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Editorial Office: Str. Nicolae Ivan FN, Cluj-Napoca, RO
Email: contact@napocaroots.ro (principal contact)
stelian@napocaroots.ro (support contact)
Site: http://napocaroots.ro/

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REV. IOAN CHIRILĂ

A Hermeneutical Pilgrimage

A HERMENEUTICAL PILGRIMAGE

REV. IOAN CHIRILĂ

Faculty of Orthodox Theology
"Babes-Bolyai"
University in Cluj-Napoca
ioan.chirila@ubbcluj.ro

I opted for the notion of 'hermeneutical pilgrimage' instead of my Western colleagues' phrase 'lost among hermeneutics', as I am not inclined to idealise or dogmatise any of the biblical hermeneutics throughout history, but rather reflect, to the best of my abilities, upon Him who is the exegete par excellence, namely Christ the God-Man. From this perspective, I invoke the notion of pilgrimage, for a Pilgrim does not seek a place, nor a theoretical rule, but the rule enbody, the rule *in-wordened*. Saint Justin Popovich of Chelije, in his work *The Abysses of Human Thought and Feeling*, stresses the fact that the divine wisdom and theology planted by God in all of Creation are bestowed by Christ the Lord Himself, who is the eternal Logos. They become 'manifest only in the light of the Logos of the incarnated God. Only when it is enlightened by the incarnated God's radiance can the human mind (reason) comprehend the divine and rational (*logos-ni*) meaning of Creation, namely the meaning of the divine Logos within Creation, and allow itself to be thus convinced by the truth of the Apostle's words: *all things have been made through Him and for Him*.'

During this pilgrimage, both analytic and synthetic, we dwell on: ▪ *the apostolic era* and see that the Apostles speak as eyewitnesses and earwitnesses and that such active participation entails a martyrial responsibility to confess the resurrected Christ; ▪ *apologists* and realise that we need to testify to the incarnated truth and to His transcendence-immanence, which is what gives the Scriptures their unity (Behold, a new norm! That of unity that stems from monotheism, from the unity of being – the testimony or rule of the obvious.); ▪ *the Holy Fathers*, the golden age of the Church, whence we borrow the *ethos*, *pathos*, and the spiritual understanding that can provide us with the model of incarnation in the sense of emptying one's mind and having it inhabited by Christ and, implicitly, the acquisition of the mind of Christ to see and express that which is natural, for all, in the light of Christ. 'Unfortunately – Father G. Florovsky pointed out in *Church. Scripture. Tradition* – we are often inclined to

evaluate the Word of God by our measure instead of letting our mind be led by Christ's measure.' The Gospel of the Word of God must be preached as it has been entrusted to us by our Saviour Himself through the saints to be preserved through faith. The words of the Scriptures cannot be adapted in a facile manner to the times it is preached according to each person's mind. The Fathers teach us to avoid exchanging the Gospel of Jesus Christ with someone's random *alien gospel*, which is why that same father stressed that 'the Gospel itself can be understood to the full extent of its wealth and depth only through spiritual experience (marked by faith). But that which is revealed through faith is truth itself. The Gospels are written within the Church. Thus, they are the testimony of the Church. They are records of the experience and faith of the Church.' According to the Fathers, the Church is the one able to interpret the message of the Scriptures, which is the *core* of the revealed scriptural text, through the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit; ▪ *modernity*, the morphosyntax of languages as a reflection of the synaxis of eternity; even ▪ *postmodernity* as a time of challenges generated by individual and sectorial developments, which call upon us to bring out the eschatological and eternal unity of nature found in the Scriptures and the epiphanic spiritual dimensions, so that everyone may identify with this eternal Self by hearing the echo of the primordial definitions within themselves.

I, therefore, believe that every one of us must acquire that minimal wisdom which requires us to include in the equation of our exegetic enterprise a time for thought/reflection/contemplation, during which we should break free from clichés and allow the echo of primary definitions to sound within us, as they are the words that create, that confess Christ and bring good tidings, they are fatherly words, ever loving and guiding towards the ever-enlightening breath of the Spirit.

The conference titled Hermeneutics between Tradition and Postmodernity, organised under the auspices of our magazine, ROOTS (*Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies*), through the papers it comprises – integrated into the two volumes of 2021 – aims to provide these perspectives for the reading of the Holy Scriptures and a hermeneutical pilgrimage towards the Truth. The studies included in this volume are intended: to indicate how we can achieve an applied exegesis in which we understand, assume and embody the Word like the Desert Fathers and especially to the Fathers of the Philokalia (*Patristic-Philokalic Hermeneia*); to familiarize us with the content of intertestamental apocalyptic literature by presenting exceptional Jewish writing: the Book of 4 Ezra (*An Intertestamental Apocalypse: the Book of Four Ezra*); to guide us in

the identification of the spiritual perspectives that place in a new light the scriptural events that from a historical point of view were fulfilled (*Spiritual Significations of the Census in the Wilderness of Sinai Nm 1*); to point out how St. Paul the Apostle takes over the old testamentary language in contexts in which the recipients (the Colossians) are expected to understand not only the allusion or echo but also to recognize their implications (*Perspectives of Colossian 'philosophy': the meaning of intertextuality in the Epistle to the Colossians*); and make a research into second millennium BCE Mesopotamia to analyze the legal framework and broad implications of an adoption process (*Was Child Adoption in Mesopotamia in the 2nd Millennium BC*).

Thus, the studies included in this volume confront us with the truth: Christ is the ultimate hermeneutical criterion, the pillar and foundation of any exegesis. An exegesis that ignores this criterion may make for a wonderful philological, historical, philosophical or any other kind of study, but not a theological one. We promote the theological dimension as a relentless attempt to bring man to the hypostasis of the complete/integral man (*Theo-anthropic*) and to that of total knowledge.

ORTHODOX EXEGESIS

PATRISTIC-PHILOKALIC HERMENEIA

Abstract

Orthodox exegetes' concern with identifying a hermeneia that is specific to the Christian East is apparent, one of the reasons being the fact that, in the Orthodox Church, there is no synodal resolution specifying the relationship that biblical scholars should have with the historical-critical method, the instruments of which cannot be overlooked by the academic world. It is out of such considerations that we have sought to provide exegetes with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with a particular kind of hermeneutics, one that is specific to the Desert Fathers and especially to the Fathers of the Philokalia. Thus, what we aim for in the present study is to highlight the manner in which ascetics approached the Holy Scriptures and identify the interpretation methods and principles they employed to access the mysteries of the Holy text. Spiritual interpretation, allegory, praxis, the power of words, behavioural paradigms, and the ethical dimension are but a few of the elements we will dwell on in this research, which we would like to be an invitation to acquire more detailed knowledge of *ascetic hermeneutics*.

REV. IOAN CHIRILĂ

Faculty of Orthodox Theology
"Babes-Bolyai"
University in Cluj-Napoca
ioan.chirila@ubbcluj.ro

Keywords

Philokalic Fathers, desert, words, praxis, ethical method

Introduction

The main goal of our magazine ROOTS (*Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies*) is to promote Orthodox exegesis in the Romanian academic environment and then in the international one but in close relation to Church life. This aim is reflected in the statements of Father Professor John Breck, who, in his volume *Scripture in Tradition*, asserts that the Eastern Church has never conducted exegesis for the sake of interpretation, but for the spiritual growth of the eucharistic community:

'Orthodox exegetes accept as integral to their calling the need to submit their reflections to the *phronêma ekklêsias*, the "mind of the Church". This implies that the exegetes will conform their interpretation to the doctrinal and moral teachings of Holy Tradition, that they will assume their exegetical labours as a *diakonia* or service to the Church, and that they will carry them out in the interests of the Church and its mission within the world.' (Breck 2003, 61) Thus, in the Christian East, interpretation has had a homiletic/catechetical/pastoral undertone, since the scriptural text has always been concerned with community life and the guidance of the faithful on the path to deification through the power of the Scriptures' words.

The present research aims to put forward a practical hermeneutical guide specific to the Orthodox environment and intended to bring back the Eastern hermeneutical principles that lie at the foundation of the writings of the Fathers, particularly the Philokalic ones, the principles of the hermeneutics of the Desert Fathers – *ascetic hermeneutics*, as Professor Ioannis Karavidopoulos (Karavidopoulos 2018, 109) calls it. Our enterprise falls into the line of research promoted by Father Professor Constantin Coman through his volumes and studies proposing a niptic interpretation of the Holy Scriptures (Coman 2002; Coman 2016; Coman 2004, 26-48; Coman 2006, 181-93; Coman 2008, 328-42; Coman 2009, 31-59; Coman 2017, 13-42). We, therefore, set out to identify a few hermeneutical principles mentioned by the Fathers in the Philokalic writings. Our research area will not be limited to the 12 volumes of the Romanian Philokalia completed by Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae, as we will look at ascetic texts from the Egyptian Paterikon or other synthetic works which bring Philokalic literature to our attention, such as Metropolitan Kallistos Ware's *The Inner Kingdom* (2000), erudite researcher of ascetic literature Douglas Burton-Christie's *The World in the Desert* (1993) or Professor Ioannis Karavidopoulos's *The Ascetic Method of Interpreting the Scriptures* (2018).

This approach is also determined by a concept known to us as the theology of contextualisation, according to which any theological enterprise is carried out in a concrete historical context (Karavidopoulos 2018, 115). One must read it in those two ways, or, in other words, take into account the two levels of addressability, a primary one and a universal – or perennial – one, which refers to how the text addresses us today. From that point of view, that which is found in Philokalic thinking and words plays a paradigmatic role, as it can make for a suitable model as to how to interpret and approach the text of the Holy Scriptures.

The Philokalia – from understanding to embodying the words of the Scriptures

The Philokalic texts have always enjoyed a privileged status within Church life. Their formative dimension and the spiritual perspectives established by the Philokalic Fathers have conferred upon these writings the quality of *vade mecums* of deification. In Metropolitan Kallistos Ware's view, the Philokalia is meant to second the reading of scriptural texts to prove in the correct application of revealed truths, both in the life of Christian communities and in that of each and every believer, every layperson: 'The testimony of the Scriptures should never be isolated from the continuing witness of the spirit in the life of the Church, [which witness is expressed through, emphasis added] the works of the Fathers (Ware 2000, 9), and, above all, the Philokalia." (Ware 2000, 147) If Philokalic texts are construed as the pinnacle of patristic writings, then they deserve to be granted increased importance in view of deciphering given which we should interpret and understand the Holy Scriptures.

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware has drawn our attention to the fact that, when speaking of our approach or the dedication of our existence to the words of the Scriptures, we should go through three steps, or, more exactly, three levels of action also specified within Philokalic thinking: proceed from the stage of soul cleansing towards that of enlightenment and then further on to the stage of *theosis* per se (Ware 2000, 141). The first stage can be assigned to the concept of active life, while the other two pertain to the contemplative life. The Metropolitan stresses the fact that the stages that concern contemplative life are not reserved for monks or ascetics, but for all believers who are part of the Church of Christ. Thus, the path to meeting Our Saviour and to deification is not reserved for spiritual elites, nor is it an individual one, but a community one (Ware 2000, 144). Whenever we attempt to meet the words of the Scriptures, the three stages have to be synchronous, they must be completed not in succession, but simultaneously. Under such circumstances, the focus will be on the logosic charge of the words, words endowed with power, or on that Christological centrality of the Eastern way of reading the Holy Scriptures which we need to seize.

Unfortunately, for too many exegetes, be they old or contemporary, the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures is limited to gathering and ordering pieces of information or to incessantly searching for the meanings of the obscurest texts. Such an enterprise is fraught with endless analyses and debates. Such an approach overlooks a few fundamental aspects of scriptural research: the aim of reading and

studying the Holy Scriptures is to meet Christ and the reading of the revealed text is intended to lead to prayer and the actual embodiment of the words read. Metropolitan Kallistos thus stresses the fact that: 'The real purpose of Bible study is to feed our love for Christ, to kindle our hearts into prayer, and to provide us with guidance in our personal life.' (Ware 2000, 148) In other words, the study of the Bible needs to lead us to a live dialogue with the Word of God in a state of prayer, without which one cannot acquire *the mind of Christ* – the criterion that any hermeneutical demand in the Christian East gravitates towards. This ultimate criterion constantly revolves around the manner in which the message of the Holy Scriptures is explained and understood in the Holy Tradition (Florovsky 1975, 22-5; Florovsky 1972, 11; Chirilă 2017: 47).

The Christological reading of the Old Testament needs to be founded on the principle uttered by Our Lord Himself when speaking to his disciples on the way ('beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about Himself in all the Scriptures.' – Lk 24:27) (Breck 2003, 70). This fundamental principle of Christological reading begins with a nominal value of the text, while also identifying the deep meaning, the mystical dimension through which the text operates to this day, and the way in which it engages me, today's reader. Then, this kind of reading goes on to propose the assumption of the mystical nature of the interpretation concerned with the spiritual meaning of scriptural realities. The historical narration refers to a concrete period in time which can be accessed today through its spiritual-symbolic content. However, the mystical content of the text presenting to us a concrete way of interaction between the created and the Uncreated places us – if we recall the three steps mentioned earlier – in the realm of contemplation and in the actual sphere of *theosis*.

Thus, the actual interpretation or understanding of the message of the words of the Scriptures is achieved not only at an intellectual level, but in the doer's concrete actions. Thus, we aim towards an exegesis and actual *praxis* that Philokalic interpretation provides. When we interpret the scriptural text and notice that it determines or triggers a concrete action, a *praxis*, an *orthopraxis*, we must discern that which the above-mentioned theologians tell us, namely that there is also an ethical dimension or relationship that a scriptural text that has been understood generates within the one who feels the words, the Scriptures, the grace imparted by the Logos. That is why, upon entering the patristic-Philokalic space, we will notice the abundant presence of the scriptural text. There are Fathers who appear to write the texts of the Scriptures in a natural succession, without taking into account the canonical aspect of

the books of the Scriptures, combining them, as what they seek to bring about is the very return or repositioning of human nature within the actual flow of life in the Word of God, for 'He is life and all-life (*svezivot*), since only Life [that comes] through HIM is life. Wherever He is not – Saint Justin Popovich goes on to say – life turns into death, because He is the only one Who makes life true life. Apostasy towards Him, Who is Life, always ends in mortality and death. That is why it is solely in Him, Who is the Logos and Reason of life, that lie the only possible rational grounds for human life within the categories of time and space.' (Popovich 2013, 123-4)

This repositioning of man within the flow of life is actually, as shown to us by the Philokalic Fathers, a liturgical one. The entire act of deification is carried out through this Liturgy, understood not only as a service but as an integral community enterprise of each of us, as part of a conscious attempt to redefine our personal existence in relation to the Creator by triggering a reordering of existence or a re-reading of the whole existence in a theological dimension. This manner of reading shows us that the scriptural text is addressed to man in his entirety, in his integrity. Consequently, it should not operate exclusively at a rational or intellectual level but needs to be understood and bring about a reorganisation or repositioning of the image of humanity within the natural and within its liturgical, doxological and mystical relationship with the Creator.

'The Hermeneutics of the (Fathers of the) Desert' – Interpretation Methods and Principles

The Holy Scriptures have exerted a fundamental influence on the ascetic life of the Fathers who carried out their spiritual labour during the first centuries of Christianity in the Egyptian desert in particular. The scriptural texts concerning the spiritual perfection of believers have served as concrete sources of inspiration for the desert ascetic movement. They outlined the daily life of hermits, offering them the possibility to come nearer to God, understand the purpose of their lives, find solutions in times of spiritual crisis or anxiety and gradually advance on the path to sainthood. The Scriptures played a decisive role both in public gatherings and in cell ordinance, where they were read, listened to, learned, assumed and embodied. That is why, when novices requested words of guidance from experienced elders, the latter used the texts of the Scriptures to teach them the path to perfection (Burton-Christie 1993, 117).

The authority and centrality of the Scriptures in the everyday life of the Fathers of the Desert are obvious. It marked the elders' way of life and constituted the

reference guide for novices pursuing perfection. When asked by some brothers what they should do to attain salvation, Avva Anthony told them: 'Have you heard the Scriptures? That is enough.' (*Egyptian Paterikon* 1997) In other words, the Scriptures, in their various forms within monastic communities of the desert (as either written texts or oral practices – such as memorising, and reciting) taught everyone how to achieve salvation. That is also the reason why Avva Gelasios, possessor of a complete parchment manuscript of the Holy Scriptures, placed this Bible at the disposal of all brothers so that anyone who wished to benefit from it should be able to enter the church it was kept in and read it (*Egyptian Paterikon* 1997). Such examples are hardly singular, as many elders used to recommend biblical readings for the strengthening of the soul. For example, Saint Epiphanius of Salamis claimed that nothing protects a man from sin better than reading the Holy Scriptures and that not knowing Them is cause for great danger (*Egyptian Paterikon* 1997). Aside from reading the Scriptures, the Fathers have equally placed significant emphasis on reciting/meditating on the revealed words. They were convinced that uttering and repeating scriptural texts like prayers imparted a special power intended to aid them in their spiritual struggle (Burton-Christie 1993, 122). As for meditation, which, to the Fathers, was more of an oral phenomenon with potential psychological significations, we can observe that, in ascetic practice, it entailed a deep assumption and internalisation of the words of God.

Thus, the hermit's reading and reciting of, as well as a meditation on the scriptural text protected him from various temptations, brought about better understanding among brothers, cured him of his physical and spiritual ailments, offered him the possibility to progress in his spiritual life, enhanced his discernment, helped him discern spirits and experience the power of words, experience the mystery of words liturgically, and united his mind with his heart (Burton-Christie 1993, 113).

Given these realities, it is necessary to reflect upon the way in which the Scriptures were assumed and interpreted by the Fathers of the Desert in order to provide today's exegete with the chance to approach a kind of hermeneutics that Eastern spirituality has promoted in the ascetic environment in particular.

D. Burton-Christie identified in the writings of the Desert Fathers three methods of interpreting the Holy Scriptures, which, albeit distinct, were harmoniously interlaced across their numerous common elements. They are as follows: ▪ *the paradigmatic method* focused on the scriptural models offered as points of reference to ascetics; ▪ *the allegorical method*, concerned with seeking the spiritual

meanings and truths of faith in the scriptural texts; and ▪ *the ethical method*, which used the Scriptures as guidelines for an authentic way of life. The author notes that these methods are not specific exclusively to the Desert Fathers, as they were constantly applied in early Christianity, in some form or other. In other words, ascetics do not have a significant contribution to the hermeneutical act. However, the manner in which they apply the above-mentioned interpretation methods and the way in which they problematise the authentic way of life in relation to the demands recorded in the Scriptures are elements of novelty and capture our interest (Burton-Christie 1993, 166).

In the absence of any normative literature other than the Holy Scriptures, the Desert Fathers entrusted the guidance of their ascetic enterprise to the paradigmatic models and episodes in both the Old and the New Testament. Consequently, they identified biblical models which fit ascetic needs, trials, or demands, understood them and assumed them to the point of identifying with them. Avva Philimon claimed that there was a special bond between him and King David marked by the reading of the Psalms. He confessed that 'God has imprinted the power of the psalms in my humble soul in the same way as in the Prophet David and I cannot part with the sweetness of the manifold visions in them.' (Ava Filimon 1948, 167) Hence we deduce that, aside from the connection built between the scriptural model and the person assuming it, such a level of identification requires detailed knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. The paradigmatic method often involved a literal interpretation of the scriptural texts. The Desert Fathers mirrored the behaviour of biblical models closely, trying to reach the same height of virtue. Resorting to such models in their spiritual life offered the certainty of salvation. When asked by a monk if, following ascetic struggles, there is the hope of salvation, Avva John the Persian answered: 'I believe I will inherit the heavenly Jerusalem which is enrolled in heaven (Heb 12: 22-23). For the one who made the promise is faithful (Heb 10:23). And why should I not believe it? I have been hospitable like Abraham, gentle like Moses, holy like Aaron, patient like Job, humble like David, hermit like John, mournful like Jeremiah, a teacher like Paul, faithful like Peter, and wise like Solomon. And, like the rebel, I believe that He who has gifted these to me out of His goodness will gift me the Kingdom as well.' [*Egyptian Paterikon* 1997, Avva Ioan Persul (John the Persian)]. We can see here the way in which Avva John the Persian associated these virtues with the biblical models that perfected them.

The Alexandrian environment and the allegorical method of interpretation influenced the manner in which the Desert Fathers related to the holy text. Even though

there were fervent opponents of Origenism among the hermits, the latter did not forego allegory, as this method is not necessarily synonymous with Origen's hermeneutics, but had a long history, which started long before it. Thus, in order to make the Old Testament in particular alive and manifest in their daily lives, they employed the allegorical method.

The ethical method of approaching the revealed text has been the most prolific one. The moral dimension of the Holy Scriptures has been the one to draw the hermits' attention the most, as they understood that the correct application of the content of the biblical texts would bring them close to holiness. It is due to this fact that the Scriptures have generated various practices and attitudes with an impact on posterity. The great elders' way of life, influenced by the revealed message of the Scriptures, would become paradigmatic for disciples seeking to be like their spiritual fathers (Burton-Christie 1993, 171).

Greek theologian Ioannis Karavidopoulos highlights several particularities of the manner in which the Philokalic Fathers approached and interpreted the scriptural text. He identifies four fundamental principles or approaches that characterise the hermeneutics of these ascetics: ▪ the correct and factual application of the content of the Scriptures taking precedence over the theoretical study of the Scriptures; ▪ opting for a spiritual interpretation rather than a literal or historical one; ▪ reinterpreting certain texts after having removed them from their primary context; and ▪ seeking the enlightenment of the Spirit for a complete understanding of the revealed text (Karavidopoulos 2018, 117).

To the Desert Fathers, the understanding of the contents of the Holy Scriptures through practice was of capital importance. Once the text had been read/heard, it needed to be understood and immediately internalised into practice. D. Burton-Christie construes this principle as the *hermeneutics of practice* (Burton-Christie 1993, 160), whereby interpretation is directed towards the embodiment of the words, which is the actual goal of the Holy Scriptures (Jones 2003, 145). In the absence of an ascetic life lived in purity and of the willingness to listen to and dialogue with the Word, it is impossible to embody the revealed text. The Fathers of the Philokalia understood that interpretation has no other role than that of making it possible to embody the words of the Scriptures (Chirilă 2017, 55). A concrete example illustrating this perspective is provided by the famous Avva Pambos, about whom Socrates Scholasticus tells us in his *Ecclesiastical History* (*PG* 67,513AB) that, at the beginning of his hermit life, he want-

ed to learn the Psalms of David from a monk famous for his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. Having heard him recite the first verse of Psalm 38 ('I said "I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue"'), the elder stopped listening to the words that followed and went off to fulfil the content of the psalm. After a while, the two met again and the monk who was to teach him the Psalter asked him why he had not come to see him again. Avva Pambos replied that he had not yet put the text into actual practice. 19 years later, another monk who knew of the elder's reply asked him if he had learned the said verse. Old Pambos said that he had just got into the habit of doing in practice that which David spoke of in that line. Palladius would testify that, even though Avva Pambos was a simple man, God had given him such wisdom that many people used to come to him to learn from his vast understanding of the divine Scriptures that God had bestowed upon him (*Egyptian Paterikon* 1997). Such wisdom as to the Scriptures cannot be acquired without a concrete rooting in the embodiment of the scriptural words.

The content of the Scriptures is not confined to its historical boundaries. The Philokalic Fathers understood this and that is why they did not go out of their way to comprehend the historical circumstances in which the biblical events took place (Karavidopoulos 2018, 115). To them, what prevailed was another interpretive dimension that personalised the text, meaning that it adapted it to the concrete needs of each believer. Otherwise put, the Fathers focused their attention on the spiritual meaning of the text, seeking to build a vivid connection between the Scriptures and man's soul. Upon being asked by Thalassius about the moment preceding the Holy Supper, when two of the disciples went into the city to meet a man carrying a pitcher of water (Mk 14:13), Saint Maximus the Confessor answered thus: 'The Scriptures remain silent as to the name of the man to whom our Saviour sent the two disciples to prepare the Passover, as well as to the name of the city they were sent into. The first thought that comes to mind is that what is meant by the *city* is this perceivable world and *man* stands for the general nature of humans. That is what they are sent out to, as disciples of God and of the Word, as forerunners and preparers of the mysterious feast that God will hold together with human nature, the first and the New Testament. The first cleanse human nature of every impurity through practical philosophy (applied wisdom), and the other elevates the mind, through knowledge or through the mysterious guidance of contemplation, from the material to spiritual sights that are akin to it. That is proven by the fact that the disciples who were sent out are Peter and John. For Peter symbolises

action and John contemplation.' (St. Maximus the Confessor 2005, 47) We note that Saint Maximus directs all of the text's details towards a spiritual understanding of the event, thus pointing Thalassius towards a personal approach to the text. The latter's concern with the name of the man with the pitcher or with the identity of the master of the house where the supper took place, albeit important for the systematic understanding of the historical content of the event, are channelled towards an understanding aimed at the mystery of a man who, through the two Testaments, is elevated from the material towards the spiritual.

The removal of certain texts from their primary context and their reinterpretation by the Fathers indicate both an incessant quest for the spiritual meaning of the scriptural texts and their freedom in relating to and approaching the Holy Scriptures in novel ways. Such an enterprise involving the detachment of a scriptural passage from its intelligible context and its interpretation in accordance with the spiritual experience of the interpreter is highly contrasting with the exegetic direction of current biblical studies influenced by the historical-critical method (Karavidopoulos 2018, 115). Nevertheless, this interpretive view can be understood if we take into consideration the way in which they experienced faith in practice and their unmediated connection to God's Spirit. The following example is taken from the same responses given to Thalassius by Saint Maximus. When asked to explain the mystery of the circumcision performed by Zipporah, the wife of Moses, on her son, when God's angel sought to kill the one sent by God into Egypt (Ex 4:24), Saint Maximus suggests to Thalassius to leave aside the history of that event, as it has been fulfilled, and raise his mind's eye towards a spiritual signification, for the Scriptures always place spiritual meanings above narrated ones, which is easily noticeable by those with healthy spiritual vision. This biblical event is projected by Saint Maximus into a spiritual dimension aimed at the permanent ascension into virtue and he addresses a prayer to God asking him that 'with every trespassing, He should not cease to send to us, as he sent the angel, a reason to threaten us within our conscience with the death brought about by error, so that, coming into ourselves, we should learn to cut off, through innate wisdom like a non-circumcision, the impurity of passions that has stuck onto us along the path of life due to our carelessness.' (St. Maximus the Confessor 2005, 81)

The enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is a hermeneutical requirement in the absence of which the scriptural text cannot be understood in its depth, nor can it become manifest in the life of the believer. Working together with Him under

Whose guidance the entire Scriptures were written is essential for the acquisition of freedom of interpretation that can broaden the meaning of the scriptural texts and clarify the mystery of the revealed content. When writing about humility, Saint John of the Ladder states that it is an unspeakable wealth, for it is said: '*Learn from Me*; so, not from an angel, nor from man or books, *but from Me* (Mt 11:29), namely from My abiding in you, enlightening you and working within you; *because I am gentle and humble of heart* and of thought and mind; *and you will find rest for your souls* from wars and relief from thoughts.' (St. John of the Ladder 1980, 298) We notice how the saint enriches the meaning of the scriptural text with his insertions. This demonstrates a profound understanding of the theological message of God's words and, implicitly, his desire to make the significance of the biblical text as comprehensive as possible.

Conclusions

The hermeneutics of the Philokalic Fathers enables us to rediscover a method of interpretation specific to the Christian East, in which peace, applied assumption and purity of heart become prerequisites for the full understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Such hermeneutics, having been overlooked for a long time, yet revived through the commendable initiative of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite, who put together a compilation of Philokalic texts, and through an interest in hesychastic practices, mainly focused on uninterrupted prayer, could reopen a relevant chapter in the history of Scriptural exegesis.

To the Philokalic Fathers, the framework for asserting the importance of the Holy Scriptures is of a liturgical nature. It entails an ascetic's inter-subjective approach to the words in view of attaining awareness of the fact that, as Exodus 3:14 tells us, God is eternally present everywhere. Knowing God means permanently experiencing His presence and understanding that He is always before us.

Philokalic hermeneutics grants special attention to the power of uttered words. Thus, the words of the Scriptures were mostly repeated in order to consolidate their theological content inside the soul of the person uttering them. Otherwise put, ascetics often experienced the spiritual phenomenon whereby biblical words materialised the reality they depicted. This practice enabled ascetics to utter words – often inspired by the Scriptures – that were endowed with extraordinary power, which moved the will of those receiving them to assume their content in practice.

The ethical method of interpretation was the main hermeneutic rule applied by ascetics to the Holy Scriptures. Such a method was mainly brought about by the practical nature of their relationship with the revealed text. To the Philokalic Fathers, the Scriptures contained the necessary coordinates for their spiritual fulfilment. The holy text met their spiritual needs, which is why careful knowledge of the Scriptures coincided with knowing them. Hence, all that was left for them to do was read/listen, understand, assume and embody the words of God.

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AN INTERTESTAMENTAL APOCALYPSE: THE BOOK OF FOUR EZRA

Abstract

Book 4 Ezra is a magnificent literary production of Judaic origin. Here we find a profound moral vision and a highly literary way of thinking. The book is a historical apocalypse, reflecting the crisis, that will lead to the destruction of the Temple by the army of the Roman general Titus. It is however an anthropological apocalypse because it speaks of man's destiny in a difficult world. In the book, we have a series of seven visions, which are divided into two parts: the first three visions consist of a threefold dialogue of Ezra with the angel Uriel, and the other four visions comprise the true apocalyptic part – the woman in mourning, the vulture with twelve wings and three heads, The Son of God and Ezra, the successor of Moses. Ezra's Apocalypse highlights the important role of fasting and prayer, which are true drivers of moral progress. The author of the book affirms the existence of two worlds, willed by God. At the end of this world, the Messiah will come and establish a new kingdom. The law is presented as a guide and as a guardian. Ezra convincingly asserts the existence and presence of divine mercy in this world. The idea of a mediator, resurrected and full of glory, has Christian connotations.

REV. REMUS ONIȘOR

Faculty of Orthodox Theology
"1 Decembre 1918"
University in Alba-Iulia
onisorremus@yahoo.com

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Ezra, vision, messianic kingdom, angel, prayer

Introduction

Old Testament Apocrypha constitutes a vast literature comprising works written in various places and over a rather long period of time. In order for a book to be included in this virtual collection, the essential prerequisite is that the pseudepi-

graph author should be a known Old Testament character and that the theme tackled therein should be a typically Jewish one. The authenticity of such authors has been challenged since ancient times. Apocrypha is acknowledged as pseudepigrapha with varied content. Some of them – such as 4 Ezra – are apocalyptic writings. The word 'apocalypse' meant 'to remove the veil', so 'revelation' in a literal sense. Whereas Greeks conceived of time as cyclical, the man of the Scriptures envisaged it as linear, thus believing that history advances towards an end. A man of God, i.e. a prophet, intervenes within history, revealing to his fellow men God's plan which will come to pass. God will establish His kingdom in this world definitively. However, the day when that is to happen remains unknown, as a 'veil' conceals the end of history from the eyes of men.

In times of crisis, the prophet knows that, in order to preserve hope, one needs more than mere words. One needs something mysterious, that ordinary people are not privy to. Thus, prophecy becomes an apocalypse. As such, the authors of such books use symbolic language, fraught with imagery, which is far more suggestive than abstract words. One resorts to pseudonyms, thus placing writing under the patronage of a famous figure from the past. Apocalypses also use encrypted language, abundant in colours, numbers, and traditional imagery. They are generally pessimistic. Their world is a negative one, ruled by Satan. History acquires a deterministic meaning. Everything has been written and decided in the heavenly books.

Among the Old Testament religious personalities featured as 'authors' of intertestamental writings with apocalyptic content, Ezra stands out in particular. He was a priest, a scholar and a religious reformer. The Bible describes him as *'a scribe well-versed in the Law of Moses'* (1 Ezra 7:6a). Rabbinical tradition holds Ezra in especially high regard, considering him a *'second Moses'* when it comes to his knowledge of the Torah. The author of 4 Ezra, implicitly Ezra himself, addresses God, lamenting that the Law of Moses is fading away (4 Ezra 14:21) and that the exiled Jews have not only lost their motherland but also their spiritual values. This is why God gives Ezra a full cup to drink (4 Ezra 14:39), so that he may be able to write things to be made known to people and thus prevent them from losing their way.

Biblical Literature Attributed to Ezra

There are several Biblical books, both canonical and non-canonical attributed to the name of Ezra (Chirilă 2018, 364-5).

The Book of 1 Ezra contains 10 chapters and starts by presenting the early years

of the Jewish Restoration (Bowker 1999, 160-1). The Edict of Cyrus authorised the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem and the commencement of the rebuilding of the Temple. The inhabitants of Samaria and its surroundings opposed these works, yet the Temple was inaugurated in 516 BC. Ezra came to Jerusalem and officially promulgated the Torah as the king's law after the scribe priest had demanded the dissolution of intermarriages between Jews and Gentile women. This action is dated 458 BC. The book of 1 Ezra is included under this same title in the Latin translation and as 'Ezra B' in the Septuagint (Paul 2010, 38).

The Book of 2 Ezra, or Nehemiah, (1-13) comprises the activity of Nehemiah, who worked on rebuilding the towers of the city of Jerusalem and solving various social and religious issues. He travelled to Jerusalem twice, from 445 onwards (Abadie & de Martin de Viviès 2017, 17). The Book of 2 Ezra is included under that same title in the Latin translation, as well as in the Septuagint (Ezra C), while, in the Hebrew Bible, it appears as 'Nehemiah'.

The Book of 3 Ezra (called Ezra A in the Septuagint) (Langlois 2009, 823) recounts the return to Jerusalem of the exiled Jews of Babylon, following the Edict of Cyrus. Then follows an account of the question discussed at the court of Darius as to which of the following was the most powerful in the world: wine, the king, or women, but, in the end, it was the truth that stood out as the most powerful. The Jews re-established the cult in Jerusalem, built an altar and attended to the issues raised by neighbouring peoples. Having completed the work on the Temple, they inaugurated it and celebrated the Passover (Chirilă 2018, 780-7). The book is called '3 Ezra' in the Latin version, being considered Deuteronomistic, and 'Ezra A' in Greek, where it is considered Anagignoskomena (= good to read) (Langlois 2009, 822).

The Book of 4 Ezra was the most widespread and most widely used non-biblical Jewish writing among early Christian communities (Paul 1975, 66). Its kinship with the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (Dupont-Sommer et Philonenko 1987, CVII-CXXII) is unanimously acknowledged. The book dates back to the late first century of the Christian era and the author is a Pharisee, who did not necessarily live in Palestine. This apocalypse is actually limited to chapters 3-14 of the book.

The Book of 5 Ezra is nothing other than chapters 1-2 of 4 Ezra, as it is of Christian origin. A classic theology of substitution is developed here: Israel was abandoned by the Lord in favour of the new people, the Christian people (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51).

The Book of 6 Ezra consists of two chapters (15 and 16) which conclude the book of 4 Ezra. This appendix is of Christian origin (Langlois 2009, 827). A conflict between the Persians and the Romans in the 3rd century AD is evoked here, which also serves as a clue as to the date when the book was written (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51). The conflict results in depopulated territories and the author asks vigilance of the recipients, in a manner similar to 1 Cor. 7,29-31 (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51-2).

Other writings which have circulated under the name of Ezra are the following: the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra, the Vision of the Blessed Ezra (in Latin), and the Questions of Ezra (in Armenian) (Caquot et Philonenko 1987, CXI). The presence of the book in the Vulgate ensured its certain dissemination. The Latin translation, similarly to some Eastern versions, was based on a Greek text, which appears to have been a translation of a Semitic (probably Hebrew) original text.

The Contents of the Book

The Book of 4 Ezra consists of three parts:

- a prologue (1-2)
- a series of seven visions (3-14)
- an epilogue (15-16) (Caquot et Philonenko 1987, CXI-CXII).

The prologue (1-2) presents Ezra and his call to mission. God reveals to him the message that he is to make known to the people. The ungodly will be punished, while the righteous will be saved. Rejected by Israel, Ezra turns his attention to the pagan world. He then contemplates in a vision a crowd that praises the Lord and receives crowns and laurels from the Son of God (TOB 2010, 2017-20).

The second part of the book constitutes the actual Apocalypse of Ezra (3-14), comprising seven visions. In reality, it is only the fourth, fifth, and sixth ones that can strictly speak, and qualify as 'visions' (Langlois 2009, 827).

The first three parts of the book contain a series of questions and answers, which will find their solution in the visions to come. The fictional framework, chosen by the author, includes 'conversations' and 'visions'. The conversations take place in Ezra's room, while the visions occur outdoors, outside his abode (4 Ezra 9:26; 12:51) (Geoltrain 1987, 1440, 1454). Ezra receives an angel whom he questions about current religious matters. The angel reveals to him certain mysteries about sin, the end of the world, and the fate of the chosen. The first three visions have a similar structure: an introduction, Ezra's prayer and dialogue with the angel, revelations, predictions, and a conclusion

(Stone 1990, VII). Ezra's conversations with the angel are preceded by fasting (4 Ezra 5:20; 6:35) (Geoltrain 1987, 1440-654). The 'visions' are prepared by techniques conducive to ecstasy: chewing grass and flowers (4 Ezra 9:24; 12:51).

The religious way of thinking underlying the 'conversations' is in line with the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, while the 'visions' derive from Daniel and 1 Enoch (Caquot et Philonenko 1987, CXII). The 'conversations' concern the fate of Israel and the destiny of every man in general. Ezra's questions are caused by the national catastrophe that Israel went through: *'Our sanctuary is forsaken, the altar is overthrown, our Temple destroyed'* (4 Ezra 10:21).

Why did God choose one single people out of all the peoples only to then scatter them among the Gentiles? Ezra does but expresses his own anxieties here. He does not start a theological debate, where he might formulate a thesis to condemn, but lets the angel do so. He would like to find a meaning to the anxiety pervading the community of believers that he himself is a part of.

The events of AD 70 are foreshadowed by the ones in 587 BC, which provide the historical 'typology' of the event.

The first vision (3:4-5:20), which might more fittingly be called a revelation, begins with Ezra's long lamentation (34-36). Wondering about the origin of evil, he provides an overview of the history of Israel, from the Patriarchs to the Exodus, during which time, in spite of all the gifts of the Law, the nature of man did not change for the better (3:20-22) (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 36). Pagans are great sinners as well. For the author, 'Babylon' (Rome) is far more sinful than Jerusalem. So it is natural for one to wonder: why are the pagans the ones ruling? The answer to the question will be revealed in the dialogue with the angel Uriel (*'God is my enlightenment'*) (Caquot 1987, 481, 495, 500), whose role is to clarify the recipient's conundrums. In fact, Uriel makes Ezra admit to his own limitations: *'Weigh me the weight of fire, or measure the wind, or call back the day that is past'* (4:5) (Geoltrain 1987, 1402). Obviously, Ezra does not know the answers. How could he then understand the will of the Most High, if he is unable to know what is happening on earth? Nevertheless, Ezra has both the wisdom and the ability to judge certain circumstances correctly. He does not demand to know the divine mysteries, but only the reason why Israel is under the dominion of the ungodly (Geoltrain 1987:1404). The angel's answer is the mere statement that the evil found in Adam continues to manifest an evil potentiality in humans. Ezra is eager to see the end of the oppression of his people. The Archangel Jeremiel (Caquot 1987, 471)

shows that deliverance will not come until the ranks of the righteous have been filled. In other words, history follows the course that God has set for it (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 37). The omens of the end of the world, according to 4 Ezra, would be the abandonment of truth and faith, the expansion of injustice, the stars changing their purpose, a generalised imbalance in nature, and universal despair.

The second 'vision' (5:20-6:34). The first part of this section presents the way in which the people of Israel were chosen (5,20-30). These singular people were selected by God from among all the nations, yet now the former is ruled over by the latter. If God has an issue with His people, why does He not take it up directly with them? The dialogue with the angel takes the same turn as in the first vision. One must admit that Ezra has his limits and is not very knowledgeable. How could he possibly understand the divine mysteries? The debate veers towards a recurring question in apocalyptic literature: what will happen to those who died before the day of judgment? (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 38) The image described by the angel is that of a circle, each man being thus positioned at the same distance from the Judgment, just like any point on a circle is at the same distance from the centre (4 Ezra 5:42) (Geoltrain, 1411). The earth is compared to a woman, who is unable to give birth to ten children at the same time but can only do it one by one. The same is true for the generations that live on earth. The earth itself is like an elderly mother, whose children are increasingly listless. Before specifying the end of the world, the text evokes a time of Esau (= Rome) and a time of Jacob (= Israel), which is soon to come. The author believes that the end of the Roman Empire will be followed by the rule of Israel over the Gentiles. In answer to Ezra's question, the angel will add to the list of signs portending the end of the world:

- the books of judgement will be opened and seen by all
- premature and precocious children will be born
- agricultural land will become barren
- seed reserves will suddenly disappear
- trumpets will be heard (the classic theme in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature Mt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Is 4:16; Rev 8, etc.)
- friends will become enemies (Geoltrain 1987, 1413u).

The third 'vision' (6:35-9:2). Following preparations similar to the ones for the previous vision – seven days of fasting – Ezra resumed his dialogue with the Lord via the angel. The first part of this vision is dedicated to creation (6:35-39)

(Geoltrain 1987, 1415-17). The author repeats the great themes of Genesis 1, in order to evoke the act of creation, while also making a few changes. In 6:47, he specifies that the seas occupy only one-seventh of the earth's surface. He gives special importance to the creation of the mythical monsters Behemoth and Leviathan, suggesting that these fantastic beasts will serve as the main course at the future feast (Denis et al. 2000, 821u). The author insists on the fact that the world was created for the benefit of Israel and only for Israel (6:55). He shows deep contempt for the pagans (6:56). As such, the dominion of the Gentiles over Israel appears incomprehensible. The humiliation of Israel and their journey along the narrow path will lead the chosen people to salvation (7:12-14). An original theme is tackled after that, namely that of a temporary messianic kingdom (7:28-29) (Geoltrain 1987, 1420).

4 Ezra 7:29 explicitly evokes the death of the Messiah, stating that He obeys the common law, for all who have a human soul shall die (Geoltrain 1987, 1420). The death of the Messiah marks the beginning of the great eschatological stages: the death of all the living and the judgment of all men, who will go either into the fiery pit of Gehenna or to the garden of Eden. In reality, it appears that only the Gentiles will be the ones to fill Gehenna (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 40). The angel tells Ezra that everything that is rare is also precious. The righteous are precious in the eyes of the Lord and He rejoices in their salvation (7:49-58) (Geoltrain 1987, 1423). The ungodly are of no value (4 Ezra 7:61). According to 4 Ezra 7:81-87, the souls of the ungodly will be judged in seven stages, which will take seven days (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 41).

The third vision expounds on the decline of the soul in an entirely original and detailed fashion. The souls of the righteous shall go to God, while the souls of the ungodly shall meet with a sinister fate. Given that everything has been decided, is it still possible to pray for the dead? Ezra believes that the righteous can pray for sinners, especially for those who were their nearest (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 40-1). However, the answer is categorical: judgment is irrevocable; no one can intervene on behalf of anyone (4 Ezra 7:105) (Geoltrain 1987:1428). Ezra challenges this answer, invoking biblical arguments: Abraham interceded for the inhabitants of Sodom (Gn 18:26) and so did Moses for the sinful Israelites (Ex 32:30), and the list can go on (Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Ezekiel...). Yet, in this case, one should bear in mind that this is eschatological time, which works according to a completely different logic. Ezra considers himself a sinner because of the Adamic sin (Geoltrain 1987, 1429). The angel reminds him that abiding by the law of Moses saves him from the fate

of the ungodly. In spite of what has been said, Ezra utters a long intercessory prayer for Israel (8:20-36) (Geoltrain 1987, 1433). Yet nothing can move his interlocutor (8:51,55). Few people will be saved, the equivalent of a single grape out of a cluster, or a small tree out of a large forest.

The fourth vision (9:26-10:59). The first three visions are not, strictly speaking, 'visions', in the sense of the apocalyptic literary genre of a mysterious phantasm followed by an interpretation. Rather, they are long conversations with the Lord through an angel. The fourth vision is the one that marks the debut of the classic form of the genre. In this case, the preparations are a lot more mysterious, without involving any fasting (9:23-25) (Geoltrain 1987, 1439-40). The food he eats is strictly vegetarian - grass, flowers - from the fields, far from the city. This echoes Adam's own food. Flowers might facilitate a vision. Foregoing fasting in the preparatory stage might mean that the time of mourning has passed, yet the time of joy - marked by meat and wine - has not arrived yet. The vision revolves around a woman dressed in mourning clothes (torn garments and ashes on her body), who is sobbing. When asked by Ezra what the cause of her suffering is, she recounts her sorrow: she was barren for 30 years, then gave birth to a son, who died on his wedding day (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 44). Ezra rebukes the woman, reminding her that Jerusalem, along with the entire country, has lost countless children. He bids her to be comforted by Zion (10:20). The desolate widow turns into a dazzling woman who suddenly transforms into a city that rises under his eyes. Turning to the angel that serves as his interpreter, he learns that the woman represents Zion. This second part of the vision foreshadows the future glory of Jerusalem.

The fifth vision (11:1-12:51). This vision is directly linked to the previous one and occurs during a night dream. It features the image of an eagle with twelve wings and three heads, of which the middle one is much larger than the other two (Langlois 2009, 827). Furthermore, its wings move in a peculiar way, as new ones appear, while others disappear, and some reign over the earth (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 45-6). A roaring lion addresses the eagle, announcing its immediate disappearance. The eagle is actually the fourth kingdom in the vision of Daniel (4 Ezra 12:11; Dn 7:7-8). The eagle's wings and heads are the various kings succeeding one another, while the lion represents the Davidic Messiah (Geoltrain 1987, 1452). The international situation in the time of 4 Ezra was different from the one in the time of Daniel. The Greeks made way for the Romans, so the eagle represents the latter. In connection with the

book of Daniel, the author proposes an update: the vision remains the same, yet the interpretation changes (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 47).

The sixth vision (13:1-58). The context of this vision is related to Daniel 7. In the book of Daniel, the striking figure is that of a being, such as the son of man, who comes on the clouds of heaven and has power over the whole of the earth. In 4 Ezra, a man is seen coming out of the sea and flying on the clouds of heaven. A crowd of people from all over the world gather to attack him. However, they will be destroyed before any battle begins (Langlois 2009, 828). The man then calls another peaceful crowd of happy and sad people. This man is actually the Son of God (12:32), who destroys the ungodly nations and gathers the ten tribes of Israel that were taken captive by the Assyrians. The interpretation echoes a legendary account according to which the exiles will remain hidden until the end of the world in a region located at the springs of the Euphrates (cf. Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, XI, 133). The Messiah comes out of the water, out of the sea. The sea does not symbolise the deeds of evil, but the hidden, mysterious, unfathomable nature of the Messiah. Nevertheless, the identity of 'those that be with him' (13:52) remains a mystery: Enoch? Elijah? or the angels?

The seventh vision (14:1-5). The last vision explicitly places Ezra in the position of Moses' successor. The scribe is called by God to a forty-day mission and carries with him many writing tablets. He will be accompanied by five companions, whose names are encountered in biblical literature (Sareas = Seraiah in Ezra 7,1; Dabrias = Dibri in Lev. 24,11; Shelemiah in Ezra 10:39; Ethan in 1 Chr 2:6 and Aziel (uncertain) in 1 Chr 4:3) (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 50). Ezra comes to a field full of flowers, where he imbibes a drink that makes him wise. For forty days, Ezra will speak continuously, while his five companions will endeavour to write down his words (Geoltrain 1987, 1464). Ezra manages to write 94 books (14:45-47). The end of the book describes Ezra's ascension to heaven, in fulfilment of that which was announced in 14:9.

Christian Amendments

The Book of 5 Ezra (4 Ezra 1-2). This book is actually a Christian introduction to the Jewish 'apocalypse' – 4 Ezra – intended to guide the overall reading. The author begins by detailing Ezra's genealogy, drawing inspiration from 3 Ezra 8:2, 1 Ezra 7:1-5, and 1 Chr 6:1-14. Ezra's mission is strictly prophetic. He will have to condemn the sin of Israel (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51). The author then develops a classic theology of substitution. Israel is forsaken by the Lord, Who will choose a new people (1:33-37).

These new people will enjoy all the promises made to Israel: 'Thus says the Lord onto Ezra: "Proclaim to my people that I will give them the kingdom of Jerusalem, which I promised to Israel. I will take their glory for myself and give them the eternal dwelling places which I had prepared for them"' (2:10-11) (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51). Ezra's mission is aimed at the Gentiles, whom he is to urge to receive and obey their shepherd (cf. Jn 10:11). The introductory part ends with a vision in which a young man crowns the chosen ones (an innumerable crowd similar to Rev 7:9) and that man is none other than the Son of God Himself.

The Sixth Book of Ezra (4 Ezra 15-16). The Christian author resumes his discourse to provide the epilogue of the book. The core of it is the announcement of violent conflicts in the land of the Assyrians, the battle between the peoples of the 'Arab dragon' (a confederation of tribes around Palmyra) and the Carmanians/ Carmonians (the Sassanid Persians) (Abadie et de M. de Viviès 2017, 51). This might be an evocation of a conflict between the Romans and the Persians of Shapur I (240-273), which suggests that this appendix was drafted in the late 3rd century AD. The conflict draws Babylon (i.e. Rome) into a vast scene of the judgement of the Gentiles (15:46-16:16). Wars leave behind a depopulated land and the author asks for increased vigilance of the recipients (16:41-45). Ezra urges his interlocutors to admit their sins in order to escape the final judgment.

Other Works Attributed to Ezra

The literature attributed to Ezra has been well-received in the Christian world. Various quotations from 4 Ezra are found in patristic literature – the Apostolic Constitutions, Clement of Alexandria, etc.

The Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible, also included 4 Ezra, even after the Council of Trent. This ensured its wide dissemination within the Western Christian world. 4 Ezra is also included in the Slavic Bibles. There are further works attributed to Ezra:

- the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra (written in Greek during the first Christian millennium)
- the Vision of Ezra, written in Latin under the title *Visio Beati Ezdrae* (9th-11th century)
- the Apocalypse of Sedrach (in Greek, prior to the 11th century)
- the Questions of Ezra (in Armenian, inspired by 4 Ezra) (Abadie et de

M. de Viviès 2017, 52)

- the Revelations of Ezra (in Latin, 9th century).

All these writings testify to the scribe's popularity as a pseudonym. A somewhat anecdotal account mentions that, in 1492, Christopher Columbus, who was in need of sponsors for the expedition he was preparing, resorted to 4 Ezra. In order to convince the Spanish sovereigns of the existence of yet unexploited lands, he does not hesitate to quote from the book of 4 Ezra 6:42: 'On the third day, you shall command the waters to gather into the seventh part of the earth. You will drain and preserve the other six parts, so that they may become useful places, sown and planted' (Geoltrain 1987, 1416). According to this verse, the oceans only make up the seventh part of the planet. And, given their immensity, there are still many stable places to be discovered.

The Origin and Construction of the Book

The Book of 4 Ezra has been preserved in its entirety only in a few Latin sources. The Latin version has its origins in the Greek one, as do the other versions: Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopian, Georgian, Arabic, and Coptic. There are further versions (one in Armenian and another in Georgian) that stem from the Latin one (Langlois 2009, 829). Chapters 1-2 and 15-26 are absent from the Eastern versions. They only contain the Apocalypse of Ezra (ch. 3-14). It is only the Latin version and some versions derived from it, such as the Armenian one, that retains the two sections. In some manuscripts, the two sections appear as 2 Ezra and 5 Ezra (Metzger 1983, 517-559). The first section that speaks of the Son of God shows that the author is familiar with the New Testament. It is believed to have been drafted in the 2nd century AD by a Christian author (Myers 1995). The last part, which alludes to events that may have taken place in the 3rd century AD, may have been compiled at the end of that century.

The writing of the Apocalypse of Ezra, with its seven visions, containing frequent allusions to the destruction of Jerusalem, may be dated to the late 1st century or the early 2nd century AD (Langlois 2009, 829). The fifth vision (4 Ezra 11-12), that of the Eagle, often alludes to the political events that are dated to the reign of Domitian (81-96). Based on an analysis of the syntax and vocabulary of the book, most specialists have determined that the original language of the Apocalypse of Ezra was a Semitic one, either Hebrew or Aramaic (Langlois 2009, 830).

Conclusions

The author of 4 Ezra behaves in the spirit of chapter 8 of the book of Nehemiah, in which Ezra reads from the Book of the Law before the people, by the Water Gate in the city of Jerusalem. The drink that Ezra consumes here (4 Ezra 14:3) explicitly reveals the typology that makes Ezra a new Moses. After the text of the Law was burned in the Temple fire of 586, he is tasked with receiving the text of the mysterious writings which will be intended only for the initiated.

This book might also be a response to the conclusion of the Hebrew biblical canon, as decided by the Council of Jamnia (90-100 AD).

The author of 4 Ezra defends with conviction the legitimacy of apocryphal and apocalyptic literature.

Many theological themes are found in this book: the notion of the 'wicked heart', the title of 'Son' – given to the Messiah, and the importance of knowledge. Essene ideas, such as enlightenment, asceticism, and esotericism, often come up in the book.

Christian religious communities after AD 70 often invoke the great figures of the biblical past, looking up to them as role models.

As the faithful, legitimate heirs, successors, and companions of Ezra, the scribes are the ones inspired to convey to the Church a brilliant and profound work that was rejected by the Synagogue.

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SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICATIONS OF THE CENSUS IN THE WILDERNESS OF SINAI (NM 1)

Abstract

Divine books, and Scriptures, are special, as they have a very clear place and purpose. The word of God, in the form of a letter, reveals itself to our hearts, speaking of His plan to save the human race. The fourth book of the Pentateuch, *Numbers*, owes its title to the two censuses reported and to the abundance of numerical information scattered throughout the book. The events took place when the Israelites were about to embark on their journey from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land, which explains the need to arrange them in a precise order, like a marching army. Although the historical aspect should not be questioned, if it were only a matter of censuses, the presence of these numerators in the Scripture would not be justified. Therefore, it is wrong to consider that the events mentioned here are simple segments of Israelite history; instead, we must understand that they are very important precisely because they are addressed to Christians, who must learn from these experiences. Thus, for Christians, the theme of the book may be spiritual progress, for in it we can identify many applications to the experiences of the Christians living in the modern era, showing how much we resemble the ancient Israelites, but, if we understand properly the message of the sacred text, we will not have to repeat the wanderings of the Israelites in our own spiritual itinerary.

EUSEBIU BORCA

Domain of Orthodox Theology
North University Center, Baia Mare
beusebiu@yahoo.com

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Book of Numbers, census, counting, spiritual interpretation

Introduction

Just like the other two previous books (Exodus and Leviticus), the Book of Numbers also starts with a coordinating conjunction, which shows that it must be

understood as part of a unitary work (Pentateuch) and not as a separate book (Companion Bible 1951, 177). Although it is neither the best-known book of the Scripture (of the Old Testament or of the Pentateuch) nor the most popular or famous one, if it is tackled correctly, on the right exegetic note, this precious book can reveal the "Word of God" ("The Lord spoke to Moses", acc. Nm 1:1), mysteriously hidden in the letter of the old law. In the pages of this book, we can see God "at work", God "in action". The God of order numbers His people (identifying those who are ready to bear witness, to fight), organises them (working by means of a hierarchy), sets out their behaviour (teaching them the importance of worship) and separates them from other peoples, so that they may remain pure and He may continue to live among them.

Similar to each book of the Scripture, which has a content, a purpose and a specific plan, closely followed by the hagiographer, the Book of Numbers describes the journey of the Israelite people, who had just gone out of Egypt, through the wilderness. To Christians, this book has a special meaning, as, if studied in depth, it gives us the possibility to partake of its infinite "beauty" and "wisdom" (Mackintosh, 1). The book can have "a unique contribution to the life of the Christian" if "the general presentation of the historical framework is regarded from the point of view of a parallel with Christian life" (Irving L. Jensen apud MacDonald 2002, 153). [our translation]

The events mentioned in the Book of Numbers are not only "segments of Hebrew history"; instead, we need to understand that they took place "for the spiritual edification" of the Christian, who has "the sacred duty to learn from the mistakes made by the children of Israel", to avoid repeating them. "The subject of the book is the spiritual journey and progress (or the absence thereof!)", which is why "Christians must avoid considering this book an arid textbook containing the history" of the chosen people. On this note, these narrations gain higher value. Thus, "the book is full of applications to the experiences of the Christians living in the modern era", showing "how much we resemble the ancient Israelites". Just like them, when we "complain", we spiritually "fall" and become "guilty of a crass lack of faith". If we understand the message of the sacred text, we will be spared from "repeating the wandering of the Israelites in our own spiritual pilgrimage" (MacDonald 2002, 153-154). [our translation]

Biblical Censuses

Censuses in the Books of Genesis and Exodus

The census of the chosen people began almost half a millennium before the event narrated in Numbers (1), with the call of Abraham, the patriarch thus being the first to be "numbered". For 75 years (Gn 13:1-3), the "census lists" included only one person and, for a long while, this "list" remained unchanged, in spite of blessings and of the renewal of the Covenant (Gn 15:1-6 et seq.). Only 25 years later, did the second name, Isaac, appear on the "list". Essentially, the history of Abraham "was closely connected to a numbering", given that, as far as the existence and the number of his offspring is concerned, for quite a while there was nothing he could number (Fărăgău 2011, 82). Although different terms are used, each renewal of the Covenant mentions a numbering of Abraham's offspring: "if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted" (Gn 13:16), "... number the stars, if you are able to number them... So shall your offspring be" (Gn 15:5).

The verb from the Book of Numbers (1:3) (תִּפְקְדֻנּוּ = "numbering them", from the פָּקַד form), which was first used in the Book of Genesis, in the episode when Sarah conceived Isaac, shows the connection between Abraham and the first census in the Book of Numbers. However, in this case, the translation of the verb has the meaning of "visiting" ("The Lord visited Sarah", acc. Gn 21:1). The Masoretic text uses the same verb when narrating about Joseph in Egypt, saying that Potiphar "made him overseer" of his house (Gen 39:4-5), "the guard appointed Joseph" (Gn 40:4), "appoint overseers" (Gn 41:34). In the last chapter of the same book, we can find the verb twice (Gn 50:24-25), consecutively, "פָּקֹד יִפְקֳדֶ", a construct translated as "God will surely visit you". These meanings of the verb are not directly related to a census, but they do point to divine preoccupation for the chosen people, which explains the very divine act of numbering the Israelites. We notice that, after three generations, Abraham's offspring reach 70 (75 according to the Septuagint) souls, who, together with patriarch Jacob/Israel, settle in Egypt (Gn 46:8-27) (Lesetre 1912, 1684).

The census mentioned in the Book of Exodus (30:11-16) is not the same as the one mentioned in Numbers 1; they are two separate numberings, whose purpose is different. Nonetheless, the census mentioned in the Book of Exodus seems to have been the basis for the first census from the Book of Numbers, hence the similar total numbers (MacDonald 2002, 155). Although a census is a "socio-economic necessity", as God is

"the only one entitled to know the real number of His subjects", embarking upon such an action without divine consent can be considered "a sin against God" (*Anania in The Bible or the Holy Scripture* 2001, 112). [our translation] The conviction according to which a census might cause a plague is expressed, which is why a fee must be paid to the sanctuary as "ransom" ("When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them" acc. Ex 30:11-12) for the lives of those who are numbered (Court 2010, 516).

According to some researchers (Usca 2003, 7), "those of the congregation who were recorded ... listed in the records, from twenty years old and upward, for 603,550 men" (38:25-26) would represent a first census, to which the first chapter of the Book of Numbers would come back. [our translation]Other researchers believe that the lists with those who came to give silver for the sanctuary (Ex 38:26) were used for the two numberings (Biblical Dictionary 1996, 450). A month before the census mentioned in Numbers 1, right before building the Tabernacle (Ex 30:11-16), God commanded Moses to number the Israelites again, which he did (Ex 38:25-26). Some rabbinic commentaries compare the Israelites with "a pile of wheat", which is numbered every time it is taken to the barn; God does the same with His people and numbers them on every occasion (Numbers Rabbah 1:4). Rabbi Rashi believes that God wants people to be numbered so often because He holds them, dear, while rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) presents a more pragmatic reason, claiming that the census in the Book of Exodus allowed the Israelites to bring their contribution to the Holy Tabernacle.

Censuses in the Book of Numbers

If early rabbis called it וַיְדַבֵּר סֵפֶר, meaning "The Book 'The Lord said'", based on the opening words of this book of the Pentateuch, later on, the following title stood up: בְּמִדְבַּר (= "in the wilderness"), another word from the first verse. In the Talmudic period, the book also received the title of "Chumash" of the Numbered/Censuses (those numbered), as it contains the presentation of the two censuses of the Israelites (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Judaica* 2000, 574). Thus, considering these two censuses from chapters 1 and 26 (38 years apart) and the abundance of numerical data it contains, the book is justly called Numbers (MacDonald 2002, 153), which corresponds to the title from the Septuagint (*Ἀριθμοὶ*).

The First Census (Nm 1)

The numbering mentioned in the first chapter aims to underscore the dynamics of an Israelite camp moving in the wilderness (Court 2010, 431). The events narrated at the beginning of the Book of Numbers happened a year and a month after the departure from Egypt and a month after the Holy Tabernacle was erected (Ex 40:17). The Israelites are on the verge of the setting off on their journey from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land, which explains why it is necessary to arrange them in a precise order, similar to marching armies. That is why God commanded a census that would include all men from twenty years old and upward, who were able to go to war (MacDonald 2002, 155).

After Moses arranged legal matters, once again at God's urge, he focused on numbering his people. This action is regarded as a numbering of the "army", as it is believed that he also wanted to have war-related matters in good order (Flavius Josephus Josephus 1999, 169), given that he aimed to prepare a military campaign to conquer the Promised Land (which would have indeed happened, if it had not been for the regrettable episode caused by the Israelite spies who were sent to the Holy Land to bring information). In this respect, the numbering is understood as a "military" census, which "follows the the pattern of a military camp, having God as supreme commander" (Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols 2011, 846). [our translation]

Lord Sabaoth (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) is the "Lord of armies", not of the army, because He has two armies, not one, at His disposal. God is commanding the heavenly armies and, through the census of His people, He also registers an earthly army. Although the two armies belonged to two different spheres, from distinct realities, they had common battles (Jo 5:13-15). The census was aimed at all those who could handle a weapon at war, as God did not want an army of mercenaries; His people was His army (Fărăgău 2011, 75).

The Second Census (Nm 26)

The two censuses mentioned in Numbers are 38 years apart: the first took place in the Sinai Desert, in the second year of the Exodus (a month after the tabernacle was erected, acc. Ex 40:17), and the second on the Plains of Moab, right before the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

In the first chapter, the order of the censused tribes seems to follow the hierarchy in the Book of Genesis (35:23-26), which enumerates the sons of Jacob, as

they were born, grouped however according to their mother (the first mentioned are the six sons of Leah, then the two sons of Rachel and only afterwards the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, the servants). There are a few differences in the Book of Numbers with respect to this enumeration: the Levites, the priestly caste, are no longer on the list, as they were not numbered, and the caste of Joseph is divided in two (Ephraim and Manasseh) and the castes of Naphtali (the tenth) and Asher (the twelfth) swap positions. In the case of the second Census (Nm 26), the order of castes also changes, and the offspring of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh swap positions (the seventh and the eighth). An important aspect is that the caste of Gad, the second to last (eleventh position) on the list from the first census, is mentioned third during the second census. Even more interesting is that the same situation is also present in the Masoretic text and in the Vulgate and was also adopted in the Romanian editions. However, the Septuagint presents a different order: the caste of Gad comes sixth, Asher seventh, the offspring of Joseph (Manasseh and then Ephraim) swap positions here as well and the castes of Dan and Naphtali are listed on the last two positions.

At first sight, we might consider the results of the census only random numbers, but, if we look at this in more detail, we notice that, after the first census, the caste of Manasseh was the smallest and that of Judah the biggest. In a relatively short period of 38 years, we can expect only small changes, a slight growth or decline, due to the births-deaths ratio (Jonathan Rosenberg).

The first census listed 603,550 men, aged over 20, while the second listed 601,730 people, 1,820 fewer. Some castes declined: Simeon lost 37,100 men, Naphtali 8,000, Ephraim 8,000, Gad 5,150 and Reuben 2,770, while others grew: Manasseh – 20,500, Asher – 11,900, Benjamin – 10,200, Issachar – 9,900, Zebulun – 3,100, Judah – 1,900 and Dan – 1,700 (Lesetre 1912, 1685).

There are two castes which do not fit in a probability calculation. We notice a significant decline among the caste of Simeon (from the third caste, in terms of size, it becomes the smallest) and an important growth among the caste of Manasseh (from the smallest, it grows above the average). Perhaps the data from the censuses take so much space precisely to draw our attention to certain aspects. On closer inspection, these numbers show that, from a numerical point of view, the castes were more or less the same; the differences between them could change, but the two aforementioned cases cannot be accidental (Jonathan Rosenberg).

The decline in the number of men from the caste of Simeon was a consequence and a sign of divine disfavour. In the episode of Num. 25, when the people bowed down to Baal of Peor at Shittim, after which 24,000 people died, an important negative role was played by "Zimri, ... chief of a father's house belonging to the Simeonites" (Nm 25:14). In such cases of inappropriate behaviour, which were quite frequent during the wandering through the wilderness, those who sinned were punished; it might be that the Simeonites were disproportionately represented among those who sinned. Moreover, the result of the second census could be the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning Jacob and Israel ("... and scatter them in Israel" Gn 49:7). The number of Simeonites declined to approximately 23,000 men, just like the Levites, which explains the territory they received within the caste of Judah (Jonathan Rosenberg).

We can explain the major growth of the people of Manasseh, which probably caused the reversed order of the offspring of Joseph during the second census, through two events: the request of the daughters of "Zelophehad... from the clans of Manasseh" to inherit their father's possession (Nm 26:1) and the capturing of the city of Gilead by the sons of Manasseh (Nm 32:39-42). These events show the outstanding initiative of some of the members of the caste of Manasseh. In this respect, the population growth in the tribe of Manasseh could be a reward for their active attitude. Thus, the numbers from this census are not random; they are mentioned in the holy text "to give a lesson" (Jonathan Rosenberg). [our translation]

This second census is extremely relevant, as the territory of the Holy Land is later divided based on these numbers (Nm 26:54) (Lesetre 1912, 1685).

Authenticity and Historicity of the Census (Nm 1)

The authenticity and historicity of the census described in the first chapter of the book are supported by the text, which contains sufficient data, and by a structure revolving around the divine commandment (Nm 1:2-4) and the narration of its fulfilment (Nm 1:17-19). From the very beginning, we find out who the author of the census is: "The Lord spoke to Moses" (1:1). The first verse also tells us where and when the narrated events take place. The location is "in the wilderness of Sinai"; more precisely, Moses receives the commandment in "the tabernacle of the testimony" (1:1). As far as time is concerned, the text mentions: "on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt" (1:1).

Therefore, on the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, the Israelites came into the wilderness of Sinai, "the Mountain of God" (Ex 19:3). The events narrated in chapters 20 and 40 of the Book of Exodus took place over the course of the nine remaining months of the same year, for, in the first month of the following year, the Holy Tabernacle was erected and sanctified (Ex 40:2). From this event until the first census (Nm 1), only a month passed, which researchers claim was included in the Book of Leviticus (Fărăgău 2011, 71).

The text of the Scripture is very precise and indicates even who should be numbered during this census. The divine message was extremely explicit: "Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, by clans, by fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male, head by head. From twenty years old and upward, all in Israel who are able to go to war, ... shall list them, company by company." (Nm 1:2-3). Nothing is left to chance, as there are indications even about who should number the people: "... you and Aaron shall list them... And there shall be with you a man from each tribe, each man being the head of the house of his fathers." (1:3-4). Trying to imagine the "scope of the office of numbering the castes of the people of Israel in a full journey through the desert", Maxwell highlights the leaders who shared this extremely difficult task and managed to organise the "chaos". Through the census, they evaluated their "resources" and found out "who the people were and how many were accompanying them on their journey". "This mammoth task was very well organised and efficiently executed" (Maxwell 2007, 79). [our translation]

However, if it were only for the censuses, there would be no justification for the presence of these numberings in the Scripture (Usca 2003, 8). Although the numbers resulting from the census, presented on this occasion, are omitted by almost all researchers, who consider them unimportant, tiresome and downright boring, many analyses can be carried out based on this data. If we estimate that those numbered during the census accounted for 20-25 % of the people, the whole number of Israelites reached 2,5-3 million people. Some researchers believe this number to be too big, as they cannot explain how they could multiply so fast, over the course of a few generations, and how such a big group of people could be disciplined during their journey through the wilderness. Nonetheless, others have managed to prove the mathematical possibility of reaching this number.

Spiritual Interpretation of the Census (Nm 1)

The one who wants to go further with research and to get to the spiritual meaning of the text can do so by means of the mysterious content of the Book of Numbers if God bestows upon them the generosity of His sublime light. To "get to Jesus,... to evolve towards perfection in Christ", we must "first go back to the school of Moses and rid ourselves of childish lack of understanding" (Origen 1981, 144). [our translation] Seeing that the events narrated in the Old Testament also have a typical value, Saint Paul gives us the right direction to appreciate the history of the chosen people, showing that "... these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our [namely, Christians'] instruction..." (1 Cor 10:11). Origen understands the narrated event in a similar way and also insists on the fact that "this text contains a mystery" and that "the intention of the Holy Spirit" is not to show us which part of the people was numbered and which not. Those who read the Scripture would get nothing out of such information and knowing these details (which part of the people was listed/numbered in the wilderness and which not) would not contribute to our salvation (Origen 1981, 139). [our translation]

These lists, which present a true classification ("taxonomy") of the Israelites, must not be understood only from a historical perspective ("historical report"), but as part of the "interpretative staging of the book". If the first list is that of the "old generation", that of Moses, who had been disobedient and would be harshly judged, the second one refers to the "new generation", who showed obedience and would be invited to the Promised Land. Thus, the two censuses have the role of showing the contrast between the two generations, a "failed" and a "faithful" one, separated by the "extent of their disobedience towards Yahweh" (Dennis Olson apud Brueggemann 2012, 100-101). [our translation]

A supporter of the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scripture, Origen "always looks for the deeper, moral or mysterious meaning of words" (Origen 1981, 140, note 5). [our translation] The "dawning" (starting point) of his exegesis is "Paul's sentence": "law is spiritual" (Rm 7:14). Therefore, the sacred text will "generate a great benefit for the soul" only if we understand it from a spiritual point of view (Origen 1981, 140). [our translation] Together with historical narrations, which also have a typological meaning, the numbers mentioned in the Scripture also have a spiritual, not only literal, meaning. Since "numbers" symbolise holiness and perfection (Mehat 1951, 69), not all were worthy of being included in these "holy numbers". That is why the census

of the castes of Israel was not carried out when they went out of the land of Egypt, for they needed to go through a series of tests which gave them the opportunity to evolve spiritually.

Over the course of the events narrated in the Book of Numbers, the God of Law spoke to His people on many occasions (Companion Bible 1951, 177) and He still does ("The Lord spoke..." acc. Nm 1:1), showing that the numbering is carried out "on God's command". The existence of a certain order as to those to be included in the "Numbers of God" is clear in the Biblical text, according to which the following were not to be numbered: women (due to female weakness), servants (due to their standard of life and manners), Egyptians (as they were foreigners and pagans), neither were all the Israelites (only those from twenty years old and upward, "who were able to go to war" (Origen 1981, 139). Here, Origen differentiates between "various degrees in the process of Christian perfection" (Origen 1981, 140, note 6). [our translation]

It is interesting to notice that, on the one hand, God "numbers" "the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names" (Ps 147:4) and in particular those who will be saved, but, on the other hand, those who die are "too many to count" (Wisd. of Sol. 1:12). This proves that, before God, the number of saints is taken into account (Origen 1981, 140), that what God appreciates and loves He numbers and takes care of, which is why the Scripture assures us that: "even the hairs of your head are all numbered" (Mt 10:30). The request of the Scripture, "all in Israel who are able to go to war, you and Aaron shall list them" (Nm 1:3) shows that the Israelite is not supposed to have only a certain age, but also a certain power. Only the one who goes to war with "the power of Israel" shall be counted before God; only that power, guided by God, which shines through the Holy Scripture, is numbered (Origen 1981, 139, 141).

Geometry, music or magic, the philosophy conveyed under the veil of allegory ("Egyptian wisdom"), astrology ("Assyrian wisdom") and encyclopaedic studies ("Greek wisdom") (Mehat 1951, 73) have "nothing to do with the number of God". Since the power of the soul of Greek philosophers heralds man's pride, the power of Assyrians/Chaldeans becomes the object of astrological studies and the supposed science of Egyptians is mysterious, they are not taken into account by God (Origen 1981, 141).

The Israelites were not numbered when they went out of Egypt, because the Pharaoh was still following them, nor when they went into the wilderness, for they had not been tested by the enemies, or when they fought against Amalek and defeated

him, or when they received manna and water from the rock because they did not have in them what they needed to be numbered. They were not numbered even when the Tabernacle of the testimony was erected, but they were numbered after the Law was given to them through Moses after the forms of the offering were prescribed and the cultic ritual was established (Origen 1981, 142).

In the stations on the road to the Promised Land, Origen sees stages of spiritual ascent, an ascent of the soul towards God: going out of the land of Egypt means breaking away from the devil, the Red Sea crossing represents Baptism (Origene 1947, 145), the entrance into the wilderness is the beginning of askesis, the battle against Amalek means the good deeds, the manna and the rock are the food of the soul, the tabernacle means virtues (Origene 1947, 214) and the law is the preparation (Origen 1981, 142).

In order to be worthy of being among those who are numbered (Origen 1981, 140), among those who go to war, the Scripture urges us to "give up childish ways and become men" (1 Cor 13:11). The man able to go to war, who is young, meaning who has reached "spiritual vigour" and the level of fulfilling Christ's will, is written in the book of God, being valued and therefore numbered and known to God. If the actual writing is done through Moses and Aaron, the spiritual one is carried out through Christ, Who, in the image of Moses and Aaron, becomes "for us both a lawmaker and a faithful and innocent high priest" (Cyril 1991, 118). [our translation]

As a lawmaker, Christ "gives us laws and advice" and, as a high priest, He "presents His offering and prayer for us to His Father". Christ is our "Lawmaker (Guider) and High Priest (Supporter) at all times. Those whom Christ writes in Him are written for eternity", in each and everyone's unmistakeable uniqueness (Cyril 1991, 119-120, nota 138). Through Moses and Aaron as an image (type), Christ writes those who fight manly (Cyril 1991, 120), just as the Scripture says: "... rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Lk 10:20). As earthly high offices follow a heavenly model (Usca 2003, 9), the "man from each tribe, each man being the head of the house of his fathers" (Nm 1:4-5), appointed by each caste to help Moses and Aaron number the people, the "most fearsome and warring" leader and defender represent the angels, who are appointed to rule those who are chosen and written in the book of life (Cyril 1991, 119). [our translation]

Each shall be valued according to spiritual rules and shall find themselves "in the place where the worthiness of their deeds put them". The placing of each and

everyone "in his own order" (1 Cor 15:23) means that those who are like or related to Reuben through their behaviour, deeds and life, shall be numbered with him, and those who show obedience shall be numbered with the Simeonites, those who fulfilled well their priestly duties or who reached a higher degree of consummation in their office shall be numbered with the Levites and those who show royal feelings and guide well the people shall be numbered with the Judahites. Thus, each shall be attached to the caste they are related to through their deeds and manners (Origen 1981, 143).

Such moral-ethical aspects can also be noticed in the meaning of the names of the sons of Israel: Simeon means "obedience", "Levi" – "holiness", and "Judah" – "perfection" (Philo 1988, 367).

(Instead of) Conclusions... Possible Applications?

Do these verses provide any teaching which is useful to the contemporary Christian? Isn't the continuously lower demographic index of the Romanian people showing that we resemble the tribes who, instead of raising the number of those who were supposed to go into the Promised Land, sacrificed an entire generation, burying them in the desert?

Do Christians nowadays know their spiritual relatives? Can they say what their spiritual genealogical tree is, just like the Israelites? If we look for the natural genealogical tree of humankind we discover that we descend "from a lost people", but Christians find their spiritual genealogical tree and origin in Christ. The Christian is "born from above" (Jn 3:3), "born again" (1 Pt 1:23), "born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5; Eph 5:26). Man's birth and worldly origin cannot be a reason to "boast"; instead, the Christians' "genealogical tree is heavenly", for we are "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:29) and "sons of God" (Rom 8:14,16; Gal 3:26; Jn 3:2) (Mackintosh, 3-5). [our translation]

To set off on the journey through the wilderness and hope that you will get to the Promised Land, it is important from the very beginning to discover the group you belong to. Before going to war and before walking through the wilderness, it was essential for every member of the people of Israel to be able to say what their genealogical tree was. An uncertainty regarding this subject would have been a disaster (Mackintosh, 5).

Are Christians nowadays able to go to war, are they good fighters and testifiers, considering they do not even know their place in the Church? Just like an

Israelite could not have assumed a place in the camp, advanced through the wilderness or fought if they could not have said what their genealogical tree was, the Christians nowadays cannot advance in their Christian life through the wilderness of this world if they are uncertain regarding their belonging to the people of God.

These so-called Christians do not even know the meaning of real battle; they often consider their own fears, doubts, lack of knowledge and difficulties the Christian's real battle. A Christian's battle is against sin. Who can dare to join such a battle if they are uncertain of whether they are a Christian or not? In the battles carried out in the wilderness or in Canaan, each Israelite was capable of saying what their genealogical tree was and of recognising their "flag". To be able to go to war, "every member of the gathering who could carry a weapon had these two elements clear" (Mackintosh, 8-9). [our translation]

The people of Israel symbolise the Christian people, the people of God, who must travel through the wilderness of this world accompanied by God, not alone. The journey they have to take is very well organised, for their principles are theocratic, the people are made up of fighters, who protect their vital core, the Holy Tabernacle, where they have ordained servants who brought offerings to God, Who confessed Himself that He lived there (Andre 1994, 9).

The two censuses were a "review" of the people, the comparison of the "resulting numbers" giving us the possibility to notice the "severe consequences of sins" committed during the journey through the wilderness. The decline in the number of men belonging to a caste has a direct consequence, leading to a "smaller surface of land" to be inherited (Andre 1994, 10) [our translation] ("... every tribe shall be given its inheritance in proportion to its list" Num. 26: 54).

The scriptures of the Old Testament have this pedagogical value, presenting models for the modern Christian and materials which are useful in a missionary approach to the sacred text. If we make a parallel, we can consider such a census was taken in Romania in 2018, when we were called to register in God's camp. It was the referendum for normal matrimony between a man and a woman, in which not all Romanians participated, only those who were mature enough (spiritually) and willing to fight (give testimony) and be lynched (for now, only in the media) in the name of political correctness. Through our vote at the referendum, we agreed to be registered in the camp of the chosen people, and we enrolled in the divine army, being willing to go through the wilderness and enter the Holy Land.

Other battles will follow, which we must fight with love, not with hatred...
... or maybe another census? ...
Synagogue.

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PERSPECTIVES OF COLOSSIAN 'PHILOSOPHY': THE MEANING OF INTERTEXTUALITY IN THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Abstract

The academic research dedicated to the way in which the author of the Epistle to Colossians relates to the Old Testament can be found in several recent specialized works by the Bible scholars Gordon Fee, G. K. Beale, C. Beetham and Jerry L. Sumney. One of the remarkable characteristics of the epistles of the Apostle Paul is that the Apostle takes over the old testamentary language in contexts in which the recipients are expected to understand not only the allusion or echo but also to recognize their implications. In this context, Colossian philosophy has a predominantly Jewish character – not a mystical one, but one anchored in a Jewish understanding of the law, circumcision and holidays.

DEACON OLIMPIU-NICOLAE BENEA

Faculty of Orthodox Theology
"Babes-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca
olimpiu.benea@ubbcluj.ro

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Introduction

One of the most debated issues regarding the interpretation of the Epistle to the Colossians is the one related to the nature of *philosophy* (Bornkamm 1952, 139-56; Hegermann 1961: 164; Malingrey 1961, 105-6) against which the Apostle Paul is motivated to answer in his epistle. An influential theory in the academic space, originating in the late nineteenth century, defines this *philosophy* as belonging to a syncretist, proto-Gnostic movement, in the form of the religion of mysteries (Zetterholm 2011, 136-9). However, the arguments in favour of such a theory are insufficient (Zetterholm 2011, 138), which led many biblical scholars to identify the Colossian *philosophy* with a form of Jewish Hellenistic-Gnostic mysticism. Recently, G. H. van Kooten, suggested

that philosophy could be identified with middle Platonism (van Kooten 2003, 138-9).

The mention of *circumcision* (2:11), food, drink, holidays, new moons, and Sabbaths (2:16), underscores the Jewish origin of philosophy (Dunn 2005, 23-5). Given the nature of the diversity of first-century Judaism, Colossian *philosophy* may have offered "a Jewish alternative to a Christ-centric Judaism" (Zetterholm 2011, 138).

It is evident from the description made by the Apostle Paul in the greeting addressed to the Church in Colossae, that the recipients were "faithful saints and brothers" (1:2). If these were not only Philemon's "church in the house" (Flm 2), but also the "church in the house" of Nymphas (4:15), we should note the existence of several *houses*, which have become places of worship in Colossae.

In this context, one can identify a crisis generated by a group of teachers from Colossae who tried to undermine the Gospel preached by the Apostle Paul, through a sustained approach of the Colossian Christians, who remained "believers in Christ" (1:2), with a different teaching (Dunn 2005, 25).

In order to interpret the epistle as correctly as possible, we need to identify this different teaching in as much detail as possible. What we have in the Epistle to the Colossians is only a part of the whole turmoil, namely the apostle Paul's response to the problems of Colossae, which were told to him by Epaphras. The Apostle Paul and the false teachers are indirectly engaged in a polemical dispute, in which the Colossian believers are only active auditors. What those teachers might answer in the polemical dispute can only be inferred by analyzing the nature of the Apostle's response in the light of the cultural context that we would know about the world of the first century in Colossae. But, in our opinion, this whole process would be inaccurate, because we would resort to secondary resources in the interpretation of the New Testament text, without first exhausting the main resources, such as the other books of the Holy Scriptures.

The Apostle Paul's response demonstrates that the recipients knew what the false teachers were saying, so he alludes only to their teaching in a few points. That is why the diversity of opinions on Bibles on this subject is also explained.

Next, we will emphasize some records of the text concerning the doctrinal error in Colossae, and then we will evaluate the main options of the Bibles, in their light, to try to define that teaching. Although we do not know the exact nature of the different teaching in Colossae, we will start our approach from the internal arguments of the epistle (Col 2:4.8.16.18), in which we observe clear warnings to the Christians of Colossae regarding the immense danger they were facing.

The Colossian 'philosophy'

The teachers of this error had an appealing discourse, their *deceptive* words bearing in them the ability to deceive Christians (2:4). Deception is defined in the context of a lack of "full understanding for the knowledge of the mystery of God the Father and of Christ" (2:2). Apostle Paul is constantly preoccupied in his epistles with the danger of the presence of such teachers (Ga 1:8; 4:17; 5:12; 6:12-13; 2Co 11:4-5.13-15.20-23; 12:11; Flp 3:2.18-19; 1 Tim 1:3-7; 4.1.3; 6:3-5). Compared to these explicit, and sometimes even harsh, texts in their expression, the language used in the Epistle to the Colossians is "quite restrained" (Dunn 2005, 25). The apostle Paul does not use the phrase, false teachers, instead, he uses a general expression about them: *μηδεὶς* (2:4.18) or *τις* (2:8.16). Nor is it very clearly described what the wrong teaching was.

What we can synthesize about this teaching, in general themes, are some observations (Rowland 1995, 220-9):

1. Doctrinal error was a deceptive and vain philosophy (2:8). The word *philosophy* was applied to a wide range of belief systems in the ancient world, suggesting very little about the origin or nature of the teaching (Malingrey 1961, 105-6). What we can understand, however, is that this teaching involved a coherent system.

2. Doctrinal error was closely related to "human teaching"/ "human ordinances and teachings" (Col 2:8.22). The similarity of the phrase to that of the Savior's words denouncing "the tradition of men" (Mc 7:5-13) suggests the Jewish nature of the teaching, although the language is too general to reach a clear conclusion to this effect.

3. Doctrinal error was dependent on the "stiches of the world" (Col 2:8) (Beekes and van Beek 2010, 1396). Although we cannot determine at first sight the strict meaning that the expression would have in the epistle, it is not certain whether this expression was used by the *false teachers* in describing their own teaching, or whether the Apostle Paul chose to apply it to their teaching.

4. Doctrinal error does not belong to *Christ* (Col 2:8).

5. Doctrinal error sustained commandments concerning restrictions on food and drink and the Jewish holy days (2:16).

6. Doctrinal error appreciated an ascetic discipline (2:18.23).

7. The attention of doctrinal error was directed to the angels (2:18). The phrase "worship of angels / ministry of angels / ministry of angels" is one of the most debated by Bibles in the context of interpreting the epistle, being the *turning*

point in the reconstruction of the erroneous teaching in Colossae. It may refer to an increased veneration offered to angels by men, or to a participation of men in the ministry performed by angels. Also relevant in this respect is the relationship between the reference to *angels* and the references to "beginners and masters" (1:16.20; 2:10.15).

8. The doctrinal error emphasized the *visions* of the error teachers in Colossae (2:18).

9. The teachers of doctrinal error suffered from pride: "being sobered with the mind, ... the fleshly one" (2:18).

10. The teachers of doctrinal error did not have a relationship with the *head* of the body, Christ (2:19). The apostle Paul, stating the phrase, "not according to Christ" (Col 2:8), suggests that the teachers of error claimed to be Christians.

11. The teachers of doctrinal error propagated various commandments – which the Apostle Paul calls *worldly* – as an important expression of spiritual growth (2:20-23).

Although the general observations of the Colossian text are sufficient to reconstruct the teaching that affected the life of faith of those in the entire area of the Lycus Valley, we must clarify some details of the text that are not very clear as to their relevance in the definition of Colossian teachings, such as the term *fullness* – *πλήρωμα* (1:19; 2:9-10), interpreted as a Gnostic or Stoic element of false teaching (Scott 1927, 266; Aletti 1993, 113-8), or *circumcision* (2:11.13; 3:11), considered to be a landmark for an understanding of the Jewish nature of the error.

That is why we will briefly recall three more important perspectives proposed for elucidating the problem.

First, it proposes the idea of a *proto-Gnosticism* that would have influenced Christian thought in Asia Minor. Since the form of a coherent system in Gnosticism can only be found in the second century, there is talk of incipient Gnosticism as a factor of influence. From this perspectivwasre very focused on the research of the nineteenth century and of the first part of the XXth century. However, recent studies demonstrate less and less influence of proto-Gnostic aspects in Colossians (Beetham 2008).

Secondly, since Colossae was a cosmopolitan location, with a population open to influences coming from any part of the Roman Empire, it insists on religious and philosophical syncretism (Dibelius 1936, 167; Hooker 1973, 315-31), without it being possible to conclude its exact nature (Bradley 1972, 17-36). The most relevant study for this perspective is by Prof. Clinton Arnold, in which he states that "The Colossian 'philosophy'… represents a combination of Phrygian folk belief, local folk Judaism, and

Christianity. The local folk belief has some distinctive Phrygian qualities, but it also has much in common with what we could also describe as magic or ritual power". In the reconstruction he proposes, Arnold insists on the veneration of angels, as the centrality of the syncretist movement against which the Apostle Paul writes his epistle. But most of the evidence presented for the *popular belief* of Colossae belongs to sources from the II-III century.

Although the syncretistic perspective touches on the problem of Judaism, it does not discuss it in a satisfactory way regarding the interpretation of the texts of Col 2:16-23.

A third perspective is that of Jewish mysticism. It is a proposal that, in recent years, has won over more and more Bible scholars on its side (Francis 1962: 109-134; Lane 1978: 216-8; Sappington, 1991). The perspective starts in its argumentation from the interpretation of the phrase *θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων* (Col 2,18). The phrase in Greek also allows the use of the subjective genitive (the ministry of angels), not just the objective one (worship of angels). For the Jewish apocalyptic context, the use of the subjective genitive in Col 2.18 is taking shape (Murphy 2012, 307-54). In many Apocrypha (Isaac 1983, 5-89 (10); Vermes 2010, 143), the authors are caught up, in their visions, in the heavens where the worship of angels before God takes place, so that the meanings of the words accompanying the phrase *θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων*, *ταπεινοφροσύνῃ* and *ἃ ἑόρακεν ἐμβατεύων*, suggests humility on the one hand – in the sense of fasting preparatory to such an experience – and on the other hand, detailed accounts of what they have seen. In such a context, teachers in Colossae would be involved in ascetic practices, such as fasting, in preparation for experiencing visions in which they would serve God with angels (Elliott and Reasoner 2011; Scott 1997, 101-19). This perspective would solve certain details of the Jewish worship mentioned in Col 2, and the Apostle Paul's response would be one that would touch exactly the essence of the problem: believers do not need *additional* mystical experiences when they are *in Christ*. Moreover, arguments would be made for the authentic experiences of the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor 12:1-6 and of the Apostle John in Revelation 1:10, experiences that did not start from the premise of searching for them on purpose.

There are, however, a few unresolved issues to this perspective. First, the interpretation *θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων* – the worship of angels – is not supposed to be entirely persuasive. Secondly, it does not explain the reason why the Apostle Paul demonstrates the superiority of Christ over the heavenly powers in Col 1,16.20; 2,10-

15. To avoid this answer, the proponents of *Jewish mysticism* argue that the *angels* of Col 2:18 are not identical to the *Powers and Dominions* of the rest of the epistle. Third, the notion of *commandments* (2:20) is not sufficiently resolved, which has a deeper meaning than mere preparation for mystical experiences.

A second presupposition is related to the definition of *intertextuality*. We assume the perspective that the quotes and allusions of the Old Testament (Berkley 2000, 17-66; Mihailos 2011, 8-10) used in the New Testament, respectively in the Epistle to Colossians, are carriers of the meaning of the context to which they belong in the Old Testament (Stanley 1992, 73-9, 341-2, 349, 351; Albl 1999, 65-9, 286-90; Beale 2012, 6-8). Fr. Augustine said in this regard: "quanquam et in vetere Novum lateat, et in Novo Vetus pateat". With regard to the meaning of intertextuality, we do not support its postmodern perspective which posits that references to previous texts have a new meaning completely different from the original meaning to which they belonged (Beale 2008, 23; Beale 2011, 2-3).

Old Testament allusions in *the Epistle to the Colossians*

In the opinion of recent Bible scholars, the Epistle to the Colossians contains only Old Testament allusions and no explicit quotations. The most important text, in this sense, is Col 3:1, in which Christ is described as "sitting at the right hand of God", a clear allusion to Ps 109:1 (LXX), one of the most quoted texts in the New Testament. Also in Col 3, speaking of the new man who "renews himself in the image of him who built him" (Col 3:10), the Apostle Paul makes "an ineluctable allusion" to Fc 1:26. The call for servants, "fearing the Lord" (3:22) and the statement that "he that doeth iniquity shall receive his iniquity; and bias cannot be – *ὁ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομίσεται ὃ ἠδίκησεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν προσωπολημψία*" (3,25) are consistent, first of all, with the Old Testament texts Dt 10:20; Pr 1:7; 3,7; Ecc 5:7 (cf. Sir 1:11-30; 2:7-9), and, secondly, with Dt 10:17 (cf. Sir 35:15). Suggestive of Col 3:22 and 3:25 is the text of 2 Par 19,7, which joins the exhortation "be it the fear of the Lord (*φόβος κυρίου*) over you" by the explanation that "to the Lord, our God, there is no injustice (ἀδικία)".

The studies dedicated to understanding the way in which the author of the Epistle to the Colossians relates to the Old Testament can be found in several recent specialized works of the Bible scholars Gordon Fee, G.K. Beale, C. Beetham and Jerry L. Sumney. In order to have an overview of these texts, we will present a table with the passages from the Colossians and their Old Testament references observed in the approaches of these authors.

VT references	Colossians
Gen 1:28; Jer 3:16; 23:3	Col 1:6
Ex 31:3; Is 11:2.9	Col 1:9-10
Ex 6:6-8. Motive „exodus"	Col 1:12-14
2 Sam 7:12-18	Col 1:13
Pr 8:22-31	Col 1:15-20
Gen 1:26-28; Ps 88:28; Ex 4:22-23	Col 1:15
Gn 1:1	Col 1:18
Ps 67:16-19	Col 1:19
Dn 2	Col 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3
Pr 2:2-6; Is 45:3	Col 2:2-3
Dt 30:6; Jer 31:31-34; Ez 36:26-27; 44:7.9	Col 2:11
Gen 17:11.14.23.24.25 Ez 44:7.9	Col 2:13
Exodus – Deuteronomy Hos 2:13; Ez 45:17; 1 Par 23:31; 2 Par 31:3	Col 2:16
Is 29:13-14	Col 2:22
Is 29:13	Col 2:20-23
Ps 109:1	Col 3:1
Gen 1:26-27	Col 3:9-10
Dt 7:6-8	Col 3:12
Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16	Col 3:20
Dt 10:20; Pr 1:7; 3:7; Ecc 5:7 (cf. Sir 1:11-30; 2:7-9) Dt 10:17 (cf. Sir 35:15) 2 Par 19:7	Col 3:22.25
Dn 2:8	Col 4:5

One of the remarkable characteristics of the epistles of the Apostle Paul, in the opinion of Gordon D. Fee, is that the Apostle takes over the Old Testament language in contexts in which the recipients are expected to understand not only the allusion or the echo but also to acknowledge their implications. Given the predominantly oral culture of the first century, in which the lack of reading and writing, characteristic of the majority of the population of the Roman Empire, was compensated especially with a very well-developed memory of oral discourse, we can understand that even with regard to religious texts there was a special emphasis on memorizing the texts or sacred history recounted – such as the Septuagint in the Pauline churches. Based on St. Luke's testimony in the Acts of the Apostles, the mission of the Apostle Paul always began in the Jewish synagogues, a place where there were also *God-fearers*, as did the centurion Cornelius (FA 10:2), who accepted the preaching about Christ. This fact suggests that the members of the Christian communities who responded to the preaching of St. Paul were people versed in terms of knowledge of the Scriptures. Therefore, the Apostle Paul, knowing these details about the recipients in Colossae, insists on allusions rather than on Old Testament quotes.

In light of this perspective of intertextuality, which emphasizes the deep connection between the text of the Epistle to the Colossians and the Old Testament text, we consider that the Church of Colossae consisted of both Hellenistic Jews converted to Christianity and *God-fearing* pagans, active participants also converted, to whom they were added, during epaphras' missionary activity, new converts. The epistle of the Apostle Paul responds to a doctrinal error which, in the light of the mentioned Old Testament allusions, was not at all foreign to the Jewish practice and understanding of the Septuagint.

Conclusions

Thus, we can assert that these doctrinal errors were predominantly Jewish in nature—not a mystical one, but one anchored in a Jewish understanding: of the law – as wisdom; of the temple – as the place of God's presence; circumcision – as a sign of entering God's people; of the Sabbaths, new months, and feasts—as inviolable sacred days; of the commandments related to "eating and drinking" – as laws concerning food restrictions (*clean/unclean* – FA 10:14-15). These errors are answered by the Apostle Paul, emphasizing that: Christ is Wisdom (Col 2,3; 1,15-20); Christ is the place of God's presence – "in him [God] pleased to dwell all fullness" (Col 1:19); Christ's sacrifice

"cut us off" from the "body of the flesh" by uniting in the burial "with him by Baptism" (Col. 2:11-13); the reality of the *kingdom* (Col 1:13) "is of Christ" (Col 2:17), the food, the drink, the holidays, the new moon, the Sabbaths – specific to the Jewish cult – being only *a shadow of* this reality (Col 2:16).

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WAS CHILD ADOPTION IN MESOPOTAMIA IN THE 2ND MILLENNIUM BC?

Abstract

This article deals with the issue of child adoption in the second millennium BCE in Mesopotamia. The discussion will cover three levels: A. Methodology and theoretical background, including child adoption terms in Mesopotamia 4000 years ago; B. The documentation of a formal adoption process through two adoption contracts referring to a young child up to the age of 10; C. The legal principles on which a Mesopotamian adoption contract was structured. We chose this period because most of the documents date back to this time and therefore the question arose as to why different adoption documents existed in the second millennium BCE and whether real child adoptions actually took place. In addition, I questioned the reason or reasons behind the adoption which was not motivated by marriage, property laundering or fraternity, but by infertility, a slave's child recognition or other socioeconomic reasons.

ASNAT KLAIMAN

Ben Gurion University of the Negev
asnatk@gmail.com

Keyword

child adoption, Mesopotamia, terms, legal principles, parents

Introduction

This article deals with the issue of child adoption in the second millennium BCE in Mesopotamia. The discussion will cover three levels: A. Methodology and theoretical background, including child adoption terms in Mesopotamia 4000 years ago; B. The documentation of a formal adoption process through two adoption contracts referring to a young child up to the age of 10; C. The legal principles on which a Mesopotamian adoption contract was structured.

My article is the summary of a master's thesis. I focused on adoption during this period because most of the documents date back to this time and therefore the question arose as to why different adoption documents existed in the second millennium BCE and whether real child adoptions actually take place. In addition, I questioned the reason or reasons behind the adoption which was not motivated by marriage, property laundering or fraternity, but by infertility, a slave's child recognition or other socioeconomic reasons. I analyzed certificates, contracts, and letters with a direct or indirect contribution to the issue of young children's formal adoption. I also searched for details about the reason behind the adoption, about the adopter's parents and the payment for the adoption involving both parties.

In the study, I was able to determine the legal stages required for adoption as well as the socioeconomic criteria adoptive parents and biological parents had to meet in order to receive or give a child up for adoption, such as the rights and obligations of the child, of biological parents, and of adoptive parents; the payment method corresponding to each type of adoption; the reasons for adopting or giving a child up for adoption; the selection of witnesses to the contract; the actual adoption and its sustainment on time. I was also able to trace the feelings of the adults involved in the process.

Theoretical Review

David (1927) pioneered the research on 'child adoption' in the ancient east. Most of his research dealt with legal files in the ancient world and texts proving that there was adoption during the OB. The study included a discussion of terms related to adopted people *NAM.IBILA* and terms for adoption such as the formula *ilqū màrutu*. He also partially addressed the breach of adoption contracts. David thought there were several types of adoption: by a man, a woman, or of adoptees who needed a socioeconomic status (David 1927, 11). He claimed that there was also adoption in Ancient Babylon in order to have a family, in the case of people who could not give birth naturally (David 1927, 110).

Driver & Miles (1952-1955) claimed that, in Assyrian law, there were several examples of *ana* mar*ūtti* adoption and they found evidence of it in texts from that period, such as the adoption of a child by a woman for the purpose of marriage; and the father received money and was satisfied with it (Driver and Miles 1952-1955, 162); A man who took a girl to have her marry his son and received her in the presence of

witnesses at the gate (Gadd 35); A brother who gave his sister for marriage, together with a dowry for her husband (Chiera 180) and a man who gave his daughter to marry a man; this man gave the bride's father a daughter (Contenau 1926, 150).

Goody (1969) tried to deal with the question of adoption purposes. He found that adoption was designed to care for orphans, illegal children and abandoned children from devastated families. On the other hand, adoption provided offspring to childless couples, and also enabled inheritance within the family, a decisive factor in the ancient world. The adoption contract usually included rights and obligations. He also found a different kind of adoption, of children whose purpose was the teaching of a professional boy by an artist – *ana tabititim*. In addition, it should be noted that he emphasized the adoption present in ancient legends, such as Sargon, and Moses (Exod. 2: 8-10), and in the Roman legend of Romulus and Ramos (Goody 1969, 53).

Until the 1980s, no further studies were carried out on the question of adoption. However, cuneiforms dealing with adoption were published, the most notable being the publication of the Nuzi cuneiforms. Most of the adoptions in the Nuzi cuneiforms were economic adoption. In addition, different legal files from Mesopotamia began to be published, which led the research towards the question of adoption feasibility, in terms of the procedure and the rights of the sides (CAD 131-138).

Roth's (1979) research tackled adoption and inheritance through the analysis of ruling files and by examining the terms of different adoption processes. The concepts were examined linguistically, making comparisons with previously published texts. Roth proved that there was an adoption for inheritance purposes, but did not pay actual attention to the various types of adoption that resulted from the texts (Roth 1979).

Veenhof (1998) discussed texts from ancient Assyria, bringing evidence of the adoption of children by adults, so as that treat them in their old age. Most of the texts were from Emar and Kentish and testified to proper payment so that the sides would agree to the 'adoption'. The main part of the adoption obligates the son to support the parents physically, while the parents are obligated to support the son financially and secure his future. Veenhof found recurring terms in these contracts, such as *palāhum* (to serve), referring to a slave who serves his masters in old age or to serving god (Veenhof 1998). Wilcke (1999) added that such an adoption imposed a duty of serving the life and living of the family. He claimed that, in the ancient world, it was the duty of every child, especially the eldest, to support *(wabālum)* their parents and to take care of all their shortages and especially of an adopted child, and the duty of elderly parents to

secure their money after their death (Wilcke 1981, 87-94).

Studies published from the 1980s to the mid-1990s referred to texts from the NB or NB and discussed the question of the purpose of adoption, especially the inheritance law (Börger 1981, 544).

Ston & Awen (1991) renewed the research during the OB. They translated new texts found in Nippur relating to the question of adoption (Stone and Owen 1991, 53-55). Ston found that adoption was due to various reasons: the adoption of girls for marriage, the preservation of property and the transfer of property within the family, concern for older parents and the adoption by childless couples. The researcher did not discuss the adoptee's age but assumed that they were 'children' in the sense of class and not of chronological age. Stol (1998) found in his studies on adoption texts that there were many reasons and cases of adoption, among which he noted innovations, such as the adoption of slaves, or of slaves and masters, recognized as legal children (Stol 1998, 59-118). In Stol's book (2000), terms related to young children were discussed for the first time, from the moment they were born to adulthood. At the same time, Stol compared these terms with the adoption of young children, especially in cases where a nanny received a baby in order to breastfeed them; the adoption contract ended with the child returning to his parent's home (Stol 2000, 12).

In conclusion, most of the studies did not deal with the ancient Babylonian period and mainly dealt with terms and formulas related to the adoption process and its violation and the reasons behind the adoption; only a few dealt with the adoption of a child.

Child Adoption Terms

First, we will try to define the terms used for 'child' in Mesopotamia. In Sumerian or Akkadian, the term 'child' or 'girl' between the ages of 0-12 years refers to young people before they are ready for marriage. In Mesopotamia, every stage from having a child to defining the child as 'mature' has a unique term. Many texts showing the adoption of a little child, infant, or newborn use the official Babylonian term ('water and blood'), meaning 'a child in his water', *ina mesu*, from the water of the womb, which refers to the moment after birth (Hammurabi codex 158). The term *šilip remīm*, 'exit from the womb', is used when it comes to adoption (Stol 2000, 128). In Akkadian, a 'child' who was born is called *şerru* or *la'u* and also *şehru* (*TU* or *dumu. da* in Sumerian), which means 'small' or baby boy or girl (Stol 2000, 176). The Babylo-

nians referred to the child's growth stages, such as breastfeeding, the stage in which the baby is attached to his mother's breast in order to suckle. The term 'mammal begins' in Akkadian is *bungu*, derived from the word *enequ* (*UŠ.G[A]* or *DUMU.GABA*), which means 'suckle' (breast milk) (Goodnick-Wetenholz 1997, 145-146). A mother of high social status would give the baby up for adoption to a foster mother in order to breastfeed them so that the biological mother can conceive again. In OB, there is evidence of the nanny-infancy profession, *mušëniqtu*. The nanny received an amount that would satisfy the baby's needs for a period of about three years until the child was weaned. This foster period was called *tenqu* or *terbitu*, from breastfeeding and hassle (Stol 2000, 181). A child between the ages of one and three would be called *lillidum,* a reptile child ḫenzer (*IGI-DIM*) (Goodnick-Wetenholz 1997, 146), a walking child who starts walking *mur-r[a-ku$_4$-ku4]* (Goodnick-Wetenholz 1997, 146), a toddler up to the age of five *gi-na* (*DUMU.DIŠ*) (Goodnick-Wetenholz 1997, 146), and a child between the ages of four and eight years would be called *šerru* or *ṣuhāru*, which means young (Goodnick-Wetenholz 1997, 145-147). In adulthood, for the adult boy, *NÍTA* was used and for the adult girl, *MUNUS* (Goodnick-Wetenholz 1997, 146). Goerze found in a text from Nippur terms that express the ages of children-heirs in adoption contracts, such as *ap-lu* or *IBILA*, which means heir-son (DUMU.DIŠ or *marū*) and, in Assyrian law, *DUMU.MU.MEŠ* (Goodnick-Wetenholz 1997, 123).

Child Adoption

The most accepted definition of the term 'child adoption' is the final and legal separation of a child from their biological parents and placement in people who become adoptive parents. They have the same obligation and responsibility for the child as those of their biological parents (Katzenelson 1985, 165). However, we have to remember that the adoption institution was used in the ancient world as a broad term and not only in connection with parents and young children: the term *mārūtu* (for boy adoption) and *mārūtutu* (for girl adoption) and, in the wide legal context, *ahūtu* (brother adoption) and *ahātatu* (sister adoption) for economic purposes or marriage.

B. Documentation of Adoption Contracts

I chose two texts representing child adoption contracts for two different reasons from the OB. The contracts were written in Sumerian using legal terms and in Akkadian using everyday language.

A) CT 33 40 (BM 97446)

Trans.	Trans.
1. [I]a-↑a- AM.<TUM! >.NI- ir-ši	1. a-↑a- AM<TUM>.NI- irši
2. KI il-ta-ni DUMU.MÍ DINGIR-šu-i-bi-šu	2. from iltani daughter of ili-šu-ibišu
3. [I]la-ma-zi	3. lamazi
4. DUMU.MÍ DINGIR-šu i-bi-šu	4. daughter of ili-šu-ibišu
5. a-na ma-ru-tim il-qí	5. to adoptive he takes her
6. KÙ.BABBAR ša ta!-ar-bi-ti-ša	6. growing money
7. [I]il-ta-ni	7. iltani
8. DUMU.<MÍ> DINGIR-šu i-bi-šu	8. daughter of ili-šu-ibišu
9. ma-aÆ-ra-at	9. got
10. li-ib-ba-šu	10. her heart
11. tà-ab	11. is good
12. 3 IKU A.ŠÀ	12. 3 IKU field
13. ša il-ta-ni	13. of iltani
14. a-na la-ma-zi i-di-in	14. to lamazi she gave
15. a-di ma-al-ṭà-at	15. as long as she lives
16. i-ka-al-ma	16. she will eat
17. ša a-↑a-am-ni!-ir-ši-i-ma	17. from a-↑a- AM<TUM>.NI- irši.
18. [I]a-↑a-AM. <TUM!>.NI-ir-ši	18. a-↑a- AM<TUM>.NI- irši
19. a-na la-ma-zi	19. to lamazi
20. i-qa-bi-i-ma	20. she will say
21. ú-ga-la-ab-šu-ma	21. shave her head
22. a-na KÙ.BABBAR i-na-di-<in>	22. with money will sell
23. IGI E-ri-iš-tum	23. before Erištum
24. DUMU.MÍ 30-i-qí-ša IGI il-ta <ni>	24. son of S↑N-iqíša before iltani
25. IGI be-li-ku-nu DUMU.MI! be-li < >	25. before belikunu son of beli

Discussion

Line 1: The name of the child by her name is a-↑a- AM<TUM>.NI- irši (sister of…)

Line 2: The name of the biological mother and family attribution are mentioned.

Lines 3-4: The adoptive mother appears. The first part of her name is similar to that of the biological mother.

Line 5: The declaration of adoption using the fixed formula (mentioned above).

Lines 6-9: The money is paid for her upbringing, but it is not specified how much.

Lines 10-11: The formula that they are satisfied with, 'good core', appears. The formula is not present in all the texts. Is it used only for adoption for the purpose of marriage? This may be where the mother's consent to marriage is expressed.

Line 12-14: The girl comes with a 'dowry', a field, for the adoptive mother, and much more.

Lines 15-17: The biological mother would enjoy the fruit of the fields as long as she lived.

Line 18-20: The breach of agreement formula. However, not all the words appear, only a clue, "she will say".

Lines 21-22: The expected penalty for breaching the contract is shaving her head and selling the hair (see Hammurabi codex 192 for comparison).

Lines 23-25: The witnesses. The mothers are not mentioned.

Conclusions

There is no evidence of a little girl, but she is not among the signatories to the contract. It could be a sign that she was indeed a girl of low social status or a young girl. There are no conditions regarding the breach of contract by the adopter, only their rights. The phrase 'good on her heart' is repeated several times in various texts, which do not actually indicate the adoption of a little girl. When parents give their little child for adoption, they approve of it using this formula. However, if the child is adopted for marriage, she is mentioned to be at least 10 years old and, if she violates the contract, she will be sold.

B) YOS 12 363

Tran.	Trans.
1. *[I]U BAR.RUM.MU.NI*	1. Ubarrum s
2. *DUMU ip-qu-ša*	2. son of ipquša
3. *u-ir-şe-ya*	3. and uirşeya
4. *KI.NÌ.TE.AN.NI*	4. took him from them out
5. *[I]a-pil-il-[d]MAR.TU DUMU a-bi I.DIN. NAM*	5. apil-ammurum son of abi-I.DIN.NAM
6. *NAM DUMU.NI ŠU.BA.AN.TI*	6. to adoption he got him
7. *NAM IBILA.NI (DUMU.NITA) IN.GAR*	7. elder son for him
8. *TUKUMBI U.BAR.RUM DUMU.NI*	8. if his son Ubarrum
9. *NAM a-pil [d] [ ] ad-da-ni*	9. to apil-ammurum his father
10. *ú-ul ad-da at-ta*	10. you are not my father
11. *iq-ta-bi*	11. he will say
12. *NAM KÚ.BABBAR in-na-an-šum*	12. sell him by money
13. *TUKUMBI -a[ ] an[ ] šu ad-da-ni*	13. If apil-ammurum
14. *NAM U BAR.RUM DUMU.NI*	14. Ubarrum his son
15. *ú-ul DUMU.NI at-ta*	15. you are not my son
16. *iq-ta-bi*	16. he will say
17. *i-na È Ú Ù né-tim*	17. From his house and from his property
18. *i-it el-li*	18. He will go out.
19. *[Ammatum, rabianum]*	19. [Ammatum, rabianum]
20-25. missing	20-25. missing
26. *[abu(m)-waqr]*	26. [abu(m)-waqr]
27-31. missing	27-31. missing (witness list)

Discussion

Line 1: The name of the child

Lines 2-3: The names of the child's biological father and mother.

Line 4: According to the phrase, the moment was: removed from the womb, meaning he was born (Wilcke 1981, 89, 93).

Line 5: The names of both adoptive parents are mentioned here.

Line 6: A whole term that indicates adoption *NAM DUMU.NI ŠU.BA.AN.TI* is mentioned here.

Line 7: The conditions; the child has the right to be considered the eldest son. There is no mention of the future, should a couple of children be born.

Lines 8-9: The names of the adoptive parents.

Lines 10-11: The formula 'You are not my father'; there is no mention of cancelling the mother's status.

Line 12: Selling the child as punishment.

Lines 13-18: Again, a formula on the father's side: 'If you are not my son...'. The father receives the penalty of leaving the property to the child.

Lines 19-31: The following lines are missing. Probably the names of the witnesses.

Conclusions

There is a special adoption of a child from the womb water, according to the phrase *DUMU a-bi I.DIN.NAM*, for a newborn. There seems to be no connection between the child's biological parents who do not register together. In line 4, it is written that the child has been removed from his parents and it seems the parents cannot keep him, and the city's welfare council decides to take care of the child. The child's future was clearly assured and none of the parent's comments on the adoption according to the 'good on her heart' formula, as opposed to other contracts. The child may have been removed from his parents or they may have given up on him because they had many children or had a low social status. The parents may not be married and the child could be born out of wedlock. The child is given to other parents and does not remain the biological father's son. If the reason for adoption was financial, the biological parents would also receive compensation to give up the child, but, here, there is no payment for the adoption. This may be evidence of the idea of getting rid of the child, who is not welcome to either of the parents. However, maybe the city's social services care for the individual's welfare. An oath on the gods is made here, which indicates the importance of the agreement and the presence of important people as witnesses to the agreement.

Child Adoption – Is It True? Some Insights

According to the law, adopting a child in the ancient world was a process in favour of a couple of childless parents, who wanted a child to continue the dynasty

and gain possession of their property. This child should not be considered different from others if they were to give birth to biological children afterwards (Katzenelson 1985, 165). Adoption was customary in the Ancient East as a means of ensuring the continuity and existence of the family in the absence of natural offspring (Driver and Miles 1952-1955, 383).

Adoption in the ancient world had different reasons. Most of the research dealt with different types of adoption in three main areas: adoption for economic purposes, adoption for social purposes, and adoption for religious purposes. Economic adoption took place between two or more people in order to transfer property and keep it out of the family so that the ruling king or council did not take over the property after the death of its owner (Driver and Miles 1952-1955, 492). Adoption for religious reasons was usually written in the myth of the king, in order for him to obtain approval from God; he thus accepts the kingdom and sovereignty over it. Social adoption usually occurred when adults adopted a child for various reasons: mainly a widow who adopted a child in order to preserve her estate or couples with many children, who were unable to support another child, or children born to unmarried mothers, such as *nāditu* (A woman who worked in a temple, usually as a slave), who could not have children as long as they worked in the temple and who were no longer able to give birth at the end of their service in the temple. Nonetheless, there were cases of a rare adoption of a child who was forcibly removed from their family by law (the elders of the city the king,) because their parents could not take care of their needs or abused them (Katzenelson 1985, 166). There was also the adoption of a child by a biological family member, in order to preserve the family's property in due course.

However, the main reason was infertility or people's inability to have a child; the adoption of newborn babies took place up to the age of 3-4 (Driver and Miles 1952-1955, 371). Such adoptions also happened between sisters (Driver and Miles 1952-1955, 491). Other types of adoption of young children included the adoption of children with the status of a slave, who were thus given civil rights; upon the death of the father, the child was granted freedom. In addition, we can notice that a child was given to a nanny under conditions which were similar to adoption, for the purpose of raising the baby and returning them to their parents through the process of re-adoption after the end of their infancy. Another reason for social adoption was the process of recognizing a citizen who did not have a child from his legal wife, a child-heir of a slave-mother citizen. This process regulated the rights of the child to inherit their

father, just like the other children (Driver and Miles 1952-1955, 371-374).

We can also examine the adoption process through the eyes of those involved in it, such as the childless parents who received a child as their legal child. These were usually elderly parents of high economic status or people with high incomes (Katzenelson 1985, 170). The adoptee was perceived as a householder and their legal status was determined by law or by the adoption contract; there were two possibilities: full rights, just like the rights of a natural and legal child, including the right to inheritance (YOS 14 344), or, in special cases, fewer privileges than those of a natural child (Freiman 1965, 431-433). Adopting a child usually required the supervision of parents until they became adults, and an inheritance, regardless of the number of children born to the couple in the future. If the son abandoned his parents, he would lose everything (Driver and Miles 1952-1955, 492).

Most contracts have no evidence of returning a young child from adoption. In ancient law, the adopted child had no right to know their origin, either to protect the child from the background from which they were removed, or because the adoption was not done by intermediaries from both parties, and the background of the adoption was known to everyone (Katzenelson 1985, 166). In the ancient world, the phenomenon of adoption occurred in families looking for an heir, but no evidence was found as to strengthening marriage or promoting one's status (ruler or class).

I found the terms attributed to child adoption recorded in contracts and certificates: *mārūtu (ma-ru-tim)* for child adoption or in the context of the *nāditu*, who gave her son or daughter up for adoption mainly in the OA (Börger 1981, 319-321). Similarly, during the OB, the natural adoption of a son by an older person could be seen upon birth (Hammurabi codex 34 / YOS 12 333); there were also terms related to the adoptee (VAS 8 127; VAS 8 73; CT 33 40), the son of an effort taken from the womb (2N-T361; CT 47 40; YOS 8 120; YOS 8 1; YOS 8 149; YOS 8 152). In Nippur and in Isîn, the unique adoption *leqû* was found: A woman gave a man the son of another woman to apparently free people from slavery, a couple adopted a girl to support them in their old age before the god ŠAMAŠ, and a child was adopted by a *nāditu* of the god ŠAMAŠ. Examples of adaptive fathers' adoption letters can be found, in which they voluntarily gave the child property, and another example is that of a couple adopting a child as their son, in the MA and NA. In MB, we can see adoption contracts of a 'son' for any purpose, from Allach, Nuzi (Gordon 1990, 135-136) and from Ugarit (Gordon 1990, 135-136). In NB, there were cases documented about a woman giving her seventeen-year-old son

as an adoptee son to another woman, or the adoption of a child for work, money, gifts, security, and the adoption of a son by a god (the legend of Sargon).

The law took adopting a child seriously and devoted a lot of files to it (Hammurabi codex: 185-193). The adoption process of a young child (boy and girl) was carried out through contracts written on tin boards, also called adoption bills. After I examined 23 adoption contracts and letters and read Mesopotamian laws, I can conclude that a young child's adoption contract consisted of most of the following elements:

a. Date (rarely)

b. The sides to the agreement:

- Name of the child or the clue as to whether he is a young child, using a fixed formula: PN1 is a son of

- PN2 (the same for a girl).

- Name of the biological parents of the child (if there are any).

- Name of the adoptive parents of the child (mostly two parents).

c. Declaration of adoption, using a fixed formula: PN1 *DUMU(.SAL)* PN3

- PN3 take PN1 and explicit mention of adoption, through the formula: *ana mārutim leqû*.

d. The reason for adoption (if it can be written).

e. Terms of the Agreement:

- Payment to biological parents and obtaining their consent to the process.

- Terms of violation of the child's agreement and punishment.

- Terms of violation of the parents' agreement and punishment (Ahmad Ali Yaseen 1996, 288).

f. Parents' oath (Biological parents if there are any and adoptive parents).

g. A list of witnesses in the following order: gods, king, mayor, and city dignitaries (Maria de J. Ellis 1975, 131, 148).

Conclusion

The article aimed to show the existence of the adoption of young children in the second millennium BCE. The concept of ' young child adoption' was recognized in Mesopotamian law but was subject to different interpretations. I realized that adopting children in the ancient east was a code name for different types of adoption and not necessarily for the adoption of a minor for his own well-being, but for socioeconom-

ic reasons. During certain periods, children were adopted for the welfare of childless couples and not in order to save children, as various texts attested. The adoption of young children, like any other adoption, was carried out as an interpretation of the laws that prevailed in the local-regional society. An adoption contract for young children was slightly different from the permanent structure which showed the various parties involved in the adoption process. There were signs testifying to the adoption of a minor, such as the names of the biological parents (the adopted child was usually adopted without a name and was not on the list of witnesses) and adoptive parents, including the list of witnesses.

Each contract was accompanied by witnesses, who were significant people in the community or family members. The adoptee's duties were not always specified, as opposed to other adoption contracts. The price of adoption varied, depending on the adoptee's age and the purpose of adoption. In order to maintain the fairness of the contract, a payment clause was introduced, which was usually nil, compared to other adoption contracts, which was evidence of the adoption of a young child and their social status, not profit. Another sign of the adoption of a minor was the vague formulation of the contract, because it mostly appeared in the complex circumstances of infertility, when there were no welfare problems, as the population was limited. The adoption of younger children took place about 4,000 years ago, a process which did not stand out in the archives, but it seems that the authorities or the family were concerned with the individual's welfare.

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Shortcuts

CAD The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2006.

MA Middle Assyria period (13-10th century BCE)
MB Middle Babylonian period (1595–1155 BCE)
NB Neo-Babylonian period (626-100 BCE)
NA Neo-Assyrian period (10th century BCE)
OA Old Assyria period (14th century BCE)
OB Old Babylonian period (1894-1595 BCE
PN Personal name

BOOK REVIEWS

DEVINE PROVIDENCE FOR THE GENTILES AND THE ROLE OF MEDIATOR OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

Cătălin-Emanuel Ștefan

Cosmin Lauran, *Missio Israelis. O lectură misionară a Vechiului Testament* [Missio Israelis. A Missionary Reading of the Old Testament] (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea, 2017), 482 p.

In the "Author's Note" section, Fr. Lauran makes an assertion which is very enlightening for the understanding of the undertaken behind this work. He claims that every reader who approaches a book "can understand or interpret it differently, according to their inner structure, their own values, choices or other hermeneutic notes" (p. 17). [our translation] This perspective which the book fully "exploits" has an important contribution to the common reader's better understanding of their relationship with God, mediated by the Holy Scripture.

This assertion could be one of the reasons why the Bible still offers something new to every believer who studies it, even though it has been constantly read and studied for thousands of years. An example is the very structure of Fr. Lauran's book. It would be useless to count all the works which speak of the *protogospel* (Gn 3:15), *the choice of Adam* and *the covenant God made with him* (Gn 12:1-3.17) or of the *"central" position of Israel in the area of creation and the responsibility thereof* (e.g.: Ez 5:5). Nonetheless, every researcher manages to emphasise a new nuance of the text, which awaits revelation. Thus, it provides the historian with historical sources, the homilist with homiletic material, *the missiologist with reference points of the divine and human mission* and so on. The holy text is itself the depositary of all these elements. Consequently, in the foreword to this book, Fr. Ioan Chirilă points to the fact that "we do not need to create catechetic, homiletic, missionary biblical editions; the introduction of proper Hermeneias is enough" (p. 14). [our translation] That is why the fact that Fr. Lauran proposes in his work a possibility by which the books of the Old Testament can be regarded from the perspective of Christian mission perfectly falls within Fr. Chirilă's line. The author resorts to the aforementioned passages, among

others, to prove that the mission of the Church is better rooted in the revelation of the Old Testament than we used to think, at least in the Romanian space. If we relate this to the initial assertion, we can conclude that Fr. Lauran does not force the text to say what it actually does not contain; on the contrary, he found a method by which he allows the Scripture to contribute to the understanding the Church has about itself, in order to better act in a fallen cosmos in need of its intervention. In fact, this is also one of the purposes of the Holy Scripture, namely to show man what the actual reality is. As the Holy Fathers have many times shown, the Bible is not a "collection" of stories and human texts, but, due to the work of the Holy Spirit, it is a writing which was given to us to respond to our spiritual needs (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*).

This book cultivates the same reality. Fr. Lauran does not enumerate passages with no connection between them, which give the impression that they can somehow suggest a certain missiological aspect. However, he shows us step by step how the rationale ingrained in the creation and divine urges converge throughout history towards the moment when God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

The starting point of his study is the fact that, from the very beginning, creation was conceived by God as a *support for the future mission* to which man is called. Moving on, the author shows that, even if men fell and therefore no longer had a proper understanding of their calling, God always worked to get them back on track towards their initial purpose. As a consequence, this study continues with the idea that patriarch Abraham was the man through whom history actually changed its course, as the Lord chose him for a special mission, namely that of "raising" a people amid whom he would work towards the salvation of the entire world. Thus, this book shows that, through the patriarch, the mission switched from the stage of potential to that of a *personal act*. Following Abraham, the preparation of the chosen people became a reality over the course of many years. When his many offspring are ready, the Lord intervenes decisively in their destiny, to entrust them with a "global" mission, that of testifying to the entire world about God's closeness to man. Therefore, at the right moment, through the Hebrew people, the mission ceases to be only personal and gains a *community* character, with *universal valences*. By means of three well-developed sequences, the author outlines the main steps of God's work in the history of Israel: "creation as mission" (p. 79), "choice as mission" (p. 197) and, in the end, the idea of "mission as an attraction" (p. 321).

Cosmin Lauran's research succeeds in demonstrating a supposition which has

long been anticipated but not fully studied until now. Consequently, he shows that the Old Testament does not speak only about the idea of *Deus mittens* or *missio Dei* (divine work in history), but it also presents the concept of *homo missum* or, in particular, as the title of the book shows, the concept of *missio Israelis* (the calling of man to work together with their Creator on the mission He entrusted to them). Thus, this book proves once more a fundamental truth preached by the Church, namely that the Lord does not work alone towards the fulfilment of creation, but also calls man to partake of it, through the mission to which they are called from their very creation (Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*).

That is why we believe that *Missio Israelis* is an exceptional and extremely complex study, which answers very well to the exigences and needs of Romanian researchers in general and of the common reader, who seeks to better understand the rationale of the world they live in. This book fully deserves the status granted by Rev. Ioan Chirilă, who considers it to be "a first missionary hermeneutic approach to the Old Testament in the Romanian space" (p. 16). We believe the characterisation Rev. Ioan Chirilă made shows not only the chronological primacy of Rev. Lauran's endeavour but also the fact that it can be considered a benchmark for future research in this field!

ANGELOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY PERSPECTIVE IN DANIEL'S BOOK

Bogdan Negrea

Ioan Iurcea, *Îngeri și Eshatologie/Învierea în Daniel 10-12* [Angels and Eschatology/Resurection in the Book of Daniel 10-12] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2018), 468 p.

Aspects related to angelology, along with the entire endeavour to define this area of reference of the Biblical space, make for an inexhaustible source of values and guidelines for exegetic analysis. Angels are spoken of in an apprehensive, sometimes shuddering way throughout the realm of theology. There are general analyses describing angels' orders, hierarchies, and their impact on our lives. Saint Dionysius the Areopagite makes sure to provide us with concrete explanations regarding the role and manifestation of angels in our lives. *The Celestial Hierarchy* constitutes a guide that analyses angels and their activities. If we were to speak of an unwritten history of angels, with the aid of Saint Dionysius, we find *in tempora* clues as to the reality of their existence.

Undertaking this endeavour of identifying angelological aspects from an isagogic, hermeneutic and exegetic perspective, Ioan Iurcea highlights the relationship between existentialism, mission, impact and eschatology within the sphere of angelology, with a particular focus on two chapters in the book of Prophet Daniel. Being aware that the said biblical excerpt is as bountiful as it is difficult to analyse, the author aims to place in the reciprocity of light two independent themes: Angels and Eschatology.

Thus, along the 466 pages, we are invited to read an overflowing exegetic excursus into the realm of the Old Testament, the passages of reference in the book of Daniel being meticulously specified. The book's five chapters testify to the author's effort, dedication and courage in tackling the prophetic text in detail. Daniel 10-12 constitutes a special section of the Bible. If in the reader's eyes, Daniel 10-11 represents a historical and prophetic excursus into the revelation of those elements that would

occupy Daniel during his activity, Daniel 12 is a preamble to the teachings about the resurrection of the dead and about the Antichrist.

In the first part of his book, the author stresses the complexity involved in tackling the chosen theme. Providing a nuanced perspective on the importance of reference works and research methods in the initial section of the book, following a short introduction, the author summarises the 'current stage of the research', giving credit to specialised literature, both Romanian and foreign, while also outlining the directions of applied research.

The second chapter is intended to introduce the reader to a stage of preparation. Terminological delimitations are a must for specialised works in the biblical realm. The reader needs to bear in mind that certain terminological structures are both leitmotifs and pillars of the work. Thus, the notions of angel, eschatology, and resurrection are but three of the core constitutive components of the message that Fr. Iurcea's book seeks to capture. The author's approach is highly commendable, as it seeks to render not so much the resonance of the above-mentioned terms, but also their historical and semantic structure. To the people of Israel, angels have been a necessity for the growth of the people, eschatology obscurity, and resurrection a flicker of hope, never fully defined in the world of the Old Testament. Thus, the words that make up the epicentre of the terminological delimitations throughout the book are not particular to the latter, but to the history of the chosen people. Aware of the need for terminological delimitation, the author dedicates nearly a fourth of the book to meet this necessity.

In a natural unfolding of content, the author tackles isagogic, exegetic and theological aspects of Daniel 10-12 within three chapters (3, 4 and 5). The said chapters stand in complete harmony, the author attempting to provide a preview of all the angelological and eschatological teachings found in the book of Daniel.

As part of his isagogic enterprise (chapter 3), Ioan Iurcea includes a description of the historical side of the book of Prophet Daniel. Touching on several particularities regarding the paternity of the book, its genre, and the theology it expresses, the author capitalises on the information describing the historical side of the text and places them in the light of a contextualisation that is extremely beneficial to the initiation of the entire exegetic process of the chapters under discussion (Daniel 10-12).

The exegetic approach (chapter 4), which is the very title of the excerpt from the book, constitutes the amplest part of the work. The author seeks to define *Angels and Their Mission* (pp. 197-257), as well as *The General Resurrection* (pp. 346-386),

bringing the two discussions together through the presentation of certain *Eschatological Conflicts* (pp. 258-345), as he calls them. Using various interpretive sources, and collections of commentaries, among other things, Ioan Iurcea manages to gather and filter the existing information in a purely exegetic manner, *for the good purpose of building up*. The scriptural text is focused on the building of Daniel's apperceptive qualities. Visions and talking with angels were not common in the Old Testament but were a mark of particularity, a sign that one has been chosen, a clue that pointed to the righteousness among men and to God's way of working with them. Remember the righteousness found by God in Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and in Jacob, Job and in the other prophets through whom God made His presence felt in the world in an ever-so-slightly mediated manner. Furthermore, Daniel is characterised as such by the very angel of God, who tells him: 'Daniel, you who are greatly valued by God... stand up... do not be afraid, for since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble ourself before your God, your words were heard and I have come because of your words' (Dn 10:11-12). The characterisation in question does nothing other than exemplify the doubt that should exist as to the concreteness of Prophet Daniel's words. Whether we choose to speak of angelology or eschatology, one of the supporting texts should be Daniel 10-12, as it comprises clear indications as to God's plans and His interventions in the world.

The final chapter (5), dedicated to theology, represents the sum of these topics derived from the text that lies at the foundation of the approach to the themes of eschatology and angelology in the present book. The author delimits a core idea that he develops in completely different directions while preserving it in essence. God's manifestation in the world, His presence in the history of mankind, constitutes the core of the theology highlighted in Daniel 10-12. Whether we speak of biblical characters, of angels and their role, or we use metaphorical language or try and get a feel of eternity through eschatology, God is always present, always revealing His plan. Thus, on an enigmatic note, we can speak of the end while accepting that God is the endless End. And whoever ends in Him ends in peace and quiet, the fruits of one's efforts.

Providing a retrospective view of the topics tackled in the book, the author concludes his work by emphasising the fact that, in the turmoil of the revelations and their clarification by the angel, Daniel has one sole mission, that of implementing allegory in revealing that which he received from God. In other words, given the immeasurability of that which he received, the only way to share it with others is through allegory, in an attempt to break it down into stages.