partner in the divine fashionings,
> he set down the names for everything that Divinity had created.[78]

> [God] set Adam as king over all creatures and all that was fashioned,
> and the house resounded at the heir who stood in it to be its lord.
> A skilled master, wise though he did not learn from a book.
> One day old and he gave names to all creation![79]

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[76] For Jacob's notions on Adam as the "image of God," see further Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques De Saroug. Tome I*, 125–134.

[77] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.118.

[78] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.119.

[79] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.119–120.

Adam sat at the head of the world like a judge,
wild beasts came in ranks before his honor.
The eagle came down from its height to worship before him,
the lion stood in lowliness out of love for him.
The creator created every species for the sake of Adam,
and for his sake did not leave them without names.
He sent them to the wise ruler whom He had made,
whatever he wished he named them, then sent them on their way.[80]

Jacob also notes that Adam, by reason of his being fashioned from both earthly and heavenly 'materials,' is the center point of all creation, but also the bond of all creatures. Here Jacob follows the same teaching that was already noted in Narsai above, so apparently this was not a controversial teaching of the School of Persia in the fifth century, but was one which was adopted by both Christological parties. Jacob, however, adds another new element into this teaching. For Jacob, Adam is the center point of all creation as it was for Narsai but, for him, this must include even the elements themselves, that is to say, that Adam was created with the perfect mixture of the elements in a way that he is even more a central point of all creation that he was in the thought of Narsai. As he says in his *Mêmrâ on the Creation of Adam and Eve*:

The creator mixed fire and air in dust and water,
He formed it into an image to manifest His wisdom to the world.
Into these He blew a living fire and presented him
to mankind with wonder and gave him senses for [his] activity.
All the beauties of all the creatures are comprehended in him,
so that in him one might see the nearness and remoteness of natures.[81]

Further on, in the same mêmrâ, he adds:

The hidden nod of creation gathered up [his] mud,
He took and formed the mud, mixed and united it with air.
He tilled it with fire and gave it "a life-giving spirit (Gen 2:7),"
and it became an image that is dry, moist, cold and warm.

[80] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.119.
[81] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.153.

> He mixed and mingled the elements like colors,
> and from them He made a comely form full of beautiful things.
> From choice pigments that He esteemed He painted for Himself an image,
> and made him a bridegroom in the great bridal-chamber He had framed.[82]

Jacob does not develop the teaching about Adam in any systematic way, nor does he include all the elements of the teaching that we have already seen, but he does maintain the very special nature of Adam as lord of creation. He even develops the idea of Adam as center and point of union beyond that of Narsai, to include the very elements themselves. In the teaching of Jacob, Adam has truly become that microcosm of creation.

JACOB OF EDESSA

Our last figure is one of the giants of the West Syrian Church, and the first "Renaissance Man" of all the Syriac-speaking churches.[83] Jacob was born around 640 near Antioch and began his studies in the famous monastery of Qenneshrê on the Euphrates River under the tutelage of Severus Sebokht. From there, he went to Alexandria to continue his studies. Somewhere around 684, he was appointed bishop of Edessa, but he soon resigned over disagreements with his clergy, due primarily to the laxity of their lives. He spent the next twenty years in the mon-

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[82] Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.159.

[83] A general study of Jacob of Edessa is a great desideratum in Syriac studies, but see Lucas van Rompay, "Jacob of Edessa and the Early History of Edessa," in Gerrit J. Reinink and Alexander C. Klugkist, eds., *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers* (Orientalia Lovanensia Analecta, 89; Leuven: Peeters, 1999) 269–285. Bibliographic guidance can be found in Dirk Kruisheer and Lucas van Rompay, "A Bibliographical Clavis to the Works of Jacob of Edessa," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 1.1 (1998), and online at http://www.bethmardutho.org/hugoye. The proceedings from the conference "Jacob of Edessa (c. 640–708) and the Syriac Culture of His Day," held at Leiden University, 4–5 April 1997, and organized by Konrad Jenner and Lucas Van Rompay, are scheduled to appear soon.

astery of Eusebona and then in the monastery of Tell 'Adâ, where he taught Greek and toiled at his revision of the Syriac Bible. In 708, he was reappointed bishop of Edessa, but he died only months after taking up this position.

The encyclopedic nature of his voluminous works reveals Jacob to be a master of almost every field of learning at that time. Unfortunately, like Isaac and Jacob of Sarug, many of the works of Jacob remain unedited, and even more have never been translated. He wrote works on liturgy, philosophy, grammar, canon law, and history. In addition to these great contributions he, as one who was fluent in Greek, made a complete revision of the Syriac Bible, and translated a number of works of Greek authors, including works of Aristotle, council canons, apocryphal works, a revised Syriac translation of the works of "the Theologian" Gregory of Nazianzus, as well as numerous letters and homilies of Severus of Antioch. If it were not for Jacob's translations of Severus most of his works would now be lost to us. His biblical works, a not insignificant component of his total output, include a commentary *On the Hexaemeron*[84] as well as *Scholia on the Octateuch*.[85]

In writing his scholia, subtitled "On the difficult words of Scripture," Jacob had slightly different purposes than did our previous au-

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[84] The text is found in Jean-Baptiste Chabot, ed., *Jacobi Edesseni Hexaemeron seu in Opus Creationis Libri Septem* (CSCO 92; Louvain: Peeters, 1928), and a Latin translation in Arthur A. Vaschalde, *Jacobi Edesseni Hexaemeron seu in Opus Creationis Libri Septem* (CSCO 97; Louvain: Peeters, 1932). See also Paulin Martin, "L'Hexaméron de Jacques d'Édesse," *Journal Asiatique* ser. 8, t.11 (1888) 155–219, 401–440, and Arthur Hjelt, *Études sur l'Hexaméron de Jacques d'Édesse* (Helsinki: Frenckellska Tryckeri-Aktiebolaget, 1892).

[85] The first recension of this *Scholia* is still unedited; for the text of the *Scholia on Genesis,* I have used Ms. Harv. Syr. 123, f. 5r–26r. A second, much embellished version was compiled by Severus of Edessa (d. 861), and is often attributed to Ephrem in the manuscript tradition. As such, the text is printed in Joseph S. Assemani, ed., *Sancti Patris Nostri Ephraem Syri Opera Omnia Quae Exstant Graece, Syriace, Latine, in Sex Tomos Distributa* (6 vols.; Rome, 1732–1743) vols. I-II; the text of the *Catena on Genesis*, accompanied by a very periphrastic Latin translation, is found in vol. I.116–193. New critical editions and modern translations of all these materials are currently being prepared by Dirk Kruisheer at Leiden University.

thors; he was not so interested in a running commentary as he was on bringing light to certain chosen difficult words and passages. Nonetheless, his teaching did not differ in essentials. In his *Scholia on Genesis*, Jacob begins his discussion of the sixth day by simply stating:

> On the sixth day, Adam was created after all the creatures.[86]

In the larger *Scholia*, Jacob elaborates further on just what the biblical author had intended by this otherwise innocent looking phrase:

> Then on the sixth day, after all the creatures were created and fashioned, and there was completed all that was necessary for the honor of man, that king who was soon to be created, Adam was created and, like a bridegroom entering into a fully adorned bridal chamber, he entered into creation which was sitting and waiting for him like his bride.[87]

For Jacob, it was for Adam and specifically for his honor that God brought about the creation. That the honor of Adam was paramount in the creation is reiterated again in the larger *Scholia*:

> The honor that God made for man is greater than that of all those sentient beasts that He had previously created for [Adam]'s sake.[88]

In his *Commentary on the Hexaemeron*, he also elaborates how the fact that God said, "Let us make man in Our image and in Our likeness," is a singular proof that "in His love for Adam, God gave to him far greater honor and love than to any of the other creatures."[89]

As Ephrem had already done before him (see above), Jacob further elaborates on the fact that everything was created specifically and exclusively for the sake of Adam. In his *Commentary on the Hexaemeron*, at the beginning of his discussion of the sixth day, Jacob re-

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[86] Ms. Harv. Syr. 123, f. 6r.

[87] Ms. Harv. Syr. 123, f. 72r. For the larger *Catena*, compiled by Severus, I did not have access to the text in Assemani; I made use of the text in Ms. Harv. Syr. 123.

[88] Ms. Harv. Syr. 123, f. 73r.

[89] Chabot, *Jacobi Edesseni Hexaemeron*, 280. Jacob goes on from here to discuss at great length the difference between the creation of everything else by the words "Let it come to be," and the creation of Adam by the words "Let us make."

turns to the creation of this world. To Jacob, this world is like a house, but for what or for whom was this house constructed?

> If the Creator is hidden and invisible then He has no need of this house, nor do any of the angelic powers have any need of it. There is no heavenly body who would have need of its shelter. It was not necessary [that it be created] for the earth which would be walked upon, nor for the waters which would be drunk, nor even for the air which would be required for the subsistence of living things. Nor was it required for the sun, nor for the moon, nor for the stars that would give light and distinguish day and night. It is evident and certain that this house was created not for any of these things, but for the sake of that man whom God was about to create in His image, after the construction and completion of this world.[90]

The second notion that Jacob brings forward in his *Scholia* above, that of creation being a fully adorned bridal chamber waiting for the groom, is one that can already be found in less developed form in the works of Jacob of Sarug.[91] But it becomes a favorite notion of Jacob of Edessa. As he further elaborates in his *Commentary on the Hexaemeron*:

> Just as one first builds a castle for a king, so did [God create the world] that it might be a place to rest and to live for [Adam] and for all those who will be born from him, and for all those animals that had previously been created to serve him, and for the birds and those animals that creep upon the earth which were created for the sake of [Adam]. This is the reason for the creation of this world: for the rest and for the needs of man. . . . It was for the sake of this one who was about to be set up by God as king and as ruler over all creation that this castle was first built and constructed.[92]

When it comes to the signification of the "image of God," Jacob now introduces a new element. He maintains that the primary notion

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[90] Chabot, *Jacobi Edesseni Hexaemeron*, 279–280.

[91] See, for example, Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.104–105, 108, 155, 159–160. This is a theme found already in the Jewish philosopher Philo; see discussion in Jansma, "L'Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarug," 32–33.

[92] Chabot, *Jacobi Edesseni Hexaemeron*, 280.

is the dominion of Adam over creation but he introduces a more intellectual interpretation, one that a more Syrian, and even Antiochian, way of thinking had previously always rejected. In his *Scholia on Genesis*, Jacob says with regard to Gen 1:26:

> "*Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.*" It is certain in every way that this phrase was spoken to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. "In the image of God his creator." The verse does not refer to his creation as the image of God, but to his freedom and to his rule over the creatures. For we should understand this phrase "according to the image" in a three-fold fashion. First, just as God rules over created things so is the lordship of the man, Adam, set over the earthly creation. And the second, that [Adam] possessed a pure soul through which he received every kind of excellence and of divine favor. The third thing is that among mortals there is intelligence and rule of the mind, which is extended to every place and brings with it an image of whatever it wishes. [God] created Adam after everything else. The understanding of the meaning of this? It is so that [Adam] should enter into creation like a bridegroom into the decorated bridal chamber, so that he not think or err and say that the work [of creation] is his.[93]

In this way Jacob, due no doubt to his familiarity with Greek and particularly with Alexandrian thought, introduces a more spiritual or intellectual explanation of the "image of God," than had been seen in our other chosen authors, though he still does not go so far as to define it by any trinitarian notion such as that Adam is the "image of God" in that he consists of body, soul, and spirit. But we do see that Jacob still maintains the importance of Adam and in some ways emphasizes, even more than all the other authors we have considered, the very special nature of Adam and the love of God for him such that He brought about creation specifically for his sake.

CONCLUSION

The preceding description is, it hardly needs to be said, far from an exhaustive treatment of the thought on Adam in the early Syriac

[93] Ms. Harv. Syr. 123, f. 6r.

church. We have chosen only a few representative authors for our task; there are many more who have also contributed to this subject. Even in the corpus of these few writers, there were many more related issues that were not even broached, and nearly all the ones that we did look at could have been developed much further, both collectively and in each individual author. Our description has, therefore, done little more than to attempt to highlight a steady but developing tradition on only a few particular elements of the teaching about the biblical figure of Adam from a few of the more important early Syriac writers.

It is quite evident that the five authors we have considered all clearly agree on the very special nature of Adam and on the privileged place that God had from the very beginning intended for him in the hierarchy of creation. In fact, for these authors, especially for Ephrem and for Jacob of Edessa the "bookends" of our exposition, creation was brought about for the sake of Adam, not simply because God's love is so great that it needs to be shared, but specifically for the honor and the glory of Adam. As Jacob of Edessa most clearly describes it Adam was, as it were, processed into this world like a bridegroom into his bridal chamber, when and only when everything else had been created and arranged into its proper place. This vision of Adam/man is quite different even from that of Sophocles with which we began our paper; for him and for the classical world, man was "simply" the apex of created beings. Needless to say, this Syrian vision is practically another species of thought from what one finds in modern thinking.

Modern Western man has, for all intents and purposes, completely rejected the biblical and classical notion of the nature of man. Even the modern question of the essence of man is broached never in terms of his place in the universe, but only in terms of his inner desires or passions, or of the determination of his existence by biological, social, and/or historical factors.[94] Often just the very utterance of such a question only elicits a "knowing smile."[95] While modern biblical exege-

[94] For an insightful critique of this modern notion of man, see Pierre Manent, *The City of Man*, translated by Marc A. LePain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[95] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966) 342–343: "To all those who still wish to talk about man, . . . to all those who still ask themselves questions

sis has not explicitly adopted the notion that the question of man's essence is laughable, it has nonetheless, at least tacitly, abandoned the importance of the question (see comments above).

Neither is our description above intended as a systematic dismantling of this modern scientific notion of man, or even as a means of chiding modern biblical commentators. Our intention is rather simply to provide an alternative view, and one which stems from a culture far from ours in terms of time, of language, and of geography—to "reintroduce" this way of thinking into the conversation as Luke Timothy Johnson asked. While this view is diametrically opposed to modern thought, it is a way of thinking that is more consistent with the more appealing, if not more plausible, claim that "God reveals himself to man, 'appears' before him, 'speaks' and converses with him so as to reveal to man the hidden meaning of his own existence and the ultimate purpose of his life."[96] Knowing who Adam was is the foundation of this revelation and a fundamental step toward the "reconstruction of belief."[97]

We can perhaps best bring an end to this paper by appealing to the thought of the great Jesuit patrologist and theologian, Henri de Lubac, as it was summarized in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, for it also points to the place of Adam in modern man's recovery of the "mystery of man":

> The truth is that only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man truly become clear. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of His love, fully reveals man to man himself and brings to light his supreme calling. It is no wonder, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.[98]

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about what man is in his essence, . . . we can answer only with a philosophical laugh—which means, to a certain extent, a silent one." His voice is not a unique one.

[96] G. Florovsky, "Revelation and Interpretation," 20–21.

[97] See the quotation of George Florovsky cited above.

[98] *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Gaudium et Spes), 22. This paragraph is, in synopsis, the fruit of the thought of de Lubac, especially as found in Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the*

If then, as a result of reading the thoughts of these Syrian writers on the subject of Adam, the reader at least has questions rise up in him concerning the "dogma" of the modern notion of a soulless and Godless man, and begins to turn back to Him who created man out of an exclusive and all-embracing love for him, and to open his eyes to a greater and deeper understanding of the great mystery that is man, then the work of these early authors will not have been in vain, and they will bear new fruit in a culture far removed from their own.

Corporate Destiny of Mankind (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1950), esp., chapter XI.

WHAT DO SYRIAC/ANTIOCHENE EXEGESIS AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM HAVE TO DO WITH THEOLOGY?

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A growing dissatisfaction with the divide between Scripture and Theology has brought much attention to interpretive strategies associated with the historical-critical method in recent times.[1] While much may

[1] Representative studies that look at the limitations of historical criticism for theological studies include: B. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970); James Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church: A study in Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970); Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *ThTo* 37 (1980) 27–38; Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today," *This World* 22 (Summer 1989); quotations taken from the reprinted version in Richard John Neuhaus, gen. ed. *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 1–23; George Lindbeck, "The Church's Mission to a Postmodern Culture," in *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World* (ed. Frederic B. Burnham; San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989) 37–55; see the excellent studies reissued by Stephen E. Fowl (ed.) *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology; Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); Lewis Ayres and Stephen E. Fowl, "(Mis)reading the Face of God: The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," *TS* 60 (1999) 513–28; J. B. Green, "Scripture and Theology: Failed Experiments, Fresh Perspectives," *Int* 56 (2002) 5–20; the collection of essays in C. Bartholomew, C. Stephen Evans, M.

be said about this topic, my remarks will be restricted in the following ways: I will begin by offering some preliminary comments on the modern discipline of biblical studies in order not only to situate the discipline as it stands today but also, and more importantly for our purposes, to illustrate the specific ways in which scientific methods, when used in isolation from other methods, have been unable to produce a theologically fruitful study of Scripture. Given this divide, scholars of the previous century have suggested that a retrieval of pre-modern interpretive strategies may offer a way of bridging biblical studies and theological inquiry.[2] In a way similar to the situation of the ancient interpreter, the exegete today has at his/her disposal various

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Healy, M. Rae, (eds.) *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation* (Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 4; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003); W. T. Dickens, *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics: A Model for Post-Critical Biblical Interpretation,* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

[2] See Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis"; Ayres and Fowl, "(Mis)reading"; Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?" Also, Marie Anne Mayeski, in response to an article by Michael Cahill ["The History of Exegesis and Our Theological Future," *Theological Studies* 61 (2000) 332–47] surveys various *resourcement* theologians, de Lubac, Daniélou, Bouyer, and identifies the allegorical and typological approaches of the Church Fathers as offering a way for theology to be historical without having to resort to historical-critical scholarship. The allegorical approach employed by the patristic theologians is presented as an example of how close attention to the text and to history may generate a theologically rich understanding, see Marie Anne Mayeski, "Quaestio Disputata: Catholic Theology and the History of Exegesis," *Theological Studies* 62 (2001) 140–53. Most recently, Luke Timothy Johnson and William Kurz, S.J., *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, critique the historical-critical method and urge a return to pre-modern strategies of interpretation: (1) Old and New Testaments form a unity that is grounded in the singleness of divine authorship; (2) Scripture speaks harmoniously; (3) the Bible, as the Word of God, is authoritative; (4) Scripture speaks in many ways and at many levels; (5) hermeneutics of generosity or charity. Note that these pre-modern strategies are taken from the "four assumptions" of pre-modern interpreters cited by J. Kugel in *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) 14–19.

interpretive strategies from the secular world.[3] In this paper, we will look at the pre-modern attitudes towards Scripture held by the Antiochene exegetes, specifically the Syriac Fathers, to see if perhaps, ironically enough, the findings of modern textual criticism might be able to bring to light a more nuanced understanding of the scriptural text that is more consistent with a pre-modern one.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS ON THE MODERN STUDY OF THE BIBLE

In Joel B. Green's article in the 2002 January volume of *Interpretation*, he describes the current state of the relationship between Scripture and Theology as a malaise that is rooted in a failed experiment initiated by Johann Philipp Gabler, who first presented his views in an inaugural address to the University of Altdorf in 1787.[4] The title of Gabler's ad-

[3] Like others, I am not suggesting a thorough rejection of historical criticism in favor of a pre-modern interpretive approach. As Henri de Lubac writes, "we would be just as mistaken—and, here again, we are overstating the case, without suggesting that the opinion can actually be supported—if we admired the ancient constructs so much that we longed to make them our permanent dwelling; or if we canonized such doctrines so as to become unconscious of their weak or outdated aspects; or if we believed that fidelity to an author meant that we had to copy him or imitate him slavishly. . . . There is no point in wondering what one of the ancients would do if he were alive today, in totally different conditions, and discovered all sorts of curious things unknown in his own day, enjoyed a more advanced stage of scientific development, could use the new tools of scholarship, was enlightened by an experience of the world whose very orientation could not have been foreseen by him. There is simply no answer to such questions" in *Scripture in the Tradition. With an Introduction by Peter Casarella* (New York: A Herder & Herder Book, 1968) 2–3.

[4] Green, "Scripture and Theology: Failed Experiments, Fresh Perspectives," 5–20. Gabler's views may be situated among various contemporary interpretive approaches and resembles the strategy for interpreting ancient myths by stripping away the historical accretions from its core essence that was proposed by C. G. Heyne and J. G. Eichhorn. For a discussion of the influence of the latter upon Gabler see Otto Merk, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments in ihrer Anfangszeit* (Marburger Theologische Studien 9; Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1972) 45–81; Rudolf Smend, "Johann Philipp Gablers Begründung der biblischen Theologie," *EvT* 22 (1962) 345–57; and the discus-

dress was "The Proper Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each." In that speech, Gabler remarked on the respective tasks of biblical and dogmatic theology in the following way:

> "Biblical theology is historical in character and sets forth what the sacred writers thought about divine matters while dogmatic theology is didactic in character and teaches what a particular theologian philosophically and rationally decides about divine matters, in accordance with his character, time, age, place, sect or school, and other similar influences."[5]

The division that he proposed between biblical theology and dogmatic theology corresponds roughly to the division that exists today between historical criticism and systematic theology, where the former is concerned with describing what the text meant during the biblical period and the latter is concerned with what the text means today.[6] The meaning sought after by biblical theology is the same meaning identified by Benjamin Jowett, the Regis Professor of Greek at the University of Oxford, who in 1859 wrote: "Scripture has one meaning—the meaning which it had in the mind of the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it."[7]

Biblical theology as it was envisioned by Gabler corresponds with what is more commonly known today as the historical-critical exegesis

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sion by Ben C. Ollenburger, "Biblical Theology: Situating the Discipline," in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson* (eds. J. T. Butler, E. W. Conrad and B. C. Ollenburger; JSOTSup 37; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985) 37–62.

[5] This translation of Gabler is taken from Robert C. Dentan, *Preface to Old Testament Theology* (rev. ed.; New York: Seabury Press, 1963) 22–23, as it appears in the important work by Jon D. Levenson, "Why Jews are not Interested in Biblical Theology," *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 35.

[6] Green refers to this understanding of biblical theology (=historical criticism) as a linear hermeneutics.

[7] Benjamin Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," *Essays and Reviews*, 7th ed. (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861) 378.

of the Scriptures. Historical criticism is a system of interpretive methods that is derived from a secular understanding of history which views the development of events in a linear way and seeks to demonstrate with certitude the validity of its results. It privileges the literary text, specifically its earliest recoverable form, as the most certain means of accessing the authentic meaning of Scripture.

Many criticisms against the type of historical-critical exegesis that Gabler called biblical theology have been made in recent years. The objective certitude sought by these systems rooted in modern scientific and humanistic methods is now recognized to be impossible.[8] The historical-critical interpreter begins his study of the text as one who stands at a distance from the biblical world. The specialization of the hermeneutical skills that biblical scholars need has become so great today as to render them the "gatekeepers" of an interpretation that has grown even further from a living community of faith.[9] The critical distinctions and specialized knowledge that are necessary for a diachronic analysis have led to the greater fragmentation of the scriptural text and the growing isolation of biblical scholars from one another.[10] Historical criticism's presupposition that the original literary text contains the most authentic meaning is the most dangerous to a theological enterprise because by equating the human author's intended mean-

[8] Green, "Scripture and Theology," 9.

[9] Green, "Scripture and Theology," 10.

[10] Green, "Scripture and Theology," 10. Historical criticism's tendency to fragment and break down the biblical text into smaller units is a notable problem. In a revision of his Ph.D. dissertation at Yale Divinity School, William Thomas Dickens undertakes a careful study of the interpretive approach espoused by Balthasar in his seven volume *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* in his recent monograph, *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics: A Model for Post-Critical Biblical Interpretation*. This work presumes the important critiques of historical criticism voiced previously in Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* and Lindbeck, "The Church's Mission to a Postmodern Culture," both of whom are associated with Yale. Dickens summarizes Balthasar's major criticisms of the modern situation as somehow failing to appreciate the analogies between beauty and revelation; "what is genuinely beautiful . . . cannot be analyzed into its constituent elements without destroying it," (p. 36).

ing with the "True" meaning, it fails to recognize the divine authorship of the text.

More than a hundred years after Benjamin Jowett, David Steinmetz similarly argued against the singularity of the interpretation presumed by historical criticism and in favor of the superiority of pre-critical exegesis and the multiple interpretations that that methodological stance allows.[11] Almost two hundred years after Gabler, Brevard Childs offered a corrective to the type of biblical theology espoused by Gabler[12] and known today as historical criticism. It is well known that Childs himself rejects the label "canonical" for its inadequacy in describing his hermeneutical approach. Childs himself uses historical criticism but takes care to assign a theological priority to the text as the word of God. Childs' approach has been rightly criticized by both Jewish and Christian scholars who point out, among other things, that his method is serviceable only to those Christians who share his theology and understanding of what the normative texts under discussion are.[13] Nevertheless, Childs has been noted for his at-

[11] Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis."

[12] Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 1970.

[13] Here I have in mind the important criticism by J. D. Levenson, "The Eighth Principle of Judaism and the Literary Simultaneity of Scripture," in *The Hebrew Bible*, 80–81. Levenson notes correctly that the starting point of the "canon" is itself the divisive point for Christians and Jews: "In short, Judaism and Christianity differ from each other not only over 'what it means' as opposed to 'what it meant'; they also differ over the antecedent of 'it,' and this difference, crucial to the shape and identity of those communities, can never be resolved by historical criticism" (81). See also the important critique of Childs by Benjamin D. Sommer, "The Scroll of Isaiah as Jewish Scripture, Or, Why Jews Don't Read Books," *Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers* (SBL Seminar Papers Series 35; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) 225–42. In that article, Sommer notes that the discussion over canonical readings of Scripture is localized among Christian scholars because contemporary Jewish interpretive approaches consider carefully the stream of traditional interpretations within the liturgical life of the Scriptures in the lectionary cycle (p. 232–33). Traditional midrashic approaches to Scripture that involve atomizing and recontextualizing one passage within another do not have the same type of conceptual regard for the "book" as a unit as is suggested by modern canon scholars like Childs (p. 233). See also the critiques of Childs by John J. Collins, "Is a Critical Biblical Theology Possible?" in *The Hebrew Bible and Its*

tempts to recover theological inquiry for the discipline of biblical studies.

In general, the recent dissatisfaction with the trajectory of biblical theology first proposed by Johann Gabler is a reflection of a growing move away from the philosophical presuppositions held by modernity, anchored in the Enlightenment and the Humanist movements.[14] Benjamin Jowett's statement cited earlier, "Scripture has one meaning," reflects historical criticism's single objective of recovering the original authorial intent of the human author that lies behind the biblical text. With the rise of postmodernism, confidence in the certainty of the objective scientific methods of the previous centuries has been challenged and critiqued, replacing textual determinacy with indeterminacy.[15] Ironically enough, the discipline of biblical studies, approached from the modernist historical-critical perspective, seems to concentrate the authority of Scripture in its earliest textual form and also the postmodern perspective that struggles to locate any authority at all in Scripture, both find themselves struggling to articulate what is distinctive and valuable about their respective endeavors.

One might say that the type of discipline proposed by Gabler proved to be thoroughly Protestant in its endeavor to strip away the dogmatic (ecclesial) accretions of the Bible's theology. After all, few would argue with the statement that much of the formative development of contemporary biblical studies happened within Protestant circles. Its objective of describing from a historical perspective the *origi-*

Interpreters (Biblical and Judaic Studies 1; eds. W. H. Propp, B. Halpern, D. N. Freedman; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 5–7; James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983) 49–104; John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984) 141–57.

[14] See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis," who writes, "the debate about modern exegesis is not a dispute among historians: it is rather a philosophical debate," 16.

[15] See the discussion by Terence J. Keegan, "Biblical Criticism and the Challenge of Postmodernism," *BibInt* 3 (1995) 1–14; also Craig G. Bartholomew's introductory essay to the excellent volume, *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation* (eds. C. Bartholomew, C. Stephen Evans, M. Healy, M. Rae; Scripture and Hermeneutics Series vol. 4; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003) 8–10.

nal theological concerns of the biblical text and its privileging of the literal text resembles a Protestant stance towards Scripture *vis à vis* Tradition. Indeed, the prominent Jewish scholar, James Kugel, from Harvard University, remarks that the sifting out and prioritization of what may be demonstrated as early or authentic from what are secondary accretions is a process that itself resembles the early Protestant distinction between "the divine Word of Scripture" and the secondary "merely human words of Church interpreters".[16] Kugel goes on to cite a description of the goal of historical criticism that was articulated by C. A. Briggs, professor of Bible at Union Theological Seminary in New York at the turn of the previous century. In his introduction to the Old Testament, Briggs makes the following, rather telling, statement:

> The valleys of biblical truth have been filled up with the débris of human dogmas, ecclesiastical institutions, liturgical formulas, priestly ceremonies, and casuistic practices. Historical criticism is digging through this mass of rubbish. Historical criticism is searching for the rock-bed of the Divine Word, in order to recover the real Bible. Historical criticism is sifting all this rubbish. It will gather out every precious stone. Nothing will escape its keen eye.[17]

While neither an exhaustive nor exclusive way of conceptualizing the modern period of biblical studies, Kugel's point that the historical-critical enterprise is primarily a Protestant endeavor does not go unnoticed.[18]

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[16] James L. Kugel, "The Bible in the University," *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, 161. In this article Kugel critiques the proponents of biblical theology because they dismiss the value of ancient interpretations, both Christian and Jewish.

[17] See Kugel, "The Bible in the University," 155–56 for the text from Briggs; also C. A. Briggs, *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture* (New York: Scribners, 1901) 531.

[18] As such an endeavor, the efforts to renew the theological enterprise of Scripture studies that we find expressed by Brevard Childs, David Steinmetz, and Joel Green could be described as a move towards embracing theological traditions within biblical scholarship.

Brigg's conceptualization of the goal of historical criticism reflects an understanding of biblical studies that was prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century. His particular articulation of historical criticism highlights the problematic nature of the discipline for theological inquiry. While Brigg's remarks may seem like a caricature to our ears today, its premise that the goal of the historical-critical method is to strip away what is secondary from what is the primary "original" text is a premise that has cast a long shadow over the discipline for many years. It has only been recently that biblical scholars, most notably James Kugel and Michael Fishbane, have pointed out the absurdity of the enterprise of recovering the words of the original human author, after all, what then would one do with the interpretations that have already joined themselves to those early texts? Scholars like Fishbane and Kugel have demonstrated in their literary studies that the scholarly distinction between the scriptural text and its interpretation is an artificial one. Their studies have illustrated how deeply the interpretive activity of the scribes, tradents, and redactors is embedded within and intertwined with the text to produce what is in effect the final form of the text, the one that we know today.[19] To separate interpretation

[19] See the classic studies by M. Fishbane, "Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis," *JBL* 99 (1980) 343–61; ibid, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); also Fishbane's article, "Use, Authority and Interpretation of Mikra at Qumran," in *Mikra: Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Martin Jan Mulder; CRINT 2,1; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 351–54; ibid, *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1992); ibid, "Inner-Biblical Exegesis," in *Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation; Vol. I: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300); Part 1: Antiquity*; ed. by Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) 33–48; and of course, J. L. Kugel, "Early Interpretation: The Common Background of Late Forms of Biblical Exegesis," in Kugel and Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (LEC 3; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986) 9–106; Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990); ibid, *Traditions of the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); also B. S. Childs, "Psalms, Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16 (1971) 137–50; D. Patte, *Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine* (SBLDS 22; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975); G. Vermes, "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis,"

from the "so-called" original text is, in fact, to misunderstand the very nature of the scriptural text. When the sacred text becomes an object of study in the way that Briggs proposed, the Scriptures become separated from the life of the community of believers[20] and subsequently removed from theological inquiry.[21]

Another presupposition embedded in Briggs' statement is his privileging of the earliest layer of the scriptural text on account of their "more original" status. When historical-critical scholars emphasize the earliest textual version as the most important for the understanding of the Scriptures, they fail to acknowledge the transcendence of the scriptural text. The divine transcendence of the text is that which is presumed by the Roman Catholic understanding of divine revelation, articulated in the concise Vatican II document *Dei Verbum* (1965),[22]

CHB 1 (1980) 199–231; J. Weingreen, "Rabbinic-Type Glosses in the Old Testament," *JSS* 2 (1957) 149–62.

[20] The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation attempted to bridge this gap by emphasizing the radical dependency between Scripture and Tradition; the Old and the New Testaments; and the human and divine, thereby giving a fuller expression to statements previously articulated by the Church. This mysterious mingling of the human and divine natures of Sacred Scripture is discussed in *DV*, 12; Scripture's relationship with Tradition is also described as "[f]lowing from the same divine wellspring, both of them merge, in a sense, and move towards the same goal" (*DV* 9) which may be seen as a re-affirmation of the Church's teachings from the time of the Council of Trent in the 16th century.

[21] Another way of describing the divide between theological inquiry and biblical studies is to trace the divide between Scripture and the community of faith that was broadened by the neoscholasticism that dominated Roman Catholic Theology from the time of Pope Leo XIII's *AEterni Patris* in 1879. Characteristic of this neoscholasticism was the objectification of the Sacred Scriptures; "the Bible (was) less a guide to life and thought (with changing applications and therefore changing meanings) and more . . . an object of study (with a univocal meaning best discerned by experts)." See W. T. Dickens' summary of the progression from the classic period to the modern period in his work, *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics*, 8.

[22] This dogmatic constitution gives fuller expression to the teachings given in 1943 in Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* which in turn stands in continuity with earlier views expressed by Pope Leo XIII's encycli-

which describes the Sacred Scriptures as "the marvelous *condescension* of eternal wisdom." The document states that "the words of God, expressed in human language, are in every way like human speech, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the weak flesh of human beings, became like them" (*DV,* 13). The council's affirmation of the divine transcendence of the Sacred Scriptures is guided by the interpretive lens of the mystery of the Incarnation. Since the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholic scholars have written on the subject of the relationship between Scripture and Theology with varying degrees of sympathy for the historical-critical method.[23]

The 1993 Pontifical Biblical Commission's statement, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" (IBC), continues to be a much-

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cal *Providentissimus Deus*. The latter made important statements on Scripture's inspiration and inerrancy in the end of the nineteenth century.

[23] Among the representative group that I have chosen to discuss briefly, it should be noted that there is a marked difference in their views on the viability of a historical-critical exegesis of Scripture. E.g., John J. Collins, Chair professor of Old Testament at Yale Divinity School, articulated his position in an article entitled, "Is a Critical Biblical Theology Possible?" in which he concludes that historical criticism assists positively in the overall theological enterprise. While it is incompatible with what he calls a "confessional theology that is committed to specific doctrines on the basis of faith," it is compatible with the "open-ended and critical inquiry into the meaning and function of God-language," (14). According to Collins, historical criticism's major contributions lie in its ability to provide a broad arena for scholarly discussion. It also clarifies the literary genre of Scripture and directs the interpreter in the way in which it should be read. For Collins, biblical theology is legitimately grounded in historical criticism, but it should be pointed out that his discussion does not presume a distinctively Roman Catholic framework. Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J., in his 1995 commentary on that document evaluates historical-critical approaches favorably, while also acknowledging their limitations theologically; see J. A. Fitzmyer, S.J., ed., *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": Text and Commentary* (SubBi 18; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995). A thorough study of the role of the historical-critical method in Catholic exegesis was published by Joseph G. Prior, *The Historical Critical Method in Catholic Exegesis* (Tesi Gregoriana Serie Teologia 50; Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1999).

discussed document that surveys various interpretive methods, many of which fall under the category of historical criticism.[24] The document describes historical-critical exegesis as having, "adopted, more or less overtly, the thesis of the one single meaning. All the effort of historical-critical exegesis goes into defining 'the' precise sense of this or that biblical text seen within the circumstances in which it was produced" (IBC). In general, it evaluates positively the results of these methods in contrast to the negative assessment given to fundamentalism and allegorical readings. It is notable, however, that the understanding of Scripture presumed by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in this document shares the perspective found in *Dei Verbum*, that Scripture, like Christ, has two natures: human and divine. Its recommendation that the historical-critical method is the proper way to engage the human nature of the biblical text acknowledges the limitations of the method in a nuanced way.[25]

USING SECULAR INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES

In a recent article in 2002, Brian Daley, S.J. has made important criticisms of the PBC's positive assessment of historical criticism by point-

[24] These studies are numerous; see representative works by Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": Text and Commentary*; I. H. Marshall, "Review: 'The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,'" *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 13 (1995) 72–75; L. Ayres and S. E. Fowl, "(Mis)Reading the Face of God: The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 513–28; L. T. Johnson and W. S. Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); B. D. Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable? Reflections on the Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms," *Communio* 29 (2002) 185–216; and the study by Peter S. Williamson, "The Place of History in Catholic Exegesis: An Examination of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*," in *"Behind" the Text*, 196–226.

[25] See Williamson, "The Place of History in Catholic Exegesis," 196–226. This, however, is the very point refuted by Lewis Ayres and Stephen Fowl who propose that the necessity of this critical interpretive approach is not warranted; see their article, "(Mis)reading the Face of God," 528. Ayres and Fowl cite the failure of historical-critical readings to build up the community and to foster contemplation of God which are better cultivated by interpretive strategies that allow for a plurality of readings.

ing out that the method is inherently atheistic, thus unable to make meaningful contributions to theological inquiry. He writes,

> "[H]istorical reality"—like physical reality—is assumed to be in itself something objective, at least in the sense that it consists in events independent of the interests and preconceptions of the scholar or narrator, accessible through the disciplined, methodologically rigorous analysis of present evidence such as texts, artifacts and human remains. . . . As a result, modern historical criticism—including the criticism of Biblical texts—is *methodologically* atheistic, even if what it studies is some form or facet of religious belief, and even if it is practiced by believers. Only "natural," innerworldly explanations of why or how things happen, explanations that could be acceptable to believers and unbelievers alike, are taken as historically admissible.[26]

In this passage, Daley makes an important critique of what he takes to be historical-criticism's understanding of "history." The modern understanding of history, the one presumed by the historical-critical method, treats history as that which may be known and studied critically; it is an objective entity in itself.[27] This conception of history does not allow for the interruption of the divine into human time and space. This view, however, differed greatly from the understanding of ancient interpreters who saw history rather as a record of events completed to bring about our salvation.[28]

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[26] Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?" 191.

[27] The development of the notion of history as a principle or active force in itself is attributed to Hegel. See the discussion by Kocku von Stuckrad, "Relative, Contingent, Determined: The Category 'History' and Its Methodological Dilemma," *JAAR* 71 (2003) 906–8. This transformation in the understanding of "history" that takes place during the modern period is an important topic that unfortunately will not be addressed to satisfaction in this paper. See the excellent studies in the collection of essays edited by C. Bartholomew *et al*, *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*.

[28] Note that Daley himself does not propose a thorough rejection of the historical-critical method, but rather envisions two scenarios, one that would engage Scripture on a historical-critical level alone and another that would judiciously utilize historical-critical methods and employ a more explicitly theological approach that would recognize the contributions of patristic forms

Indeed, scholars have been correct to point out that historical criticism is unable to produce a faith-filled interpretation, however, such a goal is not within the parameters of its objectives. Historical criticism may challenge faith but it neither produces nor does it claim to produce it.[29] Therefore, what sort of contribution can historical criticism bring to the study of Theology and what should be made of the fact that these interpretive methods emerge from an atheistic or secular context? Scholars have pointed out previously that the Church Fathers, both Antiochene and Alexandrian, frequently appropriated secular methods of interpretation and used them for theological purposes.[30] Origen and Jerome discuss how it is possible to appropriate

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of exegesis as valuable for the interpretation of Scripture within a community of believing Christians. He writes, "[I]t may be that the only way of fulfilling this need for theological exegesis and exegetical theology, in the immediate future at least, would be for the academic establishment to allow two branches of Biblical studies to emerge, of parallel authority in the 'guild': a secular approach to Scriptural interpretation, open to non-believer and former believers, as well as to believers who prefer to approach the Bible simply on historical terms; and an explicitly theological approach, which asks not simply textual and historical questions, but questions of how Christians might hear and use Biblical texts today, in the context of the whole tradition of a Biblically grounded Christian faith," see, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?" 215.

[29] See the discussion by Christopher Bryan, "The Preachers and the Critics: Thoughts on Historical Criticism," *ATR* 74 (2000) 50–53.

[30] E.g., R. M. Grant, *The Earliest Lives of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1961); C. Schäublin, *Untersuchungen zu Methode und Herkunft der antiochenischen Exegese* (Theophaneia 23; Köln: Bonn 1974); D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch: A Study of Early Christian Thought in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 96–116. Distinctions between Antiochene and Alexandrian approaches are often presented by the language of "typology" versus "allegory." For a discussion of the confusion surrounding this terminology, see the seminal article by H. de Lubac, "Typology and Allegorization," *Theological Fragments* (trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988) 129–64 [first published in *RSR* (1947) 180–226]; note also the important article by John J. O'Keefe who claims that the traditional distinctions between the Alexandrian and Antiochene traditions are somewhat artificial and strained, "'A Letter that Killeth': Toward a Reassessment of Antiochene Exegesis, or Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret on the Psalms," *JECS* (2000) 83–104.

pagan texts for Christian purposes by citing Deut 21:10–13.[31] This biblical text describes how an Israelite may take a captive foreign woman as his bride. The following translation is taken from the NRSV:

> 10 When you go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD your God hands them over to you and you take them captive, 11 suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman whom you desire and want to marry, 12 and so you bring her home to your house: she shall shave her head, pare her nails, 13 discard her captive's garb, and shall remain in your house a full month, mourning for her father and mother; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife.

Jerome cites this biblical passage in his response to Magnus, a Roman orator, who has asked why Jerome sometimes "quote(s) examples from secular literature and thus defile(s) the whiteness of the church with the foulness of heathenism."[32] Citing Deut 21:10–13, Jerome declares that his desire for the eloquence of secular wisdom is similar to the desire of the Hebrew for the captive foreign woman; similarly, once all that is "dead whether this be idolatry, pleasure, error, or lust" is removed from pagan texts, it may be used "to promote the advantage of Christ's family."[33]

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[31] Origen refers to this passage in a larger discussion about spiritual exegesis in his Homily 7 on Leviticus 11:3–7 which distinguishes between clean and unclean animals (those who "chew the cud" and "part the hoof"); see *Origen: Homilies on Leviticus 1–16*, (trans. Gary Wayne Barkley; FC 83; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990) 150.

[32] Jerome, Letter LXX, 2. Note that Jerome's reference to Deut 21:10–13 presumes the passivity of the captive female, reflecting his reading of the LXX that uses the 2nd masculine singular verb forms in vv. 12 and 13, instead of the active 3 feminine singular verbs found in the Hebrew text.

[33] Jerome goes on to write, "my so-called defilement with an alien increases the number of my fellow-servants," or in other words, his use of worldly texts may facilitate the evangelization of the pagan world, Letter LXX, 2. Jerome also points out that the fruit of the union between Hosea and the harlot Gomer was the seed of God, Jezreel (Hos 1:2–4). These texts are discussed from the perspective of gender and literary studies in Lisa Lampert's recent and excellent study, *Gender and Jewish Difference from Paul to Shakespeare* (The Middle Ages Series; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 40–43.

It is worth noting that the appropriation of secular methods was also observed among the early Jewish interpreters—even though Jewish tradition claims otherwise. The traditional Jewish claim that oral teaching was divinely revealed to Moses at Sinai stands in tension with studies that suggest that these interpretive techniques were largely derived from Hellenistic rhetoric. Jewish interpreters, like early Christian ones, employed secular pagan methods of exegesis borrowed from the Greeks who carefully applied such interpretive strategies to the Homeric corpus.[34]

Given this analogous situation, it comes as no surprise that several scholars have suggested that the secular interpretive methods associated with historical criticism may have some role in theological inquiry; however, it is unclear what that role might be. Furthermore, many have noted that a retrieval of the pre-modern reading of Scripture may offer a way of bridging the current gulf between biblical studies and theological inquiry. It seems clear that historical criticism engages Scripture in a way that takes the text seriously; however, as previously discussed, its conceptualization of the text differs from that of theologians whose confessional commitments lead them to understand the text as divine revelation. We may pose a question that needs to be revisited, namely, "how do historical-critical scholars understand or conceptualize the literal text of Scripture, and how is this similar or different from the attitudes towards the scriptural text in the ancient world?"

We know that pre-modern views towards Scripture differed most among themselves in their attitudes towards the literal sense of Scripture: the Antiochene view, noted for taking seriously and even privileging the literal sense of Scripture differed from the Alexandrian posi-

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Of course, other examples of a similar discussion are found in Augustine's corpus of writings in his discussion of the use of the spoil of the Egyptians for the manufacture of the wilderness tabernacle.

[34] See David Daube, "Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric," *HUCA* 22 (1949) 251–57; E. E. Hallewy, "Biblical Midrash and Homeric Exegesis," [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 31 (1961–62) 157–68; See Rudolph Pfeifer, *History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginning to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) 105–233.

tion in this regard.[35] The distinctive attitude towards interpretation expressed by the Antiochene exegetes is well described as due to an influence from the Syriac-speaking world by Lukas Van Rompay in his article, "Quelques remarques sur la tradition syriaque de l'oeuvre exégétique de Théodore de Mopsueste," (1987).[36] In a later study on Eusebius of Emesa, R. B. ten Haar Romeny notes that evidence suggesting influence from Syriac traditions upon the Antiochene school may be seen not only in the geographic location of Antioch and its role as the capitol of the Province of Syria but also in the tradition that "the school of Antioch was founded by the Syrian martyr Lucian (†

[35] See the excellent articles in: *The Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome* (eds. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 489–510; D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch*, 27–51; Sten Hidal, "Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Antiochene School with its Prevalent Literal and Historical Method," in *Hebrew Bible, Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation, Part 1* (ed. M. Sæbø; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) 543–68; Lucas van Rompay, "Antiochene Biblical Interpretation: Greek and Syriac," *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation: A Collection of Essays* (eds. J. Frishman and L. Van Rompay; Traditio Exegetica Graeca 5; Louvain: Peeters, 1997) 103–23; R. B. ter Haar Romeny, "Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis and the Origins of the Antiochene School," *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation*, 125–42; Frances Young, "Alexandrian and Antiochene Exegesis," *A History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 1: The Ancient Period* (eds. A. J. Hauser & D. F. Watson; Grand Rapids, Mich./Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003) 334–54.

[36] L. van Rompay's article may be found in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984. Literary Genres in Syriac Literature* (eds. H. J. W. Drijvers et al.; OrChrAn 229; Rome, 1987) 33–43; L. van Rompay, "Antiochene Biblical Interpretation: Greek and Syriac," 103–23; and also R. B. ter Haar Romeny study, "Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis and the Origins of the Antiochene School," *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation*, 125–42; see also Leloir, "Symbolisme et parallélisme chez Saint Ephrem," *A la rencontre de Dieu. Mémorial Albert Gelin* (Paris: Mappus, 1961) 363–74; all of whom argue in favor of including the Syrian Fathers with the Antiochenes, contra the position held by P. Yousif, "Exegetical Principles of Ephraem," *Studia Patristica* 18 (1990) that holds that Ephrem, because he is prior to Diodore (the long recognized founder of the Antiochene school, ca. 392), is not properly of the Antiochene School (p. 298).

312)".[37] Perhaps premodern approaches towards Scripture, as represented by the Syriac Fathers, may offer a fruitful interpretive strategy for modern biblical scholars.

The exegetical approaches employed by Syriac Fathers, like Ephrem, placed considerable importance on the literal or historical meaning of the text and typology.[38] As was often the case with ancient interpreters, Ephrem's exegesis attempted to clarify that which was unclear in the text. Similar to the modern methods of critical inquiry that seek to explain why the text says this or that but is silent about other things, Ephrem's biblical commentaries attempt to answer questions raised by the biblical text.

Ephrem's homiletical works or *madrashe* are imaginative theological works that are guided by more than clarifying what is unclear in the biblical text. Oftentimes, Ephrem's discussion of the biblical text is governed by a typological reading wherein he reads the Old Testament through a Christological lens. The Christological significance of the Old Testament Scriptures is not found in a surface reading of the text alone, but often triggered by words or phrases that point towards the deeper symbolic meanings. Scripture is used to illuminate Scripture, linking one with the other with a common word or motif. These typological readings were not only anchored by verbal signifiers but also by analogous events or characters. It is here that Ephrem reveals

[37] Ter Haar Romeny, "Eusebius of Emesa and the Antiochene School," 129. Additionally, Eusebius of Emesa, was also of Eastern origins, having been born in Edessa.

[38] The typological approaches of the pre-modern world are conflated at times with allegory which is an equivocal term for some time periods. See Henri de Lubac, "Typology and Allegorization," in *Theological Fragments* (trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 129; first published in *RSR* 35 (1947) 180–226. The typological approach towards Scripture, otherwise described as Ephrem's use of "universal symbolism," is identified as one of three of his primary exegetical approaches according to Bertrand de Margerie, "La poésie biblique de Saint Ephrem exegete Syrien (306–373)," in *Introduction à l'histoire de l'exégèse: I. Les pères grecs et orientaux* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1980) 177–79; see also R. Murray, "Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology," *Parole de L'Orient* 6–7 (1975–1976) 3.

his mastery as a poet, giving rise to various ancient legends about his miraculous inspiration.[39]

In addition to understanding Ephrem as a representative of the Antiochene school, although some have challenged these classic distinctions, we see that Ephrem is heir to various traditions familiar to Syriac asceticism.[40] Scholars have long noted the interpretive techniques he shared with the Jewish sages.[41] Sidney Griffith remarks that Ephrem's connection with Jewish strategies of interpretation "reminds the modern reader of Ephraem's work that in the Christian world of the Semitic languages there was a certain continuity of thought and imagination with the Jewish world about the interpretation of the biblical narratives that one does not always find in Greek and Latin commentaries."[42]

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[39] According to Byzantine Syriac Vita tradition, Ephrem received a supernatural gift of eloquence and wisdom: "The day after he received the document he became filled with the Holy Spirit, and began uttering marvelous things, going about preaching and teaching many. In the morning, he heard the hermits saying: 'Look, Ephrem is teaching as though a fountain were flowing from his mouth.' Then the old man realized that what was coming from his lips was from the Holy Spirit," see BL 9384, J. P. Amar (trans.), *The Syriac 'Vita' Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian* (Catholic University of America Ph.D. dissertation: Washington, DC, 1988) 234–35;

[40] S. Brock notes Ephrem's triple heritage: influence from Mesopotamian traditions, Jewish traditions, and also, but in a more restrictive sense, Hellenistic traditions; see S. P. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *JJS* 30 (1979) 212; *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World of St. Ephrem* (2d ed., CSS 124; Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1992) 19–21.

[41] See D. Gerson, "Die Commentarien des Ephraem Syrus im Verhältniss zur jüdischen Exegese. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Exegese," *MGWF* 17 (1868) 15–33, 64–72, 98–109, 141–49; J. Schirmann, "Hebrew Liturgical Poetry and Christian Hymnology," *JQR* n.s. 44 (1953–1954) 123–61; Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca* (Rome: Pontifical Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1965) 61; Nicolas Séd, "Les Hymns sur le paradis de Saint Ephrem et les traditions juives," *Le Muséon* 81 (1968) 455–501; T. Kronhom, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian, with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Tradition* (ConBOT 11; Lund, 1978) 25–27.

[42] Sidney H. Griffith, *'Faith Adoring the Mystery': Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian* (The Père Marquette lecture in Theology 1997; Milwaukee, Wisc.: Marquette University Press, 1997) 15. Griffith notes "[i]t is not

What is noteworthy for our study is the "textual plurality" that is assumed by the Syrian exegete.[43] Ephrem's interpretive approaches illustrate how a careful reading of the *littera* may produce a fruitful theological exegesis. It is Ephrem's attention to the *littera* and recognition of Scripture's transcendence that allows for both his theologically rich exegesis and for his typological interpretations which are notable for their creativity and theological insight.[44] Many have noted that even though Ephrem often cited a paraphrase of the biblical text or a Targumic version, his imaginative typological interpretations were anchored to the text by a particular word or understanding of the biblical narrative. Craig E. Morrison's recent study of the reception of the Book of Daniel in Aphrahat's Demonstrations also highlights the textual plurality of the Syrian exegete.[45] Morrison writes, "when citing the Bible, Aphrahat can adapt the citation to the argument he intends to

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only the fact that the Syriac versions he and his continuators and imitators used have the Hebrew Bible rather than the Septuagint behind them, but that many aspects of the interpretation have their closest analogues in the Jewish exegetical tradition rather than in other Christian traditions" (p. 15). See also L. Van Rompay for a brief discussion of the overlapping concerns found in Syriac writings and some notable works from the Second Temple period in, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," in *HB/OT*, 616–17.

[43] See L. Van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," 614–15. The expression, "textual plurality" is borrowed from M. Harl, "La Septante et la pluralité textuelle des Écritures," *La langue de Japet. Quinze etudes sur la Septante et le grec des chrétiens* (Paris: Cerf, 1992) 253–66.

[44] See P. S. Russell, "Making Sense of Scripture: An Early attempt by St. Ephraem the Syrian," *Comm* 28 (2001) 171–201, esp. 179.

[45] Craig E. Morrison, "The Reception of the Book of Daniel in Aphrahat's Fifth Demonstration, 'On Wars'" *Hugoye* 7 (2004). See also the comments on Syrian textual plurality by M. H. Goshen-Gottstein that early Syriac exegetes "often quoted from memory, omitted parts of verses, and of course, changed verses to fit their homiletic needs," in "Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Peshitta," in *Text and Language in Bible and Qumran* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Orient, 1960) 197; also the comments by Owens that Aphrahat relied upon his memory, "the looseness of so many of the citations suggests indeed a general pattern of *memoriter* rather than transcriptional quotation," R. J. Owens, *The Genesis and Exodus Citations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage* (MPIL 3; Leiden: Brill, 1983) 247.

develop. These adjustments to the biblical text do not witness to a memory lapse, but rather to his genius."[46]

These two great Syrian exegetes, Ephrem and Aphrahat, bear witness to a tradition of richly theological scriptural interpretation that succeeded in taking seriously the *littera* while avoiding the dangers of literalism. Both exegetes are remarkable for their literary artistry and perhaps this aspect of their interpretive discourse contributes to the theological character of their writings which seek to reveal the divine rather than define it.[47]

HOW CAN A TEXTUAL CRITICISM ASSIST IN ARRIVING AT A PRE-MODERN UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE?

Unlike the situation in the pre-modern period, careful attention to the *littera* by biblical exegetes today does not necessarily yield a fruitful theological exegesis. Nevertheless, scientific interpretive methods may be able to assist scholars who are interested in theological inquiry by bringing to light a different understanding of Scripture—one that has greater continuity with a pre-modern understanding of the text. Here our attention will turn to the specific discipline of textual criticism which has changed and developed throughout the years.[48] Textual criticism, when applied to the manuscript discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls, show that the scriptural text during the biblical period contained signs of textual pluriformity, thus suggesting that in the ancient world Scripture's authority did not reside in the specific fixed text, (the one that can be traced to the earliest human author), but rather in a more transcendent understanding of the text. Textual criticism can also shed new light on the understanding of the textual transmission process thereby allowing for a greater awareness of the inseparability of text and interpretation. The scribe's interpretive elements and tenden-

[46] Morrison, "The Reception of the Book of Daniel," §31. Morrison concludes that the textual variants do not result from a failed memory but rather a different textual version of the Peshitta.

[47] See the discussion by Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "The Odes of Solomon," in *Searching the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroad, 1994) 2:95.

[48] For a recent full discussion of textual criticism and its developments in light of the Qumran scrolls, see E. C. Ulrich, "Our Sharper Focus on the Bible and Theology Thanks to the Dead Sea Scrolls," *CBQ* 66 (2004) 1–24.

cies to contemporize and make intelligible the text that is being transmitted succeed in forming and shaping the scriptural text. I will discuss briefly both of these ways that the Scrolls have assisted in the reconceptualization of what is understood by the term "Scripture" in the following and then offer some concluding remarks.

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide textual evidence for a time period that was critically important for not only Christianity but also later forms of normative Judaism. Over nine hundred manuscripts have been identified and grouped from the caves at Qumran with a great majority of these texts falling under the category of "biblical" texts. "Biblical" texts, i.e. those texts that are aligned with what are later known as biblical texts, reveal a great deal of pluriformity during this time. Somewhat ironically, during what we term the biblical period, there was no Bible as we know it, only a notion of scriptural texts that were authoritative for particular communities. One of the major contributions of the discovery of the scrolls at Qumran has been to challenge the methodological assumptions of the historical-critical method that privilege one literal text and prioritize the earliest recoverable form of that text. In particular, the textual-critical method, understood to be the disciplined recovery of the original form of the text, has been able to demonstrate the futility of historical criticism's presupposition of linear development by underscoring the radical pluriformity of the scriptural text in the Second Temple Period.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM: BEFORE AND AFTER THE SCROLLS

Prior to the discovery of the scrolls, textual criticism relied upon the premise that the Masoretic Text (MT), Septuagint (LXX), and Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) represented distinct textual families that were geographically independent: MT was associated with Babylon, LXX with Egypt, and SP with Palestine.[49] The goal of the method during the

[49] There are many fine summaries of the history of the scholarly understanding of the biblical text: S. Talmon, "The Old Testament Text," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome, vol. 1* (eds. R. P. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans; Cambridge, 1970) 159–99; the important articles by Frank Moore Cross, "The Evolution of a Theory of Local Texts," in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text* (eds. F. M. Cross and S. Talmon; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975) 306–15; Emanuel Tov, "A

early part of the nineteenth century was the reconstruction of the original form of the text.[50] In 1863, Paul de Lagarde published a book in which he laid out his theory of archetypal manuscripts which presumed that these text-types descended from a common *Urtext.*[51] His theory of a single original text, the underlying *Urtext* behind all three textual families, eventually came to be assessed as tenuous and problematic but remained influential. Scholars who subscribe to this theory will disclose their commitments to it when they attempt to reconstruct the version closest to the *Urtext*.[52] To this day, it is often the case that scholars will confuse their understanding of the "original" text with the MT.

Influence from the manuscript discoveries of the Cairo Geniza at the turn of the twentieth century and a greater awareness of the Aramaic *Targumim* gave rise to an alternative and opposing view to the *Urtext* theory of Lagarde. P. E. Kahle proposed that there was not one single *Urtext* but several *Vulgärtexte* that developed in a linear fashion towards uniformity into what we know as the *textus receptus*.[53] His theory, unlike Lagarde's, allowed for the multiple recensions that would have taken place during the course of textual transmission. A major weakness to Kahle's theory was that it unjustifiably assigned prominence to the role of these individual "vulgar" texts that presuma-

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Modern Textual Outlook Based on the Qumran Scrolls," *HUCA* 53 (1982) 11–27; Martin Jan Mülder, "The Transmission of the Biblical Text," *Mikra*, 87–135; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (hereafter *TCHB*) (2nd rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, 1992) 155–97; and the excellent article by Eugene C. Ulrich, "Pluriformity in the Biblical Text, Text Groups, and Questions of Canon," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999 repr. from 1992) 79–98.

[50] See the discussion by Tov, *TCHB*, 155–97.

[51] Paul de LaGarde, *Anmerkungen zur griechischen Übersetzung der Proverbien* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1863).

[52] For a clear discussion critiquing the theory of an *Urtext*, see Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 169–71.

[53] P. E. Kahle, "Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Pentateuchtextes," *TSK* (1915) 399–439 [= *Opera Minora. Festgabe zum 21. Januar 1956*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1956) 3–37]; *Der masoretische Text des Alten Testaments nach der überliferung der babylonischen Juden* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902).

bly were created to facilitate understanding.[54] Lagarde's influence upon future generations of textual critics, however, exceeded that of Kahle.

After the discovery, the number of available Hebrew manuscripts increased exponentially, enabling the disciplined study of the development of the biblical text to a degree greater than was previously possible. Early in the scholarship of the Scrolls, the remarkable textual continuity of the MT with these manuscripts from the late Second Temple Period was noted as evidence in support of its greater antiquity. At first this corroborated the classic understanding of the three textual families which characterized the MT as the one with the greatest antiquity, and Greek LXX as secondary (i.e., as ideological and revisionary).[55] This classic understanding reflected the historical-critical idealization of a single text that gave rise in a linear fashion to subsequent versions. If we look at the description of the Tabernacle in the book of Exodus, the MT and the LXX preserve accounts that are wildly different from each other on both the level of lexeme variants and the larger structural order of events. David W. Gooding's studies on the tabernacle section illustrate the extent to which the preconceived attitudes about the textual witnesses (MT and LXX) influenced scholarly assessments of variants. In his 1959 assessment of the variations between the Masoretic and the Septuagint accounts of the Tabernacle sections in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40,[56] Gooding wrote the following about the LXX version of Exod 35–40:

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[54] See Tov's concise discussion of the problems behind Kahle's theory in, *TCHB*, 184–85.

[55] The SP was not taken seriously by most scholars.

[56] Some of the major works on the textual criticism of the tabernacle section include, J. Popper, *Der biblische Bericht über die Stiftshütte. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Composition und Diaskeue des Pentateuch* (Leipzig: H. Hunger, 1862); D. W. Gooding, *The Account of the Tabernacle: Translation and Textual Problems of Greek Exodus* (Text and Studies 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959); R. D. Nelson, *Studies in the Development of the Text of the Tabernacle Account (Qumran, Old Greek, Samaritan Pentateuch)* (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 1986); Anneli Aejmelaeus, "Septuagintal Translation Techniques—A Solution to the Problem of the Tabernacle Account," in *Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings (Manchester 1990)* (eds. G. J. Brooke and B. Lindars; SBLSCS 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 119–30. There is also a brief text critical treatment of the tabernacle passages in J. Barr, *The Variable*

> If these chapters are in large part by the translator of the first section, there is an immediate answer. He was, as we know, impatient of technical details and certainly careless of accuracy in translating technical terms. Having waded through all the technical details once (and that not without letting his impatience lead him into some foolish mistranslations), when he encountered these details again he would weary of them, and considering it pointless to have a full repetition, he would shorten his work by wholesale abbreviations, paraphrases and omissions. At the same time his impatience would show itself in his lack of principle and proportion in his abbreviating and paraphrases.[57]

Such an explanation for the textual variants between the manuscripts clearly presumes that the MT was the more original text that was later corrupted by the LXX translators who are here identified by Gooding as "careless, impatient, foolish, and weary." Gooding represents the classic scholarly bias in favor of the MT as the more original text and against the reliability of the LXX as a textual witness. Later scholars have demonstrated that these variations suggest the opposite, namely that the LXX preserves an earlier version of the tabernacle account and that it is the MT that in fact shows evidence of secondary reshaping.[58]

The greater abundance of manuscript evidence from Qumran has demonstrated that the classic understanding of the relationship between the MT (as primary) and LXX (as secondary and revisionary),

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Spellings of the Hebrew Bible: The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1986 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 174–77.

[57] See Gooding, *The Account of the Tabernacle*, 76–77.

[58] Aejmelaeus, "Septuagintal Translation Techniques—A Solution to the Problem of the Tabernacle Account," 116–30. Aejmelaeus rightly disagrees with Gooding's understanding of the liberties afforded to the LXX translator. According to her analysis, LXX is not a careless translation, rather it demonstrates a logical grouping of the woven items first and the metalwork second, 118. She concludes that MT is more likely the later text. Its consistent parallelism is due to a later impulse to harmonize the uneven qualities of the Hebrew *Vorlage* of LXX. The Hebrew *Vorlage* of LXX has been thought to be similar to the tabernacle account in 11QT[a] 3 and 10, thus suggesting that 11QT preserves a tradition that corroborates the LXX translation of Exod 35–40 (p. 101).

typified by Gooding and his assessment of the tabernacle variants, is mistaken. Gene Ulrich writes the following about the traditional scholarly bias *against* the LXX:

> Catholics tended to use it because it had been the Bible of the church from the beginnings, until the Vulgate replaced it. Jews tended to ignore it in favor of the traditional Hebrew, and Protestants tended to dismiss it in view of the renewed interest in the 'original Hebrew,' partly as a result of the Renaissance return to the original languages for all classics. Thus major differences between the text of LXX and that of the 'original' Hebrew were mainly seen as corruptions or deliberate changes from the inspired text.[59]

What should be noted from Ulrich's account of the scholarly attitudes towards (or better against) the LXX is that it presumes that there exists a pristine biblical text that was obscured by secondary interpretive accretions of later Greek translators/tradents. This pristine biblical text is often associated strongly with the traditional Hebrew text (MT). These attitudes against the LXX bear a striking resemblance to the statement earlier quoted by Briggs against the "débris of human dogmas, ecclesiastical institutions, liturgical formulas" and reflect a rejection of the authority associated with the Roman Catholic Church.[60]

A revision in the scholarly understanding of the LXX is coupled with a renewed interest in Septuagintal studies in recent years.[61] The scrolls have rightly revised scholarly attitudes towards the LXX and

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[59] See Ulrich, "Multiple Literary Editions: Reflections Toward a Theory of the History of the Biblical Text," repr. in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 101–2.

[60] These descriptions were taken from the Briggs quote mentioned earlier in this paper.

[61] See for example: Kristin De Troyer, *Rewriting the Sacred Text: What the Old Greek Texts Tell Us about the Literary Growth of the Bible* (Text-critical studies 4; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Martin Hengel with the assistance of Roland Deines, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture. Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon* (Edinburgh & New York: T & T Clark, 2002); Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible* (Boston/Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001); Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2000).

have revealed that the readings preserved in the LXX reflect actual Hebrew texts and not simply the capricious attitudes of the Greek translators. As textual studies on the scrolls continued, it became clear that the LXX preserved readings from ancient Hebrew texts lost long ago, as texts like 4QJer[b,d] illustrate.[62] Some of those Hebrew texts were preserved in their Greek form (LXX) and are much earlier than the MT. In other words, the scrolls suggested a curious situation for these Hebrew scrolls contained readings known from the LXX; they were "mixed" insofar as they reflected a combination of details or tendencies from the known textual families.[63]

The Scrolls challenged longstanding assumptions held by textual critics affecting not only scholarly attitudes towards the LXX but also attitudes towards the MT which privileged it as earlier and primary. As textual criticism's methodological assumptions underwent revisions, it became clear that the tidy three-fold division of texts (corresponding to the *textus receptus,* e.g., MT, LXX, and SP) was an inadequate way of describing the evidence. In an excellent study published in 1982, Emanuel Tov discussed how the readings preserved in the Scrolls do not support the traditional scholarly three-fold conceptual understanding of textual families and in fact, seem to contain several unique readings, not preserved among the three received texts.[64] He writes:

> Briefly put, a scroll does not have to be grouped with one of the so-called major sources; it can also be independent of them, that is in-

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[62] 4QJer[b,d] are the classic texts that illustrate that the LXX preserves an earlier edition of the biblical book than the MT. See E. Tov, "The Literary History of the book of Jeremiah in the Light of Its Textual History," *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism* (ed. J. H. Tigay; Philadelphia, 1985) 211–37 and *TCHB*, 321–27.

[63] F. M. Cross' theory of local texts quickly became the standard understanding that accounted for why the Qumran manuscripts were "mixed" and did not reflect discreet versions of the three pure textual families; F. M. Cross, "The Evolution of a Theory of Local Texts," in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text* (eds. F. M. Cross and Shemaryahu Talmon; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975) 306–20. Cross' theory was attractive because it succeeded in explaining the manuscript evidence from Qumran within the known categories of texts, MT, SP, and LXX.

[64] E. Tov, "A Modern Textual Outlook Based on the Qumran Scrolls," 11–27.

> dividualistic. Each scroll reflects the idiosyncracies of its own scribe. . . . Scholars have too quickly assigned scrolls to the "type" of the Septuagint or the Sam. Pent. And at the same time they have been reluctant to describe scrolls as independent or individualistic because there was no room for such characterizations in the existing system.[65]

In sum, textual studies that incorporate the material findings from Qumran do not support the traditional position that there were three textual streams in antiquity nor do they point towards the greater antiquity of the MT. Furthermore, the classic linear conceptualization of textual development (either from uniformity to pluriformity as suggested by de Lagarde or from pluriformity to uniformity as suggested by Kahle) seemed to be seriously flawed. As Tov writes, "we should now have an open mind for the possibility that some scrolls are not to be linked with any of the known textual documents, and that they present individualistic, hitherto unknown, sources."[66] The material evidence of the Scrolls suggests rather that the text was more fluid than was thought previously and that multiple literary editions of a book existed during the time of the late Second Temple period.[67]

Given that Tov acknowledges that the text was pluriform in the period prior to its canonization in the first century CE and that there were independent textual traditions apart from the known received texts, it is ironic that in the case of a particular group of scrolls, 4Q364–367, Tov is reluctant to categorize them as biblical texts, choosing instead to refer to them as "Reworked Pentateuch" texts.[68] These

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[65] Tov, "A Modern Textual Outlook Based on the Qumran Scrolls," 20.

[66] Tov, "A Modern Textual Outlook Based on the Qumran Scrolls," 22.

[67] Ulrich suggests that the process of stabilization of the text began around the 1st century due to complex political pressures exerted by the Roman empire, "The Bible in the Making: The Scriptures at Qumran," reprinted in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 31–32.

[68] In his earlier publication on these scrolls, E. Tov remarks that these scrolls are closer to rewritten Bible than to paraphrase. See "The Textual Status of 4Q364–367 [4QPP]," in *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Madrid 18–21 March, 1991* (eds. J. Trebolle Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner; 2 vols.; STDJ XI, 1; Leiden: Brill/ Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1992) 1:51. The name, "Reworked Pentateuch" was coined by Tov because he felt that "paraphrasing" suggested

scrolls contain variant readings that fall within the range of what may be considered to be normal during the process of textual transmission and seem to be representative of the individualistic textual traditions acknowledged by Tov in his 1982 article.[69]

The history of scholarship on the scrolls 4Q364–367 reflects scholarly ambivalence towards their categorization. Their label "Reworked Pentateuch" was itself a revision of their earlier name, "Pentateuchal Paraphrase."[70] While Tov felt that "paraphrase" was too strong a word for the kinds of variants found in these scrolls, he nevertheless refrained from referring to them as independent biblical texts at the Madrid Qumran conference in 1991. He echoes this view later in 1994. While each of these four manuscripts is individualistic in their tendencies towards or away from a *textus receptus*, they share a common trait of deviating from the MT. Their assessment as "reworked" could suggest an implicit hierarchy that ranks those texts that stand closer to the MT as "biblical." The text underlying the scrolls 4Q364–367 could reflect an ancient version that was recognized as authoritative and scrip-

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more extensive revisions that were found in 4Q364–367. For a discussion of the classification of these scrolls as such, see E. Tov and S. A. White, "364–367. 4QReworked Pentateuch^{b-e} and 365a. 4QTemple?" in *Qumran Cave 4, VIII: Parabiblical Texts, Part 1* (ed. H. Attridge, et al., in consultation with J. C. VanderKam; DJD XIII; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 187 and E. Tov, "Biblical Texts as Reworked in Some Qumran Manuscripts with Special Attention to 4QRP and 4QParaGen-Exod," in *The Community of the Renewed Covenant: The Notre Dame Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (eds. E. Ulrich and J. C. VanderKam; CJA 10; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994) 124.

[69] For an example of these methodological presumptions as they relate to the labeling of the so-called Reworked Pentateuch texts, see Angela Y. Kim, "A Study of the Textual Alignment of the Tabernacle Sections of 4Q365 (fragments 8a-b, 9a-b I, 9b ii, 12a I, 12b iii)," *Textus* 21 (2002) 45–69.

[70] The older terminology of "Pentateuchal Paraphrase" was based on J. Allegro's original publication of 4Q158 in "Biblical Paraphrase: Genesis, Exodus," *Qumran Cave 4, I (4Q158–4Q186)* (DJD V; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) 1–6. When 4Q364–367 became identified with 4Q158 on the basis of content, this description extended to them as well. "Pentateuchal Paraphrase" was coined by J. Strugnell in his article, "Notes en Marge du Volume V des 'Discoveries in the Judaean Desert of Jordan,'" *RevQ* 7 (1969–70) 168 which corrected many of Allegro's initial readings.

tural by Jews at the time, perhaps better described as representative of another independent textual tradition of the Pentateuch rather than a "reworking" of a text that later becomes identified as the MT.[71]

While many scholarly views on the classification of 4Q364–367 have been expressed since John Allegro's initial publication of them in 1968, it is clear that the scholarly assessment of the usefulness of categories like "reworked" or "rewritten" and of the implicit prioritization of the textual tradition that later becomes the MT continues to be reviewed and discussed further.[72] When we look at the history of the discipline of textual criticism, it is clear that it has undergone various developments, however, the basic operative assumptions by de Lagarde that accretions are secondary and negative and that the principle task is to reconstruct a text that is either closest to the original author or editor (presumed to be the MT), have proven themselves to be implicit and enduring.[73]

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[71] The evidence for what Tov referred to as "independent texts" (in his 1982 article) at Qumran is not limited to studies of the so-called Reworked Pentateuch scrolls (4Q364–367) but also finds support from the analysis of the scriptural citations in the 14 copies of Jubilees by J. C. VanderKam, "Questions of Canon Viewed through the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BBR* 11 (2001) 290–291; see also his discussion in J. C. VanderKam, "The Wording of Biblical Citations in Some Rewritten Scriptural Works," in *The Bible as Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judaean Desert Discoveries* (ed. E. D. Herbert and E. Tov; London: The British Library and Oak Knoll Press in Association with the Scriptorium: Center for Christian Antiquities, 2002) 41–56.

[72] See the most recent studies by M. Bernstein forthcoming in his article in *Textus* (2005); and M. Segal, "Between Bible and Rewritten Bible," in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran* (ed. M. Henze; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 10–28.

[73] E.g., J. Weingreen describes the task of the textual critic in the following way: "By identifying the error and explaining how it came about, the textual critic may then be able to remove the disruptive element and restore the text to its original form as written by the author or as it left the hands of the final editor" *Introduction to the Critical Study of the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) 3.

SO WHAT?

The new manuscript evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls suggests that the Scriptures were radically pluriform and that during the Second Temple period, there was no ideological association with a particular textual version.[74] This traditional attitude towards the Scriptures could perhaps help us to understand why the rabbis, given their meticulous attention to the written word, never develop a scientific study of textual criticism (as moderns would recognize it).[75] Timothy Lim's studies on the Qumran exegetical commentaries (*pesharim*) suggest that even though this literary genre makes a clear distinction between the quoted scriptural *lemma* and its interpretation, the Qumran interpreter felt free to make small textual changes to words in the quoted *lemma* in order to make a stronger connection to his interpretation.[76] A similar sort of observation was made by George Brooke in his study of the

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[74] E. C. Ulrich, "The Community of Israel and the Composition of the Scriptures," repr. in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 15–16. A similar sort of discussion over the ideological ties of the Peshitta OT to Judaism or to Syriac Christianity has also been raised by scholars; see the representative works by S. Brock, "The Peshitta Old Testament: Between Judaism and Christianity," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 19 (1998) 483–502; J. Joosten, "La Peshitta de l'Ancien Testament dans la recherché récente," in *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 76 (1996) 389; S. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature and Theology* (Collected Studies Series CS 357; Hampshire Great Britain: Variorum, 1992) 212–32; P. B. Dirksen, "The Old Testament Peshitta," in *Mikra*, 261–97; Y. Maori, "The Peshitta Version of the Pentateuch in its Relation to the Sources of Jewish Exegesis," (Ph.D. Diss, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1975); J. Perles, *Meletemata Peschitoniana* (Bratislav, 1859). The great abundance of Jewish exegetical material among other reasons contributes to the overwhelming position confirming the traditional claim that the Peshitta was a Jewish translation.

[75] Philip S. Alexander, "Why no Textual Criticism in Rabbinic Midrash? Reflections on the Textual Culture of the Rabbis," *Jewish Ways of Reading the Bible* (ed. G. J. Brooke; Oxford: Oxford University Press on behalf of the University of Manchester, 2000) 175–90.

[76] Timothy H. Lim, *Holy Scripture in the Qumran Commentaries and Pauline Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 95–120. The pesharist also seems to have made small omissions of verses or even entire chapters, e.g., Hab 3 is entirely missing from 1QpHab (p. 93).

scriptural citations found in the sectarian document, 4QMMT.[77] Bruce Metzger remarks in his work on Canon and the New Testament, that "Eusebius and Jerome, well aware of such variation in the witnesses, discussed which form of text was to be preferred. It is noteworthy, however, that neither Father suggested that one form was canonical and the other was not."[78]

The ancient understanding of the scriptural text allowed for its textual pluriformity *and* recognition of its transcendence. Textual-critical studies on the Qumran Scrolls highlight this feature of the scriptural text in the Second Temple period and present to us a realization of the sacred text as pluriform and not fixed. This attitude towards the text is perhaps closer to the attitude towards the scriptural texts held by Antiochene exegetes like the Syriac Fathers.[79] Thus, the historical-critical presuppositions that privilege one form of a scriptural text runs contrary to the historical reality of the ancient world. Textual criticism, when applied with the evidence of the scrolls, reintroduces a pre-modern understanding of "Scripture" that holds that the authoritative status of a text[80] does not rely upon the specific textual

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[77] George J. Brooke writes, "Along with many other scrolls which contain explicit citation of scripture, it seems that MMT helps us to see that we should not look for nor expect to find scripture quoted exactly in the form it is known to us in the MT. Nor should citations which contain no major words other than those which are also to be found in the MT be discarded as non-biblical," in his article, "The Explicit Presentation of Scripture in 4QMMT," in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues: Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Cambridge 1995. Published in Honour of Joseph M. Baumgarten* (eds. M. Bernstein, F. García Martínez, J. Kampen; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 88.

[78] B. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 269–70; also cited by Ulrich, "Qumran and the Canon of the Old Testament," 3.

[79] In A. Gelston's study, *The Peshitta of the Twelve Prophets* [(Oxford, 1987) 131–56] he notes various examples of variants between the Peshitta and the Hebrew MT, and argues that the Peshitta text is a free translation that goes back to a Hebrew *Vorlage*; see also the discussion in Dirksen, "The Old Testament Peshitta," 259.

[80] We could refer to the text's authoritative status as its "canonical" status however it would be anachronistic to apply such terminology to the texts from Qumran.

form of that text but upon a different conception of why that text was authoritative.[81]

It seems clear that the authority that the text possessed in premodern communities came not from its specific fixed textual form but from the recognition of that text as a divinely inspired work whose divine authorship transcends the multiple human agents who are responsible for the production of multiple texts.[82] Here it is helpful to introduce a distinction between "author" and "writer" made by Michel Foucault.[83] In his study of authorship and authority, he notes a fundamental distinction between the author and the writer. The author alone is able to transcend the individual particular moments of textual production that characterizes the writer. Foucault writes that the author, not the writer, is the ground of unity that can "neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts."[84] In the case of the scriptural text, the community's recognition of the divine authorship

[81] E. C. Ulrich, "Qumran and the Canon of the Old Testament," in *The Biblical Canons* (eds. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge; BETL 163; Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2003). He writes that "it is the book, not the specific textual form of the book, which is canonical."

[82] Such a distinction was previously offered by Barthélemy who suggested that it would be helpful to distinguish between "literary and scriptural authenticity," in which the latter (scriptural authenticity) would allow for many forms of the text; see D. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancient Testament, I* (OBO 50/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprect, 1982) 103–114; also the discussion by S. Brock, "To Revise or not to Revise: Attitudes to Jewish Biblical Translation," in *Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings. Papers Presented to the International Symposium on the Septuagint and Its Relations to the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Writings (Manchester, 1990)* (eds. G. J. Brooke, B. Lindars; Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 332–33.

[83] Note the distinction between author and writer made by M. Foucault, "What is an Author?" *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (ed. James D. Faubion; trans. Robert Hurley and others; Vol. II; New York: The New Press, 1998) 205–22. See as well the excellent application of this study to mosaic discourse by Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (JSJSup 77; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 9–16; also see Mark Vessey, "The Forging of Orthodoxy in Latin Christian Literature: A Case Study," *JECS* 4 (1996) 495–513.

[84] Foucault, "What is an Author?"

of the written text confers authority upon what has been written and transforms it from human writing to divine revelation, A.K.A. Scripture. The divine author's role differs from the human writer's; the former gives the text its authority, the latter plays a part in the actual production of the physical object.

Recognition of the scriptural text's transcendence as divine writing brings us to an understanding of the text that is closer to a pre-modern understanding. Textual criticism helps us to recognize the great pluriformity of the text in the ancient period which in turn leads to the necessary existence of a transcendent text and divine author. This understanding of the scriptures is closer to a pre-modern understanding. There was no expectation among the rabbinic commentaries on Scripture that Scripture itself was a fixed text in the same way classical models of textual criticism presumed that it was.[85] Religious communities in antiquity simply did not understand textual fixity to be criterion for the authority of a text in the same way that the modern interpretive strategy of textual criticism did.

In sum, textual criticism may contribute to a greater awareness of the radical transcendence of what was understood to be "Scripture" in the ancient world. Furthermore, the religious commitments of the community that transmitted the text are preserved in the various textual variants that arise naturally during the transmission process and testify to the actualization of the scriptures for that community. Instead of the traditional model of a linear development that understood textual deviations to be the functional deficiencies of the scribe, it is clear that in antiquity, the translation and transmission of a text was understood to be an inspired and interpretive activity which began to take on its characteristic features during the post-exilic period with the rise of scribalism and inspired exegesis. Prior to their canonization, these texts were not yet fixed and the boundary between the text and its interpretation was more porous. It is more likely that Scriptures that are known today were formed from the compounding of interpretations, similar to the interpretive expansions and accretions that are made to the pre-exilic prophecy of Isaiah during the exilic and the post-exilic periods. Thus, the transmission and translation of Scripture is a

[85] See P. S. Alexander, "Why no Textual Criticism in Rabbinic Midrash? Reflections on the Textual Culture of the Rabbis," 175–90.

process that is more than merely functional. The transmission of Scripture is a process that involves the interlacing of scribal interpretation into the text to some degree.[86] At times, the scribe creatively contemporizes or actualizes the text allowing these interpretive elements to become thoroughly mingled with the pre-existing tradition as we see in the postexilic sage who gives an inspired interpretation of the sacred texts[87] or in the creativity of the great Syrian poet, Ephrem. There is always something that remains undisclosed or elusive in Scripture, allowing for the vitality of future interpretations and inviting the exegete to continue scrutinizing and probing the revelatory text.[88] The elusiveness of the written form of revelation is also illustrated by the theophanic passages that struggle to convey in words the human experience of the divine. Ezekiel's famous description of God: "like the bow in the cloud on a rainy day, such is the appearance of the surrounding splendor, it was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord, and I saw it and fell upon my face, and heard a voice speaking" (Ezek 1:28), illustrates how the activity of describing the divine manages to elude human words with each circumlocution failing to describe completely and conclusively the experience of God. Ephrem describes

[86] See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*; Kugel, "Early Interpretation."

[87] Of course the classic example is Daniel who offers the revealed understanding of Jeremiah's seventy years prophecy in Dan 9:24; Kugel, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 58

[88] Brock writes, "When using these terms 'hidden' and 'revealed' Ephrem will be employing one of two totally different perspectives. Most frequently he will employ what we may term the human perspective: God is hidden, except in so far as he allows himself to be revealed. This human experience of God's hiddenness (*kasyuta*) is only possible through God's various instances of self-revelation. For a created being experience of all these different individual self-manifestations of God will never add up to a full revelation of God's hiddenness; the revelation is always partial. This means that this human perspective is essentially subjective: each individual will approach God's hiddenness by way of a different set of *galyata*, or points of revelation," *The Luminous Eye*, 27.

Scripture's transcendence and power in the following stanzas from his *Hymns on Paradise*:[89]

> I read the opening of this book and was filled with joy,
> For its verses and lines spread out their arms to welcome me;
> The first rushed out and kissed me, and led me on to its companion;
> And when I reached that verse wherein is written
> The story of Paradise, it lifted me up and transported me
> From the bosom of the book to the very bosom of Paradise.
>
> The eye and the mind traveled over the lines
> As over a bridge, and entered together the story of Paradise.
> The eye as it read transported the mind;
> In return the mind, too gave the eye rest
> From its reading, for when the book had been read
> The eye had rest but the mind was engaged.
>
> Both the bridge and the gate of Paradise
> Did I find in this book. I crossed over and entered;
> My eye remained outside but my mind entered within.
> I began to wander amid things not described.
> This is a luminous height, clear, lofty and fair:
> Scripture named it Eden, the summit of all blessings.

CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

The divine nature of Scripture transcends the many variations of the literal text itself. Pre-modern interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, conceptualized Scripture in a way that recognized its divine transcendence while taking seriously its wording or textuality. In other words, ancient interpreters paid careful attention to the *littera* while avoiding the dangers of literalism. Interestingly enough, the application of textual criticism on the biblical texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls may help us to better understand ancient attitudes towards Scripture and also why scriptural interpretation was more richly theological. In summary, we

[89] Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, V: 2–5, translation taken from S. P. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998) 102–104.

have proposed that the dominant understanding of Scripture among modern biblical scholars is often as an idealized text whose primary meaning resides in the earliest recoverable form of the text, the one that is also the closest to the human author. This scientific understanding of Scripture as a textual object impedes theological inquiry. Scripture's textual pluriformity during the ancient period has been highlighted in the work of many textual-critical scholars but in addition to that, its radically transcendent nature may simultaneously be restored. Scripture's textual pluriformity *and* transcendence should both be appreciated as signs of Scripture's human and divine natures through the interpretive lens of the mystery of the Incarnation (*DV* 13). Such a conceptualization of Scripture is more true to a pre-modern perspective and more open to theological inquiry.

PSALM 22 IN SYRIAC TRADITION

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INTRODUCTION

That "the Church is not afraid of scientific criticism" of the Bible, as John Paul II wrote a decade ago, is due largely to the patient labors of Catholic exegetes of previous generations.[1] Contemporary Catholic exegetes owe them a debt of gratitude. What is at issue currently is not fear, but relevance or promise. Brian Daley, S.J. has recently observed that there is a growing sense among Biblical scholars and theologians that,

> the dominant post-Enlightenment approach to identifying the meaning of Biblical texts has begun to lose some of its energy, that it has less of substance to say than once it did to those who want to spend their time reading the Christian Bible: the members, by and large, of the Christian Churches.[2]

Biblical scholarship that uses the text of the Bible primarily as a source for recovering the culture and religion of ancient Israel is useful in itself as an academic discipline, but is of limited usefulness to theol-

[1] "Allocution de sa sainteté le pape Jean-Paul II sur l'interprétation de la Bible dans l'Église," in *L'interprétation de la Bible dans l'Église, Commission Biblique Pontificale* (Paris: Cerf, 1994) para. 4, p. 5. Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.

[2] Brian E. Daley, S.J., "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?: Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms," *Communio* 29 (2002) 186; a slightly different form of Daley's paper appeared with the same title in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (ed. E. Davis and R. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 69–88.

ogy. It too often simply fails to go far enough or to ask many of the important questions. A review of a recent commentary on Genesis, to take just one current example, noted that with regard to the long and fascinating story of Rebecca and the servant of Abraham in Genesis 24 "the reader hears more about the camels as an anachronism than about the main character of this narrative," namely, the anonymous servant.[3] Biblical exegetes too often adopt the model of the technician, explaining a text's pre-history and its meaning for its original audience, resolving its historical problems, but failing to treat the text theologically, as Scripture, as the living Word of God.[4] Andrew Louth has correctly observed that when dealing with Scripture we deal not "with a technique for solving problems but with an art for discerning mystery."[5]

On another level, the historical-critical method is sometimes alleged by its ardent proponents to be able to determine the meaning of a biblical text in such a way that other, figural readings are necessarily excluded.[6] The hegemony of this method can be as limiting and as theologically restrictive as some of the rigidly Christological programs of the patristic and medieval periods that denied to the Old Testament a literal or contextual meaning apart from Christ. That biblical texts can have more than one level of meaning is a basic tenet of Christian interpretation. Saint Augustine puts it this way: "So, while one may say, 'Moses meant what I think,' and another, 'No, he meant what I think,' I think, for myself, it is more religious to say this: why did he not mean both, if both are true?"[7] The historical-critical methods go a

[3] David L. Petersen, review of David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, *Review of Biblical Literature* [http://www.bookreviews.org] 2004. In this instance Petersen seems to suggest a lack of balance between historical background to the text and explication of the text itself.

[4] For a useful discussion of the properly theological task of exegesis see A. Di Noia and B. Mulcahy, "The Authority of Scripture in Sacramental Theology: Some Methodological Observations," *Pro Ecclesia* 10 (2001) 339–40.

[5] Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery, An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983) 113.

[6] See Daley's discussion of Joseph Fitzmyer's position in Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?" 192–94.

[7] Augustine, *Conf*, xxxi. 42, as translated and cited in Daley, ibid., 199. Similarly L. Johnson and W. Kurz (*The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship, A Constructive Conversation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002]) identify inclu-

long way in helping to determine if an interpretation is true, but they are not sole arbiter of the truth of Scripture.

In 1988 Cardinal Ratzinger called for the development of a new exegetical method that would be, in his words, "thoroughly relevant" to the Church.[8] Tentatively labeled "Method C" exegesis, it would take advantage of the strengths of both the patristic-medieval exegetical approach, Method A, and the modern historical-critical approach, Method B, while remaining cognizant of the shortcomings of both.[9] In a study of Psalm 22 published in *The Thomist* in 2002, Gregory Vall offered a test case for Method C exegesis.[10] I am generally sympathetic to the aims of this project and to Vall's specific contribution to the project using Psalm 22 as a test case. Method C, as Vall envisioned it, would also take into consideration approaches that do not fall neatly under Methods A or B, namely Jewish interpretation and newer literary methodologies such as narrative criticism. In this paper, I would like to build on Vall's study and ask if the tradition of Syriac Old Testament commentary has anything to add to Method C exegesis as described by Ratzinger and developed by Vall. In formulating the topic in this way, I hope to offer a preliminary and modest contribution toward answering the question raised by this conference, whether Syriac biblical commentary can contribute to the apparent impasse in biblical scholarship between historical criticism and a desire for theological relevance. After a brief and necessarily incomplete survey of the reception of Psalm 22 in the Syrian Orient, focusing primarily on the tradition of Syriac Old Testament commentary, I will suggest several areas in which this tradition might contribute to the project described by Cardinal Ratzinger.

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sive "both/and" thinking to be characteristic of Catholic biblical interpretation.

[8] Richard J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989) 6.

[9] See further Ratzinger's remarks in ibid., 107–108, and the discussion in Gregory Vall, "Psalm 22: Vox Christi or Israelite Temple Liturgy?" *The Thomist* 66 (2002) 175–76. It should be noted that the term "Method C" tentatively suggested by Cardinal Ratzinger has not gained currency.

[10] Vall, "Psalm 22."

PSALM 22 IN SYRIAC TRANSLATION AND TRADITION

Psalm 22 in Syriac Translation

The two most important Syriac translations of the Psalter are the Peshitta and the Syro-Hexapla. According to Michael Weitzman, the Peshitta Psalter was translated from Hebrew into Syriac by a small Jewish community in the late second century AD with only occasional reference to the Greek.[11] The Syro-Hexapla, a translation from Greek into Syriac, is ascribed to Paul of Tella and dated to A.D. 615–617.[12]

Although a full catalog of the ways in which these translations differ from the Masoretic text and from our modern English translations is not useful in this context, I shall note a few of the readings that are important in understanding the commentary tradition.[13]

While the Hebrew title to Psalm 22 reads, "To the leader: according to the Deer of the Dawn. A Psalm of David," (NRSV)[14] the Syriac tradition has several alternative titles. A representative title used in the East Syrian tradition reads: "It is said by David by way of a prayer when he was persecuted by Absalom."[15] This title, which may stem from Theodore of Mopsuestia, indicates the basic historical approach

[11] Michael Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament, An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1999); see also idem, "The Peshitta Psalter and its Hebrew Vorlage," *VT* 35 (1985) 341–54. Similar conclusions are reached by J. Lund, "Grecisms in the Peshitta Psalms," in *The Peshitta as a Translation: Papers read at the II Peshitta Symposium, Leiden, 19–21 August 1993* (ed. P. B. Dirksen and A. van der Kooij; Monographs of the Peshitta Institute 8, Leiden; New York: E. J. Brill, 1995) 85–102.

[12] On the Syro-Hexapla see Robert J. V. Hiebert, "The 'Syrohexaplaric' Psalter: Its Text and Textual History," in *Der Septuaginta-Psalter und seine Tochterübersetzungen* (ed. A. Aejmelaeus and U. Quast; Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens XXIV; Göttingen, 2000) 123–46.

[13] For a full discussion of the differences between the Greek and Hebrew versions of Psalm 22 see G. Dorival, "La Bible grecque des Septante et le texte massorétique," in *David, Jésus et la reine Esther, Recherches sur le Psaume 21 (22 TM)* (ed. G. Dorival; Peeters: Paris-Louvain, 2002) 13–25.

[14] The Hebrew text: למנצח על־אילת השחר מזמור לדוד.

[15] The Syriac text reads: ܐܡܝܪ ܠܕܘܝܕ ܥܠܗ ܒܨܠܘܬܐ ܟܕ ܐܬܪܕܦ ܡܢ ܐܒܫܠܘܡ; W. Bloemendaal, *The Headings of the Psalms in the East Syrian Church* (Leiden, 1960) 42.

of the traditional East Syrian interpretive tradition. It should be noted, however, that an alternative East Syrian title found in the Denha commentary adds that "others" understand the psalm to speak "about Christ our Lord."[16]

The Syro-Hexapla Psalter tended to include the Greek titles. The Syriac commentary attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria directly translates the Greek title: "To the end for morning help, a psalm of David."[17] West Syrian commentary follows Greek tradition in interpreting this title Christologically to refer to both the epiphany, when the morning light of the redeemer shone forth, and to the morning of the resurrection, when Christ rose from the dead at the break of dawn. Another West Syrian title combines both the historical and Christological interpretive traditions in reading: "Of David. When his persecutors mocked him, and about the passion of our Lord and the cry of the nations."[18]

There are four readings in the Syriac that are significant for our purposes. The first is found in Ps 22:1b where the MT reads "the sounds of my groaning" (NRSV), while the Peshitta follows the Greek in reading "the words of my wrongdoing." This reading caused difficulties for the Christological interpretation.[19] Dionysius bar Salibi, for example, follows the Greek patristic tradition in asking, "If he had not taken hold of the person of mankind, how do these (words) fit the

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[16] The Syriac text reads: ܐܚܪ̈ܢܐ ܥܠ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܪܢ; Denha, Mingana 58, f. 57r and Bloemendaal, *The Headings of the Psalms*, 42.

[17] R. W. Thomson, *Athanasiana Syriaca, Part IV: Expositio in Psalmos* (CSCO, 387; Scriptores syri, 167. Louvain: Sécretariat du CorpusSCO, 1977) 14. Thomson's Syriac text reads: ܠܫܘܠܡ ܥܠ ܡܥܕܪܢܘܬܐ ܨ̈ܦܪܬܐ. ܡܙܡܘܪܐ ܠܕܘܝܕ. The Greek text reads: εἰς τὸ τέλος ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀντιλήμψεως τῆς ἑωθινῆς ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυιδ.

[18] Alain-G. Martin, "La Peshitta et la Syro-Hexaplair," in *David, Jésus et la reine Esther, Recherches sur le Psaume 21 (22 TM)* (ed. G. Dorival; Peeters: Paris-Louvain, 2002) 38.

[19] For a survey of patristic commentary on this difficult verse see G. Dorival, "L'interprétation ancienne du Psaume 21 (TM 22)," in *David, Jésus et la reine Esther, Recherches sur le Psaume 21 (22 TM)* (ed. G. Dorival; Peeters: Paris-Louvain, 2002) 271–72.

Son? For 'he did no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth'" (1 Peter 2:22).[20]

The second textual difference is found in 22:21 where the MT reads: "Deliver my soul from the sword, my life (יחידתי) from the power of the dog" (NRSV). In the Greek (τὴν μονογενῆ μου), the Peshitta (ܝܚܝܕܬܝ), and the Syro-Hexapla (ܝܚܝܕܬܝ ܐܝܬ) the Hebrew word for life, which is masculine, is rendered with a grammatical feminine.[21] Bar Salibi offers several interpretations that respect the grammatical gender of the Syriac.

He names the soul the **only-begotten** because we have nothing more precious than it, so it is right that we should guard it as a man guards his only daughter.

Again, he calls his soul **only-begotten** because it alone of all the souls was known (as) sin, and he is with it inseparably. Again, **only-begotten** he names the Church which stood with him, and is the most perfect of the perfect ones.

The third significant variant for our purposes is found in 22:30 where the Peshitta departs from the Hebrew and Greek (and Syro-Hexapla) by rendering the MT "fat ones" with the Syriac word "hungry." The Syriac of 22:30 thus reads: "They will eat and prostrate themselves before the Lord, all of the hungry of the earth." The expanded (rubricated) portion of the East Syrian commentary of Denha applies the word "the hungry" to believers: "Those who hunger for mercy and for knowledge of God or for contrition."[22] Daniel of Salah

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[20] All citations from Dionysius bar Salibi are based on the text and translation in Marjorie Helen Simpkin, "The Psalm-Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi," (2 vols; Ph.D. diss., University of Melbourne, 1974). I have occasionally employed readings in the manuscripts Paris Syr. 66 (A.D. 1354) and Harvard Syr. 130 (A.D. 1888). The translation generally follows Simpkin, with some revisions. I have also consulted the translation by Walter Robert Roehrs, "Bar Salibi on the Psalms," (Ph.D. diss, University of Chicago, 1937). Roehrs based his translation on Mingana 152 (A.D. 1891).

[21] See Dorival, "L'interprétation ancienne du Psaume 21 (TM 22)," 277–78, for a discussion of patristic commentary on this verse. Bar Salibi's comments here show close parallels with the commentary of Didymus the Blind.

[22] Denha, Mingana 58, f. 59r. As it will be explained below, the "expanded (rubricated) portion" of this commentary represents later additions to the

and Daniel of Tella, in the West Syrian tradition, both gloss the Peshitta with a citation from the Beatitudes. The Daniel of Tella gloss reads: "**They shall eat and prostrate themselves before the Lord, all the hungry of the earth**, i.e., as our Lord said, 'Blessed are those who hunger and etc.'"[23] Bar Salibi, by way of contrast, comments on the Greek text (Syro-Hexapla) which, with the MT, reads "fat ones": "**They shall eat and they shall worship**, i.e., the mystical provisions, that is, the divine doctrines, and when their mind has grown fat, they worship him."

Finally, we may note that in the difficult text of 22:30 the Peshitta reads the first person possessive pronoun "my soul is alive for him," with the Greek and the Syro-Hexapla but against the MT, which has the third person and a particle of negation: "he who cannot keep himself alive." (RSV) Bar Salibi comments: "**It is to him that my soul lives**, i.e., in death my soul lives in Sheol, and there it proclaims and preaches him."

Psalm 22 in Syriac Liturgies

Psalm 22 is used in the traditional Syriac liturgies of the Syrian Orthodox and of the Maronites principally during the celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday.[24] In the Church of the East Ps 22:26 is used as part of an anthem at the beginning of the offertory of the Mass.[25] Psalm 22 is also used in the office of the Church of the East, where it is found in the first Marmyatha of the third Hulala.[26]

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commentary that provide spiritual interpretation. For the Daniel of Salah commentary see B.L. Add. 17818, f. 64v.

[23] Daniel of Tella, Mingana 147 f. 21r, from a photograph in Simpkin, 2:617.

[24] Anton Baumstark, *Festbrevier und Kirchenjahr der syrischen Jaokobiten* (Paderborn, 1910) 239; Edouard Courte, *Le psaume vingt-deuxième au point de vue ecdotique et de la forme ainsi qu'au point de vue messianique et dans la liturgie* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1932) 143; Francis Acharya, *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit, The Prayer of the Asian Churches, Vol. 3: The Crown of the Year—Part II* (Kerala, India, 1985) 538.

[25] John Alexander Lamb, *The Psalms in Christian Worship* (London, 1962) 53.

[26] Ibid., 66.

PS 22 IN SYRIAC BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

Here I shall offer a brief review of the major extant Syriac commentaries on the Psalms.

Athanasiana Syriaca

A commentary attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria is extant in two Syriac forms, long and short.[27] The longer version (B.L. Add. 14568) is preserved in a damaged manuscript of A.D. 587. The shorter version (B.L. Add. 12168) dates from the 9th century. The exegesis in both forms of the commentary is very similar. Athanasius begins by relating the psalm title, which refers to "morning help," to the incarnation, which freed humanity from darkness. It is Christ who sings this psalm in the person of all humanity. In the psalm, Christ describes what happened to him at his crucifixion, prays on our behalf, and teaches us that we should pray in a similar manner. The commentaries do not make reference to David or offer an historical interpretation of the psalm's original setting. Though originally composed in Greek, this commentary attributed to Athanasius was influential in the Syriac tradition and was used by later commentators such as Dionysius bar Salibi.[28]

Daniel of Salah (6th cent) and Daniel of Tella

The earliest extant commentary on the Psalms composed in Syriac is by the 6th century author Daniel of Salah. The form of this work is homiletical but the biblical text is cited and commented on in a full and systematic way. David Taylor is currently editing the commentary for the CSCO series.[29] I have read the commentary in a partially legible British Library manuscript (B.L. Add. 17187). A full analysis and

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[27] R. W. Thomson, *Athanasiana Syriaca, Part IV: Espositio in Psalmos* (CSCO, 386–7; Scriptores syri, 167–8. Louvain: Sécretariat du CorpusSCO, 1977).

[28] On the use of Athanasius by Bar Salibi see Stephen D. Ryan, *Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary on Psalms 73–82* (Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 57; Gabalda: Paris, 2004) 71–75.

[29] See D. G. K. Taylor, "The Manuscript Tradition of Daniel of Salah's Psalm Commentary," in *Symposium Syriacum VII*, ed. R. Lavenant (OCA, 256; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1998) 61–69.

comparison with the other commentaries discussed here will have to await Professor Taylor's edition. Even a preliminary study of this text suggests that the later Syriac commentator Bar Salibi is heavily dependent on a form of Daniel's commentary.

Daniel of Salah gives Psalm 22 a traditional Christian interpretation, seeing it largely as a prophecy of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, spoken by King David under the influence of the Holy Spirit. With regard to Ps 22:19 ("they divided my garments..."), for example, Daniel of Salah observes that the words of this verse need no commentary, for it is clear that God spoke them in advance as a prophecy of the passion.[30]

Taylor has noted that one of Daniel of Salah's concerns is to combat the Phantasiast heresy which denied the corruptibility of Christ's body. With regard to Daniel's commentary on Psalm 22 Taylor writes, "Daniel is adamant that Christ's great suffering is proof that he died a natural death with all the usual consequences."[31]

A shorter edition of this commentary, revised by an unknown author, is extant in several manuscripts, the earliest of which dates to the 16th century. This new edition not only abbreviates the original but adds new material. Several manuscripts ascribe this work to Daniel of Tella, and it is not clear whether this is intended to be a reference to Daniel of Salah or to another Daniel who was later confused with Daniel of Salah.[32]

The form of the Daniel of Tella commentary is that of a brief lemma followed by a brief gloss. Most but not all of the verses are treated, with the longest discussion being given to v. 7 ("I am a worm and no man"). Psalm 22 is read Christologically as a prophecy about the coming redemption of Christ. Following Greek tradition, passages that do not seem appropriate for Christ are said to refer to sinful humanity. The psalm is not related to the life of David and little room is given to historical interpretation. At both the formal and thematic lev-

[30] B.L. Add. 17187 f. 63r–63v.

[31] D. G. K. Taylor, "The Great Psalm Commentary of Daniel of Salah," *The Harp* 11–12 (1998–1999) 38.

[32] I have consulted the Daniel of Tella commentary in a copy of Mingana 147 (A.D. 1899) reproduced in Simpkin, "The Psalm-Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi," 2:617.

els, the commentary has much in common with Bar Salibi's spiritual commentary on the Peshitta. A full comparison of this text with that of Daniel of Salah will have to await the publication of Taylor's edition.

Ishodad (9th cent)

The East Syrian commentary of Ishodad of Merv comments on less than half of the verses of Psalm 22 with lemmas followed by brief glosses.[33] The commentary follows the tradition of Theodore of Mopsuestia in reading Psalm 22 historically as a psalm about David persecuted by Absalom. In an extended introductory paragraph, Ishodad cites the position of those who read the psalm Christologically and then offers two objections. The first is that some verses of the psalm are not appropriately applied to Christ. The second objection challenges the contention that in these same cases Christ speaks in the name of humanity. Ishodad responds that some verses are clearly spoken by an individual speaking in his own name, and not as a representative of humanity in general. His basic argument then is that the prosopography must remain uniform throughout the psalm. Ishodad goes on to offer an explanation of why Christ cited this psalm from the cross. In short, his position is that Christ cited the psalm for didactic purposes, to convince the Jews and to offer us an example of how we should pray in our sufferings.

What complicates the picture slightly is the final sentence: "But others (say): numerous prophecies were spoken of our Lord, even if in the meantime they were applied to others, as in the example of the cup and the building, which we have explained above."[34] Just as a cup or a building made for a future king may be used by others before the

[33] Ishodad of Merv, *Commentaire d'Ishodad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament, VI. Psaumes*, (ed. Ceslas van den Eynde, O.P.; CSCO 434; Scriptores syri 81).

[34] Ishodad of Merv, *Commentaire*, 51. The cryptic reference to the cup and the building refers to his discussion of Ps 16:10, in which he follows Theodore of Mopsuestia in seeing here a prophecy of double application. These words refer first to Israel, Ishodad comments, but "receive their true fulfillment in Christ, as Peter [Acts 2:25–31] also testified." See the edition of Van den Eynde, ibid., 41.

king's arrival, so to words spoken of Christ may be applied in the meantime to others. Here Ishodad refers to his theory of prophecy of double application. This seems at first glance to offer an opening to a strong figural reading in which the psalm would be taken originally to have referred to Christ, but to have been applied to others as well in the meantime, in this case to David. Thus, the psalm would be read on both historical and figurative or Christological levels. Fortunately, Ishodad elaborates on his position elsewhere. In his commentary on Deuteronomy 18:15, the verse about raising up a prophet like Moses, Ishodad notes that some others hold that this text is a prophecy accomplished preliminarily in Joshua but perfectly in Christ. He then discusses Old Testament texts traditionally applied to Christ because they share a certain similitude. In this context he quotes five Old Testament texts, three of which are from Psalm 22 (vv. 2, 15, 18). He concludes: "Yet these texts do not envision our Lord alone, but as words they are appropriate to him and since they contain a similitude (ܡܬܡܬܝܐ) as to the events, their witness was applied to the economy of the incarnation."[35] Here we see more clearly that Ishodad follows Theodore of Mopsuestia in seeing in Psalm 22 a simple accommodated sense. He does not envision a stronger figural reading in which the psalm could be said to be properly Christological.[36] Like Theodore, Ishodad limits the properly Christological psalms to four: 2, 8, 45, and 110.

Denha (9th cent)

The East Syrian commentary ascribed to Denha and Gregory is dated to the 9th century. I consulted the commentary in a microfilm copy of Mingana 58, which was written in A.D. 1895.[37] Mingana's catalog notes that the commentary is twofold.[38] The longer of the two com-

[35] Ishodad of Merv, *Commentaire d'Ishodad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament, II. Exode-Deutéronome*, (ed. Ceslas van den Eynde, O.P.; CSCO 179; Scriptores syri 81) 167

[36] I follow here Van den Eynde's analysis, ibid, iv-v.

[37] I am grateful to Luk van Rompay and Clemens Leonhard for providing me with this text.

[38] A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts, Vol 1: Syriac and Garshuni Manuscripts* (Cambridge, 1933) 158–60.

mentaries, which follows the tradition of Theodore of Mopsuestia, is in black ink, and the shorter, interspersed, is in red ink. The material in red, which tends to include spiritual interpretation, seems to represent a later expansion of the commentary by a disciple of Henana of Hedhaybh.[39] The commentary on Psalm 22 is lengthy and accounts for nearly every verse. As was noted above, the psalm title offers both an historical or Davidic *Sitz im Leben* and a Christological reading: "A prayer of David when he was being pursued by Absalom on account of his sins. Others, about Christ our Lord." The commentary itself is largely historical, applying the psalm verses to the life of David and his persecution by his son Absalom. Reference is made to Christ in the expansions, but mainly to indicate how the psalm was used by Christ and corresponds to the events of the passion, not to indicate that the psalm is itself explicitly prophetic. In sum, the commentary appears to be in line with East Syrian literal interpretation, while acknowledging a restricted and quite limited accommodated usage of and by Christ.

Dionysius Bar Salibi (12th cent)

Dionysius bar Salibi, a bishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church who died in 1171, wrote three complete commentaries on Psalm 22. These were presented in parallel synoptic columns. The first is labeled literal or factual (ܦܫܝܛܐ ܡܦܫܩܢܐ), and is based on the Peshitta. The other two are labeled spiritual (ܪܘܚܢܝ ܡܦܫܩܢܐ).[40] Of these, the longer of the two is based on the Syro-Hexapla version of the Psalms and the shorter one on the Peshitta. A translation of the three commentaries, based the text and translation by Marjorie Helen Simpkin, is included here as an appendix.

Bar Salibi's short factual commentary is similar to Ishodad's commentary in format and in thematic content, but shows clear verbal dependence in only one verse.[41] With the East Syrian tradition, he understands the psalm to refer to David pursued by Absalom. The commentary makes no mention of Christian doctrine and avoids making

[39] Bloemendaal, *The Headings of the Psalms*, 7.

[40] On the terminology see Ryan, *Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary*, xviii n. 14 and 27–8.

[41] For a discussion of Bar Salibi's sources in his commentaries on Psalm 22 see Simpkin, *The Psalm-Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi*, 1:76–77.

any direct application to the life of the reader. David is portrayed as a faithful man of prayer unjustly persecuted.

Bar Salibi's spiritual commentary on the Syro-Hexapla is the longest of the three. Nearly every verse is given a comment, with some verses given several alternative interpretations. Here Bar Salibi uses a number of sources of Greek origin, chief among them Athanasius and Eusebius of Caesarea. It is not clear in what form he had access to these sources, but my own supposition is that he had access to a Palestinian catena of Greek origin in Syriac translation. It is Bar Salibi's use of sources deriving from Greek which explains the fact that his commentary is based on the Greek text.[42] Even within this commentary, however, some of the lemmas agree with the Peshitta against the Syro-Hexapla. The psalm is read Christologically from start to finish with no mention made of the life of David. Passages that are not fittingly applied to Christ are said to be spoken in the name of humanity.

What is most striking about the rhetoric of the commentary is the constant appeal to the reader as a member of the Body of Christ. Repeatedly we read that Christ came for us, suffered for us, and rose for our sake. Equally striking are the numerous references to the mysteries of the Christian faith: Trinity, incarnation, virgin birth, redemption, the Cross, resurrection, the descent into hell, original sin, Satan, the holiness of the Church, prayer, and the call of the Gentiles. While the treatment each of these themes receives is fleeting, the overall effect is to relate the biblical text to the truths of the faith such that one is given a strong impression of the overall coherence of the divine plan.

Bar Salibi's spiritual commentary on the Peshitta is considerably shorter. As in the spiritual commentary on the Syro-Hexapla, the psalm is given a thoroughly Christological reading with no mention being made of David. Scripture is cited more often in this commentary than in the other two, though the citations are in the form of brief glosses. Rhetorically this commentary contains less of the direct appeal to the reader that so marks the commentary on the Syro-Hexapla.

Bar Salibi's commentaries were often transmitted in abbreviated versions. Berlin 188 [Sachau 218], dated to A.D. 1847, contains such a

[42] Ryan, *Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary*, 52.

shortened version.[43] In this commentary, only a few of the verses are cited, and the commentary takes the form of extremely brief glosses. The approach is spiritual, but the text is so abbreviated that it bears little resemblance to either of Bar Salibi's spiritual commentaries.

Bar Salibi also wrote a fairly complete commentary on the New Testament. Though my investigation thus far has been limited to the genre of Psalm commentaries, I shall briefly consider Bar Salibi's commentary on Matthew in so far as it offers a commentary on Psalm 22. In commenting on Matthew 27:35 Bar Salibi notes that the dividing of the garments took place "to fulfill the prophecy of David," that is, the prophecy contained in Psalm 22.[44] His commentary on Matt 27:46 is more extensive and includes a lengthy discussion of the dereliction on the cross and of the varying Christologies of the Arians, those he refers to as the Nestorians, the Chalcedonians, and his own community, the Syrian Orthodox. In the course of this discussion, he cites Psalm 22 several times. The rhetorical style is reminiscent of his Syro-Hexapla commentary, making frequent reference to Christ's action for us, on our behalf, for our sakes. In the following excerpt, he comments on the opening words of the psalm and deftly links them with a verse from the end of the psalm by way of composing a response to Christ's prayer to the Father:

He cries out for us, for he saw to what ruin our generation would come. Again, because of this the Son asks the Father, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (v. 1) Let us listen to what is written in this psalm. It speaks as if from the prosopon of the Father when it says, "For this reason I forsook you, that you should suffer and that you should be crucified, in order that 'they shall remember and shall turn toward the Lord, all the ends of the earth.'(v. 27)"[45]

This analysis is quite different from anything found in Bar Salibi's Old Testament commentaries on Psalm 22. In this commentary on Matthew, he sees the psalm at once as giving voice to Christ's prayer

[43] On this text see E. Sachau, *Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1899) 2:609–12; see also Ryan, *Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary*, 104–105.

[44] *Dionysii bar Salibi commentarii in evangelia II/1* (ed. A. Vaschalde and J. B. Chabot, CSCO 95, 98; Louvain, 2d ed. 1953) 95.

[45] Ibid., 134.

and at the same time providing the Father's response to that prayer. Bar Salibi uses Psalm 22 itself to provide the words of the Father's response to the Son.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I will briefly suggest several areas in which the tradition of Syriac Old Testament commentary might contribute to the project of a more theologically relevant exegesis. But first, I would add this caution. If part of my findings are negative, that is that the Syriac tradition of Psalm commentary appears to have little that is unique, that cannot be found elsewhere in the Greek, Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, or Armenian traditions, this may reflect the limitations of the present study rather than the objective reality. It is entirely possible, for example, that there are genuine elements of the kind of rich typological interpretation so characteristic of Ephrem, Aphrahat, Jacob of Sarug, or Jacob of Edessa that are preserved in Syriac Psalm commentary that have escaped my attention.

Syriac Old Testament Commentary and Vall's Method C Approach

Gregory Vall's 2002 article in *The Thomist* contained what he called "a Method C attempt to describe the organic connection between the psalm in its Old Testament context and Jesus' quotation of it from the cross (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34)."[46] He reads Psalm 22 as a model *anawim* prayer that prepares Israel, by God's providential role in the development of *anawim* piety within Israel, for the eschatological kingdom of God. In using this psalm, Israel participated, by prophetic anticipation, in Christ's passion. Christ prayed this psalm, in an ultimate act of *anawim* piety, as the true Israel who embodied Israel's unique filial relationship to God.[47] Vall suggests the possibility that Jesus prayed this prayer not only for himself but as a proclamation of his identity and of the significance of his death on the cross.[48] That is, he prayed it entrusting himself completely to God with all his Israelite

[46] Vall, "Psalm 22," 178.
[47] Ibid., 196.
[48] Ibid., 197.

brethren and the clans of the nations in mind. As Bar Salibi would say, he offered himself completely to the Father for our sake.

My survey of Syriac Psalm commentary has found nothing that would make a substantive contribution to Vall's central thesis. I would note simply that Vall's attempt to articulate what the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls "the unity of God's plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart," (nn. 112–114) accomplishes in a modern and historically sophisticated way many of the same things that patristic commentaries did in a very different way.

Where I think the Syriac tradition can aid Vall's Method C interpretation is in giving a fuller and more balanced picture of Method A, that is of patristic and medieval interpretation. Vall states, for example, that the Method A approach read Psalm 22 exclusively Christologically and demonstrated no desire to locate the psalm in an Old Testament context. He notes briefly the Antiochene tradition but minimizes its impact by noting that Diodore and Theodore were condemned as heretics. Had Vall considered the fact that Bar Salibi's widely circulated and influential commentary contained one factual and two spiritual commentaries in parallel columns, that in its very format it proclaims that this and all the psalms are patient of both an historical and a Christological reading, he would have been able to give a slightly more accurate sketch of the Method A approach. Early Christian attempts to preserve a Davidic *Sitz im Leben* for Psalm 22 were not as fleeting or as marginal as Vall suggests. This being said, we must also add that Christian historical interpretations of Psalm 22 are by no means limited to the Syriac tradition.[49] We may say only that in Denha, Ishodad, and Bar Salibi the tradition was alive and well and preserved to our day.

In *Fides et Ratio* no. 8, John Paul II recalled that the Church reflects on Revelation "in the light of the teaching of Scripture and of the entire Patristic tradition." While consideration of the *entire* Patristic tradition is not always possible or practical, the fact that the Syriac patristic tradition is becoming increasingly accessible and familiar to

[49] Dorival ("L'interprétation ancienne du Psaume 21 (TM 22)," 268) cites evidence from Didymus the Blind on Ps 22:30c indicating "that the tradition that centered itself on Christ gave a certain value to the purely historical interpretation of the Antiochene tradition."

theologians will help ensure that the Church's reflection on Revelation is not limited to the Greek and Latin traditions.

A final area in which the Syriac tradition could make a contribution is in the example Bar Salibi and others give in commenting not only on the MT but on the Septuagint and Peshitta as well. Contemporary critics generally use the versional evidence only to establish the earliest Hebrew text. For Bar Salibi the Greek, the Hebrew, and the Syriac Old Testament versions were treated equally as authentic texts, each worthy of commentary.[50] The contemporary hegemony of the Masoretic or a critically established Hebrew text of the Old Testament is a relatively new and, in my opinion, problematic development in Catholic theology. The sources of this modern development can be traced to renaissance Humanism and to Reformation doctrines of inspiration and to the Protestant bias with which the historical-critical method has traditionally been practiced. The late Dominique Barthélemy, O.P., who devoted most of his scholarly life to the establishment of the critical Hebrew text of the Old Testament, called repeatedly for the recognition of a Christian Old Testament in two columns: one containing the Septuagint of the first centuries of our era, the second the Hebrew text canonized by the scribes of Israel.[51] While it is not possible to develop this suggestion in the present context, Catholic exegesis should take seriously the role these early translations have had

[50] I do not mean to suggest that Bar Salibi is by any means unique. Jerome, for example, commented on both Greek and Hebrew lemmas in his Old Testament commentaries as well; on Jerome's practice see Adrian Schenker, O.P., "Septuaginta und christliche Bibel," *Theologische Revue* 91 (1995) 461.

[51] Dominique Barthélemy, O.P., "La place de la Septante dans l'Église," reprinted in D. Barthélemy, *Études d'histoire du texte de l'Ancien Testament* (OBO 21; Fribourg, 1978) 126; see also Adrian Schenker, O.P., "L'Ecriture Sainte subsiste en plusieurs formes canoniques simultanées," in *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa, Atti del Simposio promosso dalla Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede* (Città del Vaticano: Libraria Editrice Vaticana, 2001) 178–86, and the expanded German version of Schenker's article, "Die Heilige Schrift subsistiert gleichzeitig in mehreren kanonischen Formen," in *Studien zu Propheten und Religionsgeschichte*, (ed. A. Schenker; Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände 36; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003) 192–200.

in forming Christian culture and should not exclude their unique readings or commentary based directly on them on the basis of a narrow doctrine of inspiration.[52] An encouraging sign in this direction are the several translation projects now underway to provide fresh English translations of the Septuagint and the Peshitta. Equally encouraging is the decision in the first volume of "The Church's Bible" to provide complete English translations of the Vulgate and Septuagint texts for each verse discussed. A fine example of how the treasures of the biblical versions and the patristic tradition can be exploited in popular commentary can be seen in Pope John Paul's recent commentaries on the psalms and canticles of Morning Prayer. There the Pope occasionally cites interpretation of the Psalter based on the text of the Vulgate and the Septuagint alongside of his comments on the Hebrew text.[53]

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[52] There is ample support in ecclesial documents to defend the use of the ancient versions, even when it is clear that for modern biblical translations the original texts are to be used. *Dei Verbum*, no. 22 (*Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. [Northport, NY: Costello, 1987] 762–63), for example, refers to the honor with which the Church holds these versions even while going on in the next sentence to call for translations to be based on the original texts: "For this reason the Church, from the very beginning, made her own the ancient translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint; she honors also the other Eastern translations, and the Latin translations, especially that which is called the Vulgate." The recent instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* (March 28, 2001), para. 41, suggests a similar concern for preserving the riches of the biblical versions: "...other ancient versions of the Sacred Scriptures should also be consulted, such as the Greek version of the Old Testament commonly known as the 'Septuagint,' which has been used by the Christian faithful from the earliest days of the Church... Finally, translators are strongly encouraged to pay close attention to the history of interpretation that may be drawn from citations of biblical texts in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and also from those biblical images more frequently found in Christian art and hymnody." I have developed some of these ideas in this article: "The Text of the Bible and Catholic Biblical Scholarship." *Nova et Vetera* 4 (2006) 132–141.

[53] I have consulted a French translation of the commentaries on the psalms and canticles of morning prayer entitled, *Prier les psaumes avec Jean-Paul II* (Paris: Baryard, 2003). In this edition examples of the Pope's use of the Vulgate and Septuagint can be found on pp. 178 (Ps 150:1), 205–206 (Ps 43:4), 341 (Ps 96:10), and 366 (Ps 86:2).

Brian Daley on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms

In the same year that Vall's article appeared, Fr. Brian Daley, S.J. published an article entitled, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?: Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms."[54]

Daley listed six characteristics of early Christian interpretation of the Psalms: the conviction of the present reality of God; the presumption of a unified narrative; the use of the rule of faith; the view of Scripture as a diverse, yet unified whole; the conviction that scriptural texts have their own historical meaning, yet are meant for us; and the understanding of the Scriptural text as mystery.[55]

While Daly cites examples from the Greek and Latin tradition, these same characteristic features are shared by the Syriac tradition, in part because the Syriac tradition was in contact with and indebted particularly to the Greek Christian tradition. This being said, we can ask if the Syriac tradition can add anything unique? My brief survey does not find any distinctive elements of Syriac exegesis that cannot be found elsewhere, other than the unique format of Bar Salibi's commentary. His is the only Christian commentary to present factual and spiritual interpretations in parallel synoptic columns. This format suggests a hermeneutic that could be useful for Method C exegesis, but nowhere does Bar Salibi articulate such a hermeneutic in explicit terms.[56]

Although Daley does not refer to Method C exegesis as such, he does suggest the need for a new branch of biblical studies, one that would be explicitly theological.[57] His vision for that new branch of

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[54] *Communio* 29 (2002) 185–216.

[55] Ibid., 194–204.

[56] On Bar Salibi's understanding of the purpose and rational for composing three commentaries and the relationship between the factual and spiritual commentaries, see Ryan, *Dionysius Bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary*, 26–46. Bar Salibi's commentary contains a preface to the Psalter written by Moshe Bar Kepha, and this text comes close to an explicit articulation of the relationship between the factual and spiritual approaches.

[57] While in sympathy with Daley on this point, it is important to avoid giving the impression that such a new discipline would retreat from the academic and scientific study of the Bible. It is useful in this context to recall John Paul II's words ("Allocution de sa sainteté le pape Jean-Paul II sur l'interprétation de la Bible dans l'Église," para. 5, p. 7) about the dangers of

biblical studies is decidedly ecumenical: "Christian exegesis must not only become more theological but more theologically ecumenical, if it is to nourish the Church."[58] The rich ecclesial diversity of the Syrian exegetical tradition could certainly make an important contribution to achieving this goal of a more theologically ecumenical exegesis. Bar Salibi's use of Ishodad of Merv as a source for his factual commentary is but one example of the ecumenical nature of the Syriac tradition. In this case, Bar Salibi, a Syrian Orthodox bishop, incorporated much of the commentary of Ishodad, a member of the Church of the East, thereby, in a small way, helping to heal ancient divisions.

Daley concludes his article by noting that it is not clear to what extent increased familiarity with patristic biblical commentary can aid modern exegetes to develop a more theological reading of Scripture. He does suggest, however, that renewed contact with ancient Christian Psalm commentary is a promising place to begin. I have tried to show in this brief contribution that the Syriac tradition of Psalm commentary, though by no means unique, has distinctive and important features that should not escape the attention of scholars seeking to develop a more theologically relevant exegesis.

"une sorte de dichotomie entre l'exégèse scientifique, destinée a l'usage externe, et l'interprétation spirituelle, réservée à l'usage interne." That Daley himself does not envision such a dichotomy is clear, for he speaks about such a new branch of biblical studies being created by the academic establishment and having "parallel authority in the 'guild.'" (Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?" 215).

[58] Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?" 213.

Factual	**Spiritual (LXX)**	**Spiritual (Peshitta)**
Dionysius bar Salibi Factual Commentary on Psalm 22	Dionysius bar Salibi Spiritual Commentary on the Syro-Hexapla of Psalm 22	Dionysius bar Salibi Spiritual Commentary on the Peshitta of Psalm 22
	22:1 For the aid of the morning, i.e., When the gloom of the Adversary was spread out over the whole world, the only-begotten, the true light shone forth in our hearts, and the radiance of his knowledge gleamed in our souls. Again, it is called, **the morning aid** because before the break of dawn our Lord arose from the grave, when he trampled upon death.	**22:1 For the morning succour, a Psalm of David**, i.e., when the Messiah set us free from the gloom of the Adversary and the night of sin, and he rose from the grave in the morning, for this reason it is called **of the morning**. The Messiah sings this psalms out of the situation of mankind, and tells us those things that happened to him in the time of the Crucifixion.
22:2 My God, i.e., a prayer of David for his sin when he was pursued by Absalom. **Why have you forsaken me?** i.e., he was not saying this while complaining, but according to the habit of the righteous. **And you have removed far away from me**, i.e., my sin which you removed far away from me. He puts a word instead of the deed and says that even if I	**22:2 My God, my God, give heed to me**, i.e., He was not forsaken by the Father, or by his deity, as if he were afraid of suffering and fled. For who compelled him to be born, and following that to go up on the cross? But we are those who were forsaken by the transgression of the commandment of Adam. And just as we who are slaves by nature and call God "our Father" in that we were honored and have arisen in the status of sons, when the Son became like us truly, though he is Son by nature, when he was made like us and became man, he called him who is his Father by nature, his God. And this (phrase) **Give heed to me**—the word does not mean that he is outside the presence of the Father, but he asks for attention	**22:2 My God, my God, give heed to me! Why have you forsaken me?** i.e., so he asks for the Father's attention, when these (features) of ours he takes upon himself. We are those who were forsaken because of the transgressions, until the time that he was incarnate and saved us. **You have removed far from me my salvation by the words of my transgression**, i.e., if he had not taken hold of the person of mankind, how do these (words) fit the Son? For "he did no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth." (1 Peter

sinned only in words, it is enough to deprive me of salvation.	from the Father, in that he was a man, while the (matters) of ours refer to him. **Why have you forsaken me?** i.e., He pleads that the desertion should be concluded i.e., that these (consequences) of the curse should be abandoned and that death should be conquered, and that we may plant the root of incorruptibility. **Afar off from my salvation, the words of my transgression**, i.e., other expositors have written **the words of my worthlessness**, **of my laments**, **of my clamor**, and not **of my transgressions**. For "he did no sin." (1 Pet 2:22) The **words of my laments**—which were because of the people; and **my clamor** which was because of Judas. **They were afar off from my salvation**, i.e., the people and the traitor gained nothing from the salvation that was brought near to them by me. Again, for our sake, those who sinned and were in iniquities through Adam's transgression of the commandment, he said **afar off** etc. And just as he took the sin and curse that was on us, since he is the fountain of blessings, so also he used the words instead of us (and) for our sake. **Afar off from my salvation by the words of my transgressions**, i.e., do not give heed to the transgression of human nature, but bestow salvation because of my sufferings.	2:22)
22:3 I will cry to you by day, i.e., by night and day I	**22:3 My God, I cry out to you by day, and by night**, i.e., not while in griefs which are represented by	**22:3 My God I call you by day**, i.e., this is because he was incarnate.

am asking release from my griefs, but there was none.

the night, do I cry out to you so that I may not suffer, but while (in) gay (affairs), that is, in the day I am crying again.
Again, by night and by day when I cry out you did not hear, but you surrendered (me) to the Passion and the Cross.
Not towards my irrationality—Nevertheless I know the mystery of Divine Providence, and I understand that it was not in vain you delayed the granting of the request.
Again, **day** and **night** he calls the time of the Cross. From the sixth hour until the ninth it was. Then the Messiah was crying out for the Jews, "Father forgive them," (Luke 23:34) and he forgave (them), but when they denied the Resurrection, sin returned upon them.

22:5 In you our father's hoped, i.e., and although you are dwelling in the saints and you hear them, much more he dwells in his only begotten, and hears him. My fathers in the flesh hoped in you, while looking for my splendor.

22:6 In you they hoped and they were not ashamed, i.e., they did not stray from their hope.
Unto you they called out and they were preserved, i.e., they were delivered from death and the Adversary and sin. Salvation from me and by my power was theirs, and they received these—hope and expectation.
Unto you they cried out, i.e., when Pharaoh was pursuing after them they called out to God and the sea was divided for them.

For us he was raising the petition and the supplication, or else because the saints were continually begging that salvation that was through him.

22:4 You are holy and enthroned in your glory, i.e., it is bound up in you, and you are the glory of Israel.

22:5 In you my fathers hoped, i.e., the fathers in the flesh, Abraham and the rest of the upright and the prophets.

22:8 They thrust out, i.e., they unburdened their lips.

22:7 I am a worm and not a man, i.e., by this he teaches us humility. Again, he reveals the lowliness of his suffering and signifies the abolition of the demons. For it was about to happen, that when he drew near to death, and was in the grave, in the fashion of a worm he would deliver up the opposing powers to corruption. Again he was named, **a worm and not a man** because he did not acquire fleshly being like men by the intercourse of male and female. Well then because he was partaking of the power that abolishes death, he was called a **worm**. Again, he was not called a worm because he was denying human nature, but that he might make known that he was not born according to natural law; and as a worm is not born from copulation but from the mire of the earth, so the Messiah was born—not from copulation, but from the Virgin and from the Spirit. And he calls himself a **worm** because he was clothed with flesh, the bait of the enemy, in which he was hiding the fish-hook of Deity.
The reproach of men and the offscouring, i.e., they were mocking the Messiah when they saw him naked and crowned with thorns, and they were shaking their heads at him.

22:7 But I am a worm, i.e., even though I was a worm when I was incarnate in the shape of human seed which, when it falls into the womb first of all receives the shape of a worm, which grows and is added to; yet I was not a man by nature, for I did not come from seed, but though I was a man, I was God by nature. Again, just as a worm does not attain existence from seed or from copulation but from decay, in the same way also the Word God, when our nature decayed and became corrupt, he was part worm and part man, that he might renew it, and might give it incorruptible life.
The reproach of men, etc., i.e., at the time of the Crucifixion he was reproached by the Jews. "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. Trust in God, let him come..." (Matt 27:40, 43)

22:10 From my mother's breasts, i.e., after their nourishment of milk and the age of infancy. And he says that from (the

22:10 Because you are my confidence from, LXX: **Because you are the one who plucks us out of the belly**, i.e., he who is conceived from seed, is consecrated from the womb. But our Savior only, the Father drew out from the belly of

time) when I gained discrimination of word and knowledge, in you was my hope.

virginity, since no seed was cast into her, but the divine child came forth from her.

22:11 Upon you I was cast from the womb, i.e., from the breasts and the womb. It was said that he was beloved by the Father in that he became man, and (this) is known by the fact that he said to Joseph that he should take the child and should flee from Herod the murderer. And again, at the time of the birth there was no midwife near, (so) it is written that you drew us out. **From my mother's belly you are my God**, i.e., because he became a man, and went forth out of the belly, then he was also named the God of the Son, who was his Father.

22:11–12 You are my God, do not go far away from me, i.e., he speaks those things that are fitting for Divine Providence, since he was a man.
By this, **Do not go far away from me, there is none who helps** [he] makes known the anger of the people of the Jews, and teaches us that we should pray in trials.

22:12 Because distress is near, i.e., of the people of the crucifiers.

22:13 The **bulls** and **calves** that surrounded him he calls the hosts that were with Absalom, which were powerful and also fierce. **Calves** are smaller than **bulls**.

22:13 Many calves surrounded me, i.e., fat ones. The rulers of the Jews he calls **bulls**.
Aquila: **The strong ones of Bashan encircled me**, i.e., those officers of Pilate who placed the crown of thorns on his head.

22:13 Bulls surrounded me, i.e., the priests and teachers.
And calves of Bashan, i.e., those nations who were not harnessed under the Law.

22:14 They opened their mouth upon me, i.e., "Away, away, crucify!" (John 19:15)
Like a lion that roars, i.e., when a lion is hungry, with fierce roaring it comes upon the beast, and afterwards tears it in pieces. So also the Jews roared against the Messiah when they said, "This one said that he would destroy the Temple." (Matt 26:10)

22:14 They opened their mouth against me, i.e., they were changed from their own nature, and by their own will became like beasts.

22:15 I was poured out like water, i.e., waters that are poured out disperse to many places. In the same way, when Jesus was seized, the disciples fled, for they were scattered like water. Again, waters that are shed on the earth make it sprout forth. In the same way also the Passion of the Messiah, when it spread out to all the world, it manifested the bringing forth of the fruits of the fear of God.
All of my bones were scattered, i.e., he calls the apostles **bones** because of their firmness, and because they were holding together the whole body of the Church.
And my heart was like wax, i.e., he refers to the grief and depression which he had in the flesh; for if he bore our weaknesses, in the same way he also endured the perversity of grief.
Again, it may be that the heart of a man is melted like wax in the middle of the belly, when he sees those whom he begat suffering evil. Because when the Messiah saw the disciples mournful and scattered, his heart was turned towards them spiritually and lovingly, when it was kindled, he received the suffering of wax in

22:15 And I was poured out like water, i.e., because I was poured out in death.
My bones were scattered, i.e., the apostles. For if the Church is his flesh, the disciples are his bones. But the bones of his body were not scattered in the grave because he was raised.
And my heart was like sealing-wax—and this was because he was grieved because of the traitor, and the crucifiers who were remaining to destruction because of their wickedness.

the middle of the belly, which suffers with those which it bore.

22:16 My power dried up like a potter's vessel, i.e., he signifies the suffering which befell him by the Cross, when he asked that he might drink and they brought him vinegar. It is evident that his power in the flesh was dried up from thirst. Again, it may be that he calls Peter the **power** of the Messiah when he confessed that he is the Son of God. This one dried up in denial, and henceforward he was ready to be shattered like an earthen vessel, unless with tears he formed it, and prepared mud for a fresh building.
My tongue adhered to my throat, i.e., because of thirst, when he asked that he might drink.
And you brought me down to the dust of death, i.e., in grace, God tasted death for every man. For if he was born, he also died. The **dust of death** he calls the grave and Sheol, where he was for three days.

22:16 My tongue clung to the roof of my mouth, i.e., in that thirst which he experienced on the cross and he said, "I am thirsty," (John 19:28) and they gave him vinegar.
And the dust of death, i.e., "By his grace, he tasted death for every man." (Heb 2:9)

22:17 Again, **dogs** he calls them because of their audacity.
And the assembly, i.e., that though they were not harmed by me, (yet) in the malice of their will, they were gathered together to destroy me.
They pierced my

22:17 Dogs have surrounded me, i.e., the officers of Pilate who were unclean like those who serve idols.
And the assembly of the evil ones, i.e., the people of the Jews.
They dug my hands and my feet, i.e., the witness of these things (is) his side which was rent and his hands and his feet that were pierced through.

22:17 Because the dogs surrounded me, i.e., the rulers of the Jews.
They pierced my hands and my feet, i.e., with nails.

hands, i.e., by this he refers to the harshness of his sufferings, and that if he had fallen into their hands, they were ready to do this to him.

22:18 They counted all my bones, i.e., thus they stretched me out when they thrust me through with the nails, so that it would be easy for whoever might wish to know even the number of bones. Again, the bones are the apostles, but the believers are the flesh of the Messiah.
Again, according to the number of the bones they also brought tortures near. They scourged (his) back, they cuffed (his) head, they slapped (his) cheeks, they have (his) mouth vinegar to drink, they pierced (his) side with a spear, (his) hands and feet they thrust through.
They observed and paid heed to me, i.e., this (phrase) **they paid heed to me** (means) that they mocked and ridiculed. Again, they knew against whom they were doing these things. They knew from the signs that they were sinning against God. Indeed they investigated closely when they were seeking sin in me, and they found me (to be) without sin.

22:18 And all of my bones wailed, i.e., from the nails and the wounds. In the Greek: **they counted**, i.e., when they were handling each of his bones, so that they might see where they ought to fasten the nails.
They observed and looked at me, i.e., when they clothed me (in) the robe, and set the crown on me, and gave me the reed to hold.

22:19 And for my clothing, i.e., when Absalom entered Jerusalem

22:19 They divided my gowns, i.e., the Gospel teaches this. For this did not happen literally in Israel to another man.

22:19 They divided my gowns, i.e., cf. "His tunic was without seam, and they cast lots for it."

and committed fornication with David's wives, he also took his garments and distributed (them) to those who were with him.

(John 19:23–24)

22:20 But you O Lord, do not remove my help far away, i.e., the Messiah was not saying these things for himself, but for mankind, or rather for himself also. For he appropriated to himself these things of humanity, because he once received this.

22:20 And you, O Lord, do not go far away from me, i.e., by these things he taught us, and was an example, that we should pray in trials.

22:21 Deliver my soul from the spear, i.e., he calls death **the spear** for he was not saying this about himself, for he is Life. But for us who are under death, he was asking that we might set free from it.
And my singularity from the power of the dog, i.e., **the dog** he calls the authority of Satan, because imprudently and savagely he bears rule over our souls. He names the soul the **only-begotten** because we have nothing more precious than it, so it is right that we should guard it as a man guards his only daughter.
Again, he calls his soul **only-begotten** because it alone of all the souls was known (as) sin, and he is with it inseparably.
Again, **only-begotten** he names the Church which stood with him, and is the most perfect of the perfect ones.

22:21 Deliver from the sword, i.e., the spear which was plunged into his side.
And from the power of the dogs, i.e., of the Jews.

22:22 Save me from the mouth of the lion, i.e., the assembly which

22:22 From the mouth of the lion, i.e., death.

cried out against him and accused him to the mouth of the grave.
And from the horn of the buffalo, i.e., from the pride of the heads, for they say about the buffalo that it leaps upon every beast, and it is difficult to meet, because of the sharpness and hardness of its horn.

And from the high horn, i.e., Satan.
And he prophesied these things about his passion and his death and he prophesied again about his resurrection.

22:23 I shall declare your name to my brothers, i.e., he calls the believers brothers whom he taught to call out, "Our Father who is in heaven."
In the midst of the congregation I will praise you, i.e., of the nations. For in it he taught that the Father should be praised. For he is not praising, but he, the Son, made known how we ought to praise the Father.

22:23 That I may proclaim your name to my brothers, i.e., these (refer to the time) when he arose and his disciples saw him in Jerusalem and in Galilee, and he said, "Go, tell my brothers..." (Matt 28:10)

22:24 Those who fear the Lord, i.e., he exhorts the others to praise. Praise him, indeed, you who are chosen for him from the rest of the nations.
Honor him! i.e., and esteem him as he esteemed you.

22:24 You who fear the Lord, extol him! i.e., because for our sake, he who was not subject to passion suffered.
All the seed of Jacob, praise him! i.e., it is named, **Jacob** in many ways. Sometimes, the appellation means Jacob son of Isaac, but sometimes the people that went forth from him; sometimes the ten tribes who were separated and clung to Jeroboam; sometimes the Messiah—Cf. "Jacob is my child, I will help him." (Isa 42:1 LXX) Well then, the nations who believed he calls **the seed of Jacob**.

22:24 Those who fear the Lord, i.e., the apostles and those who believed from the nations and became sons of Abraham.

22:25 And he did not turn his face away from me, i.e., not only was it not turned away from sinners, for the prophet was now saying these things out of their

22:25 He did not despise nor reject the clamor of the needy, i.e., these—when they believed in him, they learnt that he

situation, but also when they cried out that they might be delivered, he heard immediately.

did not despise the clamor of Adam and all his race, but when he cried out to him, he heard him and came down to him.

22:26 From you is my praise in the great congregation, i.e., the Hebrew calls the **praise** a doxology—just as I made you known to man, so also you are teaching all men that they should offer up the very same honor to me, when you say "This is my beloved son," (Matt 3:17) and on another occasion,
"I have praised you, and again I am praising you." (John 12:28).
He names **the great congregation** that which goes on until the End. Again, **congregation** he names that great theatre which is erected the next day.

22:26 From before you (is) my praise in the congregation, i.e., and not in the synagogue. And the voice came, "I have praised, and I am praising." (John 12:28) Again—when he was praised in Sheol; and when he was praised in the perceptible and mystical congregation of the nations, of the souls, and in the assembly of the angels.
I will fulfill my vows before, i.e., (in) that I was man, and I died and I saved.
Those who fear him, i.e., the angels with the disciples and the preachers.

22:27 It shall live, i.e., life and the heart he calls the ultimate release from griefs.

22:27 The needy shall eat, i.e., he calls the nations **needy** because they were in want of good things.
Their heart shall live forever, i.e., they possessed a mind that was cold through dead works, but when they turned to God, they lived. And he did not say **bodies** but **hearts** so that you might learn that the nourishment of the soul and of the heart is spiritual bread.

22:27 The needy shall eat, i.e., the nations.
All the hungry on the earth, i.e., the nations who were hungry for justice ate the Body and the Blood, the Doctrine, the Customs.
Their heart shall live, i.e., by faith.

22:28 Before him all families shall worship, i.e., the Jews were worshipping God in the temple, but the Gentiles learnt that they

might worship God in spirit and in truth, while staying where they were, worshipping. For this is worship that is before God—when a man behaves himself as God wishes. And Zephaniah agrees with these things for he said, "They shall worship before him, everyman from his place, all the islands of the nations." (Zephaniah 2:11)

22:29 Because the kingdom is the Lord's, i.e., the devils that formerly took hold were expelled, and the kingdom of God has taken hold. The prophecy first said, **they will recall**, that is, **they will remember**; then **they will be converted**; thirdly, **they will worship**. And these things are so because the kingdom is the Lord's, and he has authority over the nations.

22:30 They shall eat and they shall worship, i.e., the mystical provisions, that is, the divine doctrines, and when their mind has grown fat, they worship him. **And before him shall bow down all who go down to the dust**, i.e., those who are thinking earthly things, their downfall is the coming judgment.

22:30 All who go down to the dust, i.e., all of human nature. And also by the demons is the lordship of Christ confessed—either here or in the world that is to come, when they are in torment, and like that serpent to whom they listened, they are eating dust. **It is to him that my soul lives**, i.e., in death my soul lives in Sheol, and there it proclaims and preaches him.

22:31 And the seed, i.e., indeed I am not serving

22:31–32 The seed that will serve him shall announce, i.e., every be-

him alone, but the seed also that arises after me I am admonishing to serve him, and he also shall teach the generation that is after him, that it should hope in the Lord.

22:32 And they will come, i.e., they are these (people) as well as the people that is born from them. This (phrase) **the Lord is doing (it)** follows that (word) **his righteousness**, that he might say: "They are showing and are teaching the righteousness which the Lord did for me and for this people from the beginning."

liever who renders service to him and teaches and announces and shows righteousness to the generations that are coming, i.e., those who were the first in the Gospel saw from the belly of Holy Baptism, and they showed the righteousness of God to the world.

CATECHETICAL, LITURGICAL, AND BIBLICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE *ḤUSOYO* IN CONTEMPORARY MARONITE TRADITION

ANTHONY J. SALIM
MARONITE EPARCHY OF OUR LADY OF LEBANON OF LOS ANGELES

When Robert Miller asked me to consider contributing to this volume, he told me that he wanted to have a living witness to the ideas in the papers of the other contributors. I genuinely think that the current liturgical tradition of the Maronite Catholic Church fits the bill. Thus, the purpose of this paper will be to demonstrate how a central liturgical form of the Antiochene West Syriac Tradition, namely the *ḥusoyo*, has come to be understood as both an effective catechetical tool for passing on the Faith and a source for Maronite interpretation of the Bible.

BACKGROUND

As background to understanding this topic one must consider the effect that the Second Vatican Council had on the development of the Maronite Church's liturgical tradition. This is particularly true of the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy, or *Qurbono* "Service of the Holy Mysteries"; but it also applies to the texts of the sacramental Mysteries, such as Baptism-Chrismation, Holy Crowning, etc. In a word, the Council sent shockwaves throughout the Maronite world.

It is well known that before the Council, among the whole panoply of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Maronite Church was one of the most highly Latinized. In hindsight we now realize that the presence of Western Church customs in Maronite life was not only im-

posed from without but, as difficult as it is to admit, history shows that it was often welcomed from within this Church.

Another change the Council initiated regarded the ecclesiological perspective of the Eastern Churches collectively. Previous to the Council, Eastern Catholic groups were for the most part seen as merely adapted, so-called "Rites" of the Latin Church. As strange as it sounds today, Eastern Catholics were said to "belong" to these various Eastern Rites, as if it were possible somehow to *belong* to a ritual prayer, such as the Rite of Holy Anointing or the Rite of Blessing of Water on Theophany. In fact, this was the terminology of many of the documents preceding the Council. Indeed, one still finds an ambivalent use of the term *rite* in the "Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches" of the Council; and, regrettably, among both clergy and laity of the Eastern Churches.

In the intervening years between the end of the Council (1965) and today, important changes have taken place. Today a substantial number of Maronites have begun to recognize themselves as members of one of 21 Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome, and of course Rome with them. Maronites are not members of a so-called "Rite." Rather, like all other Catholic Churches, the Maronite Church *uses* rites in liturgical worship, or claims that it developed out of a wider liturgical Rite, or Tradition. The Maronite Church understands that the mother liturgical Tradition or Rite that it follows is that of the West-Antiochene Syriac Tradition, with considerable influence from the theological and spiritual patrimony of the Syriac Church of the East, particularly in its liturgical hymnody, as exemplified by the great teachers Ephrem, Aphrahat, and Jacob of Sarug, to name a few.

> This conversion from a pre-Vatican II mentality to its current state has not come easy. Latinizations do not die easily, especially when accommodated for so many centuries. Here in the United States, where the members of Eastern Catholic Churches live in the wider context of dominant Latin Catholicism, discovering and particularly maintaining one's Eastern heritage is challenging. Nor is the conversion by any means complete. Resistance to change from what is known and comfortable is still a reality for the Maronite Church, as for other Eastern Communities.

Yet, there is in fact no turning back. The authentic liturgical renewal that took root first in the United States in the 1970s is now also

taking hold in Lebanon, Patriarchal See of the Maronite Church, as the current revised ordo of the *Qurbono* manifests. With the firm understanding that liturgy is the true fount of Eastern Church life, other areas of Maronite Catholic life, such as catechesis and biblical studies, have also undergone a renaissance. The stage has been set with some background investigation. We turn now to a closer look at the *ḥusoyo* and its possibilities. We shall see that this central prayer plays an essential part in Syriac-Maronite Catholic self-understanding.

THE *ḤUSOYO* IN CURRENT MARONITE LITURGICAL PRACTICE

What is the *ḥusoyo*? In his introduction to the *Lectionary of the Syriac Maronite Church* (Diocese of St. Maron, USA, 1976) Fr. Joseph Amar describes the *ḥusoyo* thus:

> The *Ḥusoyo* is a form of prayer proper to the Syriac Church of Antioch, and, apart from the readings, it constitutes the largest single element of the pre-anaphoral liturgy.
>
> A simple *Ḥusoyo* is comprised of a *Proemion* . . . and a *Sedro*. The *Proemion* is a stylized introductory formula which extols the attributes of God, particularly those which relate to the specific celebration being observed. It is a prayer in praise of God for His goodness toward His people.
>
> The purpose of the *Proemion* is to prepare for the *Sedro*, a Syriac word that means "series." The Sedro petitions God to act again on behalf of the specific needs of His Church. In light of God's great deeds in the past, the *Sedro* asks Him to once again accord His help and mercy to the Church, which stands in need.
>
> The *Sedro* frequently employs an operative word or phrase whose purpose it is to call attention to the specific needs which are now being put before God. Some terms which are used most often are: . . . "Consequently," . . . "And so," . . . "Because of this," . . . "And now. . . ."
>
> The *Sedro* is the forerunner of the diaconal petitions of the type chanted during the breaking of the bread. These petitions, known alternately as the *qatholiqi* . . . , "The Universal Intercession," or as *broudiqi* . . . , from the Latin *praedicare*, conclude with "Amen."
>
> In the interruption of these petitions by a response, one may see a likely explanation of the origins of the litanies in use by the Byzantine Church.

> In addition to the *Proemion* and *Sedro*, the *Ḥusoyo* may also include one or more of the following elements:
>
> —a *Qolo* . . . , or "melody" usually made up of four short strophes chanted antiphonally and always in verse.
> —an '*Eṯro* . . . , or "prayer of incense" in prose.
> —a *Ḥwtomo* . . . , or "concluding formula" in prose.

The term *Ḥusoyo* which is applied to this major section of the pre-anaphora is itself highly significant. The word is used in the *Peshitto* Old Testament to translate the Hebrew *kapporet* . . . , the name applied to the solid gold lid which covered the Ark of the Covenant. The cherubim which surmounted the Ark were constructed in such a way so that their wings would overshadow this "Mercy Seat" or *Ḥusoyo*. When light was admitted to the chamber which housed the Ark, the *Ḥusoyo* was framed by the shadow of the outstretched wings. The *Ḥusoyo* was the meeting place of God and man, "For it is there that I shall come to meet you from above the *Ḥusoyo*" (Ex. 25: 22).

> In its origins, then, the *Ḥusoyo* is the place where God converses with His people. Moses beheld the glory of Yahweh above the *Ḥusoyo* and the priests stood in front of the Ark to sprinkle the *Ḥusoyo* with blood on the Day of Atonement.
>
> Among Christian Semites who worship in the "true Meeting Tent which the Lord, and not any man, set up" (Heb. 8:2), the *Ḥusoyo* is no longer a tangible locus, but rather becomes the prayer which sums up God's wondrous deeds toward mankind. The *Ḥusoyo* is no longer a place of meeting, but the dialogue which takes place at the meeting. It is the recounting of God's gifts from of old in order to secure them for the present.
>
> The petitions of the *Ḥusoyo* are prayed "through Your Christ" Who is the point of encounter between God and man. And the meeting is irrevocable, for "He entered the sanctuary once and for all, taking with Him, not the blood of goats and calves, but His own blood, having won an eternal propitiation" (Heb. 9:12).

FUNCTIONS OF THE *ḤUSOYO*

As Amar demonstrates here, the *Ḥusoyo* performs several important functions. However, he focuses on the liturgical (and historical). In reflecting upon the liturgical tradition, especially the *Ḥusoyo*, in the years after the reform was initiated, other equally important functions

of the *Ḥusoyo* emerged from the reflection. Indeed, as with the entire liturgical tradition as recovered (and still being recovered), the *Ḥusoyo* itself began to appear as a treasure chest of spiritual riches. It is these other functions that tie this paper to the scope of the other presentations of this Symposium. These other functions include: catechesis, biblical interpretation, and spirituality, especially liturgical and personal prayer. Let us look briefly at each of these.

CATECHESIS

Eastern Tradition in general acknowledges that liturgy in all its forms lies at the heart of all that it is and does: *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi atque agendi*. Knowledge of the Mysteries of God and of the Church is to be found in the wisdom and insight of prayer, especially liturgical prayer. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the catechesis of the faithful springs out of a profound understanding of the way one worships. Long before catechisms were conceived, the truths of the faith were experienced in the chanting of the Divine Mysteries. Icons, or prayers in color and form, followed the rhythms of the liturgical year as understood by each Tradition of the Church and the Particular Churches that emanated from those Traditions.

Beginning in the mid-1970s catechetical leaders in the Maronite Church of the United States began to see the need for a systematic way to introduce the faithful to the understanding of the Catholic Faith in an authentic way. It was seen clearly that it was inappropriate to continue to use texts produced by the Latin Church, for these could not represent the vision of the Syriac-Maronite Church emerging from the renewal. Where to turn? They turned to the only proper source they knew: the *Qurbono* and the 1976 version of the Lectionary produced by Fr. Amar. It should be noted that this was an early stage of development. Even the Maronite Patriarchal Liturgical Commission in Lebanon had not yet produced a usable lectionary for common, Patriarchate-wide use.

Central to this search were the many *Ḥusoyos* now revealed for use in the Maronite Church in the United States. As Amar maintained (previously quoted), we discovered that

> A simple *Ḥusoyo* is comprised of a *Proemion* . . . and a *Sedro*. The *Proemion* is a stylized introductory formula which extols the attributes of God, *particularly those which relate to the specific celebra-*

tion being observed (italic mine). It is a prayer in praise of God for His goodness toward His people.

From this succinct observation in the italicized phrase above there came the realization that Maronites could think with the rhythm and flow of the liturgical year. This was something virtually not previously done in recent centuries in any effective way, strange as that may seem to some, either in the Motherland, Lebanon, or the Expansion, (i.e. the communities outside of the Motherland). The exception was in monastic life. However, the problem here, of course, as in all the Eastern Churches, is the relation of monastic life to the more historically recent phenomenon of contemporary eparchial organization. In other words, how does liturgical awareness, as well as everything that flows from it, filter into ordinary Maronite Catholic life?

From this realization came the possibility of building a catechetical program in a parish based on the liturgical year and the doctrinal truths revealed in the prayers of each Sunday celebration. The realization was at the same revolutionary and fully traditional.

A CATECHETICAL ILLUSTRATION

A good illustration of this may be found in the *ḥusoyo* for the pre-Christmas Sunday Commemoration of the Announcement to Mary. The *Proemion*, *Sedro* and '*Eṭro* of that *ḥusoyo* follow:

Proemion (the Celebrant burns incense and chants):

May we be worthy to praise and confess the God of earth and sky
the Creator, the Sustainer, the Life-Giver.
In his love and foreknowledge
he decided to return to the heirs of Adam
and pitch his tent in their midst.
Prophets, apostles, and teacher came before him
in order to create a well-disposed people.
Finally, the "Man of God," Gabriel,
came and revealed his imminent coming.
To the God of this holy dispensation
we offer praise and thanksgiving,
now and for ever.

Cong: Amen.

Sedro (the Celebrant continues):

The Virgin Mary received the angel messenger
with fear and amazement.
"Peace be with you, Mary.
The Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among all women."
Mary answered, "Never have I heard such a greeting.
Who are you; who is your Lord, and why have you come?"
"I am Gabriel.
My name means 'God's Strong One,'
And I have come to tell you
That you will bear a son
by the overshadowing of God's own Holy Spirit."
Mary was overtaken with wonder and astonishment.
Fear seized and doubt filled her mind.
"Good sir, I am but a girl.
Do not speak to me this way,
for I have never known man nor am I married."
The angel said, Mary, the power of God's Spirit
is now upon you.
Your Son is the long-awaited hope of the Prophets.
He dwells in eternal realms,
And fiery ranks of angels accompany him,
for he is the flaming Word of God,
a searing fire, a white, hot coal.
Mary said, "I am a mortal creature.
Surely I will be consumed by God's all-consuming fire.
How fearful is this moment!
How my breath leaves me for fear!
How humble am I, and how overcome
That such a thing should come to pass!"

Now, O Lord, we are seized with amazement,
And, like Mary, we do not understand.
With her we draw back, blinded by your eternal flame,
scorched by its touch and overcome by its power.
We know only to offer incense
as a fitting response to so great a Word
who this day makes his presence among us.
We hide behind clouds of perfumed smoke,
and dare not even glimpse the power

that now descends over our altar.
Purge us with your living flame, O God.
Treat us as wayward children
and not as hostile enemies.
And we will praise you,
now and for ever.

Cong: Amen.

(Note: the *Qolo* (Hymn) is not printed out here. It speaks of Mary as our mother and a reliable intercessor to Jesus, who saves us)

'Eṭro (the Celebrant concludes):

O Cloud, who dropped dew upon creation
and scattered fragrance on all people;
O Pure One, from whose womb erupted
the Living Fountain to quench their thirst
and to cleanse them from all their sins,
bestow on us, on this memorial of your announcement,
the sweet dew of generous blessings,
and may the faithful departed find rest
on your feast day and for ever.

This prayer is a treasure chest of riches for catechesis and spirituality. The first thing that strikes the worshiper is that it is nearly biblically literal. The dialog between the angel and Mary is in fact a feature of the Gospel passage. So we see immediately how tied to the biblical Word the Tradition is. It is easy to see that the *ḥusoyo* is interpreting the passage correctly.

However, as Sebastian Brock points out, beyond the "correct" interpretation of a passage from Scripture, many deeper spiritual interpretations are possible:

> A passage of Scripture is capable of only one correct interpretation at a time; such a restriction, however, does not apply to spiritual interpretation: in that case, the more lucid and luminous the inner eye of faith is, the more spiritual interpretations it will be capable

> of discovering. As Ephrem points out, it would be very boring if a passage of Scripture had only one spiritual meaning.[1]

In other words, the Scriptures are very rich indeed. Syriac Tradition is never afraid to find many spiritual interpretations; indeed, the spirit and expressions of the Syriac Churches often go further into the life of the Gospel character.

The Maronite Church here is no exception, and this *ḥusoyo* illustrates this well. Here we see the real concern, even fear, of Mary at the momentous news being brought to her by the angel-messenger. Not only can she not fathom that she is pregnant. She realizes with growing anxiety that if indeed it is true, then the One she bears inside her, God's eternal Flame, "a white, hot coal," may totally consume her. Yet, just as the Burning Bush, in which Moses discovers the Presence of YHWH-Adonai, is not consumed, so neither is Mary. The angel encourages her to accept this miracle with joy and faith. Mary's acceptance of this leads to her expressing her *fiat* to this proposal by God.

This Syriac "going deeper" is expressed in this *sedro* in the form of a *sughitho*, or dialog, that is intended to drive home the point in a dramatic way. Ephrem, for one, was fond of creating such dialogs, and several survive.

What this means for catechesis is that innate within the Tradition are skits, or little plays, that, if adapted, can be used effectively to teach students many things. Children love to do skits; and as any catechist knows, if the children are involved, so will their families and guardians. By extension, a whole parish community at worship might even be evangelized through such simple, yet traditional, catechetical means.

Doctrine is also learned. In this *ḥusoyo*, for example, there are many Christian teachings. The most obvious is the Incarnation: the "White, Hot Coal" is no one less than the Word of God-Made-Flesh. In describing Who is in Mary's womb in this way, Mary in the Gospel story, and by extension the teaching and believing Church, realize that the Divine Son is the "Light from Light" from the (later formulated) Nicene Creed.

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[1] Sebatstian P. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, (St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute Correspondence Course no 1; Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute l989) 59–60.

This revelation has occurred throughout "salvation history," first to the Jews, then to the Christian Church. This is the meaning of the repetition of the word *prophet(s)*. And since it is done by a design by God in loving-kindness, we are taught the doctrine of Divine Providence.

Another theme is Revelation. The angel may be a metaphoric or symbolic figure in the story and the Tradition of the Church; but clearly, what is meant by the angel's presence and challenge is God's speaking to humanity in the person of Mary.

Mary's ultimate response is nothing other than discipleship: "Let it happen" is nothing less than I will submit to and follow God's Plan for me and others.

Virtues are expressed as well: trust, faith, courage, and others. Of note is the encouragement not to fear. In this, we see the Johannine truth: "Perfect love casts out all fear" (1 John 4:18).

All of this basic teaching is framed in the most intimate and poignant way in this *ḥusoyo*. Yet, because all of this is encapsulated in this special prayer form, repeated yearly on this Sunday, the possibility of impacting the minds and hearts of the hearers is great. Teachers and preachers have a powerful tool for the Gospel in the *ḥusoyo*.

Catechetical progress was made rather quickly after that. An initial series for the elementary level entitled, *Faith of the Mountain*, was published by St. Maron Publications. It is currently in its first revision and mandated for use in all Maronite parishes in the US's two eparchies. A series by the same name for the secondary level was also published (St. Maron Publications). Finally, an attempt was made to address the critical need for adult catechetical formation. The result was a "resource book" by myself entitled, *Captivated by Your Teachings: a Resource Book for Adult Maronite Catholics*, now in its second printing.[2] Clearly, the hunger for rediscovering the reinterpreted Tradition is great among adults inside and outside the US Maronite Community, as the number of parish adult faith formation programs is increasing. (Incidentally, the title of this text comes from Morning Prayer [*Ṣaphro*] for Thursday in the Season of Pentecost.) All of these works, particu-

[2] Anthony J. Salim, *Captivated by Your Teachings: a Resource Book for Adult Maronite Catholics* (Tucson: E. T. Nedder Publications, 2002).

larly the last, are intentionally liturgy-based, and draw much of their spirit and content from the *ḥusoyos*.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

In addition to the Maronite lectionary, the *ḥusoyo* itself reveals much about how this Church interprets the Bible. The pattern of the lectionary and the liturgical year already betrays a deep consciousness of how the Bible is to be interpreted in the life of the Christian community at large; in Catholic life in general with its varied Traditions; and in Maronite Catholic life in particular. Eugene LaVerdiere was quite correct in demonstrating this in his seminal book, *The New Testament in the Life of the Church*: *Evangelization, Prayer, Catechetics, Homiletics.*[3]

For example, when one looks at the pattern of miracle stories in the Maronite Sunday Gospel Cycle for Great Lent, one finds a brilliant preparation for celebration of the Resurrection, and one that is quite different from the lectionaries of the other Catholic Churches. In this cycle, all the miracles (of body and soul) are signs leading to the Great Feast. In this sense, the use of signs is very Johannine. The cycle begins with the miracle at Cana in Galilee. Jesus sets the stage for his own Easter transformation by a miracle of transformation. In the "end," i.e., the Resurrection, *he himself is transformed by the same divine power that informs his earthly life, enabling him to do the miracles expressed in the Gospel stories of Lent.* Further, the symbolism is carried further, for just as water is changed into wine, in the Eucharist wine is changed into Christ's own Blood, for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the world. This is a fine example of how the patterning of the lectionary interprets the New Testament for deeper insight.

The Liturgy of the Word (*synaxis*) of each of these Lenten Sundays presents a *ḥusoyo* particular to each celebration. It comments on it and draws worshipers into its enchanting and mystical sphere of spiritual influence, while inviting the hearers to make the Bible passage a real part of one's spiritual life. With reflection and study, after the Sunday worship experience, this is possible.

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[3] Eugene LaVerdiere, *The New Testament in the Life of the Church: Evangelization, Prayer, Catechetics, Homiletics* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1980).

The Cana story leads to a further consideration of exegetical possibilities. In seeing the transformation of water into wine, then wine into the blood of Jesus, we move into the realm of typology. Cana wine, centerpiece of an earthly wedding feast, foreshadows (that is, is the anti-type) of the New Wine drunk in the Church's Liturgy and the wine that Jesus promises to offer in the Kingdom (*Mt* 26:29).

While the Antiochene Fathers, especially Theodore of Mopsuestia, were conservative in their use of typology, in them it is not absent. The Syriac Teachers such as Ephrem, however, used typology much more. Since Maronite liturgical tradition partakes of both the Antiochene and the Syriac Traditions (they are of course not mutually exclusive), the question arises as whether Maronite liturgical tradition partakes in typology, and, if so, how much. If the answer is that the use of typology is considerable, then it may confidently be said that Maronite liturgical Tradition truly reveals its Syriac-Antiochene roots.

Clearly, anyone who prays the Divine of the Maronite Church will see that Old Testament examples that speak to New Testament fulfillment abound. In fact, it is really quite impossible to pray the Office—and by extension the *Qurbono*—fruitfully without a basic knowledge of the figures, places, and themes of Old Testament salvation history. The following discussion of Joseph's dream can enlighten.

AN ILLUSTRATION OF TYPOLOGY

The time of preparation for the Feast of the Nativity in the Maronite Church is known as the "Season of the Glorious Birth of the Lord." It is also known as the season of "Happy Announcements" (Syriac: *subore*). The Gospels of this season center on the people, such as Zechariah, Elizabeth, John the Forerunner, Mary, and Joseph, and of course Jesus himself, who played key roles in the drama of salvation and their rather special circumstances.

The fifth Gospel of this Announcement Cycle is that of the Dream of Joseph. In it, Joseph ponders his very real dilemma about his betrothed one Mary being pregnant without his help. God's revelation, described as an angel of the Lord, informs this righteous man that this is God's doing, that trust in God is what is needed, as it was for Job and for countless others before Joseph (and will be for countless others after him). The complete *ḥusoyo (proemion, sedro*, 2 alternate *qole*, and *ʿeṭro*) for this feast follows:

Proemion (the Celebrant chants):

May we be worthy to praise, confess, and glorify
The glorious Son, who sent the angel Gabriel to righteous Joseph;
the eternal Light, who dwelt in the womb of the pure virgin;
Christ, the good One, to whom are due glory and honor on this feast
and all the days of our lives, and for ever.

The congregation responds: Amen.

Sedro (The Celebrant continues):

Is there any lofty place like yours,
O honorable and righteous Joseph?
You served the Lord and his mother
and were their constant companion both day and night.
You carried on your arm the One who carries the whole world,
and you supported the One who supports all people.
You spoke with the eternal Word,
and you were the guardian of his mother, the blessed Virgin,
betrothed to you in purity.
O mystery of Jacob realized!
O true and perfect dream come true!
How blessed are you among the saints!

For this reason, we cry out and say:

Hail to you, O blessed angel,
who accompanied the Savior
and defended him from all misfortune!

Hail to you, O virgin who cared for the Virgin,
the daughter of the Father
and the spouse of the Holy Spirit!

Hail to you, O luminous star in the heavenly Church!
You guide her children along the right path.

O innocent and righteous Joseph,
We now petition you with the clouds of incense that we raise:
Intercede for us with the Lord
whom you served throughout your life.
Implore him to watch over us in this world
and to keep us from the misfortune of soul and body.
And we will glorify the life-giving Holy Trinity,

now and for ever.

Cong: Amen.

Qolo (Hymn) A:

I Wake up, Joseph!
Do not be doubtful of this conception,
for the conceiving Mary remains Virgin,
Yet she is the Mother of the Son of God
and his living Word.

II You will foster the One before whose fire
the angels cover their faces.
Mary is the image of his holy of holies,
and you are the serving pontiff.

All: Receive our prayer
as a pleasing fragrance,
and offer it to the King of kings.
By the confidence you enjoy with her,
may we sinners obtain his reconciliation.

OR

Qolo B:

I Righteous Joseph has become the father of the family.
Behold, the mother of the family is a spotless virgin!
The words of Isaiah are accomplished.
God is with us!

II Blessed Joseph is seized with wonder.
How amazing are the ways of God!
Mary, his spouse, is virgin and mother.
God is with us!

I And pure Mary, what can she say?
The power of God rests upon her, and she is amazed.
She is virgin and mother.
God is with us!

II O blessed Joseph, how can we respond?
Amazement robs us of our words.
Teach us your love for God and show us his mystery.
God is with us!

ʻEṭro

O blessed Fragrance who has filled the whole universe,
You have removed doubt from Joseph's heart
And have confirmed the pregnancy of Mary.
Accept our incense and grant peace to our souls
And rest to our dead.
We will glorify you,
now and for ever.

Cong: Amen.

In this *sedro,* we note the line: "O true and perfect dream come true." Its deep and rich meaning is veiled by its utter simplicity. In fact, without proper reflection this meaning may be lost. However, sufficient reflection will reveal a wonderful richness. Let me explain.

In the line quote above, "O true and perfect dream come true," a casual reading might suggest that the text has been adapted in such way as to make it relevant to today's sensibilities. In colloquial terms, we might say that it produces the kind of "warm fuzzies" and bland romance of TV soaps, as if Jesus were the proper stuff of greeting cards. However, the exact opposite is true.

When one considers the general purpose of the pre-Christmas season and the meaning of the Nativity itself, one is reminded of the great work of salvation the Word of God accomplished in assuming our humanity. Against this backdrop, we must interpret Joseph's dilemma and the real solution Jesus' Birth provides him (and us).

To understand how Jesus is the "true and perfect dream come true," we must turn to another Joseph, in the Old Testament, who, like Joseph of Nazareth, is a dreamer. The answer, of course, is Joseph, son of Jacob, rejected by jealous brothers and, saved, is promoted to preeminence in the court of Egypt (Gen 37; 39–40; 50). In this beloved and familiar story, we note that Joseph is able to save his brothers, who have come to him out of desperation and hunger. By his control of the grain supply of Egypt, he is able to send food with his brothers back to his fatherland and to save the family.

In the New Testament story, another Joseph will perform a saving act for his family. With his baby's life threatened by Herod (as the Gospel recounts), Joseph must do something. He has been assured of God's intervention in a previous dream; now God intervenes again, telling him to flee into Egypt with his wife and child where they will

be safe until it is time to return home. The Evangelist then recounts that this is just what happened.

The typology seems very clear. There are two Josephs. They both dream. The dreaming is not merely the result of an overactive subconscious, but rather the precise mode that God uses to effect his saving will. People are saved. In fact, it is helpful to reflect upon how Joseph of Nazareth saves the Savior. Parenthetically, with his penchant for juxtaposing opposites—i.e., using the literary device of paradox—one might expect to find in some *memro* somewhere a verse by Ephrem speaking of Joseph saving the Savior. Lastly, could one not link up the fact that it is grain that saved the Old Testament family with him who is saved by Joseph, namely Jesus the Bread of Life? It is possible that there are more details that could be compared in these two Joseph stories, but to do so might border on allegory. And, as we all know, the Antiochenes were only too ready to leave that to the Alexandrians.

The point of this example is to show that rather than fluff, this verse from the *ḥusoyo* shows us a fundamental truth about salvation. God's work in the dreams of Pharaoh's Joseph comes true in the most powerful way in Jesus, the fulfillment of the deepest yearnings of humanity. At least, this is what this liturgical text is trying to convey to Maronite worshipers in the 5th Sunday of the Announcement Cycle.

NOT JOSEPH'S DILEMMA, BUT OURS

At this point it must be noted that a substantial problem in Maronite life is about to occur. The newly published, unified and revised lectionary for the Universal Maronite Patriarchate is about to be promulgated throughout the Maronite Patriarchate. This new lectionary *does not contain Old Testament pericopes*! Rather, it consists almost exclusively of the writings of Paul, and occasionally from the Acts of the Apostles (Season of Resurrection). The reasoning, we are told, is that the Old Testament Readings for the day are to be found in the Divine Office; that when the Office is prayed, people will experience the Old Testament. As noted above, the reality is that people outside monasteries do not regularly pray the Divine Office. The end result, of course, is that unless the average Maronite parishioner gains knowledge of the Old Testament in some way other than the Divine Office, such as Bible study, this potentially fulfilling experience of the drama of salvation history will be lost, not to mention a fuller appreciation of the typology built right into the liturgical texts themselves. Petitions on behalf of this issue have been made from the eparchs of the United

States to the Patriarchal Liturgical Commission. However, in order to "rescue" the Old Testament for the Maronite Church these efforts must pay off. The Commission, and ultimately the Patriarch himself, will have to judge the validity of the contention of this paper, however it is communicated to them, and help to resolve the dilemma.

THE *ḤUSOYO* AS PRAYER

As pointed out from the outset, and despite the foregoing academic considerations of its catechetical and exegetical functions, the *ḥusoyo* is above all prayer. As such, its first aim is to lead the worshiper to enter into the formal and official prayer life of the Maronite Church. From an Eastern Church perspective, it can be said that prayer encourages the worshiper to enter more deeply into the Sacred Mysteries of the Church, even to experience a mystical participation in the heavenly life of the Trinity.

Church Tradition in general recognizes four basic types of prayer: 1) adoration and praise; 2) petition; 3) intercession; and 4) thanksgiving. While each type addresses the different and individual moments of our spiritual journey, taken together, these four types of prayer knit the fabric of our efforts to communicate with the Source of Life and all Being.

These four types of prayer can take on a personal dimension when done as private prayer (note *Mt* 6:5–6), as we praise and thank our God; ask for our needs to be addressed; and as we pray for others. As well, they can take on a public dimension when, for example, we gather for worship, e.g., at the Divine Liturgy or the sacramental Mysteries or the Divine Office. Although, of course, the *ḥusoyo* forms an essential part of private recitation, as, for example, when the Office is not chanted chorally; the *ḥusoyo* is in fact meant primarily to be a public prayer, the prayer of worship, and it very often does this admirably.

If we look again at the *ḥusoyo* for the Feast of Revelation to Joseph, we can see how these elements (italicized in the prayer) are expressed. A brief selection from the *ḥusoyo* (previously quoted in full) illustrates:

> (Proemion) May we be worthy to praise, confess, and glorify
> the glorious Son ..., to whom are due *glory and honor*
> on this feast and all the days of our lives, and for ever.
>
> (*Sedro*) ...O innocent and righteous Joseph,
> *we now petition you* with the clouds of incense that we raise:

Intercede for us with the Lord
whom you served throughout your life.
Implore him to watch over us in this world
and to keep us from the misfortune of soul and body.
And we will glorify the life-giving Holy Trinity,
now and for ever.

At least three elements—praise, petition, and intercession—are explicitly stated here. However, there can be no doubt that the final statement about glorifying God is a result of the heart that is thankful and full of faith.

CONCLUSION

The huge dilemma about the forthcoming lectionary notwithstanding, the truth remains: In Maronite liturgical tradition, the prayer form known as the *ḥusoyo* is the bearer and source—biblical, catechetical, and spiritual—of this Church's authentic heritage as an Eastern and Syriac Church.

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REJECTING ONE'S MASTERS: THEODORET OF CYRUS, ANTIOCHENE EXEGESIS, AND THE PATRISTIC MAINSTREAM

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Historically engaged theologians bear a close resemblance to miners. The vast stretches of the past lie before us like untapped resources that could potentially solve a current theological problem or address a current conceptual need. For historical theologians, unlike antiquarians, the study of the past is no end in itself but a goal-directed exercise designed to challenge and transform the present moment. Yet, like exploratory mines, our soundings into the past often fail to strike a vein. At other times, we may strike, but the vein turns out to be weak and unproductive, even after significant initial promise. In the first case, we will usually move on to another site without comment, but in the second, because we have invested ourselves in the project, we are tempted to continue to dig long past the point where digging is merited. In my view, much of the current debate about the legacy of Antiochene exegesis has become trapped in the second situation. We press on in hope though clearly the vein is dry.

With an increasing frequency, members of the theological guild have been warning that the historical-critical project of biblical interpretation has failed, or, at least, that it has become dysfunctional. As an intellectual project, historical-critical reading of the Bible began as a sustained effort to secure the truth of Christian revelation to the solid ground of history, and, thereby, to rescue the Church from the bitter siege of modern rationalism. The naive pre-modern view that the Bible

was self-evidently the word of God—and, because of that fact alone, the authoritative voice directing all Christian discourse—was no longer tenable in the modern world.[1] The true Gospel of Christ, many believed, had to be grounded in something more sure than the word of God; it had to be grounded in the real grit and grind of human history and event. The massive salvage operation that mobilized to reconnect the text of the Bible to the real events of history we call historical-critical reading. This particular effort surely ranks as one of the most influential and ambitious intellectual projects in the history of biblical interpretation. All theologians currently working today breathe deeply of an air that passes continually through the massive filtering agents of our historical training.

Yet, if this is so, why are so many of us ill at ease with the result of historical scholarship of the Bible? Why have we mobilized the mining corps to probe the past in the hope of uncovering insight that will move us beyond our malaise? Why do we organize symposia and books about patristic methods of reading? We do so because we are profoundly worried and our worry is not inappropriate. Despite the tremendous ambition and noble purpose that has driven the historical-critical project of Biblical interpretation, there is a widespread sense within the Christian intellectual community that this project has largely failed to deliver on its promises. Rather than securing the truth of the Bible to the truth of history, historical method has often had the effect of further eroding the coherence of Biblical revelation by fragmenting the Bible into competing historical shards. The Priestly writer and Paul compete for control of the meaning of Genesis. Isaiah is beaten back from the New Testament to his exilic context. The Song of Songs is re-eroticized, yet stripped of its two-thousand year old connection to the life of the Church and the spiritual quest. We have a sense that the Bible has become an artifact of the past. As we recover more and more of the historical detail, we lose more and more a sense of the coherence of the whole. The Bible is in danger of ceasing to function as a book capable of bearing the weight of Christian revelation.

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[1] See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

The scenario I outline here is, of course, somewhat exaggerated; I would not wish to deny the enduring insight that historical scholarship of the Bible has brought and continues to bring to our reading of scripture. Still, it seems to me that the problems noted above are very real indeed. Moreover, we are not the first to have noticed them. Already in the middle of the twentieth century, Christian intellectuals were worried that historical reading of the Bible was severing the theological connections between the various pieces of revelation. In response to the crisis, a series of expeditions were launched to explore the possibility that the fathers of the Church might offer a way out of the perceived dilemma. I am thinking here in particular of the work of G. W. H. Lampe,[2] but the perspective is quite common in the scholarly discussions of the period. The hope was that some ancient method could be found that respected both history and spiritual reading.

The scholars engaged in this work, however, were thoroughly "modern" in their approach to the problem. They were convinced that the vast bulk of patristic biblical interpretation was beyond redemption.[3] In a post-critical age, no responsible interpreter could dare to suggest a return to the proof-texting indiscretion of St. Justin, the rambling diatribes of Irenaeus, or the wild and fanciful allegories of Origen and his entourage. No indeed. If a redemptive voice were to be found in the fathers, it would have to come from some source other than the great tradition of patristic reading, now rendered obsolete in the wake of historical-critical progress. The existence of a unique (and persecuted) "Antiochene exegetical school" that was more rooted in history seemed to offer some hope of a way forward. Like most patristic scholarship of the time, interest in the "school of Antioch" focused on issues of doctrine, specifically Christology. As all of you know, many scholars found (and continue to find) in these Antiochene voices a hopeful corrective to the Alexandrian vision of Jesus.[4] If the Christian

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[2] G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woollcomb, *Essays in Typology* (London SCM, 1957).

[3] See especially R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event.* Reprint, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

[4] See especially Alyos Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition: vol. 1 From the Apostolic age to Chalcedon (451).* Translated by John Boxden, (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975).

tradition had largely forgotten the humanity of Jesus under the dominance of Alexandrian vision, the long-suppressed Antiochene vision could now be resurrected as an ancient example of a Christology consistent with emerging interest in the humanity of Jesus that accompanied modern efforts to reveal the historical Jesus and to reclaim his true humanity. Rejected Antiochene authors like Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, misunderstood in their own time, could be rehabilitated by an age more sympathetic to their concerns.[5]

The expedition charged with saving Christian figural reading recognized in a recovered Antiochene Christology that upheld the humanity of Jesus, a potentially rich environment in which to probe for an ancient model of reading that appreciated history and eschewed allegorical fancy. Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mospuestia—and to some extent members of their entourage, Theodoret of Cyrus and John Chrysostom were held up as exemplars of the new model. Here were ancient exegetes who had found a way to hold in tension the dual ambitions of historical sensitivity and theological truth. Many modern commentators claimed that method was the key. These Antiochenes, they insisted, practiced "typology," which, again according to modern scholars, was carefully and vigorously distinguished from "allegory."[6] Unlike allegory which destroys the literal detail of the biblical text and encourages readings that orbit above the detailed physicality of historical event, typology begins with event and preserves its revelatory character but attempts to discern in the events of history enduring patterns that can, in turn, be used to help make sense of latter historical events in God's saving plan. Typifying this view, Lampe wrote, "typological exegesis is the search for linkages between events, persons or things *within the historical framework of revelation*, whereas," he continues, "allegorism is the search for secondary and hidden meaning underlying the primary and obvious meaning of a narrative."[7]

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[5] For sympathetic retrievals of Theodore see Rowen Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia as Exegete and Theologian* (Westminster: Faith Press, 1961), and Dimitri Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible* (New York: Paulist, 1989).

[6] Cf. Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, translated by John Hughes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).

[7] Lampe, 40.

We at this conference are standing in the shaft excavated by these scholars. That we are standing here with some sense of urgency about the current state of biblical interpretation in our Church is, also in my view, evidence that the original expedition was not successful. In the rest of this essay, I will argue that the expedition was not successful because the original "shaft," while seeming to uncover a promising vein, turns out to have missed the mark. To be blunt, the "Antiochene exegesis" I have just described does not exist, and what has passed as such in much scholarly discussion is more aptly described as a hopeful projection of historically conscious moderns. Let me try to make a case for this assertion.

I recall a Greek Orthodox colleague of mine in graduate school once blurting out in the middle of class, "why are we spending so much time trying to rehabilitate heretics?" Since I nurture a private fear that I may wind up on the losing side of history, I have a certain sympathy even for Christianity's most notorious villains. Who cannot feel some compassion for the horrible fate of Arius who died in the outhouse apparently of severe diarrhea? More seriously, who is not upset about the condemnation of Origen centuries after his death, a condemnation that caused so much ancient wisdom to perish? Still, while I do not recall which unfortunate victim of history's callous impartiality was the object of my colleague's scorn, years later, I have come to see a kind of wisdom in his question. I do, on the whole, trust the Church to make good judgments about what is and is not good theology or, in the case under consideration here, what is and is not good interpretation of the Bible. Specifically, I would argue that the Church did not err when it recognized problems in the exegetical strategies of some Antiochene authors, and that the wider Antiochene tradition is not terribly distinct from what might be called the patristic exegetical mainstream.

In much scholarly literature the phrase "Antiochene Exegesis" stands for the work of Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, with Theodoret of Cyrus and John Chrysostom understood as disciples and keepers of the flame. Yet, readers of the works of these individuals will note quickly that these authors are not mere clones of each other. Indeed, a careful reading of the evidence reveals that even such a consummate Antiochene as Theodoret of Cyrus nurtured substantial doubts about the exegetical judgments of his masters.

The tendency to lump Theodoret together with his predecessors has obscured the many and significant ways that his work differs from

theirs.[8] This is not to say that the fundamental assumptions of the Antiochene style were not bred in his bone. He could no more ignore these than a modern scholar can ignore the basic assumptions of the historical-critical method. Theodoret's Christological project was deeply Antiochene; he sought primarily to defend God's impassible nature rather than to defend a robust sense of the drama of incarnation.[9] His exegetical method was strongly and inextricably bound up with the basic assumption of classical historiography and grammatical analysis.[10] Yet, even while all of this is true, there was a way in which Theodoret moved creatively and faithfully within the intellectual environment that formed him. He was no mere copy of his teachers; he reached a point where, so to speak, he drew a line in the sand and recognized the limitations inherent in the work of his predecessors. Theodoret's independence asserts itself throughout his exegetical works, including his commentary on the Psalms, which I will analyze in some detail here. Through the interpretation of these ancient poems, Theodoret demonstrated that as an exegete he was thoroughly ensconced in the mainstream of patristic exegesis. In other words, if "Antiochene" means what so many moderns claim it means, Theodoret was no Antiochene.

At first glance, this transformed Theodoret is difficult to locate. Every page of his commentary on the Psalms bears the characteristic stamp of Antiochene exegesis. Every psalm is subjected to a careful grammatical analysis. Theodoret seeks to uncover the basic "skopos" of the text, he comments on obscure vocabulary, and he engages in text critical analysis of his edition of the Septuagint. He makes corrections based upon comparisons with Aquila, Theodotion, Symmachus, and a text that he calls simply "the Syrian." Like his Antiochene predecessors, Theodoret reveres "historia," or the literal unfolding of the narra-

[8] Substantial portions of the following exposition of Theodoret were taken from a short contribution to a volume on patristic exegesis of the Psalms. The volume is being edited by Brian Daley, and as of this writing, has not yet appeared.

[9] John O'Keefe, "Impassible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 39–60.

[10] Frances Young, "The Rhetorical Schools and their Influence on Patristic Exegesis," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowen Williams (Cambridge, 1989).

tive and the meaning that resides there. This methodological housekeeping, however, may mislead.

Some years ago, in an article on Antiochene exegesis, I attempted to demonstrate that this interest in "historia"—which all the Antiochene and many Alexandrians shared—should not be confused with contemporary notions of history or be used to suggest that representatives of the Antiochene theological and exegetical tradition anticipated twentieth-century historical judgments.[11] By this, I do not intend to suggest that they were ahistorical. They wanted to know about the past. They were concerned about the accuracy of their texts. They wanted to know about the proper context in which to understand the Psalms, for example. However, it is important to underscore that their interests were not historical-critical. That is, they made no effort to get "behind" the text to the real story which the text itself obscured. Their historical explorations were marked by a kind of pre-modern naiveté. The explication of the "historia" of a biblical book was, for them, a process by which the narrative and chronological sequence of the text was analyzed and commented upon. Most ancient exegetes, not just Antiochenes, accepted the reliability of Old Testament historical books and allowed the sequence of events in that historical narrative to control and dominate their reading of other texts, like the prophets and the Psalms. Uncovering "historia" was all about uncovering the proper chronology and the proper relationship between events described in the various narratives. In other words, deciding where the psalms fit in the timeline provided by kings was a common practice. While Antiochene interpreters vigorously embraced these exegetical patterns, they certainly were not the only ancient interpreters to do so. Theodoret's attention to these "historical" details, then, is neither surprising nor remarkable.

A second obstacle obscuring Theodoret's resistance lies in the academic discussion itself. The word "Antiochene," at least in reference to biblical exegesis, is usually short hand for the exegesis of primarily three authors: Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret. Theodoret, however, as the last person both on this list and

[11] John O'Keefe, "A Letter that Killeth: Toward a Reassessment of Antiochene Exegesis or Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret on the Psalms," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8:1 (2000): 83–104

chronologically, has often been dismissed as an exegete riding on the shoulders of giants but making no real contribution himself. Theodoret's knowledge of the works of Diodore and Theodore is beyond dispute. In the middle of the twentieth century, G. Bardy recognized the influence Theodore had upon Theodoret. Bardy characterized Theodoret as a compiler of the work of others and declared him "un commentateur sans originalité."[12] As a compiler, Bardy added, Theodoret shared company with Jerome, except Jerome, because of his superior intelligence and knowledge of the Bible, avoided slipping into "banalité."[13] H. B. Swete was more lenient: "[Theodoret's] imitation of Theodore seldom, if ever amounts to a verbal reproduction. Theodoret recasts Theodore's matter in his own words... It is not indiscriminate. Theodoret...holds aloof from the speculations of Theodore when they would have led him away from the Catholic faith."[14]

Jean-Noël Guinot, the reigning expert on Theodoret, agrees with Swete. According to Guinot, who has spent twenty-five years of his life studying the bishop of Cyrus, Theodoret steadfastly defended Theodore as a "master" of the Antiochene tradition. His loyalty, however, did not include slavish adherence to Theodore's exegetical method. According to Guinot, it is possible to extract from the surviving literature particular aspects of Theodoret's attitude toward Diodore and Theodore. Hence, in letter 16, Theodoret responded to complaints from a certain Irenaeus, which seem to have been addressed to him because, in an earlier work, he had neglected to include the names of Diodore and Theodore in the catalogue of Church teachers.[15] Theodoret responded that he had no intention of omitting these saints, and that if he had done so, he would have been guilty of ingratitude toward these teachers. In his Ecclesiastical History, Theodoret again described the two as "teachers" and their contribution to the fight against heresy was

[12] G. Bardy, "Commentaires Patristique de la Bible," *Dictionnaire de la Bible Supplément*, tome 2, 102.

[13] Ibid.

[14] H. B. Swete, ed., "Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in Epistolas B. Pauli Commentarii. The Latin Version with the Greek Fragments," 2 vols. Cambridge, 1880–82, as quoted by Paul Parvis, "Theodoret's Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul" (D.Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1975), 109.

[15] Jean-Noël Guinot, L'importance de la dette de Théodoret de Cyr à l'égard de l'exégèse de Théodore de Mopsueste," *Orpheus* 5 (1984): 68–109.

noted with approval.[16] Finally, in *Eranistes* Theodoret explains that Eranistes himself, the person for whom the treatise was named, because of an Apollinarian bias cannot appreciate the "interpretations of Diodore and Theodore, the victorious combatants of piety."[17]

The prefaces to his commentaries also offer hints about Theodoret's attitude toward his teachers. In some of these prefaces, Theodoret appears to admit that his work is derivative. He acknowledges a debt to his predecessors; he speaks with humility about his own work, and he seems to cast himself in the role of a compiler. For example, in the preface to the Commentary on the Minor Prophets, Theodoret compares his works to the widow's contribution of two coins, which is described in Luke 21:1–4. Later in the same preface, drawing upon the image of the construction of the temple, he compares himself to women who are too poor to offer gold, precious stones, and other materials, but who possess the skill to "spin and weave" wool offered by others:

> Just like women who spun and wove wool that had been offered by others and who prepared the leather covering of the tabernacle, we, by gathering from various places what has been well said, will weave, with God's help, a single work from all of these.[18]

The originality of his exegetical work proves that Theodoret's humility in this preface is a kind of rhetorical humility, but statements like this one have helped reinforce the idea that Theodoret was a mere compiler.

Other evidence taken from the commentaries, however, actually demonstrates that Theodoret was willing to go beyond, and even to correct, the work of his predecessors. In the preface to his commentary on the *Song of Songs*, for example, Theodoret lists the names of great exegetes who had preceded him. On the list are Eusebius, Origen, Cyprian, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Diodore of Tarsus, and John Chrysostom. Theodore of Mopsuestia is conspicuously absent.[19] If Theodore did not write a commentary on the Song of

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[16] PG 82, 1256 D; 1277 AB.
[17] *Eranistes*, Ed. G. H. Ettlinger (Oxford, 1975): 95, 5–12.
[18] PG 81, 1548 B.
[19] PG 81, 32 B. Cf. Guinot, "L'importance," 76.

Songs, the omission of his name is understandable, however, even if this is the case, we do know that Theodore was unwilling to see the text as anything but love poetry "written by Solomon concerning his marriage to an Egyptian princess."[20] Moreover, in the same preface Theodoret criticized those who interpret the commentary too literally. Clearly, on this occasion Theodoret was deliberately distancing himself from the interpretations of his "master."

A similar indication of Theodoret's willingness to depart from the insights of his predecessors is found in the preface of his commentary on the Psalms. Here he urges his readers not to think of his work as a waste of time simply because so many others have commented upon it. He will offer something different. His work will avoid both the "excesses of allegorical interpretation" and "an over-emphasis on 'historia' that helps the Jews but offers nothing nourishing to those who have faith."[21]

Theodoret seems here to argue for a kind of exegetical mean between Origen, on the one hand, and Diodore and Theodore on the other. Surprisingly however, students of Theodoret rarely take him seriously. They tend to lump him together with "the Antiochenes" and ignore the extent to which "theoria," or spiritual exegesis informed his actual exegetical judgments. This is a mistake. We should not underestimate the significance of Theodoret's equivocation around the word "historia." This word is usually translated simply as "history," or sometimes and perhaps more properly as "narrative." However because the word is so common, it is equally easy to underestimate its significance. In Theodoret's exegesis, the word "historia" functions as a code for "the exegetical methods of my predecessors." It has all the weight for him that the term "historical criticism" has for modern scholars. In short, it is a methodological term, not simply a noun. So, when Theodoret claims that others overemphasized "historia" he can only be referring to his masters in the exegetical enterprise, Diodore and Theodore. It seems, then, that in the 440's, when he composed his

[20] Dimitri Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of his Old Testament Exegesis* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 33–34.

[21] PG 80, 860, CD

commentary on the Psalms,[22] Theodoret was discontent with the limits of "historia" as a method of interpretation, and he probably had been for some time already. But there is more here than an uneasiness with an exegetical style. At the center of his critique is a charge: the commentaries of his predecessors did not have enough Christian content; they were, in his view, too Jewish.

A close examination of the Psalm commentaries of Diodore and Theodore would appear to justify Theodoret's concern. Diodore's commentary opens with a general introduction to the Psalms as a whole in which he reflects upon his methodology. His opening remarks illuminate not only his strategy but also that of his disciple, Theodore, whose own commentary follows a similar pattern. In the opening lines, Diodore expresses his desire to enhance the understanding of those who are "singing the Psalms in worship." While, he explains, the Psalms offer spiritual consolation, they also provide interesting religious teaching and insight into the history of Israel. Some psalms offer moral correction, some express joy in the Lord, others defend the existence of God, and still others warn against Greek notions of a fate or chance. According to Diodore, the Psalms narrate the story of David, and they foretell the captivity in Babylon and the return from exile. Some even look ahead to the time of the Maccabees. Theodore's commentary exhibits the same basic judgments.

Both Diodore and Theodore control the interpretation of the psalms through the implementation of a strict hermeneutic that Diodore details in his prologue. Unlike some exegetes who lapse into allegorical reading, he will present an interpretation "on the basis of the narrative and the text."[23] This will not, he insists, prevent him from offering typological readings;[24] it is simply that this higher meaning will derive from the natural flow of the narrative. In this way the in-

[22] Jean-Noël Guinot, *L'exégèse de Théodoret de Cyr* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1995), 48.

[23] CCG, 6, 7.125–126. I am grateful for Brian Daley's unpublished translation of Diodore's prologue.

[24] Ibid. 7.126

terpreter can both avoid introducing foreign ideas into the text and escape "the strangle-hold" of Judaism.[25]

Both Diodore and Theodore may have claimed that their interpretations had room for Christian readings, but such readings are rare.[26] Throughout most of the commentaries, they content themselves with a simple paraphrase of the text to which they often add a brief moral reflection. By far their most pressing concern was to establish a sense of the sequence of events and the place of the Psalms in an overall narrative framework of the Old Testament Historical books. The main question was where on the timeline of Kings does a particular psalm fit? Because of these efforts, the text of the Psalms tends to be cut and pasted onto particular points on a chronology derived from other parts of the Bible.

Theodoret's reaction to Diodore and Theodore was both admiring and critical; he valued the erudition of his predecessors, but found their exegesis of limited value for believers. Unlike Diodore and Theodore, Theodoret tends to interpret the Psalms in the light of his experience as a bishop and monk. In key places throughout his commentary, the events recorded in the Psalms are reoriented and understood as a prophetic witness to the ascetical life. Monks reading such passages would recognize themselves in the text and be able to say: "That psalm is about me." Hence, while interpreting verse 83 of psalm 118 (LXX)—

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[25] It is somewhat ironic that Diodore says he is trying to avoid Jewish interpretation when that is the very charge that Theodoret implicitly levels against him. Exegetes in the fourth and fifth centuries often criticized the interpretations of their Christian opponents as being too Jewish. While these exegetes may have had contact with Jewish exegetical traditions, these accusations could also be simply a stylized way of saying that the interpretation is not very good. For a recent discussion of Jewish and Christian exegesis in antiquity, see Marc Hirsham, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (Albany: St. University of New York Press, 1996).

[26] Theodore of Mopsuestia, for example, believed that Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled within the confines of the Old Testament. Hence, in his *Commentary on the Minor Prophets* he identifies only five messianic prophecies: Amos 9:11, Micah 5:1–2, Joel 2:28–29, Zechariah 9:9–10, and Malachi 3:1. In his commentary on the Psalms, only psalms 2, 8, 44, and 109 refer to Christ. Cf., Guinot, "L'importance," 109.

"I have become as a wine skin in the frost, but have not forgotten your ordinances"—Theodoret turns to Paul in 1 Cor 9:27—"I punish my body and enslave it so that after proclaiming to others, I myself should not be disqualified." He explains that the text is about the way David surmounted his passions through his struggle with Saul. Hence, the proper reading of the verse is ascetical.[27]

Figurative readings like this set Theodoret apart from his predecessors. The interpretation of psalm 22 reinforces this impression. The second verse of psalm 22 has a famous pedigree. According to Matthew 27:46, while hanging on the cross, Jesus cries out "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me," quoting this psalm. The psalm also contains other references traditionally associated with Jesus. Verse 16 reads "they pierced my hands and my feet," and verse 17 declares, "They parted my garments among themselves and cast lots upon my raiment." Now, both Diodore and Theodore knew that these texts had been used to refer to Jesus, but they absolutely insist that according to the *historia* of the text, the proper context for the whole psalm, including these verses, is David and his problems with Absalom.[28] Both Diodore and Theodore seem embarrassed by their conclusions. Aware he is on dangerous ground, Theodore says that Jesus used the psalm in the way that anyone suffering anguish might use it. However, the psalm is not about Jesus. Similarly, Diodore says sheepishly that, if we are careful, we can see a likeness here to Jesus as long as we don't get carried away and forget that the true reference of the text is David and David's life. The reader, fairly I think, concludes that both Diodore and Theodore allow this provision only because the New Testament makes the link between Jesus and Psalm 22, but they would have preferred that the link not exist at all. For them, the psalm must fit in the historical chronology offered by Kings; that is the primary meaning. To read it in any other way would represent a breach of methodological purity.

Theodoret, on the other hand, declares at the beginning of his commentary on psalm 22 that it "predicts the suffering and resurrection of the Lord Christ as well as the call of the gentiles and the salva-

[27] PG 80, 1848, C. For a discussion of the role scripture played in the ascetical tradition, see Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[28] CCG 6, 126.5–10; CCL 88A, 107.1–5.

tion of the world." He ascribes great significance to the psalm's title: "for the end, concerning the morning aid, a Psalm of David." Theodoret takes "morning" to mean the suffering and resurrection of the Lord" and contrast that with "the end (telos)" or the day of resurrection. He declares as well that we should rely on the testimony of the holy apostles for interpretation of this psalm. He even allows himself a moment for Christological reflection; the phrase "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me," indicates that the Godhead was present to the one suffering in the "form of a slave." Yet, he is careful to point out, "the godhead itself did not receive the suffering."[29] Hence, the term "forsaken" does not mean that the Word had left his godliness behind.

Theodoret explains that when the psalmist laments of being "far from salvation," he is describing our nature without Christ. The connections with the passion story continue in earnest. Verse 3 refers to Jesus' desire to let the cup pass, and verse 4 alludes to the saving body of the lord. There are allusions to the virgin birth, to the betrayal by the disciples, and to wicked Scribes and Pharisees. When the psalmist mentions "bones" in verse 14, Theodoret hears "apostles," because the strength of a body is its bones. When the psalmist mentions "dogs" in verse 16, Theodoret hears "gentiles," because of Matthew 15:26–27 where Jesus declares to the gentile woman, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." And she says in reply, "Please Lord, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." In his exegesis of this psalm, Theodoret engages is other flights of intertextual indulgence. Here is a final sample: in verse 25, the psalmist writes that "the poor shall eat and be satisfied." Theodoret understands this to mean that the Gentiles will be called. Where in verse 28 the psalmist writes, "...all that go down to the earth shall fall down before him," Theodoret reflects that in the resurrection all will bend the knee. The "seed" that will serve him, mentioned in verse 31, is the people that has been washed clean in holy baptism.

It would be easy to go on in with more examples from this psalm or from many others. One thing, however, is clear: Theodoret's interpretations are often at odds with the interpretations offered by his

[29] PG 80, 1009.

masters. They are frequently both more figurative and more Christological.

It is also clear in his commentary on the Psalms that Theodoret was deeply indebted to his predecessors in all kinds of ways. He employed the same methodology that they had employed. For the most part he agreed with them that David's life was the primary reference point of the psalms and that the text could be illuminated through correlation with the book of Kings. Indeed, the modern reader can study page after page of Theodoret's exegesis of the Psalms and find scarcely a mention of Christ and the church. Yet, the evidence suggests that he also recognized the limitations of the methods he had inherited. The commentaries of Diodore and Theodore did not go far enough. In the end, Theodoret said "no" to his masters in some key areas.

In a way, Theodoret was not unlike the modern theologians with whom we began this paper. Having become disenchanted with inherited methods yet still admiring, they nonetheless look for less restrictive alternatives. Why did this happen to Theodoret? Who were the other voices in Theodoret's world that helped him to think about exegesis in a different way? We know he read Origen, he may have read Cyril, he says he knew Gregory of Nyssa.[30] He was also a monk who wanted to apply the text of the Bible to his life. These forces clearly moved Theodoret beyond the strict school exegesis of Diodore and Theodore.

Let us return once more to the earlier references to modern miners and anemic veins. We might do well to listen to Theodoret and recognize that there is no gold here. Diodore's and Theodore's was an exegetical project that failed. The effort to excise spiritual reading from the Old Testament in the name of methodological purity was roundly rejected by subsequent patristic authors, beginning with their most promising disciples. Neither Theodoret nor John Chrysostom retreat from reading the traces of Christ across the entire narrative of the Christian economy. Diodore and Theodore are a blip in the tradition; they do not represent a powerful alternative to it.

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[30] See the preface to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, PG 81, 32 B. See also, Jean-Noël Guinot, "Théodoret à-t-il lu les homélies d'Origène sur l'ancien Testament?" *Vetera Christianorum* 21 (1984): 285–312.

Yet, if my thesis is correct, how can we explain the modern preoccupation with these authors and the hope we have invested in them as we struggle with the continuing pressures of modernity? I think part of the explanation lies in recognizing that we have misidentified the context in which Diodore and Theodore were functioning and we have not correctly understood how ancient interpretation functioned.

When Lampe, whom I mentioned earlier, approached the topic of patristic exegesis, he was looking for models in the ancient period to help him figure out how to preserve both figurative reading and historicity. Antiochene insistence on the primacy of the literal seemed to have much in common with modern efforts to recover the context and life situation of the text. At a certain circumstantial level, the Antiochenes seemed to be "more like us." They were historical critics before historical criticism. The problem with such a reconstruction is that it ignores the actual context in which Diodore and Theodore's project came to be. Both were writing in the heat of anti-Origenism and both were disturbed by some of the theological implications of Origenist ideas, especially those that were heavily dependent upon an allegorical reading of the Old Testament.[31]

As I and others have suggested elsewhere, Diodore and Theodore sought to combat the excesses of Origenist theology through a rigid application of the ancient textual analysis that they had learned from the traditions of ancient rhetoric.[32] In other words, Diodore and Theodore tried to control biblical interpretation through the implementation of a strict hermeneutic. (They are not unlike modern biblical critics in this sense.) As we already noted in the discussion of Theodoret's resistance, Diodore details this in the prologue to his commentary on the Psalms: Unlike some exegetes who lapse into allegorical reading, he will present an interpretation "on the basis of the narrative and the text." This will not, he insists, prevent him from offering typological readings; it is simply that this higher meaning will derive from the natural flow of the narrative. In this way the interpreter can both avoid introducing foreign ideas into the text and escape "the strangle-

[31] Cf. Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[32] Young, "The Rhetorical Schools."

hold" of Judaism. Readers of Diodore and Theodore, however, quickly realize that the promised typological readings rarely materialize and one is presented with a rather monotonous paraphrase of the text according to "the letter." All this is done to resist those who lapse into "allegorical reading." These lapsing exegetes may safely be identified as Origenists.

This Antiochene resistance to Origen bears a superficial resemblance to modern historical concerns, but it is only superficial. Perhaps the key feature of modern criticism is the notion of "suspicion." The goal of our exegetical efforts is to slip behind the text to the truth of the historical event. In many cases, we view the received text as an obstruction to the truth. The truth is the event, but our texts conceal the real events beneath layers of theology and editorial finessing. We are taught to peal away the layers to reveal the true kernel of history that lies beneath. This was decidedly not what Diodore and Theodore were doing. Like all ancient interpreters, they were pre-modern. They were naively confident that the literal text spoke truly. They were not engaged in a project to recover the true historical meaning of the Bible. In other words, I think it is simply wrong to look to Antiochene interpretation as a prototype of modern criticism. The methods of Diodore and Theodore were thoroughly ancient and were deployed expressly to combat Origenism. They were not designed to defend the historical reality to which the text refers.

If the first mistake of modern readers of Antiochene exegesis was to see in them models of ancient readers who valued history, the second was to try to isolate the concern for history in the methodology known as typology. Typology, unlike allegory, it is often argued, takes seriously the historical events from which the types were drawn. Hence, when the crossing of the Red Sea is linked typologically to the crossing from sin to new life in Baptism, the real events of the real Exodus are not destroyed by the Christian reading. In contrast, the allegorical reading of Genesis as a veiled account of the unfolding of a platonic cosmos or the allegorical retelling of the erotic poetry of the Song of Songs is a violence against the literal text. Therefore, according to this view, typology is supposed to be the patristic methodology that can help us challenge the dominance of modern historical-criticism since it is both committed to history and it allows for figural interpretation.

This scenario has introduced a great deal of confusion into modern debates about patristic exegesis. No ancient interpreters, not even

Diodore and Theodore, were interested in history in the sense that modern people are interested in history. Moreover, I think it is simply erroneous to attempt to distinguish rigidly between typology and allegory in ancient exegesis. There is no time in this context to develop this claim in detail. In a forthcoming book, my colleague Rusty Reno and I attempt to outline what we believe are the fundamental exegetical presuppositions of the fathers.[33] Historical sensitivity is not one of these. Typology is not an ancient form of historically conscientious figural reading. All ancient interpretation, we argue, flowed from the basic conviction that the entire biblical narrative was fundamentally about the economy of Christ.

For the fathers, God wrote the Bible through the instrumental inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Bible as a whole—not as collection of individual books from different historical contexts—was understood to reveal the economy of Christ. In other words, the Bible was a unified narrative that, when properly read, revealed God's salvific plan for the redemption of the world through the incarnation of the Son. Every jot and tittle of the Bible was understood by the fathers to point to some aspect of that economy. From the point of view of the Christian economy, the allegorical meaning of books like the Song of Songs or the Psalms was as unproblematic to the fathers as reading "American Pie" as a veiled reference to the rock scene of the 1970s is to modern Americans.

Consider Song of Songs 2:8—"The voice of my Kinsman! Behold he comes leaping upon the mountains, bounding upon the hills. My Kinsman is alike a gazelle, or a young stag on the hills of Bethel." On its face, this text would appear to have not Christian content at all. However, where approached with the conviction that the divine economy is the subject of the whole Bible, the meaning is revealed. Commenting upon the "gazelle," Theodoret, following the pattern we have already noted in his exposition of the Psalms, explains:

> They say the gazelle is so called because of its native sharp-sightedness, and takes its name from its clarity of vision. They also

[33] John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), Forthcoming.

> say that stags are destroyers of creeping things and that right along with their herbage they eat snakes and vipers and other such beasts without incurring any harm. Since, then, the Lord Christ in his character as a human being is a "rod" springing "from the root of Jesse, and the Spirit of God" rested "upon him...the Bride likens him to a gazelle on the ground of his sharp-sightedness, his clear vision, and his foreknowledge of things to come.[34]

Here Theodoret glides from the visceral image of the Kinsman coming like a gazelle to the lover, through the prophetic tradition, to a description of the human character of Christ with an ease that disturbs historically conscious moderns. The conviction that the Bible is about the divine economy allows him to do this.

In the light of this conviction, Christian readers were thus able to discern a united story in the pages that lie between Genesis and Revelation. Both typology and allegory were techniques used to draw that story out and identify its key themes and features. They were decidedly not methods pitted against each other in the name of giving history its due. Unlike modern biblical interpretation, which attempts to control the meanings of texts by rebuilding historical contexts, ancient interpretation controlled the meaning of texts theologically by trying to conform interpretation to the "rule of faith" or, said another way, to read the Bible in the light of orthodox Christian faith. This "rule" was not an arbitrary theology imposed upon the texts, but a set of theological commitments dating back at least to the early second century. Modern critics correctly worry that the tendency of the fathers to read the whole Bible as a veiled reference to the divine economy runs the risk of generating wild and uncontrolled reading. The "rule of faith" provided discipline to these reading strategies, and, as a disciplinarian, the rule was generally effective.

We may not like this form of reading discipline, but this has more to do with our lack of confidence in the father's view of the divine economy than with the failure of the method itself. As Lampe noted, "the unity of the Bible ought never to mean the same thing for us as for the pre-critical generations." Instead, the true meaning of the Bible

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[34] Richard A. Norris Jr., *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 117

"must be sought in a collection of literature recognized to belong to very diverse times and circumstances, not in a single harmonious body of revealed truth expressing in its complex pattern of interlocking themes, typological, allegorical, parabolic, and prophetic, the one vast theme of the divine plan of creation and redemption."[35] Lampe, was trying to recover typology as a way to critique modern historical excesses in the same way that many today are trying to recover the school of Antioch to offer a similar critique. What Lampe did not realize, however, was that all patristic exegesis operated inescapably within that very economy in which he no longer believed. If we seek inspiration from the fathers for a way to address the perceived crisis in contemporary interpretation, we would do well to allow ourselves to be changed by them rather than continuing to try to tease modern views out of their pre-modern ways.

I conclude with a few observations. On the one hand, my fundamental point has been that we cannot look to the "Antiochene school" (at least the fourth and fifth century Greek variety) for assistance in our current crisis. On the other hand, I do not wish to end my paper pessimistically. I am actually quite convinced that the patristic exegetical tradition as a whole can help us to move forward. Let me end, therefore, with some brief reflections about what a new exploratory mine shaft into the ancient interpretive world might suggest.

First, we need to take a serious look at our preoccupation with the category "history." We need to ask ourselves why we are so driven by it and why we feel so compelled to build our futures on it and defend its primacy. If I am correct, the entire edifice of ancient Christian biblical interpretation, and indeed ancient Christian theology, was constructed without the benefit of a carefully articulated sense of history as the primary locus of revelation. How can that be? Clearly, we cannot completely reject our concern for history, but perhaps we can develop a form of interpretation that is less driven by its hegemony. It seems to me that post-modern theology has helped to clear a space for reintroducing a sense of the primacy of text as a value alongside the primacy of history. A careful reading of the fathers suggests that this is a path worth exploring.

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[35] Lampe and Woollcomb, 17–18.

Second, if we can appreciate anew the idea that the text, not the events behind it, is a worthy medium for revelation, we can learn again to be more comfortable with multiple meanings in a text. A text can function as a simple narrative and as the locus of symbolic or theological meaning. The existence of the two side by side does not mean we must choose one or the other. In other words, an allegorical reading of the Song of Songs does not necessarily lead to the denial of its literal eroticism.

Third and finally, we need to restore confidence in the idea that something like "the rule of faith" is a useful and valuable way to control the meaning of a text. In my own study of early Christian interpretation, I have become convinced that the most significant difference between ancient readers and modern readers is this: they actually believed in the divine economy and that the Bible was a witness to it. We moderns have largely lost confidence in both the divine economy and in the Bible's ability to witness to it. We need to recover this confidence but without the naivety of the ancients. If we are able to do this, then we may also be able to have more trust in the ability of Christian orthodoxy to regulate wayward readings, and we will not need a reconstructed and modernized "Antiochene School."

RESPONSE FROM PATRISTIC THEOLOGY

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I have been asked to comment on the papers and respond to the conference from the point of view of a student of Patristic Theology. Of course, like all of us here today, I have more to say than I have time for. This is especially true because the landscape of Patristic exegesis, as far as modern scholarship maps it, seems to be in the process of changing in important ways. John O'Keefe is one of the main engines of change in this area, in my opinion.

Scholarly analysis in the Humanities tends to work along the lines of drawing distinctions between texts and dividing material into groups as we study in order to understand them more clearly and approach them with a better grasp of their internal logic and ruling characteristics. Historical theologians work according to this logical pattern, too. We delineate the parting trajectories of Judaism and Christianity as they move through the first two centuries after the death of Jesus. We understand the growth of the expression of Trinitarian conceptions of God by sorting them into Modalist or Tritheist streams and read christological passages with an eye to whether they will lead to later Nicene or anti-Nicene positions and patterns of expression. All of this is well and good: oftentimes it is reflective of distinctions that are first expressed by authors involved in the original discussions we study. Despite the frequent usefulness of this analytical technique, it is still worth considering whether later scholars have been led by their intellectual habits into making divisions where they are not really useful and whether they have sometimes made some of their distinctions too emphatic when they form their imaginings of the past.

The traditional line drawn between the Alexandrian and Antiochene "schools" of biblical exegesis is one of the most venerable in the

trade. Professors love it because it gives shape to a period that students know nothing about and because it seems to provide a ready-made explanation for the bitter quarrels of the christological debates of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries. (We can understand why two general groups of writers formed and competed with each other if we imagine that they were led to do so by the way they had been taught to approach reading the Scriptures.) Students and authors of textbooks cling to this duality with a fervor bordering on desperation. The time has come, however, (and it is our task here, today) to wonder whether we have been too ready to make another neat distinction where none was warranted. Recent years have seen more conscious effort made by scholars to focus on detailed study of a broader range of works by writers who have been seen as members of one or the other of these two "schools" and the resultant studies are beginning to suggest new ways of making sense of what scholars are seeing.

It is becoming easier to say out loud that the contrast of an Antiochene tradition of scriptural exegesis with an Alexandrian tradition is a false dichotomy. The two schools of interpretation seem not to have been as different as they have been described to be and sometimes seem to be more the by-product of clusters of shared understandings of certain vexed verses rather than fully developed, variant methodologies. As in all scholarly endeavors, there is disagreement and there are rearguard actions being fought against this change, but I feel confident in saying that the next generation of students of early Christian interpretation of Scripture is likely to hold this new opinion more firmly than our own generation does.

It is important, however, that the excitement of discovering new things about the past should not be allowed to blind us to the truths that our old *schema* expressed. Like most mistaken interpretations, the false dichotomy of Antioch with Alexandria is not completely wrong. There certainly is a struggle built into Patristic exegesis and into Christian exegesis more broadly. I do not think, however, that it is a struggle between a spiritual interpretation of Scripture and an historical one. John O'Keefe's suggestion that we should understand 'ιστορία in Theodoret's writing as a stand-in term for "the exegetical methods of my predecessors"[1] shows his awareness that the ancient Greek word

[1] O'Keefe.

did not have the same meaning as the English one derived from it. The use of ‘ιστορία by Herodotus at the start of the earliest surviving prose historical work in Greek must be considered normative for the whole ancient period. In that passage, the word clearly means “investigation” or “research.”[2] Modern scholars, eager to find early antecedents for their own activities, seem to have been misled (by their willingness to hear what they hoped to hear) into concluding that Diodore and Theodore were claiming to do something they certainly were not. ‘ιστορία is better thought of as a word denoting ‘organized intellectual activity’ rather than ‘the study of the past,’ in the way that we use it commonly in English. This gives a very different tone to Diodore’s and Theodore’s activities than they sometimes appear to have evoked.

Since I am speaking more off the cuff than those of us who gave papers today, I am willing to say that I think it is better to characterize this struggle as one between a tendency to emphasize the idea of the Scripture as a living thing, always relevant and active, as opposed to a tendency to think of Scripture as a finished, closed artifact, surviving from the past.[3] In truth, I think that this is not really an opposition but a cross-fertilization. The best exegetes from both these groups make use of both of these insights. These two ideas are not really diametrically opposed to each other, but, rather, stand as dynamic counterparts in the balancing act that Christian interpreters of Scripture try to perform, no matter what age they live in.

O’Keefe’s mention of the figure of Origen as one of the motivating factors urging Diodore and Theodore to construct a rigid scheme of approach to the Old Testament is an important suggestion, in my opinion. It has the merit of locating the motive for action in a concern present and active during the authors’ lives rather than in a concern that is more prominent in our own times than in theirs. Origen has always been a very hot potato in the hand of the Church. At the same time that his multi-level approach is widely considered dangerous, it is also even more widely seen as attractive. There is often great fear that the application of some of his ideas to the teaching of the Church

[2] Herodotus, Book 1, I.1.

[3] That last comment, written before the meeting, turns out to echo John O’Keefe’s description of modern exegetes and their attempts to view Diodore and Theodore as fellow workers at the same task.

would be destructive, but there is also a recognition among Christian thinkers that his understanding of the Scriptures as living texts is absolutely necessary.

Diodore and Theodore, it seems, fearing Origen's freedom with the text, designed their approach to the Old Testament as an anchor that would keep it in the place in which they thought it belonged. Where Origen seemed able to apply any text to any situation (an attractive prospect for the preacher, but a slippery slope in the eyes of scholars, who tend to be less adventurous), Diodore and Theodore sought to make the relevance of particular texts be imagined as more tightly focused. The practical result of their attempt, however, was that, in their interpretation, the Old Testament lost its theological connection with the New Testament. This is an exact case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The main casualty was the theological voice of the Bible. I must say that I have tried to show elsewhere[4] that Ephrem the Syrian had a sense of the Scripture being historically anchored, while still remaining able to hear it as a living voice. I find his approach to this aspect of reading the Bible (making room for its historical location as well as some sort of present active application) much more successful than the better-known efforts of Diodore and Theodore. His conviction that the Scripture can apply to all ages, to just the age in which it was first produced, or find its full impact only in a later time, seems to me to allow for the history of human beings living in the world to have real meaning and for that history to move through meaningful periods of differing relations with the Divine. The relevance of Scripture, in Ephrem's eyes, is something that finds its existence at the meeting point between the text and the history of human beings in the world, rather than being something that is imposed upon the world from the outside by a fixed artifact known as "the Scriptures."

When seen in this light, it seems clear to me, as a member of the greater Church, that the main tradition of Christian interpretation of Scripture prevailed because it had to, by the logic of the Faith. If Diodore's and Theodore's approach had been allowed to become normative, the Christian religious view of the history of the world as over-

[4] *Communio* 28 (2001) "Making Sense of Scripture: An Early Attempt by St. Ephraem the Syrian."

seen by a unified Divine vision and an ongoing interaction with Providence would have been lost. The common sense understanding of what the New Testament says about how it relates to the Old Testament would have needed to be surrendered. I do not think that the Christian vision of the world could have survived without that as a starting point.

Where do the Syrians fit in this balance of the anchored Antiochenes with the anagogic Alexandrians? The first thing that I would suggest is that, in order to come to a clear response to that question, we need to separate out the very earliest voices in the Syrian tradition and look at them on their own, because they were formed before the influence of Greek exegesis was widely felt in the Syrian Christian stream and so are witnesses to an independent strand of thought. Those sources we have heard about today: St. Ephrem, Aphrahat, and the *Book of Steps*, are central examples of this group.

The first thing we see is that these early Syrian thinkers are not Greek. They are not limited by that culture and its approach to written sources. They look at the text with different eyes from anyone educated in the Greek world could and they see things that the Greeks of their own time, and we, in our time, cannot see. Craig Morrison showed us an example of that in Aphrahat's conviction that the Scripture is open-ended in its meaning.[5] This is not an idea that a classically trained interpreter of pagan literature would endorse. In my own mind, at present, I imagine these three early Syrian sources as viewing the Scripture from a standpoint that is more under the influence of the Jewish exegetical stream than of pagan literary interpretation as known in the Greek and Latin West. We need, however, to be careful to remember that this Jewish influence would be that of a very early sort of Judaism, coming primarily from before the period in which Judaism as we know it had become codified, and not a Palestinian form of that time, either. We don't really have the sources and knowledge to say very much in detail about this, I think, and I, myself, know very little of what is actually known by scholars, but I do know enough to think that I can see that the influences on these people are coming from a

[5] Morrison pp. 19–20, Aphrahat *Fifth Demonstration* "On Wars," (col. 235.7–237.6).

very different direction from those felt by any of the groups to the west.

These Syriac sources would, then, be new voices, or, rather, old voices, newly recognized, in the chorus of Patristic interpretation. I like the image of a chorus because adding voices to a chorus doesn't change the tune and doesn't change the conductor, but does change the experience of listening and can add richness and depth to what is already being performed. If we think of early Christian biblical interpretation as a chorus, we may be able to understand how variant voices could be tolerated and welcomed within it, while certain sorts of singing were viewed with great concern and rejected as discordant. Of course, one cannot understand that sort of distinction without knowing the tune the chorus is singing and a modern scholar cannot understand the reactions of the early Church to different exegetical approaches and results without first learning to hear the tune with the ears of the chorus. We must strive to see early Christian scriptural interpretation through the eyes of its own time, if we want to understand it. That brings us to another point.

Since I am making generalizations, let me say that I think the false juxtaposition of Antiochene with Alexandrian interpretation has been another example of a sort of mistake that historical theology has more than once been prone to: that is, the tendency to see the present while it is looking at the past. Jonathan Z. Smith's *Drudgery Divine*[6] has shown how both Protestant and Catholic scholars have tended to see their modern differences incarnated in the various strains present in the early Church. That stands as a cautionary example of the same sort of problem that I think we see in the consideration of exegesis. The way past this difficulty is to awaken our historical imaginations to see the past as it was, not as we might have acted in it had we been present or as we might wish it actually had been.

The interpretation of the Psalms is a good beginning place for the modern student who wants to look at early Christian methods of exegesis, given the Psalter's importance in the worship life of the Church and in the formation of Christian doctrine. It is fitting that work has been done in that area and interesting tendencies have been discovered. Early Christian readers of the Psalms made the book central to their

[6] Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994 (reprint).

worship, theology, and devotion, engaging with the book on many levels. The central presence of the Psalter in the early literature of the Egyptian Desert is an obvious case in point.[7] Viewed against this backdrop, the desire of Diodore and Theodore to read the Psalter as "a poetic gloss on the history of Israel at the time of David," as John O'Keefe has described it elsewhere,[8] is, indeed, a decision to read the text on a shallow level. It also makes primary in the Psalter what had been secondary in both Jewish and Christian circles. Judging by what we know of its use, the Psalter was primarily a worship book rather than a history in the minds of its users. The decision of Diodore and Theodore to treat it as history places their understanding of the Psalms completely outside not only the Christian tradition but the Jewish tradition as well. It is important to see that their suggestion is not one that is in any way more traditional than what the Christians arrayed against them were suggesting, but rather is something generated from within their own ideas of what is appropriate. It does not seem to have been present in any tradition before they suggested it. John O'Keefe's suggestion that they are "a blip" in the Christian tradition is absolutely correct and he has shown us, today, that Theodoret seems also to have been convinced that their approach was a dead end.

So, I leave you with this suggestion: the general outline of Patristic Exegesis in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries as it has been understood through the 20th century and taught in seminaries and universities is misleading. I think that the great majority of Christian interpreters of the Bible in the early period shared the same range of interpretive techniques and that they also give evidence of the peculiarities of their time, place, and background. I also think that the real divisions among early Christian exegetes will be found, as our knowledge moves forward, to track along theological (especially christological) lines. I have already tried to make a start at demonstrating that by showing how

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[7] Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* OUP 1993, 97, mentions the prevalence of the Psalms among Old Testament books, but any alert reader would come to the same conclusion.

[8] "'A Letter that Killeth': Toward a Reassessment of Antiochene Exegesis, or Diodore, Theodore, and Theodoret on the Psalms," *JECS* 8, 1, 83–104 (2000) Spring, 93.

Athanasius and Ephrem can be paired (across linguistic lines and as contemporaries who had no influence on each other) as exegetes led by their theology.[9] Much more study, of course, will reveal many interesting and important things about what the different early Christian interpreters of Scripture said and believed and I look forward to learning much from the works of others and from my own continued reading.

The Syrian tradition is important in this process of learning the early Church's mind where the Bible was concerned because it shows that Christian understandings of the Bible were not locked into a yin and yang dichotomy, but rather were the beneficiaries of, and deeply affected by, the cultures and situations in which the interpreters themselves lived their lives. This is exactly how Robert Kitchen showed us the *Book of Steps* used the Scripture. That, in itself, is a crucial point for modern Christians, especially ecumenically minded modern Christians, to understand. If the Christian tradition from its earliest stages includes a variety of voices that speak from their own experience, should not we, as modern Christians, members of a worldwide Church, expect that our own approaches to the Bible and interpretations of Scripture will be even more various and offer an even broader range of insights than they did? I think so. And I think it is a good thing. And I hope to learn more as my life goes on from the variety of Christian voices here in the present, as well as in the past.

[9] "Ephraem and Athanasius on the Knowledge of Christ: Two Anti-Arian Treatments of *Mark* 13:32," *Gregorianum* (forthcoming).

AN HISTORICAL CRITIC'S RESPONSE

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A foundational assumption of the essays in this volume has been that Christian biblical scholarship today, particularly Catholic scholarship, has come to an impasse: the nature of serious scholarly work on the Bible is said to be of little use to practicing theologians. All of the authors share this conclusion to some degree. Where they have differed is largely on the extent to which a distinct tradition of biblical interpretation that has its roots in both the patristic School of Antioch and in the Syriac Fathers offer hope for bridging this gap between historical criticism and a desire for theological relevance. As one trained in the historical-critical method, a student of a student of a student of William Foxwell Albright, I would like to begin my response by establishing whether this impasse does exist. Then I will discuss some solutions that I believe are unacceptable. And, finally, I will offer an appraisal of whether Antioch helps.

Rather than debate the intellectual heritage of the historical-critical method, let us provide a bottom-line definition[1]. For the Bible

[1] There is certainly no reason to attribute the rise of the historical critical method to atheistic Enlightenment trends. If we start in recent centuries, Wellhausen's methodology was driven by his theology (J. Bright, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing* [SBT 19, London: SCM Press, 1960], p. 22; J. H. Hayes, "Wellhausen as a Historian of Israel," *Semeia* 25 [1982]: 55; R. Rendtorff, "The Paradigm is Changing," *Biblical Interpretation* Sample issue [1992]: 2–3). Arguably, the methods are considerably older, with Source Criticism originating with Fr. Isaac la Peyrère in 1656 and developing with Bishop P. D. Huet in 1711 and Fr. Alexander Geddes in the late 1700s; Form Criticism

to be understood, this method holds, it had to be seen within its historical *Sitz im Leben*, that is, within the larger context of ancient Near Eastern culture as determined by archaeological discovery and the tradition of comparative philology.[2] It is immaterial to the definition if the historical critic worked in an a-theistic rationalism.[3] Certainly, the 20th-century paradigm, W. F. Albright, did not, and in fact, he raised biblical history to a pinnacle of religious significance.[4] Nevertheless, what mattered was the history. The landslide of text and artifacts found in the ancient Near East in the last two centuries enticed the field into a confident positivistic attitude toward finding and recovering the historical and comparing it with Israel's ancient texts.[5] Certainly, there have always been voices for a renewed emphasis on the text and synchronic approaches to it. However, they are not historical-critical methods, which are by definition diachronic. However, I would not agree that the historical-critical method seeks a singular meaning for the text, or a singular ur-text itself. Form Criticism and Source Criticism, for example, are really incompatible methodologies seeking different meanings, the results of both of which are standard historical-critical fare. And neither Redaction nor Form Criticism suppose that the original literary text contains the most authentic meaning.

As Patricia McDonald has observed, "gains in biblical understanding, although of intrinsic interest to scholars, have often turned out to be scant fare for sustaining the life of the religious communities to

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from Louis Elliès DuPin (1657–1719; e.g. his *Dissertations Historiques, Chronologiques, Geographiques et Critiques sur la Bible*, vol. 1 [Paris: André Pralard, 1711]); and Historical Criticism (in the narrower sense) with Denis Cardinal Pétau, SJ, in 1627.

[2] P. B. Machinist, "William Foxwell Albright: The Man and His Work," in J. S. Cooper and G. M. Schwartz, eds., *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), p. 392.

[3] As per B. E. Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?" *Communio* 29 (2002):185–216; DiNoia and Mulcahy, p. 337.

[4] J. F. Kutsko, "History as Liturgy and the Origins of the Lectionary," paper presented at Duke Divinity School, Durham (2000).

[5] Kutsko; M. S. Smith, "Monotheistic Re-Readings of the Biblical God," *Religious Studies Review* 27 (2001): 25–31.

which those scholars belong."[6] Herein lays the impasse. It really has several facets. On the one hand, theologians are unable to utilize the kind of exegesis produced today. "The 'so what?' question is prominent."[7] Nevertheless, theology itself as a sacred science had less interest in the Bible as it "sought to pursue its own necessary agenda, often in a more contemporary contextual setting."[8] In the 1950s and 1960s "there were Catholic theologians and exegetes who tried hard to find a grounding for Catholic exegesis in a clearer understanding of inspiration, canonicity, hermeneutics, and the patristic heritage."[9] "Yet, on the whole, their work was largely bypassed by exegetes, particularly in the United States," McDonald concludes, "because the American exegetes' colleagues, the systematic theologians, were so focused on the relatively unbiblical systems of Rahner and Lonergan."[10]

On the other hand exegetes, show little interest in a theological appropriation of their work. This is not wholly for want of motivation, as McDonald explains:

> The specialization within the exegetical enterprise leaves exegetes unable to engage with the fundamental theological questions underlying the place of the Bible in Christian life. ... Younger biblical scholars are much less likely to be ordained men who belong to a residential religious community. So ... their experience is less likely to include an extended education in philosophical and theological disciplines that is integrated into the community's apostolate and the Church's liturgical life and structures. ... In consequence, an exegete's conversation partners are much more likely to be scholars

[6] "Biblical Scholarship: When Tradition Met Method," in J. Deedy, ed., *The Catholic Church in the Twentieth Century* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 127.

[7] McDonald, 128.

[8] C. J. Dempsey and W. P. Loewe, "Introduction," in D. J. Dempsey and W. P. Loewe, eds., *Theology and Sacred Scripture* (Annual of the College Theology Society 47, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), p. xi.

[9] McDonald, 128.

[10] p. 128; cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today," in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis*, ed. R. J. Neuhaus, (1989), p. 3.

> from other Christian denominations or from the secular academy than the theologians from his or her own tradition.[11]

Some may object that the gap between theology and exegesis has already begun to be bridged. I do not dispute that some biblical interpretation is engaged in conversation with the community of faith in the context of the world at large. The prolific work of Walter Brueggemann is merely one example.[12] My contention, however, is that this is merely *Wissenschaft* plus pious reflection (*parenesis.*[13]). When the aim is to "recover from scripture 'valuable theological insights' that may have relevance for today,"[14] that is homiletics, not hermeneutics.

In one of the last presentations before his death, Roland Murphy defined the biblical theology he sought as "construal or synthesis of biblical data concerning God, man, and nature in biblical categories."[15] However, realizing that the biblical "data" were by nature contradictory and unconstruable, and that "there is no single biblical theology as a literary unit,"[16] he settled, as have many others, for theologically oriented exegesis. At most, this becomes the project Dempsey and Loewe propose, "both disciplines [Bible and theology] making a joint contribution to the fields of liturgical-pastoral theology [and] spirituality,"[17] which is not the same as exegetes producing something of use to systematicians. At its worse, it is done as Mark Smith describes:

> when scholars working in archaeology, biblical studies, or history of religion write explicitly or implicitly about Judaism and Christianity for audiences including Jews and Christians, their intellectual enterprise sometimes includes the unstated task of offering an alternative theology melding theology and nontheological data an-

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[11] p. 129; Carol Dempsey and William Loewe came to the same conclusion in their edited volume (esp. p. xi).

[12] E.g., *Testimony to Otherwise* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001); *Ichabod Towards Home* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); *Reverberations of Faith* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

[13] Similar conclusions are reached by DiNoia and Mulcahy, pp. 343–44.

[14] Dempsey and Loewe, xiii.

[15] "When is Theology Biblical?" paper presented at Washington Theological Union Evening Scholars' Conversation, Washington, 2001.

[16] Murphy.

[17] Dempsey and Loewe, xi.

> chored in the culturally prestigious discourses of history and archaeology—in short, a Bible and a theology without religious experience or even belief.[18]

As Ryan has stated, the hegemonic exclusivity of the historical-critical method must be questioned, Catholic biblical scholars cannot solve the problem by rejecting the historical-critical method. I cannot agree that the method itself is dangerous to a theological enterprise because by equating the human author's intended meaning with the "True" meaning, it fails to recognize the divine authorship of the text. It is precisely *by* seeking the author's intended meaning that Catholic biblical interpretation attains the divine author's intent.[19] Because inspiration, like Christology, is incarnational (*Dei Verbum* 13), *Divino Afflante Spirtu* (34–35), and *Dei Verbum* (12) have insisted that the point of access to the divine author's intent is that of the human author, or rather of "that which has been expressed directly by the inspired human authors" (*Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* II.B.1.c; cf. I.A.4.g; II.B.1.g; IIIa).[20] John Paul II in his Preface to *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* says (II.7), "the Church of Christ takes the realism of the incarnation seriously, and this is why she attaches great importance to the 'historical-critical' study of the Bible." Henri de Lubac maintains, "God acts within history, God reveals himself within history. Even more, God inserts himself within history."[21] For all its limitations, it remains a necessity.[22]

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[18] Smith, 31; the same phenomenon is described by Ratzinger, p. 2. An equally dead horse is efforts to use the phenomenological hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricouer to assist the convergence of biblical interpretation and life in the context of the community. Certainly philosophical hermeneutics must inform Catholic interpretation (*Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* II.A.1.a, c; II.A.2.b–d; II.B.2.c), but the Catholicity of Catholic biblical scholarship cannot be limited to this.

[19] Contra DiNoia and Mulcahy, 338, 344.

[20] This is why Paul Claudel called "historical criticism ... a holy and magnificent task."

[21] *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux de Dogme Chrétien*, rev. ed. (Paris: Cerf, 1941), p. 119.

[22] The limits and also the reasons for its necessity, as delineated in several magisterial documents, are concisely presented in J. G. Prior, *The Historical*

For this reason, I can also not follow John O'Keefe in "reintroducing a sense of the primacy of text," that is, giving synchronic higher criticisms precedence over diachronic ones. He is correct that ancient Christian exegesis and theology did not see history as the primary locus of revelation, and he has shown—more clearly than he thinks—that our Antiochenes prefigure such a non-historical but non-allegorical text-centered approach. The synchronic approach "does not advance the cause, insofar as literary criticism is engrossed in its own turmoil. The apparent result of ... [this approach] is a nihilistic relativism."[23] " Literature does not exist without a context. Furthermore, literature without a context would love its content and meaning."[24] If we are interested in the conjunction of the biblical literature and the life of faith, we will certainly "attempt to posit a context in which the literature functioned as part of the [ancient] community's life."[25]

So does Antioch help? Ryan and O'Keefe are skeptical. Certainly it would be nice to heal "the radical break between historical critical exegesis and the centuries of pre-critical exegesis that preceded it and on which the Church's theology has always been based,"[26] and in fact, that is what the Church has asked us to do (*Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* III.b; III.B.2.b, h, k). It is beyond my expertise to adjudicate

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Critical Method in Catholic Exegesis (Tesi Gregoriana Serie Theologia 50, Chicago: Loyola Press, (1999), p. 296.

[23] M. J. H. Fretz, *Lamentations and Literary Ethics: A New Perspective on Biblical Interpretation*, dissertation, University of Michigan, 1993, p. 136.

[24] Fretz, 332.

[25] Fretz, 332. Although beyond the scope of this response, great potential lies in understanding "history" in a post-modern way, as I have argued elsewhere ("How Post-Modernism [and W. F. Albright] Can Save Us from Malarkey," *Bible and Interpretation* [refereed online journal at www.bibleinterp.com], 2003.). There is no need for the historical-critical method to be historicist (contra C. Hartlich, "Historical-Critical Method in its Application to Statements Concerning Events in the Holy Scriptures," *Journal of Higher Criticism* 2 (1995): 122–39. Fred V. Burnett has proposed precisely such a postmodern historical criticism, in "Postmodern Biblical Exegesis: The Eve of Historical Criticism," *Semeia* 51 (1990): 51. While O'Keefe is correct that the Antiochenes were not interested in history as modern people understand it, they were interested in history in similar ways to the way postmodern scholars do.

[26] McDonald, 126.

whether an Antiocho-Syrian school of exegesis actually exists. Certainly much of what the Antiochene and Syriac fathers did was done elsewhere, even the much-vaunted antipathy to allegory is found in Basil of Cappadocia (*Hexameron* 9.101). At the minimum, Antioch is necessary to give a full picture of patristic exegesis, as Steve Ryan has said.[27]

At one time, Ray Brown neatly delineated the difference between exegesis and hermeneutics as the distinction between what the text once "meant" and what it "means" today. However, this is not so much the case as it is a "gap" "between what was once achieved, intended, or 'shown,' and what might be achieved, intended, or 'shown' today."[28] While the historical-critical method adroitly bridges the historical gap between our world and the world of the Bible by historical analogy, in a way synchronic criticisms do not, it is not sufficient to bridge the theological gap.[29]

Now it is not so much a gap as a continuum. Tarazi has shown clearly that the formation of the Scriptures themselves was a compounding of interpretations.[30] The evolution of interpretations that produced the text is the same evolution that we call Tradition.[31] John Kutsko has shown that Jewish lectionaries predate and even set a model for the New Testament and that many texts of the Old Testament were liturgical and "lectionary" in their very composition. Recognizing "the liturgical function and form (genre) of certain texts from their inception and the incorporation into the ongoing liturgical tradi-

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[27] It is useful to me that Paul Tarazi notes that Chrysostom avoided the mistaking of exegesis for theology I noted previously—"the text is merely a beginning" (see also Daley, p. 201). Although Aphrahat, as described by Craig Morrison, still sounds mostly homiletic.

[28] S. E. Fowl and L. G. Jones, *Reading in Communion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 61.

[29] Analogies in the theological realm nevertheless "require familiarity with both the ancient and the modern context (Fretz, p. 338).

[30] M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, repr., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[31] Lucien Legrand, "Fundamentalism and the Bible," *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 70/71 (2004): 11; W. G. Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking*, trans. T. J. Wilson (New York: Crossroad, 1988) and *Theological Hermeneutics* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

tions in Judaism and Christianity"[32] connects Form Criticism with Canonical Criticism with *Wirkungsgeschichte* and "emphasizes the continuity between the earliest practices and contemporary practices."[33]

Lectionaries, Jewish, Essene, or Christian, are by their nature pedagogical, holistic, and at times typological.[34] And here is Antioch, as O'Keefe says. Anthony Salim has shown how clearly the lectionary interpretation of Scripture is that of the Syriac tradition today, and how it is done typologically. This draws from Ephrem, with his careful liturgical attention to the *littera* Griffith noted[35]. It is the method of the Bible's own composition (as is noted in the Pontifical Biblical Commission's *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, chap. III). Certainly, Antioch's fidelity to the text is not as "historical" as some have maintained; O'Keefe is correct, and Ryan's Daniel of Salah and Robert Kitchen's *Book of Steps* gives examples. But Kitchen also states that "what Antioch does do, particularly in contrast to Alexandria, is to honor the integrity of the narrative." Even without Diodore and Theodore, from Ephrem to Chrysostom, Ishodad and Bar Salibi, this is still not the extreme allegory that held sway from Augustine until halted by Aquinas. Morrison's Aphrahat and Tarazi's Chrysostom are paradigmatic of the Actualization Morrison and O'Keefe refer to,[36] as called for by the Biblical Commission's *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (II.B.2.b, e).

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[32] Kutsko.

[33] Kutsko. This is not to say that Scripture and Tradition are the same thing. For Catholics, the Bible, as *norma normans non normata*, is fixed and inspired in a way that the continuing oral and practical Tradition, authored by man even when the truth preached is the truth of Revelation, is not (DiNoia and Mulcahy, p. 334).

[34] Fowl and Jones, 60.

[35] As Khaled Anatolios has written, "the approach of early Christians to the Scriptures was not simply a matter of praying for enlightenment from on high," "The Experience of Reading Scripture in the Early Christian Tradition" *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* 1 (2001): 366.

[36] E. V. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988).

A Pastoral Theologian's Response

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The last time I had the privilege of attending a Syriac Symposium was in 1980 at Dumbarton Oaks. There for the first time I experienced a deeper sense of appreciation of my own Syriac Maronite Church and tradition. After hearing several provocative and insightful presentations on Christianity—East of Byzantium in the Formative Period—I vividly recall one evening while dinning with Dr Sebastian Brock and several Maronite peers, having said to them: "For the first time in my adult life I feel validated as a Syriac Christian—For so long it seemed I was making it all up, and it was merely an illusion." The Symposium highlighted the significantly rich and influential Syriac Church, with its unique spirituality, profound liturgy, poetic hymnody, and beautiful iconography. I then added, "I was beginning to believe that we, working in isolation for so long, had made it all up to justify our existence as Maronites." Worse yet, Maronites from the Crusades to Vatican II became less than an Eastern and Syriac tradition due to centuries of "Romanization." There was the added dilemma of the Syriac tradition being long overlooked or identified with the Byzantine tradition.

In this volume, we have reflected on several inspiring and challenging presentations addressing the question whether the Syriac biblical school of exegesis and patristic tradition can contribute to the Church's reflection on revelation, which is not limited to the Greek and Latin traditions. I would suggest the insights of these scholars would offer a significant contribution to the contemporary discussion of the Third Quest for Jesus and to the historical-critical method.

The paradigm of Church offered by this Syriac tradition in its formative period reflects invaluable characteristics that can and should be able to make a contribution to the discussion. As Fr Ryan notes in his paper, quoting Andrew Louth that when dealing with Scripture we

deal not "*with a technique for solving problems but the art for discerning mystery*." I would suggest the very "*ruho*" of Syriac spirituality is to embrace, encounter, and experience mystery, and more particularly, Mystery-Presence, who is always communicating and revealing Itself in and through nature, words and people or types, symbols and mysteries.

Moreover, this Syriac perspective of faith, scripture, life, worship etc lives, breathes, and reveals itself in its theology, liturgy, art, hymnody, and iconography as a unique and invaluable spirituality.

As Robert Murray suggests, the Syriac tradition reflects:

1. A unique asceticism, which colored all its literature,
   - An exemplary community tradition of the sons and daughters of the covenant, which predating a later monasticism focused on virginity and *qaddishuta* or consecration—so much so that Aphrahat and Ephrem both had to defend marriage as lawful.
   - A paradigm of Christian living—this Qyama—witnessed men and women members of the Covenant who were more closely related to the church community, often living at home or in small groups.
2. Second early Syriac rhetoric—reflective of Aphrahat, Ephrem, and Jacob of Sarug represented a more Semitic understanding of Christianity, while appreciating the extent the whole Near and Middle East as a culturally hybrid world.
   - In his Symbols of Church and Kingdom Murray describes typical patterns of early Syriac literature—being litany-like sequences of divine titles and contest-poems.
3. The genius of this richness and power of symbolism in Syriac poetry, prose, and liturgy reflects a seemingly native gift of northern Mesopotamia. One of the richest symbolic themes of early Syriac Christianity—passed onto the whole world—being the drama of Christ's descent to Sheol, breaking open its doors, conquering death, and leading out the dead, from Adam on who were awaiting redemption.

This Syriac exegetical tradition—a biblical school of typology—offers a fresh venue for valuable and needed dialogue to Method C exegesis, as Ryan points out of Daley—namely a new branch of biblical studies, one that would be explicitly theological and ecumenical exegesis. Moreover, as Fr Craig Morrison notes, Syriac biblical exegesis offers the same objective of Aphrahat interpreting the Bible's message for

our own historical context and that ultimately any exegesis has as its ultimate mission and purpose to demonstrate the character of an exemplary Christian lifestyle. The entire act of prayer is a living act of mercy and the Bible is a paradigm of Christian conduct that brings into alignment one's thinking, speaking, and acting. Christian living then becomes an "actualization of biblical texts."

Anthony Salim's work underscores how the six liturgical seasons and the scriptural cycle in the Syriac Maronite Church offer a biblical view of daily life that can illuminate the way—via luminous eye—on current issues. Salim further points out that the Eastern Traditions in general acknowledge that liturgy in all its forms lies at the heart of all that it is and does. Knowledge of the Mysteries of God and of the Church is to be found in the wisdom and insight of prayer, especially liturgical prayer. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the catechesis of the faithful springs out of a profound understanding of the way one worships. Salim notes: "long before catechisms were conceived, the truths of the faith were experienced in the chanting of the Divine Mysteries. Icons, or prayers in color and form, followed the rhythms of the liturgical year as understood by each Tradition of the Church and the Particular Churches that emanated from those Traditions."

Paul Tarazi insightfully summarizes: "Chrysostom considers scripture to be authoritative not just to its original audience, but to successive audiences as well. It is meant for all generations, but all generations must apprehend the text's original meaning, and then apply it to the contemporary situation."

Essentially this biblical school of the Antiochene, Syriac patristics suggests, to coin Karl Rahner's language, that each believer needs to become an attentive hearer of the Word so as to become a sincere doer of the Word.

The Syriac patristics are not sharing homilies, *memre*, *soghyoto* for the sake of theologizing but rather for creating a vehicle, a tool to empower the believer to a fresh, new, and personal consent or encounter with the living *Dabar*. Moreover, this declaration by the Divine Word reflects a need to respect that the Scriptures were pluriform. As such, "recognition of the scriptural text's transcendence as divine writing brings us to an understanding of the text, ...and textual criticism helps us to recognize the great plurformity of the text in the ancient period which in turns leads to the necessary existence of a transcendent text and divine author."

This sensitivity for the self-disclosing presence of Divine Dabar who conceals in the very revealing, leaves—as Ephrem and others remind us—an elusiveness, undisclosed in Sacred Scripture, allowing for the vitality of future interpretations and inviting the exegete to continue probing God's revelation. The divine author transcends the literal text itself—a fundamental truth to always be remembered and balanced into any exegesis of the Sacred Scripture.

It seems to this responder that the Syriac tradition can make contributions to scriptural exegesis and offer valuable dynamics and tools for catechesis and pastoral life in the community of faith.

1. The legacy of liturgical poetry and the living tradition of the Syriac Churches serve as a vehicle for theological teaching and catechetical instruction. The primal language of poetry may better serve catechesis of the community of faith and focus on the dynamic aspect of God as mystery. The Hidden One, unknowable to the human mind but profoundly experiential to the human heart, is best described in language that contains and conveys a sensitivity for the hidden and spiritual. The most effective tools for such encounters with the Divine are poetry and typological story telling. The Church has yet to seize the opportunity for innovative and new pastoral implementation.
2. In this contemporary age of the Third Quest, yearning for faster and more, and struggling with spiritual hunger or deprivation due to materialism's betrayal of fulfilling the human heart, Syriac biblical exegesis and its symbolic theological approach offer another, fresh and solid approach for the journey of the sojourner seeking to experience God, the Mystery-Presence.
    a. While philosophical and symbolic theology compliment rather than conflict with one another, the philosophical approach to God and the mystery of divinization has for too long dominated scripture, theology, liturgy, etc. at the expense of the symbolic.
    b. Since the Sacred Scriptures are primarily a self-disclosure of Mystery-Presence rather than a textbook about the Unknowable One who from the center of divine love reveals—then the Syriac school of biblical exegesis may better serve the

spiritual sojourner seeking to encounter rather than define God—offering a comprehensive, meaningful overview of salvation history through types and mysteries contained in creation, and the OT as foreshadowings rather than straightjackets of the Divine Logos in the NT and in the Pentecostal era of the Church. Lest, as Narasi would caution, when we speak of God and divine things all we do is stutter and stammer.

3. Catechesis of adults and children must move deeper and broader than definitions and doctrinal formulas. The invaluable Catechism for the Catholic Church needs more and that more is the symbolic approach to probing and experiencing the mystery of God and his plan for salvation. The Syriac biblical-symbolic-typological approach aims at using sets of paradoxes of opposites eliciting a sense of wonder and awe. To quote Dr Brock: "This approach works by association; not definitions; it is allusive, not descriptive, dynamic not static, it leaves meaning implicit, not explicit, it suggests and does not seek to impose itself. The approach offers a holistic view of the material and spiritual worlds, and points continually to their interconnectedness."
4. The bridge and link between the material and spiritual world, in the contemporary times, are best achieved by a delicate balance of philosophical and symbolic exegesis, theology, spirituality, catechesis, and liturgy. The heightened appreciation for hidden power or meaning in types, symbols, and mysteries offers a needed alternative and a balance to the spiritual hunger of the sojourner of the 21st century. One needs only to reflect on the rich imagery offered in the poetic approach to biblical exegesis and theology from the Syriac tradition—
    a. The imagery of clothing and the act of putting on and taking off
    b. The meaningful use of creation and OT types point to Christ, the Divine Type, etc.
5. Most particularly, I would encourage for the Church in pastoral and liturgical life more effective, organized use of drama as a vehicle for para-liturgical celebrations, pastoral gatherings, and catechetical settings for adults and children. The Mystery Plays

of medieval Europe dating back to the 9th centuries unfolded the biblical narrative of the Resurrection of Christ and his appearance to Mary, and included the powerful and dramatic Passion Play—but the East got there first and The Persian Sage—Ephrem's dramatized hymns of Christ's descent into Sheol and the personification of Death and Satan are a creative witness.

a. The *sughitho* traces back to Mesopotamia and reflects a short introduction—formalized dialogue in the shape of a dispute.
b. Ephrem had speakers take alternate verse, and whole poem does not exceed 55 short stanzas. These were sung and most likely dramatized as in the case of the famous Repentant Thief and the Cherub guarding the entrance to Paradise.
c. The memre or dialogue hymns take a biblical episode as starting point, then explore the meaning and implications using a longer dramatized dialogue. These epics are more action filled and most likely were dramatically acted out, as, for example, with the biblical narrative of Genesis 22 and Abraham and Isaac.

In the end, we find in these dialogue soghyoto and dramatic narrative memre an exciting and largely forgotten Syriac heritage which can bring back to life, in a splendid way, some of the key episodes of the Bible, which can and do serve as a successful vehicle for Christian teaching and instruction and could profit our contemporary venue for Christian catechesis.

If spirituality is about a way of life that reveals and mindfully celebrates quality relationships, conversations, and daily events—then the Syriac spirituality can and does offer a powerful dynamic symbolic method to encourage the sojourner to spiritually align his thinking, speaking, and acting in the dramatic process of divinization by Mystery-Presence.

I conclude with reference to the Syriac Maronite Church's attempt (in USA) over the past 30 years to make this magnificent, unique tradition of faith a living pastoral experience in the lives of the people of God. I illustrate with some of the books, programs, and projects both Maronite eparchies have published to educate, inform, and enrich the entire Church about this Antiochene-Syriac-Maronite ex-

perience through pastoral, catechetical, liturgical, instructional, architectural, and iconographic reflections.

- Faith of Mountain Series for 12 levels of catechesis
- Coloring Books to learn by doing on its history, art, liturgy, and mysteries
- Pastoral programs to prepare couples for Crowning, parents for the Initiation Mysteries, and youth to Commitment of themselves to Christ.
- Books on its history, theology, spirituality, art, and architecture.
- Icon prints, prayer, and greeting cards of the Syriac Rabbula art to reveal their beauty and unique mystical charm.
- Music, iconography, and other educational programs available on cd's for adult enrichment about the Maronite Church.
- Soon the implementation of the historic Maronite Patriarchal Synod of October 2004 focused on restoring our Maronite Identity in theoria and praxis. This pastoral Synod has as its theme and reflects its very mission and purpose, "A Church of Faith, An Act of Hope for our World."
- The Synod must clearly define the essential, constitutive elements of its common Antiochene, Syriac ancestry for the sake of itself and for ecumenical dialogue with other Antiochene. Identify in clear, unambiguous language its uniquely monastic-Maronite heritage. Initiate a thorough process of genuine restoration of these fundamentals to its spirituality, liturgy, catechesis, iconography, architecture, music, and lifestyle. This must include, over a period of preparation time and proper education, the progressive and consistent removal of Roman and other foreign influences that have crept in over the ages, and specific implementation of changes and action-steps in direct relationship to contemporary and particular local needs.
- While the historic and memorable First and Second Vatican Councils have come, gone, and are now being implemented, the Maronite Church has long needed to assemble its community: shepherds, priests, religious, and laity, both men and women, young and old, to dialogue and refound its Antiochene Syriac roots, and to collaborate and network essential and overdue renewal for Maronites of every nation, race, culture, and language.

These insights and the contents submitted by the symposium presenters clearly support and illustrate how the Syriac biblical school of exegesis and patristic tradition can be an effective and innovative con-

tributor to the Church's contemporary reflection and dialogue on revelation—most especially the third quest for the historical Jesus.