

## HISTORY AND SYMBOL: A STUDY OF FORM IN EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

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AT LEAST since the time of Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945) and his great work, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*,<sup>1</sup> there have been more and more attempts to discuss the relationship between history and symbolism in man's awareness of the universe and in man's effort to communicate this awareness in philosophy, literature, and theology. In applying the theory of symbols (or "symbolics," as it has been called) to the study of patristic theology, we must not, of course, make the mistake of reducing everything to mere symbol and the symbol itself to the merely subjective, as some of Cassirer's followers indeed tend to do. Rather, the intention of the symbolic method is to throw light on some of the deepest levels of man's conscious and unconscious experience in his attempt to grapple with the problems of Christian revelation.

By way of a preliminary note it may be said that symbols, in general, are objects or events which are considered by men to have, in addition to their original historical or objective function, another deeper reference or relationship. Scholars distinguish, roughly, three types of symbol: the gestural symbol, the symbol artefact, and the verbal or linguistic symbol. All of these are analogous, and it would serve no useful purpose to attempt a definition which would suit all of them; but they have this in common, that in every case there is a manipulation of the spatio-temporal, the sensuous, for the purpose of conveying an intelligent or spiritual experience (an idea, a desire, etc.). Primarily, at least, it would appear that all symbols are dialogic and interpersonal: man uses symbols to communicate with other men as well as with the forces beyond the visible world; and the world in turn is felt to be a "forest of symbols" by which the otherworldly powers communicate with us. In any case, in all symbols we may distinguish the message (divided into the *vehicle* or concrete element, and the *tenor* or complex of meanings attached to it), the sender, and the

<sup>1</sup> *Die Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (3 vols.; Berlin, 1923–29).

interpreter. The actual symbol or message may, however, have either of two functions: the sign may be primarily denotative (communicative) or primarily expressive (as, for example, in a purely personal or emotional manifestation), but both elements are usually related in all human symbols. And because of the gap which exists between inner awareness and its outward expression, the meaning or tenor of the symbol will always involve a certain amount of ambiguity. Thus symbols are often, for this reason, said to be plurisignificant or polysemous; they have many levels of meaning, and the area of correct interpretation must often depend upon the complexities of the concrete relationship between persons in the sign-situation. Now this factor is extremely important for our understanding of the growth of Christian theology; for the evolving relationship between God and man in the *Heilsgeschichte* is rather like a dramatic dialogue, each moment of which must be taken in its concrete, symbolic context. Once the symbol has been removed from the dialogic context it can often be misunderstood.

Karl Rahner has once again reminded us, in a discussion of theological development, of the importance of the distinction between the Word of God as formally enunciated (*formell gesagt*) and formally communicated (*formell mitgeteilt*).<sup>2</sup> It is the distinction between the statement "Christ died" and the concrete experience of this event as the Apostles were aware of it; or, in another example of Rahner's, it is the difference between the bare statement "N. is my mother" and the full implication of this statement, in the concrete, as said by a loving son. Again, it is the gap between the bare, pragmatic, linguistic symbol and the infinite complexity of the concrete historical phenomenon. Further, the *spoken* word may be quite unambiguous in a conversation

<sup>2</sup> See Karl Rahner, "Zur Frage der Dogmenentwicklung," *Schriften zur Theologie* 1 (2nd ed.; Zurich, 1956) 49-90, especially 82. See also *ibid.* 1, 148-50, on the "peculiarities of language" and the distinction made between the word and the fact which it attempts to designate; in this connection, one should consult the entire paper on an approach to biblical theology, "Theos im Neuen Testament," *ibid.* 1, 91-167. For Rahner's very sound interpretation of the meaning of Pauline eschatology and the limits of *Entmythologisierung*, see "Auferstehung des Fleisches," *ibid.* 2, 211-25. The fundamental deficiency of the *Aussage* or abstract proposition in, for example, Christology, is thoroughly discussed in "Probleme der Christologie von heute," *ibid.* 1, 169-222; he concludes: "The true *Verkündigungstheologie* is none other than one that takes its religious task seriously with all the tools of science, in such wise that it becomes both scientific and kerygmatic at the same time" (p. 222).

between two persons who are immersed in the sign-situation; yet, once consigned to the written page and removed from the original context in time and space, the word can give rise to serious misinterpretations. Examples that come to mind are Christ's words to His mother, "What is it to me and to thee?", or the words of many of the Old Testament *nebiim* as they first uttered their prophetic oracles to their primitive audience.

But before beginning our discussion of the symbol in a very restricted area of patristic literature, it may be useful first to enumerate some of the various types of symbols. Of three basic types, the gestural, the artificial, and the verbal, the gestural is perhaps the most primitive and at the origin of all the others. Among the most common of these are the natural semantic gestures which are in use in various human communities; these are now being catalogued and correlated in the comparatively new science of kinemics or kinesics. A second type of gestural symbol is the dramatic; and closely allied with this is the so-called "parabolic act" which we find in the Old Testament, for example in Hos 1:2-3 and elsewhere, as well as in the New, as in the story of Jesus' cursing of the fig-tree.<sup>3</sup> For the history of religions the most important, perhaps, is the third type: the ritual act, which scholars today tend to break down into many kinds; for example, the magical, the therapeutic, the sacramental, and the sacrificial. Last of all, we may here classify still a fourth type, the so-called event-symbol: this is, in a sense, related to the second type of gestural symbol, but it differs by going beyond the realm of the dramatic. The event-symbol is an actual historical event which, apart from its concrete historical relationships, is felt to have a further, spiritual significance. Such event-symbols the Fathers of the Church detected in many of the details of Scripture: the crossing of the Red Sea, the fast of Jesus in the desert, the raising of Lazarus, the flow of blood and water from the side of Christ, the ascension, and so on. It is clear that the gestural symbol is at the heart of Judaeo-Christian worship.

The artificial symbol or symbol artefact need not detain us long; this is the conscious use of shape or design for communication or expression. We see its primitive form in fetishes, amulets, and charms; it is the basis of pictographic design, and thus perhaps at the heart of all written

<sup>3</sup> Mk 11:20-26; Mt 21:20-22; not in Lk or Jn.

language. Christianity parts company with Judaism in so far as the symbolism of iconography plays a very important role in the development of the liturgy and of all religious art.

Finally, the verbal or linguistic symbol may be considered on three levels. The primary linguistic symbol is the word—but this, again, means primarily the spoken or phonated word in the concrete context of communication. Here it is wise to recall that the pictographic or written word is, in the various languages, merely an artificial design used to represent the spoken word. Thus it is only natural that the written word, even apart from all the possible errors of textual transmission, can always give rise to difficulty and ambiguity. It is often said by some extremists that the spoken word is ultimately untranslatable from language to language; though an exaggeration, there is an important truth in the statement. In any case, the problem of ultimate translation from *written* texts is an even more serious one. And thus it might be argued from the purely semantic point of view that, if a living religion is to be based on certain sacred texts, it will almost inevitably fall into corruption and decay, the further away it moves in time and space from the historical origin of those texts—unless it have a constantly living, internal “interpreter,” in the semantic sense of the word.

In any case, it was the primitive use of the linguistic symbol in narrative and in poetry which brought about the development of the various literatures. Here we find the authors (or speakers) using very complicated symbols to produce a permanent record of events (history) or, at the other pole, to engage in the symbolic verbal play we call literature. Once we are in the realm of literature, however, we can easily see how writers would make use of various images, objects, or events in order to symbolize meanings which they found otherwise very difficult to express. The images of the royal bride and bridegroom of the marriage-psalm (Ps 44) become symbols of Yahweh and His people; the work-song of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia (Ps 134) may become a symbol of the song of the just Jew among sinful neighbors; and thus many Fathers of the Church have taken the love of the Canticle of Canticles as symbolic of the mystical attraction which Christ exercises on the Christian soul.

Finally, it may be said that an entire literary work, an entire poem

or psalm, an entire book of the Bible (e.g., Jonah or Job, Ruth or Judith), can be taken as a symbol, that is, as the symbolic expression of certain very profound experiences, or of certain very complicated ideas and emotions which the sacred writer attempted to express in order to instruct his audience about the nature of God's dealings with men.

So much, then, by way of a preliminary on the nature of the symbol. As an expression of the deepest part of man, it is an interpersonal relationship, useful and necessary for expression and communication, and yet fundamentally ambiguous, especially when it is separated from its concrete environment and removed from the realm of action to the printed page. Although written history is, after all, merely another form of linguistic symbol, I think that it is in order to point out a polarity between History and Symbol. By "History" I mean the actual actions and gestures of men in their concrete spatio-temporal relationship. "Symbol" refers to the whole realm of meanings that we give to these acts and gestures and the entire realm of literature. It is only against this general background that we can get a deeper understanding of certain problems which arise in patristic theology, in the way the Fathers discuss some of the difficulties of Scripture and of Church doctrine. And intimately connected with this is the employment of certain "forms" of communication in the early Church; for they are the concrete embodiment of the influences of the sign-situation.

In the first place, the problem of "form" in the Fathers arises primarily from the fact that even in a single author we find a wide variety of styles and types of discourse. On the one hand, there are the various levels of vocabulary-complexes with their associated images and symbols; on the other, there are various degrees of dogmatic complexity and obscurity, various levels of tension between what I have called History and Symbol. Much in this area of discussion will perhaps remain obscure; but even a superficial acquaintance will reveal enormous differences in style between, say, Chrysostom's treatise *On the Priesthood* and his *Homilies on Matthew*, or between Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium* and his *Commentary on the Canticle*. It is this scale of differences which I wish to explore a little more closely, at least in a comparatively restricted number of patristic works, against the background of symbolism. Differences in form, understood in the correct

sense, may perhaps help us to penetrate ever more deeply into the meaning of the organic development of early Christian literature and tradition.

Since the days of Benedetto Croce's *Estetica* (1902) and his attack on form in the narrow, rhetorical sense, critics have felt a certain embarrassment when forced to have recourse to terms like literary genre or literary form. And, surely, in the sense that each particular manifestation of symbolic form must be constructed on a definite and conscious set of rules, the expression ought to be avoided. There is some truth in the statement that poetry does not exist but poets do. But at least in a study of the patristic writers, it may still be useful to speak of form as referring to the peculiar set of concrete conditions and limitations (either from tradition or from local environment) which helped to shape the external symbol; they are part of the semantic relationship which exists between communicator and interpreter.

To discuss the problem of form in the world of the New Testament, we must recall that we are dealing with a period that was a book-civilization to a greater extent than was true of the Greek or Hebrew world of five or six centuries before. Even in the time of Plato, writing was considered primarily an *hypomnema*, a "record," an aid to the memory to help recapture what living men said and did; the chief form of communication and instruction was the living discourse. But from the time of the development of the great libraries at Rome and Alexandria and the growth of some form of courier or mail-service, the term *logos* or "word" is used not only of oral discourse but of formal written treatises as well. Thus the *logia* of the Lord (His words, and perhaps also His deeds), as preserved in the primitive Christian *kerygma*, will take on a more orderly, literary structure in the *euangelion* (Mk 1:1), and this, in book-form, will be disseminated all over the world (Mt 26:13). Soon the "good news" will be referred to as a *diegesis*, a *narratio a principio diligenter* (cf. Lk 1:1-3), or, again, as a *biblios*, a *liber* (Jn 20:30) containing "signs" or symbols (*semeia*) which are intended as an ultimate expression of "witness" (*martyria*).

The actual way, then, in which a particular work was, as it were, first "performed," with the limitations demanded by the particular sender-interpreter relationship—all this is most important for the proper analysis of the various levels of meaning which an early Chris-

tian work may have. The written word, as we have said, is fundamentally ambiguous if it loses contact with the living, with the concrete. This was early discovered by Plato and it has been more recently confirmed by modern semantics; but it was well known to the first messengers of the "good news." It is for this reason, as the author of 2 Peter reminds us, that "the unlearned and unstable" wrest the Scriptures "to their own destruction." "But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel has been preached unto you" (1 Pt 1:25). In both these letters, or *logoi*, there is a recall to the living *kerygma* which alone can communicate "the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pt 1:16).

This, then, is the meaning I wish to give to "form" in the present discussion: it is the result of the entire, particular set of concrete circumstances and conditions which helped to shape the presentation of the literary work or symbol. Thus, it does not designate a literary genre in the older sense of the term, nor yet, on the other hand, does it refer to the German *Form* as understood by the older school of *Formgeschichte*. In a sense, every symbol, being concrete, will have its own unique form; at the same time, common sense should tell us that concrete circumstances and limitations do tend on occasions to repeat themselves in a meaningful sense.

On the problem of the literary form of our ancient Christian documents, the great Père Delehayé<sup>4</sup> was among the first to tackle the question of the Acts of the Martyrs. What emerged from the discussion seems to be that there was no form, in the strict sense, in the composition of the Acts; rather, there was a whole scale of types of *acta* which extended from the almost literal transcript of the court-record, the *procès-verbal*, to different degrees of historical (or apologetic) fiction; from the *Acts of the Scilitan Martyrs* all the way to the *Vita s.*

<sup>4</sup> For the literature, see my *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs* (Oxford, 1954) pp. 260 ff. Much of the earlier discussions of "form" were stimulated by Martin Dibelius, *A Fresh Approach to the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (*International Library of Christian Knowledge*; London, 1936). On the New Testament in general, see Paul Feine, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (9th ed. by Johannes Behm; Heidelberg, 1950), although Feine-Behm relies too much on the very questionable hypotheses of O. Roller, *Das Formular der paulinischen Briefe* (Stuttgart, 1933). One must now also consult the various introductions to the New Testament books in *La sainte bible* [de Jérusalem] (Paris, 1956) pp. 1283-89, 1393-96 (Synoptics and John), 1619-20 (Apocalypse), 1481-90 (Pauline corpus), and *passim*.

*Caeciliae*. At the one pole we have a document which emerged for the purpose of having a simple record; at the other we have the more literary symbol created for the edification of various local Christian gatherings or larger communities. In a sense, the Gospels themselves constitute the first example of the *vita, acta, and passio*. And what creates so much of a problem in many of the early Christian documents is precisely this polarity between *hypomnema* (historical "record") and *apologia* (the edifying or instructive discourse). In the case of the Martyr Acts, what complicates the problem even further is the number of different recensions and the different stages of growth, as we find them, for example, in the *Passion of Sts. Perpetua and Felicitas* and the *Acts of Apollonius*; here, as in many other Martyr Acts, the disentanglement of *hypomnema* and *apologia* is still an urgent task.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the problem of the distinction between the "epistle" (or formal discourse) and "letter" (the more personal, immediate communication) is an unreal one. In a sense, a "letter" is any communication that is written to another and delivered (especially through a "courier"); but in the ancient world it was the custom for entire treatises to be sent by the author to his audience, and it would seem that homilies delivered at one place might be sent by "mail" to be publicly recited at another. In the Pauline corpus, for example, we have almost the complete scale from the *logos* or treatise sent by mail (Romans, for example) to the very personal letter (such as Philemon, in which the local, immediate problem of the scapegrace Onesimus becomes the occasion and, indeed, the symbol of a larger doctrine and of the relationship of all men in Christ); between these two extremes lie the letters grouped today as 1-2 Corinthians. In the view of some scholars, however, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistles of James and Jude and possibly even 1 and 2 Peter, the later *Epistle of Barnabas*, the so-called *Epistle to Diognetus* and *Second Epistle of Clement*, seem all to have arisen in the first instance as *logoi*, although they may have later been circulated as "letters" throughout the Christian communities. With the treatise, however, one would expect a

<sup>5</sup> On the Christian Martyr Acts in general, see B. Altaner, *Patrologie* (2nd ed.; Freiburg, 1950) pp. 184-93, and the excellent discussion by J. Quasten, *Patrology* 1 (Westminster, Md., 1950) 176-85, with the full bibliography there cited. On the *Passion of Sts. Perpetua and Felicitas* one must now consult the excellent edition of C. J. M. J. van Beek (Nijmegen, 1936) with his discussion of the problem.



covering or dedicatory letter; and, at least in the case of the New Testament treatise-letters, the original covering letter, if it existed, may well have been lost very early. Again, later editors may sometimes have felt the need to add certain epistolary formulae to justify the title of "letter." In any case, there is no need to quibble about terms; in one sense, *Romans* is a treatise sent by Paul in lieu of his personal instruction; in another, it is the epistle of Paul "to all those who are at Rome." With regard, however, to the so-called *Epistle to Diognetus*, a controversy does exist of some importance.<sup>6</sup> Even apart from the last two chapters (11-12), the peculiar style of which suggests that they may have been excerpted from a Lenten homily, the *Epistle* is perhaps more correctly described as a rather rhetorical *apologia* on behalf of the Christian way of life, dedicated to a certain pagan named Diognetus. It would seem, *prima facie* at least, to have more the air of the dedicated treatise than of an epistle. Whether the first section (1-10) really reflects a period of Christianity much earlier than the actual date of the epistle's recension is a question that need not concern us here. One has, however, the impression that the work is a kind of apologetic pamphlet composed (perhaps as late as the second half of the third century) from at least two earlier works, an *apologia* and a homily.

Of the primitive types of Christian literature, then, we have: "gospel" (or *euangelion*; I shall not enter here into the controversy on the ultimate "form" of the *kerygma*, the "announcement of the good news"), the *acta martyrum* (with its ramifications in the more or less fictitious *passio*), the personal letter, the kerygmatic or didactic sermon (sometimes included in a letter), the *logos* or treatise composed for community reading and sometimes sent with a covering letter, and the *apologia* or pamphlet composed in order to answer pagan objections.

The form known as "apocalypse" creates a problem, and perhaps no useful purpose is served in making the term a technical one applicable both to the Revelation of St. John and the so-called *Shepherd* of Hermas. In the canonical Apocalypse John speaks of his work as a *bibliotes propheteias* (Ap 22:19) or simply as a *propheteia* (1:3); he

<sup>6</sup> See the edition of H.-I. Marrou, *A Diognète (Sources chrétiennes 33; Paris, 1951)*, especially pp. 242 ff., with my own comments in *Traditio* 10 (1954) 570-71.

pronounces a blessing on all those who hear it read and also to "the reader" (a special office?), especially if they observe what is written in it (1:3). The actual "apocalypse" is rather the symbolic "vision" or series of visions, vouchsafed by God to His servant John "to make known to His servants the things which must shortly come to pass" (1:1).<sup>7</sup>

But surely this serious prophecy is not to be considered in the same class as the *Shepherd*. The simplicity of the style of the *Shepherd* and its episodic content naturally lent themselves to the vagaries of editorial addition or adaptation; it is, perhaps, mosaic work, the result of intrusions by many hands; its form, such as it is, is reminiscent rather of the Hellenistic novel or aretology;<sup>8</sup> and in its series of dream sequences and visions only rarely does it reach profundity or unified presentation in its doctrine of second repentance.<sup>9</sup> If a form were to be assigned to the *Shepherd*, I should prefer to call it allegorical fiction disguised as a primitive Christian prophecy. Despite the high regard in which it was held by many of the early Fathers, its confused theology and its haphazard manner of composition make it difficult to take the *Shepherd* seriously. It does, none the less, reflect much of primitive Christian symbolism and doctrine and is an authentic source of some areas of early Christian practice. Similar symbolic works which throw

<sup>7</sup> See now Père M.-E. Boismard's shrewd analysis of the Apocalypse in *La sainte bible*, pp. 1619-40; cf. also Feine-Behm, *Einführung*, pp. 270 ff., with the literature there cited.

<sup>8</sup> The "aretology" was a form which emerged with the Hellenistic mystery religion and developed, to some extent, alongside the Greek novel. It is a *diegesis* or narration of the theophany of a god among men with the miracles the god is presumed to have performed and disseminated for the furtherance of the cult. For the growing literature on the aretology (the "account of the virtues") see my *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*, p. 163 and note; cf. also Roger A. Pack, *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1952) p. 84, nn. 1917 (an Apollo aretology) and 1927 (Sarapis) with the literature cited. If one could, by a stretch of the imagination, look to Hellenistic literature for an analogue to the Gospels, the closest would be the Alexandrian *vita* or *bios* with some elements of the aretology.

<sup>9</sup> For the vast literature on Hermas, see M. Dibelius, *Der Hirte des Hermas (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament)*; Tübingen, 1923); and cf. also my own articles, "The Need of a New Edition of Hermas," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 12 (1951) 382-87, and "The Development of Early Christian Ethics," *Thought* 31 (1956) 385-402, especially 391-92. My suggestions with regard to a psychological analysis of the *Shepherd* have been attacked by R. Joly, "Philologie et psychanalyse: C. G. Jung et le 'Pasteur' d'Hermas," *L'Antiquité classique* 22 (1953) 422 ff.; I venture to suggest, however, that M. Joly has not perhaps been fully aware of the essentially contrived nature of the apocalyptic form in Hermas.

light on other areas of primitive Christian belief are the *Apocalypse of Peter*<sup>10</sup> and the *Apocalypse of Paul*.<sup>11</sup>

The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (of the third century) incorporates, in a sense, some of the features of the apocalypse: Perpetua's visions (especially the appearance of the ladder of bronze and the dragon) and the vision which Saturus has of the angels who transported the martyrs to a city of light are reminiscent of the atmosphere that breathes through the *Shepherd* of Hermas; and for this reason it becomes all the more difficult to separate in this work what is fact and what is fiction.<sup>12</sup> Here, as in the entire question of the *acta martyrum*, what makes our problem doubly complicated is the fact that a good number of our extant Martyr Acts come down to us through official editions, such as that made by Eusebius of Caesarea and entitled *On the Ancient Martyrs*; for by this time many of the details of the trials and the tortures, which had once been recorded as *hypomnema*, would now naturally be recast on the more symbolic level of *apologia* and *didache*.<sup>13</sup>

A good illustration of the manner in which many of the scriptural *commentaria* (*hypomnematismoi*) arose is given us in Gregory of Nyssa's prologue to his *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles*. Actually, the *Commentary* is a selection of fifteen homilies from a course of sermons delivered by Gregory in his church at Nyssa and taken down by "members of the congregation" (most probably *notarii* trained in Greek shorthand). He then sent the collection as a gift to the saintly widow (and later deaconess) of Constantinople, Olympias, the benefactress of Gregory of Nazianzus as well as Chrysostom—indeed, Olympias' house at Constantinople was apparently a haven of spiritual comfort for

<sup>10</sup> See Quasten, *Patrology* 1, 144–46.   <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146–49.

<sup>12</sup> For the vast literature, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 181–83.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius refers to this work in his *Ecl. hist.* 5, 21, 5. This "Collection of the Ancient Martyrs," published perhaps around the year 300, seems to have included the Acts of Ptolemy, Lucius, and Companions; the story of the martyrs of Vienne and Lyons; the so-called Acts of Apollonius, assigned to the reign of Commodus; an account of the martyrdom of Apollonia and companions under Decius at Alexandria; the martyrdom of Dionysius, Faustus, and their companions under Valerian; and a survey of some of the martyrs under Galerian. It would seem that the martyrs of Scilli and the account of Perpetua and Felicitas were not included. I have referred elsewhere to Eusebius' schematization of early Church history and to his possible manipulation of some of the source material in the interests of *apologia* and *didache*; see *Traditio* 10 (1954) 568.

consecrated women and was regularly visited by passing clergy and hierarchy. In the covering letter (now called the prologue) with which Gregory sent his *Commentary*, he recalls the discussions he held with Olympias on the Canticle and now wishes to give her, in the enclosed homilies, the true *philosophia* of the Canticle; and following in the lines laid down by Origen, he wishes to oppose those who (undoubtedly from the school of Antioch and Constantinople) attempted to be satisfied with the *psila pragmata*, the unadorned literal sense, of the scriptural text. As he closes he says:

This work was not composed by me merely for ostentation. As a matter of fact, some of the sermons I preached in the church were taken down by members of the congregation out of a desire for further study. And wherever their notes were coherent, I got them from them, adding the rest myself wherever necessary, making the additions always in the form of a homily, putting the discussion of the text first, followed immediately by the interpretation (*theoria*). I worked on this during the leisure time left me by my duties and the season of the year, as it was during the days of the fast that I composed this discourse primarily for the ears of ordinary people.<sup>14</sup>

Gregory then admits, apologetically, that the work is unfinished (actually he goes up to Ct 6:8) and promises to get busy on the rest if God allows.

In the prologue, therefore, or rather the covering letter to Olympias, Gregory reveals his somewhat polemical intentions in giving the *theoria* and the *philosophia* of the Canticle against the more literal interpreters who are left unnamed. He further explains his point of view in the first homily: the hidden meaning for Gregory has at least three levels. The Song of Songs portrays the drama of salvation, in which the Bride is the Church; the friends of the Bridegroom are the angels who watch the development of the mysteries of salvation; and the pastoral scenery of the Canticle symbolizes the progressive settings in which the Church evolves in the world, the eternal conflict between good and evil. On another level, the Bride is the faithful Christian rising to God through the message of salvation and the sacred mysteries of the sacraments. On a deeper level, it is the unlimited progress of the privileged soul into the Dark Cloud, ever mystically drawn and yet never quite embracing the Beloved. The soul is mystically touched by God's

<sup>14</sup> *In Cant. cant., proem.* (PG 44, 764B).

presence; and the deep insight that He gives into the nature of the universe and the meaning of existence is ever finite and provisory, with a promise of infinitely more to be attained.

How much Gregory actually revised the stenographic transcript is difficult to estimate. Direct addresses to his audience, such as we find in other public sermons, are for the most part omitted. Still, there is a good deal of repetition and looseness of structure, of the sort that would be avoided in a formal treatise intended to be read (or recited aloud) in private. Again, throughout the *Commentary on the Canticle*, at least in our present text (which needs serious revision), there are a number of lacunae and undeveloped sentences which may be the remains of hasty or incomplete revision. Further, we do not know how far Gregory may have revised his sermons in order to make them apply more immediately to the circumstances of Olympias and (presumably) her community of consecrated women. Certain passages of peculiar directness and familiarity on the desire for higher perfection,<sup>15</sup> and Gregory's reference to the holy friendship between Paul and Thecla (in the tradition of the apocryphal *Acts of Paul*),<sup>16</sup> suggest that there may have been a good deal of adaptation along these lines.

With the clue given us in the prologue to the *Commentary on the Canticle* we can get a clearer idea of Gregory's general method of composition. However, many collections of Gregory's sermons may have derived from the mere transcripts; at least in the form in which we have them today, they do not have dedications or covering letters, and the circumstances of their dissemination are more difficult to recover. Such are, for example, the eight sermons *On the Beatitudes* and the five homilies *On the Lord's Prayer* (of which we possess now an excellent translation and commentary by the accomplished patristic scholar, Miss Hilda Graef); the eight homilies *On Ecclesiastes*, which are obviously incomplete, going only to Qoh 3:13; the two sermons *On the Words "Let Us Make Man"*; and a number of others. Even in these, however, one feels that much of the evidence of actual delivery (direct address to the congregation, references to the actual circumstances of the sermon, etc.) has apparently been pruned away, with the exception of the occasional reference to "thou" (e.g., "thou seest"), and this is either the individual to whom, on second instance, the collection might

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, hom. 5 (PG 44, 876D-877A).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, hom. 14 (PG 44, 1065D).

be dedicated, or else the Christian soul, the entire audience as represented concretely in an individual.

Now from these we must clearly distinguish a type of composition which is called the *logos* (or *graphie*, or, in the case of the *In Hexaemeron*, an *apodeixis*, a "demonstration"). This is the formal, structured treatise which Gregory, for example, would sit down, as it were, to compose and dictate to his secretaries on the occasion of some special need or at the request of a particular friend or benefactor. A good example is one of Gregory's earliest extant works, the *Treatise on Virginity*, "a *logos* on perfection,"<sup>17</sup> whose dedication has been lost. The *De perfectione*, however, one of his latest works, is, as he tells us,<sup>18</sup> a *logos* on the specific stamp (*character*) and characteristics (*idiomata*) of the Christian in so far as everyone is called to the imitation of Christ. It was written, we are told, in reply to a specific request, although the name of the actual addressee has been lost and it is not clear whether we may trust the designation in some of the MSS, "to Olympius, a monk."

Perhaps Gregory's greatest achievement in this type of composition is the *Life of Moses*. This treatise may well have developed from some sermons on Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; but all traces of such an earlier stage of composition, if such there were, have been carefully removed. According to Gregory's own description, the *Life of Moses* is not really a *bios* or *vita*, but rather a *logos* on perfection;<sup>19</sup> and it was composed in answer to the request of a certain young "man of God" (whose name is given in some MSS as Caesarius<sup>20</sup>). But the method Gregory follows is the regular catechetical technique which he used in the *Commentary on the Canticle*: first, an analysis of the *historia* or

<sup>17</sup> *De virginitate* (PG 46, 317A).      <sup>18</sup> *De perfectione* (PG 46, 252A).

<sup>19</sup> *De vita Moysis* (PG 44, 300B); and see the recent edition of Jean Daniélou, S.J., *Grégoire de Nysse: La vie de Moïse* (*Sources chrétiennes* 1<sup>bis</sup>; Paris, 1955) Introd., pp. x-xxiv. It is interesting to note that both in the formally composed *logoi* and in Gregory's homilies we meet the same preferences for types of Greek clausulae. Numbering the clausulae according to the number of unaccented syllables between the last two accents of a clause, we find that in the *Life of Moses* the preference is in this order: 2 4 / 1 0 3 5 (with the first two more frequent than the last four); in the *Commentary on the Canticle* the order is the same: 2 4 / 1 0 3 5; in the sermons *On the Beatitudes* it is 2 4 / 1 3 0 5. The clausula preference would seem to reflect, therefore, the cadences of the spoken word. On clausulae in the earlier Christian literature, cf. my note in *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 17 (1956) 221-22.

<sup>20</sup> *De vita Moysis* (PG 44, 429B); but the name is omitted from some of the oldest and best MSS and is not perhaps authentic.

actual details of Moses' life, as an example or type (*hypodeigma*) of the life of progress in perfection; and then the allegorical analysis, called *theoria*, in the manner of the Philonian and Alexandrian school of exegesis. Thus there are four clearly marked sections in the *Life of Moses*: a prologue, which also does duty as an introductory letter;<sup>21</sup> the *historia* (based principally on Ex 2-19 in the LXX tradition, with the help, perhaps, of Philo's *Vita Moysis* or a similar work);<sup>22</sup> the *theoria*, or development of the "philosophy," the symbolic meaning of Moses' life for the faithful Christian;<sup>23</sup> and a brief conclusion, which, in our Migne text, may contain an interpolated summary of the whole work.<sup>24</sup>

Now it is characteristic of this treatment that the primary interest is not in the historical details of the life of Moses (such as would appeal, perhaps, to a modern historian or student of Scripture), but rather in Moses' life as an *historia*, that is, as a text by which the meaning of the life of the Christian could be taught and illustrated. Moses' ascent to Mount Sinai and his finding God in the dark cloud is symbolic of man's search for God in the world and his ultimate realization that God can be found only in the darkness of faith and known only in the constant stretching out of our finite minds to comprehend the Incomprehensible. For this reason the *Life of Moses* is perhaps one of the most important works of the early Church that have come down to us.

It is interesting to note that Gregory's method of *historia* and *theoria*, of History and Symbol, is undoubtedly related to the method for catechesis which Augustine counsels in his *De catechizandis rudibus* 3-9.<sup>25</sup> There Augustine instructs the deacon Deogratias in the two stages which are to be developed in the instruction of the *accedentes*: (1) the *narratio* or history of the world from Genesis to the present, ending with an account of the eschatological catastrophe and the world to come; (2) next they are to be instructed in *mores et scientia*, in the *via Christi*,<sup>26</sup> that is, in the imitation of Christ by a good moral

<sup>21</sup> PG 44, 297B-304C.

<sup>22</sup> PG 44, 304C-325C.

<sup>23</sup> PG 44, 326A-424D.

<sup>24</sup> PG 44, 424D-429D.

<sup>25</sup> See the edition and commentary by J. P. Christopher (Washington, D.C., 1926), with his discussion of Augustine's method, pp. 3-5. See also the same author's *St. Augustine: The First Catechetical Instruction* (ACW 2; Westminster, Md., 1946).

<sup>26</sup> *De catechizandis rudibus* 7, 25.

life which is demanded by the *narratio* of God's favors. All through the narrative, Augustine teaches, the catechist must attend not only to the *litterae*, but also to the *mysteria*, that is, to the *allegoria* underlying the religious history.<sup>27</sup> And, if some commentators are right, it may well be that the same method is the "form" which underlies Augustine's *Confessions*. On this view, the narration of Augustine's withdrawal from a life in the world, his conversion to Christianity, and his final turning to the book of Genesis in the concluding chapters, is not told for the sake of biography but rather with a view to catechetical instruction. The ultimate meaning of the narrative is to instruct the catechumen or convert in the ways of God's dealing with the human soul. This polarity between *narratio* and *allegoria* is also, I think, at the heart of the very complicated structure of the *City of God*, although the aim and interests in that work are, of course, somewhat different from what we have been considering. At any rate, there can be no doubt that the two accounts of the origin and development of the two Cities become symbolic for two ways of life in the world, for the two great sets of forces which are in conflict within the very heart of man.

Gregory's own great catechetical work, the *Catechetica magna*, is another important guide for prospective teachers of catechumens which follows the same general method: 1-37 comprise a narration of God's favors towards man; 38-40 teach the corresponding *mores* demanded of the Christian. Again, these techniques are not mere "forms"; they represent the concrete demands of the Christian catechuminate. The two parts, *narratio* and *mores (via Christi)*, ultimately, perhaps, correspond to the primitive Christian *kerygma* and *didache*, doctrine and morals, *hagadah* and *halakôth*.

But to return to Gregory of Nyssa's use of the *logos*, we should note, for example, his work *On the Psalms*.<sup>28</sup> It is a formally composed *biblios* (or *graphe*, a "writing" or a "treatise"), introduced by a covering letter to a "man of God" whose name is now lost. Its chief aim is to explain the *theoria*, or symbolic meaning, which underlies the various "headings" found at the beginning of most of the psalms;<sup>29</sup> for, he tells us, "they will contribute not a little to our progress in virtue in so far as it is possible to understand their hidden meaning from the text."<sup>30</sup> Again, Gregory composed his work *On the Creation of Man* as an Easter

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 9, 8-9.      <sup>28</sup> *In psalmodum inscriptiones* (PG 44, 432 ff.).

<sup>29</sup> *In psalmodum inscriptiones* (PG 44, 432B-433A).      <sup>30</sup> PG 44, 432A.



gift for Peter and expressed as his aim a desire to supplement his brother Basil's work on the Hexaemeron by offering a *theoria* of man, the meaning of his creation.<sup>31</sup> And here, as in all of Gregory's discussions of Genesis, there is an attempt to communicate the doctrine of the divine image in man, its immersion in sin, and the means whereby the image may once again be revealed to light by incorporation into the divine economy of salvation. This is its *theoria*, and it is only by considering the intentions of such works as these that the patristic catechetical technique becomes clear.

But the technique becomes slightly more complicated in a new form which begins to emerge in the second and third centuries, the dialogue. We find, in general, two types of dialogue form, or, rather, two poles which represent the two ultimate extremes within this form: (1) the stenographic transcription of an actual conversation or religious disputation, and (2) the completely fictitious "Platonic" dialogue, wherein the technique is employed for the exposition of a specific doctrine or point of view. We may note in passing that this roughly corresponds to the two dimensions of the Christian Martyr Acts, the legal *procès-verbal* and the completely fictitious *acta* or *passio*. But here as in the Martyr Acts, between the two poles there is an entire scale of mixed types. In connection with the dialogue we have at the one pole, for example, the so-called *Dialogue of Origen with Heracleides* from a sixth-century codex found near Cairo in a famous cache discovered in 1941. It is like having a tape-recording of a discussion on the Trinity which took place probably in a church in Arabia sometime between the years 230-270, and it is indeed unique in Christian documents.<sup>32</sup> But Augustine's dialogue *De beata vita*, as is well known, represents a fairly close approximation of an actual discussion which took place at Cassiciacum apparently on November 13, 14, and 15 of the year 386; the participants were Augustine, Monnica, Adeodatus, Augustine's brother Navigius, and four others. This is suggested by such asides as "verba pueri sicut dicta erant cum conscribi mihi placuisset."<sup>33</sup> Augustine undoubtedly made some revision, however slight, and the introductory

<sup>31</sup> *De hominis opificio* (PG 44, 125C).

<sup>32</sup> As an introduction to the literature on the *Dialogue*, see Quasten, *Patrology* 2, 62-64.

<sup>33</sup> *De beata vita* 3, 18. See the edition by Michael Schmaus (*Florilegium patristicum* 27; Bonn, 1931); and cf. the dissertation of R. A. Brown, *S. Aureli Augustini De beata vita: A Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Washington, D.C., 1944), with her discussion of the earlier literature on the dialogue-form, pp. 1-20.

section (1, 1—2, 6) serves as a dedicatory letter to the Roman statesman (and later consul) Flavius Manlius Theodorus.

Gregory of Nyssa also used the dialogue technique. *On the Soul and the Resurrection of the Body*<sup>34</sup> is a Platonic dialogue whose "characters" are Gregory and Macrina, and the point of departure for the discussion is Basil's recent death on Jan. 1, 379. How far the work represents the actual conversations between Gregory and his sister is difficult to discover. On the other hand, the so-called *Contra fatum* or, as Gregory himself calls it simply, *On Fate*, is a dialogue composed most probably on the basis of a stenographic report. Actually, the work is a letter, apparently to a distinguished member of the hierarchy ("O honorable and holy head") who had requested a report of the discussion Gregory held at Constantinople on the subject of astrology and determinism with an unnamed pagan philosopher.<sup>35</sup> Owing to the nature of the discussion and the apparent importance of the report it seems likely that Gregory employed *notarii* to sit in on the conversation and take down at least the substance of what was said on both sides.

The *Life of Saint Macrina*, on the other hand, is a peculiar combination, and the circumstances surrounding its publication are not completely clear. It is a work which proceeds from Gregory's deep sorrow at the death of his beloved sister late in 379. In form it is, apparently, a letter to an unnamed addressee; in the introductory section we are told: "From the inscription this work would seem to be a letter, and yet it far exceeds a letter in length."<sup>36</sup> But here, as in so many other introductory letters, we have lost the inscription or greeting (if it actually existed); and these few lines of explanation are so awkward that we cannot be entirely sure that they are from the hand of Gregory himself.

The *Life* is an interesting composite of panegyric and doctrinal discourse. Almost as in the *Life of Moses*, Macrina's life becomes a *hypodeigma*, a type or exemplar, in which the *historia* becomes the medium for the deeper doctrine, the *theoria*, which here implies much of the mystical doctrine which Gregory himself had been teaching from the time of the *Treatise on Virginity*. The *Life* should be read in close conjunction with the dialogue between Gregory and Macrina *On the Soul and the Resurrection of the Body*, which Gregory himself referred to as

<sup>34</sup> PG 46, 11–160.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. PG 45, 148A.

<sup>36</sup> PG 46, 959A.

the *Discourses of Macrina*. In lives and discourses of this sort one must always be conscious of the tension between *historia* and *theoria*, between History and Symbol; otherwise we have completely failed to penetrate the ultimate intentions of the patristic author. On occasions the resultant work is almost completely symbolic, such as (I venture to suggest) Jerome's *Life of Paul the First Hermit*.<sup>37</sup> In other lives there is a greater element of the *hypomnema* or historical record, as in Gregory's life of his sister Macrina and in some sections at least of the *Life of Anthony* attributed to St. Athanasius. But even in the *Vita Antonii*, I am convinced, the focal point of the whole life is the discourse put into the mouth of Anthony in 16-43, in which the pious author endeavors to convey the meaning of Anthony's "witness" in the desert; and it would seem that the primary intention of the work is to give flesh to this discourse by a selection of details, many of which were undoubtedly historical.

But we have here a complicated phenomenon which has not yet been adequately treated. Most of the work that has hitherto been devoted to hagiography has limited itself to the purely rhetorical aspects of the early Christian biography. And, indeed, it is quite legitimate to discuss the relationship between the *encomium* (or encomiastic elements) and the *vita*, and to show the connection between the Christian *encomium* and the Hellenistic panegyric as well as the Latin funeral oration. The Christian *vita*, on the other hand, must be understood against the background of the two types of Hellenistic biography: the Alexandrian or external treatment of the events of a person's life, and the Peripatetic or more internal discussion from the viewpoint of character and its manifestations,<sup>38</sup> at least in the primitive way character was understood. This treatment was indeed legitimate in the discussion of Christian biography; but it must now, it seems, be combined with an appreciation of the History-Symbol scale as we have seen it, for example, in the *Life of Moses*.

<sup>37</sup> See the translation and brief introduction to the literature by Sister Marie Liguori Ewald, in *Early Christian Biographies* (FC 15; New York, 1952) pp. 217-38.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the various types of *vita*, see Sister Genevieve Marie Cook, *The Life of Saint Epiphanius by Ennodius* (*Catholic Univ. Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Language and Literature* 14; Washington, 1942) pp. 19-31, with the literature there quoted. For the technique of the Peripatetic biography (which attempted to demonstrate the internal character or *hexis* by a selection of external deeds) see Albrecht Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie* (Göttingen, 1956).

Set against the background of the catechetical discourse with its two main elements, *narratio* and *mores*, is one of the most curious works of the early patristic period, Methodius of Olympus' *Symposium or Treatise on Virginity*.<sup>39</sup> Written in all likelihood during the "little peace" of the Church, about the years 260–290, it is an imitation of Plato's *Symposium* both in language and, to an extent, in form; but by now the literary technique implied in the word "banquet"—and this has been misunderstood by Hirzel and others who have discussed the dialogue-form—comes very close to the idea of "miscellany," to the kind of writing which we find, for example, in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* (literally, "coverlet," "patchwork," or the like).<sup>40</sup> In all conscience it must be admitted that Methodius' dialogue has more unity, and the implicit references to Plato's concept of love are not without a deep subtlety. Instead of Plato's *Eros* and the rise of man to the Beautiful on the stairway of creatures, Methodius substitutes perfect chastity or *Parthenia* (a symbol for "next-to-God-ness," as Methodius suggests by a kind of allegorical use of the anagram); and *Parthenia* rises on the chariot of the soul beyond the visible universe to the inaccessible bosom of the Father. And yet, the *Symposium* is not a successful dialogue; Methodius has missed the deeply dialectic technique of Plato and the evolution of truth by the exposition of opposite points of view. True, there is a minor clash between the first two speakers, Marcella and Theophila; indeed, Marcella's condemnation of marriage in the first *logos* or discourse seems to have been so strong that, from all the evidence, it was deleted or modified by later editors. But after the first two *logoi* we are treated merely to a succession of instructive homilies delivered by the ten maidens seated at a symbolic banquet table presided over by their hostess, Arete. The eleven *logoi* or discourses, followed by a mystic epithalamium to celebrate the marriage of the Word and the Church, are set within a

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion, complete bibliography, and a version of Thecla's epithalamium, see Quasten, *Patrology* 2, 129–37. In a forthcoming translation and commentary (in *ACW*) the present writer hopes to discuss at length the reasons why F. Diekamp's suggestion that Methodius was Bishop of Philippi cannot be accepted; in fact, the entire tradition of Methodius' life and death, coming down from Jerome, Photius, and the *Suda*, rests on a very insecure foundation.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of the form of the *Stromata*, see R. B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism* 1 (London, 1914) 186–89; see especially Quasten, *Patrology* 2, 12–15.

framework of a prologue, several interludes, and an epilogue in which the Banquet itself is impartially discussed, almost in the manner of a Greek chorus, by two ladies, Eubulion and Gregorion. Eubulion is, of course, Methodius himself, "the wise counselor" (a name, at least in the masculine gender, which Methodius regularly assumed in his other dialogues); and Gregorion represents perhaps Methodius' benefactress, an unnamed Lady from Telmessus (or Termessus, in Lycia) to whom the work seems to have been dedicated.

In the *Symposium* all details, however insignificant, seem to have their *theoria* or symbolism. The ten young ladies are the ten virgins of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins; but they are no longer divided, they now represent the complete number of the elect, symbolized by the number ten (the number of perfection); they symbolize all those who have taken the straight and narrow path, the path symbolized by the letter *iota* (which is also the Greek letter for "ten"). Arete is a symbol of perfect charity; she is also a symbol of Christ and a symbol of Mother Church, the virgin mother who offers her breast to those who are saved by her doctrine. The banquet itself is meant to recall by contrast the somewhat unseemly carousing of the Platonic dialogue, and yet to symbolize the nourishment which Mother Church offers us in this world as a foretaste of the Messianic banquet of the Millenium, when Christ the Bridegroom will come and sit down with His Bride after the resurrection of the body.

In the past, however, the concentration of scholars on the Platonic overtones of the work has tended to obscure its subtle and sometimes enigmatic Christian character, just as many Catholic scholars have tended to overlook the clear note of Millenarianism (of the spiritual sort, it is true) which is sounded throughout the entire dialogue. But the work is pure Alexandrianism, wherein allegory has been extended even further by luxuriant Asiatic symbolism. The Millenium is now translated into the exotic imagery of the Song of Songs and the forty-fourth Psalm. The Garden of Arete, in which the virgins enjoy their banquet, is the antitype of Eden, where all is light and perfume and the earth knows no dying; but it is also the Church on earth, the banquet of the Millenium, and the bridal feast of heaven. The food is laid out under the shade of the agnus-castus tree or shrub, whose branches, when steeped in water, were believed, in ancient and medie-

val times, to quiet the passions; and so, for Methodius, it is a symbol of chastity, recalling the tree of Eden and the willows by the rivers of Babylon; and it points to the archetypal trees of heaven, that is, to the virtues in their archetypal and exemplary existence (much as Porphyry and Plotinus taught) in the heart of God. Again, there are everywhere three levels of discourse (a technique Methodius learned from the tradition coming down through Origen and Irenaeus): Shadow, Image, and Reality. Using the catechetical technique of *narratio*, Methodius reveals the hidden meaning of history. The Old Testament was the period of Shadow; the life of the Church is the world of Image; but Reality, existing only in God, is yet to be revealed to us at the end of time. And yet the revelation of this Reality will not be a cruel eschatology—at least for those who hearken to the message of their Mother—but rather the initiation into the mysteries of a heavenly bridal chamber. The grave is *thalamos*, a bridal bower, and not a tomb.

This eschatological view of history, which, in a sense, makes one think of some of the world-views of more recent Russian writers like Merejkovsky, Soloviev, and Berdyaev, is further underlined by Methodius' analysis of history in terms of numerological exegesis. The entire scale of time and eternity is summed up in the number eight. Five days are the period of Shadow; the sixth millenium is the era of the Church and the New Testament; the seventh day is the period of Christ's return to earth, beginning with the resurrection of the body; and, finally, the eighth day is the day of Circumcision, the day of Resurrection, the rest of the just in the Tabernacle of heaven.

Previous scholars, it would seem, have misunderstood the fundamental form and intention of the work. Concretely, as I think, it was intended for the edification of the mysterious Lady of Termessus and (undoubtedly) a community of consecrated women of Lycia. And yet, it is not merely a *logos protreptikos*, an exhortation to chastity (and "chastity," indeed, becomes in the end almost identified with the grace of final perseverance). It is also a manual of Christian doctrine and instruction in the tradition of *historia* and *theoria*; it is, in a sense, a complete *summula* in which Methodius has incorporated discussions of Encratism and Christology, astrology and determinism; it offers instruction in the Asiatic technique of allegorical exegesis, especially of the types known as botanical and numerological; it is also a practical

manual on prayer and asceticism, psychology, and even the physiology of child-bearing, of the sort that might be found necessary for a community of isolated Christian women. The exact significance, however, of Methodius' pretensions in the matter of Neo-Platonic doctrine and terminology has not yet been completely grasped; for surely the *Symposium* must have antedated, by at least a decade, Porphyry's publication of Plotinus' *Enneads* in 300-305. Yet Methodius of Olympus remains, so far as externals go, the most Platonizing of the Fathers of the Church, although this influence is largely of a superficial sort, and Methodius, as it seems, misunderstands his master at almost every turn. But this misunderstanding of content should not distract us from the true value of the *Symposium*; and the excessive imitation of Platonic vocabulary and external form must reflect (like the little treatise "against the astrologers" which is included in Methodius' eighth *logos*, the discourse of Thecla) a local Lycian polemic which it is difficult for us now to recover.

Any scholarly evaluation of history and symbol in Methodius has been rendered very difficult by the suspicion that the text of the *Symposium* has existed in at least three forms. The text that is derived from our extant MSS and reflected in the Combefis-Migne edition as well as in the GCS edition of G. N. Bonwetsch<sup>41</sup> is full of difficult cruces, lacunae, and (in my own view) a number of serious interpolations. The sort of things that have been deliberately omitted (such as a stronger representation of the Encratist point of view in *Logos* 1), as well as the sentences which give every indication of being interpolated, suggest that we have in our MS-tradition a corrected edition made early in Byzantine times. Another type of recension or edition seems to be demanded from the remarks and quotations found in Photius' *Bibliotheca* cod. 237. Photius speaks of an edition with Arian interpolations, whereas our present text based on the MSS gives no evidence of this and, if anything, has been corrected along orthodox lines. The third recension which we must postulate is the hypothetical parent or archetype from which the Arian and the corrected editions were derived; and this, if we could reconstruct it, would bring us closer to Methodius' own edition of his work. It is unfortunate that the Old Church Slavonic version, if it existed, has been lost; the Syriac translation is represented

<sup>41</sup> Berlin, 1917.

by a tiny scrap which unfortunately offers little help towards the construction of stemmatic relationships.

In any case, at the present time all we can reasonably hope to do is to reconstruct the archetype of the corrected recension, with perhaps some indication, at scattered points in the text, of what the original uncorrected edition of Methodius must have been like. In this respect the *Symposium* of Methodius is typical of many of the problems which one encounters in attempting to restore the "original text" of a Greek patristic writer. Different from most classical texts, the patristic text usually relies on MSS that have been very heavily contaminated; copyists or monastic editors have a tendency to "conflate" readings (often out of a good though misguided intention that no variant reading should be lost to posterity), to clarify by paraphrases, to correct in accordance with orthodox doctrine. Sometimes, as in the case of Athanasius and (according to my view) Methodius, we have rival editions of the original patristic work; and thus very often we are led into several recensions, a longer and a shorter, an interpolated and a corrected edition; and then for the ultimate solution, at times, *ducimur in mysterium*. And the Migne collection is, of course, a magnificent monument; some texts are surprisingly good, others are shockingly bad. But with our modern advances in manuscript collation and critical procedures, the way has become ever more thorny; in fact, the more MSS one has of any particular work, the more difficult at times it becomes to disentangle the skeins of contaminated traditions and to choose the right readings.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The *Symposium* offers a comparatively simple case and will be a good illustration of the general problem. We have about ten MSS, some of which are copies of the earliest printed editions; but all these can ultimately be reduced to two by tracing the stemmatic lines of copying and contamination: one (P) from the monastery of St. John on the isle of Patmos (Patmius graecus 202, s. xi), and the other (O), an incomplete MS from the Vatican (Ottobonianus graecus 59, s. xiii/xiv). The edition printed in Migne goes back, through the Gallandi reprint, to the text of P. Combefis (Paris, 1672), and naturally contains a good number of mistakes, misprints, and conflated readings. And yet, the fact is that the text of G. N. Bonwetsch in the *GCS* (1917), though a marked improvement, is still deficient because of the author's incomplete comprehension of the manuscript tradition. In a future edition and translation of the text the present writer will attempt to explain the difficulties more in detail. For the present, however, suffice it to say that the text of the *Symposium* will perhaps never be able to be satisfactorily restored. The closest we can at present come to a reconstruction of the archetype of our extant MSS and *testimonia* will be by using only MSS O and P—and since 1917 it has still been impossible to get



But we have, perhaps, digressed a little from our theme of History and Symbol in the literary forms of the early Christian period. Such an analysis, however, is necessary if we are to comprehend the problems involved in searching for the real meaning of any particular patristic work in its concrete environment, and in recapturing its significance for the living Church of today. What emerges from our discussion of these few examples is that more attention should be given in our study of the early sources to the tension between *historia* (or typological history) and *theoria* (or existential interpretation in view of the needs of the actual congregation), as well as to the polarity between the *homilia* or loosely constructed sermon and the *logos* or scientific treatise. Thus, the style of the unrevised homily, set as it was within the living context of the liturgical synaxis, is very often less compact and (to our minds) often careless in logic—as one would expect direct, extempore discourse to be. At the same time, these homilies have a spontaneity, a vital contact with the living phenomenon of the Church, which is, at times, more valuable than the self-conscious, rhetorical treatise or dialogue. For in the *logos* there would more often be an emphasis on form in the Hellenistic, rhetorical sense; there would be the exaggerations called forth by polemic and disputation, more studied attempts to produce the philosophical definition.

Thus, perhaps too much emphasis has, in the past, been laid upon rhetorical form in the study of patristic literature, at the expense of the organic development of the *kerygma*. For the primary medium of symbolic communication in the early Church, in its development of the implications of the *Heilsgeschichte*, was the Judaeo-Greek technique of allegory. Allegory, as we now know,<sup>43</sup> had a very complicated parentage. On the one side was the long line of Stoic-Cynic commentators on

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an accurate transcription of the Patmos MS from the monastery there. Then, to get behind (so far as possible) the MS-tradition, we must use—with caution—the quotations in Photius and in a number of Byzantine commentators on the Apocalypse who quote Methodius fairly extensively. Even then, as I have said, we shall hardly be able to displace the theologically correct edition which was made, if my view is right, some time after Methodius' death, as a reaction to the appearance of the Arian edition which Photius speaks of in his *Bibliotheca*.

<sup>43</sup> For a recent discussion, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers 1: Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956) 24–72. Wolfson's conclusions, however, are not universally acceptable, and he tends to exaggerate the influence of Philo in the development of Christian doctrine.

pagan literature who attempted to give to the texts a contemporary moral significance; on the other was the midrashic technique of the Jewish rabbinical schools and Essenian communities, of the sort we have come to know more intimately with the developing research on the Dead Sea Scrolls; and, finally, we see the fusion of these two techniques in the syncretistic tendencies of Philo of Alexandria. Inspired by the methods of the Apostles, as we find them reflected in Acts,<sup>44</sup> and the midrashic methods of Jesus Himself,<sup>45</sup> the early Fathers of the Church discovered a wide symbolic canvas, the entire corpus of Scripture, as a source of catechetical instruction. Apart from this general approach, there is the regular use of minor metaphors and symbols to elucidate the gestures and words of the sacred history. It would not be in order here to examine in detail the particular image-complexes favored by individual writers; that is a task which can be accomplished only by many scholars over a long period of time. But the most frequent images used in the first four centuries to illustrate the manifold new relationship between God and men are symbols taken from light and darkness; the Two Ways; life and death and burial; the elements of earth, air, fire, and water; symbols connected with man's occupations, with love, marriage, and procreation; the seal of the ring and the *character* of the coin; symbols of war and peace, travel and arrival at a destination.

It would appear that some of our most prominent non-Catholic theologians, e.g., Brunner, Niebuhr, and Tillich, to name but a few, have missed what I have endeavored to show was one of the most important characteristics of historical patristic theology: that it was, in its nucleus, a repetition of the primitive *kerygma* and *didache* in the concrete context of the *paradosis*,<sup>46</sup> the hieratic tradition on which the Fathers drew in order to instruct the living faithful in the ultimate meaning of God's contact with the world in Christ. Developing from the *kerygma Petrou* wherein the life and death of Jesus was preached

<sup>44</sup> Acts 1:17-36; 4:10-12; 4:24-28, etc.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. His use of Isaiah in Mt 13:14-15 and Lk 4:17-21, of Moses and the prophets in Lk 24:25-27. In this connection see David M. Stanley, "The Conception of Salvation in the Synoptic Gospels," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 18 (1956) 345-63.

<sup>46</sup> See Walter J. Burghardt, "The Catholic Concept of Tradition in the Light of Modern Theological Thought," in *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, pp. 42-76.

within the typological context of the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah, patristic theology achieved an ever deeper symbolic penetration into the *theoria*, the meaning of the *Heilsgeschichte*.

Further, the organic development of patristic theology can be fully understood only when it is taken in close relationship with a developing liturgy. For, as we have seen, apart from the various treatises which were composed (as one might say) in the study for the edification of distant friends and benefactors, so much of their work developed from the homilies which were actually delivered at the baptismal synaxis or during the liturgy after the reading of the sacred texts in the primitive *missa catechumenorum*. In such an environment the symbolic direction of the sacred *historia* would become immediately clear. As recent scholars, such as Josef Jungmann,<sup>47</sup> have made clear, the primitive form of the Mass is the *memoria passionis*. The fore-Mass is, of course, essentially a reading from the sacred texts, followed by the homily which would give these texts their typological dimension, especially with regard to the *mysterium fidei* soon to be disclosed to the eyes of the faithful. But the true *missa fidelium*, beginning with the *praefatio* and ending just before the Lord's Prayer, was essentially a *narratio* of God's favors towards mankind, culminating with the *memoria* of the Last Supper. If the fore-Mass stressed History, the *missa fidelium* would be the high-point of Symbol: the very narration of Christ's symbolic gesture by His ministers takes on a sacramental and sacrificial dimension.<sup>48</sup> *Memoria* now becomes *mysterium*: History and Symbol

<sup>47</sup> See *Missarum sollemnia: Eine genetische Erklärung der römischen Messe* 1 (Vienna, 1948) 224-28; for a more concise summary of Jungmann's thought, see the series of lectures published as *Das eucharistische Hochgebet* (Würzburg, 1953), now available in English as *The Eucharistic Prayer*, tr. R. L. Batley (Chicago, 1956).

<sup>48</sup> On the causality of the sacramental symbols, one should consult the masterful discussion by Bernard Leeming, *Principles of Sacramental Theology* (Westminster, Md., 1956) pp. 283-381. But from the point of view of symbol theory, the discussions of the various schools would appear to be fruitless. The sacraments are gestural (ritual) symbols handed down through the *paradosis* by which the Mystical Christ communicates the graces of the atonement. As sensuous symbols, they are, like other symbols, plurisignificant and require interpretation, and their significance is different on different levels: they symbolize the intention of Christ, and the intention of the Church, to communicate certain effects; on another level, they symbolize or refer to the concrete ritual circumstances in which the gestures first arose in history (e.g., the Last Supper, immersion, anointing); on still another level, they symbolize or refer to the specific incorporation into the grace of Christ's atonement which each sacrament, in its own way, achieves. On this last level,

have become one. This is the final revelation which only the *illuminati* could witness, only those who had been mystically buried in the saving waters of baptism and restored to life again in Christ. As all the sacraments have their center in the liturgy, so too it may be said that all patristic theology has developed out of, or at least in close connection with, the primitive *Missarum sollemnia*, the supreme act of worship of the Mystical Christ.

"Symbolica theologia non est argumentativa," Thomas Aquinas has told us.<sup>49</sup> Yet a deeper realization of the meaning of the ancient catechetical techniques of *narratio* and *mores*, *narratio* and *allegoria*, will help us to achieve a new insight into the dynamic way in which the Fathers drew from the living stream of tradition, the *paradosis*, flowing from the fountainhead of all theology, the primitive *kerygma* and *didache*; of this our Gospels and inspired writings are the first and pre-eminent examples, the liturgy the concrete cult expression. In a study of the evolution of theology, the later stages of organic development will throw light on the earliest, and the earliest on the later. The gospel vision of the meaning of world history is fruitfully complemented by the symbol of the Christian soul climbing to the darkness of Sinai in Gregory's *Life of Moses*, as it is by the eschatological Bridal Song of Methodius' *Symposium*. For here ultimately is the patristic concept of theology, in which *kerygma* and *didache*, History and Symbol, are ultimately united in Christ and in His Mystical Body. Here we have a

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however, the exact significance of each symbol and its precise "causality" is not always clear. And yet this is as it should be. For it must always be remembered that the symbols, though spatio-temporal, must refer to a *supernatural* effect; and thus they must refer to that effect and, indeed, achieve it in a way that can never be adequately explained by human language. It might, however, be explained that ritual symbols of the sacraments, by a supernatural reference, achieve their specific effects on an analogy with the way in which the event-symbol of Christ's death works our redemption. Thus the causality of the sacraments is at once physical and corporate (in the Mystical Christ) and symbolic—but the symbolic reference is, above all, supernatural, in the order of the atonement.

Similarly, too, the *memoria passionis* which the Church reenacts in the Mass as both a ritual gesture and a Eucharistic prayer derives its real meaning from the gestural symbol of the Last Supper, and this can only have meaning, in the concrete circumstances, as forward-looking both to the cross and to the Church—"in mei memoriam facietis." The Mass is set within a very complicated symbolic texture; but, on its deepest level, it is, as the primitive *kerygma* reminds us, a showing forth of "the death of the Lord, until He come" (1 Cor 11:26). See also Jungmann, *op. cit.* 1, 233.

<sup>49</sup> *Quodl.* 7, a. 6, q. 14, obj. 4a; *Exp. in lib. Boethii de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 5m.

concrete illustration of the constant struggle to bridge the distance between the realization and awareness of the Transcendent, in what we might call God's intrusion in history, and the adequate human expression of this awareness with the finite symbolic means at man's disposal. This is the tension of patristic theology: a reflection of the painful searching of the human mind for the best way to express the inexpressible—and it is this expression which, by a kind of organic movement, is ever growing and becoming more perfect in vital contact with the living Church.

One of the profoundest symbols in Gregory of Nyssa's works is, as Daniélou has pointed out on many occasions,<sup>50</sup> the Pauline *epektasis*, the "stretching forth" of Phil 3:13 to the things that are before. For Gregory it is the infinite expansion of the soul, the potentiality for indefinite progress, with each new light illuminating the cloud of Darkness and yet never totally bridging the gulf between the world and the Transcendent. This, in Gregory's view, was the *theoria* behind the history of Moses, Paul, and the great prophets and saints of old, as he develops it in the eighth homily on the Cantic of Canticles:

For even after hearing the secret mysteries of heaven, Paul still continued to go on farther and farther, never ceasing in his ascent, and never allowing the perfection that he had already reached to prevent him from desiring more. In this I think he teaches us that our participation in the blessed nature of the Good is such that though the perfections we may reach are individually great, yet that which lies beyond our comprehension is always infinite in extent. And this will forever happen to those who participate in the Good: they will constantly experience an increase, as they share in greater and ever greater goods in the eternity of all the centuries to come.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, it is my belief that it is the marriage of History and Symbol in Christian theology (and liturgy) that has given us this *epektasis*, a

<sup>50</sup> See his *La vie de Moïse (Sources chrétiennes 1<sup>bis</sup>)* Introd., pp. xviii–xxxi, and pp. 102–12 with the literature cited *passim*. In the study of Gregory's theory of perfection, one should now consult Père Daniélou's article, "La colombe et la ténèbre dans la mystique byzantine ancienne," *Mensch und Wandlung: Eranos-Jahrbuch* 23 (1954) 389–418. Very important also for a chronological approach to Gregory's development is his "Chronologie des sermons de saint Grégoire de Nysse," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 29 (1955) 346–72. As a guide to Daniélou's own theory of scriptural typology, one should consult Walter J. Burghardt, "On Early Christian Exegesis," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 11 (1950) 78–116. For a survey of the vast area of Alexandrian exegetical methodology, see Quasten, *Patrolology* 2, 1 ff.

<sup>51</sup> *In Cant. cant., hom. 8 (PG 44, 940C–941A)*.

kind of infinite potential in the growth of man's ever deeper penetration into the meaning of the universe. Here we catch a glimpse of one of the organic laws of development which can help to explain the growing richness and the swift, forward progress of Christian thought. For all theology is, in a sense, an attempt to explore the *theoria* behind the history of God's dialogue with men in the *Heilskoinonia*—a history which reaches a symbolic End in the great tragic gesture of the God-Man; for at this point the very purpose of the centuries-long communication between God and man has finally been attained, the incorporation by Love into the divine life.

Perhaps the meaning of this divine Symbol, however, has not yet been fully exhausted. Its exploration, on the human level, has involved a long and sometimes unsatisfactory dialogue between men who have but fragmentary vision and who use their feeble verbal symbols to explain the great events which Christian tradition has preserved in the Sacred History. Yet, however feeble, it is a thoroughly serious dialogue within the context of man's actual existence, presided over constantly by the living voice of tradition and the infallible guide who sits in the chair of Peter. For the God-Man is still present in Peter's bark, and with His hand upon the tiller there can never be any fear that our dialogue on the ultimate meaning of History should ever go astray. Christ's final gesture in leaving this world of ambiguity has been immortally preserved in the *kerygma*; He is with us till the consummation of the world. Our work, however, is not yet done: though the fullness of time has come, the final Apocalypse is not yet. In the language of the early Church, we continue to live in the Image and not the Reality, waiting in prayer and assisting at the preparation of the Bride for that ultimate consummation.