MARK W. ELLIOTT

The Song of Songs and Christology in the Early Church 381–451

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Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Elliott, Mark W.:
The Song of songs and christology in the early church /
Mark W. Elliott. – Tübingen : Mohr Siebeck, 2000
(Studies and texts in antiquity and christianity ; 7)
ISBN 3-16-147394-9
978-3-16-158651-4 Unveränderte eBook-Ausgabe 2019

The book was printed by Gulde-Druck in Tübingen on non-aging paper and bound by Heinr. Koch in Tübingen.

Printed in Germany.

ISSN 1436-3003

To my parents

Foreword

This work is a slightly modified version of a doctoral thesis passed by the University of Cambridge in 1997: The Song Of Songs And Christology In The Early Church, With Special Reference To The Period 381 – 451. It was written under the careful supervision of Dr. Lionel R. Wickham. Additional guidance came from Drs. Nicholas de Lange, Caroline Bammel, and William Horbury. A short time in Paris spent learning from Prof. Marguerite Harl and Dr. Alain LeBoulluec was also invaluable. The quality of library resources in Cambridge and Oxford should be gratefully acknowledged, not least that of Tyndale House, Cambridge. The help of Rev. Drs. David Marshall, Andrew Goddard and David Instone Brewer was much appreciated at the later stages of preparing the thesis

Sources of financial assistance also should be mentioned. I am grateful to the Dr. Williams' Trust Fund, Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, the Divinity Faculty of the University of Cambridge, the E. Drummond Trust and the Honeyman Gillespie Scholarships, as well as the Whitefield Institute, Oxford and Tyndale House, Cambridge.

I am thankful to Prof. Dr. Christoph Markschies for his readiness to include this work in this series, and for his comments, advice and encouragement. I would also like to acknowledge the support and interest of colleagues at Nottingham University and at Liverpool Hope University College over the last two years.

Lastly I would like to dedicate this book with gratitude to my parents, Ian and Ann Elliott for all the ways in which, through them, something of love human and divine has been demonstrated to me.

Mark W. Elliott Liverpool, April 2000.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Figures and Images

The figures of Bride and Groom, together with the details of action, vision and dialogue contained in the mysterious Song have lent themselves to the consideration of how the Word of God and the believer's soul relate to each other, or how the Church, as Christ's body, is loved by and loves her 'Head' who is the exalted Christ. Since Herder and then Renan,[1] the increasing prevalence of interest in the physically sexual eroticism of the Song as part of the plain historico-grammatical sense has made these erstwhile popular understandings vulnerable. However, in an age where the rational 'plain grammatical and historical sense' of Scripture is no longer as privileged as it was, and where for many people there is more to our apparently most physical actions than may at first appear (a feeling sharply expressed in terms of a belief in a 'divine power' as the ground of being or mystery of the world), it is not surprising to see some treating the Song as doing more than praising marriage and/or love expressed in physical pleasure.

One way to justify the religious reading of the Song of Songs is the way proposed by Eric Gill, that:

> ...all art properly so-called is religious, because all art properly so-called is an affirmation of absolute values... . The poet cannot be accused of the bestial naturalism of the purveyor of ecclesiastical symbols. To say *venter ejus eburneus, distinctus sapphiris* (v.14) is not photographic, though to say *inter ubera mea commorabitur* (i.12) is not obscure. To say that the Song of Solomon is a naked poem is not to say it is naturalistic. It is heraldic rather than naturalistic, and as in all good heraldry there is no obscurity about its symbolism. The symbol is not obtained by using words in any but their strictly natural senses, but by the intention of the poet.[2]

However, to claim such was the mind of the author of the Song seems to beg the question.

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[1] Herder, *"Lieder der Liebe"* (in *Werke* III) insisted on the purity of the passion: see Rowley (1965), 217, n 6; Renan (1860), 478; see also Pelletier (1989), 417.

[2] Gill (1921), 2; 5-6.

In any case how could a moving picture of human love point say something about divine love? As (Pseudo)-Dionysius observed, one cannot remake God in our own image: "Between God and his creatures, there is no similarity by reason of something held in common but by imitation; whence we say the creature resembles God but not the inverse"[3]. Whereas the love between the Father and the Son is totally beyond representation as an *Ur/Hinter-bild*, its *Abbild*, the love between Christ and Church (Paul had allowed as much if 1 Corinthians 11:1-4 is spliced with that of Ephesians 5:22ff) *can be* represented in a *Bild* of human love.[4] Yet the reference of the symbolism in the Song was, for the writers looked at in this study, the 'divine-human love' in the Incarnation, a sort of hybrid.

According to Dionysius: "theological tradition has a dual aspect, the ineffable and mysterious on the one hand, the open and more evident on the other. The one resorts to symbolism and involves initiation. The other is philosophic and employs the method of demonstration."[5] Doctrine feels like negative, mystical theology, while symbolic, imagic theology seems like 'positive, revelatory'. The genre of poetry (also found in the prophets) is a source for such positive, image-based theology. As P. Ricoeur has insisted, one can be moved by poetic metaphors at level of depth. Ricoeur argues, basing himself on Aristotle's treatment of metaphor in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, that this trope aims to persuade as it describes.[6] The Song is not narrative, but possibly something that, in the reciting, shines light further down into the human condition than stories can. One question which exercised the early church was: how much faith should theology put in such metaphors? The problem with metaphor is that certain ones resonate with some situations better than others, so that none of them can be seen as universally or diachronically efficacious in their communicative power. The purpose of metaphor as Aristotle saw it was not to confuse nor even elaborate a thought, but was one of clarification; behind it God as simple accommodates himself to the perverse, fragmented, and difficult thought-processes of humans.[7] But the patristic or perhaps simply Platonic standard was to think of imagery in

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[3] Cited by Thomas, *Commentary on Book One of the Sentences: Distinctio* XXXV, qu.1, art.4; cf. Ricoeur (1978), 274, 360. Cf. Gill (1921): "In an irreligious age, on the contrary, divine things will be made symbols of human things, and that humanity was created in the image of God will be forgotten, or remembered only as a jest." (5-6)

[4] Cf. Frank (1975).

[5] Rorem (1993), 224: Letter 9:1105D: τὸ διττὴν εἶναι τὴν τῶν θεολογων παράδοσιν, τὴν μὲν ἀπορρήτον καὶ μυστικὴν, τὴν δὲ ἐμφανῆ καὶ γνωριμωτέραν· καὶ τὴν μεν συμβολικὴν καὶ τελεστικὴν, τὴν δὲ φιλόσοφον καὶ ἀποδεικτικὴν.

[6] Ricoeur (1978), 12f.

[7] See his introduction to *Ars Rhetorica*; 1354a1-3. Vickers (1988), 300, comments: "the rationale of rhetorical figures as the crystallization of real-life emotional states." Cf. also Ricoeur (1978), 43: "Lively expression is that which expresses existence as alive."

Scripture as merely presenting things like spiritual realities in all their difficulty.[8] The complexity may relate to the diversity of creation, especially humans, so that even if the biblical message comes from God, its accomodation to the subtleties of conscious and subconscious minds means any simplicity is soon lost.

Marcia Falk has claimed that because the Song, perhaps more than any other biblical text, is composed from a string of metaphors, there is a *prima facie* case for reading it as an allegory, by which she means an extended metaphor.[9] This is precisely what the fathers did, projecting higher the reference of the Song's own metaphors or similes. The Song characteristically draws from the world of nature and applies to the world of humans (physical, lovely qualities). Moralising exegesis of the Song moves from these aesthetic 'givens' to speak of virtues and right emotions. Allegorising goes yet a step further and by-passes the human to refer the natural world to the spiritual world which is itself a re-ordered paradise. Allegory gets humans away from seeing any tropology as merely about themselves or that which reflects themselves; just as the Song itself sets a human love affair in the context of nature, order, disorder, covenant and spontaneity. Both the Song and its allegorical interpretation are holistic.

1.2 The Song of Songs: early influences on its interpretation

There is almost no evidence of Christians reading the Song, or at least paying it the honour of citation as Scripture, until the beginning of the third century. There are, however, a few places in the NT where a case could be made for a Messianic if not properly "Christological" interpretation. While most of the claims that the Song is the source of other verses in the Johannine corpus are fanciful,[10] Jesus's promise that streams of living water would come out of anyone who believes in him *according to the Scriptures* (John 7:38) clearly refers to something more precise than a *locus communis*. Cant 4:12 in the Hebrew certainly has גל (spring), even if the Greek renders κῆπος, as if reading גן (garden). Daniélou avers that in Hippolytus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Irenaeus, Aphrahat and Ephraim, but *not* Origen, the fountain is understood to be Jesus; he then pointed to Ezek 47 as the primary text associated. Yet Ezek 47 lacks, while Cant 4:15 (in the same passage, a few verses later) has, the phrase ὕδατος ζῶντος. Also, the case for Rev 3:16's being dependent on Cant 5:2 has been skilfully supported by M. Cambe.[11]

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[8] So Augustine *De Doctrina Christiana* II, 6,7-8; CCL 32, p. 35.

[9] Falk (1982), 82ff.

[10] E.g., Hengel (1994)'s claim for 2 Jn 1 no less so than Feuillet (1984)'s for Rev 12.

[11] Cambe (1962)

For many Jewish commentators the Song was related to God's self-revelation in his deeds. For them it was a song recounting God's leading and instructing of Israel (R. Akiva) or even the manifesting of his very self at the Red Sea (R. Eliezer). It seems increasingly clear to scholarship that the proto-kabbalistic *Shiur Qomah*, based around the description of the Groom's body in Cant 5, has a long pedigree as a form of mysticism which claims or aims at the vision of God's own form if not face. This is quite a different movement from Qumranic mysticism which tends to present itself as oriented towards preparation of a community for holy warfare at the Messiah's coming. The radical orientation of *Shiur Qomah* (or its antecedents) was redirected in so far as it affected mainstream Palestinian Judaism; first by R. Akiva and then by R. Johanan.[12] Contrary to Barthélemy's surmisings, there is just no hard evidence that the canonical status of the Song was established before and without any recourse to a spiritualising explanation. Even if the LXX translation, whose date is probably late, is fairly literal in its renderings, there are more small glosses than is sometimes made out. Nor was there in Judaism a strict canonical principle as far as the *ketubim* were concerned before the Common Era; thus the Song could be seen by some as sacred and by others as profane, depending on one's estimation of Solomon.[13] The spiritualising approach confirmed by Akiba was extended into a new translation by Aquila, as can be seen from Field's *Hexapla Origenis* on, e.g., Cant 6:12; 8:5.[14] A specifically messianic interpretation was side-lined, only to find later approval in the Targumists. Perhaps it is not such a surprise that the Christian writer who makes the greatest overtly Christian 'Christological' use of the Song is Apponius who manages to blend the Origenian and Hippolytan ways of reading the Song. However, as we shall see, Christian opinion was united in seeing Christ as the form of God whose appearance is predicted and described in the verses of the Song.

The Song, like its heroine (Cant 3:6), appeared out of the wilderness of a general neglect which continued in conservative situations. It is not purely coincidental that it was regarded as canonical and cited as Scripture in areas where the unity of Christ was emphasised. Origen is clearly the central player in that not only did he give the Song a worldwide audience where before it had been the preserve of Palestinian and Jewish-minded Christians — it was

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[12] For early Jewish interpretations, see Urbach (1971); Kimmelman (1980); Manns (1990). In the Targum, the story unfolds throughout the course of the Song, from the early verses where Moses is the one whose soul is the bride to God the bridegroom, through to the last verses which speak of the Messianic age when the Shekinah will rest on Jerusalem.

[13] See Hanig (1993).

[14] LXX: ἔθετό με ἅρματα Ἀμιναδάβ; Ἀ: ἅρματα λαοῦ ἐκουσιαζομένου ἄρχοντος.

LXX: ἐκεῖ ὠδίνησέν σε; Ἀ: ἐκεῖ διεφθέρη.

in Melito's 'Palestinian' canon long before any other[15] and was championed by one from that area, Hippolytus. Consequently the similarity of ideas of a heavenly Groom and a heavenly bridal chamber to those Gnostic fables and systems could not have been missed — especially among those Syriac churches who made sure that God as a Groom was to be thought of as present on earth in performing these mysteries (in baptism[16], eucharist), and not far removed in another corner of reality to which we have remote access. By way of reaction, an insistence on letting God be God and (wo)man be (wo)man prevented the Song from being taken seriously in a spiritual sense. However, those who made room for it in their theology believed that Christ was somehow a unity of God and humanity in the heavenly realities before or as well as the person who appeared on earth.

1.3 Exegetical Styles

The realisation that metaphor easily extends into something which needs to be taken as pointing to another reality in a forward then upward motion (e.g. to the Church and the final Kingdom of Heaven) is peculiarly Christian. The approach to the Song is grounded in the sure belief that there is something about human courtship which overlaps the divine-human engagement.[17]

It has become increasingly difficult to hold to any easy classification of hermeneutical styles in the Church of Late Antiquity. The comfortable bifurcation into 'Alexandrian' and 'Antiochene' is still used and reinforced by notions that one is 'Platonic', the other 'Aristotelian', but it has for a long time been under attack.[18] C. Schäublin has shown how keen Theodore of Mopsuestia was to see much of the packaging and expression of the ideas and events of the Old Testament as rhetoric which was attributable not to God, but to the prophet himself, who often was not speaking from the kind of direct experience which the apostles would have, but who was trying his hardest to get the point across.[19] Thus Old Testament *texts* are susceptible to a sort of 'rhetorical analysis' and therefore the Song of Songs can be best classified as

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[15] See Melito of Sardis (1979), 66: Fragment 4.

[16] So, Hesychius of Jerusalem; cf. SC 187, 264-5; also, Cyril of Jerusalem *Bapt. Cat.* 3.

[17] See Kittay (1987), 275f about the "common boundary" of "perception" in Plato's use of the sunshine as a metaphor for the Good. That metaphorical language is usually more than "mere metaphor", see Soskice (1985), Ch 6.

[18] Cf. B. Studer in "Die patristische Exegese, eine Aktualisierung der Heiligen Schrift" (paper read at XII International Patristics Conference) following M Simonetti (1985), 355: "Man sah ein, dass die beiden genannten Schulen um 400 einander viel näher standen, als dies zuvor behauptet worden ist."

[19] Jerome subscribed to a more nuanced but close view which explains, to some extent, his sense for sense theory of translation.

a table song. Schäublin's account is slightly at odds with Theodore's own version, insofar as this is found in the proceedings of his condemnation.[20] The heretic there would seem to rule out any table song as not belonging to a canonical genre, for there needs to be some moral or typological value. (One might compare Eustathius of Antioch, who made sure that the text of 1 Samuel 28 affirmed that the deluded woman saw an illusion of Samuel, not that Samuel was brought up from the dead: the lesson is a moral one, that one should not consult the dead, not an insight into biblical cosmology.) Theodore argued that so-called allegory was actually just a Hebraic love of metaphor. Moreover these metaphors were in fact similes, only the presence of the preposition ὡς in the LXX was often missing due to a lack of an equivalent preposition in the Hebrew *Vorlage*.[21] Yet Schäublin recognises that Theodore, at least up to that point, was atypical of the majority of so-called "Antiochenes", in that the other leading representatives, notably Diodore and Theodoret, had views which respected the possibility of texts *in their wording* having some hidden meaning which pointed forward to the gospel, which were in fact divinely inspired, i.e., prophetic.

Other reasons counting against making too fixed a categorisation include the lack of uniformity among those apparently of the 'Alexandrian' persuasion. For example what debt did Cyril have to Origen and Didymus? Not very much it would seem.[22] He shared their interest in Scripture's semantic triplicity, with importance added to the moral outworking by the hearer; yet the Origenian tradition conceived of this more mystically, while Cyril saw particular historical realities as containing, not pointing to, the truth. For Origen (and for his disciples), words as symbols mattered. The context of the immediate text or of the Bible as a whole yielded priority to a love of contrasting 'paired' terms, such as ἀγάπη (*caritas*) and ἐρῶς (*amor*),[23] thus manifesting his unfamiliarity with the notion of biblical poetry's sympathetic parallelism. Origen viewed the ensuing tension or *diaphora* of meaning as an occasion to show how the reconciliation of such contradictions had to be found at a higher level of sense. The LXX did not

[20] *ACO* IV, 1, 68-70.

[21] Cf. Rompay *Introduction*, xxxix ff to *Théodore: Psaumes* (1982). The Hebrew Scriptures were mostly intended to tell Christians what they should *not* do.

[22] Cyril does not seem to have followed Didymus; e.g., there is no mention of ἀναγώγη in Cyril: cf. Abel (1941), 164; Kerrigan (1952), 443.

[23] Cf. the contrast of ἀγαπάω and φιλέω. "Die methodische Herkunft dieser Begriffsunterscheidungen weist jedoch in eine pagane Richtung": Neuschäfer (1987), 142. The process of semantic differentiation between synonyms in which both terms get pulled towards the sense of respective homonyms was very popular with Origen.

provide a divine language but did contain some inspired forms and pictures so that the Word and his Spirit could be said to speak in and through it.[24]

Origen may have taught the Cappadocians to deprecate literal exegesis, especially when it concerned the Trinity,[25] but such concerns were also evident in Marcellus and Athanasius, albeit in a modified form. For the latter, according to Sieben, *skopos* meant that which the Spirit points us to behind the texts, particularly what refers to the pre-existent Logos and what to the incarnate Son. In Scripture we have *paradeigmata*, which are not the divine realities themselves;[26] yet they are not simply human conceptions (*epinoiai*). The "fountain" paradigm, i.e., where the Bible speaks of the Father as source and the Son as the river, connoting the ideas of both continuity and distinction can be found in Jer 2:19, Bar 3:10-12 and Ps 65:9.

Athanasius in turn sponsored Didymus as teacher of the catechetical school in Alexandria, probably as late as the mid-360s.[27] Any association with Origen seems to have become disadvantageous only at the time of the Origenist controversy. Before then Didymus had promoted the earlier Alexandrian interpreter's heritage to, *inter alios*, Jerome, Rufinus and Evagrius. The two epithets *oculum habens sponsae de Cantico canticorum* (Jerome) and *divina luce fulgentem Didymum* (Rufinus), which both play on the faculty of sight, contrast with Epiphanius' naming of the lay teacher as a heretic in the line of Origen's errors,[28] but not for his method or skill in exegesis at large. The moderate nature of Didymus' approach can be further appreciated from W. Bienert's conclusion that *Allegoria* and *Anagoge* are not interchangeable, *pace* Doutreleau.[29] According to Bienert's analysis, allegory (for Didymus anyway) was often the projection of OT the text's meaning into

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[24] Neuschäfer (1987), 143, and 403, n. 60: "Obwohl Origenes durch die Wahrnehmung typischer Wortbildungen der LXX die Spracheigentümlichkeit der LXX klar erkannte – dies lag durch seine textkritische Vergleichsarbeit ohnedies nahe, sind seine Darlegungen zu dieser Frage noch nicht so entwickelt wie bei den späteren Antiochenern." Cf. Schäublin (1974), 127ff.

[25] For example, the regular use of ἐν with the Holy Spirit in the gospels should not (according to Basil, against Eunomius) be taken to imply his subordination. See Pelikan (1981).

[26] Cf. *Ep. Serap.*1.20: In Lebon's translation (1947), 119: "... la divine Écriture nous a donné aussi des exemples tels que par eux ... il soit possible à ce sujet de parler d'une manière quelque peu simple."

[27] Thus within Athanasius' lifetime and after the disruptions of the early 360s.

[28] Epiphanius, *haer.* 64 (GCS 31, 403ff); for Epiphanius' *Bildungsfeindlichkeit* (and consequently his iconoclasm!) see Schneemelcher (1962): 925f.

[29] Bienert (1972), 107, on *ZaT* 145,24f: "im ersten Fall das Wort 'Babylonier' als Bild versteht, als Chiffre für Grausamkeit und Unterdrückung; im zweiten Fall (140,19) kennzeichnet er die Stellung der 'allegorisch' verstandenen Babylonier im Heilsplan Gotes als dämonische Mächte".

the area of New Testament theology; *anagoge* goes one step further. This seems hardly different from Diodore's or Theodoret's *theoria.*

From this it can be seen that it was almost always the exegesis of the *Old* Testament that was the acceptable field for spiritualising exegesis. Origen's understanding of John's Gospel as allegory probably went beyond the pale for many. Yet even Origen was aware of the possibility of harm to hearers, and refused to imitate a readiness, common since Aristotle, to *critique* any sacred text.[30] It may be that the question was answered in practice according to one's audience. In the case of the nascent monastic movement, some Egyptian and Asian monks (e.g., the Tall Brothers, Olympias' convent) favoured some allegory, others (e.g., the Nitrians, Bethlehemites) did not. Nevertheless it is more than the dictates of academic fashion which demand that interpretation be seen as a task of *aggiornamento*, especially in the context of liturgy. Edification, not doctrinal edifices, was requested through clarification of the more obscure passages, leaving plain ones to the work of paraphrase. Without rhetorical flourishes the hard-pressed Ambrose tailored his exegesis to the preaching of the gospel. The Bible led to Christ who revealed the Father in the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the hearer.[31]

However, as recent studies have made clear, allegory arises out of a sense that the Scriptural text must mean something. It seems likely that there was a 'turn to experience', a subjectivising of truth, around the half-way stage of the fourth century, in line with philosophical developments and the ascetic movement.[32] It is also noticeable that, unlike Didymus,[33] Evagrius makes little mention of doctrinal issues. Although the Song was hardly used by the Desert Fathers, while the dialogical praying of the Psalms *was* standard, this may be accounted for by the simple fact that the Scriptures were not in such a physical form as to be readily taken into the wilderness. So theological education does not seem to have been a priority for eremitic monasticism,

[30] According to Neuschäfer (1987), pp. 79-81, ΕΠΟΠΤΕΙΑ is found in Plato, but is especially prominent in Stoics; (Sextus Empiricus *Adv Math* 7,16; cf. Augustine *De civitate Dei* VIII, 4 Diog. Laert. 7,39). As for the Platonists, see A tius *plac.*1 *prooem*, 2 for ΦΥΣΙΚΗ, ΕΘΙΚΗ, ΛΟΓΙΚΗ Jerome (Ep. 30,1) has *logicam* as the highest and then, later (in Ep. 121,10,25), *theologiam.* It seems that Aristotle and his scheme — ΠΟΙΗΤΙΚΗ, ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΗ, ΘΕΩΡΕΤΙΚΗ (MET 6,1:1025-6) was ignored (cf. H. Dörrie, 1974.) After all Aristotle's own text hardly lent itself to allegorical interpretation. In other words the "intellectual" understanding by Origen of the highest level (and not stages of advancement) reveals a strong Stoic influence, and thus an eschewing of any 'Aristotelian' way of reading.

[31] Cf. Studer's conclusion in "Die patristische Exegese, eine Aktualisierung der Heiligen Schrift."

[32] Cf. Burton-Christie (1991), 22, writing about the Desert Fathers as influenced by Neoplatonism: "the hermeneutical key to Plotinus' interpretation... a radical interiorization of Plato's world of forms."

[33] See, for Didymus, Bienert (1972), 123-26.

while the Psalter's popularity was due not only to its 'memorisability' through widespread liturgical use (although perhaps also owing to its having a greater affinity with the warfare of the desert than the lyrical scenes of the Song. Perhaps the atmosphere of the Song seemed too eudaemonistic to be able to correspond to even the best of God-given experience of this life, let alone to austere or Evagrian 'intellectual' monasticism, and so was left alone. Then again its appeal to the passions, even in the context of sublimation, may have appeared unhelpful. Even in the Macarian homilies, replete as they are with affective mysticism, the Song is used sparingly.[34]

At the extreme end of this process was a view of Old Testament Scripture (along with the liturgy) as a stock of symbols. This can be seen to some extent in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.[35] Talking of God from a source which is largely non-philosophical was, as Pépin has claimed, a Stoic-style therapeutic operation of correct reading which would transport people back to their original pure state. However for the majority, the recognition of Porphyry's criticisms of Christian allegorising by Augustine[36] (perhaps significant for Augustine and others' neglecting the Song as a source of theology) are a sign that, in the early fifth century Church, the idea of a salvation by texts would have been played down. Whereas Origen, in reliance on Philo, but with more of a paedagogic intent, had tried to build a Christian philosophy on the Old Testament, for the North African, while meaning was indeed hidden in places, the story and message of Scripture was largely clear and allegory need be resorted to only in those rare cases. It would therefore only be a slight exaggeration to speak of a depreciation in the value of the Old Testament mysteries.

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[34] This seems to be included as a concession to the idea of the soul's being "wounded" by divine *eros*, along with 'the five senses' as another borrowing from Origen. The figures of bride and groom are there, but they seem based on NT texts; e.g., Makarios/Symeon, *Reden und Briefe* II, 110,12ff. G. Bunge's work (e.g.) should make one careful of seeing Evagrius' relation to Macarius in dialectical terms.

[35] Ps-Dionysius, *Ep.* 9; (1991), 194. Cf. Pépin (1987), 209.

[36] In *De Civ. Dei* X,11; Dombart-Kalb, 420f; see also *De Doctrina Christiana* III which counsels against resorting to allegory too quickly: see esp., 13. For both thinkers the lower soul needs purifying and instruction from the *mind*, rather than entertaining by pictures. But for Augustine the stakes seemed higher (cf. *De civ. Dei* X,9). Thus his polemic against the *physiologi*: "Ipsas physiologias cum considero, quibus docti et acuti homines has res humanas conantur vertere in res divinas, nihil video nisi ad temporalia terrenaque opera naturamque corpoream vel etiamsi invisibilem, tamen mutabilem potuisse revocari; quod nullo modo est verus Deus."

1.4 Setting the scene

It is a commonplace that one's hermeneutic reflects one's world. A sketch of that world must be modest in compass. Suffice to say, the latter part of the fourth and the earlier part of the fifth centuries saw a continued and possibly intensified sense of the importance of the sacramental; heavenly things could be grasped but not naturally or directly. However, there was also a process of Christianisation through demolition and building, law (cf. Theodosius' edicts), and (as coined by M. Foucault) 'totalising discourse',[37] although one wonders how far outlying regions were affected by such propaganda. The Church was conceived of as already perfect 'by definition' (e.g., in Epiphanius *Ancoratus* 118, and Chromatius, *Sermon* 10[38]) as a model for the State to learn from. By this time the definitive answer to the Arian threat had been given and largely received in the definition of the action of God as proceeding out from his essence. Rhetoric, under the influence of the Second Sophistic, was restrained and appropriate to the content, as Gregory of Nyssa showed in his denunciation of Eunomius as bombastic and "Aristotelian". Long, difficult journeys were normal; there seems to have been almost a dialectical relationship between the public careers and the monastic preference of many of our commentators. Particular controversies and local issues must have left their mark on the various men, but a growing sense of freedom from institutionalised heresy after Theodosius I and a rooting out of heresy which now seemed multiform and indigenously rooted, e.g., Priscillianism, Arianism, Donatism, Pelagianism and Photinianism (in the West), Origenism, Messalianism, Sabellianism and Nestorianism (in the East).[39] The lack of cultural as well as political cohesion is best attested to by the repeated efforts of Julian, the Theodosii, and, later, Zeno and Justinian (to give but some examples) to supply it.

In these circumstances a theology which could catch the unpredictable popular imagination while remaining true to the New Testament and the formulae of the fathers must have seemed desirable. Evidence of such a theology would be found in liturgy, poetry and hymns of the period, but also simply in the homilies of the commentators, the genre of which was rarely "pure scholarship".

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[37] Cf. the thesis of Averil Cameron (1994), and, less ambitiously, McMullen (1984).

[38] *Sermo X*; CCL 9a, 22: "Nupta dicitur (Ecclesia), quia per Spiritum sanctum Christo coniuncta est; virgo, quia innupta et incorrupta manet a peccato."

[39] Even the so-called "Eutychianism", proscribed at Chalcedon, could be seen as essentially a "two-natures" heresy. According to this school, the human nature existed already in Mary and contributed to his 'overall' person through its mingling with the Word.

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