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**Some Influences of Apologetic Motivation  
on Biblical Exegesis  
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**Introduction**

Biblical exegesis, like science, tends to be idealized by its practitioners as a pure and disinterested search for the truth. Indeed, most Christians would agree that truth is what both these activities should be striving to attain. Yet life is short; man's capabilities are finite; the responsibilities which press upon him are many; and not one of us is without bias. Such problems affect science and exegesis equally. In exegesis, however, the stakes are higher and the results are more personal, so the struggle between opposing points of view has often been stronger, more protracted, unyielding and bitter in spite of the ameliorating effects of Biblical ethics.

In this paper we would like to consider how such struggle affects the quality of exegesis produced. What is the influence of apologetic motivation upon exegesis? Let us understand "apologetic" in the sense "defending in writing or speech," an adjective from the noun "apology," which means "argument to show that some idea, religion, etc. is right."<sup>1</sup> We will not restrict the religion to orthodox Christianity, although the exegesis will be confined to the interpretation of the Bible.

Our study will proceed more or less chronologically from the intertestament period to the present. Obviously it will not be comprehensive; a complete study would have to examine every extant apology, commentary, sermon and letter containing exegesis written in the past two thousand years! Instead we will sketch the history of (mostly Christian) exegesis over this period, sampling some of the major expositors and controversies to see what sorts of influence apologetic motivation actually has had. We will seek to avoid characterizing expositors, making vast generalizations, propounding universal negatives, or arguing from silence, yet in the end we hope to compile a list of some actual effects which apologetic motivation has already produced.

For convenience, let us divide our discussion into historical periods as follows: early Jewish, early Christian, post-Nicene, medieval, reformation and modern. Each case will be numbered for purposes of reference in drawing conclusions. In most of the cases considered, the works from which examples are drawn will be explicitly apologetic. In a few cases, however, due to lack of historical information, apologetic motivation is only inferred. The Biblical text used is the NASB.

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<sup>1</sup> *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*. College ed. (Cleveland: World Publishing Co, 1955), 68.

## Early Jewish Exegesis

Before the rise of Christianity, the principal opponent of Judaism was paganism. Within Judaism, however, there were various groups with differing views which argued among themselves. We are most familiar with the Pharisees, who came to dominate Judaism shortly before the fall of the second temple. We know less about the Essenes, Sadducees, and Hellenistic Jews other than Philo. Other sects we know only by name.<sup>2</sup> A number of phenomena occur in Jewish writings of the intertestamental and early Christian periods which seem to indicate apologetic motivation; we suggest paraphrase, expansion and omission of the Biblical text, and literal and allegorical exegesis. Let us look at each of these in turn.

### Paraphrase

In the centuries following the Babylonian captivity, many Jews came to be less familiar with Hebrew than with another language. For some the more familiar language was Aramaic; for others, Greek. Consequently Bible translations were made into Aramaic (at first oral, later written) and into Greek. The Aramaic translations are called Targums; the earliest Greek translation, the Septuagint (LXX). The Targums, especially the Palestinian, tend to be periphrastic. The Targum of Onkelos and the LXX are less periphrastic, but all have paraphrases to soften the Old Testament anthropomorphisms.

1. For example, the theophany of Exodus 24:10 is rendered more or less literally in the KJV: "And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone..." The LXX paraphrases this: "And they saw the *place*, where the God of Israel *stood*; and that which was under his feet was like a work of sapphire brick..."<sup>3</sup> The Targum of Onkelos has: "And they saw the *Glory* of the God of Israel, and under the *throne of His Glory* as the work of a precious stone..."<sup>4</sup> The Palestinian Targum reads: "And Nadab and Abihu lifted up their eyes, and saw the *glory* of the God of Israel; and under the *footstool of His feet which was placed beneath His throne*, was like the work of a sapphire stone."<sup>5</sup> In these paraphrases there is apparently an apologetic motivation, though its exact nature is uncertain. Such paraphrases may be directed at pagan defenses of image-making ("Your God has human form, too"), or they may be attempts to reconcile this passage with others (e.g., Ps 139:7-10) which picture God's omnipresence. The effect in this passage, however, is to obscure the details of an important Old Testament theophany.

2. A milder example of paraphrasing away an anthropomorphism occurs in the LXX of Joshua 4:24. Here the literal translation "hand of the Lord" is replaced by "power of the

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Marcel Simon, *Jewish Sects at the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta* 7<sup>th</sup> ed., 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1962), 1:127. My translation and italics.

<sup>4</sup> J. W. Etheridge, ed., *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch, with Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum, from the Chaldee*, 2 vols. in 1 (London: 1862-65; reprint ed., New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1968), 1:400. Italics mine.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:526. Italics mine.

Lord."<sup>6</sup> Most interpreters would agree that this paraphrase accurately represents the meaning of the author, even though his wording has not been retained.

## Expansion

Early Jewish exegetes also expanded the Biblical texts to resolve difficulties.

3. One example involves Jacob's dream at Bethel. McNamara<sup>7</sup> claims that Genesis 28:11 pictures Jacob using several stones for a pillow and that Gen 18:18 has him using only one. He suggests that the Palestinian Targum seeks to resolve this by postulating a miracle: "... the four stones which Jacob had set for his pillow he found in the morning had become one stone."<sup>8</sup> It is not possible to be sure whether McNamara is right in seeing this expansion as an attempt to resolve a difficulty. The RSV, NEB, NASB and NIV all translate the Hebrew מאבני as "one of the stones." If they are right, there is no difficulty here. It may, however, be a place where peculiar exegesis is used to build up one of the patriarchs by multiplying the miraculous. In either case, this seems to be an example of apologetic motivation distorting the text.

There are a number of examples of expansion designed to make the good characters of the Old Testament better and the bad ones worse.

4. The Book of Jubilees is an intertestamental work which retells Genesis, restructuring the whole into a chronology of seven-year sabbatical cycles and jubilees, and reading back many Mosaic laws into the patriarchal period. Here Abraham is pictured (Jub 11:6ff) as rejecting idolatry in his youth:

And the child began to understand the errors of the earth, that all went astray after graven images and after uncleanness ... and he separated himself from his father that he might not worship idols with him.<sup>9</sup>

5. Jacob doesn't quite lie to Isaac when his father asks him if he is really his son Esau. According to Jub 26:19, Jacob answers "I am thy son"<sup>10</sup> instead of the Biblical "I am" (Gen 27:24).

6. In Jub 35:12, Jacob is called Isaac's "perfect and upright son," and his mother Rebecca testifies (35:6): "My son, I have not seen in thee all my days any perverse but (only) upright deeds."

7. By contrast, Isaac says of Esau (Jub 35:13):

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<sup>6</sup> Rahlfs, *Septuaginta*, 1:360.

<sup>7</sup> Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament* (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1972; American ed., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 71-72.

<sup>8</sup> Etheridge, *Targums*, 1:252.

<sup>9</sup> R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2:30.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:53.

... now I love Jacob more than Esau, for he has done manifold evil deeds, and there is no righteousness in him, for all his ways are unrighteousness and violence.

According to McNamara, avoidance of anthropomorphism and building up Israel and its elders were standard features of early Jewish exegesis.<sup>11</sup> This latter feature also appears to be apologetically motivated. Whatever its original cause, its effect appears to have been to scale down recognition of the real pervasiveness of sin, aiding in the rise or maintenance of the sort of legalism which Jesus so scathingly attacked among the Pharisees.

### **Omission**

As expansions of the Biblical text were designed to make the elders look better, so were omissions. In the synagogue reading of Scripture, certain passages were not targummed (translated into Aramaic). The Mishnah (*Meg* 4.10) lists several such passages.<sup>12</sup>

8. One, the blessing of the priests (Numbers 6:24-26), was presumably omitted because the translator might not be a priest and therefore unqualified to pronounce the benediction. The others, however (Reuben's incest, the golden calf, David and Bathsheba, Amnon and Tamar) were clearly omitted for apologetic reasons, whether to protect the reputation of Israel and its patriarchs or to avoid planting sinful ideas in the minds of the worshipers.

The Jewish historian Josephus also is involved in this activity. His *Antiquities of the Jews* was written to Gentiles (among other purposes) to impress them with the great age of the Jewish nation relative to the Greeks and to demonstrate Jewish virtue and the wisdom of the Biblical laws.<sup>13</sup>

9. To Josephus' credit, he does not omit an account of the slaughter of the Shechemites by Jacob's sons (Genesis 34). However, he does omit the fact they accomplished this feat with the aid of a false covenant and the Shechemites' pain due to their recent circumcision.<sup>14</sup> It certainly would not have helped the Jewish proselytism of the time for Josephus to advertise that Jews had once slain Gentiles who had entered a covenant of circumcision with them!

10. Josephus also omits Moses' slaying of an Egyptian in narrating his departure from Egypt as a young man (Exodus 2:11).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, 33-34.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> H. St. John Thackeray, Ralph Marcus, Allen Wikgren and L. H. Feldman, eds., *Josephus*, 9 vols., The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1926-65); *Antiquities* 1.5-25 (Preface). Parenthetical references will be to the Whiston edition.

<sup>14</sup> *Antiquities* 1.337-340 (1.21.1).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.254-256 (2.11.1).

11. The golden calf episode (Exodus 32) is also omitted.<sup>16</sup>

To be fair to Josephus, it was not his purpose to give every Old Testament incident in his *Antiquities*. There is also something to be said for not advertising one's shortcomings to others. Yet for all of this, the result is an interpretation of Scripture which plays down the real sinfulness of God's people.

### Literal Exegesis

If Josephus was not exactly fair in defending the Jews, he was far more balanced than some of his pagan opponents.<sup>17</sup> In his defense *Against Apion*, he mentions Lysimachus as claiming Moses taught the Jews to hate all men, give misleading advice, and destroy temples.<sup>18</sup> Apollonius Molon, he reports, calls the Jews "atheists and misanthropes ... cowards ... the most witless of all barbarians ... the only people who have contributed no useful invention to civilization."<sup>19</sup>

One might be inclined to doubt the testimony of Josephus in this matter, were it not for the fact that extant pagan authors speak the same way. The Roman historian Tacitus, for instance, cites considerable anti-Semitic material from the Greek authors,<sup>20</sup> for example:

The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor ... the other customs of the Jews are base and abominable, and owe their persistence to their depravity ... the Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity.<sup>21</sup>

In answering these kinds of charges, Josephus often employs straight-forward exegesis:

12. To the charge of Apollonius Molon that the Jews will not admit pagans to their society, Josephus admits this is true. The reason, he says, for God prohibiting such mixture is to keep out "persons with other preconceived ideas about God" and to avoid association with "those who have chosen to adopt a different mode of life." He compares this regulation to Plato's *Republic* in which foreigners were kept out so that the state would be "pure and confined to law-abiding citizens."<sup>22</sup> This is certainly a fair representation of the Old Testament laws separating Jew and Gentile, seeing that they both warn the Jews against being tempted to idolatry by pagans and also provide for Gentiles becoming proselytes.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 3.75-101 (3.5.1-8).

<sup>17</sup> See the materials collected in Menachem Stern, ed., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 1: *From Herodotus to Plutarch* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> *Against Apion* 1.304-311 (1.34).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 2.148 (2.15).

<sup>20</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v., "Anti-Semitism. In Antiquity," by Joseph Heinemann, Joshua Gattmann and staff.

<sup>21</sup> Tacitus, *Histories* 5.4-5; cited in Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, s.v. "Tacitus."

<sup>22</sup> *Against Apion* 2.257-258 (2.37).

More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that Philo of Alexandria, the great proponent of allegorical exegesis, also used literal exegesis to answer pagan attacks:

13. Against the Gentile claim that the Jews were taught to hate them, Philo responded by noting in detail the very important place which love for mankind has in the Mosaic laws. Philo discusses this virtue, among others, in a literal and straight-forward way in his work *On Virtues*.<sup>23</sup>

### **Allegorical Exegesis**

Allegory in the strict sense is usually associated with the Jewish philosopher-exegete Philo, who, as we shall see below, made considerable use of this technique. If, however, we define allegory broadly as "an attempt to find in a text hidden meanings for which there is no explicit evidence," then the rabbis also used allegory apologetically.

14. Already before the time of Christ, Hillel set forth seven rules,<sup>24</sup> which were expanded to thirteen by R. Ishmael in the second century AD.<sup>25</sup> At first sight, these rules seem merely to be logical principles. As actually applied, however, they were used to uncover "deeper meanings,"<sup>26</sup> some of which are clearly fantastic.<sup>27</sup> Vermes suggests these rules were designed to link the Oral Law (however tenuously) to the written Torah.<sup>28</sup> The apologetic motivation in all this may have been to reformulate Judaism after the fall of the second temple, as Vermes suggests,<sup>29</sup> or to defend the Pharisaic position against the Sadducees who rejected the Oral Law.<sup>30</sup> Probably both were involved.

15. There is a little allegory here and there in Josephus also. He refers, for example, to the tabernacle as a symbol of the universe.<sup>31</sup> So little point is made of this by Josephus, however, that it is not clearly apologetically motivated.

But allegory comes into its own as an apologetic device with Philo. Borrowing a tool which the Stoics had used to avoid embarrassment from Homer and the Greek myths and to find their own philosophy therein, Philo put it to use in the service of his brand of Judaism. As Beryl Smalley notes:

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<sup>23</sup> Erwin R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 44.

<sup>24</sup> Briefly discussed in Frederic W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 18-22.

<sup>25</sup> Briefly discussed in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Hermeneutics" by Lewis Jacobs, 8:367-370.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

<sup>27</sup> See examples in Farrar, *Interpretation*, 20-21.

<sup>28</sup> Geza Vermes, "Bible and Midrash: Early Old Testament Exegesis" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 3 vols., ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (Cambridge: University Press, 1963-70), 1:222.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, rev. ed. (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1949; reprint ed., New York: Schocken Books, 1975), xxi, 146.

<sup>31</sup> *Antiquities* 3.123 (3.6.4).

The chief function of allegory was apologetic. It enabled him to read philosophy into the Scriptures and to exalt such details as might seem trivial or scandalous to a higher level.<sup>32</sup>

This is seen in Philo's rules for excluding the literal sense. The literal meaning is not only rejected when Scripture itself allegorizes, but also when it states something unworthy of God, or when literal interpretation would produce a contradiction.<sup>33</sup>

One prominent type of allegorization for Philo involves anthropomorphisms, which earlier interpreters removed by paraphrase. Philo's solution is characteristically Greek:

The whole question of "personality" in God had not been raised by either Jew or Greek, and it never entered Philo's head to raise it. The matter had reached only the stage of questioning "anthropomorphism" and here Philo stands firmly with the Greek philosophers, to the point of saying that the anthropomorphic passages in the Bible are nonsense if taken literally.<sup>34</sup>

16. As an illustration of Philo's treatment of anthropomorphism, consider his comments on Genesis 4:16, "... Cain went out from the face of God...":

Let us here raise the question whether in the books in which Moses acts as God's interpreter we ought to take his statements figuratively, since the impression made by the words in their literal sense is greatly at variance with truth. For if the Existent Being has a face, and he that wishes to quit its sight can with perfect ease remove elsewhere, what ground have we for rejecting the impious doctrines of Epicurus, or the atheism of the Egyptians, or the mythical plots of play and poem of which the world is full?<sup>35</sup>

Philo goes on to say that God has no "parts" or "passions,"<sup>36</sup> and so far most interpreters who take the Bible as God's revelation would agree. But when we reach his positive suggestion, Philo allegorizes "to go out from the face of God" to mean "to become incapable of receiving a mental picture of Him through having lost the sight of the soul's eye."<sup>37</sup>

The apologetic motivation is quite obvious here, and such passages have caused Philo and other early Jewish interpreters to do some thinking. Yet the context of the passage (sacrifice, Cain and God talking) suggests the possibility of some sort of local theophany,

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<sup>32</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952; reprint ed., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Farrar, *Interpretation*, 22.

<sup>34</sup> Goodenough, *Philo*, 87.

<sup>35</sup> F. H. Colson, G. H. Whitaker and R. Marcus, eds., *Philo*, 12 vols., The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1929-53), 2:329; *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile* 1.2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.7-8.

perhaps analogous to God's later manifestations in connection with Sinai, the tabernacle and temple. If so, "face" might be understood as "visible presence," and leaving "God's face" as departing from the place of His manifestation. That Philo does not suggest some such possibility may well indicate the heavy influence of Platonic philosophy on his exegesis.

17. Much of Philo's other allegorizing may be understood as an implicit answer to the pagan charge that the Jews had contributed nothing to civilization. Philo answers, on the contrary, that all that is greatest in Greek philosophy comes from Moses:

He insisted always and on every occasion that the Jewish Scriptures taught Greek mysticism in a perfect way which the Greeks themselves never approximated. To show this he had to do some amazing things with the scriptural texts. But he refused to believe that anything so sublime as Greek philosophy and mysticism could have been unsuspected by Moses and the Patriarchs.<sup>38</sup>

18. Clearly Philo understood that he was not interpreting the Genesis narratives literally when he saw in the lives of the Patriarchs and their wives complex allegories of how the soul may attain to true philosophy and union with God,<sup>39</sup> yet the Greek philosophers he admired were doing similar things to their sacred literature. Allegory allowed him to find timeless truths about the soul and God in passages which the contemporary Greek culture would have considered mere and unedifying history:

When these difficulties are past, Philo's ideas of psychology become much easier. The Stoic eightfold division of the soul ... the Platonic division ... the Aristotelian division ... all these Philo can use interchangeably, guided largely by the numbers or details involved in a scriptural passage he may at the time be allegorizing.<sup>40</sup>

We see here the danger of allegory, a tool which can make any text say anything. Coupled with apologetic motivation, the text can be interpreted to fit one's own theology, to appeal to some target audience, or to match the unchallenged presuppositions of contemporary society. In fact, Philo appears to have been doing a little of all three. His own theology is eclectic, both accepting and rejecting elements of Greek philosophy, but also doing the same with the normal understanding of Scripture. He is seeking to reach cultured pagans and to keep Jews in the fold who are in danger of apostasy to Hellenism. He accepts without question a Platonic contempt for the body, history and literal interpretation and a corresponding exaltation of the soul, philosophy and allegory. Philo's methodology, through Origen and others, later brought the same problems into Christianity.

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<sup>38</sup> Goodenough, *Philo*, 88.

<sup>39</sup> *Allegories of the Sacred Law*.

<sup>40</sup> Goodenough, *Philo*, 114.

19. Yet Philo did not see himself as paganizing, but rather as a faithful Jew who through Greek philosophy had found the right questions by which to understand the Bible:

What had this mystical life to do with Judaism? It was Jewish for Philo in every particular. True, the whole formulation of escape from matter ... of the higher knowledge, mystic union ... were all foreign to any natural meaning in his Bible, and came to him and his fellows directly from the pagans about him. But Jews felt that though the pagans had asked the right questions about how man was to come to a higher reality, still the pagan answers were nonsense. Judaism had the true answer, and Judaism alone.<sup>41</sup>

### Early Christian Exegesis

In Christianity the apologetic concerns were somewhat more complex, as orthodox Christians faced a war on three fronts, against paganism, Judaism and heresy.

#### Against Judaism

The earliest apologetic of Christianity was directed against Judaism, since Christianity began its mission in Jerusalem. Two main concerns of this apologetic involved (1) the Messiahship and deity of Jesus, and (2) the continuation of the Old Testament law.

Regarding the first of these, the groundwork for Christian apologetic exegesis was already laid by Jesus and the New Testament writers in their use of Old Testament passages.

20. We see some good exegesis of such materials not only in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* (the Jew), but also in Origen's *Against Celsus* (the pagan) and Tertullian's *Against Marcion* (the heretic). Messianic prophecy was not only a valuable apologetic against Judaism, but also against paganism and certain of the heresies.

21. Christians also fastened upon a number of Old Testament passages which indicated that God was not a strict unity in the sense understood by Jews. For example, Justin argues that one of the three men who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18 was God (18:1, 2, 22, 33; 19:1), but also distinct from God, as seen in Gen 19:24, "the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven."<sup>42</sup>

22. A reaction to this sort of argument appears in the Palestinian Targum in Genesis 18, where it is explained that all three men are angels, three being needed because "... it is not possible for a ministering angel to be sent for more than one purpose at a time." One is sent to announce Isaac's birth, a second to rescue Lot, and a third to destroy Sodom.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>42</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 1:223-224; *Dialogue* 56.

<sup>43</sup> Etheridge, *Targums*, 1:209.

The Targum clearly distinguishes God from the three angels in verses 2 and 3, and especially at verse 22:

And the angels who had the likeness of men, turned thence and went toward Sodom. And Abraham now supplicated mercy for Lot, and ministered in prayer before the Lord.<sup>44</sup>

23. Yet we also see Christians involved in some very weak allegorical argumentation in this area. Justin argues that the cross is prefigured by the tree of life, by Moses' rod, by the tree that sweetens the waters of Marah, by Jacob's peeled rods, by Aaron's rod that budded, and even by Jacob's staff which Tamar took as a pledge!<sup>45</sup>

24. Of the same stripe is the argument in Barnabas 9:8 that Abraham's 318 servants prefigure the cross of Christ. In Greek alphabetic numerals 318 is TIH,<sup>46</sup> T = cross, and IH are the first two letters of "Jesus."

The second line of argumentation involved the Jewish belief that the law was eternal. The apocryphal book Baruch speaks in 4:1 of "the law that endureth forever." Josephus, after the fall of Jerusalem, says: "Robbed though we be of wealth, of cities, of all good things, our Law at least remains immortal."<sup>47</sup> Rabbinic argumentation sought to support this belief from Scripture:

25. Leviticus 27:34, "These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the sons of Israel at Mount Sinai," was understood<sup>48</sup> to teach that no prophet coming after Moses could introduce any innovations.

26. Another rabbinic argument was based on Deuteronomy 30:11-12, "This commandment ... is not in heaven":

Moses said to Israel: "Do not say: 'Another Moses will arise and bring us another Torah from heaven'; I therefore warn, IT IS NOT IN HEAVEN, that is to say, no part of it has remained in heaven."<sup>49</sup>

The first known Christian martyr Stephen was put to death for allegedly saying "that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us" (Acts 6:14). Since Stephen is not allowed to complete his defense, we do not know whether or not this is a fair representation of his teaching.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 212-13.

<sup>45</sup> Justin, *Dialogue* 86.

<sup>46</sup> John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), 43.

<sup>47</sup> *Against Apion* 2.277 (2.39).

<sup>48</sup> Isidore Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud*, 35 vols. (London: Soncino Press, 1935-52); Meg 2b; Shab 104a.

<sup>49</sup> H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *The Midrash Rabbah*, 5 vols. (London: Soncino Press, 1977); Deut. R. 8.6.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote to Jewish Christians facing a persecution in which they were tempted to abandon their Christianity and return to safety in Judaism. One of his grounds for arguing that they must not do this is that the law has been superseded. He proceeds to demonstrate this with a brilliant literal exegesis of three Old Testament passages:

27. In Heb 7:11-25, he argues from Psalm 110:4, "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek,'" noting that a change in priesthood from the Levitical requires a change in the law.

28. In Heb 8:1-13, he cites Jeremiah's prediction of a new covenant (Jer 31:31-34), arguing that God would not mention a new covenant if the old were adequate (8:7) and that the term "new" implies the obsolescence of the Mosaic one (8:13).

29. In Heb 10:1-9, the author of the epistle cites Psalm 40:6-8, arguing that the animal sacrifices and offerings of the Mosaic covenant were not God's ultimate purpose, but that they foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Coming One predicted in Scripture, who "takes away the first in order to establish the second."

30. In striking contrast to this exegesis is that found in the epistle of (Pseudo-) Barnabas. Rather than argue for a change in the law, the writer contends that God never did intend the kosher laws to be literally observed. Regarding, for example, the prohibition on eating pork:

Therefore it is not God's commandment that they (literally) should not eat, but Moses spoke in the spirit. For this reason, then, he mentions the "pig": Do not associate, he is saying, with such men – men who are like pigs. That is, men who forget their Lord when they are well off, but when they are in need, they acknowledge the Lord; just as when the pig is feeding it ignores its keeper, but when it is hungry it makes a din.<sup>50</sup>

In such debates between Jews and Christians, disagreement soon developed over the text of the Old Testament. The Jews claimed that the Masoretic text must be followed; the Christians responded that the Jews had deleted Christological materials from it.<sup>51</sup>

31. For apologetic reasons, therefore, Origen determined to use the Jews' own text with them in debate. It thus appears that an apologetic motivation was involved in Origen's massive Hexapla project, by which he made the Masoretic text available in Greek for Christians.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Robert M. Grant, gen. ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, 6 vols. (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964-68), vol. 3: *The Didache and Barnabas* by Robert A. Kraft, 110; Barn 10:2b-3.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Justin, *Dialogue* 81-83.

<sup>52</sup> M. F. Wiles, "Origen as a Biblical Scholar" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 1:456, 458.

## Against Paganism

As a sample of early Christian exegesis against paganism, let us consider Origen's work *Against Celsus*. Celsus, a second century pagan philosopher, was the author of *The True Discourse*, a lengthy and fairly sophisticated attack on Christianity which employed both Jewish and pagan materials. Origen's reply, which is unquestionably apologetically motivated, has several interesting methodological remarks:

32. Origen admits the difficulty of proving the historicity of an account at some later time. Responding to Celsus' skepticism regarding the voice at Jesus' baptism, he says:

Before we begin our reply, we have to remark that the endeavour to show, with regard to almost any history, however true, that it actually occurred, and to produce an intelligent conception regarding it, is one of the most difficult undertakings that can be attempted, and is in some cases an impossibility.<sup>53</sup>

33. Origen admits that some of Celsus' arguments are weighty. For instance, Celsus objects that Jesus did not appear to everyone after his resurrection.<sup>54</sup> Origen spends several chapters to provide an answer, yet he does not appear to have been totally successful.

34. Origen occasionally suggests stronger arguments which Celsus could have used but apparently overlooked. For instance, Celsus' objections to Jesus' genealogy do not involved the apparent discrepancies between Matthew and Luke.<sup>55</sup> Celsus claims the flood narrative is falsified from that of Deucalion, but does not pounce on the problem of getting all the animals in an ark of the size reported.<sup>56</sup> Apologetic motivation, then is not necessarily inconsistent with recognizing problems and allowing due weight to the arguments of opponents.

35. Origen seeks to be fair to Celsus, but complains that Celsus is not fair with the Scripture:

... Celsus ought to have recognized the love of truth displayed by the writers of sacred Scripture, who have not concealed even what is to their discredit ...<sup>57</sup>

... observe in what a spirit of hatred and falsehood Celsus collects together the statements of sacred history; so that wherever it appeared to him to contain a ground of accusation he produces the passage, but wherever there is any exhibition of virtue worthy of mention – as when Joseph

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<sup>53</sup> Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4; *Against Celsus* 1.42.

<sup>54</sup> *Against Celsus* 2.63.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.32.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.41.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.45.

would not gratify the lusts of his mistress, refusing alike her allurements and her threats – he does not even mention the circumstance!<sup>58</sup>

Although Origen is inclined to allegorize the Old Testament heavily, much of his apologetic exegesis is literal:

36. In discussing the word *almah* in Isaiah 7:14, Celsus adopts the Jewish argument that it merely means "young woman," but Origen argues that it literally means "virgin." Origen considers its usage elsewhere in the Old Testament (though not exhaustively).<sup>59</sup> He then discusses its context, especially the reference (7:11) to its being a "sign," noting that the normal birth of a child would hardly be a sign as "high as heaven" or as "deep as Sheol." He notes that the title "Immanuel" (God with us) is also more appropriate to the Christian interpretation.<sup>60</sup>

37. When Celsus claims that Paul's remarks in 1 Corinthians 3:19 ("the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God") show that Christians are trying to appeal to "the ignorant and foolish alone," Origen explains that the reference is to "wisdom of the world," that is, human wisdom rather than divine wisdom.<sup>61</sup> He later goes on to say that Christians do not despise even human wisdom, pointing to the education of Moses and Daniel and noting that some such also exist among Christians.<sup>62</sup>

38. Origen even refuses to use allegory in defending Lot's daughters for their incest with their father, though he intimates that the passage has allegorical significance. Instead he suggests that the girls supposed all the rest of mankind had been destroyed (not an unreasonable interpretation of Genesis 19:31) and were seeking to preserve the human race.<sup>63</sup>

Yet allegory is also a part of Origen's apologetic. He does not deny Celsus' charge that "the more modest of Jewish and Christian writers" use allegory, though he is not willing to grant that they do so "because they are ashamed of these things."<sup>64</sup> Origen responds that if Celsus is going to attack Christians for this, the Greek literature which is allegorized is far more shameful! Instead he argues that the Bible gives evidence that it is *intended* to be allegorized without, however, denying the historicity of its events:<sup>65</sup>

39. Origen (literally exegeting) gives examples of Paul's reference to muzzling the ox (1 Cor 9:9-10), to marriage as a picture of Christ and the church (Eph 5:31-32), to the Israelites being "baptized" in the Red Sea (1 Cor 10:1-2) and being followed by Christ the spiritual rock (1 Cor 10:4). Less aptly, perhaps, he claims that Asaph's remark "I will

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 4.46.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 1.34.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 1.35.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 6.12.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 6.14.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 4.45.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4.48.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 4.49.

open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old" (Psalm 78:2) indicates "the histories of Exodus and Numbers to be full of difficulties and parables."<sup>66</sup>

40. When Origen actually applies allegory to the Old Testament in answer to Celsus' ridicule against the Bible recording trivia, the results are not so happy. Jacob's devices to get Laban's livestock (Genesis 30) prefigure the salvation of the Gentiles. The narratives of patriarchal well-digging (as opposed to cisterns) point to their reception of blessings from God, the real source of blessing. The patriarchal marriages and intercourse also have spiritual meanings which, however, Origen prefers to discuss in his commentaries.<sup>67</sup>

As in Philo's allegorizing, so in Origen's we see the influence of Platonism – the debasing of history and the allegorizing of sacred literature. Though Origen refuses to deny the historicity of Biblical events, he is not able to see their place in salvation history. With such a tool as allegory ready at hand, we should not be surprised to see it used in apologetics as well as in other exegetical activities such as teaching and preaching.<sup>68</sup>

### **Against Heresies**

As an example of early Christian apologetic against heresy, let us consider Tertullian's work *Against Marcion*, which has been characterized as "one of the finest pieces of scriptural exposition in Christian antiquity."<sup>69</sup> Marcion, raised a Christian, came to teach that the God of the Old Testament was a different being than the God of the New Testament. Both existed, but the former was harsh, the latter merciful. The former was the creator of matter; the latter, above and beyond creation, was the Father of Jesus. In his *Antitheses* Marcion sought to demonstrate his thesis by collecting apparent discrepancies between the Old Testament and the New.

By and large, Tertullian responds to Marcion by means of a straight-forward literal exegesis.

41. To Marcion's claim that the law-gospel distinction points to different Gods behind the Old Testament and the New Testament,<sup>70</sup> Tertullian responds that such a change was actually predicted in the Old Testament. He cites Jeremiah 31 on the new covenant; Hosea 2:11 on putting an end to Israel's festivals; Isaiah 1:13-14 on God's hatred of Israel's ceremonials; Jeremiah 4:4 on circumcising the heart; and (far less cogently) Isaiah 43:19, "Behold I will do a new thing."<sup>71</sup> All of this is fairly literal interpretation, though one could well question whether every passage is likely to be referring to the coming of the new covenant in Christ.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 4.43-44.

<sup>68</sup> See the summary on the apologetic value of allegory in Smalley, *Bible in the Middle Ages*, 2; on Origen's treatment of problem passages, see Wiles, "Origen as a Biblical Scholar," 463.

<sup>69</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, "Biblical Exegesis in the Early Church" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 1:427.

<sup>70</sup> Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3; *Against Marcion* 1.19.

<sup>71</sup> *Against Marcion* 1.20.

42. Tertullian also notes that in all of Paul's remarks about the law-grace distinction, there is not the slightest hint that he knew anything of some new God, unknown in the Old Testament.<sup>72</sup> This is certainly straight-forward exegesis, and it attacks through a gaping hole in Marcion's position, using Marcion's "own" apostle against him!

As noted earlier (case 20), Tertullian uses Old Testament Messianic prophecy in his apologetic. As it happens, a literal exegesis of such material is well-adapted to fight Marcion's particular heresy, as it demonstrates a vital link between Old and New Testaments.

43. Though obviously apologetically motivated, Tertullian has thought over some of the hermeneutical principles involved in the interpretation of prophecy. He is aware of the larger figurative element in this material:

... very many events are figuratively predicted by means of enigmas and allegories and parables, and ... they must be understood in a sense different from the literal description.<sup>73</sup>

Tertullian is also aware of the prophetic perfect,<sup>74</sup> probably through the literal nature of his Latin version of the Bible, as he notes that "future events are sometimes announced as if they were already passed."<sup>75</sup>

44. Tertullian responds to Marcion's characterization of the Old Testament God as severe and the New Testament God as merciful by generalizing his exegesis to the level of theological synthesis. There is only one God, says Tertullian, who always demonstrates his attributes of both justice and mercy.<sup>76</sup> This is certainly based on a straight-forward exegesis of numerous passages in both testaments.

On occasion, Tertullian will seek to answer Marcion's charges by making distinctions or by attempting to go "behind the text" to the author's (God's) inferred intention:

45. Marcion, for instance, attacks the Old Testament God as "creating evil" (Isaiah 45:7). Tertullian responds by distinguishing between "sinful evil" and "penal evil" (disaster brought upon people by God), claiming that God is the author of the second kind only.<sup>77</sup> This is certainly a reasonable interpretation of "evil" in Isa 45:7, based both on its context (God's control of history) and its other occurrences with the word "peace." Today we would probably say the Hebrew word עָוֶן means both (moral) "evil" and "disaster."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 1.21.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 3.5.

<sup>74</sup> E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., translated A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), §106n.

<sup>75</sup> *Against Marcion* 3.5.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 2.29.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 2.14.

<sup>78</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 947-949; William A. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 341-342.

46. Apparently Marcion saw the Old Testament law of retaliation (Exodus 21:24 and parallels) as the unmerciful God's "permission to mutual injury." Tertullian responds that God reserves vengeance to himself (Deut 32:35), and then goes beyond any explicit statements in the text to suggest that such a penalty is to the contrary a deterrent, even to "hot-blooded injury."<sup>79</sup> This is a very reasonable guess as to God's purpose behind the law.

47. Less successful is Tertullian's response to Marcion's mockery of the distinction between clean and unclean foods. Tertullian sees the prohibition of certain meats as a regulation to control the appetite, to encourage fasting, and to inhibit the related vices of "lust and luxury."<sup>80</sup> It is easy to see here an apologetic desire to have a ready answer when the correct one is unknown, though we cannot rule out the possibility that this interpretation was originally motivated by a desire to find Biblical warrant for ascetic practices.

Tertullian makes little use of allegory in his apologetics compared with Philo or the Epistle of Barnabas, yet he is not entirely free from the vice:

48. When discussing the Old Testament prohibition on eating cuttlefish (see Deut 14:9-10), he sees the regulation a figurative one for avoiding heretics,<sup>81</sup> using much the same argument as in Barnabas 10:5, 10b.

### Post-Nicene Exegesis

With the legalization of Christianity (and later, its establishment), paganism and Judaism become less of a threat. Yet apologetic motivation remained an integral part of exegesis. According to Theodore of Mopsuestia, the task of the exegete was (1) to explain hard words in the text, and (2) to defend orthodoxy.<sup>82</sup> As samples of apologetic exegesis in this period, let us consider Jerome's work *Against Helvidius* and Augustine's *Harmony of the Gospels*.

#### **Jerome *Against Helvidius***

Helvidius was a fourth century Christian theologian who sought to defend marriage against asceticism. He wrote attacking the theory that Mary had continued a virgin after the birth of Christ, arguing rather that Jesus' brothers and sisters were younger natural children of Joseph and Mary. Jerome's reply, actually entitled *Concerning the Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Mary Against Helvidius*, maintains that Mary was always a virgin and that the brothers and sisters of Jesus were actually cousins, children of Mary's sister

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<sup>79</sup> *Against Marcion* 2.18.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.20.

<sup>82</sup> Theodore, *Commentary on John*; cited in M. F. Wiles, "Theodore of Mopsuestia as Representative of the Antiochene School" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 1:491.

Mary, the wife of Alphaeus.<sup>83</sup> The debate is conducted exegetically though somewhat abusively!

49. Helvidius argues from Matthew 1:18 ("before they came together") that Mary and Joseph later did "come together" to have children. Jerome does not deny the sexual meaning of "come together," but he argues that the phrase "before ..." can be used for an action contemplated but not subsequently carried out.<sup>84</sup>

50. Helvidius argues from the use of the term "wife" to describe Mary (Matt 1:20, 24) that she and Joseph were actually married. Jerome shows that the term is used in the Old Testament for those who are only betrothed as well.<sup>85</sup>

51. Helvidius then questions why God waited until Mary was betrothed to Joseph before her conception occurred. Here Jerome must speculate, but he suggests three reasons: (1) to show Mary's origin by means of Joseph's genealogy (assuming they were relatives); (2) to protect Mary from stoning on a charge of adultery by having Joseph to be commonly regarded as Jesus' father; (3) to provide Mary "some solace, though it was that of a guardian rather than a husband" during Mary's escape to Egypt.<sup>86</sup>

52. Helvidius argues that Matthew 1:25 ("Joseph knew her not till she gave birth") implies they had sexual relations after Jesus' birth. Jerome responds with examples of "till" where no change occurs when the time limit is reached (e.g., Isa 46:4; Matt 28:20; 1 Cor 15:25).<sup>87</sup>

53. Helvidius responds that Matt 1:25 would have been worded differently if the Bible really taught Jerome's view, as for example with Judah and Tamar in Gen 38:26: "And he did not have relations with her again." Jerome responds abusively, arguing from Lev 12:2-3 that Joseph could not have had relations with her immediately after childbirth:

Otherwise how can the words stand good, "he know her not, till she had brought forth a son," if he waits after the time of another purifying had expired, if his lust must brook another long delay of forty days? The mother must go unpurged from child-bed taint, and the wailing infant be attended by midwives, while the husband clasps his exhausted wife.<sup>88</sup>

54. Turning to Luke, Helvidius argues from 2:7 ("she gave birth to her first-born") that the term "first-born" is inapplicable to an only child, so Jesus must have had at least one brother or sister. Jerome responds from Numbers 18:15 that "first-born" must be applicable to an only child, for how could priests claim the firstlings if they had to wait

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<sup>83</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (1958), s.v. "Helvidius."

<sup>84</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 14 vols. (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), vol. 6; *Against Helvidius* 3-4.

<sup>85</sup> *Against Helvidius* 4.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

for successors? He notes that the redemption price may be paid as early as one month, long before a successor could be born. Finally Jerome notes how this law applies to Jesus in Luke 2:23-24.<sup>89</sup>

55. Helvidius now points to the passages mentioning Jesus' brothers, two of whom are James and Joseph (e.g., Matt 13:55-56) and claims that the "Mary, mother of James and Joseph" at the crucifixion (Matt 27:56) is Jesus' mother. Jerome compares the latter passage with its parallel in John 19:25 and claims that Mary the mother of James and Joseph is actually "Mary the wife of Clopas." This Mary, he says, is the sister of the virgin Mary and mother of the apostle James the Less (identifying his father Alphaeus with Clopas). James and his brothers were thus called brothers of Jesus, though they were actually only cousins.<sup>90</sup>

56. Regarding Helvidius' reference to Jesus' brothers, Jerome notes that "brother" is used in four senses in Scripture: (1) natural brothers, such as Jacob and Esau; (2) racial brothers, in the sense that all Jews are brothers; (3) relatives, as Abraham and Lot (Gen 13:8, 11), Laban and Jacob (Gen 29:12), where in each case a nephew is called "brother"; (4) brothers by affection, as all Christians are brothers. Jerome argues that Jesus' brothers are not (2) or (4); he then opts for (3), dismissing (1) with the remark that these "brothers" are nowhere called sons of Joseph or Mary.<sup>91</sup>

Looking back at this exchange, it is clear that Jerome is the better-equipped scholar of the two, and that both in the heat of argument over-reach themselves. Apologetic motivation clearly can cause one to overstate his case. Jerome does succeed in showing that his view is actually *possible*, but it depends on unusual interpretations of several words and phrases and a wholly speculative relationship between Mary of Clopas and Jesus' mother. Such an exchange, however, does have the merit of bringing out the best arguments on both sides, and of drawing attention to what the text actually says and what is its possible range of meaning. Apologetic motivation can also obscure understanding, but the clash of opponents with such motivation can also clarify it.

### **Augustine's *Harmony of the Gospels***

Let us move on to Augustine. His *Harmony of the Gospels* was the first attempt to give a complete discussion harmonizing all the incidents of the Gospel narratives. True, Tatian (late 2<sup>nd</sup> century) had produced a single interwoven account in his *Diatessaron*; Eusebius (early 4<sup>th</sup> century) had compiled lists of all parallel passages; and various commentators had dealt with particular passages. Augustine was not therefore completely innovating, yet his accomplishment was still substantial. Taking the traditional order of the Gospels as the order of their composition, he sees mark as merely preparing a condensation of Matthew.<sup>92</sup> Thus Augustine first goes through Matthew in order, discussing all events

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 13-16.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>92</sup> Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1<sup>st</sup> series, 14 vols. (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), vol. 6; *Harmony of the Gospels* 1.3-4.

with parallels in other Gospels; then he starts over again, discussing all events with parallels which are not in Matthew.

57. In discussing the differing genealogies in Matthew and Luke, Augustine proposes that "Joseph may have had two fathers, one natural and one adopted."<sup>93</sup> Luke, he thinks, probably lists the adopted father, as he is the one who uses "as was supposed" for Joseph being the father of Jesus.<sup>94</sup> This is, in fact, one of several possible harmonizations consistent with the accuracy of both Gospels, though probably not the most likely one.

58. Examining each genealogy separately, Augustine counts the generations in each and indulges in some typical number mysticism.<sup>95</sup> It is difficult to tell whether or not this is apologetically motivated, and if so, in what way. Allegory loves numbers, and the need to get edifying teaching and preaching material from genealogies is probably a sufficient motivation. Augustine takes no note of the fact that several names are missing from Matthew's genealogy; doubtless it would have confirmed his belief that the numbers were chosen for their mystical significance!

59. Comparing the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke, Augustine develops a general principle which he will apply elsewhere as well. Each evangelist, he believes, constructs his narrative on a plan of his own to give it the appearance of completeness and order. Any incidents which the evangelist does not plan to include will be passed over in silence.<sup>96</sup> This is a reasonable suggestion (though a guess) – one more favorable to the Bible's own claims for itself than modern liberal views that such differences were due to invention, bias or faulty transmission during the oral period. One might add the suggestion that the unusual shortness of the Gospel narratives (designed, perhaps, to facilitate their circulation in an age of expensive books) is the main reason behind the principle Augustine has proposed.

60. Augustine's principle by itself does not guarantee the proper reconstruction of the Gospel chronology, however. Augustine puts the visit of Joseph and Mary to the temple (Luke 2:22-38) after the visit of the Magi (Matt 2:9-112) instead of before,<sup>97</sup> making problems for himself later on.<sup>98</sup>

61. Regarding difference in order of events, Augustine notes that Matthew and Luke have Jesus' second and third temptations reversed. Having insufficient information, he does not arbitrarily try to solve the problem, but rather leaves the order uncertain.<sup>99</sup>

62. In discussing the relative order of the cleansing of the leper and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, Augustine asks:

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<sup>93</sup> *Harmony* 2.5; Augustine later changes his explanation to normal and levirate marriage, *Retractions* 2.16.

<sup>94</sup> *Harmony* 2.5.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.8-9, 12-13.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.16.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.17.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.24.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.33.

... of what consequence is it in what place any of them may give this account; or what difference does it make whether he inserts the matter in its proper order, or brings in at a particular point what was previously omitted, or mentions at an earlier stage what really happened at a later, provided only that he contradicts neither himself nor a second writer in the narrative of the same facts or of others?<sup>100</sup>

63. Regarding differences of wording, Augustine adopts various techniques. For the apparent discrepancy between John the Baptist's words to Jesus at his baptism (Matt 3:14): "I ought to be baptized by you," and John's words later to his disciples (John 1:33): "I knew him not," Augustine suggests that John did know Jesus in advance, but did not realize he was the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit until the sign of the dove occurred at his baptism.<sup>101</sup>

64. On the other hand, in the case of different words used by Jesus and his disciples when he calmed the sea, Augustine points out that all the accounts have the same general significance and the various words used make no real difference. Regarding the exact words actually spoken, he suggests the possibility that the various words of the disciples may all have been spoken by different individuals; the various words recorded of Jesus may each be parts of a longer statement.<sup>102</sup>

65. Regarding differences in number, Matthew mentions two Gadarene demoniacs, but Mark and Luke only one. Augustine presumes that one of the two was more noteworthy; perhaps he was particularly lamented or there was unusual anxiety for his deliverance.<sup>103</sup>

In all these matters, Augustine is surely motivated to defend the detailed historical accuracy of the evangelists. Those who deny such accuracy will naturally see a detrimental effect on his exegesis here. Yet if Augustine's assumption is correct, something of the sort must be done. Augustine in fact established the general approach to these problems that Bible-believers have followed ever since. In contrast to some harmonizing attempts, Augustine generally demonstrates "simplicity and good sense."<sup>104</sup>

This is not to say that Bible-believers agree in detail with Augustine's particular solutions or his reasons for them. Fifteen hundred years of further work have produced many alternative suggestions which seem more likely. In addition, in spite of Augustine's brilliance, spiritual insight and love for Scripture, he was weak both in linguistic and historical knowledge.<sup>105</sup>

66. Because Augustine knew little Greek, he harmonizes a discrepancy between the Latin of Matthew and Luke by postulating that part of the large herd of swine was "around the

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 2.51.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 2.32.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 2.55.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 2.56.

<sup>104</sup> Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1<sup>st</sup> series, 6:72.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 6:71-72.

mountain" and part "on the mountain."<sup>106</sup> There is no such problem in the Greek, where both Gospels have the herd on the mountain.

67. Similarly, Augustine uses the Latin to harmonize the location at which the palsied man is healed (Matt 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12). Matthew says the event occurred in Jesus' "own city," which was at Augustine's time understood to be Nazareth. Mark explicitly puts the event at Capernaum. Augustine plays on the double meaning of the Latin *civitas*, "city" or "state," to claim that Matthew's phrase means Galilee rather than Nazareth.<sup>107</sup> Today most expositors would see Capernaum as Jesus' "own city" in the sense that he lived there between preaching tours during his Galilean ministry (e.g., Matt 4:13: "leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum").

68. Augustine's historical knowledge is also weak. Though he rightly guesses that the Herod at Jesus' birth and trial are different persons, he is not aware of Josephus' histories which would make this explicit.<sup>108</sup> Later he is unaware of the length of Archelaus' reign, also available in Josephus.<sup>109</sup>

### Medieval Exegesis

The medieval period was especially the time when allegory dominated Biblical exegesis. Apologetic motivation was apparently one of the forces leading to the dominance of allegory, but it was also a force in delivering exegesis from allegory.

69. As noted above, fulfilled prophecy was valuable in argument not only with Jews and pagans, but also with some heretics. It also helped strengthen Christians in their faith.<sup>110</sup> In the course of early church history, allegory more and more came to replace literal exegesis in the interpretation of prophecy, while the rabbis in defense sought to abandon it altogether.<sup>111</sup>

70. Yet the dominance of allegory was itself attacked in Christian circles, and that for apologetic reasons. Isidore of Pelusium (died about 450) was concerned about the type of exegesis that found Christ everywhere in the Old Testament. This, he complained, only made it easier for opponents to reject the real Christological passages.<sup>112</sup> Yet in spite of Isidore's protest, allegory won out for centuries. It was not until the twelfth century that the Victorine school, under the influence of the Jewish literal exegesis of Rashi and his followers, began to revive literal interpretation in Christian circles.

71. Richard of St. Victor, for instance, saw both the influence of allegory in earlier handling of Biblical problems passages and the value of literal exegesis for the same:

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<sup>106</sup> *Harmony* 2.56.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.58.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.20.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.23.

<sup>110</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, "The Exposition of Scripture to Gregory the Great" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 2:162.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:163-164.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:178.

The ancient Fathers ... were glad to find passages which according to the letter could not stand. These "absurdities" of the letter enabled them to force certain persons, who accept Scripture but mocked at allegorical interpretations, to resort to a spiritual meaning .... This is the reason, in my opinion, why the ancient Fathers passed over in silence the literal exposition in certain more difficult passages, or treated it rather carelessly, when by perseverance they could doubtless have found a much more satisfying explanation than any of the moderns.<sup>113</sup>

72, Andrew of St. Victor used literal exegesis in the reconciliation of Genesis chapters one and two. Unlike Augustine and many of the fathers, he did not use the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus to claim that everything was really created simultaneously. Instead he pays close attention to the words of the Scripture text. Unlike modern liberals, he accepts the historical reliability of both passages. Thus he arrives at the conclusion that Genesis 2 is a recapitulation of selected parts of Genesis 1, much as Bible-believers see it today.<sup>114</sup>

73. Yet Andrew's exegesis of fulfilled prophecy raised quite a stir in Christian circles. Perhaps influenced by Jerome to view the Jewish interpretation as the proper literal interpretation,<sup>115</sup> Andrew thought Isaiah 53 literally referred to righteous Jews rather than to Christ.<sup>116</sup> In Andrew's defense, it should be noted that he, together with most medieval Christians, had come to associate Christian theology with allegorical exegesis. Thus he saw no need to argue that the Christological interpretation of Old Testament prophecy was the literal.<sup>117</sup>

74. By way of contrast, Andrew's contemporary Bartholomew of Exeter, no literalist himself, saw the Jews departing from the literal sense at just these crucial points:

The chief cause of disagreement between ourselves and the Jews seems to be this: they take all the Old Testament literally, whenever they can find a literal sense, unless it gives manifest witness to Christ. Then they repudiate it, saying that it is not in their books, or they refer it to some fable, as that they are still awaiting its fulfillment, or they escape by some other serpentine wile, when they feel themselves hard pressed.<sup>118</sup>

75. The upshot of this controversy was that Christians, influenced by apologetic motivation and by contact with Jewish exegesis, were forced to re-examine the relationship between the literal and theological meanings of the Biblical text. Was the

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<sup>113</sup> *Prologus in visionem Ezechiels* 527-28; cited in Smalley, *Bible in the Middle Ages*, 208.

<sup>114</sup> Smalley, *Bible in the Middle Ages*, 132-35.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-65.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>118</sup> *Dialogue against the Jews*; cited in Smalley, *Bible in the Middle Ages*, 170-71.

Jewish view of such passages as Isaiah 53 the true literal meaning (and the Christian view the true allegorical meaning), or was the Jewish view simply wrong?<sup>119</sup>

76. Apologetic motivation was also a stimulus to the renewal of language study in the Middle Ages:

... so technical a subject needs very strong stimulus to keep it healthy. Zeal for converting the infidel supplied the motive. It accounts largely for Roger Bacon's and Raymond Lull's pleas for the study of the language and for the arrangements made at the Council of Vienne.<sup>120</sup>

Science, too, began to revive with the rediscovery of Aristotle in the thirteenth century, after having been nearly defunct since before the Christian era. This led to attempts to reconcile the Bible with Aristotle, just as it had earlier been reconciled with Plato.

77. The Jewish scholar Maimonides went so far as to see Biblical prophecy as merely a natural phenomenon. However, he would not deny the doctrines of creation, providence, rewards and punishment.<sup>121</sup>

78. A milder form of reconciliation is seen in William of Auvergne, who supported Ecclesiastes 1:7 – "All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again." – by reference to Aristotle's *Meteorics*. Unfortunately for William's argument, his version of Aristotle was faulty, giving as Aristotle's view that of Plato which Aristotle was attacking!<sup>122</sup>

79. The rediscovery of Aristotle also brought Biblical exegesis into contact with the scientific outlook:

... a person accustomed to reading a scientific text, to reflecting on the mechanism of the universe and its component parts, will proceed to the study of any other text with new eyes. He will not be content to know that things happened but will ask how they happened. And he will fasten on to anything that adds to his stock of scientific knowledge.<sup>123</sup>

### **Reformation Exegesis**

Two of the most influential figures of the reformation period were Martin Luther and John Calvin. It is only proper in a quick sketch of apologetic motivation to examine samples of their exegesis.

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<sup>119</sup> Smalley, *Bible in the Middle Ages*, 364-65; Beryl Smalley, "The Bible in the Medieval Schools" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 2:214.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:219.

<sup>121</sup> Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, "The Study of the Bible in Medieval Judaism" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 2:274-75.

<sup>122</sup> Smalley, *Bible in the Middle Ages*, 310-11.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

## Martin Luther

Luther was unmistakably an apologist, an occupation which may put real strain on one's exegesis:

80. The theological controversies in which Luther engaged dealt with issues and opinions that came out of his exegesis. He often charged that his opponents had permitted controversy to blind them to the true meaning of the Scriptures, and his opponents often made the same charge against him. If these charges were true it was not the first time in the history of theology that this had happened, not yet the last.<sup>124</sup>

Yet Luther's apologetic motivation was not only negative in its effects. Pelikan also suggests a positive influence:

81. Nevertheless, it is also possible that something quite different was happening in Luther's theological controversies.... Possibly it was only in controversy that Luther found the true meaning of the Scriptures at one or another crucial place. As a debater, lecturer, and preacher accustomed to think on his feet, Luther seems frequently to have developed insights *ad lib* which had escaped him during the calm reflection of his study. Thus the problem of mutual influence of commentary and controversy in Luther is a complex one. He was not merely defending his view of the exegesis of the Scriptures in a controversy, he was shaping previous exegesis; he was re-examining his exegesis in the light of further study of the Scriptures.<sup>125</sup>

In looking at samples of Luther's exegesis, let us consider the two controversies discussed by Pelikan in his chapter "Commentary and Controversy": (1) Luther's debate at Leipzig with John Eck over papal primacy, and (2) his arguments with various Protestants over the nature of the Lord's Supper.<sup>126</sup>

82. In the former controversy, Luther dismisses Eck's argument from John 5:19 as irrelevant to the controversy. Rather than proving a hierarchy throughout the universe of which the ecclesiastical hierarchy is an analogue, it merely demonstrates the equality of Christ with the Father.<sup>127</sup> Here Luther is certainly on the sounder exegetical ground.

83. The main passage at issue between Eck and Luther was Matthew 16:18, the "rock" passage. Eck saw Peter as the rock; Luther identified the rock with "faith."<sup>128</sup> It is fair to say, with Luther, that faith in the person of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, is the

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<sup>124</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, companion volume to *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 109.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-134.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-112.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-115.

main point of the context, and that the church is surely built upon this. Yet in Eck's favor, Jesus does make a word-play between "Rock" and "Peter," which are similar in Greek and possibly identical in Aramaic. It thus appears that apologetic motivation is distorting the interpretation somewhat in order to win the argument. Surely a church that is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph 2:20) is therefore built upon Peter, even though Christ is the corner stone. To justify the Roman Catholic position, one must still prove that Peter designated successors and that these are the bishops of Rome.

84. The Leipzig debate also had hermeneutical consequences:

At Leipzig, Luther came to see the difference between Biblical exegesis and traditionalism. For traditionalism, as exemplified by Eck, the church fathers determined the meaning of the text; for Luther's exegesis, on the other hand, what the fathers said illumined but did not determine what the text meant .... Luther's method was to call upon the resources of the Bible and of tradition to help him, not in the substantiation of a traditional position but in the clarification of the text.<sup>129</sup>

85. Turning to the controversy over the Lord's Supper, Luther argues against Zwingli, Carlstadt and Oecolampadius that John 6:63 – "It is the spirit which gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." – is irrelevant to the controversy.<sup>130</sup> The context, he admits, does refer to the Lord's Supper in verse 55, but the phrase "the flesh" in verse 63 does not refer to Christ's flesh (for which Jesus always uses "my flesh"), but to unregenerate human nature, as in Genesis 6:3 and John 3:6. Thus verse 63 means we cannot understand Jesus' words unless we are regenerate.<sup>131</sup> The context refers to the spiritual eating and drinking of the believer in Christ (i.e., to "faith"), not just to the sacrament.<sup>132</sup> Here again, one feels that Luther has made a real contribution to understanding the passage, but that he has gone beyond the passage in the interests of defending his own peculiar view of the Lord's Supper. May not the passage be Jesus' explanation of another symbolic significance of the Lord's Supper? That just as the supper will look back to Christ's death and forward to the Messianic banquet, so it will remind believers that our daily life is sustained by faith in the death of Christ?

86. Positively, Luther maintained that "this is my body" must be understood literally. He admitted only three reasons for departing from the literal sense of a Biblical text: (1) an explicit statement in the text indicating it is figurative; (2) strong evidence from another passage that the text should be understood figuratively; or (3) disagreement of the literal sense with "a clear article of the faith."<sup>133</sup> When his opponents countered with the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 118-119.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 110, 121-22.

<sup>131</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works*, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958-67), 23:166-67.

<sup>132</sup> Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 122-23.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 126-27.

Biblical statements: "I am the vine" (John 15:1) and "the rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4), Luther replied that Christ really was a vine and a rock, only not a natural rock or vine.<sup>134</sup>

87. Finally Luther was driven to a sort of irrationalism:

Nothing avails here but to say: "Indeed in the matter of eating Christ's body and drinking Christ's blood I am not going to confer with reason; I shall give heed to what Christ Himself says on the subject." Reason suggests one evil thought after another to you. It continually turns up its nose at these words. But he who can overcome reason enters the spiritual school and the spiritual sphere .... It is immaterial to me that I cannot see this or cannot reason it out.<sup>135</sup>

Admitting that God's ways are beyond our full comprehension, it still seems that apologetic motivation defending a weak cause has here been driven to adopt a hermeneutic which, applied elsewhere, would be the end of all communication. Surely some sort of figurative sense for "this is my body" better fits the whole scope of Scripture. Yet Luther's strong emphasis on the literal was largely beneficial, especially when compared with the dominant allegorism that preceded him.

### **John Calvin**

Let us turn now to John Calvin, generally conceded to be the outstanding exegete of the period. Calvin urged restraint in exegesis:

88. Since in this life we cannot hope to achieve a permanent agreement in our understanding of every passage of Scripture, however desirable that would be, we must be careful not to be carried away by the lust for something new, not to yield to the temptation to indulge in sharp polemic, not to be aroused to animosity or carried away by pride, but to do what is necessary and to depart from the opinions of earlier exegesis only when it is beneficial to do so.<sup>136</sup>

89. The same caution carries over into apologetic exegesis:

We must always be careful not to give the Jews any reason to claim that we split hairs in order to find reference to Christ in passages not directly related to him.<sup>137</sup>

Yet Calvin, too, was involved in apologetics *per se*, not just in the apology that all commentators practice in defending their own interpretations. As a sample, let us

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>135</sup> *Luther's Works*, 23:168.

<sup>136</sup> *Corpus Reformatorum* 38,405; cited in Hans-Joachim Kraus, "Calvin's Exegetical Principles," *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 11-12.

<sup>137</sup> *Corpus Reformatorum* 59,644; cited in *ibid.*, 15.

consider his response to the letter written by Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto in 1539 to the Genevans urging them to return to the Catholic Church.<sup>138</sup>

90. To Sadoletto's claim that salvation is our chief and only good, that nothing is more disastrous than the loss on one's soul,<sup>139</sup> Calvin notes that man's "prime motive for his existence" is not salvation, but "zeal to illustrate the glory of God," citing Romans 11:36. Calvin does concede, however, that concern for one's salvation comes second behind this.<sup>140</sup> Though Calvin does not remark on the matter, the examples of Moses (Ex 32:32) and Paul (Rom 9:3) being willing to suffer destruction for Israel's sake would seem to favor Calvin here, or even to put one's salvation third behind the salvation of others.

91. Calvin agrees with Sadoletto regarding the danger of false worship to our salvation,<sup>141</sup> citing 2 Samuel 15:22. Calvin adopts this as the basis of his defense: Which group, Catholicism or Protestantism, has the true worship and which the false? The answer, says Calvin, must be decided by determining which worship is based on Scripture, citing John 10:27, Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Peter 1:23.<sup>142</sup> The passages are not exegeted in Calvin's letter, but all relate to God's people being obedient to God's word.

92. Sadoletto, surprisingly, argues that salvation is indeed by faith alone, but that faith is more than mere "credulity and confidence in God":

When we say, then, that we are saved by faith alone in God and Jesus Christ, we hold that in this very faith love is essentially comprehended as the chief and primary cause of our salvation.<sup>143</sup>

To this plausible presentation, Calvin responds that Paul's phrase "righteousness of faith" refers to an imputed righteousness, not one we have earned, since God is spoken of as "not imputing our sins" (2 Cor 5:19). Paul, he says, always speaks of justifying faith in the narrow sense of dependence on "a gratuitous promise of divine favor," and thus Paul may reason "if by faith, then not be works" and vice versa.<sup>144</sup> Calvin goes on to argue that although good works have no place in our justification, they must be present in our lives if indeed we are really Christians, that they are the very purpose of our calling and election (Eph 1:4, 1 Thess 4:7).<sup>145</sup> Regarding the relation of our love to our salvation, Calvin responds:

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<sup>138</sup> John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto, *A Reformation Debate*, ed. John C. Olin (New York: Harper and Row, 1966; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-38.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 59.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

... who can assign any other cause for our adoption than that which is uniformly announced in Scripture, viz., that we did not love Him, but were spontaneously received by Him into favor and affection?<sup>146</sup>

93. To Sadoletto's claim that Christians have their sins removed by performing "whatever expiation, penances and satisfactions" are commanded by the Church ("always" accompanied "by the grace and mercy of God"), Calvin responds sharply:

Your ignorance of this doctrine leads you on to the error of teaching that sins are expiated by penances and satisfactions. Where, then, will be that one expiating victim, from which, if we depart, there remains, as Scripture testifies, no more sacrifice for sin? Search through all the divine oracles which we possess; if the blood of Christ is uniformly set forth as purchasing satisfaction, reconciliation and ablution, how dare you presume to transfer so great an honor to your works?<sup>147</sup>

94. Sadoletto claims that the Church "cannot err, since the Holy Spirit constantly guides her public and universal decrees and Councils." But even if (for argument's sake) the Church did err, God would not hold anyone responsible who sincerely and humbly obeyed its authority.<sup>148</sup> In response, Calvin appeals to the Bible and the early church fathers to show that major features of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice did not exist in early times, citing images, indulgences, purgatory, auricular confession, and prohibiting the communion cup to the laity.<sup>149</sup> He notes that Christian leaders must lead within the bounds set by Scripture (1 Pet 4:11) and that their decisions are to be tested by the congregation (1 Cor 14:29).<sup>150</sup> God, he adds, does not patronize even ignorant error, citing Matt 15:14, "... if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."<sup>151</sup>

95. If one were to raise the question whether Calvin's view requires infallible human interpretation to avoid disaster, Calvin replies soberly:

I do not, however, dream of a perspicacity of faith which never errs in discriminating between truth and falsehood, is never deceived; nor do I figure to myself an arrogance which looks down as from a height on the whole human race, waits for no man's judgment, and makes no distinction between learned and unlearned. On the contrary, I admit that pious and truly religious minds do not always attain to all the mysteries of God, but are sometimes blind in the clearest matters – the Lord, doubtless, so providing in order to accustom them to modesty and submission .... I only contend that so long as they insist on the Word of the Lord, they are never so caught as to be led away to destruction, while their conviction of

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 37, 70.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 71-74.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

the truth of the Word of God is so clear and certain that it cannot be overthrown by either men or angels.<sup>152</sup>

To summarize: though here and there we find a Scripture quotation that is not wholly apt, and once a spiritualization of a prophetic passage that seems to be literal,<sup>153</sup> Calvin's exegesis in this apologetic situation is as careful and incisive as any we have examined. Apologetic motivation need not distort the exegesis of Scripture.

### Modern Exegesis

Recent centuries have seen the rise of a scientism that denies the occurrence of the miraculous and of a historicism that "looks down as from a height" on all past generations. Much of the apologetic motivation in recent centuries has been a reaction to or an accommodation with these trends. Alan Richardson perceptively compares the situation to that of the early church:

96. The allegorical interpretation had done for the cultured and philosophically-minded Fathers of the ancient Church what the historical method was to do for the Victorians and their successors: both methods helped to reconcile the scriptural teaching with changed views of the universe, whether Ptolemaic or Copernican, whether Stoic or Darwinian, and they made it possible to explain away ethical injunctions and practices which no longer commended themselves to the enlightened conscience.<sup>154</sup>

### Wellhausen and Green

One of the most influential figures in the application of scientism and historicism to the Old Testament was Julius Wellhausen. In 1878, Wellhausen presented in readable form a theory for the explanation of the Pentateuch that combined nearly a century of work in analyzing Scripture into hypothetical documents with the view that religion is continually evolving from more primitive to more advanced stages.<sup>155</sup> Within a generation Wellhausen's JEDP theory had swept the field, and with slight modifications it still dominates liberal Old Testament studies today.

Several responses to Wellhausen were written, though none were able to stem the tide which carried nearly all the major Protestant denominations into liberalism in the twentieth century. One of the most successful responses was that written by the Bible-believer William Henry Green.<sup>156</sup> Let us examine some of the debate between

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 60-61; Zechariah 14:8 as the spread of the Gospel to all the world.

<sup>154</sup> Alan Richardson, "The Rise of Modern Biblical Scholarship and Recent Discussion of the Authority of the Bible," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 3:302-03.

<sup>155</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Berlin: Reiner, 1883; reprint ed., Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

<sup>156</sup> William Henry Green, *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978).

Wellhausen and Green on the important matter of the location of worship in ancient Israel.

97. Basically, Wellhausen's argument is that a multiplicity of altars was standard practice in Israel to the time of King Josiah (7<sup>th</sup> century BC), and that no regulations existed prohibiting such until the writing of Deuteronomy (D) at that time. But Deut 12:1-14 projects a single-altar commandment back into the time of Moses, and the later priestly writers (P) assumed such a commandment was Mosaic.<sup>157</sup> Wellhausen's argument thus resembles that of Marcion in his *Antitheses*, except that the antitheses alleged are between largely hypothetical documents – the early J, E, Judges, Samuel and Kings (multi-altar) on the one hand, and the later D and P (single-altar) on the other – rather than between the extant Old Testament and New Testament. Since Wellhausen can adjust the boundaries of his documents and bring in redactors (editors) to account for troublesome details, his position is harder to attack than Marcion's. Green's response is basically to show that the phenomena of the Old Testament make sense taking the material as it stands, that the single-altar regulation of Deuteronomy is not a late invention, but comes from the time of Moses.<sup>158</sup>

98. Specifically, Wellhausen claims that from the time of the Judges onward there is no trace of a single sanctuary until the building of the Jerusalem temple:<sup>159</sup>

If people and judges or kings alike, priests and prophets, men like Samuel and Elijah, sacrificed without hesitation whenever occasion and opportunity presented themselves, it is manifest that during the whole of that period nobody had the faintest suspicion that such conduct was heretical and forbidden. If a theophany made known to Joshua the sanctity of Gilgal, gave occasion to Gideon and Manoah to rear altars at their homes, drew the attention of David to the threshing floor of Araunah, Jehovah Himself was regarded as the proper founder of all these sanctuaries – and this not merely at the period of the Judges, but more indubitably still at that of the narrator of these legends.<sup>160</sup>

Green's response is that the "unity of the altar" goes back to patriarchal times in the sense that "no rival sanctuaries" existed, but that during the patriarchal and wilderness wanderings, the site of worship moved with the group.<sup>161</sup> Green further maintains that before the time of Solomon, Deuteronomy 12 would not yet take effect:

... Deuteronomy xii looks forward to the time when Israel should be permanently settled in the land which Jehovah their God was giving them to inherit, and he should have given them rest from all their enemies round about .... These conditions were not fulfilled until the peaceful reign of

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<sup>157</sup> *Prolegomena*, chapter 1.

<sup>158</sup> *Higher Criticism*, 147-153.

<sup>159</sup> *Prolegomena*, 17.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>161</sup> *Higher Criticism*, 147.

Solomon, who by divine direction built the temple as Jehovah's permanent abode.<sup>162</sup>

99. These two principles propounded by Green do not cover all the wide variety of phenomena found in the Old Testament. Green notes that all of Wellhausen's alleged legal codes normally restrict sacrifice to some central location, but that Exodus 20:24 also handles certain unusual circumstances as well. (1) A special theophany would allow sacrifices temporarily at that location (e.g., the cases of Gideon and Manoah). (2) The withdrawal of God might leave the people without a sanctuary (as, for example, when the ark is lost and then secluded during the time of the judges, or the people of the Northern Kingdom are prohibited from going to Jerusalem), in which case they must worship where they can.<sup>163</sup> Naturally, the disobedience of the people to God's law is a factor as well. With these additional principles, it appears that Green can fit all the data, though one might question whether exception (2), above, is not more speculation than exegesis.

100. The same, however, can be said for Wellhausen's much more extensive treatment, for if Green has several variables to cover the data (moving altars, theophanies, withdrawal of God, and disobedience), Wellhausen has hundreds (the exact placement of boundaries between his documents and the editorial activity of various redactors). He puts the erection of an altar by the trans-Jordan tribes (Joshua 22), which clearly pictures concern over a competing altar in the time of Joshua, in the later P document.<sup>164</sup> The remark of 1 Kings 3:2, set in the time of Solomon ("The people were still sacrificing on the high places, because there was no house build for the name of the Lord until those days"), and the censures of later kings for not removing the high places, are all dismissed as the work of later redactors.<sup>165</sup> Wellhausen speculated that the alleged patriarchal worship sites were really only Canaanite and that non-patriarchal sites are later Israelite.<sup>166</sup> Though arguing for purely local sanctuaries in the time of the judges, Wellhausen admits that Shiloh was important enough for Elkanah to cross tribal boundaries to visit it yearly.<sup>167</sup>

101. Wellhausen must also postulate a scheme to end the multiplicity of altars. He suggests that the preaching of Hosea and Amos against the corruption of the Northern Kingdom, followed by its destruction, not only left Jerusalem with its temple supreme, but also caused people to view the destruction of the Northern Kingdom as God's judgment.<sup>168</sup> Wellhausen brushes aside the attempts of Hezekiah to abolish the high places (before the writing of D) as of doubtful authenticity<sup>169</sup> (though mentioned by both the narrator and an Assyrian general, 2 Kings 18:4, 22) and places the actual reform in the time of Josiah (trusting the same narrator, 2 Kings 23), but finally admits that the

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 149-50.

<sup>164</sup> *Prolegomena*, 38.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

Babylonian captivity was necessary to bring a complete end to the multiplicity of altars.<sup>170</sup>

Such a sketch does not really do justice either to Wellhausen or to Green. Both have some valuable insights, and both are trying to reduce a complex historical situation to a set of logical rules. The desire to give an answer defending one's position is involved as well: Green is defending the Bible as a historically reliable revelation from God; Wellhausen is defending an evolutionary reconstruction of Israel's history. Yet it must be said that Green is attempting a straight-forward exegesis of the text as it stands, whereas Wellhausen is attempting exegesis of hypothetical and radically reconstructed texts.

## **Bultmann**

Moving from Old Testament to New Testament, and from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, we come to Rudolf Bultmann, the Wellhausen of New Testament studies. Let us here consider one of the most important aspects of Bultmann's theology and exegesis, his demythologizing of Scripture.

102. Bultmann believes that the worldview of the Bible is no longer tenable, having been refuted both by science and by history.<sup>171</sup> Thus we cannot expect modern man to receive the Biblical message as it is:

Now that the forces of nature have been discovered, we can no longer believe in spirits, whether good or evil. We know that the stars are physical bodies whose motions are controlled by the laws of the universe, and not demonic beings which enslave mankind to their service.... Sickness and the cure of disease are likewise attributable to natural causation.... The miracles of the New Testament have ceased to be miraculous.... Even occultism pretends to be a science.... It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles. We may think we can manage it in our own lives, but to expect others to do so is to make the Christian faith unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world.<sup>172</sup>

103. To make the Christian faith intelligible to modern man, Bultmann proposes not merely that we adopt the ethics of the New Testament (as old liberalism advocated) but also that we accept the message hidden in its mythology:

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 26-28.

<sup>171</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1958), 14-16.

<sup>172</sup> Rudolf Butlmann et al, *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 4-5.

We must ask whether the eschatological preaching and the mythological sayings [of Jesus] as a whole contain a *still deeper* meaning which is concealed under the cover of mythology.<sup>173</sup>

104. To find this deeper meaning Bultmann treats myths as transcendent truths disguised in "an immanent, this-worldly objectivity."<sup>174</sup> These concrete myths must be transcendentalized by a process that Bultmann calls demythologizing. For instance, the mythological language "God lives in heaven" really means "God is transcendent." Hell and its darkness are merely concrete pictures of the truth that evil, too, is transcendent, powerful and fearsome. The myth of Satan and evil spirits is a primitive insight into the fact that men sometimes lose control of their passions to commit inexplicable evils.<sup>175</sup>

105. Eschatology is similarly demythologized:

As in the conception of heaven the transcendence of God is imagined by means of the category of space, so in the conception of the end of the world, the idea of the transcendence of God is imagined by means of the category of time.<sup>176</sup>

Bultmann believes eschatology reveals in the "end of the age" the transitory nature of our world and life; in "the last judgment," God's judgment of our actions, calling us to repentance; and in the "eschatological hope," a call to be "open to God's future in the face of death and darkness."<sup>177</sup>

107. Thus the whole message of Jesus as demythologized by Bultmann has an existential cast:

This, then, is the deeper meaning of the mythological preaching of the Jesus – to be open to God's future which is really imminent for every one of us; to be prepared for this future which can come as a thief in the night when we do not expect it; to be prepared because this future will be a judgment on all men who have bound themselves to this world and are not free, not open to God's future.<sup>178</sup>

If one can distance himself somewhat from our modern worldview dominated by historicism and scientism, it is obvious that Bultmann is doing the same thing that Philo and the Christian allegorists were doing – interpreting the Biblical message in terms of a dominant philosophy. For Philo it was Platonism; for Bultmann, it is existentialism, most nearly that of Martin Heidegger.<sup>179</sup> The interpretive technique is also very similar, a form

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<sup>173</sup> *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 18; my italics.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-31.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>179</sup> Antony C. Thistelton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 227-34; Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 229.

of allegorizing in which certain words and phrases are transposed to an entirely different thought system. The results likewise are similar: some significant Biblical themes are retained (for Philo, ethics and union with God; for Bultmann, the existential choice) which may even remind Bible-believers of features they have neglected; yet the scheme as a whole is drastically divergent from any Biblical theology that an inductive method would produce.

To end our survey, let us briefly mention two other recent interpreters, Edwin R. Thiele and Harold Lindsell. In contrast to Bultmann, both are conservatives in Biblical matters and have written defending the accuracy of the Bible.

### **Thiele**

Thiele set out to find a solution to the vexing problem of the chronology of the divided kingdom era in Israelite history. He outlines his procedure as follows:

107. Without deciding *a priori* that either the data regarding the synchronisms or the lengths of reign must necessarily be late and probably largely in error, I made an attempt to ascertain whether there might exist some method of chronological procedure whereby the numbers which seemed so obviously and hopelessly contradictory could be fitted together into a harmonious pattern of reigns.<sup>180</sup>

Thiele does not explicitly reveal an apologetic motivation anywhere in his book, but the fact that it arose from a doctoral dissertation done at the University of Chicago is significant. Chicago is not noted for its Biblical conservatism, and doctoral candidates do not intentionally spend their time researching hopeless causes. Thiele must have felt some reasonable assurance that a reconciliation of the Biblical data with itself and with secular chronology existed.

And Thiele was vindicated. His advisor at Chicago, William A. Irwin, writes:

... the astonishing fact is that he demonstrates conclusively the precise and dependable accuracy of Hebrew chronology of the times of the kingdoms.<sup>181</sup>

His accomplishment has been widely recognized in both liberal and conservative Old Testament circles. Though not universally accepted, Thiele's work is seen as epoch-making, "by far the most valuable" among the "most important studies" of the chronology of the Hebrew kings.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), vi-vii.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>182</sup> *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), s.v. "Chronology of the O.T." by S. J. DeVries, 1:599.

## Lindsell

Harold Lindsell's *Battle for the Bible* has created quite a stir in evangelical circles by documenting the abandonment of Biblical inerrancy in various denominations and church organizations, most notably at Fuller Seminary. Lindsell is to be commended for his adherence to inerrancy, a crucial Biblical doctrine; less commendable is the quality of his defense of Scripture against alleged discrepancies. In two cases at least, it seems to this writer that problems have been solved using poor exegesis.

108. In 2 Chronicles 4:2 we are told of the large bronze water tank made for Solomon's temple:

Also he made the cast metal sea, *ten* cubits from brim to brim, circular in form, and its height was five cubits and its circumference *thirty* cubits.

To the common objection that such a tank either would not be circular or demonstrates a crude value of  $\pi$  (3 instead of 3.141...), Lindsell maintains that the diameter was measured to the outside of the tank ("a handbreadth thick," verse 5), but the circumference was measured around the inside, thus giving a value of  $\pi$  accurate to two decimal places.<sup>183</sup> Unfortunately this solution cannot be right, for the phrase translated "its circumference thirty cubits" is literally "a *line* of thirty cubits encircling it round about." Try to measure an inside circumference with a measuring line! Perhaps the proper solution is that both 10 and 30 are round numbers; there is a range of values which round off to 10 (9.5-9.7) that multiplied by  $\pi$  round off the 30. Or perhaps, since the brim of the tank was shaped like a lily-blossom (verse 5), the diameter was measured at the flared brim, but the (outside) circumference was measured below the flare, where a line could be gotten around the tank.

109. In seeking to reconcile the various Gospel accounts of Peter's denials, Lindsell adopts the view of J. M. Cheney, that Peter actually denied Jesus six times, three before the first cock crowing and three between the first and second.<sup>184</sup> Here again, the solution departs from the Biblical data, for if anything is clear in the text, it is that all four Gospels agree on *three* denials, not six. A more likely resolution is that Peter's three denials are three occasions of denial, each separated by some time. On each occasion, one person charges Peter with being a disciple of Jesus, others chime in, and Peter experiences increasingly more difficulty in silencing them.

## Conclusions

We have now completed our brief survey of examples illustrating some effects of apologetic motivation upon Biblical exegesis. It only remains for us to gather together our observations into some sort of summary. Before doing so, however, let us consider what these examples are likely to be worth.

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<sup>183</sup> Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 165-66.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-76.

First of all, these examples are not intended to present a balanced picture of any of the exegetes mentioned. Some of these men are surely better interpreters than the examples would lead one to believe; others are probably worse.

Second, the author of this paper has definite theological and exegetical views which are doubtless erroneous in some points. Therefore the assignment of particular examples to some of the categories below will not meet with the approval of every reader. The author feels confident, however, that each category given has been a real influence of apologetic motivation upon Biblical exegesis and that at least some of the examples under each category will be admitted as valid.

Third, the categories below are not exhaustive. Certainly other categories could be devised and examples found for them, probably even from among the examples given here. The categories used here were derived from the examples, and they cover some very important matters.

With over one hundred examples given, the relative number in each category probably has some statistical significance. Those categories with numerous examples are presumably the more common influences; those with few examples, the rarer.

Let us consider first some negative influences of apologetic motivation upon exegesis:

### **Negative Influences**

1. Apologetic motivation may obscure the actual intent of one or more Biblical passages (1, 3, 4-7, 22, 24, 40, 48, 49-56, 58, 69, 73-74, 80, 83, 96, 97, 100, 104-106).
2. Apologetic motivation may encourage one to defend an erroneous position which ought rather to be abandoned (4-7, 14, 17, 25-26, 30, 40, 69, 77, 85, 87, 97, 100, 102-106).
3. Apologetic motivation may cause one to yield to the temptation to go beyond the exegetical evidence (14, 17, 23, 24, 39, 47, 51, 54, 55, 57, 83, 85, 97, 99, 100, 101, 108, 109).
4. Apologetic motivation may distort the Biblical message by seeking to make it more acceptable to one's own generation or peer group (8, 9-11, 16-19, 39, 40, 73, 77, 96, 102-106).
5. Apologetic motivation may lead one to give a quick solution to a problem when the true solution is unknown or unacceptable (22, 30, 47, 53, 57, 60, 66-67, 69, 71, 78, 87, 108, 109). Notice, however, evidence of restraint here (61, 62, 88, 89).
6. Apologetic motivation might even lead one to amend or restructure the text to support one's own views (97, 98, 100, 101).

Yet the picture is not entirely a bleak one. There have also been positive influences of apologetic motivation upon Biblical exegesis:

### **Positive Influences**

1. Apologetic motivation may lead to a more careful examination of the Biblical text itself (27-29, 34, 36, 49-50, 52-56, 57-65, 71, 72, 81, 82-83, 85-86, 92, 98, 99, 107).
2. Apologetic motivation may force one to deal with difficult passages that would otherwise be ignored (33, 38, 41, 45, 49-55, 57, 59-65, 72, 83, 85, 86, 97-99, 107).
3. Apologetic motivation may help to deliver the actual meaning of the Biblical text from misunderstanding (2, 12, 13, 16, 36, 37, 44, 45, 54, 63, 64-65, 72, 82, 83, 92, 97, 107).
4. Apologetic motivation may encourage the reconsideration of one's own hermeneutical principles (39, 43, 62, 64, 65, 70, 71, 75, 79, 84, 86, 87, 89, 91, 94, 95). Of course, this is not good if one decides to abandon a good hermeneutical principle!
5. Apologetic motivation may lead one to new exegetical and theological perspectives through the errors or insights of one's opponents (32, 35, 44, 45, 46, 56, 70, 74-75, 81, 85, 92).
6. Apologetic motivation may locate real evidence for the truth of Christianity or the falsity of particular forms of opposition (20, 21, 27-29, 41, 42, 92, 93, 107).
7. Apologetic motivation may lead one to study the original languages of Scripture (76).
8. Apologetic motivation may lead one to study textual criticism (31).