"WHAT DID EZEKIEL SEE?"

Christian Exegesis of Ezekiel's Vision of the Chariot from Irenaeus to Gregory the Great

Angela Russell Christman

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by

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For Tom, Sidney Marie, and Cecilia

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ABBREVIATIONS

b.	Babylonian Talmud
CCL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Turnhout 1953–.
CPG	M. Geerard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, Turnhout 1974–.
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Vienna 1865–.
DB	*Dictionnaire de la Bible*, Paris 1895–1912.
DTC	*Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, Paris 1903–1970.
EEC	*Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, New York: Oxford 1992.
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller, Leipzig, Berlin 1897–.
LXX	Septuagint
OLD	Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*
PG	Migne, Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca, Paris 1857–66.
PL	Migne, Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina, Paris 1841–64.
SC	Sources chrétiennes, Paris 1941–.
Vulg.	Vulgate (n.b.: I have indicated the difference in numbering of the Psalms between the Hebrew and the Greek and Latin versions by (LXX) even when the text under discussion is in Latin and the version of the biblical text is the Vulgate or Vetus Latina. I have made special reference to the Vulgate or Vetus Latina only when the text contains something peculiar to it which is significant for the discussion.)

When referring to the works of pagan authors I have used the abbreviations found in Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* and Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. For the writings of Christians I have used the abbreviations listed in Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* and Blaise-Chirat, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français des auteurs chrétiens*.

All translations of early Christian texts are my own unless otherwise indicated. When translating scriptural passages embedded in patristic works, I have followed the RSV whenever that was consistent with a reasonable rendering of the biblical text as quoted by the ancient author. Where following the RSV would obscure some critical aspect of the version being used, I have made my own translation or modified that of the RSV.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel 1

"In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. [2]On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), [3]the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

[4]As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness round about it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze. [5]And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the form of men, [6]but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. [7]Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. [8]Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: [9]their wings touched one another; they went every one straight forward, without turning as they went. [10]As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man in front; the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle at the back. [11]Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. [12]And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. [13]In the midst of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. [14]And the living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning.

[15]Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel upon the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. [16]As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of a chrysolite; and the four had the same likeness, their construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel. [17]When they went, they went in any of their four directions without turning as they went. [18]The four wheels had rims and they had spokes; and their rims were full of eyes round about. [19]And when

the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. [20]Wherever the spirit would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. [21]When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

[22]Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, shining like crystal, spread out above their heads. [23]And under the firmament their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another; and each creature had two wings covering its body. [24]And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of a host; when they stood still, they let down their wings. [25]And there came a voice from above the firmament over their heads; when they stood still, they let down their wings.

[26]And above the firmament over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form. [27]And upward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire enclosed round about; and downward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him. [28]Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking." (Text from the Revised Standard Version)

In his two-volume commentary on Ezekiel, the contemporary Old Testament scholar Walther Zimmerli interprets the prophet's inaugural vision in a section entitled "The Call" that treats Ezekiel 1.1–3.15.[1] His exegesis of these opening chapters compares them to other biblical call narratives and addresses issues concerning the prophet's identity, the date and location of the call, the chapters' literary unity, textual emendation, and the text's tradition history. After spending almost sixty pages on these matters, Zimmerli turns to the question of the prophet's aim, "the message of Ezekiel 1.1–3.15." He observes that the vision shows "the continuity of divine faithfulness" and proclaims the absolute sovereignty of the God of Israel who is free to appear to his people even "in an unclean land" such

[1] Zimmerli 1979–83, I.81–141.

as Babylon. Moreover, this manifestation of divine faithfulness and sovereignty demonstrates that Ezekiel's pronouncements of God's judgment are simultaneously announcements of God's grace.[2]

What is striking to the reader is that this last task, the interpretation of the prophet's aim, requires less than two full pages and seems to be merely a footnote to the discussion of technical, historical-critical issues found in the previous sixty pages. This sense is only heightened by Zimmerli's final comment on the opening chapters, in which for the first time he looks beyond the prophet's historical horizon: "Thus Ezekiel was called to be a witness to a history which the Christian Church believes has its center in Jesus Christ."

Zimmerli stresses historical and philological issues and gives far less attention to theological concerns, and in this regard, his approach differs significantly from that of the Church Fathers. To be sure, like their modern counterparts, patristic exegetes investigate historical and philological matters, but these pursuits are always in the service of answering the fundamental theological question: What does this text say to the Church about the triune God who is revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

By contrasting ancient and contemporary interpreters in this way I do not intend to imply that modern scholarship on the Bible has no value. Historical criticism certainly makes positive contributions to the exegesis of Scripture. However, commentators guided primarily by this method too often stop short of engaging precisely those theological issues that patristic authors devote so much attention to, and that still occupy Christians today.[3]

This book examines the way in which early Christians, from Irenaeus to Gregory the Great, interpreted Ezekiel 1 as they sought to discern its theological message. During this period, three dominant exegetical themes emerged as they pondered the prophet's vision. A "dominant theme" as I am defining it is one which persists in the tradition: once it is articulated, it is taken up and oftentimes reworked, modified, and even expanded by later commentators as they seek to understand and live by Scripture. But such a reading is not simply

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[2] Ibid., I.139–141.

[3] For example, in a recent survey of historical-critical Ezekiel studies, it is striking how infrequently substantive theological issues arise; the text's orality, its literary qualities, its historical and social settings, etc., are the primary focus (Darr 1994).

one that is repeated, for it is also theologically substantive. Some explanations of particular details of the prophet's vision appear over and over, but do not engage weighty issues, and so do not qualify as "dominant." For example, numerous authors observe that the word "cherubim," used to describe the living creatures, means "fullness of knowledge."[4] However, this is almost always merely a parenthetical remark and not central to a theological explication of Ezekiel 1, so I give it almost no attention here. Because I focus on interpretations which address significant matters, this work is not an exhaustive examination of patristic treatments of Ezekiel 1. Rather, it is a study of the way in which theological exposition of this passage evolved, and what this reveals about the exegetical habits of early Christians.

Although the three interpretive themes are often interwoven and evolve together, I deal with them individually. The first, the subject of chapter 2, concerns the very nature of *Christian* exegesis, because patristic authors consider that certain aspects of the vision manifest its inherently christocentric character, thereby showing that the Old and New Testaments form a unified book and that the full import of any Old Testament text can only be discerned when it is read in the light of Christ. I turn to it before the other two because it demonstrates "how the words of the prophets harmonize with those in the gospels"[5] and in so doing, logically forms the foundation for the other two. In chapter 3 I trace the second exegetical strand which, from its beginnings in Irenaeus' debates with the Gnostics to its culmination in the fourth and fifth centuries, explores what Ezekiel 1 reveals about human knowledge of God. Finally, like all the prophets, Ezekiel calls his people to repentance, and so it should not be surprising that in the third major interpretive theme, treated in chapter 4, early Christians find that the vision illumines the moral life, the way of virtue.

When they comment on Ezekiel 1, the Fathers assume that the prophet did indeed experience what the text describes: the vision is an actual historical event that conveys revelation from God. Thus, although John Chrysostom asks, "What did Ezekiel see?" within the

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[4] The living creatures are first referred to as cherubim in Ezekiel 9.3. Nonetheless, when patristic authors discuss Ezekiel 1, they frequently call them "cherubim."

[5] Origen, *Hom in Ezech.* 1.3 (Trans. Trigg 1990).

specific context of arguing with the neo-Arians about what humans can know of God, his question is in a sense the catalyst for all early Christian interpretations of the passage. Each of the three dominant strands is, at least implicitly, an attempt to respond to this question, "What did Ezekiel see?", and to elucidate what the answer means for the Church.

As these three dominant strands develop, the Fathers display an impressive sensitivity to the literary structure and vocabulary of Ezekiel 1. Moreover, with few exceptions, patristic commentators attend not only to the passage's lexical details, but also to their predecessors' exegesis of it. They do not, contrary to historical criticism's assessment of them, practice eisegesis by imposing preconceived interpretations onto the vision.[6] Rather, their understanding of Ezekiel 1 grows out of a keen awareness of the contours of the sacred text, an appreciation for earlier expositions, and the firm belief that the words of Scripture were addressed not only to figures in the past, but also to God's people in the present and future. The meaning of any particular passage is neither completely determined by its original historical context nor fully exhausted by already-established readings.

Because two of the three interpretive themes frequently appear side by side in the same author, and therefore evolve together, treating them individually might seem artificial. I have chosen this method, however, because separating them enables us to discern more clearly the connections between different exegetes and to observe with greater clarity how a particular motif unfolds over time. It sets in relief the process of development and modification, so that we can more easily follow the reasoning of each successive commentator. Gregory the Great offers an instructive example. In his *Homilies on Ezekiel* he often takes as his starting point a received reading and then elaborates on it in significant and creative ways. If this is not kept in mind, his exegesis can seem arbitrary and forced.[7] Finally, the approach I have taken not only makes the logic operating in any one passage

[6] A classic articulation of this view is Harnack's claim that one of the primary aims of the Fathers' spiritual interpretation was "to harmonise the statements of Holy Scripture with the prevailing dogmatics . . ." (1958, 3.199).

[7] Thus, for example, I think Gregory's reading of Ezekiel 1 actually undercuts Markus' judgment about his treatment of Scripture: "Whatever the exegetical cost, it is the continuity of the subject matter that dominates the sequence of [Gregory's]

more transparent, but also better illuminates the assumptions undergirding the entire interpretive tradition of Ezekiel 1.[8]

It is a commonplace that the book of Ezekiel was a source of controversy among the Rabbis. A major part of this dispute centered on the enigmatic opening vision of God's chariot, the *merkabah*, and in recent decades a considerable amount of research has focused on Jewish *merkabah* traditions.[9] By comparison, there is a paucity of scholarship on Christian readings of Ezekiel 1. To this date, the most extensive analysis has been Wilhelm Neuss' *Das Buch Ezechiel in Theologie und Kunst bis zum Ende des XII. Jahrhunderts* (1912), an attempt to chart the emergence of Christian literary and artistic responses to Ezekiel which was inspired by his viewing a twelfth-century cycle of paintings on the ceiling of a church in Schwarzrhein-

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exposition. The treatise may have its origin in the text, but once it takes off from that diving board, the periodic returns to the text, under the guise of 'figurative' exposition . . . are no more than polite obeisances toward the convention of the form. The text is mercilessly atomized and tortured to support a treatise disguised as commentary. This is not without good rhetorical warrant and precedent, but it is exegetical free-wheeling, all the same" (1995, 6). Markus' position is, I suspect, grounded in tacit acceptance of the historical-critical method's formulation of what constitutes exegesis. By contrast, tracing the development of interpretation of Ezekiel 1 shows that in passages where Gregory's subject matter appears pre-determined, he is actually taking his cue from the established tradition and building upon it.

[8] Another possible approach would be chronological rather than thematic, with chapters devoted to individual authors. However, this would make it more difficult to see the development of the interpretive tradition, i.e., the connections between successive exegetes as they reflect on both the biblical text and previously-established readings to discern the significance of the prophet's vision for the Church in their own day.

[9] See, e.g., Halperin 1980 and 1988; Morray-Jones 1988. For analysis of the history of scholarship of Jewish exegesis of Ezekiel 1, see Morray-Jones 1988, 1–29 and Halperin 1988, 5–7. For tracing the emergence of patristic readings of the vision the most important of these is Halperin's *The Faces of the Chariot* (1988), a detailed examination of Jewish *merkabah* traditions from the first to the fifth centuries of the common era. However, Halperin is sometimes overeager to find rabbinic influence on Christian construals of Ezekiel 1. The most significant points of contact between the two groups are found in Origen, and Halperin does a masterful job in laying out his indebtedness to the Rabbis. There also appears to be overlap between Jewish interpretations and those of Pseudo-Macarius and Jerome, but it is minor in comparison. Although the Rabbis and their Christian counterparts were often in (polemical) conversation, the distinctive ways in which exposition of Ezekiel 1 develops in each religion results in relatively little interaction from the late third century through the sixth. In rabbinic debates, the other controversial aspect of Ezekiel was that the plan for the Temple in chapters 40–48 conflicts with that in the Torah; see b. Menahot 45a; cf. Zimmerli 1979–83, I.74. Origen reports that among the Jews of his day Ezekiel 1 and 40–48 were taught only to those who were mature, not to the young; see Halperin 1988, 26.

dorfer. Because Neuss is concerned with the entire prophetic book, the treatment of any particular chapter is not detailed. Moreover, because he is ultimately interested in visual representations, he does not focus on the way in which written interpretations develop. More recently, Dassmann has surveyed Christian exposition of Ezekiel 1.26–28 from the New Testament period through Gregory the Great.[10] Unfortunately, he misreads a number of patristic authors and concludes that they were reluctant to investigate these verses because they considered them too awesome to expound. This mistake is particularly glaring in his analysis of Origen, most of whose writings on Ezekiel are no longer extant. However, the nature of Origen's surviving corpus suggests that for him, the vision's inaccessibility would have provided only a goad, not a deterrent, to the enterprise of its exegesis![11]

In *The Visionary Mode: Biblical Prophecy, Hermeneutics, and Cultural Change*, Michael Lieb takes Ezekiel 1 as his starting point. His primary focus, however, is what he calls "the visionary experience," Jung's *visionären Erlebnis*. Lieb considers the prophet's vision to be the *Urerlebnis*, the *locus classicus* of the visionary mode, and the catalyst for later figures' experience of "the divine." As Morrison has rightly noted, Ezekiel 1 and its interpretations "are subordinate to, and derivative from, Lieb's great preoccupation: the experience of the sacred proclaimed by the prophet and relived by exegetes as they struggled to authenticate and unfold the meanings in his words."[12] Thus, when Lieb turns to early Christian understanding of Ezekiel's vision, he devotes most of his attention to works which do not even deal with Ezekiel 1, but which do manifest the visionary mode (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa's *The Life of Moses*). He treats readings of Ezekiel 1 from Origen, Pseudo-Macarius, Jerome, and Gregory the Great, but only briefly. From the perspective of the history of interpretation, there are several problems with Lieb's study. Although he examines Jewish and Christian writings in chronological order, his basic approach is ahistorical, perhaps even antihistorical, with the result that the contours of the exegetical tradition's development over time

[10] Dassmann 1985 and 1988.

[11] For a fuller discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Neuss, and of the problematic conceptual issues in Dassmann, see Christman 1995, ch. 1.

[12] 1993, 1162.

are obscured and eclipsed. Moreover, his deconstructionist hermeneutic seems to allow him to find things not actually present in the texts or to overemphasize the importance of certain motifs. (E.g., in his analysis of Origen, Jerome, and Gregory the Great, he magnifies the importance of minor comments regarding sexuality, perhaps to draw parallels to the Jewish tradition in which such references play a greater role.) Indeed, Lieb's hermeneutical assumption that the prophet's vision steadfastly refuses to disclose its meaning, but rather forces the interpreter to disclose himself could well be applied to his own enterprise.[13]

Although patristic exegesis of the prophet's vision has not previously been the focus of sustained scholarship, the three dominant interpretive themes indicate that the Fathers understood it to be a key text in certain sorts of theological discussions.[14] Their interest in the prophet's vision was surely prompted partly by its mysterious quality; the diverse ways in which artists have attempted to depict what Ezekiel sees attest to its elusiveness. Moreover, some of its details intersect with other texts, both within the Christian biblical tradition and without, in ways which prove fruitful. But early Christians' fascination with this passage was also guaranteed by its influence on the New Testament.

Ezekiel's vision significantly shapes at least two passages in the New Testament: the christophany in Revelation 1.12–20 and John of Patmos's experience of the heavenly liturgy in Revelation 4.[15] Both of these draw on the Septuagint versions of Ezekiel 1 and other Old

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[13] Cf. Morrison 1993.

[14] Thus I disagree with Meeks' comment that "[t]hough occasionally Ezekiel's vision played a key role in the christological development, on the whole it did not attract much attention among patristic writers—at least in the surviving remains" (2002, 134). Meeks says this on the basis of Neuss' study which he himself admits needs updating and which often does not take account of the significant interest in Ezekiel 1 in works that are outside the commentary/homily tradition.

[15] Ezekiel 1 may have had an impact on a number of other New Testament texts, but not in the direct way seen in Revelation 1 and 4. For example, several scholars consider that the antecedents of rabbinic interpretation of the *merkabah* also lie behind Paul's description of his ecstatic experience in 2 Corinthians 12.1–12 and his identification of Christ's visage with *the glory of the Lord* in 2 Corinthians 3.18–4.6 (see, e.g., Segal 1990, 34–71, and Morray-Jones 1993). I shall not pursue this question here, because regardless of whether Ezekiel's vision provides part of the background for these passages in 2 Corinthians, it is not explicitly interpreted in them. Vincent (1994) sees the influence of Ezekiel 1 in 1 Corinthians 15.5.

Testament theophanies (e.g., Daniel 10 and Isaiah 6) as well as divine appearances in intertestamental literature. The relationship between Ezekiel 1, Revelation, and other epiphanies both canonical and non-canonical has been thoroughly investigated, and to pursue these complex connections would take us too far afield.[16] For our purposes it is sufficient to summarize those details which Revelation has borrowed and modified from Ezekiel 1.

Revelation 1.12–20 recounts John's vision of Christ standing among seven golden lampstands reminiscent of the seven-branched candelabrum of Exodus 25.31. Although many parts of this passage can be traced to Daniel 7 and 10,[17] two stem from Ezekiel 1. In verse 15, John describes Christ's appearance: *and his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters.* That his feet are *like burnished bronze* (ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ) seems to be inspired by Ezekiel 1.7 which portrays the living creatures' feet as *like gleaming bronze* (ὡς ἐξαστράπτων χαλκός).[18] The auditory dimension of Christ's manifestation also reveals a debt to the prophet, for his voice is *like the sound of many waters* (ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν), an element clearly derived from Ezekiel 1.24 where the living creatures' wings produce the same noise (ὡς φωνὴν ὕδατος πολλοῦ).

Revelation makes more extensive use of Ezekiel 1 in chapter 4, where various aspects of John's experience of the celestial liturgy are adapted from the prophet's vision.[19] Ezekiel saw the heavens opened (1.1); John views an open door in heaven (4.1). Like Ezekiel (1.26), John looks upon a figure seated on a throne (4.2–3). John seems more reluctant than Ezekiel to describe this being, speaking not of *a likeness as it were of a human form* (ὁμοίωμα ὡς εἶδος ἀνθρώπου) as his

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[16] The links between these texts have been explored by Rowland (1975, 1980, and 1982) and Halperin (1988), among others.

[17] For example, "one like a son of man," and "his head and his hair were white as white wool." Of course, these visions in Daniel are indebted to Ezekiel 1. For an analysis of the use of Daniel 7 and 10 in Revelation 1.12–20, see Rowland 1980. For the dependence of Daniel 7 and 10 on Ezekiel 1, see Rowland 1975, 88ff.; 1982, 97ff.; and Halperin 1988, 74–78.

[18] This use of Ezekiel in Revelation 1.15 may be mediated by Daniel 10.6 which depicts the arms and feet of *the man clothed in linen* as *like gleaming bronze* (ὡσεὶ χαλκὸς ἐξαστράπτων). However, Daniel's vision is clearly dependent upon Ezekiel 1; see note 16.

[19] The details of Ezekiel's vision which appear in John's—the four animals and the figure seated on the throne—are mentioned throughout his work, but they are described most fully in this initial account of the celestial liturgy.

forebear does, but simply of *one seated on the throne* (ὁ [ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον] καθήμενος) who *appeared like jasper and carnelian*.[20] Another detail John appears to take from Ezekiel (1.28) is the rainbow surrounding this royal seat (4.3), though the two authors employ different words (Ezekiel, τόξον; Revelation, ἶρις). The flashes of lightning issuing from the throne in John's vision as well as the seven torches of fire before it (4.5) may also be drawn from Ezekiel 1.13. Similarly, the glassy sea in Revelation 4.6 almost certainly derives from the crystal-like firmament of Ezekiel 1.22.[21] Perhaps the most important debt is found in the animals John sees, although they are simpler than those in Ezekiel 1: Revelation depicts four different creatures, each of which has one face (lion, ox, man, or eagle), in contrast to the prophet's four identical beings, all of which have four countenances (man, lion, ox, and eagle). This change is noteworthy insofar as patristic authors discuss the faces of Ezekiel's living creatures as if there were only four rather than sixteen.[22] The New Testament animals are *full of eyes* (4.8), a characteristic of the wheels seen by the prophet (1.18) which are not included in Revelation 4.[23] Like Ezekiel's creatures, John's have wings, but instead of four, they have six as do the seraphim in Isaiah 6.

Revelation's dependence upon Ezekiel 1 functions in two ways with regard to the Christian exegetical tradition. First, the very use of the prophet's vision in the New Testament ensures that later commentators will feel compelled to ponder its meaning. At the same time, the details borrowed from it become parts of another seer's

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[20] The figure seated on the throne is later said to be God (e.g., Rev 19.4), but this identification does not endure in the patristic tradition which tends to take it to be Christ. (Jerome is an exception here, referring it to both the Father and the Son.) John's reluctance to portray this entity more fully may reflect an increasing tendency, also seen in certain intertestamental texts, to avoid anthropomorphisms when speaking of God. See Rowland 1975, 64 and 1982, 85–87; Halperin 1988, 89.

[21] Rowland 1982, 224–225; cf. Halperin, who also draws connections to I Enoch 14 (1988, 93).

[22] While Christians reduce the number of faces, Jewish interpreters move in the opposite direction: the Targum records their total number as sixty-four! (Halperin 1988, 125–27)

[23] John's description of the creatures as *full of eyes* is derived from the Septuagint translation of Ezekiel 1.18 which puts the eyes on the creatures rather than on the wheels' rims. Also, Ezekiel 10.12 describes both the wheels and the creatures as being covered with eyes. For the Septuagint reading, see Halperin 1988, 91 and 525; for the description of the wheels and creatures in Ezekiel 10.12, see Zimmerli 1979–83, I.227.

mysterious visions. As a result, Revelation provides little direct guidance about how Ezekiel 1 should be understood. The New Testament leaves unanswered the questions the Fathers will bring to this text, particularly those concerning the nature of theophanies and the significance Ezekiel's experience holds for the Church.

From the second through the sixth centuries four still-extant exegetical works on Ezekiel were produced: Origen's *Homilies on Ezekiel*, the first of which deals with the inaugural vision; two commentaries which treat the entire prophetic book, one in Latin from Jerome and one in Greek from Theodoret; and Gregory the Great's *Homilies on Ezekiel* in which he preaches on chapters 1–4.3 and 40.[24] While these writings may be considered the backbone of the interpretive tradition, much of the theologically significant exposition is found embedded in commentaries or sermons on other biblical books, or treatises on specific topics, from a number of different authors (e.g., Irenaeus of Lyons, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Ambrose of Milan).

Finally, before turning to the patristic writers themselves, I should mention briefly what this study is *not*. It is not an analysis of hermeneutical theory but rather of exegetical practice. Although I will sometimes refer to the former, my focus will remain on the latter. Second, when examining various authors' readings of Ezekiel 1, it would be tempting to draw conclusions about each one as a biblical commentator. I refrain from doing this however, because to make such judgments would require me to expand my focus beyond exegesis of Ezekiel 1, a move which would necessitate a very different, and much longer, book.[25] While my analysis of each author's construal of the vision may—and I hope will—suggest questions that should be raised about his entire corpus, these must remain unanswered

[24] At least three other commentaries were extant in antiquity: from Origen, Apollinaris of Laodicea, and Polychronius of Apamea (see Christman 1995).

[25] See, for example, Kessler (1995), a study of Gregory the Great's *Homilies on Ezekiel* which examines this work in the context of his larger corpus and as monastic theology. While Kessler discusses Gregory's indebtedness to earlier authors, with regard to exposition of Ezekiel 1, he focuses primarily on Jerome's commentary and the Latin translation of Origen's homily (1995, 113–35, 240–45) and seems unaware of some of the significant interpretive developments which surely influenced Gregory (e.g., Ambrose's treatments of Ezekiel 1 in *de Virginitate* and in *Expositio Psalmi 118*). Moreover, although Kessler examines Gregory's relation to his predecessors, because the sermons cover Ezekiel 1–4.3 and 40, he can not give the exegetical tradition of Ezekiel 1 the sustained attention it merits.

here. Lastly, because theology and the exposition of Scripture are essentially one in the patristic period, we shall deal with major issues and controversies as we follow the evolution of the interpretive tradition of Ezekiel 1. However, I will limit exploration of these to what is necessary for understanding the role that explication of Ezekiel 1 plays in them.[26] Again, I hope that my study will contribute to fruitful reflection on these broader theological topics.

[26] For example, in chapter 3, which treats the role of exegesis of Ezekiel 1 in discussions of God's incomprehensibility, I examine texts in which patristic interpreters begin to make a distinction which corresponds to later discussions of God's essence and energies, an issue with major theological implications that cannot be fully investigated here.

CHAPTER TWO

EZEKIEL'S VISION AND THE CHRISTIAN READING OF OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

> "*See the Consonance of the Words of the Prophets and the Gospels*"[1]

This first major strand in the exegetical tradition of Ezekiel 1 is perhaps the broadest in scope. As we will see in subsequent chapters, the other two deal with relatively well-defined topics: the incomprehensibility of God and the life of Christian virtue. In contrast, the first initially seems considerably more diffuse because it encompasses three distinct motifs: 1) the four creatures of Ezekiel 1 and the four gospels, 2) the Ezekiel-Christ typology, and 3) the chariot's *wheel within a wheel* as a sign of the relationship between Old and New Testaments and of the spread of the Gospel not only throughout the world but also in the individual believer. These motifs might initially appear to be independent of each other. However, they should be understood as parts of a single interpretive theme because they share a central focus: in each of them, the Fathers are keen to explore how particular details of the prophet's vision demonstrate the unity of Old and New Testaments.

The artificiality of separating this first dominant strand from the other two will be most clear in this chapter, particularly since it is closely knitted to them in a variety of ways. But this strand's interconnectedness with the other two goes beyond simply those passages in which we can see it woven together with one of them, because it assumes and establishes the very foundation not only for Christian commentary on Ezekiel 1 but also for reading the entire Old Testament through the lens of Christ. Thus, the explication of the prophet's vision which focuses upon the Bible and its intrinsic unity is part of both the developing interpretive tradition and the larger body of theological reflection aimed at showing that the Old Testament is a

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[1] Origen, *Hom in Ezech.* I.3, quoted in de Lubac 1998, 440 n. 52.

Christian book which, even as it recounts the past events of God's relationship with his people, always looks forward to Christ and his body, the Church. It is simultaneously *a formulation of* and *a practical application of* the method of Christian exegesis. I have treated this strand before the others because its concern to demonstrate the oneness of the Testaments gives it logical and theological priority.[2] The other two are dependent upon it because, by displaying the christocentric character of all of Scripture, it forms the basis for all other construals.[3]

The four creatures of Ezekiel 1 and the four Gospels

This motif, which appears more frequently than any other interpretation of the prophet's vision, consists of a correlation between the four creatures of Ezekiel 1 and the gospels. Conceived by Irenaeus of Lyons, it was reproduced by numerous authors and depicted repeatedly in Christian art, from the Book of Kells to stained glass windows throughout the world. Irenaeus introduces it in Book III of *Adversus haereses*,[4] finding in Ezekiel's vision support for his claim against Marcion and Gnostics that there can be only the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, no more, no less. While Irenaeus stresses this fourfold quality of the Good News, his discussion also

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[2] The second exegetical strand, focusing on God's incomprehensibility, has its beginnings in Irenaeus of Lyons, as does the first. (The third appears initially in Origen.) Nonetheless, even though these two strands share chronological priority, the first still takes precedence theologically because it establishes the possibility, indeed the necessity, of a Christian reading of the Old Testament.

[3] This point parallels de Lubac's observations regarding the order in which medieval writers enunciated the senses of Scripture. Some authors list them as literal (or historical), moral (or tropological), allegorical, and anagogical. However, others articulate a sequence that "puts allegory right after history" and this, according to de Lubac, "expresses authentic doctrine in both its fullness and its purity" (1998, 115). This second arrangement (literal/historical, allegorical, moral, and anagogical) is theologically superior because, by placing the allegorical directly after the historical *and before the moral*, it first confirms that the entire Bible speaks about Christ. Then, all other readings, whether moral or anagogical, are implicitly grounded in that prior allegorical and christocentric interpretation.

[4] Citations are made to the *Sources chrétiennes* edition of *Adversus haereses*. Irenaeus wrote in Greek, but his treatise is preserved in its entirety only in Latin, although the original Greek of some passages has been preserved. Thus, when presenting the original text behind a translation, I have given the Latin first and then, when available, the Greek.

underscores the gospels' inherent unity which is derived from God's identity.

The "principles (*principia*/ἀρχαί) of the Gospel," Irenaeus explains, are that there is one God, creator of the universe, to whom the prophets bore witness, and who is the Father of Jesus Christ. Because they are founded so firmly on these tenets, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John prove the Gnostics' errors: the particular gospel each respective heretical group turns to for confirmation of its beliefs actually refutes them. Thus, for example, the Gospel according to Matthew does not, as the Ebionites think, validate their theology, but rather undermines it. In effect, Irenaeus claims that each gospel contains within itself the remedy for those who misread it.[5] Although he does not explicitly say this, his remarks suggest that this corrective is intimately connected to the "principles of the Gospel," the claim that the God of the Old Testament who revealed himself to the prophets both fashioned the cosmos and is the one whom Jesus calls Father.

That the Good News is proclaimed in a fourfold way—in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—does not undermine its unity but rather reinforces it. Just as there are "four regions of the world" and "four universal winds" so it is fitting, Irenaeus explains, that the Church "scattered through the whole world" which is upheld by the "Spirit of life" and the evangelical tidings, "should have four pillars (cf. 1 Tim 3.15), breathing out incorruptibility on every side and reviving human beings."[6] From this he concludes, "the Creator of all things, the Word, *who sits upon the Cherubim* (Ps 79.2 LXX) and *sustains all things* (cf. Wis 1.7)" gave a four-fold Gospel that is united by one spirit and is reflected in the cherubim's four faces which are "images of the Son of God's work."[7]

Irenaeus lists the four creatures and the aspect of the Logos' work that each symbolizes. The lion, he explains, represents Christ's imperial and royal qualities, the calf his sacrificial and priestly role, the

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[5] *Haer.* III.11.7.

[6] Ibid., III.11.8. In his commentary on Revelation, G.B. Caird considers that the identification of the cherubim, and thus the four living creatures, with the four winds arose naturally from 2 Samuel 22.11 and Psalm 18.10, both of which juxtapose the image of God flying on a cherub with a reference to the wind (1966, 64). In bringing together the notion of the Church scattered throughout the world and the four winds Irenaeus may also be dependent upon Matthew 24.31 and *Didache* 10.5. See Clabeaux 1997, 265 n. 26.

[7] *Haer.* III.11.8.

man[8] his advent among human beings, and the eagle the gift of the Spirit hovering over the Church. These features of the divine economy, and the animals that denote them, signify the four gospels. The lion corresponds to the Gospel according to John since its prologue describes the Word's "original, efficacious, and glorious generation from the Father." Luke's proclamation is depicted by the calf, for it begins with the priest Zechariah offering sacrifice to God. The man's countenance indicates Matthew because he opens with Jesus' genealogy and emphasizes his humility and gentleness. Finally, the eagle stands for Mark's version of the Good News since his first chapter manifests the spirit of the prophets through quotations from them.[9]

For Irenaeus, the Word's activity, as represented by the gospels and the creatures' faces, can be seen in the history of salvation. The Logos, "in accordance with his divinity," signified by the lion, spoke to the patriarchs before the time of Moses. During the era of the law, he provided for "priestly and liturgical service," as denoted by the calf. Then, after the Incarnation, represented by the man, he sent the gift of the Spirit, symbolized by the eagle. Irenaeus explains that just as the Son of God's labors throughout the ages correspond to the form of the four creatures, so also they are congruent with the character of the Gospel, and concludes: "The animals are fourfold, the Gospel is fourfold, and the Lord's work is fourfold."[10]

When Irenaeus introduces the living creatures in this section, he does so by quoting Revelation 4.7 rather than the Septuagint text of Ezekiel 1.[11] However, that he is also thinking of Ezekiel can be seen by his referring to them as the four-faced cherubim. In his opening vision, the prophet never calls the four animals "cherubim,"

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[8] The Septuagint text of Ezekiel 1 has ἄνθρωπος, while the Vulgate has *homo*, for the Hebrew *ʾadam*. While each of these words could be translated as "human being," I have consistently rendered them as "man" because the interpreters clearly understood this figure to be male.

[9] *Haer.* III.11.8.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Cf. Dassmann 1985, 161. Revelation 4 describes four animals, each of which possesses a different face, while Ezekiel 1 speaks of four creatures all of which have four different visages. Thus, Irenaeus' reference to "four-faced cherubim," makes it clear that he is thinking of Ezekiel's vision. Cf. Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Io.* 36.5, where he explicitly mentions both Ezekiel and Revelation when making the correlations between the living creatures and the gospels (CCL 36, 327.9–39).

but he gives them this name in chapters 9–11, and early Christians take this identification for granted. Irenaeus' comment that the four gospels are united by one spirit may also be an indication that he had Ezekiel 1 in mind, because verses 19–21 describe the harmonious movement of the four wheels attached to the creatures as resulting from the spirit in the wheels.

In this passage the quadriform nature of Ezekiel's living creatures validates Irenaeus' claim against Marcion and the Gnostics that there were four, and *only* four, gospels. His tactic of correlating the faces to the gospels will be adopted by numerous authors and become a *topos* in Christian literature. However, this correspondence does not remain static, and different versions of it appear in subsequent writers.[12]

One of these later expositors is Jerome, whose correlation of the gospels to the living creatures will become dominant, especially in medieval art. In his *Commentary on Ezekiel*[13] Jerome follows Irenaeus in understanding the man and the calf to symbolize Matthew and Luke respectively, but he considers that the lion signifies Mark because this gospel begins with Isaiah's prophecy, "A voice crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths," and the eagle points to John by virtue of its lofty opening, "In the beginning was the Word."[14] In his *Homilies on Ezekiel*[15] Gregory the

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[12] Because so many authors employ this *topos*, I treat only the few who introduce a substantive variant on it. For a comprehensive listing, see Zahn 1883, 257–75; cf. Borret in Origen 1989, 94 n. 1. On artistic depictions of the creatures as the evangelists, see Neuss, 1912.

[13] In 410 CE, some thirty years after translating Origen's *Homilies on Ezekiel*, Jerome began his own exposition of the prophet, thus fulfilling a promise he had made to Eustochium and her mother, Paula, who was by this time deceased. (On Jerome's practice of composing commentaries for individuals' private study, see Jay 1985a, 48–9.) Soon after starting it, he was interrupted by news of both Alaric's invasion of Rome and the deaths of several friends, including Pammachius and Marcella. Overwhelmed by grief, he set it aside (CCL 75, 3.1–14; cf. Kelly 1975, 304; Cavallera 1922, I.317–20, II.52–3, 164). A year later he resumed his labors and was able to complete the first three books before he suspended work again because of the chaos ensuing from an invasion of Egypt, Palestine, Phoenicia, and Syria. He returned to it the final time in 412 and finished it in 414, so that it is his last complete commentary. On Jerome's exegesis, see Jay 1985a and 1985b; for a fuller discussion of the composition and characteristics of his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, see Christman 1995, chapter 5.

[14] *Ezech.* I.1.6–8a (CCL 75, 11.191–202). In this passage Jerome does not explain why the lion signifies Mark. However, in both his *Commentary on Matthew* and *Tractatus in Marci Evangelium* he likens the "voice crying in the wilderness" to a lion's roar (CCL 77, 3.55–4.84; CCL 78, 451.1–10).

[15] Gregory preached these homilies, which treat the prophet's vision in greater

Great relates the four countenances to the gospelers according to Jerome's pattern.[16] However, in a characteristic move, he is not content with the meaning passed down in the tradition, but embellishes it in several different ways.

Gregory first elaborates on the standard correlation of the creatures' faces to the gospels through what could be called an eschatological interpretation which takes the four evangelists to be an apt image for the elect of the Church.[17] He finds this in the prophet's initial description of the creatures emerging from a fiery cloud with *brightness all around it* (Ez 1.4–5). The cloud also has flashing fire, and in the midst of this is electrum, a mixture of silver and gold that Gregory had previously explained to be a symbol of the union of human and divine in the person of Christ.[18] These images of brightness, fire, and electrum prompt him to quote several biblical verses which he reads as descriptions of Christ's judgment at the end of time: Matthew 24.27, 1 Corinthians 3.13, Psalm 49.3 (LXX), and

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detail than any earlier extant text, in 593 while he and the people of Rome nervously anticipated the Lombards' invasion, and he revised them for publication eight years later. His original audience surely included monks from St. Andrew's, the monastery he had founded on his family estate, and perhaps some educated laity and exiled bishops. For the dating of Gregory's composition and revision of the *Homilies on Ezekiel*, see Recchia (1974, 25–26) and McClure (1978, 217), but cf. Meyvaert who doubts this generally accepted date (1978–79, 202 n. 25). The question of Gregory's audience centers around his statement that he delivered the first series of homilies *coram populo* (*Hom. Ez., praef.* 4) and whether this implies a liturgical setting with a *lectio continua* of Ezekiel or a public delivery to a more select circle. McClure (1978, 217–19) considers that it consisted primarily of monks, while Recchia (1974, 32–35) and Meyvaert (1978–79, 202 n. 25) envision a more diverse group. J. Richards has described the *Homilies on Ezekiel* as "an extended lamentation over the destruction of Rome and the way it should be responded to" (1980, 54). Although Gregory does allude to these circumstances in the sermons dealing with Ezekiel 1, it is not one of his major concerns.

The work is divided into two books: the first comprises twelve discourses on Ezekiel 1.1–4.3, and the second covers Ezekiel 40 in ten sermons. I shall be concerned primarily with the first eight homilies of Book 1, since these deal with the prophet's inaugural vision. Although Gregory's treatment of Ezekiel 1 is sermonic, he attends to every detail of the text, moving through it verse by verse, as if he were writing a commentary. Also, although each homily can stand on its own, when read in succession they are clearly interconnected. Citations are to the *Sources chrétiennes* edition.

[16] *Hom. Ez.* I.2.15, 18 and I.4.1. In I.2.15 and 18 Gregory simply states that the four faces represent the evangelists. In I.4.1 he actually lays out the correspondence between each particular visage and gospeler.

[17] Ibid., I.2.17–18.

[18] Ibid., I.2.14. See the discussion of Gregory's christological reading of the electrum in the section on the Ezekiel-Christ typology below.

2 Peter 3.10. But, Gregory explains, Christ will not return alone, for he will be accompanied by "all the saints who left this world perfectly." The evangelists—and thereby the living creatures' countenances—fittingly represent these saints, "the number of all the perfect," because, Gregory concludes, "all those who now have been perfected in the Church learned the righteousness of their perfection through the gospels."[19]

This interpretation deserves our attention for several reasons. First, two of the verses Gregory quotes concerning Christ's return as judge, 1 Corinthians 3.13 and 2 Peter 3.10, contain the word "fire" (*ignis*) found in Ezekiel 1.4. A third, Psalm 49.3, includes not only "fire" but also the phrase 'all around it' (*in circuitu eius*) which occurs in Ezekiel 1.4. The fourth, Matthew 24.27, does not share any exact vocabulary with Ezekiel 1.4, but uses the term *fulgur*, a synonym for *splendor* which appears in Ezekiel 1.4.[20] Thus, Gregory's eschatological reading of Ezekiel 1.4–5 is firmly grounded in linguistic ties to other biblical texts. The second critical feature of his exposition lies in the way he brings together the prophet's vision and the Church in his own day. Irenaeus' correlation joined the faces and the evangelists, and thereby asserted the unity of Old and New Testaments. Gregory does not abandon this link between the prophet and the New Testament authors, but forges it more strongly by establishing the continuity which extends from the four creatures of Ezekiel 1 to the gospelers to Christ's followers in the present. As a result, his exegesis tacitly underscores the notion that the Old Testament is a book of the Church.[21]

Gregory embellishes his reading of the living creatures in other ways also.[22] Like his predecessors, in his initial comments on the faces he focuses on the four different visages, taking them to denote the evangelists. He elaborates on this in the third homily, however, in a move that seems to derive from the prophet's seeing not merely

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[19] Gregory elaborates on the four faces as symbols of the elect in a section of a later homily, I.4.2, a treatment of Ezekiel 1.10–12.

[20] *Fulgur* means "a flash of lightning," while *splendor* can mean a "flash of light" (OLD, 744, 1808).

[21] In a delightful twist on Gregory's exegesis which reinforces this idea, later interpreters will find the living creatures' faces to be symbols not only of the evangelists but also of the four doctors of the Church, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great himself. See de Lubac 1998, 5–6.

[22] *Hom. Ez.* I.3.1–2.

one but rather *four* creatures with four countenances. Gregory starts with the description in Ezekiel 1.6, *each had four faces, and each had four wings* and observes that the countenances must signify knowledge (*notitia*), because the face reveals the person, while the wings must betoken flight, as the example of birds indicates. From this he concludes that the creatures' visages "pertain to faith (*ad fidem*)" and their wings to contemplation (*ad contemplationem*). These observations lead him to play with the ideas of faith and knowledge, wings and contemplation. While we know one another "by face," we are known by God through our faith (*per fidem*), he explains, appealing to John 10.14 (*I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me . . .*) for support. That contemplation is symbolized by the wings, he adds, shows that through it (*per contemplationem*) we are lifted above ourselves. From these remarks focused on the ongoing experience of Christians, Gregory returns to Ezekiel 1, quoting again a portion of verse 6, *each had four faces*, and finding in this detail an affirmation of the gospels' unanimity:

> If you ask what Matthew thinks about the Incarnation of the Lord, it is obviously what Mark, Luke, and John think. If you ask what John thinks, it is without a doubt what Luke, Mark, and Matthew think. If you ask what Mark thinks, it is what Matthew, John, and Luke think. Finally, if you ask what Luke thinks, it is the same as that which John, Matthew, and Mark think. Therefore, *each had four faces*, since in each one the knowledge of faith (*notitia fidei*), by which they are known by God, is what it is simultaneously in all four. Moreover, whatever you find in one, this you rightly find in all four at the same time.[23]

Although it is never entirely clear, the basis for Gregory's understanding of the gospelers' harmony seems to be that there are four creatures (perhaps one creature stands for one gospel), and each possesses four identical visages (perhaps representing each gospel's concurrence with the other three). He explains to his audience the characteristics of the evangelists' unity, finding in their countenances and wings the most important dimension of their agreement: their preaching about Christ's humanity and divinity. The creatures' wings illustrate their contemplation of his divine nature, while their faces witness to his human nature since they turn them to look upon him in his body.[24]

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[23] Ibid., I.3.1, ll. 12–21.

[24] Ibid., I.3.2. Although Gregory does not explain what he means when he

It would be easy to pronounce Gregory's view of the gospelers' harmony naïve and unsophisticated. However, that he discusses their concord precisely with regard to the Incarnation suggests that the consensus he discerns among them reflects recognition of their broad and fundamental theological agreement on the person of Christ, rather than an attempt to gloss over or dismiss their distinctive aspects.[25] Although he understands the four creatures to express the evangelists' unity in their proclamation of Christ, he is not oblivious to differences among them,[26] and in his fourth homily he introduces several more variations on the basic interpretation of the faces which are grounded in the way each connotes its particular gospeler.[27] He begins this sermon by outlining Jerome's correlations of them: the man stands for Matthew because he starts with Jesus' human genealogy; the lion represents Mark because of his quotation of Isaiah 40; Luke's emphasis on sacrifice in the story of Zechariah corresponds to the calf; and the exalted opening of John concentrates on Christ's divinity as an eagle focuses on the sun. Gregory's next exegetical move is based both on the specific theological import of the four countenances and on his earlier reading of them as icons not only of the gospels but also of all the elect. He observes that "all the elect are members of our Redeemer, and our Redeemer himself is the head of all of them," drawing on the pauline conception of the Church as the body of Christ.[28] Since he has already established that the four visages denote this body, he concludes that nothing

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describes the evangelists as turning their faces to see the incarnate Christ, he is probably thinking of the creatures as turning around to look at the human figure of Ezekiel 1.26–27 whom they carry and whom Gregory, like earlier interpreters, takes to represent Christ.

[25] In their assertion of the unanimity of the biblical witness to Christ the Fathers have not been viewed favorably by historical-critical exegetes, who have often characterized them as "unsophisticated" (cf. Birdsall, 1990) and as projecting doctrine (e.g., the Nicene *homoousion*) onto the biblical texts. For an argument that the Nicene *homousion* "is neither imposed *on* the New Testament texts, nor distantly deduced *from* the texts, but rather, describes a pattern of judgements present *in* the texts," see Yeago 1997. Although Yeago focuses specifically on the Nicene *homoousion*, arguments similar to his could be made with regard to other doctrines.

[26] See Augustine's *De consensu evangelistarum* (especially I.3.5–7.10 and IV.10.11) for a similar approach to this same issue that includes brief and undeveloped allusions to Ezekiel's vision.

[27] Hom, Ez. I.4.1–2.

[28] 1 Cor 12.27; Eph 1.23, 4.12, 5.23; Col 1.18 and 2.19.

prevents us from also taking them to symbolize Christ himself and delineates how each one exemplifies his characteristics:

> For the only-begotten Son of God himself truly became a man. He deigned to die like a calf in a sacrifice for our redemption. He rose like a lion by virtue of his strength. Also, the lion is said to sleep with its eyes open since, in that death—in which, because of his humanity, our Redeemer could sleep—by continuing to be immortal through his divinity, he remained awake. Finally, since Christ ascended into the heavens after his resurrection, he was lifted to the heights like an eagle. Therefore, for us, all of this means that he became a man by his birth, a calf by his death, a lion by his resurrection, and an eagle by his ascension into heaven.[29]

Gregory's understanding of the four countenances as pointing to Christ is interesting because it makes explicit what was implied in Irenaeus' original interpretation of them. In correlating them to the gospels, Irenaeus was illustrating the unity of the Old and New Testaments, but when doing this, he did not overtly claim that Christ is the ultimate object of the Old Testament.[30] Thus, when Gregory directly connects the four visages to Christ, he is simply setting out with greater clarity the concept which was tacitly the underpinning of Irenaeus' original interpretation.

After displaying how the four faces connote Christ, Gregory returns to his observation in the second homily that, since they symbolize the evangelists, they also denote "the number of all the perfect" because the elect attain their status through the gospels' tutelage.[31]

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[29] *Hom. Ez.* I.4.1. Gregory is perhaps dependent upon Ambrose here. In the prologue to his *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* Ambrose refers to the correlation of the four animals of Revelation 4—he does not directly connect this to Ezekiel—and the gospels. He comments on the aptness of the calf as a symbol for Luke because it is a priestly sacrifice as Christ was. He then relates the four animals to Christ himself:

> . . . some think that our Lord himself is represented in the four forms of animals corresponding to the four gospels: that he is a man, a lion, a calf, and an eagle. He is a man, since he was born of Mary; a lion, since he is so brave; a calf, since he is a sacrifice; and an eagle, since he is the resurrection. (CCL 14, 5.128–6.132)

Gregory has followed Ambrose's basic outline, except that he has more clearly brought out the language of virtue in the description of Christ as a lion, and substituted the ascension for the resurrection in his remarks about the eagle.

[30] Irenaeus makes this claim explicitly elsewhere. For example, in *Adversus haereses* IV.2.3 he asserts, "The writings of Moses are the words of Christ."

[31] *Hom. Ez.* I.2.18. For Gregory, the righteousness (*rectitudo*) that characterizes the elect comes from imitating Christ (Morel 1986).

Here he develops this earlier point, explaining that the righteous person, like Jesus, is a man, calf, lion, and eagle:

> Therefore, since everyone who is just becomes a man through reason, a calf through the sacrifice of his mortification, a lion through the strength of calmness, and an eagle through contemplation, each perfected Christian can rightly be signified by these holy animals.[32]

Gregory's comments are noteworthy in several ways. As we saw above in Homily I.2.14, when demonstrating the unity of Old and New Testaments he is not content simply to illumine the relationship between Ezekiel 1 and Christ. Rather, he pushes his exegesis further, showing how this connection extends to the Church. While the living creatures' four countenances look forward to their fulfillment in the incarnate Word, they also continually anticipate their realization in the lives of those who through imitating Christ—by becoming a man, lion, calf, and eagle as he did—are made perfect in righteousness. Furthermore, Gregory's construal not only shows how he intertwines this first strand of exposition with the third which focuses on virtue, but also offers a concrete example of de Lubac's contention that a text's allegorical sense has theological precedence over its moral or tropological meaning.[33] That the perfected Christian becomes a man, lion, calf, and eagle—the moral interpretation—only occurs insofar as that person conforms to Christ's consummation of the qualities exemplified by the four faces—the allegorical. Finally, in this passage as in Homily I.2.14, we see that although Gregory gives priority to the christological dimension of the passage, his concern for its moral lessons is always evident, a prominent feature of his preaching which we will return to in chapter 4.

The Ezekiel-Christ typology

The Prophet and Christ

While Gregory the Great's reading of the four countenances is much more elaborate than Irenaeus', its basic point is the same: the faces of the prophet's vision prefigure the gospels. When Irenaeus first presents this interpretation, he does not explicitly state that the ultimate

[32] Ibid., I.4.2.
[33] See note 3 above.

subject of the Old Testament is Christ. Nonetheless, this claim tacitly undergirds his explication of the four visages, and it appears outright elsewhere in *Adversus haereses*. However, in the Ezekiel-Christ typology, the link between Old and New Testaments is made even more directly as commentators discover connections between Jesus and not only the prophet himself but also the specifics of his vision.

Origen is the first to articulate this typology, and although others replicate it, his formulation of it remains the fullest and most-developed through the sixth century, since subsequent exegetes usually condense and only rarely amplify his original interpretation. He sets it out in his *Homily 1 on Ezekiel*,[34] the first of a series of fourteen homilies on this prophetic book which he delivered in Caesarea in Palestine probably sometime between 239 and 242[35] and which have come down to us only in Jerome's Latin translation.

Origen introduces the typology by stressing that Christ is the key to understanding the Bible: "If you wish to hear Ezekiel, the son of man, preaching in captivity, understand him as a type of Christ."[36] With this Origen suggests to his audience that the prophet's words are addressed to them, Christians of the third century, and they can

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[34] This homily is not a verse-by-verse exposition, but treats only Ezekiel 1.1–7, 10, 12, 16, and 27, and more than half of it focuses on 1.1–3. Unfortunately this is the only extant work on the prophet's vision that we have from Origen. He wrote a *Commentary on Ezekiel* containing twenty-five books, according to Eusebius (*H.E.* 6.32.1), but it has not survived. However, PG 13 prints two sections of fragments on Ezekiel attributed to him. The first consists of passages thought to be from the lost commentary (PG 13.664–65), but these do not contain any material on Ezekiel 1. The second is entitled *Selecta in Ezechielem* (PG 13.767–823). These *selecta*, culled from the catenae and not yet edited, include short excerpts from both the lost commentary and the original Greek text of Origen's homilies (CPG I, 1442). Only a few treat Ezekiel 1 and 10; they comprise just two columns of Greek text. However, since Origen may have presented in his commentary an interpretation consistent with or identical to that found in his homily, we cannot always be certain whether any given passage in the *selecta* preserves the Greek behind Jerome's translation of the homily or a section of the lost commentary. While I sometimes draw the reader's attention to the *selecta* in footnotes, my analysis and arguments are based on Jerome's translation of Origen's homily.

[35] Borret in Origen 1989, 9–15; cf. Nautin 1977, 401–5. Borret basically follows Nautin. Halperin has serious doubts about Nautin's dating, but himself admits that he cannot offer an alternate hypothesis (1988, 337–38). On the question of audience, Dassmann says that Origen delivered them to catechumens (1988, 1152), but I know of no evidence that those already baptized were excluded.

[36] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.4.1–2. I follow Joseph W. Trigg's translation (1990), occasionally making changes. Citations are to the *Sources chrétiennes* edition.

apprehend his message by looking for the ways in which he signifies Christ.

In Origen's reading, Ezekiel points to Christ with his initial words:

> *In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened . . .*

The typology's first feature is based on the phrase *In the thirtieth year* which presented many ancient interpreters with a conundrum, as it still does for modern exegetes. From what era or event were the thirty years to be counted? Origen exhibits none of the uncertainty of later commentators, and without hesitation assumes that this indicates the prophet's age.[37] Ezekiel's location on the banks of a river and the opening of the heavens are also components of the typology: when the prophet was thirty years old, alongside the river Chebar, he saw a breach in the firmament, just as Jesus, at the same age, witnessed the heavens part when he was baptized in the river Jordan.[38] Similarly, the vision's date prefigures sacramental realities, Origen explains, because *in the fourth month on the fifth day of the month* refers to the fourth month of the Jewish year. Thus Ezekiel's experience occurred in January, the time when Jesus was baptized.[39]

Origen offers another possible explanation as to why Ezekiel received his vision *in the fourth month on the fifth day of the month.* The connection here is not to Jesus' baptism, but rather to the Incarnation when, he observes, the Word both assumed a human body made up of "the four elements of the world" and received "the human

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[37] Among ancient interpreters, Jerome ultimately seems to agree with Origen, but he expresses some reservations and discusses the difficulties involved in dating *the thirtieth year* (*Ezech.* I.1a, CCL 75, 5.1–20). Palladius, treating Ezekiel 9.1–6, concurs with Origen (*v. Chrys.* 18; PG 47.64). Theodoret focuses on determining the vision's date with respect to the chronology of the exile and on the question of whether *the thirtieth year* was a jubilee year (PG 81.816b–820b). Gregory the Great follows Origen in considering *the thirtieth year* to be a reference to the prophet's age (*Hom. Ez.* I.2.5). Origen's reading of *the thirtieth year* is usually dismissed by contemporary interpreters, but a few approve of it. For this and other related issues, see Greenberg 1983, 39–40, Zimmerli 1979–83, I.112–15, and Miller 1992, 499–503.

[38] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.4.5–9. Jesus' age at his baptism is reported only in Luke 3.23.

[39] Ibid., 1.4.53–68. Origen insists that the months are to be counted according to the calendar that begins with Rosh Hashana which places the vision in January. In contrast, some Jewish sources start with the month of Passover. The *Visions of Ezekiel* puts the prophet's experience in the month of Tammuz, when Pentecost (Shabuot) is celebrated. See Levey 1987, 20 and 21, n. 2; cf. Gruenwald 1972.

senses."[40] In this comment he both links Ezekiel and Christ and argues against those who question the truth of the Incarnation.

Other parts of the typology not only bolster Origen's defense of the Incarnation's authenticity, but also undermine heterodox beliefs that the Creator is not the one whom Jesus calls Father. As Origen elaborates the ways in which Ezekiel prefigures Christ, these doctrinal concerns become clearer. The epithet *son of man*, he explains, is applied to both men, and thereby indicates the genuineness of Christ's humanity.[41] The very name "Ezekiel" also looks forward, for it means "power of God" and who except Christ, he asks, is the power of God? In addition, the definition of the prophet's surname, *son of Buzi*, is "held in contempt."[42] The theological import of Ezekiel's patronymic becomes clear as Origen argues against heterodox views of Jesus and the Father:

> If you encounter the heretics and hear them rejecting the Creator, counting him for naught, even indicting him of crimes, you will see that my Lord Jesus Christ is the son of the one who is, in their opinion, a most contemptible Creator. What if someone should object, someone who does not want to understand the prophecy as we interpret it? I would ask that person why it is in fact recorded in Scripture that, in the thirtieth year of Ezekiel's life, the heavens were opened and he saw those visions that are contained in his book. What difference does the number of years make to me, except this, that I learn that in their thirtieth years the heavens were opened to both the Savior and the prophet, and *comparing spiritual things to spiritual* (cf. 1 Cor 2.13), I recognize that all the things that are written are words of the same God?[43]

Three other details from Ezekiel's opening lines confirm Origen's typology. The statement in verse 1, *and I was in the midst of captivity*, also provides a parallel to Christ:

> The words *and I was in the midst of captivity* are, it seems to me, spoken ironically. "Even I," as if a prophet should say in history, "Even I, who took no part in the sin of the people, *I* was in the midst of captivity." By the same token, allegorically, Christ could say, "even I came to a place of captivity, I came to those limits, where I served,

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[40] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.4.64–68. Although Origen does not enumerate the five senses he clearly understands *the fifth day* to symbolize them.

[41] Ibid., 1.4.9–21.

[42] Ibid., 1.4.34–38.

[43] Ibid., 1.4.38–50.

> where I was detained as a captive." This is the way our Savior speaks in the person of the prophets.[44]

The next phrase in Ezekiel 1.1, *the heavens were opened*, signifies Christ's advent, for prior to this the heavens had been closed. This breach of the firmament at the Incarnation allows the Holy Spirit's descent upon Jesus at his baptism.[45] Finally, verse 3 also pertains to Christ, Origen explains, for *the word of the Lord* that came to the prophet is none other than the Logos described in John 1.1 "who in the beginning was with the Father."[46] This is the typology's last major element; in the remainder of the homily he focuses on the vision's moral interpretation.

Replicating much of this typology in his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, Jerome expands on the connection Origen had drawn between the site of the vision along the Chebar and Christ's baptism.[47] Both Daniel and Ezekiel, he notes, received "revelations of the future" on riverbanks in order to manifest the power of baptism. The meaning of water is revealed even more in the account of Paul's being "washed in the Lord" by Ananias (Acts 9.18) and in the report of the emergence of living things from the seas (Gen 1.20).[48] Jerome's elaboration on Origen's exegesis is interesting because, by bringing in Genesis and Acts, he reinforces the link Origen forged between the Old and New Testaments. But he also extends this through an explicit tie to the body of Christ in his own day, as Gregory the Great did in his development of Irenaeus' reading of the four faces. Jerome accepts

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[44] Ibid., 1.5.1–8.

[45] Ibid., 1.6.2–4.

[46] Ibid., 1.9.1–10.8. This interpretation is not, strictly speaking, typological. I have included it in this section, however, because Origen presents it in the context of the typology. He routinely understands the phrase *the word of the Lord* to refer to Christ. See Crouzel 1989, 70.

[47] *Ezech.* I.1a–3b, CCL 75, 5.1–7.78. Jerome basically follows Origen, but he does not say that "the thirtieth year" is a reference to the prophet's age, although it seems implicit in his interpretation. Elsewhere, he is not hesitant to link the ages of Ezekiel and Jesus. For example, in his exposition of Isaiah 5.10, when commenting on the mystical qualities of the number 10, he writes: *et de tricenario, in quo prophetavit Hiezechiel et Dominus baptizatus est . . .* (*Is.* 5.10, CCL 73, 70.27–28; cf. *Tract. Marc.* 13.32–33, CCL 78, 500.151–63).

[48] *Ezech.* I.3a, CCL 75, 6.46–52. Theodoret makes a similar observation, commenting that the vision's location along the Chebar signifies "the salvation of all human beings, and shows plainly the knowledge of God that will come to the faithful through the new birth of water" (PG 81.821b), but does not tie this to Jesus' baptism.

the typology joining the prophet beside the Chebar to Jesus in the Jordan, but he builds on it, discerning a token of the Church's sacrament of rebirth in Ezekiel's (and Daniel's) location.[49]

Gregory the Great reproduces the basic Ezekiel-Christ typology set forth by Jerome and Origen, but instead of enlarging upon their expositions, he abbreviates them: Gregory's treatment is slightly shorter than Jerome's, and Jerome had already condensed Origen's.[50] It might be easy to conclude from this that the influence of Origen's interpretation wanes as the tradition develops. This, however, would be a mistake, because it would fail to recognize the fundamental significance of Origen's exegetical program, not simply of Ezekiel but of the entire Old Testament.

It is difficult to overstate the seminal role played by Origen in the emergence of a distinctively Christian and comprehensive reading of Scripture. His impact can be gauged by comparing him with Irenaeus, whose remarks are also foundational for the tradition. In his construal of the four living creatures, and throughout *Adversus haereses*, Irenaeus attempts to demonstrate that the Old Testament is the Church's book, a witness to the God whom Jesus calls Father. Exegesis is at the heart of this work, and it goes hand in hand with theology. However, *Adversus haereses* is a treatise, not a commentary, and therefore Irenaeus' approach to the sacred text is *ad hoc*: he deals with the passages most germane to the theological issue under discussion. Although he is guided by the premise of the Bible's unity, the result of his *ad hoc* style is that much of the Old Testament receives little or no attention. This way of proceeding is characteristic of patristic authors until the third century when Origen revolutionized Christian exegesis. While Origen's legacy shapes later writers in many ways, perhaps his most impressive contribution is his contention that, because Christ is the key to Scripture, the Christian interpreter not only can but also ought to treat the *entire*

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[49] That Origen fails to connect the site of the vision to baptism does not mean he was unconcerned with the way it foreshadowed the body of Christ, for he is acutely interested in showing that Ezekiel is a book of and for the Church. However, the ecclesial issues he dealt with in the third century were different from those facing Jerome. Origen stresses the typology to illumine the link between Old and New Testaments (thereby showing the identity of the God of the Old Testament and the God whom Jesus calls Father), and to argue against heterodox rejection of the reality of the Incarnation.

[50] *Hom. Ez.* I.2.5–6.

Old Testament, not merely select verses.[51] In a sermon on the book of Numbers, he describes the task incumbent on the biblical expositor: while the preacher is limited in what he can cover, the person composing a commentary should explain the text in detail, omitting nothing.[52] Eusebius reports that Origen's *Commentary on Ezekiel* contained twenty-five books,[53] so we can be fairly confident that he "omitted nothing." Since it has not survived, we cannot know its content, but it surely was more exhaustive than his homily. Regardless of the lost commentary's content, however, Origen's most enduring contribution is that, through his insistence that *all* of Scripture be examined and read through the lens of Christ, its ultimate object, he opened up the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, for the Church and made an indelible mark on the history of exegesis.[54] Because of this it can be said that all subsequent Christian interpreters of the vision are dependent upon him, even if they were not always directly familiar with his explication of it. It would not be too much to say that even though his typology becomes less prominent over time, the theological insight behind it continues to undergird all Christian exploration of Ezekiel 1.

The One Seated on the Throne and the Incarnation

The only authors of the first six centuries to delineate the Ezekiel-Christ typology are Origen, Jerome, and Gregory the Great. However, there is another reading of the vision that is typological and grows out of the assumption that the Old Testament prefigures Christ.

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[51] On Origen's understanding of Christ as the key to the Bible, see *Hom. in Ezech.* 14.2, along with Borret's note on this section in the *Sources chrétiennes* edition. (Cf. *sel. in Ps.* 1, PG 12.1076c–1077c, translated and discussed in Nautin 1977, 263–64. See also de Lubac 1950, 336–46; Simonetti 1985, 78–79.) This notion and his belief that the spiritual and christological content of Scripture are coterminous provide the foundation for his reading of the Old Testament.

[52] *Hom. 14.1 in Num.*, PG 12.676c.

[53] *H.E.* 6.32.1.

[54] The decisive nature of Origen's contribution to Christian biblical exposition is cogently set forth by Manlio Simonetti in *Lettera e/o Allegoria* (1985, 73–74). Origen was, of course, dependent upon his predecessors, both Christian and pagan. But, as Simonetti has argued, he sharpened his forbears' interpretive tools, and brought them together, along with a greatly refined critical awareness, to create a systematic method that took the entire Bible as its focus. In this way, Origen surpassed those who had gone before him and had a decisive impact on all subsequent Christian exegesis.

Found in Eusebius of Caesarea, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Gregory the Great, it takes the man seated on the throne as Christ and his physical attributes as symbols of the union of the human and divine natures in the Incarnation.[55]

Eusebius presents such an interpretation when commenting on Psalm 79.3 (LXX), *you who are enthroned upon the cherubim*.[56] The person addressed in this verse, he explains, is the one who both "became the shepherd of holy men" and "rode upon the cherubim." Drawing connections between the cherubim of Psalm 79.3 and those mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, Eusebius observes that in Exodus (25.10–22, cf. 37.1–9) Moses was commanded to fashion "images and symbols" of the cherubim for the Ark of the Covenant. These were seen by Ezekiel, and they form God's chariot, because they support the throne upon which the Lord's glory rests. But what, Eusebius wonders, is the glory of the Lord revealed in the prophet's vision? He asks his readers:

> Do you see how the passage [Ezekiel 1.26] conceived of the glory of the Lord, the glory borne on the throne when it expounded the vision of the man? What would this vision of a man be—which is said to be not God himself, but the glory of God—what would it be except the only begotten Word of God? . . .[57]

Identifying the man seated on the throne as the Word, Eusebius implies that his physiognomy—electrum above the loins and fire below—is consistent with the Incarnation. The Logos' divinity is "compared to electrum which is more precious than anything else." Likewise, the fire and brightness from the loins downward symbolize sexuality and reproduction, parts of human life.[58]

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[55] A number of authors, including Ambrose, identify the figure seated on the throne as Christ. However, here I am only treating those who present substantial exegetical support for this and/or who explore the christological significance of the electrum.

[56] *Ps.* 79.3, PG 23.956a–d. For Eusebius' terminology in this passage (i.e., image and symbol) see Curti 1987, 230–35.

[57] Ibid., PG 23.956b. Although the *Commentary on the Psalms* is difficult to date, Eusebius probably completed it before Nicea; see Rondeau 1968, 419–22. In chapter 3 we will see that in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, written after Nicea, Eusebius modifies his reading of Ezekiel 1, particularly in its christological dimensions, so that it conforms more closely to the council's judgments.

[58] Eusebius' remark is, as far as I know, the first occurrence of such an interpretation. While Origen also ties the electrum to the divine realm, specifically that God is refreshment and not just torment, and the fire to the human sphere,

After querying his audience about Ezekiel 1.26, Eusebius returns to Moses and the "icons and symbols of heavenly things" on the Ark of the Covenant. He observes that "the mercy seat (τὸ ἱλαστήριον) made of gold" and placed atop the Ark between the cherubim is "like a charioteer" and is also "a type and icon of the one seen above the cherubim in the prophet Ezekiel, which we show to be the Word of God." In a deft exegetical move, Eusebius sets the capstone into his argument that the man seated on the throne in the prophet's vision is the Logos by relating the mercy seat (τὸ ἱλαστήριον) of Exodus 25 (which he had already shown to be a type of the figure in Ezekiel 1.26) to Paul's description of Christ in Romans 3.25, *Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement (ἱλαστήριον) by his blood.* This reading is not entirely original, for Origen had already associated the mercy seat of Exodus 25 and 37 with the ἱλαστήριον of Romans 3.25, but Eusebius is the first interpreter who uses this connection to identify the figure of Ezekiel 1.26 as Christ.[59]

In his *Commentary on Ezekiel* Theodoret of Cyrus, like Eusebius, explores the way in which the electrum and fire of verse 27 point to the two natures of the incarnate Christ, but he reverses what these two elements symbolize. The fire from the loins downward discloses Christ's divinity, a reading confirmed by Deuteronomy 4.24, *For your God is a consuming fire.* The electrum represents his humanity because it combines gold and silver, just as the body is made up of earth, water, fire, and air, and human nature joins the rational soul and mortal flesh.[60]

Theodoret finds the figure seated on the throne an extremely fitting visual representation of the Incarnation because the electrum and fire are separate. The fire below (denoting the divine nature) bears the electrum above (expressing the human) because "the divine nature clothed itself with the human" and "the divine nature bore the human." Throughout the christological controversies of the fifth century Theodoret labored to show that Christ's two natures were

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particularly sexual activity, his main focus is asceticism, not the Incarnation (see chapter 4 below).

[59] Other authors took the figure of Ezekiel 1.26 to be the Word (e.g., Irenaeus), but they did not provide the "exegetical proof" Eusebius put forward. For Origen's reading of Romans 3 and the mercy seat, see his *Comm. in Rom.* 3.25 (1957, 156.14–158.2 and 160.1–2).

[60] PG 81.836a–b; cf. 901d where, commenting on Ezekiel 11.22–23, Theodoret again identifies the fire and electrum with Christ's divine and human natures.

not mixed, because otherwise the unique properties of each would be denied.[61] Thus in his exegesis here, he endeavors to distinguish between the electrum of the upper body and the fire of the lower, but his version of the Septuagint text of Ezekiel 1.27 presents him with some difficulties in this regard. This verse describes the torso as *like a vision of electrum, like a vision of fire within him round about (ἔσωθεν αὐτοῦ κύκλῳ)*.[62] Thus, while the figure has fire below the loins, the electrum above is surrounded by a blazing nimbus. This poses a problem for Theodoret because it blurs the sharp line between fire and electrum, and thus between Christ's humanity and divinity. However, Theodoret resolves this dilemma by finding the fiery halo around the electrum to be a sign of the Incarnation's effect on Christ's human nature:

> The prophet saw, from the loins and above, an image like electrum, but also *like a vision of fire within him round about.* For, by the nature which inhabited it (ὑπὸ τῆς ἐνοικούσης φύσεως), the humanity of the Word of God became sparkling and brilliant and highly esteemed, immortal and incorruptible.[63]

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[61] In his summary of the second dialogue of his *Eranistes*, Theodoret explains what is at stake in this point:

> Those who believe that one nature resulted from the union of the divinity and the humanity destroy by this teaching the individual properties of both natures; and the destruction of these [properties] results in a denial of both natures. For mixing the realities that were united prevents us from considering flesh as flesh, and God as God. But if there was a clear difference between the realities united even after the union, there was no mixture; a union without mixture took place. If one admits this, then Christ the Lord is not one nature, but one Son, who shows both natures without mixture (*Eran. suppl.*, 1975, 257.10–15; trans. Ettlinger, 6–7).

Also, in *Ep.* 21, Theodoret argues that if the two natures of Christ are not kept distinct, then the Son is necessarily subordinated to the Father (SC 98, 77). Grillmeier observes that the "indwelling framework" intrinsic to Theodoret's two-nature Christology tends to bring about "a loosening of the conjunction of God and man." Thus, Grillmeier contends, images such as that in Ezekiel 1 were particularly attractive to Theodoret because they allowed him to balance his Christology by placing weight on the unity of Christ's divine and human natures in one countenance (1975, 491–93).

[62] This reading of the Greek text, which is consistent with the Masoretic text, appears only in Codex Alexandrinus and in Origen's Hexapla. Origen marked it with an asterisk, thereby denoting that it was taken from other translations which agreed with the Hebrew (Rahlfs 1979, LXIII; Ziegler 1977, 96). Although Theodoret most often makes recourse to the versions of Symmachus, Aquila, and Theodotion, he appears to have had access to Origen's Hexapla, for he refers to it in his commentaries. See, e.g., *Ps.* 26.1 (PG 80.1048d) and *Is.* 45.3–5, 60.7–9, and 63.11–12 (SC 315, 20.119, 250.134, and 296.58).

[63] PG 81.836b.

Unfortunately, Theodoret does not explore the soteriological implications of this intriguing comment.

Gregory the Great presents a similar christological reading, but unlike Eusebius and Theodoret, he discovers the Incarnation prefigured in the electrum by itself because it is a combination of two metals, gold and silver. Moreover, his exposition of Ezekiel 1.27 reflects the Chalcedonian definition of the person of Christ, when he explains that in this alloy,

> . . . the gold's brilliance is tempered by silver, and the silver's appearance becomes bright through the gold's brilliance. And in our Redeemer, the human and divine natures are united without confusion and joined to each other so that through his humanity the brilliance of his divinity could have been tempered for our eyes and through his divinity, the human nature in him might become brilliant and, being exalted, might have splendor beyond that which it had when created.[64]

It seems unlikely, given the variations in the details of these three interpretations, that Theodoret borrowed from Eusebius or that Gregory had recourse to either of them.[65] However, what they share, and what is of most consequence, is that they are based upon the same assumption which grounds Origen's Ezekiel-Christ typology: the subject of the entire Bible is Christ and all of the Old Testament points forward to him.

A wheel within a wheel, the spread of the Gospel, and the unity of the testaments

In the first section of this chapter we saw that when Irenaeus related the gospels to the living creatures' faces, he invoked the earth's four regions, the four winds, and the Church scattered throughout the

[64] *Hom. Ez.* I.8.25 (4–11). Expounding Ezekiel 1.4, Gregory offers the same interpretation in *Hom. Ez.* I.2.14 and *Moralia in Iob* 28.1.5. In the *Moralia* he explains how "God speaks through angels by things" and presents the vision as an example of this. Through it the prophet was granted an understanding of those things which would happen "in the last days": the Incarnation and subsequently, Christ's judgment as signified by the fire surrounding the electrum (CCL 143B, 1397–98).

[65] However, since Eusebius' commentary seems to have been published widely and translated into Latin, Gregory may have had access to it (Rondeau 1982–85, I.70–71).

world, but he did not directly connect the vision's details to the Gospel's dissemination. In this third motif, interpreters building on Irenaeus make precisely this move, establishing how the wheels of Ezekiel 1.15–21 signal the promulgation of the Good News to creation's farthest reaches.

Preaching the Gospel to the Ends of the Earth in Ezekiel 1 and Psalm 76

This reading of Ezekiel's wheels shows up in several different contexts, the first of which is exposition of Psalm 76.19 (LXX; Hebrew, Ps 77.19), *The voice of your thunder was in the whirlwind*. Patristic authors yoke Ezekiel 1.15–21 with Psalm 76.19 on the basis of common vocabulary that appears in both the Greek and Latin versions. The link between these passages emerges because the Septuagint uses the same Greek word τροχός ('wheel') for the Hebrew term *ofan* in Ezekiel 1.15–21 (usually rendered into English as 'wheel') and the Hebrew *galgal* in Psalm 77.19 (often translated as 'whirlwind'). This verbal tie also appears in the Latin since both Ezekiel's *ofan* and the psalmist's *galgal* are rendered as *rota*.[66] Thus, for early Christian commentators who found τροχός in the Septuagint of Ezekiel 1.15–21 and Psalm 76.19, or *rota* in the Latin, the linguistic, and therefore exegetical, relationship between the texts was obvious.

The earliest interpretation joining these passages is found in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Commentary on the Psalms*, where he employs the phrase *a wheel within a wheel* (Ez 1.16) to explicate Psalm 76.19 (LXX). He begins by probing the spiritual import of the word 'thunder' used by the psalmist:

> Here *thunder* hints at the preaching of the Gospel (τὸ κήρυγμα τὸ εὐαγγελικὸν), for just as a *voice of thunder* is a celestial sound, surpassing every human capacity, likewise the preaching of the Gospel, since it is heavenly, did not depend upon mortal strength. It did not originate from human will, but filled the entire world (κόσμον) with divine power. This is the reason the Savior called the disciples *Boanerges*, which means *sons of thunder* (Mk 3.17). Therefore, because of what the Savior would say later, already in the Psalter it said, *The voice of your thunder is in the wheel [RSV: whirlwind]*. The wheel refers to the whole life, since also in Ezekiel, *a wheel within a wheel* (1.16) signifies the entire life of human beings. Therefore the world is a wheel, for it is spherical (σφαιροειδής)

[66] Both versions in the Vulgate (i.e., the translation based upon the Hebrew and the one made from the Septuagint) use *rota*.

> and moves in a circle (κυκλοφορητικῶς κινούμενος). And here a wheel is the ever-changing life of human beings. This is why it says, *a wheel within a wheel.*[67]

Similar readings of Psalm 76.19 (LXX) appear in works attributed to Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, both of whom seem to have been familiar with Eusebius' *Commentary on the Psalms.*[68] In his *Expositio in Psalmos*, Athanasius writes:

> *The voice of your thunder was in the wheel.* He uses *thunder* to speak about the Gospel preaching (τὸν εὐαγγελικὸν λόγον) which resounds throughout the world (τὸν κατακτυπήσαντα τὴν ὑπ' οὐρανόν). For this reason, he dubbed the preacher a *son of thunder* (cf. Mk 3.17). He calls the life of human beings *a wheel*, as taught in Ezekiel. Therefore, it is as if he is saying, "Your Gospel preaching (ὁ λόγος σου ὁ εὐαγγελικός) has been spread to every human tribe."[69]

Although Athanasius does not make the connection to the account of Jesus naming James and John *sons of thunder* as overtly as Eusebius, he obviously has it in mind. Also, Athanasius' remarks contain an interesting ambiguity. Throughout this passage, he uses third person singular verbs without always indicating who the subject is. His initial observations ("He uses . . ." and ". . . he dubbed . . .") seem to refer to the psalmist and Jesus respectively. However, the speakers in the remaining two sentences ("He calls . . ." and ". . . as if he is saying . . .") are unclear. They could be Ezekiel and the psalmist, but it is also plausible that Jesus is the subject in both, a possibility that implies the notion that the voice of Scripture, in both Old Testament and New, is Christ's. While Athanasius only hints at this univocal quality of the Bible, Eusebius had expressed it straightforwardly in his discussion of Psalm 76.19: "Therefore, because of what the Savior would say later, already in the Psalter it said, *The voice of your thunder is in the wheel.*" But regardless of whether this idea is stated outright or only suggested, it animates the Fathers' exegesis not only of Ezekiel 1 but of the entire Bible.

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[67] *Ps.* 76.19, PG 23.897c–d.

[68] Although there are questions about the authenticity of these texts, the attributions are probably correct. See Christman 1995, 62 n. 177; cf. Devreesse 1928 and 1970.

[69] *Exp. Ps.* 76.19, PG 27.348c–d. Athanasius' *Expositio in Psalmos* has survived only in the catenae, so it is difficult to date. However, based upon a study of its theological vocabulary, Rondeau places it in the same period as *Contra gentes et de incarnatione*, which, following Kannengiesser et al., he takes to be 335–37 (1968, 422–27).

The comments of both Eusebius and Athanasius appear to lie behind the exposition of Psalm 76.19 attributed to Cyril of Alexandria:

> The *thunder* is the Gospel preaching which has resounded throughout the entire world (ὁ εὐαγγελικὸς λόγος ὁ κατακτυπήσας τὴν ὑπ᾽ οὐρανόν), and from which some are named *sons of thunder*. It was given in the wheel, that is, in this world which is spherical and moves in a circle (ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ τῷ σφαιροειδεῖ καὶ κυκλοφορικῶς κινουμένῳ). According to Ezekiel, there is another wheel in the world, that is, the life of human beings: *a wheel within a wheel* (1.16).[70]

Several interpretive moves are involved in these treatments of Ezekiel 1 and Psalm 76. First, the connotation of the phrase *the voice of your thunder* emerges when it is paired with Mark 3.17 where Jesus gives James and John the epithet *sons of thunder*. All three commentators assume that because the sons of Zebedee are apostles, *the voice* must be their preaching about Christ. Here Eusebius is the most sophisticated, because his explication of the texts implies that *thunder* indicates the divine power inherent in the Gospel.[71] Finally, the authors bring in Ezekiel's *wheel within a wheel* (1.16) in order to discern what Psalm 76.19 (LXX) means when it speaks of *the voice of your thunder* (i.e., the preaching of the Gospel) as being *in the wheel*. Their understanding of a *wheel within a wheel* derives from the philosophical notion of human beings as a microcosm of the universe, the macrocosm, a concept Cyril articulates the most explicitly when, borrowing Eusebius' language, he first identifies "the wheel" as "this world which is spherical and moves in a circle" and then adds that Ezekiel's *wheel within a wheel* refers to "another wheel in the world, that is, the life of human beings."[72] What is most essential for our grasp of the exegetical tradition's development, however, is that by juxtaposing Psalm 76.19 (LXX) and Ezekiel 1.16, Eusebius, Athanasius, and Cyril find that Ezekiel's *wheel within a wheel* prefigures the spread of the Gospel as human beings carried it around the globe. While this idea of the

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[70] PG 69.1193.a–b.

[71] This is naturally suggested by the Psalm text which describes the thunder as being God's (i.e., *your thunder*).

[72] This idea has its roots in the pre-Socratic philosophers and seems to lie behind Plato's understanding of the universe in the *Timaeus*. Aristotle is the first to actually use the term microcosm, which Christian authors pick up. For the development of this philosophical concept and the Christian appropriation of it, see Barkan 1975; Thunberg 1987, 295–97; and Clarke 1996.

Gospel's dissemination was hinted at in Irenaeus through his mention of the Church scattered to all parts of the world, it was neither fully elaborated nor tied directly to the prophet's vision as it is in these fourth- and fifth-century writers. That this expanded reading first appears in the wake of Constantine's political triumph, a victory that some saw as a harbinger of the Church's spiritual success, is surely no accident.

Preaching the Gospel within the Believer's Heart and the Unity of Old and New Testaments

While Eusebius, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria emphasize the communal aspect of the tidings of Christ being published to all peoples, their reference to the microcosm within the macrocosm at least alludes to the weightiness of this message for each person. Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose of Milan, and Jerome all present interpretations similar to those of Eusebius et al., but in a variety of ways each of them spotlights the growth of the Gospel within a single person.[73] This change in stress is important because through it Basil, Ambrose, and Jerome begin the process whereby the original exposition of *a wheel within a wheel* is adapted to fit the Church's changing circumstances. The focus of their construal of Ezekiel 1 shifts from the Gospel's continued geographic spread to its flourishing in each Christian. In conjunction with this reading, Ambrose introduces the notion of the unity of the Old and New Testaments, and Jerome replicates this. Finally, enlarging on these two themes, Gregory the Great extends Ambrose's observations to discuss Scripture's historical and spiritual senses and its adaptability to Christians of different stages of spiritual advancement.

Basil of Caesarea

Basil brings together both Psalm 76.19 (*The voice of your thunder is in the wheel [RSV: whirlwind]*) and Ezekiel 1.15 when preaching on Psalm 28.3 (LXX), *the voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders*. After describing the meteorological conditions that produce thunder, he offers a spiritual reading of the text:

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[73] Their concern for the Gospel's spread within the individual ties this motif to the moral reading of the prophet's vision.

> It is also possible for you, using the Church's way of speaking, to give the name *thunder* to that teaching which comes to the souls of those already initiated, after their baptism and through the Gospel's eloquence. *Thunder* denotes the Gospel, as is clear from what the Lord did when he gave the disciples a new name, calling them "Sons of Thunder" (Mk 3.17). Therefore, the voice of such *thunder* is not in just any person, but only in the one worthy to be called a wheel. *The voice of your thunder*, it says, *was in a wheel.* That is, whoever is *straining forward to what lies ahead* (τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενος [Phil 3.13]), like a wheel, touching the earth with a small part of itself (ὀλίγῳ μέρει τῆς γῆς ἐφαπτόμενος), just like that wheel Ezekiel spoke about: *I saw and behold there was one wheel on the earth attached to the four living creatures, and their appearance and their form was as the appearance of tharsis* (1.15).[74]

Like Eusebius, Basil analyzes the meaning of the word *thunder* through Jesus' epithet for the sons of Zebedee. Although Basil starts with Psalm 28.3 (LXX), he also relates Psalm 76.19 (LXX) to the wheel of Ezekiel 1.15ff and to Mark 3.17. But while he concludes from these texts that *thunder* denotes the Good News and its teaching, he does not share Eusebius' interest in its universal promulgation. Instead, by inserting Philippians 3.13 into the exegetical matrix, Basil trains his attention on the individual believer. The wheel's progress is seen not in the evangelization of the world, but in the Gospel's growth in every disciple who, like the apostle Paul, strains forward to what lies ahead. Basil accomplishes this change of focus by glossing Philippians 3.13 with the phrase, "like a wheel, touching the earth with a small part of itself." This remark about Paul's eagerness, combined with the use of Psalm 76.19, enables Basil to bring in the *one wheel* of Ezekiel 1.15. Presumably what he means here is that the person "worthy to be called a wheel" is always striving to conform more and more to the thunder of the Gospel. We should take note of this gloss because both Jerome and Gregory the Great will reproduce it, but each will put a distinctive slant on it.

Ambrose of Milan

In a move perhaps dependent upon Basil's *Homily on Psalm 28*, Ambrose of Milan brings Philippians 3.13 to bear on Ezekiel 1 in *De virginitate* 18.117–118, a passage we will examine again in chap-

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[74] *Hom. in Ps. 28.3*, PG 29.292b.

ter 4. Although his primary concern here, particularly when he cites Philippians 3.13, is with the living creatures' wings as a sign of the soul ascending to God, he also quotes Ezekiel 1.16, *a wheel within a wheel*, explaining that this pertains to the body "adapted to the soul's virtue" and "molded to the Gospel teaching." In a phrase reminiscent of Eusebius' image of the circuit of human life moving within the larger wheel of the cosmos, Ambrose describes the *wheel within a wheel* as "a life within a life," which, he adds, evinces either the internal consistency of the saints' lives or the intimations of eternal life experienced in this world when one's physical and spiritual existence are consonant. Ambrose does not discuss the spread of the Good News here, but his notion of the holy person's body as "molded" to the evangelical instruction tacitly suggests the interpretive shift seen in Basil's homily: Ezekiel's wheels signify the Gospel's increase in each Christian.

In two other works, *De Spiritu sancto* and *Expositio Psalmi 118*, Ambrose presents a construal of Ezekiel's wheels in keeping with the comments of Basil et al., although he does not quote Psalm 76.19 (*The voice of your thunder is in the wheel*). In these writings he initiates a new theme: the *wheel within a wheel* as an icon of the unity of the Old and New Testaments.

Exploring the Spirit's role in commissioning and sending the prophets in *De Spiritu sancto*, Ambrose brings in Isaiah's vision of the seraphim, arguing that in Isaiah 6.9–10 it was the third person of the Trinity who sent the prophet to the people.[75] Wondering how the seraphim could fly and stand still at the same time, he asks, "If we are unable to grasp this, how do we wish to understand God, whom we do not see?" and turns to Ezekiel 1 for his answer:

> But just as the prophet saw *a wheel* running *within a wheel* (Ez 1.16)—which certainly does not refer to a sort of physical vision, but to the grace of the two Testaments, since the life of the saints is smooth (*teres*) and so in harmony with itself (*ita sibi concinens*) that the later parts are consistent with the earlier—therefore, *a wheel within a wheel* is life under the law, life under grace, inasmuch as Jews are within the Church,

[75] *Spir.* 3.21.159–64, CSEL 79, 217–19. Ambrose's comment is reminiscent of Paul's remarks in Acts 28.25–26. *De Spiritu sancto*, a defense of the Holy Spirit's divinity, was completed in 381; see Williams 1995, 128–69 and Di Berardino 1986, 169–70).

> and the law within grace. For he is in the Church *who is a Jew in secret*, and *circumcision of the heart* (cf. Rom 2.29) is a sacrament within the Church. But that Judea is within the Church about which it is written: *In Judea God is known* (Ps 75.1 [Vulg.]). Therefore, just as *a wheel* runs *within a wheel*, likewise wings both stood still and flew.[76]

In its context in *De Spiritu sancto*, Ambrose's use of Ezekiel 1 seems awkward, since it does not advance his discussion. Nonetheless, for our purposes, several things are noteworthy. First, although he does not tie the prophet's *wheel within a wheel* to the world-wide proclamation of Christ, he does implicitly link it to the Gospel's growth in the individual believer, for it manifests "the grace of the two Testaments" and the evidence for this is the smoothness and internal harmony of the saints' lives. Of greater consequence, however, is his new interpretation of the *wheel within a wheel* as a symbol for the unity of the two Testaments (and of law and grace, in an echo of John 1.17), one which later writers will repeat and expand upon.[77]

Ambrose offers another reading of Ezekiel's wheels in his *Expositio Psalmi 118*, a series of sermons on the twenty-two stanzas of Psalm 118 (LXX) probably delivered between 386 and 390.[78] In the closing sections of the fourth homily, when commenting on Psalm 118.32, *I will run in the way of your commandments when you widen my heart*, he brings together several biblical verses and disparate images that eventually lead him to Ezekiel 1. Quoting Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians to *widen [their] hearts* (2 Cor 6.11–13), Ambrose meditates on the Trinity's desire to abide in the spacious heart. Pondering both the metaphor of running in the way of the commandments and the need to proclaim Wisdom in broad streets (cf. Prov 1.20) and expansive minds, he is reminded of two other passages: 1 Corinthians 9.24 (*Thus run, so that you may obtain all things*) and 2 Timothy 4.7 (*I have finished the race*). These scriptural texts, he explains, apply to the person who "runs like a good horse." Christ, Ambrose adds, has his own steeds: the apostles who preached the Good News and

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[76] *Spir.* 3.21.162, CSEL 79, 218.22–32.

[77] Cf. Maximus of Turin's exegesis of Luke 17.35, where both Ezekiel's wheels and the two stones of a grain mill are likened to the Old and New Testaments (*Serm.* 20 [CCL 23, 75–77]).

[78] *Psal. 118*, 4.27–29; CSEL 62, 80.15–82.4. For the dating of this work, see Di Berardino 1988, 163–64. I have given references only to CSEL 62 because the text in PL 15 is riddled with errors, both typographical and textual.

brought the nations to belief in him. Praising them as a "marvelous team of twelve good horses" guided by "bridles of peace" and "reins of love," he draws on Ezekiel 1 to enlarge on this imagery:

> [The apostles] are bound together among themselves by the chains of harmony and subjected to the yoke of faith when, by the *four wheels* (cf. Ez 1.15), they introduce the mystery of the Gospel to the ends of the whole earth, carrying the good charioteer, the Word of God. With his whip earthly enticements are driven away, the ruler of this world is destroyed, and the course of the righteous is fulfilled. O grand rivalry of reason-filled horses! O wondrous mystery! *A wheel* was running *within a wheel* (Ez 1.16), and it was not hindered, the New Testament within the Old. It ran within that through which it was announced. *The wheels went in four directions (in quattuor partes), and they did not turn back* (Ez 1.17). Since *the Spirit of life was in them* (cf. Ez 1.20), they ran to the four corners (*in quattuor partes*) of the whole world. The wheels ran without obstruction, since the good life of the horses was four-square. The horses ran because the one who rode them did not sleep. Therefore Jesus, the charioteer of our souls, wishes us both to mount our horses—that is, our bodies—but also always to be alert, lest it be said to us, *Those who mounted horses slept* (Ps 75.7).[79]

In this passage Ambrose weaves together several interpretations: one concerning how the news of Christ was first published, another addressing the unity of the Testaments, and a moral reading that describes the apostles who delivered the Gospel to all the nations as righteous, four-square, and filled with the Spirit.[80] The way in which

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[79] Ibid., 4.28–29; CSEL 62, 81.13–28. As in *De Spiritu sancto*, the *wheel within a wheel* signifies the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, but this is articulated differently in the two works. In *De Spiritu sancto*, Ambrose implies that the outer wheel is the New Testament and the inner, the Old, when he comments, "Therefore the *wheel within a wheel* is life under the law, life under grace, inasmuch as Jews are within the church, and the law within grace." In his sermon on Psalm 118, however, the inner wheel is the New Testament and the outer, the Old, for as Ambrose explains, the New Testament "ran within that through which it was announced." Pizzolato suggests that in *Expositio Psalmi 118* Ambrose seeks to emphasize the chronological precedence of the Old Testament, whereas in *De Spiritu sancto* he wants to underscore the axiological primacy of the New Testament (1978, 48–49). In portraying Jesus as the charioteer of souls Ambrose is alluding to Plato's myth of the soul in his *Phaedrus*. His use of this philosophical text is examined in chapter 4.

[80] Ambrose may be borrowing from the classical tradition when he says "the good life of the horses was four-square (*quia bona vita equorum quadrabat*)." In *Protagoras* 339b Plato quotes the poet Simonides who describes the good man as blameless and four-square (τετράγωνος), and Aristotle picks up this description in both *Nicomachean Ethics* 1100b20 and *Rhetoric* 1411b27. Ambrose's use of *quadrare* seems consistent with

he articulates the connections between Ezekiel's wheels and these three themes, here and in other texts, suggests that they were closely related for him.[81]

The motif of Ezekiel's wheels as symbols of the Gospel-filled world appears in Ambrose only here in *Expositio Psalmi 118.32*,[82] and he is most likely dependent upon Irenaeus, Eusebius, and Athanasius who focused on the universality of the evangelical proclamation. Nonetheless, he has woven together with great sophistication a moral explication of the wheels and one centered on the Gospel's dissemination.[83] Equally important, our analysis demonstrates well not only the difficulty of separating strands of interpretation in an exegetical tradition, but also the necessity of this task for discerning the logic at work in any particular passage. Finally, one of Ambrose's major contributions to the growing number of readings of the prophet's vision is his conception of the wheels as an icon of the Old and New Testaments' unity. This will be taken up by Jerome and Gregory the Great and become one of the dominant construals of Ezekiel's wheels.

Jerome

In his *Commentary on Ezekiel* and *Tractatus in Psalmos*, Jerome intertwines remarks about the Gospel's progress throughout the world, its growth in each of the baptized, and the unity of Old and New Testaments. In the *Commentary on Ezekiel* he first presents these readings not in his treatment of *a wheel within a wheel*, but in his explanation of Ezekiel 1.8b–9,

> *And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another; they went every one straight forward, without turning as they went.*[84]

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the moral meaning of τετράγωνος as used by Plato and Aristotle. I am not aware of any classical Latin authors who use of *quadrare* in this sense and thus might have been the immediate source for Ambrose.

[81] This same link appears in other works by Ambrose that we will examine in chapter 4.

[82] Ambrose presents a similar image in *De Abraham* II.9.65, though he only alludes to Ezekiel's vision (CSEL 32.1, 619.23–620.3). Noting the ordinal number in Genesis 15.16 (*And they shall come back here in the fourth generation . . .*) he briefly mentions the living creatures, but not the wheels, before observing that the Church is gathered from the four corners of the earth.

[83] In chapter 4 we will see that the moral interpretation only hinted at in this passage is developed more fully in *De virginitate.*

[84] Ezech. I.1.8b–9, 14.309–15.317.

This description illuminates both the relationship among the four gospels and their activity in the world because, as Jerome explains, they "are joined together and cling to one another, and they run to and fro, soaring through the whole world."[85] Their flight is unending and "they are always going to higher levels (*semper ad altiora procedunt*)."[86] As support for this Jerome immediately cites Philippians 3.13, *forgetting what lies behind and straining myself forward to what lies ahead*, and adds that what is true for the gospels is also true for the soul's virtues, the passage of time, and the mixture of the elements: "they always let go of what has gone before and make haste to what lies ahead (*semper ad priora festinent*)." He repeats this imagery in his exposition of Ezekiel 1.12, *And each went straight forward*. In a comment reminiscent of Ambrose, he notes that the straight-forward movement mentioned in verses 9 and 12 prefigures the "mystery of the two Testaments, because in those four animals, both the Law and the Gospel hasten on to what will be (*ad futura festinet*) and never move backward."[87]

The motif of the Gospel's universal propagation appears again in Jerome's exegesis of Ezekiel 1.15–18.[88] He reiterates that the wheel and the motion of the four creatures show how "the apostolic word" has filled the world. Like Eusebius and others, Jerome quotes Psalm 76.19, *The voice of your thunder in a wheel*, but he does not directly connect it to the notion of preaching the Gospel or to the sons of Zebedee. The conjunction of *a wheel within a wheel* indicates either "the joining of the two Testaments"—another borrowing from Ambrose—or that the gospels "touch the earth a little bit as, always hurrying, they hasten to the heights (*paululumque quid attingat in terra*

[85] Jerome presents similar imagery in a letter to Paulinus of Nola on the Bible: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the Lord's chariot (*quadriga Domini*), the true cherubim, which means abundance of knowledge. Their bodies are full of eyes, they glitter as sparks, they run and return like lightning, they have straight feet, and their wings are lifted up and ready to fly in all directions. They hold on to each other and are interwoven with each other. They roll along like *a wheel within wheel*, and they move onward wherever the breath of the Holy Spirit leads them. (*Ep.* 53.8; PL 22.548)

[86] Jerome frequently portrays the gospels (and in some cases the individual Christian) as hastening to the heights. See, e.g., his *Commentary on Matthew* where the Gospel according to John in particular is characterized as *ad altiora festinans* (CCL 77, 3.67).

[87] CCL 75, 16.360–17.372.

[88] Ibid., 20.484–95.

ut, semper properans, ad excelsa festinat)."[89] This last image is surely an echo of Basil's depiction in *Homily on Psalm 28* of the person who, while *straining forward to what lies ahead*, becomes "like a wheel, touching the earth with a small part of itself" and is thereby "worthy to called a wheel." Here Jerome applies this metaphor to the gospels, although he is not entirely clear about what it means to speak of them in this way.[90] In his *Tractatus in Psalmos*, he makes similar but less ambiguous remarks. More important, however, Jerome's writings are probably the source for Gregory the Great's expansions on this theme.

In the *Tractatus in Psalmos*, written *c.* 400 CE, Jerome, like his predecessors, draws on Ezekiel 1 to interpret Psalm 76.19 (LXX), *The voice of your thunder in a wheel.* In the first section of this lemma,[91] he offers the same basic comments made by earlier exegetes. The thunder is the preaching of the Gospel which has traveled in a wheel, that is, throughout the world. Moreover, Jerome supplements this picture of the Good News' geographic pervasiveness with a temporal dimension. "The Gospel," he explains, "is heard not only in Judea: you but speak, and it is heard forever (*in saeculum*)."[92]

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[89] Halperin suggests that Jerome's metaphor of the gospels hastening to the heights may reflect his knowledge of b. Hagigah 13b, the passage containing most of the exegesis of Ezekiel 1 found in the Babylonian Talmud (1988, 130–35). This, however, seems unlikely. In this section of the Talmud there is a short treatment of Ezekiel 1.15, *I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures*. The text transforms the wheel (which it assumes to be gigantic because it both touches the earth and is beside the living creatures supporting the divine throne) into an angel, Sandalphon, who stands on the earth but is so tall that his head is next to the living creatures and the divine throne, and who spends his time weaving "wreaths for his creator." Sandalphon functions, Halperin proposes, as an intermediary between the synagogue worshipper and God: he fashions wreaths from supplicants' prayers and delivers them to the divine throne. Halperin suggests, albeit tentatively, that Jerome, when writing of *rota in rota* (representing the gospels) as touching the earth and hastening to the heights, may have been drawing upon this Jewish interpretation of the wheel as the angel Sandalphon. However, Halperin seems to be unaware of the interpretations of Ezekiel 1 found in both Basil and Ambrose. The interpretation Jerome presents clearly has more affinities with those of his Christian predecessors than with that in the Talmud.

[90] Jerome's conception of the gospels as hastening "to the heights" may reflect the influence of some of Ambrose's construals of Ezekiel 1 since they emphasize ascent to God. These readings from Ambrose will be analyzed in chapter 4.

[91] CCL 78, 60.174–61.183.

[92] This temporal axis is suggested by his remark in the *Commentary on Ezekiel* that the gospels' flight is unending, but here in the *Tractatus* he is more emphatic.

Apart from adding this temporal axis, Jerome has so far simply followed earlier expositors, except that he has not yet brought the prophet's vision into the exegetical matrix. He introduces Ezekiel's wheels however, when he shifts his focus from the world-wide spread of the Gospel to each person:

> . . . let us also speak specifically about the inner person. A wheel stands on the earth, resting on a small part of itself. It does not simply stand, but it rolls along. It does not stand, but touches the earth and goes on by. Indeed, when it rolls, it always climbs to higher things (*semper ad altiora conscendit*). Thus also, the holy man, since he is in the body, needs to think about earthly things. And yet, when it comes to food and clothing and other similar sorts of things, since he has these, he is content with them while touching the earth, and he hastens on to higher things (*his contentus est tangens terram, et ad altiora festinat*). Your word is in him who runs and hastens on to higher things. We also read in the prophet, *Holy stones roll over the earth* (Zech 9.16). Notice that he said, *Holy stones roll over the earth.* For since they are wheels, they roll over the earth and hasten on to higher things (*volvuntur super terram et ad altiora festinant*). Do you wish to know about many wheels? We read, *And a wheel within a wheel.* We read in Ezekiel that *the wheels were connected to each other.*[93] The two wheels are the New and Old Testaments. The Old is joined to the New, and the New to the Old. Still, you see what Ezekiel says, *And wherever the spirit led, there the wheels also followed.*[94]

In this passage Jerome concentrates primarily on the wheel-like Christian's ascent "to higher things," and in this context the image of a wheel "touching the earth" both becomes clearer and appears close to Basil's, for here it represents the concern for practical, earthly matters which the holy man must display, even if only minimally, as he hastens to be filled with God's word. Unlike Basil, however, Jerome does not associate this directly with Ezekiel's wheels, for they do not have a place in his exposition until the end of the lemma, where they are signs of the Old and New Testaments. He does not explain the relationship between the wheel that symbolizes the human being who "touches the earth" but climbs "to higher things" (i.e., the holy man/stone rolling over the earth) and those of Ezekiel 1, the Old and New Testaments. Nonetheless, the combination of his

[93] Although Jerome cites this sentence as if it were a direct quotation, it is not found in Ezekiel 1 or 10.

[94] CCL 78, 61.184–201.

remark that "Your *word* is in him who runs and hastens on to higher things," and his closing quotation of Ezekiel 1.20 suggests an intimate connection between the motion of the wheels of Old and New Testament and that of "the holy man." Perhaps the most significant aspect of this text, particularly when compared to the earlier readings of *a wheel within a wheel*, is the increasing attention given to the individual person. This same accent is found later in *Tractatus in Psalmos* where, commenting on Psalm 97.3 (LXX), Jerome cites the descriptions of the wheels in both Ezekiel 1.15–21 and Ezekiel 10. Here he brings them to bear on each Christian by highlighting their spirit-filled quality and exhorting his audience to imitate them:

> *All the ends of the earth (omnes fines terrae) have seen the salvation of our God.* Not only Israel and Judah saw it, but all lands (*omnes fines*). At the same time, *the ends of the earth* has a mystical meaning. As long as we are in the midst of the earth, we cannot see God. But when we leave the earth and are in the heights, then we deserve to see God. Do you wish to know how the ends of the earth see God? We read in Ezekiel: *And the wheels which revolve were called GELGEL* (cf. Ez 10.13), which means "revelation revelation." For GEL means "revelation," so GEL-GEL means "revelation revelation." These wheels are addressed as "revelation revelation," since a wheel, as it were, touches the earth (*tangit terram*) with just a small part of itself, but at the same time the entire wheel hastens on to heaven (*festinat ad caelum*). Because of this another passage says, *Holy stones roll over the earth* (Zech 9.16). And what does Ezekiel say? *Wherever the spirit went*, he says, *there the wheels followed also* (Ez 1.20). Let us follow the Spirit, and let us be called wheels. And what does it say there? *And they did not go backwards*, he said, *but they always went forward* (cf. Ez 1.12, 17). Consider what he says: he does not say, "they turned back," but they always went forward. For they *have forgotten what is past*, and in fact *were stretching themselves toward what lies ahead* (cf. Phil 3.13). And he says the wheels were full of eyes (cf. Ez 1.18), for all parts of those wheels were filled with the light of God.[95]

These comments, like the exegesis of Psalm 76.19, are somewhat cryptic. It is unclear precisely what Jerome means by "revelation revelation." The phrase may hint at the unity of Old and New Testaments, but we can only conjecture. However, what is most critical here is that although he initially stresses the geographic spread

[95] CCL 78, 163.56–164.75.

of the Gospel—not only Israel and Judah, but even the earth's remotest bounds have seen God's redemption—he quickly moves to concentrate on the individual believer. This focus then provides the context for introducing not only Ezekiel 1, but also Philippians 3.13, which he ties closely to the prophet's vision through his loose quotation of Ezekiel 1.12, 17, and 18.

In all of these passages Jerome is clearly indebted to the earlier commentators we have examined. And, in characteristic fashion, he has sought not to eliminate any of these prior construals, but rather to weave together as many of them as possible: the notion of the Gospel's publication originally found in Eusebius, the use of Philippians 3.13 laid out by both Basil and Ambrose, Basil's image of a wheel touching the earth with just a small part of itself, and Ambrose's understanding of a wheel within a wheel as illuminating the concord of the two Testaments. Jerome's skillful interlacing of his predecessors' insights prompts two observations about the developing exegetical tradition of Ezekiel 1. First, in his writings we can clearly see that by the early fifth century there are several established *and complementary* readings of the wheels of the prophet's vision: as symbolizing the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world and in each person, as well as the unity of the Testaments. Moreover, on the basis of these, Ezekiel 1 is deployed to expound a number of other biblical references to wheels. Second, the way in which Jerome combines elements from these previous explications illustrates clearly how the Fathers read the vision in light of not only other scriptural passages but also the interpretive tradition. What we see in Jerome will be manifest even more acutely in Gregory the Great.

Gregory the Great: Synthesis and Innovation

Jerome exhibits such a strong tendency to reproduce as many of his predecessors' interpretations as possible that his works on Scripture sometimes appear to be merely lists of others' remarks. Gregory the Great only rarely displays this inclination simply to catalogue earlier exegetical insights, but his treatment of Ezekiel 1 is similar to Jerome's in that he frequently repeats other writers' observations. What distinguishes Gregory from Jerome, and from all those before him, is the degree to which he both expands upon prior comments and integrates them into his own original exposition. Thus, he includes readings which emphasize the Gospel's spread throughout the world,

its progress in the individual believer, and the unity of Testaments, and these are woven together throughout. Moreover, he explores multiple meanings for each detail of the vision so consistently that a comprehensive analysis of his homilies cannot be presented here. In this section, as in chapter 4, I will present selections from them that best illustrate the way he not only appropriates and embellishes the tradition, but also initiates new and elaborate motifs.

Although the Gospel's dissemination to all lands is not a prominent theme in Gregory's sermons on Ezekiel, his desire to include as many previous readings as possible ensured that he would not drop it. However, while most commentators find this idea signified by the *wheel within a wheel*, Gregory discerns it in other features of the vision, introducing it first in his explication of Ezekiel 1.4.[96] This verse's description of fire, a great cloud, and a stormy wind from the north leads him into a discussion of both the crucifixion and persecution, particularly the torment endured by the first apostles, and he understands the phrase *brightness round about* in light of this. This *brightness*, he explains, represents "the apostles' holy preaching" which traveled throughout the world due to the persecution in Judea. As support Gregory presents a rather free quotation of Acts 13.46, which records Paul's response to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia. After they had "reviled him" (Acts 13.45), Paul charges them with rejecting the Gospel and then announces that as a result, he and Barnabas will now turn to the Gentiles. Although Paul was in Asia Minor when he revealed this new missionary focus, Gregory cites Acts 13.46 to show how the suffering of the Church in Judea led to the Gospel's spread. Thus, on one level, his reference to Acts seems in error insofar as the historical context that he assumes is wrong. However, his use of this passage may have been prompted by points of contact between Acts 13 and Jerome's exegesis of Ezekiel 1. After declaring his shift to evangelizing the Gentiles in Acts 13.46, Paul explains in 13.47 that God has commanded such a move, reciting Isaiah 49.6 as evidence for this: *I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.* The second half of this verse (*ut sis in salutem usque ad extremum terrae*) strongly parallels Psalm 97.3 (LXX)—*All the ends of the earth (omnes fines terrae) have seen*

[96] *Hom. Ez.* 1.2.10–13.

the salvation (salutare) of our God—the line from the Psalter that Jerome had connected both to the Gospel's promulgation beyond Palestine and to Ezekiel's wheels. Thus, although Gregory quotes not Acts 13.47, but rather the verse immediately preceding it, the resonances between Paul's recourse to Isaiah 49.6 in Acts 13.47 as explanation for his ministry to the Gentiles and Jerome's exposition of Psalm 97.3 (LXX) in terms of the Gospel's spread may lie behind Gregory's (historically inaccurate) quotation of Acts. To us this link may seem tenuous at best. However, as we will repeatedly see, Gregory's ear seems to have been especially sensitive to such echoes between his forbears' interpretations of the prophet's vision and other biblical texts that, though not yet a part of the tradition, could potentially be incorporated into it.

For Gregory, just as the *brightness round about* points to the Gospel's spread, so too does Ezekiel 1.7, which portrays the four living creatures as having *sparks like the appearance of burnished brass* (*et scintillae quasi aspectus aeris candentis*).[97] Brass is an extremely sonorous metal (*aeris metallum valde sonorum est*), Gregory explains, and thus it is appropriately understood as the voice of the preachers (the four evangelists as represented by the creatures) since Psalm 18.5 (LXX) says, . . . *their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world* (*in omnem terram exivit sonus eorum, et in fines orbis terrae verba eorum*). In this exposition Gregory builds the bridge between Ezekiel 1.7 and Psalm 18.5 (i.e., between the living creatures' burnished brass [*aes candens*] and the preachers' voices [*sonus eorum*] sounding to the earth's farthest reaches) through *sonorum*, a mediating term which though not in the biblical text, describes the brass of Ezekiel 1.7 and provides a linguistic link to Psalm 18.5 through its cognate *sonus*. This is an exegetical pattern Gregory follows frequently. He first focuses on a word or phrase in Ezekiel 1 (in this instance, the brass) and then delineates the characteristics of what it connotes. Finally, on the basis of the vocabulary he employs in this description, he draws verbal connections to other scriptural passages.[98] And equally important, he does this in the context of a received interpretation, in this case, the

[97] Ibid., I.3.5.

[98] Occasionally Gregory does not include this final step, but simply grounds his interpretative conclusions in the description that emerges as he reflects on the words of Ezekiel 1.

assertion that the prophet's vision relates to the Gospel's geographic advance. This pattern appears so frequently in these homilies as to give the impression that, once Gregory has accepted an already-established reading of a specific verse in Ezekiel 1, with playful ingenuity he finds intimations of it in as many other details as possible.

With comparable inventiveness Gregory recognizes hints of the Gospel's global publication in the quadriform aspects of the vision. That the human hands under the living creatures' wings are on all four sides (*in quatuor partes*; Ez 1.8a) reveals the earth's four regions to which the saints carried their evangelical message,[99] as does the similar presence of wings and faces (*et facies et pennas* per quatuor partes *habebant*; Ez 1.8b).[100] Finally, Gregory finds the spread of the Good News symbolized by the wheel, but he does not discern it in the *wheel within a wheel*, as most earlier readings do. Rather, he bases this interpretation on his version of Ezekiel 1.15 which has a textual variant, peculiar to the Vulgate and Symmachus' Greek translation, that describes the one wheel of this verse as having four faces: *[rota] iuxta animalia habens quatuor facies*.[101] For Gregory, the wheel's faces signify the four corners of the world to which the Gospel has been preached.

Although these passages show Gregory's desire to reiterate the tradition's focus on the dissemination of the Good News to the earth's remotest bounds, this theme occupies a relatively minor place in his homilies. In addition, while most earlier interpreters had found this notion in the *wheel within a wheel*, particularly when this phrase was read in conjunction with other biblical passages, Gregory detects the Gospel's geographic spread in other features of the vision. This is not, however, because he is uninterested in the prophet's *wheel within a wheel*. To the contrary, Gregory's sixth homily is basically an extended meditation on the ways in which the wheels of Ezekiel 1.15–18 symbolize the Bible, its interpretation, and the unity of the Testaments.

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[99] *Hom. Ez.* I.3.7.

[100] Ibid., I.3.15. This description in verse 8b of the creatures as having faces and wings on all four sides is unique to the Latin textual tradition.

[101] Ibid., I.6.12. Gregory sets forth this interpretation after quoting Ezekiel 1.16, but he connects it to verse 15 (*[rota] iuxta animalia habens quatuor facies*) which he had cited in the prior section of the homily, I.6.11, ll. 24–25. The phrase *habens quatuor facies* is an attempt to translate what is a perplexing phrase in the Hebrew; see Zimmerli 1979–83, I.85, verse 15, note b.

Gregory begins his contemplation of this topic by commenting on the single wheel described in Ezekiel 1.15, *As I looked at the living creatures, one wheel appeared above the earth.*[102] This denotes Scripture because, like a wheel, it rolls "from every direction to hearers' minds (*ex omni parte ad auditorum mentes*)," proceeding "rightly and humbly" amidst both "adversities and prosperity." Gregory seems to imagine the spiritual and literal meanings of the sacred writings as two points on the wheel which are 180 degrees apart. As it moves along, little children (*parvuli*) or those who are spiritually weak receive its lessons through the literal level, while those more advanced (e.g., *docti viri*) learn from its spiritual dimension. To illustrate the pedagogical value of both senses of the Bible, Gregory presents a historical and an allegorical commentary on the story of Jacob and Esau.[103] Jesus' miracle at the wedding in Cana also reveals the weight of these two types of signification.[104] That he chose first to fill the empty pots with water, and then to change it into wine illustrates for Gregory the relationship between a text's literal and spiritual readings. The water in the jars represents its historical content (*sacrae lectionis historia*) and the wine its spiritual message (*spiritalis intelligentia*). Our hearts, Gregory explains as he draws out the implications of Christ's wondrous deed, must first be replenished with the historical interpretation. Only then can *historia* be transformed into the wine of spiritual understanding "through the mystery of allegory (*per allegoriae mysterium*)." Returning to the original imagery from Ezekiel 1.15, he concludes:

> Therefore, the wheel is, as it were, drawn along the ground, since it adapts itself to children by its humble language. Yet it fills adults with spiritual things, as it lifts its orbit to the height (*in altum*) and rises from where it was seen before to touch the earth just a little (*terram tangere paulo*). Truly it edifies in every way (*undique aedificat*), in the same way that a wheel runs through its orbit.[105]

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[102] *Hom. Ez.* I.6.2.

[103] Ibid., I.6.2–6.

[104] Ibid., I.6.7.

[105] Ibid., I.6.7 (11–14)–I.6.8 (1–2). Gregory's juxtaposition of remarks about the pedagogical value, even necessity, of *historia* and this image of the adaptable wheel suggest that even the spiritually advanced will alternate between literal and spiritual interpretations, a movement which is consistent with his view that even for the mature, Christian life involves continual cyclical movement from the active life to the contemplative, and back to the active. See Pier Cesare Bori 1986 and Carole Straw 1988.

Gregory's description of the wheel as "[touching] the earth just a little," a reference to literal or historical explication, is reminiscent of Jerome's (and Basil's) exegesis. However, in Jerome, the wheel(s) "touching the earth a little" symbolized either the gospels as they rush to the heights or the holy man hastening to higher things.[106] Gregory adapts Jerome's language and concepts to speak of Scripture's senses: as the wheel rolls along, the point making contact with the ground, the literal/historical exposition, nourishes neophytes, and when it moves upward in its revolution to the spiritual meaning, it edifies the mature. Moreover, in this homily Gregory is engaging not only established construals of Ezekiel 1 but also a tradition of reflection on the Bible's capacity to benefit both novices and those advanced in the Christian life. In *Confessions* III.5.9, Augustine characterizes the sacred writings as

> neither open to the proud nor laid bare to mere children; a text lowly to the beginner but, on further reading, of mountainous difficulty and enveloped in mysteries.

This remark is not made in the context of commenting on any specific passage, but is grounded in Augustine's observation that the Bible never fails to feed its readers, whatever their stage of spiritual growth, as long as they approach it with humility.[107] Gregory's innovation lies in recognizing that latent in the received interpretation's identification of Ezekiel's wheels as Scripture is a compelling image for the theological insight articulated by Augustine.

Continuing to meditate on Ezekiel 1.15, Gregory further illustrates how the Bible "edifies in every way" by presenting an elaborate allegorical reading of Exodus 25.31, *You shall make a lampstand hammered of purest gold, with its stem, branches, cups, bowls, and lilies going forth from it.*[108] Christ is the lampstand because he illuminates the world and,

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[106] The gospels speeding to the heights: *Ezech.* 1.15–18 (CCL 75, 20.490–91); the holy man hurrying to higher things: *Tract. psal.* 76.19 (CCL 78, 61.191). The passage from Jerome's treatment of Psalm 97.3 (CCL 78, 163.66) is more ambiguous because of his discussion of GELGEL, but it nonetheless seems to be referring to Scripture in general as touching the earth before racing to heaven.

[107] *Conf.* III.5.9. (All quotations of Augustine's *Confessions* are from Chadwick's translation.) Augustine registers similar sentiments in *en. Ps.* 8.8. That Augustine considers humility essential to receiving Scripture's lessons is clear from his account of reading the Bible after studying Cicero's *Hortensius*.

[108] *Hom. Ez.* I.6.8–9.

like gold hammered to purity, he was sinless but endured sufferings. The lampstand's stem is the whole Church, its branches the preachers who bring a new song to the world, and its cups are their hearers' minds (*mentes auditorum*) that, like cups of wine needing to be refilled, require replenishment of knowledge. The bowl (*sphaerula*), Gregory explains, is "fluency of preaching (*volubilitas praedicationis*)" because,

> Preaching cannot he held back by adversity, nor is it lifted up by prosperity. It is a sphere (*sphaera*), since it is strong in the midst of adverse things and humble in the midst of prosperous things. It does not have the difficulty of fear or of elation. In its course it cannot be stopped, since it draws itself fluently (*volubiliter*) through all things.[109]

The lampstand has lilies, Gregory continues, because "the grace and fluency of preaching" produces a sort of spiritual springtime of holy souls as eternal flowers. Turning from this verdant picture he concludes that just as the bowls Moses describes signify "the teaching received through preaching" so the wheel Ezekiel sees symbolizes the Bible. With this, Gregory repeats the verse which originally prompted his interpretation, Ezekiel 1.15, *As I looked at the living creatures, one wheel appeared above the earth.*

Gregory's exegesis is dizzying, even in this abridged form. Connecting the wheels of Ezekiel's vision to the hammered lampstand of Exodus 25 strikes the contemporary reader some fourteen hundred years later as a strained interpretation, at best. But closer examination reveals Gregory's interpretive logic, and begins to dispel the vertigo. The circular shape of both the wheels and the lampstand's bowls offers an obvious link between the two texts, one that is reinforced by his understanding of the bowls as "fluency of preaching (*volubilitas praedicationis*)." The bowls' roundness naturally suggests "rolling motion"—one of the meanings, along with "fluency," of *volubilitas*.[110] But this use of *volubilitas* does more than simply facilitate his construal of them as "fluency of preaching," for it also creates a bridge to Ezekiel's wheels. The prophet reprises many of the details of his inaugural vision in Ezekiel 10, but with new vocabulary, and in the Vulgate version of this chapter the chariot's wheels are said to be

[109] Ibid., I.6.8 (47–50).
[110] OLD, 2100.

volubiles (Ez 10.13). Gregory's characterization of the bowls of Exodus as *volubilitas praedicationis* thereby resonates with the description of the wheels as *volubiles* in Ezekiel 10, and so strengthens his juxtaposition of Ezekiel 1 and Exodus 25.

The roundness of bowl and wheel as well as the cognates *volubiles* and *volubilitas* would probably have provided Gregory sufficient basis for yoking Ezekiel 1 and Exodus 25. Moreover, the established reading tying Ezekiel's wheels to the world-wide preaching of the Gospel would only have buttressed this bridge to the bowls and their "fluency of preaching." However, Gregory's impulse to join these two seemingly unrelated texts may also have been grounded in a keen sensitivity to the way in which the New Testament authors themselves juxtaposed passages from the Old Testament, because Ezekiel 1 and Exodus 25.31 had already been linked in Revelation 1.12–16, John of Patmos' vision of Christ standing among seven gold lampstands with feet like those of the living creatures and a voice *like the sound of many waters* (Ez 1.7 and 24).[111] In his homily Gregory follows Exodus 25.31 by having only one lampstand rather than seven, and he relates Exodus 25.31 to the chariot's wheels rather than to the living creatures' feet or their wings that were *like the sound of many waters.* Nonetheless, the inspiration for these exegetical moves almost surely comes from Revelation 1.12–16. This is noteworthy for two reasons. First, it suggests that Gregory found the warrant for this exposition, which initially seems so bizarre to us, in Scripture itself, because he is following the lead of John of Patmos who had already interwoven Ezekiel 1 and Exodus 25. Furthermore, in connecting the gold lampstand to the wheel of Ezekiel 1.15, rather than to the feet of burnished bronze or the voice of many waters as Revelation does, he is merely modifying and elaborating on one feature of the tradition, in the same way that he builds on the comments of Jerome, Ambrose, et al. Second, if I am correct in suggesting that Gregory is simply delineating what he considers to be the interpretive implications of Revelation 1.12–16, this homily aptly illustrates the Christian assertion of the unity of the Old and New Testaments.

It should not surprise us that Gregory's treatment of Ezekiel 1 should so clearly manifest this claim, because like Ambrose, he finds

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[111] See chapter 1 for the relationship between Revelation 1.12–16 and Ezekiel 1.

the two Testaments' unity prefigured in the next verse he turns to, Ezekiel 1.16 with its *wheel within a wheel*:

> In the letter of the Old Testament, the New Testament lay hidden through allegory. . . . Therefore, a *wheel* is *within a wheel*, since the New Testament is within the Old. And, as we have often said, what the Old Testament promised, the New Testament showed forth. What the Old announces in secret, the New openly proclaims as revealed. Therefore, the prophecy of the New Testament is the Old Testament, and the exegesis of the Old is the New.[112]

Gregory is clearly following Ambrose's exposition of a *wheel within a wheel* as the Old and New Testaments, but he develops what Ambrose, and later Jerome, had articulated in only rudimentary form. They had understood the *wheel within a wheel* to indicate the unity of these two covenants, but neither explained what was involved in this or how it was manifested. Ambrose perhaps gave a hint of the role of the Old Testament relative to the New when, in his reading of Psalm 118 (LXX), he wrote,

> A *wheel* was running *within a wheel*, and it was not hindered, the New Testament within the Old. It [i.e., the New] ran within that [i.e., the Old] through which it was announced.

Nonetheless, this comment still leaves the relationship between the two Testaments largely unexplored. Jerome was even more reticent, noting in his interpretation of Psalm 76.19 (LXX) only that, "the Old is connected to the New, and the New to the Old." In expanding on these spare statements, Gregory is surely also indebted to Augustine, who sharpened the theological insight nascent in the remarks of Ambrose and Jerome by observing that the New Testament is hidden in the Old, while the Old is disclosed in the New.[113] Gregory's contribution to this ongoing theological reflection is first, to pair Augustine's fuller formulation of the interconnectedness of Old and New Testaments with Ambrose's exegesis of Ezekiel's wheels, and then to build on this in a way that accentuates the distinctive

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[112] Ibid., I.6.12 (5–6). Thomas Aquinas quotes Ezekiel 1.16 (*rota erat in rota*) and briefly refers to this passage from Gregory when discussing the relationship between the New Law and the Old (*Summa Theologiae* 1–2.107, 3, *sed contra*).

[113] Augustine expresses the basic insight in a variety of ways. See e.g., *Civ.* 4.33, 5.18, and 16.26, and de Lubac 1998, 245 and 441 nn. 63–65 for other passages.

roles of each, not allowing the Old to be swallowed up in the New. In doing this, Gregory draws from Scripture itself an image which illuminates not only its essential oneness, but the unique place of each of its parts within the economy of revelation.[114]

That Gregory speaks about the two Testaments first in the past tense (". . . what the Old Testament promised, the New Testament showed forth"), but then shifts to the present (". . . the Old announces . . . the New proclaims") is suggestive of another theological point he will stress as he comments on the prophet's vision. The link between these two divisions of Scripture is not merely forged in the past, though it is that, since the events of the Old Testament and their original fulfillment in the New are part of history. But it is also continually fashioned in the present as the faithful reader delves into the sacred text, reading the Old Testament through the New and the New in light of the Old. Although Gregory only hints at this here through the grammar of his statements, he makes clear in his homilies that this ongoing contemporary appropriation of the Bible is central to his purposes.[115]

In his interpretation Gregory not only preserves the singular character of both Testaments, but also goes further, splitting each into two segments. The basis for this is the variant in the Latin text of Ezekiel 1.15 which suggests that each wheel has four faces.[116] From this he deduces a four-fold division of the Old and New Testaments into the Law, the prophets, the gospels, and Acts and the apostles' sayings.[117] However, while this helps to ensure that the Old Testament is not absorbed into the New, Gregory asserts that these categories are held together by an overarching unity, like the two Testaments themselves, in his exegesis of Ezekiel 1.16, *And there was one likeness*

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[114] On the use of the *wheel within a wheel* by authors after Gregory, see de Lubac 1998, 245–46. Although Gregory underscores the singular function of each Testament, he does not understand them to be on equal footing, and the New Testament's superiority is at least implicit in his comments. For example, that the living creatures—icons of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are introduced before the single wheel of Ezekiel 1.15 demonstrates the gospels' precedence over the Old Testament, and Gregory hints that the prophet had knowledge of this (*Hom. Ez.* I.6.10). Similarly, on the basis of Ezekiel 1.17, *And when they went, they did not turn back*, he explains that when not understood spiritually, the Old Testament is "turned back on itself" (Ibid., I.6.17).

[115] See, e.g., *Hom Ez.* II.2.1.

[116] On this textual variant, see note 101 above.

[117] *Hom. Ez.* I.6.12 (6–11).

of the four (*et una similitudo ipsarum quatuor*). In the Hebrew and Greek texts of this phrase, it clearly applies to the one wheel standing beside each of the four living creatures (Ez 1.15). However, in Gregory's Latin version, it seems to refer back to the wheel's four faces, leading him to conclude that the single likeness symbolizes the fundamental oneness which transcends the Bible's four sections. What the Law foretells, he explains, the prophets announce. The gospels recount the fulfillment of these things, while Acts and the apostolic sayings proclaim the Gospel's world-wide consummation. "Even if the divine pronouncements are given at separate times," he concludes, "they are united in their meaning."[118]

Gregory continues in the seventh homily the discussion of Scripture and its exegesis in the Church that he began in the sixth. However, initially he was primarily concerned with the Bible itself and the relationship between its two parts, Old and New Testaments, and its different levels of meaning, literal and spiritual. This is the prominent theme even in those sections of the sixth sermon where he addresses the reader's role in interpretation. For example, in explaining how the sacred text's literal exposition is suited to the neophyte's needs and abilities, while its spiritual sense nourishes the more advanced, his focus is not the individual believer, but the adaptability of the wheel of Scripture. In the seventh homily his attention shifts and the notion of the Bible's movement within each Christian comes to the fore.

Verse 19 of the prophet's vision describes the coordinated motion of the living creatures and the wheels. Using the significations already established in his interpretation—the creatures as the saints, the wheels as the text—Gregory finds in this verse a portrayal of the interaction between the faithful reader and the Bible:

> The living creatures proceed when the saints understand from the sacred Scripture how they may lead a moral life. Truly the creatures are lifted up from the earth when the saints raise themselves up in contemplation. And since the more one of the saints advances in the sacred Scripture, the more Scripture advances in him, it is rightly said, *When the living creatures went, the wheels equally went; and when the creatures*

[118] Ibid., I.6.14. Gregory's exegesis of Ezekiel 1.17, *they went through their four directions*, basically repeats the interpretation laid out here. The four directions show the advance of Scripture from Law/mystery through Prophets/prophecy to Gospel/revelation and then to the apostles' writings/preaching.

> *lifted themselves up from the earth, likewise the wheels lifted themselves up also* (Ez 1.19). For the divine pronouncements (*divina eloquia*) grow with the reader: the more deeply someone turns his mind to them, the deeper is his grasp of them. Thus, if the living creatures are not lifted up, the wheels are not elevated. Unless the readers' minds advance to higher things, the divine sayings lie dead, as if on the ground, since they are not understood.[119]

Moreover, when the Bible does not arouse the reader's mind, its wheel stands idle (*otiosa*) "since the living creature [i.e., the reader] is not lifted up from the earth." But, the wheel's otiose condition can be transformed by the continually maturing Christian's appropriation of the text's various dimensions. When she seeks to live a moral life, the wheels begin to roll, keeping pace. Similarly, when the winged creature stretches itself in contemplation, the wheels are lifted up, and he begins to understand the divine writings in a heavenly rather than earthly way. Gregory describes the height of such a person's grasp of Scripture: "And the wondrous and ineffable strength (*virtus*) of the sacred text is recognized when the reader's soul is penetrated by heavenly love (*superno amore*)."[120]

Gregory further illuminates the relationship between the reader and the Bible when he presents a unique construal of Ezekiel 1.20, *wherever the spirit went, there, since the spirit went, the wheels also were lifted up equally, following it* [i.e., the spirit].[121] Earlier exegetes had taken this occurrence of *spiritus*, as well as the phrase *spiritus vitae* in the second half of 1.20 and in 1.21, to refer to the Holy Spirit.[122] However, because the first mention of *spiritus* in Ezekiel 1.20 lacks the qualifier *vitae* found later in 1.20 and in 1.21 (*for the spirit of life was in the wheels* [spiritus enim *vitae* erat in rotis]) Gregory assumes that the two are different. For him, *spiritus* (without *vitae*) is "the spirit of the reader (*spiritus legentis*)." Picking up from his comments on

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[119] *Hom. Ez.* I.7.8. Gregory's exegesis implies that the faithful reader continually grows in understanding of Scripture. On the importance of this for Gregory, see Dagens 1977, 69–72; de Lubac 1993, I.653–56; and Kessler 1995, 252–53.

[120] Ibid., I.7.8. In *Moralia in Iob* 19.23.36 he presents a somewhat different interpretation of Ezekiel 1.19. Here the creatures symbolize preachers and the wheels their hearers. When the preachers set a good example and the audience follows it, then both are lifted up (CCL 143A, 985).

[121] *Hom. Ez.* I.7.9.

[122] For example, Ambrose relates Ezekiel's *the spirit of life was in the wheels* to *the word of life* from 1 John to argue that the Holy Spirit, like the Word, is life (*Spir.* 1.15.151, CSEL 79, 79.).

Ezekiel 1.19, he understands the wheels to be guided by the *spiritus legentis* insofar as the divine words are raised to whichever sense the reader's spirit yearns for. If someone is looking for a passage's historical and moral explication, "the moral meaning of history follows him."[123] Similarly, if a typological exposition is sought, figurative language is soon recognized; if a contemplative interpretation is desired, the wheels seem to take on wings and ascend so that "the heavenly meaning (*intellegentia caelestis*)" is revealed.[124] Gregory concludes this section by describing the cooperation between Scripture's wheels and the spirit of those who long to comprehend the text:

> For the wheels follow the spirit, since the words of the sacred speech, as has often been said, grow through understanding (*per intellectum*) in accord with the readers' perception (*sensum legentium*).[125]

Gregory's conceptions of the Bible, the reader, and their interaction are complex. In the sixth homily, he presented the Old and New

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[123] Gregory implies that the text's historical or literal level is replete with moral instruction, especially in the *exempla* of historical characters (Morel 1986–90, I.246 n. 1).

[124] The contemplative understanding, as Morel notes, refers to what is more commonly called the anagogical sense, i.e., that which pertains to eternal, heavenly realities which await full revelation in the eschaton (Ibid., I.247 n. 2). Gregory does not consistently use one set of terms for the various levels of Scripture. For example, he employs different vocabulary to describe the same meaning, e.g., *littera* and *historia*. Moreover, the same word sometimes refers to several different levels, e.g., *moralis* can indicate the text's historical signification when this teaches a particular moral lesson, but it can also point to a spiritual reading. Thus, although his exegesis contains the three traditional levels of meaning—literal or historical, allegorical or spiritual, and moral or tropological—and sometimes uses their precise names, it is best understood in terms of historical and spiritual interpretation. See Morel 1986–90, 16–19; McGinn 1994, 42; and de Lubac 1993, I.187–89, 404–5.

[125] Gregory does not here entertain the question of what happens when the perception of the reader(s) is antithetical to the Gospel (as, for example, when Christians have used the Bible to underwrite slavery and racism in the United States and apartheid in South Africa). His failure to raise this issue perhaps derives from the fact that Ezekiel portrays the wheels as filled with "the Spirit of life" and the creatures as moving in harmony with them, which seems to preclude their settling on an exposition counter to the Gospel. This seems consistent with his comment in I.7.8 that "the living creatures proceed when the saints understand from the sacred Scripture how they may lead a moral life." Presumably Gregory would have said that when a reading opposed to the Gospel occurs, the wheel of Scripture sits lifeless, for he makes it clear that God speaks to the faithful through the divine writings in order to draw them to love of God and neighbor (*Hom. Ez.* I.10.14; cf. Dagens 1977, 72). Moreover, in good Augustinian fashion, Gregory was not naïve about the human capacity for self-deception, as will be clear in chapter 4. For a discussion of contemporary theological exegesis which addresses the issue of Christians arriving at interpretations inconsistent with the Gospel, see Fowl 1998.

Testaments as the wheels of Ezekiel 1.15–16, thereby conveying the idea that Scripture has its own dynamism and discloses levels of meaning proper to each person's capability as it rolls along. Or, as he puts it in his seventh sermon, the sacred writings have power or strength, *virtus*, that is fully apprehended only by the one penetrated by heavenly love. However, he modifies this notion through his exegesis of Ezekiel 1.19–20, claiming, in effect, that the text's vitality is dependent upon the *spiritus legentis*. Its movement follows the reader's. But he adds yet another qualification based on the final phrase in Ezekiel 1.20, *the spirit of life was in the wheels*. This is the Holy Spirit who is "in the wheels," Gregory explains, "since through the divine words we are brought to life by the gift of the Spirit, so that we may fend off deadly works."[126] This Spirit "touches the reader's soul to the observance of patience" and the wheels follow, as she finds models of steadfastness in the midst of suffering: Moses and Aaron, Samuel, and Jesus.[127] This Spirit "arouses the reader's soul to the study of prophecy" and he discovers the examples of Moses, Stephen, Peter, and Paul, who delivered God's oracles even in the face of danger.[128] Likewise, this Spirit "goads the reader to penitential laments" and the Bible presents pictures of David's repentance after Nathan's rebuke, the Publican of Jesus' parable in Luke 18, Peter's tears of sorrow over his denial of Christ, and the conversion of the thief on the cross.[129] Ezekiel says *the spirit of life was in the wheels* two times, Gregory notes, because there are two Testaments "which the Spirit of God wished to be written" so that we might be freed from "the soul's death."[130] Finally, he adds that, while Scripture provides the lamp for our journey, it is created and so must be illumined by uncreated light. Thus, *the spirit of life was in the wheels* indicates that "the omnipotent God himself fashioned the sayings of the holy Testaments for our salvation, and he himself opened them."[131]

Prior to interpreting the phrase *for the spirit of life was in the wheels*, Gregory suggested that appropriating the Bible's message involves a

[126] Ibid., I.7.11.
[127] Ibid., I.7.12.
[128] Ibid., I.7.13.
[129] Ibid., I.7.14.
[130] Ibid., I.7.16.
[131] Ibid., I.7.17.

collaboration of the reader with the divine writings. Scripture possesses its own dynamism, but its movement and growth in the believer also depend upon the *spiritus legentis*, for its wheels follow the faithful person who seeks its meanings in accord with his capacities. However, with his exegesis of *for the spirit of life was in the wheels*, Gregory shows that this symbiotic relationship includes not just two members, but three, for the entire process of reading—and indeed of the original composition—of the Bible is infused with the Holy Spirit's activity. The Spirit of Life works not only in creating the sacred text and opening it up for its human audience, but also in inspiring the reader's spiritual state (as described in the examples of the observance of patience, the study of prophecy, and penitential laments) and in leading him to seek and find those passages that address each condition.

This construal of Ezekiel 1.19–21 is original to Gregory and not derived from the earlier exegetical tradition of the vision. Nonetheless, we can see, as we did in his sixth homily, that while expounding these verses he is once more engaging Augustine's remarks in *Confessions* III.5.9. When Augustine had commented on Scripture's adaptability to the different spiritual levels of its audience, explaining that it is "a text lowly to the beginner but, on further reading, of mountainous difficulty and enveloped in mysteries," he also hinted at the way in which the believer's appropriation of the sacred text changes as that person increases in faith: "Yet the Bible was composed in such a way that as beginners mature, its meaning grows with them."[132] Again, Augustine's insight was not tied to any particular passage, but was almost surely based at least in part upon his own experience of becoming proficient in the theological interpretation of Scripture, of learning to understand "the Lord's style of language," as he put it in *Confessions* IX.5.13. This process mentioned only briefly by Augustine in *Confessions* III.5.9 is explored at length by Gregory

[132] Both Gregory's and Augustine's comments echo Ambrose's more terse formulation, "For your sake, the Word either lessens or grows according to your capabilities" (*Luc.* VII.12; CCL 14, 218.135–36). That Ambrose makes this comment not only in the context of interpreting the Transfiguration, but also after quoting 2 Corinthians 3.18, *[And we all,] with unveiled face, beholding the glory of God, are being changed into his [i.e., Christ's] likeness* . . ., shows that Scripture's adaptability to the reader is ultimately teleological.

in his seventh homily. His innovation is to recognize that the spirit-filled creatures and wheels of Ezekiel's vision aptly symbolize this never-ending interaction of God, the Bible, and the faithful reader.[133]

In this chapter we have examined the motifs in the first dominant strand of interpretation of the prophet's vision: 1) the four creatures of Ezekiel 1 and the evangelists, 2) the Ezekiel-Christ typology, and 3) the chariot's wheels as signs of the Gospel's universal promulgation and its growth in individual Christians, as well as the relationship between the two Testaments. Although these three topics seem wide-ranging, they are closely related by the Fathers' intense concern to demonstrate the unity of Old and New Testaments and the implications of this for Christian exegesis. Moreover, we have seen that when producing these various readings, patristic authors not only approach Ezekiel 1 and the rest of Scripture with sensitivity to the text's details, but also attend carefully to the already-established tradition. In the next chapter we will see how the Fathers, convinced of the Bible's fundamental unity, display these same exegetical habits as they seek to discern what the prophet's vision reveals about human knowledge of God.

[133] Dagens, although not mentioning the debt to Augustine, rightly says of Gregory: "n'est-il pas un de ceux qui ont le plus magnifiquement exposé ce principe capital de toute l'herméneutique chrétienne, selon lequel la Parole de Dieu, lue et méditée dans la foi, ne cesse d'approfondir et de renouveler l'intelligence du croyant?" (1977, 70). See also Bori 1985.

CHAPTER THREE

EZEKIEL'S VISION AND THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD

"*What Did Ezekiel See?*"[1]

This second exegetical strand addresses the problem of how Christians should understand prophetic claims to see God, particularly in light of other biblical passages which assert that no one can look upon God and live. It first emerges in Irenaeus of Lyons' *Adversus haereses* when he brings Ezekiel 1 into a discussion of human knowledge of God aimed at refuting the Gnostics. It appears again in the works of Eusebius of Caesarea and Cyril of Jerusalem who modify and refine it in ways consistent with theological deliberations of their own day. Finally, it reaches its fullest elaboration in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyrus as they dispute the beliefs of Eunomius and his followers.

Irenaeus of Lyons

Irenaeus takes up Ezekiel 1 in Book 4 of *Adversus haereses*, a section of the work which he says is primarily a reiteration of his arguments against Gnosticism presented in the previous books, that the God disclosed in the Old Testament is the one whom Jesus calls Father. However, Irenaeus explains that in this fourth book he desires to confirm his earlier claims "through the Lord's words (*per Domini sermones*/διὰ τῶν τοῦ Κυρίου λογίων)."[2] This statement is telling because it underscores that his disagreement with the Gnostics is fundamentally concerned with the proper reading of Scripture, especially the correct understanding of the Old Testament in light of the New.[3]

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[1] John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensibility of God* III; see note 75 below.

[2] *Haer.* IV, Preface, § 1.

[3] In a number of passages Irenaeus makes it clear that the Gnostics' mistake begins with their misreading of Scripture. See, e.g., *Haer.* I, Preface; I.7.1; and IV.5.1–2. However, Irenaeus does not argue against Gnosticism solely on the basis

The Gnostics err, he tells us, because they fail to recognize that the prophets' predictions of the Incarnation prove that the God of Israel is the one whom Jesus addresses as Father.[4] Parallel to this, they do not realize that the Logos speaks through the Old Testament and that "the writings of Moses are the words of Christ."[5]

Irenaeus presents an example of the Gnostics' flawed exegesis to illustrate his point. The text of Matthew 11.27 (*No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*), he explains, shows that Jesus is the Word who brings knowledge of the Father to humankind. However, the Gnostics misconstrue this verse because they mistakenly take it to be

> No one *knew* the Father except the Son, nor the Son except the Father, and any one to whom the Son would reveal [the Father].[6]

According to Irenaeus, this faulty reading leads them to conclude that the one whom the Logos makes known had never before communicated with humankind and therefore could not be the Creator spoken of in the Old Testament. This interpretive blunder has other implications, for it not only supports their belief that the God of Israel and the god disclosed by Jesus are different, but it also prevents them from acknowledging that God is incomprehensible. That is, they do not understand that humans are unable to attain knowledge of God without the help that is offered only through Christ.[7]

In much of the first 19 chapters of Book 4 Irenaeus lays out his argument for the unicity of the Creator and the god whom Jesus names as Father. This oneness is clear, he contends, when the reader appreciates both how Abraham, Moses, and the prophets pointed forward to the Incarnation and how the law and sacrifices find their fulfillment in Christ. In chapter 20 Irenaeus returns to his earlier

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of exegesis; for a discussion of the relationship between Irenaeus' arguments in Books 1 and 2 and those in the remaining books, see Norris 2002.

[4] Haer. IV.11.4; IV.5.2.

[5] Ibid., IV.2.3; cf. IV.5.2.

[6] Ibid., IV.6.1. The critical difference in the Gnostic version of Matthew 11.27 is the use of "knew" (cognovit/ἔγνω) in place of "knows" (cognoscit/ἐπιγινώσκει). Irenaeus considers that the Gnostics' textual mistake is not innocent and is caused by their desire to be wiser than the apostles (*Haer.* IV.6.1).

[7] Irenaeus repeatedly makes this connection between the Gnostics' inaccurate reading of Scripture and their failure to understand that God is incomprehensible. See, e.g., *Haer.* IV.6.2–7 (especially IV.6.4) and IV.5.1.

assertion that we can apprehend the true God, who is inscrutable, only through the revelation given by and through the Logos. Here he examines the visions of Ezekiel and other Old Testament figures in the context of defending his paradoxical claim that God is incomprehensible but at the same time is disclosed in Christ.

Irenaeus contends that although we can know God's love, which has been displayed through the Word, we cannot grasp God in his greatness (*magnitudinem*/τὸ μέγεθος).[8] Simultaneously, against the Gnostics he maintains that the God who was beheld in theophanies is not different from "the Father of all" who is invisible. The prophets, he explains, "indicated beforehand that God should be seen by men," and this was guaranteed by Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Mt 5.8). But, he adds, this vision is only of God's love, kindness, and omnipotence and is given only to those who love him. It does not touch upon God's "greatness" and "indescribable glory" (inenarrabilem gloriam/τὴν ἀνεξήγητον δόξαν). These are beyond human perception, for God is inscrutable and "no one shall see God and live (cf. Ex 33.20)." That some people did actually receive glimpses of God shows that God, who eludes human understanding and is incomprehensible (incomprehensibilis/ἀκατάληπτος) and invisible (invisibilis/ἀόρατος), chose to make himself visible and comprehensible. Moreover, while those who love God are granted these epiphanies, they do not experience them through their own capacities:

> For a person does not see God by his own powers; but when [God] pleases he is seen by humans, by whom he wills, and when he wills, and as he wills.

Indeed, God's might is manifest in the multifarious ways he has been, is, and will be witnessed throughout history: "through the Spirit in a prophetic way," "through the Son in an adoptive way," and in the future "in the Kingdom of Heaven in a fatherly way."[9] Irenaeus is not troubled by the diverse forms in which God disclosed himself to the prophets and patriarchs, for these simply reveal the Father, Son, and Spirit, and were intended by God, as Hosea's prophecy (12.11 LXX) demonstrates: *I multiplied visions, and in the hands of the prophets I was made a likeness (ὡμοιώθην).*[10]

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[8] Ibid., IV.20.1 and IV.20.4.
[9] Ibid., IV.20.5.
[10] Ibid., IV.20.6, ll. 145–51. Hosea 12.11 comes up in exegesis of Ezekiel 1 to

Although the Father is "invisible and indescribable" (invisibilis et inenarrabilis/ἀόρατος καὶ ἀνεξήγητος) to his creatures, Irenaeus concludes, he is not unknown, for he has been revealed by the Son. The Gospel according to John confirms this: *No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known* (1.18).[11] While this verse bolsters Irenaeus' paradoxical declaration that the Creator, "the Father of all," is not only invisible and beyond our ken, but also disclosed to us in Christ, it necessarily raises questions about the numerous theophanies recounted in the Bible. If the various recipients of these visions did not look upon God, then what or whom did they see? And who was at work in these epiphanies? Irenaeus finds the answer to these queries in the same passage, John 1.18: the Son was present in and the agent of these divine appearances and through them he imparted an awareness of God, but at the same time preserved "the Father's invisibility."[12]

While the Gospel according to John supports the claim that God has never been seen, Irenaeus must reconcile this not only with his earlier statements concerning the prophets' predictions that one day humankind would look upon God, but also with Jesus' pronouncement, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*. This apparent inconsistency prompts him to qualify his position by turning to the biblical accounts of theophanies. Since the prophets were announcing that humans would behold God, it was especially apt, he explains, that they should receive visions of God as intimations of the future. At the same time, these sightings are not without limitations, as Moses' encounter with God on Mt. Sinai proves. When Moses asked to view God's face, Irenaeus observes, God told him to stand "on the peak of the rock"[13] and said that he would cover him with his

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a large degree because of its use of the verb ὁμοιόω. The noun related to this verb, ὁμοίωμα ("likeness"), occurs throughout Ezekiel 1, so the two texts echo each other. I have deliberately translated the aorist passive indicative of ὁμοιόω using the awkward phrase 'I was made a likeness' in order to draw attention to the resonances between the Septuagint's use of ὁμοιόω in Hosea and of ὁμοίωμα in Ezekiel 1, resonances which a more felicitous rendering of Hosea 12.11 would obscure.

[11] Ibid., IV.20.6. Irenaeus makes a similar argument in IV.6.1–7, but it is less exegetically-based.

[12] Ibid., IV.20.7.

[13] Irenaeus' text for Exodus 33.22 has a fascinating variant. Where the LXX reads εἰς ὀπὴν τῆς πέτρας ("in the cleft of the rock"), Irenaeus has ἐπὶ σκοπῆς τῆς πέτρας ("on the peak of the rock"). This enables him to link Moses' sighting of the Word in Exodus 33 with his vision of Jesus on the mountaintop—"the peak of the rock"—during the Transfiguration.

hand to prevent him from glimpsing God and, as a result, dying. Moreover, as Irenaeus understands the Exodus narrative, Moses makes his request to the Logos, not to "the Father of all." Irenaeus explains the implications of this episode:

> This passage [Exodus 33.20–22] shows two things: First, that it is impossible for humankind to see God; and second, that, through the wisdom of God, humankind will see him in these last times on the peak of a rock, that is, in his coming as a man.[14]

Indeed, Moses' petition to look upon God is fulfilled, Irenaeus explains, in the Transfiguration when both he and Elijah encounter Jesus face to face.[15]

The experiences of Moses, of Elijah, and of Isaiah in the Temple (Is 6) show that by virtue of their exceptional role the prophets were granted visions that, though not of God himself, did communicate "the economies and the mysteries through which humans might one day see God." But for Irenaeus it is Ezekiel's sighting of the chariot which makes it absolutely clear that the prophets did not behold God himself, but rather God's economies (*dispositiones Dei*/τὰς οἰκονομίας τοῦ θεοῦ), and those only in part. Irenaeus offers a brief summary of Ezekiel 1.1–25, but then quotes directly from Ezekiel 1.26–27. The particular expressions he cites are striking: "the likeness of a throne (similitudinem throni/ὁμοίωμα θρόνου)," "a likeness as it were of a human form (similitudinem quasi figuram hominis/ὁμοίωμα ὡς εἶδος ἀνθρώπου)," "like the appearance of electrum (quasi figuram electri/ὡς ὄψιν ἠλέκτρου)," and "like a vision of fire (quasi visionem ignis/ὡς ὅρασιν πυρός)." Although he does not expound on these phrases, the reader cannot help but notice the repetition of 'likeness (similitudinem/ὁμοίωμα)' and 'like (quasi/ὡς),' words which suggest that the prophet was in some way qualifying the nature of what he witnessed. Irenaeus does, however, explicitly comment on Ezekiel 1.28, explaining that the prophet concluded his record of this mysterious event with the disclaimer, *This was the vision of the likeness of the glory of God*, in an attempt to ensure that it was not misconstrued.[16] The combined effect of the phrases quoted from verses 26–27 and

[14] *Haer.* IV.20.9.
[15] Ibid., IV.20.9.
[16] Ibid., IV.20.10.

of Irenaeus' remark concerning verse 28 gives the reader the unmistakable sense that Ezekiel's vision of God was not direct, but rather mediated in some way. In closing these reflections, Irenaeus reiterates that the likenesses seen by Ezekiel and the other prophets represent the work of the Word, not of the invisible Father.[17]

Irenaeus' treatment of biblical theophanies in general and Ezekiel 1 in particular encompasses several issues which are significant for the developing interpretive tradition of the prophet's vision. First, central to his examination of Ezekiel 1 and other reports of divine appearances is the question "What does it mean to see God?" While such an inquiry might initially seem simple and straightforward, it necessitates consideration of what is involved in speaking about both *God* as within the scope of human sight and *the act of seeing* when its object is God. Although Irenaeus does not explicitly articulate these matters, and so his analysis of them is not systematic, they are woven throughout his discussion. Thus, he implicitly reflects upon both "What does it mean *to see* God?" and "What does it mean to see *God*?"

When dealing with biblical accounts of theophanies, the question "What does it mean *to see* God?" concerns the nature of such vision, and Irenaeus hints at what this entails. To look upon God is to participate in God, to be "in God," to receive his "splendor," and to

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[17] Ibid., IV.20.11. Irenaeus was not the first to argue that the Word, not the Father, is active in Old Testament theophanies. This idea seems to be at least nascent in New Testament commentary on Isaiah's vision (Jn 12.40–41). Immediately after quoting Isaiah 6.10

> *He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.*

with regard to Christ, the evangelist John observes, *Isaiah said this* [Is 6.10] *because he saw his* [i.e., the Word's] *glory and spoke of him*. Implicit in this remark is the notion that when Isaiah said, *I saw the Lord* (Is 6.1), the one he beheld was the Logos, not the Father. In the second century, and prior to Irenaeus, Justin Martyr made this concept explicit when he explained to Trypho that the Logos, not the supreme God, was present in Old Testament theophanies (*dial.* 56–61; Goodspeed 1914, 155–167). Justin does not mention Ezekiel and other prophets, but focuses instead on the various epiphanies received by the patriarchs in Genesis and Moses in Exodus. After Irenaeus, Tertullian makes a similar observation in *Adversus Praxean* 14 (CC 2.1176–78) where he mentions the experiences of not only the patriarchs and Moses, but also Isaiah and Ezekiel. However, his basic point is different from Irenaeus', because he is arguing against Praxeas' modalism and patripassianism. Thus, he wants to show that the Father and the Son are two distinct persons. However, like Irenaeus, he maintains that no one can behold God the Father, and Old Testament theophanies are therefore manifestations of the Word.

be "made immortal."[18] Moreover, asking what it means *to see* God inevitably raises issues about the one who has such an experience. Irenaeus contends that only those who "bear [God's] Spirit" behold him.[19] Also, undergirding these reflections is the assumption that to see something is to know it.[20] If something can be perceived with the eyes, it is comprehensible, and conversely, what can not be viewed surpasses human understanding. As the Christian interpretive tradition matures, this correlation of sight and cognition, as well as its attendant implications, will play a greater role in explication of Ezekiel 1.

In considering the question "What does it mean to see *God*?" Irenaeus asks what the object of the prophets' visions is. That is, who or what do these epiphanies portray? And who is the agent behind them? Irenaeus' answers are nuanced in at least two ways. First, he differentiates between God's greatness and glory, which can not be seen, and his economies (e.g., his love, kindness, etc.), which can. As the interpretive tradition of Ezekiel 1 develops, this point will be made repeatedly. Second, he distinguishes between "the Father of all" and the Word.[21] In this regard, he is consistent with other second-century theologians in holding that the Logos appears in biblical theophanies. As Christianity's meditation on the person of Christ deepens, however, and recognition of his divinity increases, this assertion begins to fade and the discrimination made between God's activities and his essence becomes increasingly prominent in exegesis of Ezekiel 1.

Two further observations need to be made with regard to Irenaeus' exposition. First, in his argument that God is beyond human

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[18] *Haer.*, IV.20.5–6.

[19] Ibid., IV.20.6.

[20] This premise is common among patristic authors. Origen makes the correlation between seeing and cognition when he explains that we "come to know the Father and Maker of this universe by looking at the image of the invisible God" (*Cels.* 7.43). John Chrysostom, in his homilies *On the Incomprehensibility of God* which we shall turn to later, also makes this connection, observing that "To look fixedly is to know" (IV.233). In his remarks on "the lust of the eyes" (1 Jn 2.16) Augustine mentions both "the leading role" of sight in "acquiring knowledge" and the way we use the language of vision to speak about understanding even when it is grounded in the other senses (*Conf.* X.35.54).

[21] Irenaeus also draws a distinction between "the Father of all" and the Spirit, but that between Word and Father is more pronounced, and more important for our purposes.

comprehension, Ezekiel's vision is the exegetical linchpin. This is so because Irenaeus is sensitive to its literary structure and its lexical details. By quoting from Ezekiel 1.26–27 to show how the prophet characterizes his experience, Irenaeus pays close attention to the narrative's exact words. Similarly, with regard to literary structure, he notes the way in which Ezekiel himself concludes his account: *This was the vision of the likeness of the glory of God.* That Irenaeus is so mindful of these features of the text indicates that his theological position is not forced onto Ezekiel 1, but arises from a careful reading of it. Finally, we should notice that he never treats any specific verse(s) in isolation. Rather, he interprets every passage within the larger context not only of the biblical book in which it occurs, but of the entire Bible. He assumes that Scripture is a unified work, not a collection of discrete writings, and each section can be properly understood only in light of the whole.

Early Fourth-Century developments: Eusebius of Caesarea and Cyril of Jerusalem

As the exegetical tradition of Ezekiel 1 develops after Irenaeus, the question of what the prophet's vision implies about human knowledge of God takes a back seat to other interpretive concerns until the Neo-Arian controversy of the second half of the fourth century. There are, however, two brief discussions of Ezekiel 1 from the first half of the fourth century, found in the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea and Cyril of Jerusalem, which should be mentioned.

Eusebius of Caesarea explores Ezekiel 1 and the matter of God's incomprehensibility not in the context of a polemical work as was the case with Irenaeus, but rather in his *Commentary on Isaiah*,[22] specifically in his exposition of Isaiah 6, the prophet's vision in the Temple. Isaiah's declaration that he beheld "the Lord Sabaoth" seated on a throne prompts Eusebius to inquire *who* was actually seen. Quoting John 1.18 (*No one has ever seen God.*) and 6.46 (*Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father.*) and observing that these verses preclude the possibility that

[22] Citations are to the text in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller*. On Eusebius' *Commentary on Isaiah*, see Michael J. Hollerich 1999.

Isaiah looked upon the unbegotten divinity (τῆς ἀγεννήτου θεότητος), God the Father, Eusebius asks:

> But who is this other than *the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father* (Jn 1.18), who when he descends from his majesty and humbles himself, makes himself visible and comprehensible to humans?[23]

For Eusebius, this provides the key to understanding that in the numerous Old Testament theophanies the Word, not the unbegotten God, was present. Eusebius strings together quotations of a number of these, especially from the Pentateuch,[24] as examples of the Logos' manifestation. Turning finally to Ezekiel, he quotes 8.2, a parallel to the portrayal in 1.27 of the man seated on the throne, and identifies this figure as Christ.[25] These representations are noteworthy, he explains, because each is unique and the divine person active in them is not the Father, but the Logos:

> Through all these divine appearances, we learn that those who were chosen beforehand received, not the same vision, but rather different ones. It was said to Moses, *You will not be able to see my face, for no one may see my face and live* (Ex 33.20). For the face of the Word of God and the divinity (θεότης) of the only begotten Son of God would not be comprehensible to mortal nature. The glory of the Word appeared to Ezekiel in a figurative way.[26]

Although Eusebius emphasizes that the differences in the various theophanies are of significance, he does not delineate why this is so. Rather, he summarizes again the divine epiphanies witnessed by Abraham and Jacob in Genesis 18 and 32 and then offers a brief comparison of physical and spiritual sight:

> But the present prophet[27] testifies that he also saw [the Word's] glory. Therefore, he saw the glory of our savior Jesus Christ through the

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[23] *Is.*, § 41; GCS Eusebius Werke 9, 36.8–10.

[24] Ibid., § 41; GCS Eusebius Werke 9, 36.10–27. Eusebius quotes the theophanies in Gen 12.7; 17.1; 18.1; 26.23–4; 31.13, 17; 32.29, 31; 35.6–9; Ex 33.13, 17.

[25] We saw in chapter 2 that Eusebius explicitly identifies the figure on the throne with Christ in his exegesis of Psalm 79.3 (LXX) (*Ps.* 79.3, PG 23.956b), but he does not raise the issue of theophanies as he does here in his *Commentary on Isaiah*.

[26] *Is.* § 41; GCS Eusebius Werke 9, 36.29–37.3.

[27] Eusebius is probably referring to Isaiah rather than Ezekiel when he says, "But the present prophet . . . (ὁ δὲ παρὼν προφήτης)." However, it is plausible that he has Ezekiel in mind since, prior to the passage I have quoted, the last prophet explicitly mentioned is Ezekiel and almost immediately following it he writes, "So the Logos did not appear in the same way to Moses and to Ezekiel." In both places,

> things set before him. So the Logos did not appear in the same way to Moses and to Ezekiel. And the prophet saw the glory of our savior not at all with eyes of the flesh, but rather with eyes of understanding (διανοίας) illuminated by the Holy Spirit. For as the eyes of the body, in looking at perceptible things, are assisted by the beam of light coming in from outside them, in the same way the eyes of the purified soul which are illuminated by spiritual light are able to see divine things. The savior also taught this when he said, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*[28]

With this, Eusebius concludes his analysis of prophetic visions and turns back to his original text, Isaiah 6.1, and its report of King Uzziah's death.

Eusebius' exegesis invites several observations. First, although Isaiah 6 triggers his treatment of divine appearances, it receives relatively little attention. Eusebius focuses instead on the Logos' epiphanies in the Pentateuch and in Ezekiel 1. Ezekiel's vision is more prominent than Isaiah's perhaps because it is more consistent with the pronouncements of Exodus 33.20 and John 1.18 and 6.46[29] which form the foundation for Eusebius' understanding of these manifestations. That is, while Isaiah says that he saw the Lord, Ezekiel claims to have viewed only the Lord's glory. This qualification ensures that Ezekiel's account is less equivocal than Isaiah's: it is clearly consonant with Exodus 33.20 as well as John 1.18 and 6.46. As a result,

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Eusebius emphasizes that Ezekiel saw the Word's glory, as he does in this remark. In favor of identifying "the present prophet" as Isaiah we should note that the book under immediate (i.e., "present") discussion is Isaiah, and in other passages Eusebius clearly intends this phrase to denote Isaiah (cf. Hollerich 1999, 69). Further, his comment may contain a partial quotation of John 12.41, a text which explicitly names Isaiah and alludes to his vision in the Temple. Eusebius' text reads, "But the present prophet testifies that *he also saw his glory*" (ὁ δὲ παρὼν προφήτης *ἰδεῖν* καὶ αὐτὸς μαρτυρεῖται *τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ*), while John 12.41 has, "Isaiah said this [Is 6.10] because *he saw his glory* and spoke of him" (ταῦτα εἶπεν Ἡσαΐας ὅτι *εἶδεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ*, καὶ ἐλάλησεν περὶ αὐτοῦ). Although the referent of ". . . the present prophet . . ." may be ambiguous, the argument is not dependent upon whether it is Isaiah (read through the lens of John 12) or Ezekiel, for both confirm the theological point under discussion: Old Testament theophanies are appearances not of the Father, but of the Logos, and even this is only of his glory.

[28] *Is.* § 41; GCS Eusebius Werke 9, 37.9–18. Matthew 5.8 is often brought into discussions of whether and how humans can look upon God, and of the necessity of a pure heart if one is to behold God spiritually. See, e.g., Origen, *Cels.* 6.4, 69; 7.33, 43–45.

[29] Ex 33.20, *You will not be able to see my face, for no one may see my face and live*; Jn 1.18, *No one has ever seen God*; Jn 6.46, *Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father.*

Ezekiel 1 often plays a more central role than Isaiah 6 in patristic reflections on theophanies.

In his reading of Ezekiel's vision, Eusebius does not give the same careful attention to the text's lexical details and literary structure that Irenaeus did. Irenaeus highlighted both the prophet's repetition of terms such as similitudinem/ὁμοίωμα and quasi/ὡς and his insistence that he saw only the Lord's glory (Ez 1.28). In contrast, Eusebius focuses simply upon Ezekiel's closing remark in 1.28. In this respect, his exegesis is perhaps less sophisticated than his predecessor's. Although he is less sensitive than Irenaeus to these aspects of Ezekiel 1, his treatment of Old Testament theophanies is more developed. While he follows Irenaeus in understanding them to be the work of the Logos who is subordinate to God the Father, he goes beyond him by analyzing the character of these manifestations in greater detail. Thus, after quoting Exodus 33.20, he comments,

> For the face of the Word of God and the divinity (θεότης) of the only begotten son of God would not be comprehensible to mortal nature. The glory of the Word appeared to Ezekiel in a figurative way.

Although Eusebius does not elaborate on this, the passage is interesting because of its potential christological implications, particularly in light of his ambiguous stance within the matrix of the Arian controversy. His christology before the Council of Nicea is usually deemed to occupy an intermediary position between those of Arius and of Alexander.[30] Eusebius clearly understands the Son to be subordinate to the Father. In writings dated prior to Nicea, he explains that the Son's divinity is derivative from the Father's and is dependent upon his participation in the Father. For example, in the pre-Nicene *Demonstratio evangelica* Eusebius consistently refers to the Son as "a second God (δεύτερος θεός)." Moreover, in the *Demonstratio* he registers no objections to statements that the prophets and patriarchs saw the Logos and expresses no concern about his divinity.[31]

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[30] For a much fuller treatment of Eusebius' position and the ways in which it lies between those of Arius and Alexander, bishop of Alexandria from 312 until 328 and Athanasius' immediate predecessor, see Hanson 1988, 46–59; Williams 1987, 171–74; Simonetti 1975, 60–62 and 1983, 35–7; and Grillmeier 1975, 167–90. Perhaps Eusebius' most significant theological disagreement with Arius is his rejection of the notion that the Logos was created *ex nihilo*, an idea Arius affirmed. Eusebius claimed, based upon the Septuagint text of Isaiah 53.8 (*Who will explain his generation?*), that the Son's generation was unknowable.

[31] For example, in Book 5 Eusebius deals with Old Testament theophanies and

By contrast, in the *Commentary on Isaiah*, written after Nicea, Eusebius never uses the term δεύτερος θεός.[32] Michael Hollerich observes that the absence of this and other subordinationist language reflects Eusebius' "theological caution" in the wake of the council. In this work Eusebius still ascribes theophanies to the Logos—an attribution traditionally based upon subordinationist assumptions—but his remarks that the Word's "face" and "divinity" are incomprehensible to mortals and that Ezekiel therefore saw only his glory "in a figurative way" are consistent with this "theological caution" and suggest that Eusebius brought Nicea's judgments to bear on his biblical interpretation. Its affirmation of the Son as *homoousios* with the Father led him to realize that the accepted reading of theophanies as manifestations of the Logos was problematic, and thus he modified this tradition with a caveat concerning the nature of these appearances.[33]

A full investigation of the influence of Nicea on Eusebius' exegesis is beyond the scope of this work. However, for our purposes it is essential to recognize that while doctrinal developments affect biblical exposition, such influence should not be viewed as simply a crude projection of dogma onto Scripture. To assume that Eusebius simply transferred Nicea's decrees onto his reading of theophanies would be to forget that debate about the meaning of particular scriptural texts was at the heart of the council. Since the Fathers approach the Bible as a unified book, the interpretive conclusions of Nicea were bound to shape the construal of other passages not specifically taken up in its deliberations. But Nicea does not cause Eusebius to reject outright the exegetical tradition established by Irenaeus and others. Rather, in a sophisticated and subtle process of interaction

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attributes them to the Word. When examining Genesis 32, he quotes Exodus 33.20 but has no reservations about saying that Jacob saw the Logos (*d.e.* 5.11, GCS 23.233–34). Similarly, in *d.e.* 7.1 (GCS 23.298–99) and 9.16 (GCS 23.438) he considers that Isaiah 6 recounts a vision of the Word.

[32] See Michael J. Hollerich 1992 and 1999.

[33] I am not suggesting by this that when he wrote the *Commentary on Isaiah* Eusebius agreed with the claims of Nicea. The tempering of his subordinationism in these comments about the inability of humans to comprehend the Word's divinity may simply reflect his awareness that if his remarks about prophetic visions were not consistent with the council's decrees, his readers' attention would be diverted from his apologetic purposes to the ongoing controversy about the Son's status (cf. Hollerich 1999).

between exegesis and doctrine, he refines it, introducing theological nuances not perceived by earlier commentators.[34]

In his reading of Ezekiel 1 Eusebius modifies the interpretive tradition in light of Nicea and also introduces another concept not present in Irenaeus: the notion that the prophet's vision of the Word's glory was seen "not at all with eyes of the flesh" but instead "with eyes of understanding (διανοίας) illuminated by the Holy Spirit." This discrimination between physical and spiritual sight is also made by Cyril of Jerusalem in the opening of his Ninth Catechetical Lecture, an exposition of the credal words, "Creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible":

> It is impossible for the body's eyes to see God, for what is incorporeal cannot be apprehended by corporeal eyes. The only begotten Son of God himself bore witness to this when he said, *No one has ever seen God* (Jn 1.18). Now someone might think that Ezekiel saw him, based upon the passage from this prophet. But what does the Scripture say? He saw *the likeness of the glory of the Lord* (Ez 1.28), not the Lord himself, but *the likeness of the glory*, and not the glory itself as it truly is. And when he saw only *the likeness of the glory*, and not the glory itself, he fell to the ground in fear. But if the vision of *the likeness of the glory* caused such fear and anguish in the prophets, if someone were to attempt to see God himself, he would surely lose his life, according to the passage, *No one shall see my face and live* (Ex 33.20).[35]

Cyril reads the text of Ezekiel 1 carefully and finds the prophet's description of what he saw as *the likeness of the glory of the Lord* to be central. Further, Cyril's comment that "the vision of *the likeness of the glory* caused such fear and anguish in *the prophets*" suggests that Ezekiel's caveat in 1.28 concerning his own experience provides the hermeneutical key for *all* divine epiphanies.

Cyril does not, like Irenaeus and Eusebius, catalog numerous Old Testament theophanies to establish his point. However, he does note that when Daniel beheld Gabriel before him, he fell down on his face in fear (Dan 10.5–9), as Ezekiel had done when confronted with the likeness of the Lord's glory (Ez 1.28). Cyril asks his audience,

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[34] It is important to realize that the process of modification of scriptural interpretation I am describing does not depend upon Eusebius' personal assent to Nicea.

[35] *Catech.* 9.1, PG 33.637a–b. Cyril delivered his catechetical lectures *ca* 350 CE.

> If the vision of Gabriel caused such fright in the prophets, if God himself had been seen as he is, would not everyone have been destroyed?[36]

Then, using a distinction familiar to us from Irenaeus, he observes,

> It is impossible to see the divine nature (Θεῖαν φύσιν) with eyes of the flesh, but it is possible to come to a vision of his power from the divine works. . . .[37]

In concluding this exegetical introduction to the ninth lecture, Cyril presents the issue which lies behind his reflections on physical and spiritual sight, God's inscrutability:

> Do you wish to know that it is impossible to grasp the nature of God (θεοῦ φύσιν καταλαβεῖν ἀδύνατον)? When the three young men were singing praises to God, they said *'Blessed are you who sit upon the cherubim and look into the depths.'*[38] Tell me what the nature (φύσις) of the cherubim is, and then consider the one who is seated on them. Indeed, the prophet Ezekiel described them as much as a person is able, when he said that each one had four faces—a man, a lion, an eagle, and an ox—and that each one had six wings[39] and eyes all over them, and that under each was a four-part wheel. And even though the prophet described it, we still cannot penetrate (καταλαβεῖν) what we read. But if we are unable to apprehend the throne Ezekiel described, how will we be able to comprehend the one who sits upon it, the invisible (ἀόρατον) and ineffable God? For it is impossible to examine God's nature (φύσιν θεοῦ) closely, but it is possible to offer him praise for his visible works.[40]

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[36] Ibid., 9.1, PG 33.637a–640a.

[37] Ibid., 9.2, PG 33.640a.

[38] Song of Thr. 32. In Cyril's Bible this is Daniel 3.55. In the Septuagint, the 68 verses of the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men are inserted between verses 23 and 24 of Daniel 3, the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Azariah) in the fiery furnace.

[39] Cyril's error here may reflect the influence of Revelation 4.8 (see chapter 1) and is an example of the way in which patristic exegetes sometimes interchange details of Isaiah's six-winged seraphim (Is 6) with those of Ezekiel's four-winged cherubim.

[40] *Catech.* 9.3, PG 33.640b–641a. In his sixteenth catechesis, when pondering the effects of the Holy Spirit on the believer, Cyril observes that just as someone who has been in the dark is able to see when he comes out into the sun, so the person who receives the Spirit is illuminated and perceives things he previously had not known, and although "his body is on the earth, he beholds the heavens as in a mirror (cf. 2 Cor 3.18)." Cyril likens the Spirit-filled person's enlightenment to Isaiah's glimpse of the Lord on his throne, Ezekiel's view of "the one above the cherubim," and Daniel's sight of the thousands at the Lord's service (Dan 7.10). Although this might seem to contradict Cyril's contention that humans are unable to comprehend God, it actually does not because he emphasizes that they can have

Here Cyril considers that the difficulties of simply understanding the vision hint at the impossibility of grasping the one whom it describes.

In Eusebius' and Cyril's treatments of Ezekiel 1, Irenaeus' exegesis is not only reinforced, but also sharpened. Taking into account the developments of Nicea, Eusebius introduces a caveat concerning the Logos' manifestation. Also, both Eusebius and Cyril draw distinctions between physical and spiritual sight, the corporeal and incorporeal. Moreover, these refinements are accompanied by greater precision in theological language, for example in Eusebius' discussion of the Word's divinity (θεότης) and Cyril's reference to God's nature (φύσις θεοῦ).

The interpretation of Ezekiel 1 in the Neo-Arian controversy

In their treatments of Ezekiel 1 both Eusebius and Cyril lack the polemical tone found in Irenaeus' reading, and their interpretations of the prophet's vision do not seem to be aimed at correcting the erroneous exegesis of a specific opponent. Overt controversy is absent from their discussions of God's inscrutability perhaps because on this matter, Nicenes and Arians, as well as those whose theological positions lay between these two groups, appear to have been basically in agreement in the early fourth century. Arius held that humans can not fully fathom God, as did his adversaries, although their respective reasons for affirming this were radically different.[41] However,

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such illuminated vision only through the Spirit. Also, although he describes the Spirit-filled person as grasping things not previously known, he does not ascribe full comprehension of God either to this person or to the prophets (*Catech.* 16.16, PG 33.940c–941b).

[41] For Arius' belief that God is incomprehensible, see Williams 1987, 105–107 and Hanson 1988, 125. This assertion is integral to Arius' theology, for "it is a necessary consequence of God's being what he is, *uniquely* self-subsistent" (Williams 1987, 106, emphasis in original). Thus, for Arius God is unfathomable not only to humans, but also to the Son because as a dependent creature whose mode of existence is different from the Father's, the Son cannot comprehend a state of being (i.e., the Father's) that is unlike his own (Ibid., 107). On this point, Nicenes and Arians parted company. The question of the Son's knowledge of the Father is, of course, intimately connected to that of his relationship with the Father, and has implications for discussions of human perception of the Father (Ibid., 207–208). I am not treating this issue in any detail, however, because it does not involve the exegesis of Ezekiel 1.

about the middle of the fourth century a group emerged which is usually considered to trace its roots to Arianism. Led first by Aetius and then by Eunomius, this group, the Neo-Arians,[42] rejected the notion that God could not be completely known. In the remainder of this chapter I will trace the prominent role exegesis of Ezekiel 1 comes to play in the works of those who maintain, against the Neo-Arians, that God is incomprehensible.

While Aetius seems to have professed that he knew God as well as he knew himself, the pro-Nicene writings which involve explication of Ezekiel 1 are directed primarily against Eunomius.[43] This is not surprising since Aetius' only surviving work, the *Syntagmation*, is comprised of 37 propositions and makes little overt recourse to Scripture, thereby suggesting that he did not ground his position in exegesis. However, although Aetius never directly cites the Bible, he does allude to it in a number of places, and in the introduction to the *Syntagmation* he submits that the treatise "is in accordance with the meaning of the Holy Scriptures."[44] Moreover, he is reported to have had a significant interest in biblical interpretation, focusing on it for a number of years and even capping his theological education with study of the prophets, and in particular, Ezekiel![45] Aetius' lack of explicit scriptural quotation is puzzling.[46] His successor, Eunomius, would take a different tack.

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[42] Neo-Arians have also been referred to as Anomeans or Eunomians. Barnes and Williams (1993, xiii–xvii) argue that the standard designations of the factions in the different stages of the 'Arian' crisis need to be reconsidered and, in some cases, replaced by titles which more accurately reflect the positions of each party. Although in agreement with Barnes and Williams' basic point concerning the title 'Arian,' Hanson contends that the term 'Neo-Arian' is particularly apt for Aetius, Eunomius, and their followers (1988, 598), and I have followed his usage.

[43] On Aetius' affirmation that God is comprehensible, see Hanson 1988, 606.

[44] See Kopecek 1979, 227; the translation is Kopecek's. Cf. Wickham 1968, 535, 540 and 545.

[45] The ecclesiastical historian Philostorgius, himself a follower of Eunomius, furnishes this detail. See Kopecek 1979, 71.

[46] On the lack of reference to Scripture in Aetius' *Syntagmation*, see Hanson 1988, 610–11. However, Hanson also observes that Epiphanius says that the most important thing for Aetius was knowing God and links this to Aetius' emphasis on John 17.3 (Ibid., 606). With regard to why Aetius made little recourse to Scripture, Kopecek conjectures,

> . . . Aetius' concern to present the "meaning" of scripture rather than its letter should not be taken too quickly to imply that he was not much interested in the authority of scripture. . . . A more likely explanation for the Neo-Arian's procedure is that he realized positions based on scriptural exegesis could not

Like Aetius, Eunomius appears to have made a claim about human apprehension of God, though the evidence suggests it was slightly different from Aetius'. That is, Eunomius declared that his knowledge of God's essence was the same as God's own grasp of it. While this exact assertion is not found in his extant works, all of his theological opponents attribute it to him and argue against it,[47] and it is consistent with his theory of language in which "every name convey[s] direct knowledge of the essence of the thing named." For Eunomius, the Father's name is "ingenerate (ἀγέννητος)," and thus his actual being is ingenerateness.[48]

Although there are subtle distinctions between Aetius' and Eunomius' beliefs concerning human knowledge of God, for our study the most significant difference between the two lies in the latter's use of Scripture. In Eunomius' initial work, *Liber apologeticus*, he quotes or alludes to approximately 40 passages, and in the subsequent *Apologia apologiae* and *Expositio fidei*, he draws on the Bible more and more. Although there are no references to Ezekiel 1 in these writings, from

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as easily be defended as those based on syllogistic inferences from commonly admitted premises. He wanted his followers not only to be right in their theological combats but to win; like Tertullian, he realized that theological victories could not be assured by appeals to scripture. (1979, 229)

Kopecek is referring to Tertullian's *De prescriptione haereticorum*, especially ch. 19. In this section Tertullian proposes that appeal should be made first to the Rule of Faith because true exegesis of Scripture can be found only where the Rule of Faith is adhered to. Of course, appeal to the Rule of Faith can be as problematic as appeal to Scripture, since the two are intimately bound up with each other.

[47] For example, the Cappadocians and John Chrysostom all ascribe this position to him. Moreover, Theodoret of Cyrus and the church historian Socrates each present the claim in the form of a direct quotation, and Vaggione has demonstrated that this attribution is correct (1987, 167–70, 179). Vaggione also carefully examines the subtle but theologically substantial differences between Aetius and Eunomius on human knowledge of God. Given the nature of polemical literature, it is reasonable to ask whether Eunomius' opponents are accurately representing him, especially since the claim to comprehend God in his essence is nowhere attested in the extant Neo-Arian corpus. Nonetheless, several scholars have argued convincingly in favor of its authenticity (e.g., Heine 1975, 132–33; Kopecek 1979, 532, 537–38; Vaggione 1987, 167–70; Wiles 1989, 164–65; cf. Williams 1987, 105–7, 207). Two of these (Heine and Wiles) have also offered credible (albeit different) explanations for how Eunomius came to such an assertion.

[48] Hanson 1988, 629–30; cf. Vaggione 1987, 169–70. Of course, the Nicenes would agree with Eunomius that the Father is ingenerate. The problem with Eunomius' doctrine, from the Nicene perspective, is that it takes ἀγέννητος to be the Father's name, and thus asserts that his being (οὐσία) is ingenerateness. For the philosophical background of Eunomius' epistemology, see Hanson 1988, 630–32.

relatively early in the Neo-Arian controversy the pro-Nicenes bring Ezekiel 1 into the debate; we will turn to them now.

The first written response to Eunomius was Basil of Caesarea's *Adversus Eunomium*, composed *ca* 362–65 in reply to his opponent's *Liber apologeticus*. Although the main topic of Basil's work is God's incomprehensibility, he treats the question of prophetic visions only briefly, alluding to those of Ezekiel, Moses, and Daniel.[49] In explaining that God's essence is truly known only by the Son and the Spirit, he observes that Scripture speaks of God's being in figurative and allegorical language (τροπολογία and ἀλληγορία). If a person does not realize this, he will fall into the error of pagan philosophers who considered that God was material.[50] Moreover, if the biblical text is construed in this literal fashion, the reader will infer in turn that God was a combination of bronze and fire (Ez 1.27, 8.2), or simply fire (Dt 4.24), or a hoary old man (Dan 7.9–10). The problem of such contradictory and potentially deceptive descriptions is solved, Basil concludes, when one understands that the purpose of these narratives is solely to confirm the fact of God's existence. Beyond that, God is unfathomable.

After Basil's brief reference to Ezekiel's vision in his *Adversus Eunomium*, the next use of Ezekiel 1 in the Neo-Arian conflict occurs in Gregory of Nazianzus' writings.[51] His response to the Neo-Arians in 380 CE, in the form of his five *Theological Orations*, seems to have been spurred by their growing strength in Constantinople which was displayed both in challenges to his teaching and preaching and in their missionary activity.[52]

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[49] *Eun.* I.14, SC 299.220–24, PG 29.544a–545a.

[50] Here Basil is probably alluding to Stoics and Epicureans. See Sesboüé in Basil of Caesarea 1982–3, I.223 n. 2.

[51] There were, of course, other works written in this period to counter neo-Arian theology, the most important of which are by Gregory of Nyssa. Although Gregory refutes Eunomius' claim to know God, he does not bring in Ezekiel 1. In my study of the interpretive tradition of the prophet's vision, one of the most surprising and disappointing discoveries is that Gregory of Nyssa shows almost no interest in this passage.

[52] *Or.* 27.2, 5 and *Or.* 29.1. Gregory treats Ezekiel 1 in *Oration* 28. Although there is consensus that *Orations* 27, 29, and 30 were delivered in Constantinople in 380 against the Neo-Arians, there is some disagreement regarding 28 and 31. However, Norris argues convincingly that *Oration* 28 was in the same series as 27, 29, and 30, and that all five were aimed at the Neo-Arians (1991, 76–80, 132–33; cf. Szymusiak 1966). For discussions of these five orations in the context of the Neo-Arian conflict, see Hanson 1988, 703–14; Kopecek 1979, 494–503; and Norris 1991, 53–68. Citations are to the *Sources chrétiennes* edition.

The second of these addresses, *Oration 28*, deals with the incomprehensibility of God and treats the issue of divine epiphanies. Taking up this topic, Gregory asserts, "No one has ever found, or will be able to find, what God is in his nature (φύσιν) and essence (οὐσίαν)."[53] Such a discovery will only be possible when human reason has returned to its archetype, God, for which it longs. If some persons are described as knowing God—Gregory is clearly thinking of scriptural accounts—this does not mean that they fully grasp God's being. Rather, their understanding of God so surpasses other people's that they *seem* to comprehend God.[54] Gregory catalogues examples, explaining that despite their great achievements these people did not completely apprehend God: Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Elijah, Manoah,[55] Peter, and finally, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the rest of the prophets.[56] Gregory describes the throne visions of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, and although he avers that the precise character of these theophanies is known only to God and to the two who received them, he nonetheless concludes unequivocally:

> Neither Ezekiel or Isaiah, nor anyone like them, *stood in the being* (*ὑποστήματι*) and essence (οὐσίᾳ) *of the Lord* (Jer 23.18 [LXX]) according to Scripture, and they neither saw nor explained the nature (φύσιν) of God.[57]

Gregory crowns his list of biblical figures who had spiritual visions with Paul, observing that although the apostle was taken up to the third heaven (2 Cor 12.2–4), he could not express the revelation he had been privy to. For Gregory, Paul's inability to articulate his experience is instructive: "But since the mysteries were ineffable, let them also be honored by our silence."[58] Another pauline text gives

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[53] *Or.* 28.17, ll. 1–2. Cf. Gregory's similar comments in 28.4, ll. 1–2 and 28.11, ll. 11–12.

[54] *Or.* 28.17, ll. 4–15.

[55] Jg 13.22. Manoah and his wife, Samson's parents, received several visits from an angel of the Lord, announcing the birth of their son and outlining the Nazirite way of life he was to follow. Afterwards Manoah exclaimed in despair, *We are doomed, O wife, for we have seen God.* Although initially this text might seem inconsistent with Gregory's point, it is not. That the couple did not die is evidence that they had not beheld God in his essence. Thus this verse is especially useful for Gregory's argument: Manoah's cry to his wife reinforces the view that a human can not look upon God and live, and their survival implies that the vision was not of God himself.

[56] *Or.* 28.18–19.

[57] Ibid., 28.19, ll. 29–32.

[58] Ibid., 28.20, ll. 4–5.

Gregory further justification for commending reticence with regard to the supernatural realm: *We know in part and we prophesy in part* (1 Cor 13.9). Although we can know that God exists, Gregory explains, we can not apprehend what he is; we can not fathom the divine essence.[59]

While Gregory's use of Ezekiel 1 is perhaps more developed than Basil's some 15 years earlier, it is nonetheless still relatively brief. Although one could maintain that Gregory singles out the visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel as the most theologically significant in the Old Testament, he does not concentrate on the lexical details or literary structure of these passages to support his contention that neither prophet grasped God's being.

Such an emphasis is found, however, in John Chrysostom's homilies *On the Incomprehensibility of God* which are particularly important for at least two reasons. First, John preached these sermons in the 380s in Antioch, a vibrant city with a number of competing religious traditions, including Christianity, Judaism, and traditional Greco-Roman religion.[60] Although Christianity was a relative newcomer, Antioch had long been one of its great urban centers. However, in John's day, the Church in Antioch was splintered into several factions: two separate groups of Nicene Christians existed side-by-side,[61] and the Neo-Arian party was vigorous. The strength of Neo-Arianism is not surprising when one considers that it had been born in Antioch *ca* 350, and the city continued to be a fertile seedbed for its leaders.[62] Moreover, in 380, Eunomius himself traveled from Constantinople to Antioch to meet with his metropolitans there, most probably in response to the growing power of the Nicene bishop Meletius and his followers. Eunomius seems to have been successful in shoring up the confidence and resolve of his own adherents, for at the time of John's sermons, they presented Nicene Christians with a formidable opponent.[63] Second, and of equal importance, John engages the Neo-

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[59] Ibid., 28.5, ll. 10–12 and 16–18. For similar statements from Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, see Heine 1975, 134–35.

[60] Wilken 1983, 16–26, 34–65.

[61] This division arose because Meletius, bishop of the Nicene party, had been ordained by Arians. Thus, some of the Nicene Christians rejected his episcopacy and elected Paulinus in his place (Socrates, *h.e.* 2.44, 3.6 [PG 67.356b–357b, 388c–389a]).

[62] Malingrey in John Chrysostom 1970, 11–12; cf. Wilken 1983, 10–11.

[63] Kopecek 1979, 508–12. John calls Eunomius and his followers "Anomoeans,"

Arians on the topic of God's incomprehensibility primarily in the arena of biblical interpretation—to a greater degree than the Cappadocians—and he gives special attention to prophetic visions. Since John preached these sermons when Eunomius' disciples were strong, and because his arguments about knowing God are so thoroughly exegetical, his homilies illuminate the growing importance in the Neo-Arian conflict of the exposition of Scripture, and especially of theophanies.[64]

John delivered his five homilies *On the Incomprehensibility of God* in 386–87, shortly after his ordination to the priesthood. At first he was reluctant to engage in such open combat with Eunomius' followers. Confident as they were, they frequently attended services when he was preaching, with the intention of engaging him and other Nicene Christians in theological debate. He noted that they seemed to be listening to him "with pleasure,"[65] and he feared frightening them away and losing them entirely if he addressed the problem directly. However, members of his own congregation had close friends and relatives among the Neo-Arians and, John tells us, the need to protect his own flock from their influence finally compelled him to take them on.[66]

Although all five sermons deal with God's incomprehensibility, the problems arising from Old Testament reports of prophetic visions are explored primarily in the third and fourth. John opens the third homily with agricultural metaphors that underscore the importance of exegesis in the controversy. The Neo-Arians, he explains, are like ground that has been left untended and has produced only thorns and weeds, because they have been bereft of Scripture's benefit.[67] In an attempt to remedy this, John promises to prove that God is

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a title derived from their belief that the Son is unlike (ἀνόμοιος) the Father. However, the epithet "Anomoean" is misleading because the Neo-Arians asserted this only with regard to the Father's and Son's essences and did not hold that the Son was unlike the Father in all ways (cf. Hanson 1988, 598 and 634–5).

[64] For example, neither Basil's *Adversus Eunomium* nor Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomian* is as thoroughly exegetical as John's *On the Incomprehensibility of God*. Kopecek suggests that this may reflect the changing character of Neo-Arianism. While Aetius' *Syntagmation* contained few biblical allusions, over time Eunomius and his pro-Nicene opponents became increasingly concerned with scriptural interpretation (cf. Kopecek 1979, 541–42).

[65] *Incomprehens.* I.337. Citations are to the *Sources chrétiennes* edition.

[66] Ibid., I.328–81; cf. Kopecek 1979, 529–31 and Wilken 1983, 14–16.

[67] *Incomprehens.* III.15–21.

beyond the ken not just of humans, but also of angels, principalities, powers, virtues, and the seraphim and cherubim.[68] Quoting the doxology of 1 Tim 6.15–16:

> *. . . the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*

John observes that the phrase "who . . . dwells in unapproachable light" indicates God's inscrutability because God himself must be even more unapproachable than his dwelling.[69] To show that neither humans nor celestial creatures can fathom God, John turns to Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel.

Isaiah describes the seraphim as covering their faces (6.2), John explains, because they cannot bear to see the sparks and lightning emanating from God's throne, and how much less can they endure looking at God's essence (οὐσία). Indeed, whatever the seraphim beheld was due to God's accommodation (συγκατάβασις), that is, God's appearing, not as he is in himself, but in accordance with the capacity of the viewer. Just as the seraphim's sight of God was possible because of this divine condescension, so also Isaiah's. The text makes this clear, John asserts, because the prophet describes the infinite and incorporeal God using the corporeal and finite imagery of one sitting on a throne. Moreover, while the seraphim's and the prophet's visions are not of God's being and result from his accommodation, the seraphim's is clearer by virtue of their greater purity and wisdom.[70]

As his treatment of Isaiah 6 makes clear, John is fond of arguments "from the lesser to the greater," and he uses this technique again when interpreting Daniel 10. That the prophet fell down on his face, overcome with weakness at the sight of the heavenly entity which appeared before him, shows that even the holiest persons are not capable of looking upon an angel's essence, much less God's.[71] The Neo-Arians, John counsels his audience, should learn from this reaction:

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[68] Ibid., III.53–74.

[69] Ibid., III.78–83, 113–123. For John the adjective "unapproachable (ἀπρόσιτος)" includes the notion of being "incomprehensible (ἀκατάληπτος)" (Ibid., III.124–133).

[70] Ibid., III.162–193.

[71] Ibid., III.196–265.

> Let them hear, all those who busy themselves with inquiring about the Lord of the angels! Daniel, before whom the eyes of lions were ashamed (Dan 6.23 LXX); Daniel, who though in a human body had superhuman strength (Dan 6.4 LXX); he could not endure the presence of a servant of God, but lay there without breath. For he said, *My entrails turned when I saw the vision, and there is no breath in me* (Cf. Dan 10.16–17). But they—so lacking in virtue and righteousness—profess to know (εἰδέναι) perfectly the very essence (τὴν οὐσίαν), which is highest and supreme and produced the myriad of these angels, though Daniel was not strong enough to look at just one of them.[72]

With this, John returns to his original point that celestial beings can not comprehend God. Here he turns to Ezekiel's vision and the cherubim, who are of even higher rank than the seraphim because they form God's throne.[73]

Ezekiel, like Daniel, witnessed the divine manifestation near a river. God grants his servants visions in such peaceful places, John explains, so that they can more easily contemplate what God divulges to them.[74] But, he asks his congregation, "What did Ezekiel see?"[75] In answer, he summarizes Ezekiel 1.4–28 for his congregation in a mix of direct quotation and paraphrase which is itself significant for our investigation. In the Septuagint text of these verses there are thirteen occurrences of the adverb ὡς, "like,"[76] and nine of the noun ὁμοίωμα, "likeness." John's synopsis does not replicate each instance of these words, but he employs ὡς eight times and ὁμοίωμα six. With his superb rhetorical skills he undoubtedly ensured that his audience noticed the reiteration of these terms which seem to imply that the prophet's experience was mediated or indirect. And, in case some missed the import of this, John interpreted the passage for them:

> Because the prophet wishes to show that neither he nor those heavenly powers encountered the pure essence (τῇ ἀκράτῳ οὐσίᾳ) in itself, he says, *This was the vision of the likeness (ὁμοιώματος) of the glory of the*

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[72] Ibid., III.256–265.

[73] Ibid., III.266–276. John explains that this description of the cherubim does not mean that God needs a throne, but instead indicates their exalted status in the heavenly court. For John's angelology, see Daniélou's introduction in the *Sources chrétiennes* edition of the homilies.

[74] Ibid., III.277–286.

[75] Ibid., III.287ff.

[76] In my count I am including one use of the related adverb ὡσεί which also means "like."

> *Lord* (Ez 1.28). Do you not perceive God's accommodation (συγκατάβασιν) to human limitations both here and in the other passages? This is why even the celestial powers cover themselves with their wings (Ez 1.11), [even though they are wiser, more knowledgeable, and purer than we].[77]

Just as Irenaeus drew attention both to the repetition of ὡς and ὁμοίωμα and to the prophet's final statement in Ezekiel 1.28, so John also attends to these aspects of the passage. John, however, goes further than Irenaeus, and finds theological significance in the description of the wings of the cherubim (and of the seraphim in Isaiah 6): even spiritual powers, because they are created, cannot know God's being.[78]

John begins his fourth homily with a reprise of the treatment of prophetic visions in the third that focuses upon Daniel's experience and the cherubim.[79] He also stresses that Ezekiel ended the description of what he witnessed by declaring, *This was the vision of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*, and he observes that this verse points to God's condescension toward the cherubim: although they are spiritual powers, they too are unable to apprehend God's nature.[80]

In this fourth homily, however, John expands and strengthens his case by bringing in the evidence from both Moses, *No one shall see*

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[77] *Incomprehens.* III.305–12. The bracketed phrase is not in all manuscripts and may be a gloss.

[78] In his exegesis of the visions of Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel, John emphasizes two concepts: first, that even such lofty entities as the seraphim and cherubim can not comprehend God, and second, that even the holiest of humans cannot bear to look upon an angel's visage, much less God's. The Cappadocians make similar points in their writings against the neo-Arians, but not through exposition of theophanies. For example, on spiritual beings' inability to grasp God, see Basil of Caesarea, *Eun.* I.14; Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* I (Jaeger, I.222.18–25 [NPNF V, p. 99]) and *Eun.* II (Jaeger I.245.19–246.14 [NPNF V, p. 257]); and Gregory of Nazianzus *Or.* 28.3. On humans' incapacity to fathom created things, let alone God, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* II (Jaeger I.247.4–248.3 [NPNF V, p. 257]); and Gregory of Nazianzus *Or.* 28.21–31.

[79] John seems to have reviewed his earlier points because he interrupted his preaching against the Neo-Arians after the third homily in order to address the problem of judaizing Christians. See Harkins in John Chrysostom 1984, 25, 115 and Wilken 1983, 34–5.

[80] *Incomprehens.* IV.75–82. When expounding John 1.18 in his fourth homily, Chrysostom explains that this verse applies not only to humans, but also to noetic creatures (Ibid., IV.188–204). In the third, he makes a similar observation about the seraphim of Isaiah 6 (Ibid., III.157–66). That they cover their faces with two of their wings is an indication both of their inability to take in the divine vision and of God's συγκατάβασις.

God and live (Ex 33.20), and the fourth evangelist, *No one has ever seen God* (Jn 1.18). As Irenaeus' writings showed, these verses often press the exegete to discuss Old Testament passages which describe humans as looking upon God. John lists several prophets, quoting the corresponding biblical text which seems to contradict John 1.18 and Exodus 33.20: Isaiah (6.1), Daniel (7.9), Amos (9.1), and Micaiah (1 Kings 22.19). How is it, he asks his congregation, that these prophets and others like them had visions of God and yet the fourth evangelist says, *No one has ever seen God*? John explains that the gospeler was speaking of "perfect comprehension (τὴν ἀκριβῆ κατάληψιν)" and "clear knowledge (τὴν τετρανωμένην γνῶσιν)," whereas what the prophets witnessed resulted from God's accomodation (συγκατάβασις) to his creatures' limitations and did not disclose God's essence (οὐσία).[81] That these epiphanies were each unique and distinct from the others also indicates that God's being was not seen, for if it had been, they would necessarily have been identical. John finds a scriptural basis for his position in Hosea 12.11 (LXX): *I multiplied visions and in the hands of the prophets I was made a likeness (ὡμοιώθην)*.[82] Although it seems that the pro-Nicenes had not used this prophecy in the Neo-Arian conflict until this time, we should remember that Irenaeus had understood it to indicate that the multiple forms of theophanies were not a problem, but rather, warranted by Scripture itself.

John's homilies manifest several major developments. First, they are more thoroughly exegetical than the Cappadocians' anti-Neo-Arian writings. Second, John is attentive to the lexical details and literary

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[81] Ibid., IV.164–92.

[82] Hos 12.11 (LXX). Chrysostom develops similar arguments in two other works. Expounding Isaiah 6, he asks whether the prophet's statement, *I saw the Lord* (Is 6.1), conflicts with Jesus' words in John 1.18 and 6.46. In these passages Christ was not speaking of "perfect understanding (τὴν ἀκριβῆ κατανόησιν)," he replies, and no one has ever seen God in his essence. Quoting Hosea 12.11, he concludes that if the prophets' visions had been of God's οὐσία, they would not have been under different forms. In addition, these manifestations occurred through God's accommodation (συγκατάβασις) to human limitations (*Is. interp.*, VI.1; SC 304, 256.34–258.72). Chrysostom also alludes to a number of biblical theophanies (including Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1) in his *Homilies in praise of St. Paul*, and closes his discussion of them by citing Hosea 12.11, noting that each one is adapted to particular circumstances. However, he makes this point for a reason very different from that in *On the Incomprehensibility of God*: here he is defending Paul's claim that he became as a Jew to the Jews, as a Gentile to Gentiles, etc. (I Cor 9.20ff.), by drawing parallels between divine epiphanies and the apostle's missionary strategy (*Laud. Paul.* 5.5–6; SC 300.238–40).

structure of Ezekiel's vision, and his theological defence of God's inscrutability is based upon these aspects of the text. Third, he introduces the concept of God's condescension (συγκατάβασις) to discern what is happening in biblical theophanies. Earlier commentators read these accounts as appearances of the Word, but after Nicea interpreters recognized that this was problematic. In his treatment of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1, Eusebius of Caesarea began the process of modifying the standard construal of these narratives in accord with the council's judgments, and Cyril of Jerusalem made similar moves. Through his reflections on God's accommodation, John further nuances Eusebius' and Cyril's explications of Old Testament epiphanies in a way that is consistent with Nicea and holds in tension both the prophets' claims to have looked upon God and the assertion of passages such as John 1.18 that God cannot be seen. Chrysostom is not the first to employ this idea of divine accommodation; however, he emphasizes it and is the first to use it in expounding Ezekiel 1.[83] Finally, in his sermons we can begin to appreciate the place Ezekiel 1 holds in a constellation of biblical texts that pro-Nicene authors understood as having implications for interpreting prophetic visions and realizing that God is unfathomable.

Roughly four decades after John Chrysostom delivered his homilies, Theodoret of Cyrus penned the only complete Greek commentary on the prophet extant from the patristic period.[84] In this and other works he presents arguments against Eunomius very similar to those found in John, whose corpus he was familiar with.

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[83] Origen used the notion to describe both manifestations of the Word in the Old Testament (e.g., *Hom. 14.1 in Gen.*; SC 7 *bis*, 336.22–26; trans. in 1982, 197) and other scriptural reports of angelic appearances (e.g., to Zechariah in Luke 1, *Hom. 4 in Lc.*, PG 17.317a).

[84] Theodoret's commentaries are notoriously difficult to date, in part because he so rarely mentions contemporary events. He wrote his *Commentary on Ezekiel* after those on the Song of Songs and Daniel, which are usually dated between 425 and 435 (Brok 1949; McCollough 1989, 157; although cf. Guinot [in Theodoret 1980–84] who places all the commentaries after 435 and before 447). The relatively abstract christological language in these works may indicate that they were written within several years after the council of Ephesus (Richard 1936, 470–71; cf. Young 1983, 273–75, 284). The *Commentary on Ezekiel*, like Theodoret's other commentaries, rarely hints at the circumstances of its composition. However, all of them probably originated in the form of lectures delivered to audiences made up of both lay people and clergy, perhaps in Antioch, and were intended for publication from their inception. Parvis provides the most thorough analysis of these issues (1975, 253–70).

Despite his debt to Chrysostom, Theodoret's own writings are important, because they show more clearly than any previous texts how Ezekiel 1 serves as the exegetical linchpin in discussions of prophetic visions and the incomprehensibility of God.

Although Theodoret never mentions Eunomius by name in his verse-by-verse exegesis of Ezekiel 1, throughout it the reader encounters polemic concerning what this chapter implies about human knowledge of God. This combative strain begins in Theodoret's reading of Ezekiel 1.1–2:

> . . . *the heavens were opened and I saw a vision (ὅρασιν) of God* . . . Ezekiel said that the heavens were opened. This did not actually happen physically, but it was a spiritual vision. *And I saw*, he says, *a vision of God*, not the essence (οὐσίαν) of God, but rather a vision (ὅρασιν) of God, that is, a kind of revelation, or a representation, that is accessible to human nature.[85]

While Theodoret insists that Ezekiel did not see God's being, he grants that the prophet's narrative does communicate certain things about God.[86] That he experienced this theophany after being transported with the children of Israel to a foreign land demonstrates the way God deals with his wayward creatures: although Ezekiel was pious and righteous, he was exiled in Babylon with his impious and law-breaking countrymen, because "such is the Lord's love for humankind, that he gives up his own servants to griefs and misfortunes for the sake of sinners." The vision also divulges God's "unspeakable goodness" in that he would not abandon his people during this time, but judged them worthy of his continuing care and solicitude. Finally, that the epiphany occurred in Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans (v. 3), confirms that God is uncircumscribed and his power is not limited to Jerusalem: God is not only sovereign over the Jews, but also maker and ruler of all things.

Although Theodoret allows that the vision evinces God's philanthropy and sovereignty, he repeatedly insists that it does not disclose God's essence. Moreover, like John Chrysostom, he considers the human inability to comprehend created spiritual entities relevant to his argument. This idea is found in his exposition of Ezekiel 1.5, where he introduces it with regard to the cherubim. For Theodoret,

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[85] PG 81.820c–d.
[86] Ibid., 821a.

the adverb ὡς is key to recognizing that Ezekiel did not perceive the actual nature of these noetic beings:

> *And in the midst [of the fire], like a likeness (ὡς ὁμοίωμα) of four living creatures.* . . . He did not say that he saw four living creatures, nor even a likeness (ὁμοίωμα) of four living creatures, but *like (ὡς) a likeness of four living creatures* since it is clear that the divine prophets did not see the very natures (φύσεις) of the invisible things, but rather some images and reflections. In his generosity God has presented these images and reflections in order to respond to each particular need. Therefore Ezekiel describes for us the shapes of the living beings that he saw.[87]

In Theodoret's reading, the prophet's description of these animals, especially their four wings (Ez 1.11), signifies the appropriate response of finite creatures to their restricted apprehension of celestial realities. That two of the wings are opened and two closed indicates that even for the cherubim some things are revealed, while others remain veiled. Their outstretched wings naturally symbolize how they "revel in the spiritual insight granted them," while the two that are folded show that they are "content with the lack of awareness of hidden things and do not strive to understand what it is not fitting to know."[88] Although Theodoret does not explicitly tie his construal of their wings to the issue of divine ineffability, when describing their dutiful acceptance of the restraints on their knowledge, he seems to be subtly counseling his audience likewise to submit obediently to the limitations on their own grasp of God.[89]

Commenting on Ezekiel 1.22–25, Theodoret reprises his insistence that Ezekiel did not view noetic realities in themselves:

> The divine prophet everywhere points out the likeness (ὁμοίωμα), teaching us to see a certain rough sketch of the divine things, and not the very nature (αὐτὴν τὴν φύσιν) of invisible things.[90]

Theodoret elaborates on this theme in his exegesis of Ezekiel 1.26a. The prophet's vision in no way displays the essences of God and of

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[87] Ibid., 824b–c. Cf. Thedoret's comments on Ezekiel 10.8 where he maintains that the prophet saw, not the natures of invisible beings, but rather "some likenesses (ὁμοιώματά τινα) and images" (Ibid., 893b).

[88] Ibid., 825c–d.

[89] The exhortation implicit in Theodoret's interpretation harks back to the commentary's preface, where he criticizes unnamed Christians who misunderstand Ezekiel's prophecy and seek knowledge that is properly hidden (Ibid., 808a–b, 809b).

[90] Ibid., 832a.

spiritual entities, he declares, but rather attests to their incomprehensiblity. The sapphire-like throne and the cloud surrounding it (v. 4) hint at "the divine nature's depth and invisibility."[91] Like many patristic authors, Theodoret draws upon sun and light imagery to elucidate his understanding of God. "That pure and unapproachable light [cf. 1 Tim 6.16]," he explains, is like darkness to humans because they cannot fix their gaze upon it, in the same way that after someone attempts to look directly at the sun even for just a moment, he sees shadows and blackness instead of light.[92]

The Septuagint text of Ezekiel 1.26–28 uses the adverb ὡς five times, and Theodoret stresses this word's importance, as he did earlier in his discussion of verse 5. "Everywhere Ezekiel puts 'likeness' (ὁμοίωμα)," Theodoret observes, "he also puts 'like' (ὡς), thereby teaching us not to stop here, but to see that each of the visions fits a need."[93] Establishing that the various theophanies were tailored to specific circumstances, he cites other Old Testament passages: the Lord appeared to Abraham "as a human (ὡς ἄνθρωπος)," and likewise to Jacob at the river Jabbok. Theodoret finds still more examples in the epiphanies experienced by Moses before the burning bush, by the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai, and by Elijah on Mount Horeb.[94] Although these illustrations are consistent with Theodoret's general point that the manifestation of God is adapted to each situation, unlike Ezekiel 1.26–28, the texts do not contain the adverb ὡς, which originally motivated his remarks. However, Theodoret, like exegetes before him, clearly considers Ezekiel's repetition of 'likeness' (ὁμοίωμα) and 'like' (ὡς) to provide the hermeneutical key for all such narratives, so that the absence of these terms from any certain one is not problematic. He concludes:

> Therefore, whenever you hear accounts of different visions of God, do not conclude that the Divinity (τὸ Θεῖον) has multiple forms. For it is entirely bodiless and without form, simple and not composite, without shape, invisible and unseen, and not circumscribed by any limit.[95]

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[91] Claims that God is invisible and unfathomable often go hand in hand. See, e.g., John Chrysostom, *Incomprehens.* III.54.

[92] PG 81.832b–c.

[93] Ibid., 833a.

[94] In the case of Abraham, Theodoret seems to be referring to the Lord's appearance in the guise of three men (Gen 18). The other texts he alludes to are LXX Genesis 32.25; Exodus 3.2 and 19.16; and 1 Kings 19.9ff.; and he consistently stresses the visual elements of these theophanies over the aural.

[95] PG 81.833d.

In his exposition of Ezekiel 1.28, Theodoret again draws attention to the words used by the prophet and contends that Ezekiel did not look upon God's essence:

> *This was the vision of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.* And he did not say, "This was the nature (φύσις) of the Lord," or "This was the glory of the Lord," but rather, *This was a vision of the likeness (ὁμοιώματος) of the glory of the Lord.*[96]

In these passages Theodoret is surely indebted to earlier interpreters, especially Irenaeus, Cyril of Jerusalem, and John Chrysostom. But the sensitivity to the text's lexical details and literary structure that we saw in these exegetes is even more pronounced in Theodoret. For example, he remarks on both the use of the words 'like' (ὡς) and 'likeness' (ὁμοίωμα) and the prophet's closing comments. But he also goes beyond his predecessors when he explores the significance that Ezekiel's opening statement (*. . . the heavens were opened and I saw a vision of God*) holds for understanding that humans cannot grasp God's being.

These sections of Theodoret's verse-by-verse commentary which I have presented demonstrate that his reading of Ezekiel 1 is held together by a polemical thread, the repeated insistence that the prophet did not behold the essence of God or of any other spiritual entity. Although Thedoret never names his opponent, we can recognize him as Eunomius because of similarities to matters raised by Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom. Moreover, we saw that in pro-Nicene arguments against the Neo-Arians, particularly John Chrysostom's, Ezekiel's vision was part of a matrix of texts that also included the theophanies experienced by Isaiah and Daniel. A similar array of passages is found in Theodoret's exegesis of these two prophets.

As we might expect, Theodoret broaches the issue of God's inscrutability in his exposition of Isaiah 6, asserting that the prophet did not see God's being.[97] As support he cites several New Testament texts: John 1.18, John 6.46, and Matthew 11.27.[98] While the fact of

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[96] Ibid., 836c. In commenting on Ezekiel 8.2, where a figure similar to that described in 1.27 appears, Theodoret also focuses on the prophet's use of ὁμοίωμα. Here too he explains that God's essence was not seen, and because of this Ezekiel says that he viewed a likeness (ὁμοίωμα) (Ibid., 881a–b).

[97] *Is.* 6.1, SC 276, 256.32–258.50.

[98] Jn 1.18 *No one has ever seen God*; Jn 6.46 *Not that any one has seen the Father except*

God's existence is revealed in Isaiah's vision, Theodoret continues, God's nature is not. Theodoret finds further corroboration of this in the multifarious ways in which God appeared to Abraham, Moses, Micaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel.[99] Like John Chrysostom, he infers that since these epiphanies were different, they could not have been of God's essence, for then they would necessarily have been identical. Using language very similar to that in his comments on Ezekiel 1.26–28, Theodoret declares:

> The Divinity (τὸ θεῖον) does not have multiple forms, but is without both form and shape, not composite, simple, invisible, and beyond comprehension. This is why God says, *I multiplied visions and in the hands of the prophets I was made a likeness (ὡμοιώθην)* (Hos 12.11), not 'I was seen (ὤφθην).' For God gives form to the visions as he wishes.[100]

Athough Theodoret's basic points are the same as those in his reading of Ezekiel 1, his polemic is not as sharp here as in the *Commentary on Ezekiel*. In addition, his discussion of divine incomprehensibility is briefer in his exposition of Isaiah 6 than in his treatment of Ezekiel 1. Finally, although he never mentioned Hosea 12.11 in his interpretation of Ezekiel's vision, he does quote it here as evidence for the pro-Nicene position.

In his *Commentary on Daniel* Theodoret raises these same issues in exegesis of Daniel 7.9–10 and 8.15–17, the visions of the Ancient of Days and of Gabriel, and explicitly identifies his opponent as Eunomius. The prophet's response to the angel, Theodoret explains, undermines Eunomius' claims to know God: . . . *and when [Gabriel] came, I was frightened and fell upon my face* (Dan 8.17). Following the lead of Chrysostom, Theodoret reasons that since Daniel was overwhelmed by the sight of God's messenger, humans surely could not endure actually apprehending God's essence.[101]

The last passage from Theodoret that concerns us is his exposition of Daniel 7.9–10. Theodoret explains the significance of this divine appearance:

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him who is from God; he has seen the Father; Mt 11.27 *No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*.

[99] In the lemma on Isaiah 6.1, Theodoret simply lists these prophets. This contrasts with his lengthy treatment of Ezekiel 1.26–28 in which he details God's appearances to Abraham, Jacob, Moses and the people of Israel, and Elijah.

[100] *Is.* 6.1, SC 276, 258.46–50.

[101] PG 81.1448d.

> It is fitting to know that God is incorporeal, simple and without form, having no boundaries. But since his nature is unbounded, frequently—whenever it is helpful—he gives form to the visions, as he wishes. We can see that he appears in one way to Abraham, in another to Moses, and yet in another way to Isaiah, just as he showed a different vision to Ezekiel. Therefore whenever you see different manifestations of God, do not think that the divinity has multiple forms, but listen to him speaking through the prophet Hosea: *I multiplied visions and in the hands of the prophets I was made a likeness (ὡμοιώθην)* (Hosea 12.11 [LXX]). He said, *I was made a likeness*, not "I was seen (ὤφθην)," for, as he wishes, he gives form to the visions. Similarly, after the blessed Ezekiel contemplated what he had seen—a mixture of electrum and fire—and described the vision, he added, *This was a likeness (ὁμοίωμα) of the glory of God.* And he did not say that he had seen the Lord, or the glory of the Lord in itself, but *the likeness of the glory of the Lord.*[102]

Although the logic behind Theodoret's interpretation of Daniel 7 is not new, I have quoted it in full because he brings together the first chapter of Ezekiel, references to other Old Testament theophanies, and Hosea 12.11 (LXX). This passage demonstrates clearly how Ezekiel 1, especially when read in conjunction with Hosea 12.11, serves as the hermeneutical key to understanding the epiphanies granted to various Old Testament figures.

That John Chrysostom would preach a series of sermons in the 380s against Eunomius and his disciples is not surprising, for Neo-Arians presented Nicene Christians with a vigorous opponent. However, it is generally assumed that after Eunomius died in 394, the influence of his followers quickly declined. If this is true, we must ask why Theodoret takes them on more than twenty-five years later and whether he was seriously and justifiably concerned about Neo-Arianism. Several pieces of evidence bear on this. First, while Eunomius' adherents may have lost much of their power after their leader's death, they appear to have been active in Constantinople, and even experienced a schism.[103] It seems however that any residual strength was confined to the capital city; beyond Constantinople, their numbers dwindled. In his *Haereticarum fabularum compendium*, written perhaps twenty years after the *Commentary on Ezekiel*, Theodoret describes the

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[102] Ibid., 1421b–c.

[103] Philostorgius *h.e.* XII.11, PG 65.620b–c; cf. Kopecek 1979, 540–41 and Le Bachelet, 1323–24.

Neo-Arians he is aware of as a small group that exists primarily in urban areas and meets secretly, trying to remain inconspicuous.[104] In this work he betrays no fear that the Neo-Arians might, through some quirk of history, experience a resurgence and pose a threat to Nicene Christianity.

This is not, however, the picture painted in Theodoret's epistles where he makes reference to his polemical writings against Eunomius' followers.[105] In Epistle 21, he explains why he so staunchly maintains his belief that the two natures of Christ were distinct: to do otherwise would destroy the orthodox defence against Arius and Eunomius.[106] Likewise, in Epistle 104, dated to November, 448, and addressed to Flavian, the bishop of Constantinople, Theodoret speaks of the dispute with Arians and Neo-Arians as an ongoing struggle.[107] This conflict is also mentioned in Epistle 113, written in autumn, 449, to the bishop of Rome, Leo the Great, where he writes that

> since God's grace was working with me, I freed more than a thousand souls from the sickness of Marcion; and I led many others from the sect of Arius and Eunomius to our master Christ.[108]

This letter was composed in the hope that Leo would overturn the deposition and exile pronounced against Theodoret by the Robber Council of Ephesus in August, 449. While Theodoret may have exaggerated the numbers of Christians he delivered from heresy, it seems unlikely that in this crucial apology for his orthodoxy he would have fabricated such a claim unless it were both credible and—with allowance for some rhetorical hyperbole in counting—true. Neo-Arians must have been numerous enough in the first half of the fifth century to pose at least a *perceived* threat, or Theodoret's rhetoric would have been useless. Finally, evidence suggests that Neo-Arians were active in North Africa in at least the early decades of the fifth century.[109] Given these circumstances, both Theodoret's fear of the

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[104] *Haer.* IV.3, PG 83.421b.

[105] *Epp.* 83 and 116; SC 98, 218 and 111, 70. Unfortunately, the works Theodoret wrote specifically to refute the Arians and Neo-Arians are no longer extant.

[106] *Ep.* 21, SC 98, 77. If the two natures are not kept distinct, Theodoret explains, then the Son's subordination would be inevitable.

[107] SC 111, 27–28.

[108] *Ep.* 113, SC 111, 62. Marcionism seems to have been tenacious in the Orient, especially in Syria (Aland 1992, 523–4; Drijvers 1987–88, 153–72; and Amann 1927, 2027–28).

[109] Elena Cavalcanti establishes this on the basis of the anti-Neo-Arian polemic

future revitalization of Eunomius' followers and his desire that Nicene Christians guard against this possibility are reasonable.

In *A History of Neo-Arianism*, Thomas A. Kopecek offers a careful analysis of John Chrysostom's homilies *On the Incomprehensibility of God*. Although he does not treat Theodoret's writings, he arrives at two conclusions which are pertinent to an examination of patristic exegesis of Ezekiel 1, particularly as we have seen it develop in John and Theodoret. First, Kopecek observes that over time Eunomius and his followers became increasingly concerned with scriptural interpretation.[110] Second, he conjectures that the Neo-Arians in Antioch had a series of biblical proof-texts which supported their position, and that John Chrysostom challenged their exposition of these passages in his own sermons.[111] As Kopecek reconstructs the Antiochene Neo-Arian catena, it includes the following passages that have emerged as part of a matrix of texts relating to the matter of God's inscrutability:[112]

> Isaiah 6.1: *In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up . . .*

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of Synesius of Cyrene and Cyril of Alexandria (1975 and 1976, 106–37). In this regard it is interesting to note that when commenting on John 1.18, Cyril describes certain people—he calls them "the more unlearned"—who hold that Isaiah and Ezekiel beheld God's being. The evangelist, Cyril counters, penned the words *No one has ever seen God* precisely to avert this sort of misunderstanding. In language similar to Theodoret's, he maintains that God's nature was not viewed in its essence but only in a likeness. He also stresses the significance of Ezekiel 1.28, *This was the vision of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*. Although Cyril never identifies his "unlearned" opponents, his exposition of John 1.18 is certainly consistent with Theodoret's polemic against Neo-Arians (*Jo.* I.10; PG 73.176c–177c).

[110] Kopecek 1979, 541–42, cf. 526.

[111] Ibid., 531–42. Kopecek contends that the Neo-Arians in Constantinople also had a catena of scriptural proof-texts, and that its contents can be deduced from Gregory of Nazianzus' *Oration 30* (Ibid., 501–3). As Kopecek proposes them, the Constantinopolitan and Antiochene catenae show little overlap: the former stresses the Son's subordination to the Father, whereas the latter is primarily concerned with human knowledge of God. It seems unlikely that the followers of Eunomius in these cities focused upon two entirely distinct sets of biblical texts, though there may have been regional differences. This semblance of two independent catenae may result in part from Gregory and John using different strategies.

[112] According to Kopecek, the Antiochene Neo-Arian catena also includes Psalm 50.8 (LXX); John 10.15; 1 Corinthians 8.6, 12.8–12; Ephesians 3.5–10; and 1 Timothy 6.15–16. I have not listed these passages because they do not come into play in exegesis of Ezekiel 1. It should be noted that three of the texts in the catena are found in Eunomius' extant works: Mt 11.27, Jn 1.18, and 1 Tim 6.15–16 (Kopecek 1979, 533–36; cf. Vaggione 1987, 192–93).

> Matthew 11.27: *All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*
> John 1.18: *No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.*
> John 6.46: *Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father.*

The verses from the New Testament might initially seem odd candidates for Neo-Arian proof-texts because they affirm that no one has ever known (or seen) God the Father. However, both Matthew 11.27 and John 1.18 allow that the Son has revealed the Father to at least some humans. Presumably, the Neo-Arians averred that they could grasp God's being because it had been disclosed by Jesus.[113] Most likely they also posited that Isaiah had been granted apprehension of the divine οὐσία in his vision.

Theodoret's expository works lend support to Kopecek's theory, for like Chrysostom, he cites a number of these proof-texts in attacks against the Neo-Arians. In his construal of Isaiah 6.1 he quotes Matthew 11.27 as well as John 1.18 and 6.46 as he contests their beliefs. Moreover, in several of his writings on New Testament books, Theodoret refutes their position in his commentary on pauline texts that were also part of the Antiochene Neo-Arian catena.[114] However, that Ezekiel 1 is so prominent in the anti-Neo-Arian polemic of both John Chrysostom and Theodoret suggests two possibilities beyond Kopecek's reconstruction. First, Eunomius and his followers may have included the prophet's opening statement (*. . . the heavens were opened and I saw a vision of God*) in their series of proof-texts and used it to assert that comprehension of God's essence was imparted to Ezekiel, as also to Isaiah, in a foreshadowing of Jesus conveying that same knowledge. Since so little of their biblical explication has survived, this can only be conjecture. However, if they did employ Ezekiel 1.1 in this way, it probably was not long before Nicene Christians

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[113] Kopecek 1979, 537. The Neo-Arians may have argued this in conjunction with their theory of language and the relationship between names and essences. Also, they may have used other biblical texts to bolster their reading of Matthew 11.27 and John 1.18 (e.g., Jn 17.6–8), although we have no textual evidence for this.

[114] Theodoret disputes Eunomius' theology in his exegesis of I Corinthians 8.6 (PG 82.289b) and Ephesians 3.8 (PG 82.528c), two of the Neo-Arian proof-texts (see n. 112).

realized that they need only examine the prophet's vision in its entirety to argue that humans can not fathom God. A second possibility is that the Nicene Christians first introduced Ezekiel 1 into the debate because, in comparison to other narratives of divine epiphanies, it provides the strongest support for, perhaps even requires, the Nicene stance. Ezekiel's repetition of the qualifiers 'like' (ὡς) and 'likeness' (ὁμοίωμα) ensures that his account is especially well-suited to resolving the tension between the reports of some Old Testament figures that they beheld God and scriptural declarations that no one has ever looked upon God (e.g., Ex 33.20, Jn 1.18). Furthermore, the occurrence of 'likeness' (ὁμοίωμα) makes Ezekiel 1 dovetail nicely with Hosea (12.11 LXX), a prophecy which suggests that if different people had looked upon God himself, these theophanies would necessarily have been identical. But regardless of who initially brought Ezekiel 1 into the dispute, it serves as the exegetical linchpin holding together a complex web of passages because John Chrysostom and Theodoret, like others before them, interpret it with sensitivity to both its specifics and the larger contours of Scripture. Not only do they attend to its lexical details and literary structure, but they also read it in the context of the entire Bible, in particular those portions of the New Testament that speak of seeing and knowing God, and they undertake this painstaking analysis of the prophet's vision in order to discern its theological significance.

CHAPTER FOUR

EZEKIEL'S VISION AND THE CHRISTIAN MORAL LIFE

"Ezekiel Will See His Vision Again"[1]

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Mt 5.8). These words of Jesus suggest that whatever seeing God may entail, it has a moral element, purity of heart. Irenaeus hints at this when he observes that to look upon God means to participate in God, to be "in God," and to "bear [God's] Spirit,"[2] and although he does not present a tropological interpretation of Ezekiel 1, he brings Matthew 5.8 into his discussion of theophanies. Because Irenaeus and later authors make this connection between the prophet's vision and Jesus' beatitude, we should not be surprised that one of the dominant patristic readings of Ezekiel 1 concerns the Christian moral life. This third exegetical strand has its roots in Origen, appears in the fourth-century most clearly in Ambrose of Milan and Pseudo-Macarius, and comes to its fullest expression in Gregory the Great.

Origen

In his *Homily 1 on Ezekiel* Origen introduces two moral interpretations of the prophet's vision. The first explores the ways in which both the vision itself and the very fact of Ezekiel being in exile illuminate the spiritual purgation each soul must undergo in its journey back to God. Origen develops this theme fully, and later commentators repeat it. His second explication is quite spare and relates the four living creatures to the tripartite soul of Plato's *Phaedrus*, a motif that will be taken up and expanded by Ambrose of Milan.

Origen opens his homily with an extended discussion of sin, enslavement, and spiritual cleansing which sets the stage for his treatment of Ezekiel's vision. "Not everyone who is a captive," he observes,

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[1] Ambrose of Milan, *De virginitate* 18.118.
[2] *Haer.* IV.20.5–6.

"undergoes captivity on account of sin." Rather, a few righteous persons were found among the sinners exiled in Babylonia because without them, the Israelites would have been bereft of God's assistance.[3] This shows that God, who is "gentle, kind, and a lover of humanity," always tempers his chastisements with mercy.[4] The story of Joseph furnishes Origen with an apt illustration of God's forbearance and philanthropy. With the seven-year famine coming, God chose to provide not only for his own people, but also for the Egyptians, although they were strangers to him.[5]

The prophets, Origen adds, prove his point. Although Daniel, the three young men (Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael), Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Haggai did not sin, they were in captivity to preach to the people. Their presence among the children of Israel confirms both that God's punishments are mitigated by his mercy and that he is sovereign over his people even when they are in exile. Moreover, the Israelites themselves testify that God tempers his judgments: *We have eaten the bread of tears, and we have drunk in tears and in measure* (Ps 79.6 [LXX]). Origen reads the psalmist's phrase *in measure* to indicate the way God's discipline is balanced with his clemency. Furthermore, his anger is necessary, and its purpose is always the amendment of sinners' lives. His chastisements benefit the recipients—as do a father's corrections of his son or a teacher's of a pupil—and although they might seem bitter, Origen explains, they are actually sweet because they persuade sinners to repent and thereby protect them from the greater torments of hell.[6]

Having preached about one-sixth of his homily, Origen finally turns to the text of Ezekiel 1, noting that his introductory remarks disclose "why the prophet was in exile." He was in Babylonia not because of his own sin, but in order to comfort his fellow Israelites. Ezekiel himself, however, was not without consolation, for he received the sight of the open heavens (Ez 1.1) as solace for the "sorrows of

[3] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.1.1–8.

[4] Ibid., 1.1.11–14.

[5] Ibid., 1.1.32–34. Origen's point is a polemical one, as he makes clear. That God provided for Joseph to be in Egypt and avert the disaster of the famine shows "that the heretics are wrong to condemn the Creator for immoderate wrath." This is just one of a number of statements directed against Marcionites (cf. Ibid., 1.12.26–29). See Borret in Origen 1989, 457–60.

[6] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.2.

captivity" all about him.[7] Although Origen has not yet presented substantive exposition of the prophet's vision, his introductory remarks indicate clearly that it is about the moral life. Thus he begins to explore its details and their moral import.

Describing the chariot seen by Ezekiel, Origen observes that the four living creatures carried a driver who was "fiery, but only from the waist to the feet. From the waist to the head he glowed with the brilliance of electrum." These features of the charioteer's physiognomy offer yet more proof that God provides not only discipline but also refreshment. The fire below the waist symbolizes sexual activity which is censured with the punishments of Gehenna, and the electrum—more precious than gold or silver—reflects God's splendor.[8]

Turning to other scriptural passages which mention fire, Origen examines the significance of the charioteer's physique. Bringing together Hebrews 12.29 (*Our God is a consuming fire* [cf. Dt 4.24]) and 1 Corinthians 3.12–13:

> *Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.*

he observes that this divine flame destroys works of sin—the spiritual equivalent of wood, hay, and stubble—while it preserves the soul's gold, silver, and precious stone. The prophet Isaiah spoke of this blaze (Is 10.16–17), Jesus came to kindle it on earth (Lk 12.49), and it devours the wickedness in souls so that they may be glorified.[9]

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[7] Ibid., 1.3.1–5. The notion of the prophets receiving consolation in captivity is not uncommon in early Christian literature, but I know of no other patristic author who says that Ezekiel's inaugural vision was given expressly to comfort him in exile. For a contemporary argument that the vision was intended to convey judgment rather than solace, see Allen 1993.

[8] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.3. Cf. *sel. in Ezech.* 1.26 (PG 13.769d) where based upon the human figure's fire and electrum Origen concludes that "the passage involves not only punishments, but through them [the punishments] it also involves rest." Origen's understanding of God as bringing both discipline and refreshment is a theme which runs throughout his homily. In his *Homilies on Jeremiah* Origen interprets Ezekiel 1.27 in a similar manner (*Hom. in Jer.* 9.5.24–42).

[9] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.3.9–55. Origen repeatedly turns to 1 Corinthians 3.12–13 when discussing spiritual purgation. See, e.g., *Cels.* 4.14, 5.15, 6.70; *Hom. in Jos.* 4.3; *Hom. in Lev.* 15.3.

Origen insists that God's chastisements benefit sinners. Unfortunately, he explains, those whose faith is immature desire to do good only when threats of punishment hang over their heads. For this reason he counsels his listeners to believe that the exile did indeed happen. Nevertheless, they are to go beyond the literal account to grasp the mystery behind it: the soul that is at peace inhabits Jerusalem, but when it sins, "God's visitation" departs and it is handed over to Nebuchadnezzar as a captive in Babylon. If it repents, Ezra is sent to lead it back to Jerusalem and to rebuild the city.[10] Here Origen understands Israel's history as a paradigm of the soul's relationship with God which has unavoidable implications for his audience, because the narrative's spiritual meaning applies to each person. Like a trainer trying to rouse sluggards to activity, he reminds his listeners of their free will and exhorts them to embrace their sacred toil:

> This must be understood: by freedom of will some ascend to the summit of goodness while others descend to the depth of wickedness. But you, o man, why do you not exercise your will? Why do you consider it so tedious to advance, to labor, to contend, to become, through good works, the cause of your own salvation? Would you be happier sleeping, would you like to be utterly undisturbed so that you could always be comfortably relaxing? . . . Why do you not like to work, even though you were born for it? Do you not wish your work to become righteousness (*iustitia*), wisdom (*sapientia*), and purity (*castitas*)? Do you not wish it to be courage (*fortitudo*) and all the other virtues? Therefore, those who deserve the punishments of slavery because of their sins are led away into captivity.[11]

Origen's imagery of a vertical axis along which souls either rise to God or plunge "to the depth of wickedness" pervades the homily. Immediately prior to the passage just quoted, he recollects that Satan had originally "dwelt in the paradise of delights" (cf. Gen 2.8) but then fell from heaven.[12] The trajectory of upward and downward movement also appears in references to the Incarnation and to the Holy Spirit alighting on Jesus at his baptism.[13] This motif of ascent and descent is, of course, found throughout Origen's writings. I draw attention to it, however, because it will become increasingly important as moral exegesis of Ezekiel 1 develops.

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[10] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.3.55–88.
[11] Ibid., 1.3.117–130.
[12] Ibid., 1.3.95–117.
[13] Ibid., 1.5–6.

Origen parses other aspects of the vision, relating them to purgation. The *destructive wind (spiritus auferens)*, like the consuming fire of Deuteronomy 4.24 (cf. Heb 12.29), signifies God who eradicates evils from one's soul, a point confirmed by John 4.24, *God is spirit (Deus Spiritus est)*.[14] The *great cloud* borne along by the *destructive wind* represents the goodness that results from this purification. Illuminating his point, Origen draws comparisons to other biblical clouds: the one that overshadowed Jesus at his Transfiguration, from which the Father spoke (Mt 17.5), and that in Isaiah 5.6 which God ordered not to rain on his wayward vineyard, the house of Israel. This *great cloud*, Origen observes, will surely shower upon the good vineyard of the soul that is washed by the *destructive wind*.[15] If this first stage of cleansing effected by the *destructive wind* is not sufficient, a second occurs; it is fiery and described in Ezekiel 1.4, *And brightness in its circuit, then a blazing fire in the midst of it like a vision of electrum*. Drawing upon the oracle of Ezekiel 22.17–22 that portrays smelters refining metal as a symbol of God's judgments, Origen demonstrates the necessity of this *blazing fire*: through "evil, vices, and passions" the soul has become like *electrum* polluted with brass, tin, and lead, so that it must be melted to eliminate the dross. Origen expresses the hope that "we may pass safely through [the fire], like gold, silver, and precious stones [cf. 1 Cor 3.12] . . ."[16]

This construal of Ezekiel 1 in terms of spiritual purification is based on the prophet's actual circumstances, his exile with the children of Israel.[17] Characteristically, Origen does not remain content simply with a literal exposition of either the vision's details or the

[14] Ibid., 1.12.1–10.
[15] Ibid., 1.12.39–53.
[16] Ibid., 1.13.1–30.
[17] David Halperin contends that Origen's emphasis on Ezekiel's historical situation and on the vision as a sign of God's mercy and grace reflect his dependence on the homilies of the Rabbis in Caesarea (1988, 322–58; cf. 1981). Halperin's primary focus here is on the synagogue preaching for the festival of Shabuot when the Torah selection is Exodus 19.1ff. and the *haftarah* is Ezekiel 1. He suggests that Origen and his congregation were familiar with these sermons and that Origen may have felt he was competing with his Jewish counterparts (cf. de Lange 1976, 86–87). Halperin's argument for Origen's debt to the Rabbis is convincing, but it is not conclusive; for a discussion of its strengths and weaknesses, see Christman 1995, 39–48. While some Christian commentary on Ezekiel 1 may have been influenced by the Rabbis in this early stage, after the third century Jewish and Christian readings move in different directions.

broader contours of the exilic narrative. The reader is always pushed beyond these to their theological message; the historical Ezekiel is tied to Christ and the moral exegesis is thereby grounded in the Ezekiel-Christ typology. Also, early in the homily Origen enunciates a hermeneutical rule: "compare Scripture to Scripture."[18] Although he commends this principle to his audience when explaining that seemingly bitter punishments are in reality sweet, its application is not limited to his discussion of divine chastisements. Rather, it guides his entire treatment of Ezekiel 1 and is manifest most clearly in his attention to the exact words and expressions of the text—*destructive wind*, *blazing fire*, *great cloud*, and *electrum*—that lead him to other verses containing either these same terms or closely related images (e.g., metal being refined in fire). In each case, the meaning of the passage is determined by placing it in relationship with other parts of the Bible. The coherence and internal logic of Origen's interpretations derive from this practice of "comparing Scripture to Scripture."

While Origen's first moral explication of Ezekiel 1 is well developed, his second appears only in embryonic form at the end of the homily and deals with the faces of the cherubim.[19] Here he suggests that the four visages might signify the tripartite soul with a fourth element added to it. In this scheme, the man stands for the rational part of the soul (*rationabile*), the lion for the irascible (*iracundia*), and the calf for the concupiscent (*concupiscentia*). The eagle—the fourth part—denotes the "governing spirit of the soul" (*spiritum praesidentem animae*) which is linked to courage (*fortitudo*) and presides over the other three.[20] In understanding the creatures' countenances in this fashion, Origen is dependent upon Plato's metaphor for the soul as a charioteer driving two winged horses set out in *Phaedrus* 246ff.[21]

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[18] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.2.67. Origen attributes this to Paul, in an allusion to 1 Cor 2.13, *interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit.*

[19] Ibid., 1.15.4–8. Origen strengthens the identification of the four living creatures as cherubim, which is based on Ezekiel 10, by quoting Psalm 79.2b (LXX).

[20] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.16.3–19. Crouzel observes that this passage is unusual in Origen because he normally rejects the platonic view of the tripartite soul in favor of the pauline idea of the entire human being (1962, 60–61).

[21] This metaphor appears in *Phaedrus* 246ab, 253d–254e (see Appendix 2); *Rep* 436–441; and *Tim* 69d–70a. On the conception of the tripartite soul in these works, see Nussbaum 1986, 222–23. After Plato, the notion of the soul as a charioteer driving a team of horses became a commonplace (Mähl 1969, 12). Pierre Courcelle (1974) has analyzed the neo-Platonic and Christian tradition concerning the soul's wings, but when treating the Christian authors he gives little attention to exegetical issues. See also d'Alès, 1933.

Origen also explores the import of the term *cherubim*, noting that it means "fullness of comprehension," and concluding, "Whoever is full of knowledge is made a cherub, and God directs this person."[22] He returns to this image of the divinely guided cherub, with its implicit theme of obedience, in his closing exhortation: "Let us become cherubim which are under God's feet, to whom the wheels of the world are attached, and whom the wheels follow (cf. Ez 1.19–21)."[23]

Origen's construal of the four living creatures is quite spare, in contrast to his development of the theme of spiritual purgation, and seems to be little more than an afterthought. Nonetheless, in the fourth century this interpretation will become prominent when it is developed by both Ambrose of Milan and Pseudo-Macarius.

Ambrose of Milan

Although Ambrose of Milan never treats Ezekiel 1 in its entirety, he deals with portions of it in a number of his writings. In his various explications, two prominent themes emerge. The first, addressed in chapter 2, concerns the unity of the Old and New Testaments. The second probes the passage for its tropological meaning and occurs in *De virginitate, De Abraham*, and *De Iacob et vita beata*. In the first two works, Ambrose focuses on the creatures and their wings, appropriating and rewriting Plato's metaphor of the soul as chariot to which Origen had alluded at the close of his homily, while in the much briefer commentary in *De Iacob* he concentrates on the chariot's *wheel within a wheel*. I begin with *De virginitate* because it contains his fullest moral reading of the prophet's vision, and then turn to the other two treatises, showing how they complement it. Throughout, special attention will be given to the way Ambrose christianizes his classical sources in the course of interpreting Ezekiel 1 and other scriptural texts.

De virginitate is probably based on homilies Ambrose preached to defend his position on virginity set forth earlier in *De virginibus*.[24] The

[22] *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.15.6–8.
[23] Ibid., 1.16.21–23.
[24] I am following the paragraph enumeration in E. Cazzaniga's 1952 edition of *De virginitate*; Migne has typographical errors in the numbering starting at 17.107.

centerpiece of his vindication and praise of this vocation is an exposition of the Song of Songs. In chapter 15, he treats Song of Songs 6.12b (Vulg. 6.11b), *He set me in the chariots of Aminadab* (*Posuit me currus Aminadab*).[25] Ambrose does not mention the first half of this verse, *nescivi anima mea conturbavit me*, but he seems to have it in mind because after quoting 6.12b he observes that

> . . . our soul is joined to the body in the same way that a chariot with clamoring horses needs a certain guide as its charioteer.[26]

This conjunction of *anima* and *currus* prompts him to think of Plato's chariot metaphor (*Phaedrus* 246ff.),[27] and he begins to explore what Song of Songs 6.12b implies for a Christian understanding of the soul. Since Aminadab is the father of Nahshon, the leader (*princeps*) of the tribe of Judah in Numbers 2.3, Ambrose concludes that Aminadab is a type of Christ, the true *princeps* of human beings. Thus, the righteous soul has Christ as its charioteer.[28] In words strongly reminiscent of the *Phaedrus*, Ambrose details both the disruptive behavior of the wicked horse and the driver's efforts to overcome it and steer his team to "the Plain of Truth."[29]

Nonetheless, since Cazzaniga is scarce, references to it are followed by citations, in square brackets, to the 1845 Migne text. The oral delivery and subsequent publication of *De virginitate* are usually dated to *ca.* 378; see, e.g., Di Berardino 1986, 167–78; McLynn 1994, 63–4; De Labriolle 1928, 218–19. However, Michaela Zelzer has challenged this, arguing that *De virginitate* was written near the end of Ambrose's life and represents a synthesis of his ascetic thought (2000). If Zelzer is correct, Ambrose's reading of Ezekiel 1 in *De virginitate*, his fullest treatment, can be seen as the culmination of those in *De Abraham* and *De Iacob*. Nonetheless, for our study of the exegetical tradition's development, the dating of *De virginitate* does not pose a crucial problem. In terms of chronology, Jerome is the next significant Latin exegete of Ezekiel 1 after Ambrose. Since Jerome composed his commentary after Ambrose's death, he most likely would have had access to all of his interpretations.

[25] Ambrose quotes only Song of Songs 6.12b and his version differs from the Vulgate, in which the entire verse reads: *nescivi anima mea conturbavit me propter quadrigas Aminadab*. This text is the most difficult and vexing in the Song of Songs. On the thorny translation problems of the Hebrew and the ways in which the Septuagint, Vulgate, and later commentators attempted to make sense of it, see Pope 1977, 584–592.

[26] *Virgin.* 15.94 (1952, 44.6–8 [PL 16.290b]).

[27] For the relevant sections of *Phaedrus*, see Appendix 2.

[28] *Virgin.* 15.94 (1952, 44.5–13 [PL 16.290b]). As we saw in chapter 2, Ambrose also uses Ezekiel 1 and names the soul's charioteer as Christ in his explication of Psalm 118.32 (LXX).

[29] Ibid., 15.96 (1952, 44.24–45.9 [PL 16.290d]).

Although Ambrose borrows a number of elements of Plato's myth,[30] he also introduces several theologically substantive changes. First and most obvious, through a typological reading of Aminadab, he shows that the soul's charioteer is Christ, instead of Zeus or reason.[31] Moreover, while he follows Plato in calling the soul's desired pasture "the Plain of Truth" (*Phaedrus* 248b), he draws a distinction between the nourishment mentioned by the philosopher and that which Christ provides. In *Phaedrus* 247c–e, the horses of the gods' chariots return to their stable and are fed ambrosia after beholding "true being;" in 248ab the unruly teams pulling mortals' chariots, unable to take in the sight of eternal verities, consume "the food of semblance." In contrast, the steeds of the Christian soul are given eucharistic fodder. Identifying this sacramental sustenance, Ambrose not only quotes John 6 but also echoes Luke 2.7, the account of Mary placing the infant Christ in a manger. The steeds which submit to "the yoke of the Word," he explains, are led "to the Lord's manger (*ad Domini praesepe*)" (cf. Lk 2.7) where they eat, not hay (*non fenum est esca*), but rather *the Bread which comes down from heaven* (cf. Jn 6.33).[32]

Thus far Ambrose has not yet referred to Ezekiel 1. However, he hints that this passage will be central to his rewriting of Plato's metaphor in at least two ways. First, although Ambrose generally seems to follow the *Phaedrus* in understanding the chariot to have two horses, in one section he portrays it as pulled by four steeds that correspond to the soul's dispositions or movements (*affectiones*):

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[30] On Ambrose's dependence upon the *Phaedrus*, see Courcelle 1956, pp. 226–228, especially p. 227 n. 5, where he lays out the parallels between *De virginitate* 15.96 and passages from Plato's dialogue.

[31] The identity of the charioteer in the *Phaedrus* is somewhat ambiguous. In one passage Plato speaks of Zeus as driving his winged team (246e), just as the other gods guide theirs (247b). The charioteer of mortals' souls is not explicitly named but seems to be reason, since Plato, using a nautical metaphor, calls it "the soul's pilot (κυβερνήτης)" (247c); cf. *Timaeus* 70a.

[32] *Virgin.* 15.96 (1952, 45.6–9 [PL 16.290d]). Although *ad Domini praesepe* could be translated as "to the Lord's stable," I have rendered it as "to the Lord's manger" because the Latin text of Luke 2.7—both the Vulgate and Ambrose's version (see Ambrose's text of this verse in his *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*; CCL 14, 48.548–50)—says that Mary laid the infant Jesus *in praesepio*. (The form *praesepium* is a variant of *praesepe*; see OLD 1441.) Doubtless Ambrose intended his audience to hear this echo of Luke's nativity story, which would only strengthen the reference to the Incarnation made through quotation of John 6.33.

ira, *cupiditas*, *voluptas*, and *timor*.[33] This doubling prefigures the way in which Ambrose will engage Plato in a later section of *De virginitate* by drawing a correspondence between the soul's *affectiones*, the four cardinal virtues, and the chariot and creatures of Ezekiel 1. He gives his readers a second indication of the significance of the prophet's vision for his topic immediately after he describes the soul as feeding on *the Bread which comes down from heaven*. Here he suggests that the Holy Spirit plays a role in this incorporeal vehicle:

> The prophet spoke about the wheels of this chariot: *And the Spirit of life was in the wheels* (Ez 1.20). This is so inasmuch as the chariot of the soul is smooth and round (*teres atque rotundus*) and rolls without any obstruction (*sine ulla offensione*).[34]

This passage is especially interesting because Ambrose not only introduces the prophet's vision but also borrows from both Cicero and Horace.

In *Satire* 2.7, Horace invites his slave Davus to speak his mind freely since it is the Saturnalia. Davus begins by cataloguing Horace's inconstancies and vacillations. Alluding to the Stoic paradox, "Every fool is a slave," Davus suggests that Horace might be found to be more of a fool than his own bondsman. Davus' criticism moves to a deeper level when, after recounting his master's adultery, he observes that Horace is a prisoner both to another man's wife and to fear. Sharpening his judgment still more, he points out that were Horace to object that he has not actually committed infidelity he would be no less captive, for his innocence would spring from dread of being caught, not from inner discipline, the hallmark of the sage. Davus then characterizes the wise man as the only truly free person,

> . . . who is lord over himself, whom neither poverty nor death nor bonds affright, who bravely defies his passions, and scorns ambition,

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[33] *Virgin.* 15.95 (1952, 44.14–15 [PL 16.290b–c]). Here *affectiones* could be translated as "passions." However, later in the treatise Ambrose will use the same term for those virtuous qualities which correspond to, but counteract, the passions mentioned here. Thus I have chosen to translate *affectiones* as "dispositions" or "movements" in both sections.

[34] Ibid., 15.97 (1952, 45.10–13 [PL 16.290d–291a]). For Ambrose's use of *teres* see below, including note 56. I have translated *sine ulla offensione* as 'without any obstruction' because the prevailing image here is of the soul's smooth-rolling chariot. However, Ambrose almost certainly intends *offensio* also to convey the idea of 'transgression' (OLD, 1242). In *De Iacob et vita beata* he employs *sine ulla offensione* when expounding Ezekiel's wheels and makes the moral sense primary.

> who in himself is a whole, smoothed and rounded (*teres atque rotundus*), so that nothing from outside can rest on the polished surface, and against whom Fortune in her onset is ever maimed.[35]

Davus challenges Horace to find any of these traits in himself. Confident that he will not, Davus, employing the image of a charioteer, tells Horace that lust, his master (*dominus*), goads him on.[36]

Ambrose, in his portrayal of the chariot of the soul, has used the exact words Horace placed on Davus' lips to characterize the wise man: *teres atque rotundus*. But the points of contact between Ambrose's composition and Horace's satire are not limited simply to this phrase, because Davus's description of the sage appears in a discussion of slavery to the master, lust, that also includes a brief allusion to a charioteer. Thus, the context of Davus's profile of the wise man resonates with the theme of *De virginitate*, since Ambrose is counseling both virgins and his wider audience not only to shun desire for the world and its temptations, but also to remain faithful and entrust themselves to their true lord and bridegroom, Christ.[37]

The other classical quotation in this section of *De virginitate* is from Cicero's *Oratio post reditum ad populos*. Cicero opens this speech by observing that if he had lived a tranquil life, he would never have experienced the kindness bestowed upon him by the people after his return from exile. His account of this peaceful existence which eluded him includes the phrase *vitae sine ulla offensione cursu*.[38] Ambrose uses part of this expression, but it does not have the same degree of resonance with Cicero's text that his borrowing from Horace did with its original context in *Satire* 2.7. I draw attention to it, however, because it occurs several times in Ambrose's exegesis of Ezekiel's vision.

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[35] *S.* 2.7.83–88. Quotations are from the Loeb Classical Library edition. My discussion of Horace is indebted to Niall Rudd's treatment (1966, 188–201). Augustine also describes the wise man as *teres atque rotundus* (*Quant. an.* 16.27). This picture of the sage may be dependent on Plato's account of creation in *Timaeus* 33bc: the world is smooth and round because the sphere is the most perfect figure.

[36] *S.* 2.7.93–94. Horace here uses language that can refer to prodding horses (*stimulus*; see OLD, 1820) and steering them (*versare*; see OLD, 2040). See also Rudd 1966, 193.

[37] See, e.g., *Virgin.* 5.26, 12.74–76, and 16.99–102. Although *De virginitate* is addressed primarily to the virgin, at several points Ambrose makes it clear that he also has the larger Christian community in mind. For example, in 15.93 he says, "Seek [Christ] then, virgin, and let us all seek him."

[38] *Red. Pop.* § 2.

After this brief mention of Ezekiel's wheels in *De virginitate* 15.97, Ambrose temporarily sets aside the notion of the soul as chariot and, in chapter 16, turns to the imagery of the Word of God entering his garden (Song of Songs 6.1). In this section Ambrose details both the virgin's dependence on Christ for the cultivation of the virtues and for cleansing her soul and Christ's role as physician, righteousness, light, life, the way, etc.

The soul and its ascent to God come to the fore again in chapter 17 when Ambrose exhorts the virgin to avoid boastfulness as her virtue increases. In this warning he echoes Virgil's reflections on the wisdom of bees who know the limitations of their fragile wings (*Georgics* 4.195–96). Moreover, when delineating these insects' exemplary flight that can teach the virgin so much, Ambrose uses the expression "oar-like wings" (*remigium alarum*) from *Aeneid* 6.19, a favorite virgilian phrase he will quote more than once in *De virginitate*.[39]

Continuing to describe the virgin's prudent flight, Ambrose observes that "[t]he soul has its own wings," and supports this assertion with Isaiah 60.8: *Who are these that fly like clouds, and like doves with their own young?* Alluding again to the myth in the *Phaedrus*, he remarks that when the soul calms the horses' agitation (*perturbatio*) it rises "above the world (*supra mundum*)" where justice, purity, goodness, and wisdom exist.[40] Here Ambrose combines Plato's imagery with language Cicero uses to discuss the Stoic understanding of πάθος which he terms *perturbatio*.[41]

The soul, Ambrose explains, needs to be *supra mundum* because the terrestrial realm is Satan's domain, a point he establishes with John 14.30 and Matthew 4.8. In addition, he reassures his audience that one can still be in the body when "above the world." To be in this exalted state simply means that nothing earthly touches one and the soul's wings are interiorized, for "the person who carries God in his body is above the world."[42]

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[39] *Virgin.* 17.107 (1952, 49.12–21 [PL 16.293b–c]). For these and Ambrose's other allusions to Virgil, see Diederich, 1931 (83–4 on *De virginitate*). *Alarum remigium* appears ten times in Ambrose's works (Ibid., 121). In Virgil, the combination occurs both in *Aeneid* 1.301, the report of Mercury's flight to Carthage to ensure that the city would welcome the fleeing Trojans, and in *Aeneid* 6.19 which recounts Daedalus offering his wings to Apollo and building a temple in honor of him.

[40] *Virgin.* 17.108 (1952, 49.22–50.12 [PL 16.293c–d]).

[41] See, e.g., *Tusculan Disputations* 3.4.7, 3.10.23, and 4.6.11.

[42] *Virgin.* 17.109 (1952, 50.13–20 [PL 16.294a]). Jn 14.30: *I will no longer talk much*

Adding a disclaimer to his discussion, Ambrose asserts that no one should think he is drawing upon the writings of the philosophers and poets for the symbolism of the soul's wings, chariots, and horses. These images, he explains, come from Scripture, notably Ezekiel's vision, and the classical authors borrowed them.[43]

To illustrate this independence from the classical philosophical and literary traditions, Ambrose quotes and interprets Ezekiel 1.3–5 and 10–11,[44] focusing on the four living creatures with their outstretched wings (*et alae eorum extensae*). Together they represent the soul, and the individual animals depict its four dispositions or movements (*affectiones*).[45] Here, however, the *affectiones* listed in chapter 15 (*ira, cupiditas, voluptas*, and *timor*) are replaced with *rationabilis, impetibilis, concupiscibilis*, and *visibilis*. The man signifies rationality (*rationabilis*), the lion spiritedness (*impetibilis*),[46] the ox desire (*concupiscibilis*), and the

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with you, for the ruler of this world is coming; Mt 4.8: *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world . . .*

[43] Ibid., 18.112 (1952, 51.24–52.10 [PL 16.294d–295a]). Ambrose makes a similar remark in *De Abraham*; see the discussion below. Ambrose is not the first Christian author to claim that Plato borrowed the metaphor from Ezekiel. To my knowledge, the earliest occurrence of this is in the late third-century work *Cohortatio ad Graecos* (*Coh. Gr.* 31; PG 6.297c–300a; Marcovich in Pseudo-Justin 1990, 68). Pseudo-Justin, as its anonymous author is known, seeks to demonstrate that Plato derived many of his "doctrines" from the Old Testament (Marcovich in Pseudo-Justin 1990, 3–9; cf. Runia 1993, 184–88; Grant 1958, 128–34; Harnack 1968, II.2, 151–58). He asks how Plato could have learned about "the winged chariot which he says Zeus drives," if not from the prophetic writings, and then quotes Ezekiel 11.22:

> *And the glory of the Lord went out from the house, and it rested on the cherubim, and the cherubim lifted up their wings. The wheels were beside them and the glory of the Lord of Israel was over them.*

It was this biblical text, he explains, that inspired the philosopher to cry out "O great Zeus, driving the winged chariot in heaven" (*Phaedrus* 246e). Although Pseudo-Justin simply quotes Ezekiel 11.22, never even naming the prophet, his use of it is noteworthy because he explicitly draws the connection between the chariots of the *Phaedrus* and Ezekiel's vision.

[44] *Virgin.* 18.112–13 (1952, 52.3–18 [PL 16.295a–b]).

[45] Ibid., 18.114 (1952, 52.19–53.6 [PL 16.295a–b]). Ambrose acknowledges parenthetically that the living creatures correspond to the four gospels, but he neither dwells on this nor outlines the correspondences. In *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*, Ambrose sets out and explains the correlation of the four creatures to the gospels, but he explicitly refers to Revelation 4, not Ezekiel 1 (*Luc.* Prologue, 7; CCL 14, 5.115–32).

[46] The word Ambrose uses here, *impetibilis*, is especially difficult to translate and should not be confused with its homograph which means impassibility. Because Ambrose elsewhere relates *impetibilis* to the Greek θυμικόν I have translated it as "spiritedness" (cf. Blaise-Chirat 1954, 412). *Impetibilis* may also carry the overtone

eagle discernment (*visibilis*). Ambrose explains why these *affectiones* are different from those introduced earlier: that discussion dealt with those souls which, having been invited to heaven, are receiving instruction and making spiritual progress. The soul portrayed in Ezekiel's vision, however, is already perfected and resides in heaven with the Word of God.[47] Observing that this purified soul's *affectiones* parallel the qualities which the Greek sages deemed present in every wise man—*logisticon, thymeticon, epithymeticon*, and *dioraticon*—and correspond in Latin to the four cardinal virtues of prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice, Ambrose elucidates the correlations between these attributes and the virtues:

> Prudence is based upon human reason; fortitude scorns death and has a certain capacity for strength which makes one fierce; temperance, by the bond of holy charity and by contemplation of the heavenly mysteries, disdains the desires of the body; justice, since it is set in a particularly lofty position, sees and inquires into all things.[48]

In this correspondence between the entire grouping of the four creatures and the virtues, the eagle (*aquila*) stands for discernment (*visibilis*) which is associated with *iustitia* and, in Greek, *dioraticon*. Ambrose elaborates on how this bird symbolizes justice, observing that it also signifies the righteous soul "because it flees earthly things" and, concentrating on "the mystery of the resurrection, it obtains glory as the prize for its righteousness." Based upon this identification, he concludes that the words of Psalm 103.5—*Your youth will be renewed like an eagle's*—are spoken to the soul.[49]

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of volatility, for in Christian authors θυμικόν often connotes the tendency toward anger. Ambrose also employs *impetibilis* to correspond to θυμικόν in his *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* 7.139. The numerous variants for *impetibilis* in this work's manuscript tradition attest to the term's difficulty (see the critical notes in CCL 14, 262.1495).

[47] Cf. *Phaedrus* 246b–c where Plato explains that the perfect (τελέα), fully-winged soul ascends upward and governs the entire world. In contrast, that soul which has lost its wings is confined to the earth.

[48] *Virgin.* 18.115 (1952, 53.10–15 [PL 16.295b–c]). On Ambrose's reference to the cardinal virtues in this passage and others, see Mähl 1969, 12–14. See *De Isaac vel anima* 8.66 for a passage in which Ambrose articulates more clearly the relation between the four virtues and the passions.

[49] *Virgin.* 18.115 (1952, 53.17–21 [PL 16.295c–296a]). Ambrose has actually presented two explications of Ezekiel 1 here: first, the creatures as sign of the perfected, virtuous soul and second, the eagle as icon of the righteous soul. Offering his audience alternate construals of a text is typical of Ambrose; see Nauroy 1985, 393–396.

Ambrose reinforces the image of the soul as an ascending bird by turning to the songs of David, specifically Psalm 123.7 (*Our soul [nostra anima] has escaped like a bird [passer] from the hunter's snare*) and Psalm 10.2 (*I trust in the Lord; how can you say to my soul [animae meae], 'Flee to the mountain like a bird [passer]'?*). These texts confirm that "the soul has its own wings with which it can lift itself up free from the earth." Speaking of this motion that carries the soul upward, Ambrose again uses the virgilian phrase *alarum remigium*.[50] This oar-like movement, he observes, is "an uninterrupted sequence of good works" that is similar to the Lord's exemplary deed, the crucifixion. Delineating the relationship between the crucifixion and wings, Ambrose quotes Psalm 56.2 (*I will hope in the shadow of your wings [in umbra alarum tuarum]*) and explains that Christ's arms, outstretched on the cross, are like wings which temper the flames of this fiery world, and provide "the cool shade (*umbra*) of eternal salvation."[51]

Having presented this picture of the crucified Christ, whose extended arms are the shadow of God's wings and a refuge of hope for the ascending soul, Ambrose encourages his audience to apply themselves to this spiritual flight:

> Since all of us have been given this ability to fly, let everyone cultivate gratitude to God and *forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, press on toward the goal* (cf. Phil 3.13–14).[52]

Although Ambrose does not actually refer to Plato here, his quotation of Philippians 3.13–14 sets up a tacit but significant contrast to the philosopher's description of the advancement of the soul. For Plato, the soul progresses in a cyclical manner that involves reincarnation (*Phaedrus* 248c–249c), but for Ambrose, it moves along a linear path and ideally draws ever closer to God.

Ambrose immediately adds a caveat to his exhortation, recalling Icarus' reckless course. He warns his flock to distance themselves from the passions of this world, so that what happened to the young boy might not befall them as well. Ambrose insists that the story of Icarus is not true, but he intimates that this fable holds a lesson for them nonetheless. Their spiritual flight should reflect their prudence and wisdom. If, instead, they imitate those who are immature, fickle,

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[50] See note 39 above.
[51] *Virgin.* 18.116 (1952, 53.22–54.14 [PL 16.296a–b]).
[52] Ibid., 18.117 (1952, 54.15–17 [PL 16.296b]).

and easily swayed by earthly desires, like Icarus, they will crash to the earth.[53]

Ambrose's remark about Icarus is noteworthy because it follows so closely upon his characterization, in the previous paragraph, of the motion of the soul's wings as an *alarum remigium* when he explores the metaphor of bees' judicious flight. What makes his quotation so interesting is that in *Aeneid* 6.19 *alarum remigium* refers to Daedalus' wings that carried him to safety even as Icarus plunged to his death after forgetting his father's counsel. When Ambrose first employs this expression, he advises the virgin to avoid the sin of boastfulness and learn from the wisdom of bees. Although he does not name Icarus in this first passage, the echo of Virgil provided by *alarum remigium* reminds the virgin of the consequences of imprudent flight. Ambrose's second use of *alarum remigium* is followed almost immediately by direct mention of Icarus, so that the spiritual instruction to be gained from the story of his fatal voyage is made explicit.

Ambrose concedes that the spiritual flight he is counseling is not easy. Returning to Ezekiel 1, he observes that when the living creatures are in conflict, "the course of human life is difficult."[54] But, he continues, when there is no discord,

> the prophet will see in us that one *wheel above the earth* (Ez 1.15) which is joined to the four creatures. Ezekiel will see his vision again. For up to this point, he sees and he lives, and he will continue to live. He will see, I say, *a wheel within a wheel above the earth* (Ez 1.15–16), gliding without obstruction (*sine offensione*).[55]

In describing the smooth motion of the *wheel within a wheel* which the prophet sees in the virtuous soul with the phrase *sine offensione*, Ambrose echoes Cicero's *Oratio post reditum ad populos* for the second time. More important, however, is his comment that "Ezekiel will see his vision again." This suggests that Ezekiel 1 (and more generally any passage from Scripture) is reenacted and comes to fulfillment in each virtuous Christian's life, an idea that will reappear in Gregory the Great.

This smooth-rolling *wheel within a wheel*, Ambrose continues, is the life of the body when it is "adapted to the soul's virtue" and "molded

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[53] Ibid., 18.117 (1952, [PL 16.296b]).
[54] Ibid., 18.118 (1952, 55.5–6 [PL 16.296c]).
[55] Ibid., 18.118 (1952, 55.7–11 [PL 16.296c]).

to the Gospel teaching." The *wheel within a wheel* is like "a life within a life," a concept that, according to Ambrose, may be understood in two different ways. First, it may symbolize the saints' lives which are free from internal conflict; that is, their earthly existence is continuous with that in the next age.[56] Or, it may indicate that when the body's life is consistent with the soul's, "the experience of eternal life is gathered up in this life of the body."[57] Ambrose concludes his treatment of Ezekiel 1 with a comment on the human figure seated on the throne:

> When those things unite harmoniously (*cum ista congruerint*), then the divine voice will echo (*resultabit*), then *the likeness of a man*—that is, his visual appearance—will be seen above *the likeness of the throne* (Ez 1.5 and 26). This man is the Word, since *the Word was made flesh* (Jn 1.14). This man is the charioteer of our living creatures (*agitator nostrorum animalium*; cf. Ez 1.5), the guide of our habits (*nostrorum rector morum*) . . .[58]

It is not entirely clear what Ambrose is referring to when he says "When those things unite harmoniously. . . ." Presumably he simply means all the things he has just mentioned. That is, when the life of the body, that of the saints, and the upward ascent of the righteous soul are all in accord, then the figure on the throne will be recognized as the Word made flesh.

Ambrose also develops the notion of the winged soul in *De Abraham*,[59] where he again treats Ezekiel 1 in terms of the virtues. While his remarks in *De virginitate* arise from interpretation of the *currus Aminadab* of Song of Songs, in *De Abraham* the discussion is prompted by Genesis 15, the record of the covenant ceremony between God and Abraham. Commenting upon the animals that God asks the patriarch to sacrifice (Gen 15.9), Ambrose concentrates on the birds, the turtledove and

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[56] Ambrose makes a similar point in the section of *De Spiritu sancto* we examined in chapter 2. There he explains that a wheel within a wheel denotes "the grace of the two testaments, since the life of the saints is smooth (*teres*) and so in harmony with itself (*ita sibi concinens*), that the later parts are consistent with the earlier [ones] . . ." (*Spir.* 3.21.162, CSEL 79, 218.22–32). As we will see momentarily, he also uses *teres* when talking about the Maccabean martyrs, especially the fourth brother.

[57] *Virgin.* 18.118 (1952, 55.14–17 [PL 16.296c–297a]). In relating Ezekiel's wheel within a wheel to "a life within a life" Ambrose is also echoing the philosophical conception of the human being as microcosm discussed in chapter 2.

[58] Ibid., 18.119 (1952, 56.1–6 [PL 16.297a–b]).

[59] *De Abraham* was written between 382 and 388. For questions concerning its dating, content, and composition, see Di Berardino 1986, 156.

pigeon. They remind him of the doves offered by Jesus' parents in the Temple (Lk 2.22–24) and the birds that nest in the branches of the mustard tree (Lk 13.18–19). In turn, all these avian images lead him to Ezekiel 1.24 and the sound of the living creatures' wings (*vocem alarum eorum*).[60]

Ambrose quotes this verse, but does not initially expound on the wings. Instead, he turns to the chariot, asserting that Plato borrowed this figure from Ezekiel.[61] Moreover, he observes that there are discrepancies between the prophet's and the philosopher's descriptions. He notes that Plato identified the flying chariot as heaven[62] and corrects this mistaken appropriation of Ezekiel's imagery:

> But the prophet did not say that heaven itself is a bird. Rather, he said that there are birds in heaven. And David said, *The heavens are telling the glory of God* (Ps 19.1). This refers either to the heavenly powers or to the way God is proclaimed to be the creator when the beautiful element is seen. Moreover, the prophet describes the soul which has four emotions (*motus*) which are like horses: λογιστικόν, θυμικόν, ἐπιθυμητικόν, and διορατικόν. These are the four living creatures, that is, the man is λογικόν, the lion θυμικόν, the ox ἐπιθυμητικόν, and the eagle διορατικόν. Reason (*ratio*) has been set in front so that the rest may follow.[63]

Having laid out the correspondences between the soul's four emotions and the living creatures, Ambrose turns to the wheels of Ezekiel 1.19,[64] noting that when the living creatures are elevated, the wheels

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[60] *Abr.* 2.8.53; CSEL 32.1, 606.7–24. Savon considers that the connection between the three texts dealing with birds (i.e., Gen 15.9, Lk 2.22–24, and Lk 13.18–19) is tenuous and suggests that the link joining them to Ezekiel 1 is found in Ambrose's exegesis of the parable of the mustard seed (*Exp. Luc.* 7.185 ll. 2033–2035) where he draws a parallel between the ascending soul and the birds that nest in the mustard tree (Savon 1977, I.150). However, Savon does not seem to realize that the imagery of wings is sufficient to tie these texts together, as we have already seen in *De virginitate*. Much of Ambrose's discussion of the soul arises from avian references; see, for example, *De bono mortis*.

[61] *Abr.* 2.8.54; CSEL 32.1, 607.1–6.

[62] Of course, Plato does not actually designate the flying chariot as heaven. The passage Ambrose is alluding to is probably *Phaedrus* 246e where Plato says that the charioteer Zeus is *in heaven* (ἐν οὐρανῷ). Savon is almost certainly correct in suggesting that Ambrose makes this mistake because he is relying on Philo's *Quaestiones in Genesim* 3.3 (Savon 1977, I.151; cf. Madec 1974, 45 n. 123).

[63] *Abr.* 2.8.54; CSEL 32.1, 607.6–14. Here Ambrose seems to give *ratio* the premier position thus departing from his earlier claim in *De virginitate* that justice is preeminent.

[64] *Abr.* 2.8.54; CSEL 32.1, 607.15–608.1.

are also. This coordinated movement has implications for understanding human life:

> If the four emotions of our soul (*animae nostrae motus quattuor*) are lifted up, then our life is raised up also. This is why Ezekiel added, *Since the spirit of life was in the wheels* (Ez 1.20).

Ambrose does not elucidate what Ezekiel 1.20 portends for a theological anthropology, but reinforces his association of the soul and chariot by quoting Song of Songs 6.12: *You set me in the chariots of Aminadab*. In this verse it is the soul which speaks, and the chariots of Aminadab are God's. He concludes, "Therefore the prophetic narrative does not agree with the tradition of the philosophical schools."[65] Although he does not elaborate on this comment, in this context Ambrose may be emphasizing that the chariot of the soul is not, as in *Phaedrus* 246e, the vehicle driven by Zeus but rather that of the God who called Abraham. Finally, Ambrose turns to the sound of the living creatures' wings, the very detail which prompted him initially to mention the prophet's vision. Here he equates the wings themselves with the four virtues:

> Indeed, the prophet said he heard *the sound of wings* (*vocem alarum*) (cf. Ez 1.24). These wings are the virtues. With their mighty and twofold beating they echo (*resultant*) the melodious grace of prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice, the refrain of life (*vitae cantilenam*).[66]

These remarks are a springboard for still more criticism of Plato. The philosopher, Ambrose avers, following after "glory and ostentation rather than the truth," borrowed another idea from the prophet: the *vitae cantilena*, the "melodious grace of prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice" voiced by Ezekiel's living creatures' wings, is what Plato called the music of the heavenly spheres. Here Ambrose does not limit his judgment to non-Christians: he takes Origen to task for too readily accepting Plato's understanding of this celestial song. Concluding this critique of philosophy, he quotes Colossians 2.8,

> *See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.*[67]

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[65] Ibid., 2.8.54; CSEL 32.1, 608.1–4.
[66] Ibid., 2.8.54; CSEL 32.1, 608.4–7.
[67] Ibid., 2.8.54; CSEL 32.1, 608.7–21. Ambrose may be indebted to Philo

Before turning to *De Iacob et vita beata*, we should note several similarities and differences in these two treatments of the vision. First, and most obvious, the exposition in *De Abraham* is less detailed than that in *De virginitate*. Nonetheless, the basic idea is the same: Ezekiel's chariot is the virtuous soul ascending to God, and Plato borrowed this from the prophet. Second, Ambrose's critique of philosophy is more overt and polemical in *De Abraham*, probably due to the varied purposes of these works: *De virginitate* is a defense of asceticism, while one of the aims of *De Abraham* is to argue against the pagan practice of haruspicy.[68] Third, the two readings diverge largely because the equation between the soul's movements and the virtues is not made in *De Abraham*. Instead, the four dispositions correspond to the living creatures, while the virtues relate to their wings. However, this difference is not theological but rather rhetorical or homiletical. Finally, *De Abraham* lacks the tightly woven tapestry of scriptural texts that Ambrose crafts in *De virginitate*, a point we shall return to.

Ambrose also draws on Ezekiel's vision to illuminate the virtuous Christian's life in *De Iacob*. Probably based upon sermons preached in the late 380s, this work deals with the role of right reason in the virtuous person's attainment of the *vita beata*.[69] It contains a number of allusions to 4 Maccabees, and its closing chapters comprise an extended exposition of the martyrdoms of the priest Eleazar and the seven brothers and their mother. The emphasis on these heroes' endurance under persecution has led some scholars to suggest that Ambrose originally delivered the homilies in 386 when Nicene Christians were faced with the revival of anti-Nicene groups in Milan.[70] The example of the Maccabean martyrs' courage and fidelity presumably would have shored up the resolve of weary Nicene Christians.

(*Quaestiones in Genesim* III.3) for his knowledge of Plato's notion of the music of the heavenly spheres (Madec 1974, 114). When censuring Origen for acceptance of this idea, Ambrose probably has in mind Origen's lost commentary on the Creation account (Savon 1977, I.162 and II.78, n. 195).

[68] Haruspicy survived at least through the end of the fourth century despite the attempts of a number of emperors (Julian excepted!) to eliminate it. See Savon 1977, I.141–43.

[69] Di Berardino 1986, 158 and McHugh in Ambrose 1972, 117. Analyzing both the structure of *De Iacob et vita beata* and Ambrose's use of sources, Nauroy (1974) considers this work to be based on four sermons.

[70] See Di Berardino 1986, 158; Mara 1992, 28; and Simonetti 1992, 78.

Ambrose introduces Ezekiel 1 in his exegesis of the fourth brother's martyrdom.[71] This brother, after being bound to the wheel,[72] cries out to his captors, telling them that in torturing him, they only add to the grace of his suffering and they cannot rob him of the consolation of his death. The young man's cry, Ambrose explains, is

> *the voice of thunder in the wheel* (Ps 76.19 [LXX]),[73] since the heavenly oracle echoes (*resultat*) in the good and virtuous course of such a life (*in bono et inoffenso vitae istius cursu*) . . .

The wheels of Psalm 76.19 and of the fourth brother's torment remind Ambrose of those in Ezekiel 1.15–21:[74]

> Thus I understand more clearly now what I have read,[75] since *a wheel* runs *within a wheel* and is not impeded. For a life lived without any offense (*sine ulla offensione*), whatever the suffering, is smooth (*teres*); even in these circumstances, it runs like a wheel. The law is within grace,[76]

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[71] *Iac* 2.11.49; CSEL 32.2, 63.22–64.9.

[72] Ambrose's account switches the details of the martyrdoms of the third and fourth brothers. In 4 Maccabees 10.1–11 the third brother has his limbs broken, his scalp removed, and finally, in verse 8, he is tortured on the wheel. In 4 Maccabees 10.12–21, the fourth brother's tongue is cut out. In Ambrose, the third brother loses his tongue and the fourth brother is bound to the wheel. This confusion may result from the conflict between the narratives in 4 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees 7.10–14. In the much shorter 2 Maccabees, the third brother dies after his tongue and hands are cut off, and the fourth is said to be tormented "in the same way."

[73] The obvious connection between Psalm 76.19 and the young man's torture is the *wheel*. However, Nauroy has pointed out a more subtle link between the psalm and the martyrdom, in that the young man's spoken confession of faith corresponds to the *voice of thunder* in Psalm 76.19 (1990–91, 66). This, of course, resonates with the interpretations (discussed in ch. 2) in which Psalm 76.19 is taken to refer to the preaching of the Gospel.

[74] The connection between Ezekiel 1.15–21 and Psalm 76.19 (LXX) is clear in Ambrose's text, for both texts contain the word *rota*. For a discussion of this linguistic link which appears in the LXX and Vulgate but not in the Hebrew, see chapter 2.

[75] *Itaque illud quod legi nunc manifestius recognosco*. . . . Nauroy takes *nunc* to modify *legi* and thus to mean that Ezekiel 1 was among the lectionary readings for the liturgy on the day Ambrose delivered the sermon on the Maccabees (1989, 237 esp. n. 53). However, *nunc* can just as easily be taken as modifying *manifestius recognosco*.

[76] Ambrose makes this same point about law and grace with regard to Ezekiel 1.16 in *De Spiritu sancto* 3.21.162. Nauroy (1990–91, 66 n. 53) conjectures that this reading of *the wheel within a wheel* derives from Origen because it is found in Jerome's *Commentary on Ezekiel* (CCL 75, 20.487–88). However, Jerome does not indicate that it is taken from earlier exegetes. Moreover, he was familiar with *De Spiritu sancto*, having criticized Ambrose's reliance on Didymus the Blind's treatise on the Holy Spirit (see McLynn 1994, 289). It is at least possible that this construal originates with Ambrose and Jerome learned it from him.

> and observance of the law is within the course of divine mercy, for the more it rolls, the more it is commended. It is better to endure adversities here, so that we may be able to find consolation from the Lord there. And the fourth brother, fulfilling his course, gave up his spirit and, victorious, poured forth his soul.[77]

Although Ambrose focuses only on the wheels of Ezekiel's vision, this passage from *De Iacob* is in keeping with his earlier treatments of Ezekiel 1, especially in its allusions to classical authors. First, in *De virginitate* 15.97 Ambrose quoted Horace to speak of the virtuous chariot of the soul as *teres atque rotundus*. *De Iacob* lacks the complete expression, but it does describe the life of virtue as *teres*. Second, in *De virginitate* 15.97 and 18.118 Ambrose borrowed part of the phrase *vitae sine ulla offensione cursu* from Cicero's *Oratio post reditum ad populos*. Here he replicates part of it again—in the two clauses *in bono et inoffenso vitae istius cursu* and *sine ulla offensione*—though with a slightly different meaning from that which it carried in its original setting.

While Ambrose is indebted to classical authors for particular phrases, he may be relying on Basil of Caesarea for some features of his exposition. As we saw in chapter 2, when explaining the theological meaning of "thunder" in the homily on Psalm 28.3 (LXX) (*The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders*), Basil brings together the same two texts (Ps 76.19 and Ez 1.15) which Ambrose joins in his remarks on the fourth brother's martyrdom:

> It is also possible for you, using the Church's way of speaking, to give the name *thunder* to that teaching which comes to the souls of those already initiated, after their baptism and through the Gospel's eloquence. *Thunder* denotes the Gospel, as is clear from what the Lord did when he gave the disciples a new name, calling them "Sons of Thunder" (Mk 3.17). Therefore, the voice of such *thunder* is not in just any person, but only in the one worthy to be called a wheel. *The voice of your thunder*, it says, *was in a wheel.* That is, whoever is *straining forward to what lies ahead* (Phil 3.13), like a wheel, touching the earth with a small part of itself, just like that wheel Ezekiel spoke about: *I saw and behold there was one wheel on the earth attached to the four living creatures, and their appearance and their form was as the appearance of tharsis.*[78]

In this brief portion of his homily Basil makes a clear connection between Ezekiel's vision and Christian virtue, showing both that the

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[77] *Iac* 2.11.49; CSEL 32.2, 63.22–64.9.
[78] *Hom. in Ps 28.3*, PG 29.292b.

Christian life involves giving voice to the Gospel's thunder and that to proclaim the Good News in this way is to be like the wheel the prophet saw, whose movement is described in Philippians 3.13 as *straining forward to what lies ahead*. Unlike Ambrose, Basil does not overtly draw on philosophical conceptions of virtue in his comments on Ezekiel 1. Nonetheless, his homily may have inspired some of the bishop of Milan's exegetical moves. In *De Iacob* Ambrose links the wheels of Psalm 76.19 and of Ezekiel 1 together in a way that echoes Basil's juxtaposition of them. Furthermore, although Ambrose does not use Philippians 3.13 in *De Iacob* to speak about the fourth brother's virtue, he quotes it in *De virginitate* 18.117 when exhorting his congregation to apply themselves to the spiritual flight incumbent upon all Christians. That Ambrose both admired and borrowed from Basil's writings is well known, and it seems likely that his interpretations in these treatises were shaped by Basil's reading of Ezekiel 1 and Psalm 76.

In *De virginitate, De Abraham*, and *De Iacob* Ambrose not only embellishes a number of already-existing treatments of Ezekiel 1 in a variety of ways, but also originates several other important themes. Origen related the vision's details to the moral life and the process of spiritual purification. He also sketched the connection between the four creatures' faces and Plato's metaphor for the soul, though without specific mention of the virtuous life.[79] Ambrose combines these motifs from Origen and elaborates on them significantly: he brings together exegesis of Song of Songs 6.12b (*He set me in the chariots of Aminadab*), Ezekiel 1, and a number of other passages pertaining to the soul's

[79] Ambrose is probably indebted to Origen for the connection between the soul and Ezekiel 1. As we saw earlier, Origen merely presents this association in his homily. However, we can be fairly confident that he explored it more thoroughly in his now-lost *Commentary on Ezekiel*, based on Jerome's testimony (*Ezech.* 1.6–8a [CCL 75, 11.209–12.228]; cf. Madec 1974, 124–26 and Savon 1977, 159–161). However, in relating Ezekiel 1 to the cardinal virtues Ambrose may have been influenced by Philo's discussion of the four rivers of Genesis 2.10–14 as symbolizing the cardinal virtues in *Legum Allegoriarum* 1.17.56–23.73. In this regard it is interesting to note that the apse mosaic of the mid-fifth century church of Blessed David, in Thessalonica, brings together Ezekiel 1 and Genesis 2 in its depiction of Christ carried by Ezekiel's creatures above the four rivers of Paradise. See Mathews (1993, 115–19, 136–37, and fig. 88), and cf. Bourguet (1984, 242–243, and fig. 2) for a similar artistic representation in the catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus in Rome. See also Meeks (2002, 130–32) who is less certain that the mosaic depicts the four rivers of Genesis. However, he seems unaware of the fourth-century literary juxtaposition of these texts.

ascent to God;[80] he introduces the correlation between the four living creatures and the cardinal virtues; he draws on the insights of others such as Basil of Caesarea, expanding on them as he integrates them into his own exposition; and finally, he includes images and phrases from classical and philosophical sources in his new reading of the prophet's vision. This last feature is perhaps the most important because Ambrose rewrites and christianizes these Greco-Roman elements as he knits them into his own construal.

Considerable scholarship on Ambrose has concentrated on the question of his sources. While this issue might initially seem straightforward, it is actually complex because of the sophisticated and seamless way he interlaces phrases, images, and ideas from the Bible, classical writers, Jewish texts, and other patristic authors. Numerous works have examined both his familiarity with and use of Plato and neo-platonists, especially Plotinus, and his borrowings from Virgil and Cicero. His debt to Philo and to Christian writers, most notably Origen, has also been explored.[81] While we are not concerned primarily with assessing his knowledge of these authors, several findings of these earlier studies are significant for our investigation. Most important perhaps are those of Courcelle which show that Ambrose's allusions to the *Phaedrus* in *De virginitate* indicate he had read at least *Phaedrus* 246–247 (and perhaps 246–254) even if only in the form of an *excerptum*.[82] His reference in *De virginitate* 18.112 to "philosophers and poets" and his mention of Plato by name in *De Abraham* (2.8.54) suggest at the very least that, regardless of *how* he became familiar with the myth of the soul as chariot, he knew its origin.[83]

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[80] As Courcelle (1968, 318), Madec (1974, 121–26), and others have noted, Ambrose's explication of Song of Songs is indebted to Origen's (preserved in *Excerpta procopiana* [PG 13.197d–215c]). However, neither the fragments from Origen nor the evidence from Jerome suggest that Origen brought Song of Songs 6.12b and Ezekiel 1 together; this appears to be Ambrose's innovation.

[81] Ambrose's use of classical authors in the sections of *De virginitate* and *De Abraham* relevant to our study are examined by Courcelle 1944, 1950, 1956, and 1968; Hadot 1956; Madec 1974; Solignac 1956; and Wilbrand 1911. His dependence on Philo is treated most fully in Savon 1977; see also Nauroy 1985, 372–73 and Dudden 1935, I.113 esp. nn. 2 and 3.

[82] Courcelle 1956; reproduced in Courcelle 1968, 312–319.

[83] See Madec 1974, 44–45. This is not to say that Ambrose's knowledge of Plato's myth was completely accurate. As we have already seen in *De Abraham* 2.8.54 Ambrose reproduces Philo's erroneous claim that Plato identified the flying chariot as heaven. See note 62 above. Nonetheless, regardless of mistakes or confusion, Ambrose recognized that the metaphor of the soul as chariot derived from Plato.

While Ambrose's use of sources has been scrutinized carefully, his appropriation of them through his explication of Scripture has not. For example, almost without exception, scholarship focused on his debt to Plato and Plotinus has explored this issue with a view toward discerning whether, and to what degree, his sermons were the foundation for Augustine's understanding of (a Christianized) neo-platonism.[84] As a result, much effort has been devoted to delineating specific parallels between the works of Plato and Plotinus and those of Ambrose. However, for our study, the way in which he rewrites metaphors, concepts, and phrases from Plato, Virgil, Cicero, and Horace by means of his biblical exegesis is even more significant than his knowledge of and borrowing from them. Moreover, because so little attention has been given to this feature of his corpus, it has been common to assume either that Christian thought was subordinated to pagan concepts when he drew on classical authors, or that

[84] It is baffling that on this topic McLynn writes, "Ambrose did not lead Augustine to Plotinus; *but the reverse may in some sense be true*" (1994, 241; emphasis added) and for support turns to Courcelle's *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin*, p. 138 n. 2. There are several problems with this proposal. First, in the passage McLynn refers to, Courcelle asserts exactly the opposite:

> Même si ma démonstration relative à la date du *De Isaac* et du *De bono mortis* n'avait pas entraîné la conviction, il n'en resterait pas moins sûr qu'Ambroise a lu les *Ennéades* et prêché des doctrines plotiniennes. Prétendre que ces sermons sont postérieurs au séjour d'Augustin reviendrait donc à imaginer qu'Augustin a révélé Plotin à Ambroise. *Ce qui paraît absurde* (emphasis added).

Second, although McLynn offers a possible scenario for his notion that "in some sense" Augustine led Ambrose to Plotinus, it has weaknesses. In his reading, Ambrose was spurred to investigate Plotinus' writings because Manlius Theodorus (probably the "man puffed up with pride" who gave Augustine *platonicorum libri* [*Conf.* VII.9.13]) and his friends, including Augustine, were in Milan in the mid-380s. McLynn contends that "[t]hese Platonist courtiers . . . presented an implicit challenge to the reputation for learning which [Ambrose] had so assiduously cultivated" (1994, 241). However, this narrative does not take into account that from the time of his consecration in 373 or 374, Ambrose had studied with the presbyter Simplicianus, an intimate friend of the neo-platonist Marius Victorinus. This would more naturally lead to the conclusion that Ambrose became familiar with neo-platonism in the 370s, long before Augustine's arrival in Milan. (Cf. Courcelle 1968, 136–8.) Also, in an article not cited by McLynn, Courcelle has argued, through a careful analysis of Ambrose's and Augustine's vocabulary, that certain passages in Augustine suggest that his knowledge of at least some of Plotinus' doctrines was mediated through Ambrose's sermons (1950, 48–51). Finally, more recently Lenox-Conyngham has dated Ambrose's engagement with philosophy, especially neo-platonism, even earlier than Courcelle. He argues that Ambrose was an advocate in Rome in the early 360s and studied philosophy during this time, "when Marius Victorinus was at the peak of his reputation" (1993, 116–18).

he brought in philosophy simply "to 'fortify' his sermons."[85] Concomitant to this, some scholars have dismissed as naïve his assertion that the chronological priority of Moses and the prophets demonstrates the dependence of Plato and other ancient writers on the Old Testament.[86] Likewise, Madec has suggested that Ambrose's comments about philosophy are superficial polemic and his eclectic approach ensures that what he retains from Plato, the Stoics, Cicero, et al., is not "véritable substance intellectuelle," but merely "ornements littéraires."[87] However, such views fail to recognize the deliberate way in which Ambrose modifies these images and ideas through his scriptural interpretation in order to create a Christian culture. While I am not suggesting that his claim of classical authors' reliance upon Moses is historically correct, that he declares this repeatedly and so forcefully should prompt us to think more carefully about the way he employs these texts and whether Christian beliefs are in fact subordinated to pagan ideas.

A definitive statement on these issues would require a comprehensive examination of Ambrose's scriptural exposition, something

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[85] For example, Courcelle suggests that Christians in the late fourth century sought to accommodate their Christianity to their platonism (1944, 65). Elsewhere he characterizes Ambrose's thought as permeated by neo-platonism and describes passages where Ambrose either "suppresses" or "preserves" a particular neo-platonic idea (1950, 1956, and 1961). On the view that Ambrose was fortifying his sermons, see Lenox-Conyngham (1993, 113–14) who considers that Ambrose's use of classical philosophy is instead an attempt to neutralize it (Ibid., 128). While this perspective has more to commend it than the notion that he was accommodating his Christianity to platonism, it still does not recognize the extent to which he thoroughly transforms concepts from classical philosophy through his exegesis.

[86] See, for example, Hagendahl 1958, 355. Also, see Homes Dudden, who considers Ambrose "fanatical in his refusal to allow merit to pagan thinkers," for citations to other passages in which Ambrose makes similar claims about the philosophers' dependence on the Bible (1935, I.15–16).

[87] Madec 1974, 94 and 175. While I agree with Madec that Ambrose has not preserved the intellectual substance of Plato, Cicero, et al., I am arguing that he does not reduce their images and phrases to simply "ornements littéraires." Concerning Ambrose's theory of the philosophers' debt to the Hebrew tradition he writes:

> Ce ne sont que pointes rhétoriques et polémiques assez superficielles; et celles-ci n'ont d'autre objet que de dresser la philosophie en repoussoir pour exalter la sagesse biblique. (Ibid., 94).

While Madec is correct that Ambrose's intent is to hold up scriptural wisdom, his treatment of philosophy is neither superficial nor simply motivated by a desire to set up a foil for the Bible. Rather, Ambrose seeks to foster a Christian culture. Madec also contends both that Ambrose is denouncing the philosophers for taking ideas from Moses as a way of justifying his own borrowing from them (Ibid., 45) and that Ambrose was seduced by the poetic beauty of Plato, just as he was taken in by Virgil (Ibid., 131).

beyond the scope of this study. However, my analysis of Ambrose's use of Ezekiel 1 to rewrite and appropriate Plato's chariot metaphor suggests that the effect of his exegesis is not to subordinate Christianity to platonism, but rather precisely the opposite. The concepts he borrows from the *Phaedrus* are, in the end, thoroughly transformed by and absorbed into his reading of the Bible. Similarly, Ambrose inserts phrases from Virgil, Horace, and Cicero into a tapestry of scriptural quotations and allusions so tightly woven together that the meaning of these classical phrases derives no longer from their original sources but from their new, Christian context.

Ambrose accomplishes this transformation most fully in the portions of *De virginitate* we have discussed. In chapters 15.94–97, he begins with a scriptural image (*the chariots of Aminadab*), and then rewrites the details of *Phaedrus* 246ff. through this and other biblical motifs and texts. By speaking of the soul (*anima*) as being set in a chariot (*currus Aminadab*), Song of Songs 6.12 invites the allusion to Plato. Then, the typological reading of *Aminadab* shows that Christ is the driver of the *currus animae*. With this key point established, Ambrose develops his "corrective reinterpretation" of the philosopher's metaphor. It is Christ, not Reason, who is able to steer unruly steeds into the "Plain of Truth," and they are led not to the troughs of *Phaedrus* 247–248, but "to the Lord's manger (*ad Domini praesepe*)"—as it were, to the Incarnation recounted by Luke and the other gospelers—where they are nourished with eucharistic fodder, *the Bread which comes down from heaven*. Ezekiel's statement, *And the Spirit of life was in the wheels*, further illuminates the *currus animae* when, echoing Horace and Cicero, Ambrose observes that these wheels make the chariot "smooth and round (*teres atque rotundus*)" and ensure that it "rolls without any obstruction (*sine ulla offensione*)." Thus, Horace's "smooth and round" wise man and Cicero's tranquil life are revealed in and defined by Ezekiel's Spirit-filled wheels. With this, Ambrose makes the prophet's vision the source for the meaning of these two classical phrases.

Similarly, in *De virginitate* 17.107–18.119, Ambrose makes the connection to Plato through mention of a chariot.[88] But even more prominent here are metaphors of wings and flight which are grounded

[88] E.g., in 18.112–14 where he quotes Ezekiel 1.3, 10–11 and says that these verses pertain to the soul, and in 18.118–19 where he cites Ezekiel 1.15–16 and calls Christ the charioteer of our souls.

in the specific words of Scripture Ambrose cites as he discusses the virgin's progress toward God. In 17.107 he reintroduces the notion of the soul rising to the celestial realm with one of his favorite virgilian phrases, *remigium alarum*, and an allusion to the bees of *Georgics* 4.195. In his extended discussion of this heavenward movement (17.108–18.119) he quotes the Bible fifteen times [see Table 1 on pp. 153–54]. Seven of these passages—two of which are from Ezekiel's vision—contain one or more terms referring to the soul (*anima*), birds (*columba*, *aquila* [Ez 1.10–11], *passer*), wings (*alae extensae* [Ez 1.10–11], *umbra alarum*), flying (*volare*), or clouds (*nubes* [Ez 1.3–5]). Of the eight remaining, six are directly related to the imagery of the soul's winged pilgrimage.[89] Ambrose presents these six in order to clarify aspects of this ascent, and four of them are from Ezekiel 1 (vv. 15 and 16 in *De virginitate* 17.118, and vv. 5 and 26 in 18.119). Although these texts concern the living creatures, the wheels, and the human figure seen by the prophet, as integral parts of the vision they naturally remind the reader of wings, flight and ascent. Only two of the fifteen passages—Philippians 3.13 and John 1.14—lack conceptual or linguistic links to the other verses, but as Ambrose employs them, both elucidate the nature of the soul's flight. John 1.14 offers additional evidence that the charioteer, the human figure of Ezekiel 1.26, is Christ. Philippians 3.13 specifies the manner in which the soul should advance: pressing on toward its destination with unflagging persistence. But this pauline text also implicitly corrects another feature of Plato's myth. In the *Phaedrus*, the soul's travel toward the Plain of Truth is cyclical insofar as it involves transmigration and the attendant need to grow new wings (248c–249c). Through his use of Philippians 3.13, Ambrose suggests that this journey is linear, thereby tacitly ruling out Plato's theory of reincarnation.

In *De virginitate* 17.107–18.119 Ambrose tightly interweaves a number of biblical verses—connected most often by words but sometimes by imagery—which together confirm that Scripture speaks of the soul as winging its way to God and continue the remedial reinter-

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[89] The two that, on the surface, do not seem pertain to the soul's travel are John 14.30 and John 17.20. Nonetheless, Ambrose quotes these two passages to illuminate this journey. In 17.109 he cites John 14.30 (. . . *the ruler of this world is coming, and he has no power over me*.) to explain that the soul should seek to be above the world with Christ even in this life. Similarly, in 17.110 he uses John 17.20–21 (*I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one* . . .) to urge his audience to imitate the apostles' ascent to God.

pretation of the *Phaedrus* myth he began earlier in 15.94–97. At the same time, worked into this scriptural tapestry, but carefully subordinated to it, are references to classical authors and the cardinal virtues. Ambrose's second use, in 18.116, of Virgil's *remigium alarum* is particularly instructive on this point. After quoting two passages from the Psalms which liken the soul to a bird (Psalm 123.7 and 10.2), he describes its upward movement with the phrase *remigium alarum*. Defining this as "an uninterrupted sequence of good works," he holds up for his congregation the *remigium alarum* par excellence, the crucified Christ whose outstretched arms provide shade and prompt the soul to say, *I will hope in the shadow of your wings* (Ps 56.2). The meaning of *remigium alarum* now comes not from the *Aeneid*, but from the suffering Christ and the Psalmist's mention of wings. But Ambrose goes further, for he expressly echoes the original context of *remigium alarum*, Virgil's version of the tale of Daedalus and Icarus, revealing the careless son to be the counterpoint to Christ. While Christ exemplifies "an uninterrupted sequence of good works," Icarus embodies the fickleness of youth and the foolhardy flight which the virgin should shun. Of course, Icarus had always been a sort of "negative model." Ambrose's innovation is to make Christ the standard against which his imprudent behavior is measured. Thus, even in invoking the classical setting of *remigium alarum*, Ambrose cements his redefinition of it. As he quotes this virgilian phrase, he pours into it new meaning derived from the sacred text and the example of the crucified Christ. Similarly, he introduces the cardinal virtues and the movements of the soul, but through his correlation of them to Ezekiel's creatures, they become dependent on, and in a sense spring from, these biblical animals.

The result of Ambrose's borrowing from philosophy is not the platonizing of his Christianity. Instead, philosophical sources are absorbed into and transformed by Scripture. From Ambrose's perspective, this move is perfectly legitimate: whenever and wherever Truth is found, its ultimate source is the God who has revealed himself in the Bible. The sacred text is therefore the primary source for our understanding of the soul as a winged chariot ascending to God. Plato can only be a secondary, derivative source, at best, and Scripture itself provides a corrective to his errors.

A parallel observation can be made with regard to Ambrose's use of Virgil, Cicero, and Horace. In his borrowings from them we do not have the classicizing of his Christianity, but rather the

christianization of classical literary forms. Moreover, these should not be seen simply as optional embellishments or ornaments.[90] In redefining phrases from these revered authors, investing them with new meaning through the interpretation of Scripture, Ambrose begins to create a distinctively Christian culture, one that echoes the classical to be sure, but is centered on Christ and has the Bible for its framework.[91]

Pseudo-Macarius

Through his construal of Ezekiel 1, Ambrose corrects Plato's conception of the *currus animae*. Another fourth-century author, Pseudo-Macarius, also presents a moral exposition of the prophet's vision, emphasizing both the soul as chariot and Christ as its driver. However, he does not engage the Greek philosophical tradition openly, and the constellation of texts undergirding his exegesis is markedly different from that in Ambrose.

In recent scholarship, study of the anonymous author of the corpus which includes the *Great Letter* and the *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* has been centered on several thorny issues: the identity and provenance

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[90] This appears to be Diederich's position (1931, 126–27). Her judgment seems motivated by a desire to show that Virgil did not affect Ambrose and his theology in any profound way. What I am arguing is that while Ambrose was influenced by virgilian, horatian, and ciceronian discourse, he reshaped it and put it at the service of the Church through his construal of the Bible.

[91] My analysis confirms Nauroy's suggestion that Ambrose is attempting to establish a "biblical culture" in place of the classical (1985, 379–80). McLynn rejects this, but his reasoning is perplexing (1994, 239 n. 71). He agrees with Nauroy that Ambrose's "sermons were addressed to ordinary Christians (against earlier assumptions of an audience of intellectuals)." Nonetheless, McLynn continues, "but [Nauroy's] suggestion of a programme designed to inculcate a comprehensive 'biblical culture' is implausible, given the circumstances of delivery . . ." For support he refers to an article by Ramsey MacMullen (1989) which argues that fourth-century preachers (e.g., John Chrysostom, Basil of Caesarea, Jerome, and Augustine) generally addressed groups made up of the well-educated elite and their slaves, and that a more heterogeneous assembly was likely only for special occasions (e.g., "fair-days" and baptisms). McLynn's citation is puzzling because MacMullen's position undercuts Nauroy's description of Ambrose's audience, one that McLynn claims to agree with. More recently, through a careful analysis of Ambrose's rhetoric, Rousseau has convincingly demonstrated, *contra* MacMullen, that Ambrose preached to a more diverse gathering: "Only a member of the élite [such as Ambrose] could have developed such vivid discipline [i.e., in his rhetorical skills]; *but the invitation to understanding and social inclusion was visibly broader in its address*" (1998, 400 [emphasis added]). Although Rousseau does not give extensive attention to Ambrose's exposition of Scripture, his view is not incompatible with mine.

of the writer now generally known as Pseudo-Macarius; the composition of and connections between the four collections of works attributed to him; the relationship between his *Great Letter* and Gregory of Nyssa's *De instituto Christiano*; and the matter of whether he was Messalian or anti-Messalian.[92] There is now a general consensus that he lived in Asia Minor or Mesopotamia. Although he wrote in Greek, he was deeply influenced by the distinctive thought of Syriac Christianity and was probably bilingual.[93] The question of his association with Messalianism seems as yet unanswered, but this is not problematic for understanding his use of Ezekiel 1. What is critical in this regard is that he was "a seasoned monastic pedagogue" writing for a community of monks in the late fourth-century, offering them guidance for living a Christian life.[94]

Pseudo-Macarius actually cites verses of Ezekiel 1 and interprets them in only two of his fifty homilies. However, his initial explication of the vision occurs in Homily 1 and is extensive, providing a framework for his conception of the soul and the spiritual life, especially the individual's submission to Christ and struggle against the powers of Satan. His second quotation of it, in Homily 33, is brief and simply recapitulates one aspect of his exegesis in Homily 1. Nonetheless, in a number of his other sermons, Pseudo-Macarius alludes to Ezekiel 1 (and his own exposition of it), so that the significance of the prophet's vision extends beyond Homilies 1 and 33.

Pseudo-Macarius begins the first of his *Fifty Spiritual Homilies* with a spiritual reading of Ezekiel 1. He focuses on the four animals, listing their faces, and observing that their wings were placed so that

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[92] In Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Pseudo-Macarius' corpus is listed under Macarius Aegyptius, reflecting its predominant but incorrect attribution (attested in the manuscript tradition) to this renowned hermit of the desert of Scetis (1961, xxxii). On the four collections and their interrelation, see Maloney in Pseudo-Macarius 1992, 5–6. The homilies which draw on Ezekiel 1 are part of the *50 Spiritual Homilies* comprising collection II. I have followed H. Dörries' critical edition and also consulted Maloney's translation. However, Maloney must be used with care, because it is based primarily on the Migne text which is inferior to Dörries'. For a summary of scholarship on the relationship between Pseudo-Macarius and Gregory of Nyssa, see Maloney in Pseudo-Macarius 1992, 9–11 and 28 n. 5. On the debate concerning Pseudo-Macarius and Messalianism, see Stewart 1991, Meyendorff 1970, and Vööbus 1972.

[93] See Vööbus 1972, Maloney in Pseudo-Macarius 1992, 7–10, and Stewart 1991, 9–11, 84–95, 167–237.

[94] Blowers 1991, 42. For the dating of the Pseudo-Macarian homilies to the 380s, see Stewart 1991, 70–71.

each one had no back or hind parts. However, it is their eyes (Ez 1.18 and 10.12) which hold the greatest fascination for him:

> The living creatures' backs were full of eyes, and similarly their breasts were filled with eyes. There was no area which was not full of eyes.[95]

Pseudo-Macarius' assumption that the living creatures themselves, rather than the wheels, are covered with eyes is based upon the Septuagint translation of Ezekiel 1.[96] For him, their luminosity is one of the most striking details of the text, and he returns to this throughout the homily, finding these radiant eyes to be an icon of the soul that has accepted its Lord.

Pseudo-Macarius continues his summary of Ezekiel 1, noting that the spirit was in the wheels and that the Lord sat on the chariot pulled by the living creatures. Moreover, Pseudo-Macarius hints at a special relationship between the charioteer and these animals, for he merely turned to face in whatever direction he desired them to pull this spiritual vehicle.[97]

While Pseudo-Macarius affirms that Ezekiel's vision actually occurred, he nonetheless discerns its meaning in later events, for it foreshadows a

> mystical and divine thing, *a mystery* truly *hidden for ages and generations* (Col 1.26), *revealed at the end of times* (1 Ptr 1.20) at the appearance of Christ.[98]

This is the mystery of the human soul which chooses to receive the Lord and "to become the throne of his glory." Pseudo-Macarius

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[95] *Hom.* 1.1.13–16.

[96] As Halperin has noted, the Septuagint's use of the neuter plural pronoun (αὐτά) in Ezekiel 1.17–18 and 10.11 suggests the translator took these verses to pertain not to the wheels (οἱ τροχοί), but to the living creatures (τὰ ζῷα) (1988, 525 endnote f). Like the Septuagint, the Targum considers the eyes to be on the animals' backs (Levey 1987, 22). Similarly, Revelation 4 says that they are "full of eyes in front and behind" (v. 6), and makes no mention of wheels. Departing from this reading, Jerome, both in his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, and in the Vulgate, understood the eyes to be on the wheels, using the feminine pronoun *ipsarum* (for *rotae*) rather than the neuter *ipsorum* (for *corpora*). Nonetheless, Jerome sometimes construes Ezekiel 1.17–18 as indicating that the creatures, rather than the wheels, are covered with eyes (e.g., *Ep.* 53.8; PL 22.548). Likewise, Gregory the Great considers the eyes to be covering the *animalia*, noting that the prophet's choice of the neuter pronoun *ipsorum* over the feminine *ipsarum* shows that he had shifted his focus from the wheels to the creatures (*Hom. Ez.* I.7.2.).

[97] *Hom.* 1.1.17–21.

[98] Ibid., 1.2.24–27.

accentuates the multitudinous eyes when he depicts the soul that, as the Lord's seat and dwelling-place, becomes "all light, all face, all eye" and "full of the spiritual eyes of light."[99] It has no imperfection and no hind parts, but rather faces forward on all sides, "covered with the inexpressible beauty of the glory of the light of Christ," her charioteer. It is like fire and the sun which are filled with light and lack any defect or posterior part. Pseudo-Macarius paints a dazzling picture of the soul which has attained this spiritual state:

> Thus, the soul which has been perfectly illumined by the inexpressible beauty of the glory of the light of Christ's face and has had perfect fellowship with the Holy Spirit, is deemed worthy to be the dwelling place and throne of God, and becomes all eye, all light, all face, all glory, and all spirit. Christ, who bears, leads, supports (βαστάζοντος), and carries the soul, has fashioned it to be so. In this way, he also prepares the soul and adorns it with spiritual beauty. For it even says, *The hand of a man was underneath the cherubim.* This is because he is the one who both is supported (βασταζόμενος) in the soul and leads it.[100]

Here, using the detail of the hand beneath the living creatures' wings (Ez 1.8 and 10.8, 21) combined with active and passive participles of βαστάζω, Pseudo-Macarius enunciates one of the paradoxes of the Christian spiritual life: that soul which seeks to bear Christ as on a throne also experiences itself as being borne by him.[101]

Like Origen and Ambrose, Pseudo-Macarius understands the four creatures to signify the soul. However, his reasoning is different from theirs, for he explains that these animals are "a type of the soul's leading reasoning parts." Just as the eagle rules other birds, the lion controls wild beasts, the ox commands tamed animals, and human beings govern all creation, so there are "more excellent reasoning parts" which direct the soul, specifically the will, the conscience, the mind, and the power of loving. The creatures symbolize these

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[99] Ibid., 1.2.28–33. Pseudo-Macarius stresses the notion of the indwelling of the divine presence. The vocabulary of indwelling is not unique to him: it has its foundation in the New Testament and is taken up by a number of Greek patristic writers. Nonetheless, Stewart argues that although Pseudo-Macarius is not innovative, he is more expansive in his use of this terminology than most early Christian authors (1991, 203–23).

[100] *Hom.* 1.2.41–50.

[101] For other examples of this sort of paradox in Pseudo-Macarius, cf. *Hom.* 46.4.60–62, "The Lord becomes the soul's inheritance, and the soul becomes the Lord's inheritance," and 46.5.80–81, "[The Lord] reveals [the soul] and is revealed to it."

"reasoning parts" because "through them the chariot of the soul is guided (κυβερνᾶται), and in them God rests."[102] Pseudo-Macarius' use of the verb κυβερνάω is interesting because in *Phaedrus* 247c Plato employs the cognate noun, κυβερνήτης, to speak of reason as the soul's pilot. However, it seems unlikely that this possible echo of the *Phaedrus* reflects Pseudo-Macarius' desire to christianize classical philosophy as was the case with Ambrose, for he does not consistently engage Plato's thought. Moreover, although his psychology occasionally reveals the influence of Greek philosophy, including Stoicism, it seems to be shaped much more by Scripture, notably Romans 2.15.[103]

Expanding on his understanding of the soul's chariot, Pseudo-Macarius explains that its rider, Christ, guides it "with the reins of the Spirit" and the living creatures proceed only in the direction he desires:

> For just as the spiritual creatures went, not where they wanted to go, but where the one seated on them and guiding them both saw and wished them to go, so also here he holds the reins and leads souls by his Spirit, and thus they go, but not in accordance with their own will. When he wishes, in heaven, and after the body has been cast aside, he holds the reins and drives the soul in the heavens by means of the will. And again, when he desires, he comes in the body and the thoughts. When he wishes, he drives the soul to the ends of the earth and shows it the revelations of mysteries. O, what a good and kind and, indeed, only true charioteer![104]

Pseudo-Macarius does not expressly quote Scripture to support his remark that the living creatures go, not where they desire, but where the charioteer wishes. However, it seems likely that he bases this upon Ezekiel 1.12, 20–21.[105]

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[102] Ibid., 1.3.51–57. Halperin is probably correct in assuming that the source for Pseudo-Macarius' comment about the different sections of the animal kingdom ruled by each animal is the rabbinic haggadah of the faces recorded in b. Hagigah 13b (1988, 131 and 136). This haggadah was perhaps mediated to him through other works, since he employs it to explain the correlation between the creatures and the soul's reasoning faculties, while the Talmud uses it to interpret Exodus 15.21 (*Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted*).

[103] Rom 2.15: "*They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them.*" As I noted above (note 21), Plato's metaphor for the soul had become a commonplace. Cf. Colish 1985, I.27–31 on Stoic psychology.

[104] *Hom.* 1.3.72–76.

[105] Cf. Theodoret of Cyrus who, in his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, considers Ezekiel 1.12, 20–21 to witness to the living creatures' obedience to God (PG 81.828a).

In the next five sections of the homily, Pseudo-Macarius does not mention the prophet's vision, but elaborates on the themes which arose from its exposition. Taking his cue from Matthean texts, he presents a number of other metaphors, for example, the Christian as both light of the world and salt, sacrifice and dying to Christ, and the soul as temple. In concluding this train of thought, he returns both to the metaphor of radiance initially suggested by the eyes covering the creatures' backs and to the concept of the soul as chariot, quoting Ezekiel 1.8:

> Therefore, let us pray that we may be sacrificed through his power, die to the age of the evil of darkness, and destroy the spirit of sin within us. Let us put on and receive the soul of the heavenly Spirit and be transported from the wickedness of darkness into the light of Christ. Let us rest in life forever. For just as on the race course, the chariot out in front thwarts and holds back and hinders another from stretching forward and seizing the victory, so also the thoughts of the soul and of sin run the race in human beings. If, by chance, the thought of sin gets ahead, it thwarts and holds back the soul, beating it back and hindering it from drawing closer to God and from gaining the victory over sin. But where the Lord himself is the charioteer who mounts and guides the soul with reins, he is always victorious. He skillfully guides the chariot of the soul into the heavenly and divine mind forever. He does not wage war against wickedness, but since he is the commander with supreme power, he himself always attains the victory. Therefore the cherubim go, not where they wish, but where the one seated upon them, holding the reins, guides them. Wherever he wishes, there they go, and he supports them. For it says, *The hand of a man was underneath them.*[106]

Pseudo-Macarius briefly exhorts his audience to examine themselves and to pray to the Lord for true life. Finally, he returns to Ezekiel l and integrates the imagery developed from it with other scriptural metaphors used throughout the homily, demonstrating how this vision aptly portrays the soul that has attained the goal of freedom from sin and rest in the Lord:

> Therefore, if you have become God's throne, and the heavenly Charioteer is seated upon you, and your whole soul is a spiritual eye and all light, if you have been nourished by that spiritual food, if you have drunk of the living water, if you have put on the raiment of ineffable light, if your inner man has attained all these in experience and full assurance,

[106] *Hom.* 1.9.192–209.

> behold you are already living eternal life, with your soul resting in the Lord.[107]

Homily 33, a short sermon devoted to the subject of prayer, contains the only other explicit mention of Ezekiel 1. Pseudo-Macarius presents the example of a businessman who, in his attempt to make a profit, tries various strategies. We should imitate such a person, he concludes, by cultivating versatility and skill in our souls so that we may attain God. Success in this endeavor is expressed, as in the first homily, in terms of Ezekiel 1: the Lord will find rest in "the soul's good choice," making the soul his throne of glory and resting in it.

> Thus, in the prophet Ezekiel, we heard about the spiritual animals yoked to the Lord's chariot. He presents them to us as all eye. Similarly, the soul which bears God, or rather is borne by God, becomes all eye.[108]

Pseudo-Macarius understands the Christian spiritual life as the struggle to overcome the sin that permeates the soul as a result of the Fall.[109] Although he describes in various ways the victory achieved through the cooperative efforts of the Holy Spirit and the human will, the chariot of Ezekiel 1 with its light-filled living creatures offers him a particularly felicitous symbol for it. Given his penchant for poetic language, it is not surprising that the prophet's vision and the imagery it generates recur and resonate throughout his *Fifty Spiritual Homilies*. What is more interesting about his treatment of Ezekiel 1, however, is that although he shares Ambrose's view that this passage concerns the soul's moral and spiritual progress, the tenor of his homilies is quite different from that of Ambrose's writings. This contrast arises not simply from the absence of the open engagement of the philosophical tradition, but primarily from the distinctive exegetical moves Pseudo-Macarius makes. In Ambrose, the soul's progress is depicted in terms of a vertical axis of ascent. This metaphor is prominent because he emphasizes the living creatures' wings and

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[107] Ibid., 1.12.257–63. The concepts of spiritual experience, rest, and perfection articulated in this passage are central to Pseudo-Macarius' thought. See Vööbus (1972, 15) and Stewart (1991, 96–168).

[108] *Hom.* 33.2.16–28.

[109] For a detailed analysis of Pseudo-Macarius' conception of the spiritual life, see Stewart 1991, 74–83.

construes the vision within a matrix of biblical verses filled with avian references. Both the concept of the soul's chariot and his occasional remarks about "fleeing the earth" reinforce this. In Pseudo-Macarius the controlling theme is instead one of light and darkness. He develops this by stressing the parts of Ezekiel 1 that convey brightness, especially the living creatures' eyes and God's glory, and intensifies it by quoting other passages in Scripture that also suggest illumination. Moreover, although he speaks of the soul as a chariot, he does not expressly engage Plato but rather underscores the soul's need to accept Christ as its charioteer in order to win the battle against evil. Finally, he integrates the biblical motif of eternal rest into his interpretation. However, while Ambrose's and Pseudo-Macarius' different strategies produce readings which on the surface seem so divergent, it is noteworthy that, independent of each other, they both consider the vision to signify the Christian moral life.

Gregory the Great

Moral readings abound in Gregory the Great's *Homilies on Ezekiel*. Indeed, as Robert Markus observes, the primary issue Gregory treats in all of his works is how a Christian ought to live. This represents a change from Ambrose and Augustine's day when the full framework of Christian identity was still being forged, and the more pressing question was "What is a Christian?" In the fourth century the Church's impact on the larger society was just beginning to manifest itself, and the world did not yet bear the biblical impress that it would in the sixth. This reality surely motivated Ambrose as he sought to transform classical culture through his construal of Ezekiel 1 and other Scripture. Gregory lived in a different era, one shaped by the efforts of Ambrose and Augustine. In this new setting, the subject a bishop needed to address had altered, as Markus notes:

> By imperceptible shifts a world had come into being in which the crucial question was "how should a Christian conduct his life?" Compared with Augustine, Gregory could take for granted the settled contours of his spiritual landscape. Christianity had come to give definitive shape to what we might follow fashionable writers in calling a totalizing discourse. The opaque patches of Augustine's world had become translucent in the light of the Gospel. . . . Christianity could now be taken for granted. There might still be some, Gregory conceded, "who perhaps do not carry the Christian name," but if there were such, they

> were marginal, and he was more interested in those who did bear the name but were like the *iniqui* who "deviate from righteousness by the wickedness of their works," who were Christians in name only, out of outward conformity. This is why Gregorian exegesis is so heavily dominated by his tropological interpretation and why his exposition merges into exhortation. As Ann Matter has so beautifully reminded us, the shift from the allegorical to the tropological is a shift from "belief" to "behavior." Behavior, not belief, is what caused Gregory disquiet.[110]

Markus' comments should not be taken to imply that Gregory is unconcerned with specifically allegorical interpretation, if we understand this following the medieval distich about Scripture's four-fold sense: "allegory [teaches] what you should believe."[111] As we saw in the second chapter, in his sermons Gregory stresses the unity of Old and New Testaments, the foundation for all spiritual readings, whether allegorical, tropological, or anagogical. Moreover, he does not hesitate to take up doctrinal issues when necessary.[112] Nonetheless, Markus is correct in seeing a shift in the basic questions Gregory brings to the Bible. As Dagens observes, when Gregory approaches the sacred text he is interested primarily in discerning what it offers in the way of guidance for the Christian life, rather than in "élaboration doctrinale."[113] Gregory himself summarizes this perspective well when he writes, "In the darkness of this present life, Scripture has been given to us as the light for the way."[114]

While we may recognize with Markus a certain discontinuity between the exegesis of Gregory and that of earlier authors, we should not fail to see the strong continuity which remains. Much of Gregory's explication of Ezekiel 1 is based on his predecessors' insights. Sometimes these are explicitly articulated, but just as often Gregory simply assumes them as the basis for his own moral expo-

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[110] Markus 1995, 7–8. Cf. the parallel remarks of Leyser (1995, 41): "Gregory's universe was radically christianized, his culture biblical: he made presumptions of the Christian community far more confidently than did Augustine, for whom the future of the Church was uncertain, and its relations with imperial power structures unclear." For a more detailed treatment of the changes from the fourth century to the sixth, see Straw 1988, especially 8–14. On Gregory's attitude toward pagan culture, see Dagens 1977, 31–54.

[111] De Lubac 1998, 1.

[112] See, e.g., *Hom. Ez.* II.8.7–10 where Gregory addresses doubts about the resurrection of the dead.

[113] 1977, 55–81. This is perhaps why Gregory so often presents concrete and elaborate examples of the virtues and/or vices under discussion in any given passage.

[114] *Hom. Ez.* I.7.17.

sition. Thus, he begins with the premise, established by Origen and Ambrose, that the prophet's vision speaks to the Church about the life of Christian virtue. This enables him to build on their remarks and gives him the freedom to probe the text's details for their tropological content. The result is a wealth of moral interpretations. As a practical implication of this, only a limited number of passages can be discussed. Nonetheless, those I treat are representative of the ways in which Gregory, throughout his exegesis of Ezekiel 1, not only appropriates received readings but also goes beyond them, amplifying and modifying them.

In his first homily Gregory repeats the essential points of Origen's *Homily 1 on Ezekiel*. The righteous prophet was in captivity with sinners who, though deserving God's wrath and punishment, would have been bereft without his presence. "The divine grace," Gregory explains, "thus made Ezekiel pleasing to itself, so that through him it might predict all the things which would happen and deign to console the soul of the despondent people."[115] Also, by granting the unjust exiles fellowship with the just prophet, God comforts their hearts and does not forsake them entirely, making their eventual repentance more likely. Gregory draws an analogy to a mother who scolds her naughty son but rescues him from harm when he wanders into danger's way.[116]

Although Gregory briefly recapitulates Origen's moral exposition in this passage, he does not dwell on these themes in the rest of his homilies on Ezekiel 1. Instead, his explication of the vision is much closer to Ambrose's, for he emphasizes the virtues throughout. Again, because his interest in tropological exegesis is so intense, his variations on Ambrose are numerous. The following examples will show how he not only takes up his predecessor's insights and modifies them, but also introduces interpretations which though new, are grounded in the tradition.

Action and Contemplation in Christian Virtue

Like Ambrose, Gregory considers that the prophet's vision signifies the cardinal virtues: prudence, fortitude, justice, and temperance.

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[115] Ibid., I.1.18 (6–8).

[116] Like Origen, Gregory speaks of the divine *dispensatio* (Origen, *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.2.3; Gregory, *Hom. Ez.* I.1.18 [9]).

However, he finds them not in the wings or faces, but in the four sides of each living creature mentioned in Ezekiel 1.8, *and the hand of a man was under their wings on four sides* (*quatuor partes*).[117] We must maintain the order of these virtues, he explains, because of their inherent unity. For instance, prudent judgments are worthless without the fortitude to carry them out. Likewise, when the moderating influence of temperance is absent, justice too often devolves into cruelty.[118]

From this brief treatment of the unity of the virtues Gregory moves into a discussion of the active and contemplative lives, a prominent theme in both these homilies and his other writings.[119] The cardinal virtues are integral to his understanding of these two modes of existence because the active life not only consists of good deeds but also leads to the contemplative.[120] That these two ways of being are inextricably intertwined is shown by the juxtaposition of hands and wings in Ezekiel 1.8: "Therefore, *the hand of a man was under their wings*, that is, the virtue of the work under the flight of contemplation."[121] Expanding upon this relationship between action/hands and meditation/wings, Gregory turns to the story of Mary and Martha, quoting the description of Mary sitting at Jesus' feet while her sister was occupied with much serving (*frequens ministerium*) (Lk 10.38–42). Although Gregory appreciates the necessity of both women's roles, the receptive and reflective Mary is to be preferred to the busy Martha who "devoted herself (*serviebat*) to outward serving (*ministerium*)," as Jesus himself attested: "Mary has chosen the best part."[122]

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[117] *Hom. Ez.* I.3.8. Gregory later takes the living creatures' faces and wings to be symbols of virtue, but he does not draw a connection specifically to the cardinal virtues; see e.g., *Hom. Ez.* I.4.2; I.4.5; and I.7.21. (For his explication of the wings as virtues, see below.) Here, in I.3.8, Gregory makes the correlation to the cardinal virtues after observing that the four sides indicate the corners of the world to which the saints' preaching has traveled (see chapter 2 above).

[118] Gregory seems particularly sensitive to the abuses to which justice is prone when separated from temperance and mercy; see *Hom. Ez.* I.5.3.

[119] *Hom. Ez.* I.3.9–13. For discussions of the active and contemplative lives in Gregory's thought, see Dagens 1977, especially 135–63, and Straw 1988, 189–93 and 225–35.

[120] *Hom. Ez.* I.3.9 (2–4). Gregory is clear that the contemplative life is to be preferred to the active. Nonetheless, the latter is the indispensable foundation for the former. See, e.g., *Hom. Ez.* I.3.10 and 5.12.

[121] Ibid., I.3.9 (8–9).

[122] The complementarity of Mary and Martha and of the two ways they represent was already established and Gregory would have been familiar with this con-

The position of the hands *under* the wings in Ezekiel 1.8 is consistent with the Gospel, because it indicates the superiority of Mary's orientation: ". . . since the active life is of less merit than the contemplative, Ezekiel rightly says, *The hand of a man under their wings.*" Having interpreted Ezekiel 1.8 through Jesus' words in Luke 10, Gregory returns to the Old Testament, noting that "in Moses" the active life is called slavery (*servitus*) and the contemplative, freedom (*libertas*). This observation launches him into an extended discussion of Exodus 21.2–6, verses which set forth laws concerning the manumission of a Hebrew slave in the Sabbath year and which are replete with cognates of *servire, servitus*, and *libertas*, vocabulary he has just applied to the dispositions of Mary and Martha.[123] Through his exegesis of this passage Gregory further refines and elucidates the understanding of these two modes symbolized by the hands and wings of Ezekiel 1.8: both are bestowed through grace; when someone advances to contemplation, that person need not abandon more mundane pursuits; and although Mary's way is characterized by *libertas*, in this world it never attains that perfect freedom described by Paul in Romans 8.21. Closing this excursus on Exodus 21, Gregory concludes that even if the *libertas* of the contemplative life is imperfect, it "flies to the heavenly realities" and so surpasses the active life that the prophet fittingly said, *The hand of a man under their wings.*[124]

As with other passages we have analyzed, the connection Gregory draws between Ezekiel 1.8 and Exodus 21.2–6 might initially seem baffling to a modern audience. Nonetheless, when the pattern undergirding his exegesis is discerned, its logic emerges clearly. Commenting on Ezekiel 1.8, *and the hand of a man was under their wings on four sides*, Gregory begins with the assumption that the prophet's vision speaks about Christian virtue, a notion already well-grounded in the tradition. Even though the cardinal virtues had not been directly tied to the hands of Ezekiel 1.8 but rather to the wings and faces, Gregory's tendency to look for intimations of received readings in the vision's

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strual through Augustine. See Morel 1986–90, I.130 n. 2; Heffner 1991, 120–121; and Kessler 1995, 250–52.

[123] *Hom. Ez.* I.3.10–13. Gregory quotes Exodus 21.2–6 in full in I.3.10.

[124] Thomas Aquinas draws extensively on this passage, as well as Gregory's *Hom. Ez.* II.2.7–15 and *Moralia* 6.37, in his own comparison of the active and contemplative lives (*Summa Theologiae* 2–2.182). However, he omits the connections Gregory makes between these two modes and both Ezekiel 1 and Exodus 21.

details prompts him to discover them in the four hands. Moreover, his own interest in the active and contemplative lives, combined with the appropriateness of hands as a symbol for work and wings for meditation, naturally leads him to explore these two modes and the *locus classicus* for theological reflection on them, the story of Mary and Martha. His use of the verb *servire* to explain the *ministerium* in which Martha engages results in his juxtaposition of *servitus*/the active life and *libertas*/the contemplative life. From this pairing it is a short step to Exodus 21.2–6 with its multiple occurrences of *servire, servus*, and *liber*. Finally, after mining the Exodus passage for insights into these two dispositions, Gregory again quotes Ezekiel 1.8 so that the entire discussion of the cardinal virtues and the active and contemplative lives is framed by this verse.[125]

The pattern of Gregory's exposition here is similar to that of his reading of Ezekiel 1.7 (examined in chapter 2). In that example, when Gregory discusses the *burnished brass* of Ezekiel 1.7, the foundation for his exegesis is the established interpretation which found the prophet's vision to signify the apostles' preaching the Gospel throughout the world. Drawing a connection between the apostles' voices and the resonant quality of brass, he then forged a link to Psalm 18.5 (LXX) through the mediating term *sonorum* which describes the brass, and its cognate, *sonus*, found in Psalm 18.5. In his remarks on Ezekiel 1.8, the relation between the prophet's vision and Exodus 21.2–6 is slightly more complex because it is created through two words (*servire/servitus, libertas*), rather than simply one (*sonus/sonorum*), and it also involves a third biblical text, Luke 10. Despite this, the same logic is at work. Gregory begins with a theme arising from the tradition: the prophet's vision symbolizes the virtuous life. Because he sees an intrinsic connection between the active and contemplative lives and Christian virtue, he discerns this well-established reading in Ezekiel 1.8. The hands and wings of this verse—signs of the active and contemplative lives—lead him to Mary and Martha. The mediating words which establish the linguistic link between Ezekiel 1 and Exodus 21—*servus* and *liber* and related terms—then emerge from his explanation of the sisters' contrasting choices.

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[125] Gregory frequently frames his exegesis by quoting the verse being interpreted at the beginning and end of his discussion of it. In this particular example he also cites Ezekiel 1.8 a third time, in the middle of his exposition, after his remarks about Mary and Martha.

Virtue and Christian Community

In *De Abraham* Ambrose had taken the creatures' wings to signify prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance when he interpreted the phrase from Ezekiel 1.24, *the sound of their wings*. Gregory also considers the wings to symbolize virtue, but he makes this move when commenting on Ezekiel 1.11b, *Each had two wings which were joined, and two which covered (tegebant) their bodies*. Moreover, in another departure from Ambrose, he correlates the wings to theological (rather than the cardinal) virtues. Because the wings are described as being stretched upward (cf. Ez 1.11a), he concludes that they represent love, hope, fear, and penitence, virtues which "lift every winged creature from earthly acts (*a terrenis actibus*)." Love and hope "raise the mind of the saints to things above" and are appropriately understood as joined, he explains, because "the elect . . . love the heavenly things they hope for, and hope for the things they love." The animals' bodies are cloaked with the wings/virtues of fear and penitence because with these, they—and the elect symbolized by them[126]—"hide their past sins from the eyes of God Almighty" and conceal "carnal deeds" with the covering of good works. Gregory supports his exposition by quoting Psalm 31.1 (LXX), *Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered (tecta sunt)*, a verse which like Ezekiel 1.11b contains a form of the verb *tegere*. Even the holiest of people have sins they need to veil, he reassures his audience, as the cases of Job and Paul clearly show.[127]

This explication of the living creatures' wings is oriented primarily along a line from human beings to God, extending from the earthly actions which the virtues lift the person above to the heavenly things on which everyone should be focused. This vertical axis is only reinforced in Gregory's remarks about covering one's sins from God's sight. However, as Gregory moves through the text of the prophet's vision, returning to the theme of the virtues whenever wings are mentioned, he adds a corresponding horizontal dimension

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[126] As we saw in chapter 2, Gregory considers the creatures' faces to symbolize not only the four evangelists but also Christians in general because "all those who now have been perfected in the Church learned the righteousness of their perfection through the gospels" (*Hom. Ez.* 1.2.17–18). In the beginning of the homily currently being discussed, Gregory expands upon this (Ibid., 1.4.1–2).

[127] Ibid., 1.4.5–6.

relating individuals to one another.[128] One instance of this occurs in his construal of Ezekiel 1.23, *And under the firmament their wings were stretched out straight (rectae), one toward another (alterius ad alterum)*.[129] Gregory takes this verse to portray the symbiotic spiritual relation which should exist between persons and the charity which should govern human community. The wings of virtue are straight, he explains, "when the good which one (*alter*) has, he devotes to another (*impendit alteri*)." He reinforces his point with a number of illustrations: those who have received wealth (*terrenam substantiam*) can help those in poverty (*indigens*); "the one filled with the grace of teaching (*qui doctrinae gratia plenus est*)" can enlighten the ignorant; those wielding temporal power can protect those in danger of being oppressed; and "the person who has received the grace of skill in medicine (*qui gratiam curationis accepit*)" can tend to the sick.[130] After listing these and other possibilities, Gregory returns to his first example, the prosperous who aid the indigent. Observing that those who are concerned with worldly possessions frequently lack vigilance in prayer (*orationi non invigilet*), while those who dedicate their time to prayer often do not have even the basic necessities, Gregory describes the reciprocity that should obtain between these two sorts of people, a reciprocity that not only supplies what each person needs but also realizes the prophet's vision in the present:

> But when the rich man (*dives*) offers food and clothing to the poor man, and the poor man (*pauper*) devotes his own prayer to the rich man's soul (*orationem suam animae divitis impendit*), then the creatures' *wings are stretched out straight, one toward the other* (*pennae animalium rectae alterius ad alterum tenduntur*).[131]

Gregory's exposition is interesting for several reasons. First, we should note that even though his complex interpretation of Ezekiel 1.23 is unique in the tradition thus far, it is firmly rooted in his predecessors' exegesis. He starts with Ambrose's reading, in which aspects of the prophet's vision (particularly the creatures' wings) shed light on the moral life. Gregory combines this with his own notion that the

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[128] Gregory explicitly discusses how the love of God and neighbor, the vertical and horizontal axes, are necessarily united; see Ibid., I.7.22.

[129] Ibid., I.7.21.

[130] Although these uses of *gratia* might be better translated as "gift" I have translated them as "grace" to preserve the echoes of 1 Peter 4 in this passage; see below.

[131] *Hom. Ez.* I.7.21 (16–19).

four *animalia* represent not only the evangelists, but also Christians in general. From this, he begins to mine Ezekiel's description of the creatures (in this case, the position of their wings) for even more insight into Christian virtue. Second, his comment that when rich and poor care for one another, ". . . the creatures' *wings are stretched out straight, one toward the other*" is reminiscent of Ambrose's assertion that when the believer is virtuous, the four *animalia* are in harmony, and "the prophet will see in us that one *wheel above the earth* (Ez 1.15) . . . Ezekiel will see his vision again." For Gregory just as much as Ambrose, the prophet's vision, like all of Scripture, is reenacted in the lives of the faithful. Finally, it is noteworthy that as Gregory describes the relationship of mutual affection and solicitude which should obtain among persons, his language shifts so that it echoes the story of Dives and Lazarus (Lk 16.19–31). He initially refers to the affluent with the phrases *terrenam substantiam accipere* or *terrenam substantiam occupari*, and to the needy with *indigens* or *sustentationem vivendi non habere*. However, in the passage just quoted, he uses *dives* for the rich person and *pauper* for the poor, both words in the Latin version of Jesus' parable.[132] With this subtle allusion to Dives and Lazarus, Gregory not only depicts the love which ideally should have been found between these two, but also implicitly warns his audience of the consequences of lacking it, that is, of not extending their wings like Ezekiel's living creatures.

Gregory elaborates further on what it means to actualize this detail of the vision, drawing particularly on the exhortation of 1 Peter 4.7–11:

> When someone offers the word of preaching to me and expels the darkness of ignorance from my heart and, at the same time, because he is perhaps oppressed by a powerful person of this world, I impart to him the solace of my protection and pluck him from violent hands, then in reciprocity we are extending our wings to each other so that we touch each other by affection and mutual assistance from the good we receive. Thus the first Shepherd advises us well when he says, *The end of all things is at hand; therefore be prudent and vigilant in your prayers (prudentes et vigilate in orationibus). Above all, have continual mutual love toward one*

[132] The Vulgate text of the parable (Lk 16.19–31) uses *dives* for the rich man, but *mendicus* for Lazarus. However, some versions have *pauper* instead of *mendicus* (Nestle-Aland 1979, 214). Ambrose, for example, employs *pauper* for Lazarus throughout his discussion of this passage in *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* (8.13, CCL 14, 302.135), a text Gregory was surely familiar with.

> *another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable toward each other without murmuring. As everyone has received grace (accepit gratiam), bestow it on another (in alterutrum illam administrantes)* (1 Ptr 4.7–10). What is called "wings" in Ezekiel is called "received grace (*accepta gratia*)" in the apostle Peter. What the prophet said in one way, *their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another (alterius ad alterum)*, the Shepherd of the Church said in another, *As everyone has received grace, bestow it on another (alterutrum)*. For our wings are not straight now if they are bent back only for our own benefit. But they become straight when we use what we have for our neighbor's benefit. For we have received the good things we have not from ourselves, but from him who brought about our existence. The more we discern that they were given to us by our Creator for the common benefit, the more we ought not to keep them private (*privata*), for ourselves. Therefore the apostle Peter rightly added to his exhortation, *as good stewards of God's varied grace (multiformis gratiae Dei)*. Again, he added, *whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the virtue (ex virtute) which God supplies* (1 Ptr 4.10–11). Or, to speak more clearly, "In humility, devote (*impendite*) the good to your neighbors, since you know that what you have you did not receive from yourself."[133]

The logic of Gregory's exegesis initially eludes the modern reader, but emerges from careful scrutiny of his language and that of the biblical verses he quotes or alludes to. As we have seen before, he begins with the assumption of earlier commentators, especially Ambrose, that the living creatures' wings relate to the virtuous life. Rather than follow Ambrose's understanding of the wings as the cardinal virtues, however, he looks to other scriptural passages to flesh out his reading. He surely introduces 1 Peter 4.7–11 at least in part because of the verbal link to Ezekiel 1.23 found in the imagery of reciprocity each passage contains, expressed through forms and cognates of *alter* which he draws attention to, i.e., *alterius ad alterum* in Ezekiel and *in alterutrum illam administrantes* in 1 Peter. The reference to *virtus* in 1 Peter 4.11 only reinforces this connection. Moreover, although Gregory brings in 1 Peter 4.7–11 only midway through his exposition of Ezekiel 1.23, from the very beginning of his discussion, when he enumerates the ways in which individuals can devote their good to others, his own vocabulary is shaped by this New Testament text. 1 Peter 4.7 counsels attentiveness in prayer (*estote . . . vigilate in orationibus*), and Gregory uses strikingly similar phrasing to describe

[133] *Hom. Ez.* I.7.21 (19–47).

the rich as wanting in precisely such vigilance (*orationi non invigilet*), while also recalling for his audience the lesson of Dives and Lazarus. Similarly, just as 1 Peter 4.10 exhorts members of the community to exercise "the grace (*gratia*)" they have each been given for the good of others, as God's stewards, so Gregory details Christians who possess a specific "grace (*gratia*)" and challenges his congregation to use these talents for the benefit of their neighbors. While Gregory's example of "the person filled with the grace of teaching (*qui doctrinae gratia plenus est*)" is reminiscent of 1 Peter 4.10 only through the use of *gratia*, his illustration of the individual with the gift of healing presents a stronger echo since it also duplicates the verb used in 1 Peter 4.10 (*accepit gratiam*).[134]

This passage illustrates several salient characteristics of Gregory's exegesis in the *Homilies on Ezekiel*. First, as we have seen repeatedly, he begins with the understanding of the prophet's vision articulated by earlier commentators, but goes beyond this, amplifying their insights by making connections to other biblical passages, sometimes through explicit quotation (e.g., 1 Ptr 4.7–11) and other times by allusion (e.g., Lk 16.19–31). Moreover, the way Gregory echoes the sacred text shows how completely its language permeates his thought. Finally, that he interprets Ezekiel 1 through not only 1 Peter 4 and Luke 16, but also the tradition, gives concrete expression to the hermeneutical connections he repeatedly makes between the Old Testament, its fulfillment in Christ as recounted in the New, and its ongoing consummation in the life of the Church.

Ezekiel's Vision and the Imitation of Christ

Although the Fathers frequently emphasize the necessity of modeling one's life on Christ's, prior to Gregory the Great this theme

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[134] Even as he reproduces the language of 1 Peter 4.10, Gregory also echoes Gabriel's greeting to Mary, *ave gratia plena Dominus tecum* (Lk 1.28) when he describes those who are "filled with the grace of teaching (*doctrinae gratia plenus est*)" and "filled with the spirit of prophecy (*prophetiae spiritu plenus est*)." Although, he does not capitalize on this and draw an overt connection between Ezekiel 1.23 and Luke 1.28 as he does with 1 Peter 4.7–11, this echo illustrates once again how thoroughly his thought is shaped by Scripture. At the same time, his remarks about helping the needy and providing "the solace of protection" to the person being oppressed are reminiscent of Augustine's discussion of the love of neighbor and works of mercy in Confessions XIII.17.21, even if this is based on images rather than on repetition of Augustine's exact words.

receives little attention in explication of Ezekiel 1. Given Gregory's affinity for tropological exegesis, we should not be surprised that it emerges prominently in his homilies. For example, he relates the vision to the imitation of Christ through a close analysis of the linguistic details of the prophet's report of the living creatures' faces. In chapter 2 we saw that when commenting on Ezekiel 1.5, *and in the midst of it the likeness of four living creatures*, Gregory takes the creatures to symbolize not only Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but also "the number of all the perfect" because the saints were tutored in their holiness by the four evangelists' preaching of the Gospel.[135] He then notices that in this same place Ezekiel also says, *And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man* (*similitudo hominis*) (Ez 1.5), but that later in verse 10, when filling out the picture of these entities, the prophet reveals each one to have the likeness of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (Ez 1.10). This leads Gregory to examine the passage more closely, searching for theological significance in this discrepancy between the two verses. In exposition which is especially elegant in its rhetoric and attentive to Scripture's exact words, he concludes that in the expression *similitudo hominis*, Christ is the referent of *hominis*, basing this on a verbal connection between Ezekiel 1.5 and Philippians 2.6–8, Paul's narrative of Christ's self-emptying:

> *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, having been made in the likeness of a man* (in similitudinem hominum factus), *and being found in human form. . . .*

The phrase *in similitudinem hominum factus* in Philippians 2 shows that the *similitudo hominis* of Ezekiel 1.5 is Christ, Gregory explains, and the four creatures have this likeness because they strive to be conformed to him as they rise toward "the virtue of sanctity." Describing Christ as the source of the creatures' holiness, he effortlessly moves into an ecclesiological reading which assumes the identification, established earlier, of these animals with the elect. Thus, just as Paul attained this *similitudo Christi* and urged his congregations to do the same, so also, Gregory observes, "Every saint is led to the likeness of this man, in the same proportion as he imitates the life of his Redeemer."[136]

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[135] *Hom. Ez.* I.2.17–18.

[136] Ibid., I.2.19 (23–25). As evidence for Paul's likeness to Christ, Gregory quotes

After cataloguing the saints' numerous virtues, with relevant biblical texts illustrating Jesus' perfect embodiment of each, he concludes:

> Therefore, let it be said about the holy animals that the likeness of a man was in them, since whatever is holy, whatever is wonderful, is in them according to a sort of likeness (*de specie similitudinis*), that is, by virtue of imitation (*de virtute imitationis*).[137]

With this, Gregory introduces a new interpretation into the tradition, one which like his other expansions is based on careful scrutiny of the specific words of Scripture, in this case, Ezekiel 1 and Philippians 2.[138]

And each went straight forward; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning . . .

Gregory presents another novel construal in his remarks on the prophet's account of the movement of the living creatures and the wheels beside them. Earlier exegetes had focused primarily on the wheels' spirit-filled locomotion.[139] However, Gregory attends to both, taking the motion of the wheels (Ez 1.19–21) to symbolize the interaction between the faithful reader and the biblical text (discussed in chapter 2), and that of the living creatures (Ez 1.9, 12) to relate to the virtuous life. In this second interpretation, Gregory appears to be dependent upon Jerome.

Both Ezekiel 1.9 and 12 say that as the four creatures travel, they go straight forward, without turning. In his *Commentary on Ezekiel*

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1 Corinthians 4.16 (*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*) and 1 Corinthians 15.49 (*Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man who descended from heaven*).

[137] Ibid., I.2.19 (48–50).

[138] This particular interpretation also illustrates the way in which Christological and ecclesiological expositions go hand in hand for Gregory. As Kessler observes, Gregory maintains that "Christ and the Church are one person," with the result that "[j]ust as every person and every event of the Old Testament text can be interpreted as a typos of Christ, in the same way the same things can be understood as a symbol of the Church" (2000, 146; cf. 1997, 52).

[139] For example, Origen hints at this when he exhorts his audience to "become cherubim which are under God's feet, to whom the wheels of the world are attached, and whom the wheels follow." Ambrose understands these same verses as symbolizing the ascent of the soul's chariot to God in *De Abraham.* Theodoret reads the straightforward movement of the living creatures reported in verse 12—*And each went forward, wherever the spirit was, they went, and they did not turn*—to denote their unswerving obedience (PG 81, 825d–828a). Jerome offers a similar construal in his remarks on verses 12 and 19–21 but does not develop it.

Jerome takes verse 9, *They did not turn when they went, but everyone went straight forward (unumquodque ante faciem suam gradiebatur)*, to signify the gospels' union with each other and their flight throughout the world as they always rise toward higher levels (*ad altiora*). As support for this he quotes Philippians 3.13, *forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead*, briefly adding that what is true of the gospels is also true of "the soul's virtues."[140] His exegesis of verse 12, *And each went straight forward (unumquodque coram facie sua ambulabat); wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went*, is more oblique but basically consistent with that of verse 9. Here Jerome also alludes to several biblical texts that convey the dangers of "turning back," including the demise of Lot's wife (Gen 19.26) and Luke 9.62 (*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God*). The living creatures provide an admirable contrast to these examples, for by not "turning back," but rather following the Spirit, they "fly throughout the world and lift themselves to higher things (*ad excelsa*)."[141]

Gregory builds on Jerome's nascent tropological interpretation when he treats Ezekiel 1.9 in his third homily.[142] The four creatures always proceed "from earthly actions to spiritual things," not reverting to what they have left behind. He likens this to "always going mentally toward better things (*ad meliora*)" and continues:

> *No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God* (Lk 9.62). For to put the hand to the plow is to open the earth of one's heart, as if through a sort of ploughshare of compunction, in order to bring forth fruit. But if someone, after embarking upon good works, returns to the evil things he had left behind, then he is looking back behind the plow.[143]

The living creatures' straight-forward motion also indicates that "the eternal lies before us" while "the temporal lies behind us," and we

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[140] *Ezech.* I.1.8b–9 (CCL 75, 14.308–15.315).

[141] Ibid., I.1.12 (CCL 75, 16.360–368). These comments illustrate a disappointing, all too frequent characteristic of Jerome's exegesis. In less than five lines in the *Corpus Christianorum* edition he marshals four scriptural texts, all of which somehow involve turning back, to illuminate Ezekiel 1.12: Luke 9.62, Gen 19.26, Dt 32.24, and 1 Sam 4.18. The reader naturally expects him to elucidate the theological point to be derived from these verses, but he fails to do this. Presumably this web of passages is intended to underscore the importance of obedience, but he never articulates this unambiguously.

[142] *Hom. Ez.* I.3.16–17.

[143] Ibid., I.3.16 (9–14).

should advance from the latter to the former. In support of this Gregory quotes Philippians 3.13–14, adding this gloss:

> In reaching for the things which lie ahead, he had forgotten the things which lie behind, since he despised temporal things and sought only those things which are eternal.[144]

The living creatures, he explains, exemplify the kind of progress Paul describes because by moving forward and not turning back, "they place the foot of good works beneath the eyes of their contemplation" as they seek heavenly things.

In this homily Gregory combines and expands upon elements of Jerome's exposition of Ezekiel 1.9 and 1.12. First, he follows him in using both Philippians 3.13 and Luke 9.62. Also, the passage of the living creatures *ad meliora* in Gregory parallels their movement *ad excelsa* in Jerome's exegesis. Moreover, by emphasizing and intertwining the temporal (past/future) and spiritual (good/evil; heavenly/earthly) axes, he has developed the moral reading of Ezekiel 1.9 which was only hinted at by Jerome.[145] Finally, consonant with his practice elsewhere of bringing his interpretations to bear on the challenges of the Christian life, Gregory also offers vivid illustrations of how hard it is to walk forward without turning back.[146]

Gregory displays this same concern for drawing out the practical implications of exegesis in his treatment of Ezekiel 1.12. Like Ezekiel 1.9, this reports that the four creatures traveled straight ahead, but in the Vulgate these two verses express the idea in slightly different language: 1.9 has *ante faciem suam*, while 1.12 reads *coram facie sua*. Not surprisingly, Gregory finds a theological point in this small variant. Since *coram* also means "in the presence of (*in praesenti*)," he notes, walking straight forward (*ante faciem*) and walking in one's presence do not carry the same connotation:

> For to walk straight forward (*ante faciem*) is to seek the things in front. Truly to walk in one's own presence (*in praesenti*) is not to be absent from oneself. Every righteous person painstakingly examines his own

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[144] Ibid., I.3.17 (6–10).

[145] Gregory may also be indebted to Ambrose and Basil since they use Philippians 3.13 in their treatments of Ezekiel 1. However, neither of them connects it directly to the living creatures' straight-forward movement.

[146] *Hom. Ez.* I.3.18. Gregory describes, for example, those who pledge themselves to sharing their possessions with the poor but fail to keep this promise out of fear that they will become destitute.

> life and ponders diligently how much he grows in the good each day, or possibly how much he shrinks from the good. Such a person walks in his own presence (*coram se ambulat*) since he places himself before himself. For he vigilantly watches whether he rises or falls. But whoever neglects being circumspect about his own life—examining what he does, what he says, what he thinks or disdains or is ignorant of—this person does not walk in his own presence (*coram se iste non ambulat*), since he does not know what sort of person he is either in his habits or in his actions. Nor is that person present to himself who is not anxious to examine and to know himself each day. For he who truly places himself before himself and is present to himself, observes himself in his own actions as if he were another.[147]

Gregory realizes the difficulty of the task he has set before his audience. To walk in our own presence, to look on ourselves as on our fellow human beings, is not easy, he explains, because in our self-love (*privatus amor*) we deceive ourselves, blinding ourselves to the weightiness of our own offenses while magnifying the seriousness of our neighbors'. The result of such self-delusion—that is, of the failure to proceed *coram facie sua*—is that individuals abhor in others the very sins which in themselves they dismiss as trivial. Gregory relates concrete instances of this self-deception, for example, those who give to the poor one day oppress them the next, and the person who guards the chastity of his own body simultaneously nurtures a hidden hatred of another.[148] In concluding both his exposition of Ezekiel 1.12 and this homily, Gregory again exhorts his listeners to imitate the living creatures:

> Therefore in all we do, we ought diligently to examine ourselves, both inside and outside, so that following the winged animals we may be present to ourselves (*nobismetipsis praesentes simus*) and always walk in the presence of ourselves (*coram facie nostra semper ambulemus*), having as our helper the only one of the Father, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.[149]

Gregory's novel reading is grounded in his predecessors' exegesis insofar as it concerns the life of virtue, but it injects a new dimension into the tradition based on careful inquiry into the details of Ezekiel 1.9 and 1.12, specifically, the different terms used in the

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[147] Ibid., I.4.8.
[148] Ibid., I.4.9–10.
[149] Ibid., I.4.10 (29–33).

Latin version to characterize the living creatures' movement. In accord with his interpretive habits, Gregory highlights a particular feature of these verses and draws out its theological significance. However, his usual practice is to make connections to other biblical texts through what I have dubbed a mediating word (or expression) which emerges from reflection on the passage being expounded. Here he focuses on *coram facie sua*, explaining that it can mean "in the presence of (*in praesenti*)." Ordinarily, we might expect *in praesenti* to function as the mediating phrase, allowing him to link Ezekiel 1.12 with other parts of Scripture. He does not use it in this way, however, but instead bases his theological observations directly on its meaning.[150]

Although Gregory's explication of Ezekiel 1.12 is less closely tied to earlier construals of the prophet's vision and does not rely on linguistic connections between this and other verses of Scripture, we should not conclude that it is less tethered to the tradition. Even as Gregory presents a new reading of Ezekiel 1, he is directly engaging the Church's broader theological discourse, for his analysis of the self-love (*privatus amor*) that stands in opposition to walking *coram facie sua*, and of the self-deception fostered by it, is influenced by Augustine. As O'Donnell has so cogently observed, central to Augustine's enterprise in *Confessions* is his recognition that "human beings are opaque to themselves no less than to others. We are not who we think we are."[151] Gregory's theological anthropology is thoroughly Augustinian, and he too recognizes the seemingly boundless human propensity for self-delusion evoked so frequently in *Confessions*. In delineating the difficulty of proceeding *coram facie sua* as Ezekiel's living creatures do, Gregory voices stinging indictments of precisely this disposition for self-deceipt. Moreover, when he describes the seedbed for this subterfuge, *privatus amor*, he echoes Augustine's discussion of it in *De Genesi ad litteram*.[152] Like Augustine, he quotes 2 Timothy

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[150] Of course, Gregory quotes other scriptural texts as he explores the implications of walking *coram facie sua*. However, he initially establishes its theological import simply through his discussion of *in praesenti*, and brings in other biblical passages only in I.4.9–10 when explaining the nature of the self-love which resists proceeding in this fashion. Moreover, these verses are not connected by precise words, but rather by the theme of self-love.

[151] O'Donnell 1992, I.xviii.

[152] *Litt.* XI.15.19–20 (CSEL 28.1, 347–48). In this passage Augustine discusses the two loves, of self and of God and neighbor, and the corresponding two cities, and also expresses his desire to write *De civitate Dei*.

3.2, *People shall be lovers of self*, and his list of the ways in which we fail to walk *coram facie sua* details concrete instances of that self-love which Augustine had defined in more general terms as envious; seeking its own advantage; trying to dominate others; and eager for any praise, even false. As he did in his comments on *the spirit* of Ezekiel 1.20a (see chapter 2), Gregory has introduced a new interpretation by recognizing how a detail from Ezekiel's opening chapter provides an apt visual symbol for a theological notion already articulated by Augustine. Gregory's exposition of Ezekiel 1.12 manifests once again the intimate connection and interplay between exegesis of the prophet's vision and the larger tradition of Christian theological reflection.[153]

Gregory and the other authors we have examined in this chapter employ a variety of approaches for discerning how Ezekiel 1 illuminates the Christian moral life. Origen develops his exposition by exploring the spiritual significance of both the prophet's historical situation and the text's details. Ambrose articulates a Christian conception of the soul's ascent, rewriting metaphors and phrases from Plato, Virgil, Horace, and Cicero through a matrix of scriptural passages in which the chariot vision is central, and thereby beginning to create a distinctively Christian culture. Pseudo-Macarius likewise weaves a web of biblical verses revolving around Ezekiel 1 and controlled by images of eyes and light to depict the luminous soul that has submitted to Christ. Finally, Gregory the Great builds on Origen, Ambrose, and Jerome, multiplying the tropological readings of the prophet's vision by bringing in both other scriptural texts and the insights of the larger theological tradition. Despite the differences in exegetical strategy, we can nonetheless still see a continuity of theme among these commentators. Each of them is guided by the same basic principle, one that necessarily links the moral explication of the vision to the notion of the unity of the Testaments: the prophet's opening chapter does not simply record a past event, but also awaits its fulfillment in the lives of all the faithful when, as Ambrose tells us, "Ezekiel will see his vision again."

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[153] Of course, the Church's theological reflection is intrinsically exegetical (e.g., Augustine's discussion of *privatus amor* occurs in a work on Genesis). The distinction I am making is between the narrow tradition centered on Ezekiel 1 and the wider sweep of Christian theology which it is necessarily a part of.

Table 1. Scriptural Quotations in *De virginitate*, chs. 17–18

Ch. 17, § 108	Habet enim *anima volatus* suos.	For the soul has its own wings.
Ch. 17, § 108	Qui sunt isti, qui sicut *nubes* volant, et sicut *columbae* cum pullis suis (Is 60.8).	Who are these that fly like clouds, and like doves with their own young?
Ch. 18, § 112	Et facta est illic super me manu Domini, et vidi, et ecce spiritus surgens veniebat ab Aquilone, et *nubes* magna erat in eo, et ignis refulgens, et lumen in circuitu eius sicut lumen electri in medio ignis, et lumen in eo, et in medio sicut similitudo quatuor animalium (Ez 1.3–5).	And the hand of the Lord was upon me. I looked, and behold, a stormy wind came from the north, and a great cloud was in it, and there was fire flashing, and brightness round about like the brightness of electrum in the midst of the fire, and brightness in it, and in the midst as the likeness of four creatures.
Ch. 18, § 113	Similitudo, inquit, vultus eorum facies hominis, facies leonis a dextris illis quatuor, et facies vituli a sinistris illis quatuor, et facies *aquilae* desuper illis quatuor, et *alae* eorum extensae (Ez 1.10–11).	The likeness, he says, of their faces: the face of a man, the face of a lion to the right, the face of an ox to the left, and the face of an eagle above, and their wings were extended.
Ch. 18, § 115	Renovabitur sicut *aquilae* iuventus tua (Ps 103.5).	Your youth will be renewed like an eagle's.
Ch. 18, § 116	*Anima* nostra sicut *passer* erepta est de laqueo venantium (Ps 123.7).	Our soul has escaped like a bird from the hunter's snare.
Ch. 18, § 116	In Domino confido, quomodo dicitis *animae* meae: Transmigra in montem sicut *passer* (Ps 10.2).	I trust in the Lord; how can you say to my soul, 'Flee to the mountain like a bird'?
Ch. 18, § 116	Et in umbra *alarum* tuarum sperabo (Ps. 56.2).	I will hope in the shadow of your wings.
Ch. 18, § 117	Ergo quia volandi nobis data est copia, excitet unusquisque in se Dei gratiam, ac posteriora obliviscens, priora appetens, ad destinata contendat (cf. Phil 3.13–14).	Since all of us have been given this ability to fly, let everyone cultivate gratitude to God and *forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, press on toward the goal.*

Table 1 (*cont.*)

Ch. 18, § 118	. . . videbit et in nobis Propheta rotam illam unam super terram (Ez 1.15) coniunctam animalibus quatuor. Videbit ergo rursus Ezechiel, videt enim adhuc et viget et vigebit. Videbit, inquam, rotam in medio rotae super terram (Ez 1.15–16) sine offensione labentem.	The Prophet will see in our souls that one *wheel above the earth* which is joined to the four creatures. Ezekiel will see his vision a second time. For up to this point, he sees and he lives, and he will continue to live. He will see, I say, *a wheel within a wheel, above the earth*, gliding without obstruction.
Ch. 18, § 119	. . . divina vox resultabit, tunc super similitudinem throni similitudo sicut species hominis apparebit (Ez 1.26). Hic homo Verbum est, quia Verbum caro factum est (Jn 1.14). Hic homo nostrorum est agitator animalium (cf. Ez 1.5), nostrorum rector est morum . . .	. . . the divine voice will echo, then *the likeness of a man* will be seen above *the likeness of the throne*. This man is the Word, since *the Word was made flesh*. This man is the charioteer of our living creatures, the guide of our habits . . .

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Our study of the Fathers' treatment of Ezekiel 1 has shown that they understood this text to illuminate several significant issues: 1) the very nature of a distinctively Christian exposition of Scripture (including the relationship between Old and New Testaments), 2) the character and extent of human knowledge of God, and 3) the Christian pursuit of virtue. Although these three exegetical strands address a wide range of theological topics, all of them demonstrate that when reading this enigmatic passage the Fathers did not simply impose a preconceived meaning on it. Rather, they meticulously examined its literary context and structure, as well as its lexical details, and placed it in the larger context of the entire Bible. Moreover, even as successive generations discerned new or more elaborate interpretations of Ezekiel 1 that addressed the theological concerns of their own day, they also listened conscientiously to their predecessors' voices, attending to already-established readings. Their approach is guided by the belief that the vision, like all of Scripture, conveys a message that is not limited to Ezekiel's time and place. Through the text, God speaks to his people across history, and as they read it and conform themselves to it, it comes to fulfillment. Or, as Ambrose puts it: "Ezekiel will see his vision again."

The belief that the words of Scripture must come to fruition in the lives of the faithful was essential to patristic exegesis, as de Lubac recognizes when he describes one of the Fathers' central assumptions:

> All that Scripture recounts has indeed happened in history, but the account that is given does not contain the whole purpose of Scripture in itself. This purpose still needs to be accomplished and is actually accomplished in us each day, by the mystery of this spiritual understanding.[1]

[1] De Lubac 1998, 227. De Lubac wrote this in a section focused on the harmony of Old and New Testaments. However, it applies just as fully to all dimensions of the spiritual sense since it is founded on the understanding of the unity of the Testaments.

In beginning this study, I drew our attention to the commentary on Ezekiel by the Old Testament scholar, Walther Zimmerli. In contrast to his historical-critical approach, which seeks the meaning of the Bible through a detailed study of its pre-history, de Lubac's comments suggest that the Bible's import fully emerges only as the faithful community meditates upon it and enacts it in and through their lives on a daily basis. Moreover, as our study of the Fathers' explication of Ezekiel 1 shows, this process is ongoing as each successive reader takes up the passage and ponders it in light of not only the rest of Scripture but also the received tradition. Its signification is not exhausted by its historical or literal sense, or by already-established spiritual interpretations. The task of expounding the sacred text is never completed: "In spite of all their commentaries, the holy doctors . . . have never fully interpreted Scripture: human words cannot enclose what the Spirit of God reveals."[2] Although John of the Cross made this observation centuries after the period we have covered, it captures well the perspective of patristic exegetes who sought to discern how the prophet's vision of the chariot might speak anew to their particular time and place.

Articulating a perspective different from both Zimmerli's and de Lubac's, Lieb has recently argued that the polysemous nature of Ezekiel 1 indicates that it "remain[s] forever elusive"[3] and allows its interpreters to reveal only themselves:

> The text of [Ezekiel's] vision remains forever impenetrable. Defying all attempts at a hermeneutics, the text distinguishes itself by virtue of its "otherness." Perpetually remote, it refuses to yield itself. It will not allow the exegete to impose his will upon it. Just the opposite is true: it imposes its will upon the exegete. It overwhelms him. . . . Every effort at analysis becomes an exercise in self-exegesis. Seeking to provide insight into the text, the interpreter discloses himself. He becomes the text, or at least that version of the text which he reveals about himself and disseminates to others.[4]

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[2] John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, preface § 1; quoted in de Lubac 1998, 79–80.

[3] 1991, 39. Lieb deals with both Jewish and Christian writers. However, my remarks are intended to respond only to his conclusions with regard to the Christian tradition.

[4] 1991, 40. Cf. Lieb's concluding remarks: "In the text through which the hermeneut seeks to interpret that [visionary] event, the vision remains ultimately impenetrable. Defying all attempts at a hermeneutic, the text distinguishes itself by virtue of its 'otherness.' In its remoteness it refuses to disclose its meanings. It will not allow the act of interpretation to compromise its indeterminacy. On the con-

With this, it is easy to imagine the words of Ezekiel 1—a virtual text?—disintegrating before one's eyes, as the commentator alone remains. But my purpose here is not to engage in a discussion of hermeneutical theory. Nonetheless, despite Lieb's claim that the expositor's will is rendered ineffective, his remarks imply that, across the span of the entire tradition, exegesis, now reduced to an act of self-disclosure, is an arbitrary imposition upon the text, and therefore capricious. Lieb's assumptions, like Zimmerli's, can help us to set in relief the Fathers' interpretive suppositions and accompanying practices.

To be sure, Ezekiel's inaugural vision is enigmatic. Origen considers it lofty and beyond compare, with levels of signification not accessible to all. After the pagan critic Celsus denigrates Scripture because of its coarse style, Origen responds by claiming that the prophetic writings are more profound than "the words of Plato" revered by his opponent, and he adduces as evidence for this the theophanies witnessed by Ezekiel and Isaiah.[5] Likewise, one can almost hear the sigh of relief from Gregory the Great as he announces to his audience that he has completed his homiletical treatment of the prophet's opening chapter, an oracle "enclosed in deep obscurities and bound in knots of mysteries," and is now turning to a less difficult section.[6] But, although patristic commentators acknowledge the vision's mysterious aspects, from their perspective it does not unequivocally resist the interpreter. Rather, it discloses itself precisely when it is read not in isolation but as part of a unified Bible, *a wheel within a wheel*, whose message is established in the Incarnation. Through such an approach, they are led not only to an understanding of this text, but also to a deeper grasp of the Bible of which it is a part. As the rest of Scripture helps to reveal the import of Ezekiel's vision, so too the prophet's vision illuminates other scriptural passages. Further, its polyvalence does not devolve into the endless indeterminacy Lieb suggests. Although its meaning is not exhausted by any

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trary, it obliges the hermeneut to reveal himself instead. In the hermeneutical circle that defines the visionary mode, the act of interpretation is finally not reciprocal at all. Attempting to impose his will upon the text, the hermeneut discloses himself" (1991, 353).

[5] *Cels.* 6.18; SC 147, 222–24. On the vision as lofty and beyond compare, see *Jo.* 4.21–23; SC 157, 144–46; on its inaccessibility, see *Hom. in Lev.* V.5.28–33; SC 286, 228.

[6] *Hom. Ez.* I.9.1.

one explication, it is not "forever elusive" because it is anchored in, determined by, the fact of Christ.

Early Christians consider the enigmatic quality of particularly difficult passages such as Ezekiel 1 to be salutary. Concerning the obscurity of some biblical texts Augustine writes,

> I have no doubt that this is all divinely predetermined, so that pride may be subdued by hard work and intellects which tend to despise things that are easily discovered may be rescued from boredom and reinvigorated.[7]

Gregory the Great makes similar remarks in the opening of this sixth homily on the prophet's vision: "the very obscurity of God's speech" is beneficial (*magnae utilitatis*) because it forces one to tirelessly seek out Scripture's message, and the more wearying the search, the sweeter the reward.[8]

The multiple meanings that result from this sweet search are an indication not of endless indeterminacy, but of God's providence which ensures that the sacred writings will edify the faithful, from the neophyte to the mature, throughout all generations. For patristic exegetes, passages such as 1 Corinthians 10.11[9] testify that Scripture's purpose is to nourish the entire body of Christ.[10] In his oft-quoted dedicatory letter prefacing the *Moralia in Job*, Gregory the Great describes how the Bible is able to meet the needs of every reader: "The divine word" he explains, is like a river "shallow and deep, in which a lamb may walk and an elephant swim."[11] He expresses this same idea in his construal of both the wheel of Ezekiel 1.15, which signifies Scripture as it revolves through its literal and spiritual senses in accord with each person's stage of spiritual development, and *the Spirit of life* of Ezekiel 1.21 which inspires everyone to the appropriate attitude, from patience to penitence, and guides them to the

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[7] *Doct. Chr.* 2.6.7. Cf. Ibid., 2.6.8, "It is a wonderful and beneficial thing that the Holy Spirit organized the holy scripture so as to satisfy hunger by means of its plainer passages and remove boredom by means of its obscurer ones." (All quotations of *De doctrina Christiana* are from the translation of R.P.H. Green.)

[8] *Hom. Ez.* I.6.1. Gregory's and Augustine's observations are, of course, also consistent with Origen's discussion in Book 4 of *De principiis*.

[9] *Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come.*

[10] See, e.g., Gregory of Nyssa's prologue to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, and Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* I.1.1.

[11] *Mor., Ep. ad Leandrum* 4 (CC 143, 6.177–78).

words that will provide the requisite sustenance.[12] Moreover, Gregory's formulation here is perhaps superior to that in *Moralia in Job* because it makes clear that there are not simply two participants in this process, but three: the sacred text, the reader, and the Spirit. Also, although he articulates this understanding of the Bible's theological interpretation at the end of the period we have studied, it is consistent with the practices of earlier commentators.

Finally, the polyvalence which emerges in this dynamic process is neither absolutely open-ended nor arbitrary. As we saw over and over, early Christian commentators display extraordinary sensitivity not only to the particular words of the prophet's vision, but also to the vocabulary of the entire Bible. Thus their interpretations develop, even flourish, within linguistic confines presented by the sacred writings themselves. Parallel to this, they explore any specific passage in the light of both Scripture's overarching meaning—its *skopos*—and the Church's belief in Christ. In their search for a text's signification they do not limit themselves to what would have been understood by its original author or audience. While the polysemia which often appears in the Fathers prompts some to think their exegesis is unrestrained, precisely the opposite is true: Scripture itself provides the control. This notion is seen in Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*, where he discusses the Bible's multivalent character and authorial intent:

> Sometimes not just one meaning but two or more meanings are perceived in the same words of scripture. Even if the writer's meaning is obscure, there is no danger here, provided that it can be shown from other passages of the holy scriptures that each of these interpretations is consistent with the truth. The person examining the divine utterances must of course do his best to arrive at the intention of the writer through whom the Holy Spirit produced that part of scripture; he may reach that meaning or carve out from the words another meaning which does not run counter to the faith, using the evidence of any other passage of the divine utterances. Perhaps the author too saw that very meaning in the words which we are trying to understand. Certainly the spirit of God who worked through the author foresaw without any doubt that it would present itself to a reader or listener, or rather planned that it should present itself, because it too is based on the truth. Could God have built into the divine eloquence a more generous or bountiful gift than the possibility of understanding the

[12] See chapter 2.

> same words in several ways, all of them deriving confirmation from other no less divinely inspired passages?[13]

The practice described here by Augustine, of seeking out a passage's meaning by searching all of "the divine utterances," is manifest in the exegetical tradition of Ezekiel 1. As we have seen, the Fathers repeatedly bring the prophet's vision into relation with other texts—Isaiah 6, Hosea 12.11, Psalm 76.19, John 1.18, and Philippians 3.13 to name just a few—as they attempt to discern its import. Through the matrix of these various verses the *skopos* of the Christian Scriptures emerges, and the explication of Ezekiel 1 is tied to this overarching meaning. Indeed, that the exposition coalesces into three dominant strands, which are characterized by ever-deepening theological reflection on Ezekiel 1, the entire Bible, already-established readings, and the Church's ongoing life and doctrine, evinces the constraints internal to this process.[14] Interpretations other than these three do arise, but where they are deemed inconsistent with Scripture's *skopos* and the Church's faith, they are discarded.[15] Thus, Scripture's polyvalence, its inexhaustibility, is always governed by adherence to Christ.

Patristic exegetes studied and commented on the biblical books not as windows on a world long past, but as the living Word that continually illumines and guides both the individual Christian and the corporate Church. Interpreting Ezekiel 1 in this way, in light of all of Scripture and through the lens of the Incarnation, they found confirmation of the sacred writings' unity in the *wheel within a wheel* of God's chariot and discerned that although the one who reveals himself in the vision is ultimately beyond human comprehension, he draws souls into the life of virtue, into fellowship with the Trinity, through the guidance of the Word.

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[13] *Doct. chr.* 3.27.38.

[14] Of course, the appearance of these three particular strands in this early period would not preclude others from emerging later.

[15] Because I have focused on the development of the three dominant strands I have not treated these abandoned interpretations. An example of a construal that is discarded can be found in Novatian's *De Trinitate*; see Christman 1995, chapters 4 and 8.

APPENDIX 1

EZEKIEL 1 IN THE SEPTUAGINT AND VULGATE

Septuagint (from *Septuaginta*, edited by Alfred Rahlfs)

[1]Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ τριακοστῷ ἔτει ἐν τῷ τετάρτῳ μηνὶ πέμπτῃ τοῦ μηνὸς καὶ ἐγὼ ἤμην ἐν μέσῳ τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας ἐπὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τοῦ Χοβαρ, καὶ ἠνοίχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδον ὁράσεις θεοῦ· [2]πέμπτῃ τοῦ μηνός (τοῦτο 2
τὸ ἔτος τὸ πέμπτον τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας τοῦ βασιλέως Ιωακιμ) [3]καὶ ἐγένετο 3
λόγος κυρίου πρὸς Ιεζεκιηλ υἱὸν Βουζι τὸν ἱερέα ἐν γῇ Χαλδαίων ἐπὶ τοῦ
ποταμοῦ τοῦ Χοβαρ· καὶ ἐγένετο ἐπ᾽ ἐμὲ χεὶρ κυρίου, [4]καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοὺ 4
πνεῦμα ἐξαῖρον ἤρχετο ἀπὸ βορρᾶ, καὶ νεφέλη μεγάλη ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ φέγγος
κύκλῳ αὐτοῦ καὶ πῦρ ἐξαστράπτον, καὶ ἐν τῷ μέσῳ αὐτοῦ ὡς ὅρασις
ἠλέκτρου ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ φέγγος ἐν αὐτῷ. [5]καὶ ἐν τῷ μέσῳ ὡς ὁμοίωμα 5
τεσσάρων ζῴων· καὶ αὕτη ἡ ὅρασις αὐτῶν· ὁμοίωμα ἀνθρώπου ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῖς, 6
[6]καὶ τέσσαρα πρόσωπα τῷ ἑνί, καὶ τέσσαρες πτέρυγες τῷ ἑνί. [7]καὶ τὰ σκέλη 7
αὐτῶν ὀρθά, καὶ πτερωτοὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτῶν, καὶ σπινθῆρες ὡς ἐξαστράπτων χαλκός, καὶ ἐλαφραὶ αἱ πτέρυγες αὐτῶν. [8]καὶ χεὶρ ἀνθρώπου 8
ὑποκάτωθεν τῶν πτερύγων αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὰ τέσσαρα μέρη αὐτῶν· καὶ τὰ
πρόσωπα αὐτῶν τῶν τεσσάρων [9]οὐκ ἐπεστρέφοντο ἐν τῷ βαδίζειν αὐτά, 9
ἕκαστον κατέναντι τοῦ προσώπου αὐτῶν ἐπορεύοντο. [10]καὶ ὁμοίωσις τῶν 10
προσώπων αὐτῶν· πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπου καὶ πρόσωπον λέοντος ἐκ δεξιῶν
τοῖς τέσσαρσιν καὶ πρόσωπον μόσχου ἐξ ἀριστερῶν τοῖς τέσσαρσιν καὶ
πρόσωπον ἀετοῦ τοῖς τέσσαρσιν. [11]καὶ αἱ πτέρυγες αὐτῶν ἐκτεταμέναι 11
ἄνωθεν τοῖς τέσσαρσιν, ἑκατέρῳ δύο συνεζευγμέναι πρὸς ἀλλήλας, καὶ δύο
ἐπεκάλυπτον ἐπάνω τοῦ σώματος αὐτῶν. [12]καὶ ἑκάτερον κατὰ πρόσωπον 12
αὐτοῦ ἐπορεύετο· οὗ ἂν ἦν τὸ πνεῦμα πορευόμενον, ἐπορεύοντο καὶ οὐκ
ἐπέστρεφον. [13]καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ζῴων ὅρασις ὡς ἀνθράκων πυρὸς καιομένων, 13
ὡς ὄψις λαμπάδων συστρεφομένων ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ζῴων καὶ φέγγος τοῦ
πυρός, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐξεπορεύετο ἀστραπή. [15]καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοὺ τροχὸς 15
εἷς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐχόμενος τῶν ζῴων τοῖς τέσσαρσιν· [16]καὶ τὸ εἶδος τῶν τροχῶν 16
ὡς εἶδος θαρσις, καὶ ὁμοίωμα ἓν τοῖς τέσσαρσιν, καὶ τὸ ἔργον αὐτῶν ἦν
καθὼς ἂν εἴη τροχὸς ἐν τροχῷ. [17]ἐπὶ τὰ τέσσαρα μέρη αὐτῶν ἐπορεύοντο, 17
οὐκ ἐπέστρεφον ἐν τῷ πορεύεσθαι αὐτὰ [18]οὐδ᾽ οἱ νῶτοι αὐτῶν, καὶ ὕψος 18
ἦν αὐτοῖς· καὶ εἶδον αὐτά, καὶ οἱ νῶτοι αὐτῶν πλήρεις ὀφθαλμῶν κυκλόθεν
τοῖς τέσσαρσιν. [19]καὶ ἐν τῷ πορεύεσθαι τὰ ζῷα ἐπορεύοντο οἱ τροχοὶ 19
ἐχόμενοι αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐξαίρειν τὰ ζῷα ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἐξῄροντο οἱ τροχοί.

20 [20]οὗ ἂν ἦν ἡ νεφέλη, ἐκεῖ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ πορεύεσθαι· ἐπορεύοντο τὰ ζῷα
καὶ οἱ τροχοὶ καὶ ἐξῄροντο σὺν αὐτοῖς, διότι πνεῦμα ζωῆς ἦν ἐν τοῖς τροχοῖς.
21 [21]ἐν τῷ πορεύεσθαι αὐτὰ ἐπορεύοντο καὶ ἐν τῷ ἑστάναι αὐτὰ εἱστήκεισαν
καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐξαίρειν αὐτὰ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἐξῄροντο σὺν αὐτοῖς, ὅτι πνεῦμα ζωῆς
22 ἦν ἐν τοῖς τροχοῖς. [22]καὶ ὁμοίωμα ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς αὐτοῖς τῶν ζῴων ὡσεὶ
στερέωμα ὡς ὅρασις κρυστάλλου ἐκτεταμένον ἐπὶ τῶν πτερύγων αὐτῶν
23 ἐπάνωθεν· [23]καὶ ὑποκάτω τοῦ στερεώματος αἱ πτέρυγες αὐτῶν ἐκτεταμέναι,
πτερυσσόμεναι, ἑτέρα τῇ ἑτέρᾳ, ἑκάστῳ δύο συνεζευγμέναι ἐπικαλύπτου-
24 σαι τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν. [24]καὶ ἤκουον τὴν φωνὴν τῶν πτερύγων αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ
πορεύεσθαι αὐτὰ ὡς φωνὴν ὕδατος πολλοῦ· καὶ ἐν τῷ ἑστάναι αὐτὰ
25 κατέπαυον αἱ πτέρυγες αὐτῶν. [25]καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ὑπεράνωθεν τοῦ στερεώματος
26 τοῦ ὄντος ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς αὐτῶν. [26]ὡς ὅρασις λίθου σαπφείρου ὁμοίωμα
θρόνου ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ ὁμοιώματος τοῦ θρόνου ὁμοίωμα ὡς εἶδος
27 ἀνθρώπου ἄνωθεν. [27]καὶ εἶδον ὡς ὄψιν ἠλέκτρου ἀπὸ ὁράσεως ὀσφύος καὶ
ἐπάνω, καὶ ἀπὸ ὁράσεως ὀσφύος καὶ ἕως κάτω εἶδον ὡς ὅρασιν πυρὸς καὶ
28 τὸ φέγγος αὐτοῦ κύκλῳ. [28]ὡς ὅρασις τόξου, ὅταν ᾖ ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ
ὑετοῦ, οὕτως ἡ στάσις τοῦ φέγγους κυκλόθεν. αὕτη ἡ ὅρασις ὁμοιώματος
δόξης κυρίου· καὶ εἶδον καὶ πίπτω ἐπὶ πρόσωπόν μου καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν
λαλοῦντος.

Vulgate (from *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, edited by Bonifatius Fischer [3rd edition, 1983])

1:1 et factum est in tricesimo anno in quarto in quinta mensis cum essem in medio captivorum iuxta fluvium Chobar aperti sunt caeli et vidi visiones Dei
1:2 in quinta mensis ipse est annus quintus transmigrationis regis Ioachin
1:3 factum est verbum Domini ad Hiezechiel filium Buzi sacerdotem in terra Chaldeorum secus flumen Chobar et facta est super eum ibi manus Domini
1:4 et vidi et ecce ventus turbinis veniebat ab aquilone et nubes magna et ignis involvens et splendor in circuitu eius et de medio eius quasi species electri id est de medio ignis
1:5 et ex medio eorum similitudo quattuor animalium et hic aspectus eorum similitudo hominis in eis
1:6 et quattuor facies uni et quattuor pinnae uni
1:7 et pedes eorum pedes recti et planta pedis eorum quasi planta pedis vituli et scintillae quasi aspectus aeris candentis
1:8 et manus hominis sub pinnis eorum in quattuor partibus et facies et pinnas per quattuor partes habebant

1:9 iunctaeque erant pinnae eorum alterius ad alterum non revertebantur cum incederent sed unumquodque ante faciem suam gradiebatur
1:10 similitudo autem vultus eorum facies hominis et facies leonis a dextris ipsorum quattuor facies autem bovis a sinistris ipsorum quattuor et facies aquilae ipsorum quattuor
1:11 et facies eorum et pinnae eorum extentae desuper duae pinnae singulorum iungebantur et duae tegebant corpora eorum
1:12 et unumquodque coram facie sua ambulabat ubi erat impetus spiritus illuc gradiebantur nec revertebantur cum ambularent
1:13 et similitudo animalium aspectus eorum quasi carbonum ignis ardentium et quasi aspectus lampadarum haec erat visio discurrens in medio animalium splendor ignis et de igne fulgor egrediens
1:14 et animalia ibant et revertebantur in similitudinem fulguris coruscantis
1:15 cumque aspicerem animalia apparuit rota una super terram iuxta animalia habens quattuor facies
1:16 et aspectus rotarum et opus earum quasi visio maris et una similitudo ipsarum quattuor et aspectus earum et opera quasi sit rota in medio rotae
1:17 per quattuor partes earum euntes ibant et non revertebantur cum ambularent
1:18 statura quoque erat rotis et altitudo et horribilis aspectus et totum corpus plenum oculis in circuitu ipsarum quattuor
1:19 cumque ambularent animalia ambulabant pariter et rotae iuxta ea et cum elevarentur animalia de terra elevabantur simul et rotae
1:20 quocumque ibat spiritus illuc eunte spiritu et rotae pariter levabantur sequentes eum spiritus enim vitae erat in rotis
1:21 cum euntibus ibant et cum stantibus stabant et cum elevatis a terra pariter elevabantur et rotae sequentes ea quia spiritus vitae erat in rotis
1:22 et similitudo super caput animalium firmamenti quasi aspectus cristalli horribilis et extenti super capita eorum desuper
1:23 sub firmamento autem pinnae eorum rectae alterius ad alterum unumquodque duabus alis velabat corpus suum et alterum similiter velabatur
1:24 et audiebam sonum alarum quasi sonum aquarum multarum quasi sonum sublimis Dei cum ambularent quasi sonus erat multitudinis ut sonus castrorum cumque starent dimittebantur pinnae eorum

1:25 nam cum fieret vox supra firmamentum quod erat super caput eorum stabant et submittebant alas suas
1:26 et super firmamentum quod erat inminens capiti eorum quasi aspectus lapidis sapphyri similitudo throni et super similitudinem throni similitudo quasi aspectus hominis desuper
1:27 et vidi quasi speciem electri velut aspectum ignis intrinsecus eius per circuitum a lumbis eius et desuper et a lumbis eius usque deorsum vidi quasi speciem ignis splendentis in circuitu
1:28 velut aspectum arcus cum fuerit in nube in die pluviae hic erat aspectus splendoris per gyrum
2:1 haec visio similitudinis gloriae Domini . . .

APPENDIX 2

PHAEDRUS 246–254

As to soul's immortality then we have said enough, but as to its nature there is this that must be said. What manner of thing it is would be a long tale to tell, and most assuredly a god alone could tell it, but what it resembles, that a man might tell in briefer compass. Let this therefore be our manner of discourse. Let it be likened to the union of powers in a team of winged steeds and their winged charioteer. Now all the gods' steeds and all their charioteers are good, and of good stock, but with other beings it is not wholly so. With us men, in the first place, it is a pair of steeds that the b
charioteer controls; moreover one of them is noble and good, and of good stock, while the other has the opposite character, and his stock is opposite. Hence the task of our charioteer is difficult and troublesome.

And now we must essay to tell how it is that living beings are called mortal and immortal. All soul has the care of all that is inanimate, and traverses the whole universe, though in ever-changing forms. Thus when it is perfect and winged it journeys on high and c
controls the whole world, but one that has shed its wings sinks down until it can fasten on something solid, and settling there it takes to itself an earthy body which seems by reason of the soul's power to move itself. This composite structure of soul and body is called a living being, and is further termed 'mortal'; 'immortal' is a term applied on no basis of reasoned argument at all, but our fancy pictures the god whom we have never seen, nor fully conceived, as an d
immortal living being, possessed of a soul and a body united for all time. Howbeit, let these matters, and our account thereof, be as God pleases; what we must understand is the reason why the soul's wings fall from it, and are lost. It is on this wise.

The natural property of a wing is to raise that which is heavy and carry it aloft to the region where the gods dwell, and more than any other bodily part it shares in the divine nature, which is fair, e
wise, and good, and possessed of all other such excellences. Now by

these excellences especially is the soul's plumage nourished and fostered, while by their opposites, even by ugliness and evil, it is wasted and destroyed. And behold, there in the heaven Zeus, mighty leader, drives his winged team. First of the host of gods and daemons he proceeds, ordering all things and caring therefor, and the host fol-
247 lows after him, marshaled in eleven companies. For Hestia abides alone in the gods' dwelling place, but for the rest, all such as are ranked in the number of the twelve as ruler gods lead their several companies, each according to his rank.

Now within the heavens are many spectacles of bliss upon the highways whereon the blessed gods pass to and fro, each doing his own work, and with them are all such as will and can follow them, for jealousy has no place in the choir divine. But at such times as they go to their feasting and banquet, behold they climb the steep
b ascent even unto the summit of the arch that supports the heavens, and easy is that ascent for the chariots of the gods, for they are well balanced and readily guided. But for the others it is hard, by reason of the heaviness of the steed of wickedness, which pulls down his driver with his weight, except that driver have schooled him well.

And now there awaits the soul the extreme of her toil and struggling. For the souls that are called immortal, so soon as they are at the summit, come forth and stand upon the back of the world, and
c straightway the revolving heaven carries them round, and they look upon the regions without.

Of that place beyond the heavens none of our earthly poets has yet sung, and none shall sing worthily. But this is the manner of it, for assuredly we must be bold to speak what is true, above all when our discourse is upon truth. It is there that true being dwells, without color or shape, that cannot be touched; reason alone, the soul's
d pilot [κυβερνήτης], can behold it, and all true knowledge is knowledge thereof. Now even as the mind of a god is nourished by reason and knowledge, so also is it with every soul that has a care to receive her proper food; wherefore when at last she has beheld being she is well content, and contemplating truth she is nourished and prospers, until the heaven's revolution brings her back full circle. And while she is borne round she discerns justice, its very self, and likewise temperance, and knowledge, not the knowledge that is neigh-
e bor to becoming and varies with the various objects to which we commonly ascribe being, but the veritable knowledge of being that veritably is. And when she has contemplated likewise and feasted

upon all else that has true being, she descends again within the heavens and comes back home. And having so come, her charioteer sets his steeds at their manger, and puts ambrosia before them and draught of nectar to drink withal.

Such is the life of gods. Of the other souls that which best follows a god and becomes most like thereunto raises her charioteer's head into the outer region, and is carried round with the gods in the revolution, but being confounded by her steeds she has much ado to discern the things that are; another now rises, and now sinks, and by reason of her unruly steeds sees in part, but in part sees not. As for the rest, though all are eager to reach the heights and seek to follow, they are not able; sucked down as they travel they trample and tread upon one another, this one striving to outstrip that. Thus confusion ensues, and conflict and grievous sweat. Whereupon, with their charioteers powerless, many are lamed, and many have their wings all broken, and for all their toiling they are balked, every one, of the full vision of being, and, departing therefrom, they feed upon the food of semblance. 248 b

Now the reason wherefore the souls are fain and eager to behold the plain of Truth and discover it, lies herein—to wit, that the pasturage that is proper to their noblest part comes from that meadow, and the plumage by which they are borne aloft is nourished thereby. c

Hear now the ordinance of Necessity. Whatsoever soul has followed in the train of a god, and discerned something of truth, shall be kept from sorrow until a new revolution shall begin, and if she can do this always, she shall remain always free from hurt. But when she is not able so to follow, and sees none of it, but meeting with some mischance comes to be burdened with a load of forgetfulness and wrongdoing, and because of that burden sheds her wings and falls to the earth, then thus runs the law. In her first birth she shall not be planted in any brute beast, but the soul that hath seen the most of being shall enter into the human babe that shall grow into a seeker after wisdom or beauty, a follower of the Muses and a lover; the next, having seen less, shall dwell in a king that abides by law, or a warrior and ruler; the third in a statesman, a man of business, or a trader; the fourth in an athlete, or physical trainer, or physician; the fifth shall have the life of a prophet or a Mystery priest; to the sixth that of a poet or other imitative artist shall be fittingly given; the seventh shall live in an artisan or farmer; the eighth in a Sophist or demagogue; the ninth in a tyrant. d e

Now in all these incarnations he who lives righteously has a better lot for his portion, and he who lives unrighteously a worse. For a soul does not return to the place whence she came for ten thou-
249 sand years, since in no lesser time can she regain her wings, save only his soul who has sought after wisdom unfeignedly, or has conjoined his passion for a loved one with that seeking. Such a soul, if with three revolutions of a thousand years she has thrice chosen this philosophical life, regains thereby her wings, and speeds away after three thousand years; but the rest, when they have accomplished their first life, are brought to judgment, and after the judgment some are taken to be punished in places of chastisement beneath the earth, while others are borne aloft by Justice to a certain region of the
b heavens, there to live in such manner as is merited by their past life in the flesh. And after a thousand years these and those alike come to the allotment and choice of their second life, each choosing according to her will; then does the soul of a man enter into the life of a beast, and the beast's soul that was aforetime in a man goes back to a man again. For only the soul that has beheld truth may enter into this our human form—seeing that man must needs understand
c the language of forms, passing from a plurality of perceptions to a unity gathered together by reasoning—and such understanding is a recollection of those things which our souls beheld aforetime as they journeyed with their god, looking down upon the things which now we suppose to be, and gazing up to that which truly is.

Therefore is it meet and right that the soul of the philosopher alone should recover her wings, for she, so far as may be, is ever near in memory to those things a god's nearness whereunto makes him truly god. Wherefore if a man makes right use of such means of remembrance, and ever approaches to the full vision of the perfect mysteries, he and he alone becomes truly perfect. Standing aside
d from the busy doings of mankind, and drawing nigh to the divine, he is rebuked by the multitude as being out of his wits, for they know not that he is possessed by a deity.

Mark therefore the sum and substance of all our discourse touching the fourth sort of madness—to wit, that this is the best of all forms of divine possession, both in itself and in its sources, both for him that has it and for him that shares therein—and when he that
e loves beauty is touched by such madness he is called a lover. Such a one, as soon as he beholds the beauty of this world, is reminded

of true beauty, and his wings begin to grow; then is he fain to lift his wings and fly upward; yet he has not the power, but inasmuch as he gazes upward like a bird, and cares nothing for the world beneath, men charge it upon him that he is demented.

Now, as we have said, every human soul has, by reason of her nature, had contemplation of true being; else would she never have entered into this human creature; but to be put in mind thereof by 250
things here is not easy for every soul. Some, when they had the vision, had it but for a moment; some when they had fallen to earth consorted unhappily with such as led them to deeds of unrighteousness, wherefore they forgot the holy objects of their vision. Few indeed are left that can still remember much, but when these discern some likeness of the things yonder, they are amazed, and no longer masters of themselves, and know not what is come upon them by reason of their perception being dim. b

Now in the earthly likenesses of justice and temperance and all other prized possessions of the soul there dwells no luster; nay, so dull are the organs wherewith men approach their images that hardly can a few behold that which is imaged, but with beauty it is otherwise. Beauty it was ours to see in all its brightness in those days when, amidst that happy company, we beheld with our eyes that blessed vision, ourselves in the train of Zeus, others following some other god; then were we all initiated into that mystery which is rightly accounted blessed beyond all others; whole and unblemished c
were we that did celebrate it, untouched by the evils that awaited us in days to come; whole and unblemished likewise, free from all alloy, steadfast and blissful were the spectacles on which we gazed in the moment of final revelation; pure was the light that shone around us, and pure were we, without taint of that prison house which now we are encompassed withal, and call a body, fast bound therein as an oyster in its shell.

There let it rest then, our tribute to a memory that has stirred us to linger awhile on those former joys for which we yearn. Now d
beauty, as we said, shone bright amidst these visions, and in this world below we apprehend it through the clearest of our senses, clear and resplendent. For sight is the keenest mode of perception vouchsafed us through the body; wisdom, indeed, we cannot see thereby—how passionate had been our desire for her, if she had granted us so clear an image of herself to gaze upon—nor yet any

other of those beloved objects, save only beauty; for beauty alone this has been ordained, to be most manifest to sense and most lovely of them all.

e Now he whose vision of the mystery is long past, or whose purity has been sullied, cannot pass swiftly hence to see beauty's self yonder, when he beholds that which is called beautiful here; wherefore he looks upon it with no reverence, and surrendering to pleasure he essays to go after the fashion of a four-footed beast, and to beget offspring of the flesh, or consorting with wantonness he has no fear
251 nor shame in running after unnatural pleasure. But when one who is fresh from the mystery, and saw much of the vision, beholds a godlike face or bodily form that truly expresses beauty, first there come upon him a shuddering and a measure of that awe which the vision inspired, and then reverence as at the sight of a god, and but for fear of being deemed a very madman he would offer sacrifice to his beloved, as to a holy image of deity. Next, with the passing
b of the shudder, a strange sweating and fever seizes him. For by reason of the stream of beauty entering in through his eyes there comes a warmth, whereby his soul's plumage is fostered, and with that warmth the roots of the wings are melted, which for long had been so hardened and closed up that nothing could grow; then as the nourishment is poured in, the stump of the wing swells and hastens to grow from the root over the whole substance of the soul, for
c aforetime the whole soul was furnished with wings. Meanwhile she throbs with ferment in every part, and even as a teething child feels an aching and pain in its gums when a tooth has just come through, so does the soul of him who is beginning to grow his wings feel a ferment and painful irritation. Wherefore as she gazes upon the boy's beauty, she admits a flood of particles streaming therefrom—that is why we speak of a 'flood of passion'—whereby she is warmed and
d fostered; then has she respite from her anguish, and is filled with joy. But when she has been parted from him and become parched, the openings of those outlets at which the wings are sprouting dry up likewise and are closed, so that the wing's germ is barred off. And behind its bars, together with the flood aforesaid, it throbs like a fevered pulse, and pricks at its proper outlet, and thereat the whole soul round about is stung and goaded into anguish; howbeit she remembers the beauty of her beloved, and rejoices again. So between
e joy and anguish she is distraught at being in such strange case, perplexed and frenzied; with madness upon her she can neither sleep

by night nor keep still by day, but runs hither and thither, yearning for him in whom beauty dwells, if haply she may behold him. At last she does behold him, and lets the flood pour in upon her, releasing the imprisoned waters; then has she refreshment and respite from her stings and sufferings, and at that moment tastes a pleasure that is sweet beyond compare. Nor will she willingly give it up. 252
Above all others does she esteem her beloved in his beauty; mother, brother, friends, she forgets them all. Nought does she reck of losing worldly possessions through neglect. All the rules of conduct, all the graces of life, of which aforetime she was proud, she now disdains, welcoming a slave's estate and any couch where she may be suffered to lie down close beside her darling, for besides her reverence for the possessor of beauty she has found in him the only physi- b
cian for her grievous suffering.

Hearken, fair boy to whom I speak. This is the experience that men term love [ἔρως], but when you hear what the gods call it, you will probably smile at its strangeness. There are a couple of verses on love quoted by certain Homeric scholars from the unpublished works, the second of which is remarkably bold and a trifle astray in its quantities. They run as follows:

> Eros, cleaver of air, in mortals' speech is he named,
> But, since he must grow wings, Pteros the celestials call him.

You may believe that or not, as you please; at all events the cause c
and the nature of the lover's experience are in fact what I have said.

Now if he whom Love has caught be among the followers of Zeus, he is able to bear the burden of the winged one with some constancy, but they that attend upon Ares, and did range the heavens in his train, when they are caught by Love and fancy that their beloved is doing them some injury, will shed blood and not scruple to offer both themselves and their loved ones in sacrifice. And so does each lover live, after the manner of the god in whose com- d
pany he once was, honoring him and copying him so far as may be, so long as he remains uncorrupt and is still living in his first earthly period, and in like manner does he comport himself toward his beloved and all his other associates. And so each selects a fair one for his love after his disposition, and even as if the beloved himself were a god he fashions for himself as it were an image, and adorns it to be the object of his veneration and worship.

e Thus the followers of Zeus seek a beloved who is Zeuslike in soul; wherefore they look for one who is by nature disposed to the love of wisdom and the leading of men, and when they have found him and come to love him they do all in their power to foster that disposition. And if they have not aforetime trodden this path, they now set out upon it, learning the way from any source that may offer or finding it for themselves, and as they follow up the trace within
253 themselves of the nature of their own god their task is made easier, inasmuch as they are constrained to fix their gaze upon him, and reaching out after him in memory they are possessed by him, and from him they take their ways and manners of life, in so far as a man can partake of a god. But all this, mark you, they attribute to the beloved, and the draughts which they draw from Zeus they pour out, like bacchants, into the soul of the beloved, thus creating in
b him the closest possible likeness to the god they worship.

Those who were in the train of Hera look for a royal nature, and when they have found him they do unto him all things in like fashion. And so it is with the followers of Apollo and each other god. Every lover is fain that his beloved should be of a nature like to his own god, and when he has won him, he leads him on to walk in the ways of their god, and after his likeness, patterning himself thereupon and giving counsel and discipline to the boy. There is no jealousy nor petty spitefulness in his dealings, but his every act is aimed
c at bringing the beloved to be every whit like unto himself and unto the god of their worship.

So therefore glorious and blissful is the endeavor of true lovers in that mystery rite, if they accomplish that which they endeavor after the fashion of which I speak, when mutual affection arises through the madness inspired by love. But the beloved must needs be captured, and the manner of that capture I will now tell.

In the beginning of our story we divided each soul into three parts, two being like steeds and the third like a charioteer. Well and
d good. Now of the steeds, so we declare, one is good and the other is not, but we have not described the excellence of the one nor the badness of the other, and that is what must now be done. He that is on the more honorable side is upright and clean-limbed, carrying his neck high, with something of a hooked nose; in color he is white, with black eyes; a lover of glory, but with temperance and modesty; one that consorts with genuine renown, and needs no whip, being

driven by the word of command alone. The other is crooked of e
frame, a massive jumble of a creature, with thick short neck, snub nose, black skin, and gray eyes; hot-blooded, consorting with wantonness and vainglory; shaggy of ear, deaf, and hard to control with whip and goad.

Now when the driver beholds the person of the beloved, and causes a sensation of warmth to suffuse the whole soul, he begins to experience a tickling or pricking of desire, and the obedient steed, 254
constrained now as always by modesty, refrains from leaping upon the beloved. But his fellow, heeding no more the driver's goad or whip, leaps and dashes on, sorely troubling his companion and his driver, and forcing them to approach the loved one and remind him of the delights of love's commerce. For a while they struggle, indig- b
nant that he should force them to a monstrous and forbidden act, but at last, finding no end to their evil plight, they yield and agree to do his bidding. And so he draws them on, and now they are quite close and behold the spectacle of the beloved flashing upon them. At that sight the driver's memory goes back to that form of beauty, and he sees her once again enthroned by the side of temperance upon her holy seat; then in awe and reverence he falls upon his back, and therewith is compelled to pull the reins so violently c
that he brings both steeds down on their haunches, the good one willing and unresistant, but the wanton sore against his will. Now that they are a little way off, the good horse in shame and horror drenches the whole soul with sweat, while the other, contriving to recover his wind after the pain of the bit and his fall, bursts into angry abuse, railing at the charioteer and his yokefellow as cowardly d
treacherous deserters. Once again he tries to force them to advance, and when they beg him to delay awhile he grudgingly consents. But when the time appointed is come, and they feign to have forgotten, he reminds them of it—struggling and neighing and pulling until he compels them a second time to approach the beloved and renew their offer—and when they have come close, with head down and tail stretched out he takes the bit between his teeth and shamelessly e
plunges on. But the driver, with resentment even stronger than before, like a racer recoiling from the starting rope, jerks back the bit in the mouth of the wanton horse with an even stronger pull, bespatters his railing tongue and his jaws with blood, and forcing him down on legs and haunches delivers him over to anguish.

And so it happens time and again, until the evil steed casts off his wantonness; humbled in the end, he obeys the counsel of his driver, and when he sees the fair beloved is like to die of fear. Wherefore at long last the soul of the lover follows after the beloved with reverence and awe.

From *Plato: Phaedrus*, translated with introduction and commentary by R. Hackforth. With permission from Cambridge University Press.

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