

MOSES AND THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST IN ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA'S EXEGESIS*

PART II

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Having set out his unrepentant Alexandrian hermeneutical principles generically in this way, Cyril advances into the precise exegesis of the nativity of Moses (Exodus ch. 5) working from consistently Christocentric bases. The story of the birth is prefixed in the biblical text by the desperate state of Israel, forced to work like slaves under harsh overlords. This, for Cyril³², signifies the state of humanity at the time of Christ, when all the nations of the earth were labouring under the worst dominion of demons. The children of Israel, are a type of humanity under the tyranny of sin. The Pharaoh is the evil Prince of this world (Satan), whose overseers (localised demons) keep the people enslaved, and at a time when misery could hardly increase, the evil king devises a plan for the blotting out of male Israelite children. These signify those in whom the desire to serve God is still strong (virile) : in other words, the last hope among the elect for the world to turn back to God in the future. It is at the lowest ebb of the world's fortunes that God decides to send his Son for the salvation of the race. Cyril does not explicitly cite his fundamental source for this but it is surely an echo of the fifth chapter of Romans³³ which draws the distinction between the covenant of death (Phthora - corruption as Cyril will have it) stretching from Adam to Moses, and that of life, from the time of Jesus onwards. The macro-context again ensures that he draws the

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32 *Glaphyra* in Exod. 1. 2-3. PG 69. 386 C - 392B.

33 cf Rom. 5.20.

sharpest possible lines, in his exegetical theory, between the two Testaments, and accepts the Old Covenant only in so far as it has relevance to the New, a relevance as determined by the New. This is a radicalisation of Origen's biblical theory who (though positing the same generic principle of the New dispensation unfolding the significance of the Old) more genuinely than Cyril saw an eternal verity in the Old Testament text, as part of his wider philosophical hermeneutic. Cyril, in the Fifth Century, is more ready to draw a sharper line of division.

The textual 'motive' for Moses' nativity story as given in Exodus, therefore, that of the broken and tragic state of Israel (the elect), is elevated by Cyril as the fundamental textual indicator that this story is 'essentially' about the time of the economic advent of the Saviour Christ. This is what typological exegesis means in Cyril - the essential interpretation of narrative meaning :

We were 'labouring' under the sin inherited from our first parents, and were 'heavy burdened'³⁴ by our deprivation of all that was good. What is more, we had been enslaved in the savage dominion of that wicked ruler Satan, and set under those brutal overseers, the unclean spirits. We had come to the extremity of our trouble. Nothing could have been added to the sum of our misery and degradation. Then it was that God took pity upon us, lifted us up and saved us. And we shall understand how this was so, from those things that follow in the text. For all that is written about the blessed Moses we affirm to be an icon and a type of that salvation which comes in Christ.³⁵

Here his interpretative key moves from the concept of bondage under sin universally experienced (again *Romans* and *Galatians*) and hinges on the ideational parallelism of the world in bondage as yoked unwillingly (enslaved) to Satan but, when redeemed, as finding itself yoked to Christ by the Lord's Kenotic choice to come alongside us in our broken condition. The Pauline sense of yoke, the analogy of the movement from slavery to freedom in Christ, helps Cyril to underline the radical break between the dispensations which he wishes to sustain.³⁶ It is another reminder how constantly he comes at the Old Testament text from Pauline starting points. The New dispensation alone interprets the Old. Even when the Old foreshadows the New, as far as Cyril is concerned, that very foreshadowing can only be recognised retrospectively, in and through the Christ Mystery. Chronological principles of priority have no valid application here. That which comes before is not more authentic (a frequently used presupposition in historical exegesis of the modern era), merely analogous, and helpful only in so far as the analogy can be discerned largely from the basis of the exegesis of the proto-

34 He is alluding to Mt. 11.28

35 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.3. PG 69. 392 AB

36 As for example in *Galatians* 5.1.

type. In this sense, the exegesis of the Old Testament, for Cyril, is merely a set of extended comments illuminating aspects of the New which are more clearly given in the Gospel and Apostolic writings, but can be 'checked' against their ancient prefigurations in particular cases.³⁷

From this exegetical basis the nativity story of Moses is unfolded as a Christological type, in the following manner, the details filling out, as it were, the significance of his master-idea that all relevant Old Testament narratives retain an essential salvific significance only in and through the Christ economy.³⁸ So, as the Hebrews were before Moses, so was all Mankind in peril before the advent of Christ. The male children, those who had the potential to be specially pleasing to God as faithful servants, were especially prone to fall under the hostility of evil forces (the evil King and his minions), Satan-Pharaoh had set his heart obdurately on submerging such male children in the waters and mud of the river, that is the filth of earthly passions, which could distract them from their quest for God. The race was, by this Satanic device, left so effete (de-masculinised) that those who remained as the few specially chosen initiates of the Spirit (the prophets) were amazed at the state of general corruption and expressed how badly the race had declined from God.³⁹ To express the nadir of the decline Cyril alludes to LXX Ps 13.3:⁴⁰

All had fallen away and become utterly useless. There is no-one acting in goodness, not even one.'

Once again this takes us straight back to Cyril's invisible master- text, for the selfsame Psalmic proof text features large in Romans ch. 3 where the Apostle is making the same point: that when sin had reached its zenith, and the old dispensation was incapable of dealing with its effects, then God designed a new Christic economy of salvation.

At this low point, Cyril says, Emmanuel came : one of our nature, who elected to be with us, but who was supremely 'male', that is having no effete inclination to sin:

37 cf. *Comm. in Isaiam*. 2.3. verse. 23. PG 70. 640D- 641A.

38 I am following the main typological line. Cyril adds in several other detailed interpretations in other places, such as the name of Moses' father being obscured in the narrative to merely 'a certain man', and this being a sign how Christ's earthly paternity would not be a feature of the true sacred narrative (Glaphyra in Exod. 1.4. PG 69. 396A) ; Moses as a levitical figure - signifying Christ's hidden priestly character (Glaphyra in Exod. 1.4. PG 69. 393B) ; The innocence of the baby signifying that new creaturehood the incarnate Lord would effect (ibid. PG 69. 393CD); & Moses' elegance as a child connoting the beauty of the Messiah (ibid. PG 69. 396B).

39 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.5. PG 69. 396 CD. Cyril refers especially to Ps. 13.3

40 In western numbering = Ps. 14. Its parallel is in LXX Ps. 52.4. (Ps. 53.3)

But since he came among us, and was numbered among the transgressors, he was called Emmanuel; for how truly he was by nature a male child, having no trace of any effeness of character, since in no way was he a weakling in regard to sin.⁴¹

Cyril tells us that because of his radiant goodness Christ was, as it were, hidden from (and implicitly invisible to) the eye of the wicked King Satan-Pharaoh, just as the child Moses was hidden, and the 'Synagogue' nurtured him until he grew to maturity.

So far all this has been generally predictable, but Cyril then turns into a Cross-centred apologetic with Judaism. It is an interesting textual movement, somewhat unexpected, *in situ*, and apparently⁴² based on the thought pattern of 1 Cor. 2.8⁴³ where Paul himself makes a deliberate parallel between the Jewish leaders who crucified Christ, and the 'princes of this world' who are the demonic influences at work seeking out the just. Moses' true mother, then, who stands now for the 'synagogue which resists Christ' (the contemporary synagogue as he infers (not merely the historical Jewish chief priests) places the baby Moses into a basket and sets the child adrift on the waters. The daughter of Pharaoh finds the child and adopts it. The true mother of Moses has been led astray by the evil king's edict of destruction. Even though unwillingly, she is brought into a kind of assonance with an evil mentality (Israel's unwilling bondage in sin and the inability of the Law to remove the root of sin⁴⁴) and this is why she typifies the Synagogue under condemnation for sin (a sinfulness which will peak in the rejection of the Saviour and (Cyril implies) will endure in the continuing resistance to the spread of Christianity in his own time. The basket to which she abandons her child to the real threat of death (the waters of the Nile) is thus a type of the tomb of Christ who is also abandoned by his own people to the experience of death, which he overthrows in his resurrection. The symbol of the waters of the river Cyril uses to connect the two motifs of the one woman who rejects and the other who receives : for the daughter of Pharaoh (an unlikely convert from sin since she is flesh and blood of the most wicked archetype of sin) means essentially the gentile world which through the mystery of the saviour-found-in-the-waters (Baptism into Christ⁴⁵) is liberated from sin and death and comes into possession of life:

41 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.5. PG 69. 397A.

42 In so far as Cyril is himself also making a close parallel throughout his text between the Archon Pharaoh and the demonic Archon Satan.

43 Also seen in Acts 2 :23, 36; and Acts. 4.10 which probably represents a Lukan form of the Pauline kerygma.

44 Paul's general thesis in *Hebrews* 10; *Romans* 5 ; and *Galatians* 3-4 .

45 Again showing how much *Romans* (6.4-5) is behind his mind throughout this whole exegetical essay.

The Synagogue of the Jews alienated itself from Emmanuel, but the daughter of Pharaoh, which is the Church of the gentile nations, even though she had Satan as her father, discovered him in the waters, which can be understood as a type of holy baptism through which and in which we discover Christ, and she opened up the wicker basket. For Christ did not remain among the dead but rather rose to life again, trampling death underfoot and rising from the tomb, so that they might come to belief, through faith in him who through us came to death that he might regain life on our behalf.⁴⁶

His conclusion is that this mystery of the nativity of Moses setting out the mystery of Christ's economy of salvation is 'patently obvious':

And so the Nativity of Moses and all those things signified along with it are patently obvious symbols of the Mystery of Christ, for people of good sense.⁴⁷

His confidence is remarkable. This is the first of the three perorations to the Moses triptych which we noticed above, and thus the first place where he turns around the exegesis to its primary conclusion: the gentile Church alone has the proper claim to interpret the significance of Moses. In Cyril's active exegesis of what Moses 'really' means he finishes with an invitation to the daughter of Israel, Moses true mother, that is the Alexandrian Synagogue, to come to faith in Christ under the guidance of the daughter of Pharaoh who has seen the true light, and thereby becomes the real agent of the story of how Moses was elevated as type of saviour to come. If the daughter of Israel does this, he says, the Synagogue will not lose its reward. As was the case with Moses' true mother, the experience will prove to be one which allows her to receive back her natural baby as her own. In seeing Moses as the forerunner of Jesus, the Synagogue will be reappropriating its own story of salvation:

The text speaks of the daughter of Pharaoh, and says that the little child was 'of the Hebrews' (Ex. 2.6). And so, as in the fullness of time the Synagogue of the Jews shall receive the Christ from the Church of the gentile nations, this is clearly and mystically signified in the way the daughter of Pharaoh gives back the child to its mother. For even though the Synagogue of the Jews once, as it were, exposed and cast off Jesus through faithlessness, even so in these last days it shall receive him, being initiated into the mystery through the teachings of the Church. And then it may indeed have the confidence that it shall not miss its reward, but rather a great hope shall be offered to it. And this is why the daughter of Pharaoh is said to promise a reward to the mother of Moses if she will nurse her own child.⁴⁸

46 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.5. PG 69. 397B.

47 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.5. PG 69. 397D.

48 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.5. PG 69. 397 CD.

This 'convincing' of Israel which the Church's preaching effects is, for Cyril, a sign of the 'perfecting of times' and is an indication (once again) of his reliance on Paul⁴⁹ and perhaps also a sign of his great confidence as Christian Ethnarch in the second decade of the Fifth Century when he was extending the missionary activity of his church, encouraged by the imperial policy emanating from Constantinople. As with his attitude to the Hellenistic cults around him, Cyril stands revealed in his exegetical philosophy as dynamically interested in missionary apologetic.

After this extended treatment of the type of Moses' nativity, Cyril begins to paraphrase the rest of the Moses' story⁵⁰ up to the point of his flight to a foreign land where he defends the daughters of Jethro the priest, marries Sepphora, and fathers a son called Gersom. The narrative is a straightforward 'historic' re-telling of the story. It is not, however, an exegesis as far as Cyril is concerned, for the essential meaning still requires elucidation. This, in line with his earlier treatment of Moses' nativity, means precisely that inner significance, in which the narrative appears to relate to the mystery of Christ:

And now our discourse turns again to that inner and higher sense (theoria) supplying as much of the history as is appropriate but turning more to what appears to be the spiritual meaning, that is in the way the text refers to the economy (of salvation) in Christ.⁵¹

The Christological significance of the exile in Midian, Cyril tells his readers, confirms the symbolism of Moses' birth story. The general motive for Moses' exile was the way in which he had come to the rescue of his afflicted brother (Exodus 2: 11-12). So too, Christ comes kenotically among mankind, to rescue his distressed brethren. The Pauline hermeneutical key is again discernible. Here Cyril explicitly alludes to Galatians 4.4.⁵² This demonstrates how the Kenosis of the Word is the manner in which the Saviour redeems the race from the oppression of the evil of Egypt and its Pharaoh. The Egyptian whom Moses killed, is the Satan, brought down to death by Christ's economy.⁵³ When he continues the narrative to the point of how Moses defends the daughters of Jethro from the shepherds who are driving their flocks away from the watering trough, he follows up on the same idea. The shepherds hostile to the priest's children are the demons who prevent mankind

49 See, for example, *Romans* 11. 25-28 where the return of Israel is set as an eschatological sign. Also Gal. 4.4. which he specifically alludes to in his following section (*Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.7. PG 69. 400D).

50 Exodus 2. 11-22a. cf. *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.6. PG 69. 397D - 399A.

51 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.6. PG 69. 400.C

52 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.7. PG 69. 400D.

53 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.7. PG 69. 401B - 405A.

drawing wholesome water: that spiritual water⁵⁴ which is true worship that would allow the flock to live and see truth. The demons have oppressed mankind (here specifically the gentile peoples) through a false cult. But Cyril lingers on one detail more than any other as bearing a significance in the narrative of the exile of Moses in Madian, and that is his marriage to only one of the daughters (he 'elect one') out of no less than seven potential spouses. This, he tells us, was Sepphora. Jethro, the father, is etymologically explained as 'vacuous man'. For Cyril he means a worldly unredeemed man, who serves as priest of an alien (gentile) false cult. His daughter Sepphora, however, signifies the woman that Moses, the type of the Saviour, has elected as his own. She is, therefore, mystically a symbol of the 'church of the gentiles', whom Christ has chosen as his bride :

For Moses took Sepphora to himself as his own most beautiful spouse, a bride from the gentile nations, which we understand to symbolize the Church.⁵⁵

Her name means beauty, visitation, or spiritual grace, Cyril goes on to tell us,⁵⁶ and this ideally shows her as a type of the redemption that Christ brings to the elected gentile church. After the daughters are liberated by Moses, even Jethro is renamed Raguel, a new title which signifies 'flock of God'. In all this Moses appears straightforwardly as a positive prior type of the Christ as liberating saviour. There is an interesting resumption of the Sepphora typology, however, in his *Commentary on John*, which shows a different side of the picture, for there Sepphora is the liberator of Moses. It concerns the episode where the angel of God seeks to kill Moses in the tent (Exod. 4: 24-26), which Cyril regards (like many moderns still) as rather 'problematic'.⁵⁷

This does not stop him from going on to interpret it anyway, and he notes how Moses' circumcision clearly cannot save him from the hand of death. Here he speaks of Moses' 'boast' of circumcision in terms so redolent of Romans 2 :17, 23 that we again detect the general context and guiding line of his hermeneutical approach. There Paul spoke of the 'boast of the law' being insufficient to save, and argued that the uncircumcised who have faith shall judge the circumcised, since the true Jew is the one who is so 'inwardly'. Cyril is substantially following all of this when he goes on to interpret the enigmatic passage, noting how it is the intervention of Sepphora which saves Moses' life. She, whom he repeats is the typological symbol of the gentile church, becomes the actual saviour of Moses. Even if

54 Here he relies on John 7.37. cf. Glaphyra in Exod. 1.8. PG 69. 408 B.

55 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.8. PG 69. 408D.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Comm. in Joannem.* Bk. 4. PG 73. 693C. 'If anyone thinks otherwise in regard to this most mystical and enigmatic text, I would be grateful to hear from them.'

sometimes Moses stands as a type of Christ the saviour, he is also a type of other more limited things such as the Law, or the sinful disobedience of Israel (as when he is punished for striking the rock). In this instance he stands as a symbol of the circumcision of the Law which cannot save even a man such as he from the power of death. The gentile church, who became 'the spouse' by the elective marriage of Moses *qua* Christ, is thus given the mission to save Moses' life. Sapphira's sacrifice is acceptable to God, and Moses is liberated. Cyril means, by this extended typology, something very similar to the peroration given after his discourse on the nativity of Moses : whatever the historical sequence of the election of the gentiles (coming after that of Israel) the essential meaning of the text is that it is the Christian Church which now has the mystery of election and stands inviting Moses (the Synagogue) into life. It is quite clear that he wishes the type of Moses to operate Christologically, but not absolutely so, or always in a positive and straightforward sense.

The third chief point where Cyril expands on the typological significance of Moses turns around the epiphany of the Burning Bush. Here the tension around Moses as a Christological type is very visible, for the general patristic tendency was to view the theophanies in the Old Testament as epiphanic experiences of the Logos. This is why Moses features ambivalently as a type of Christ in the narrative. Cyril immediately begins the section restating his generic explanation of the motive for the incarnation. The human race had sunk in sin to a miserable extent. There were some, however, who retained some clarity of spiritual vision, and these, the prophets who related to God in ancient times, were able to call upon God for mercy, to appeal for the rescue He would finally effect in the fullness of time by the incarnation of the Logos. Such was Israel calling to God for rescue, when God heard their cry and sent them Moses, back from his exile in Madian. Moses, as such, is still a type of Christ the Saviour who comes into the world to crush Satan (Pharaoh has just died in the Exodus narrative) and deliver mankind from tyranny.⁵⁸ Moses is also called to Mount Horeb. This too signifies how, when human misery had reached its peak, God sent his Son into the world to effect salvation.⁵⁹ In both cases, then, as a 'called one', Moses stands as a type of Christ as redeemer. Having said this, however, Cyril quickly turns away from Moses as a Christological type, for he begins to expatiate on the significance of the Logos' epiphany in the Bush. From this point on Moses appears as a symbol of incomprehension before the divine plan.

The mystery of Christ, and how it prefigures the end of the shadows of the old dispensation is the essential truth contained in this enigmatic vision, Cyril says :

58 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.9. PG 69. 409C - 412B.

59 *Ibid.* 1.9. PG 69. 412D. cf. Heb. 10.1, 5f (a favourite Christological source for Cyril).

For God gave the Law as a help, as the prophet said⁶⁰..... But he set up this demonstration of the more perfect things to come as if it were a shadow of them. And the final goal of this initial pedagogy was the Christ Mystery.⁶¹

And to underline his intent to stress the discontinuity, having closely paraphrased the Exodus story to this point, he deliberately breaks off the paraphrastic narrative from Exodus (what he refers to as the ‘history’) at the telling verse where it depicts Moses being unable to look at the face of God after the Lord reveals He is the God of Moses’ fathers.⁶² The type of Moses as Christ figure thereafter gives way in his treatment to demonstrations of how Moses as prophet could not approach the fullness of the Logos’ epiphany.

The first aspect of this, for Cyril, is how fire generally connotes in the biblical text, the power of the divinity. The fire was within the bush, carried by it in a sense, but it did not consume the bush. Moses cannot understand how this can be, or indeed what it can mean:

How utterly amazing a thing this was and beyond all comprehension..... and this was why the blessed Moses cast down his eyes.⁶³

It falls to Cyril, the mystagogue of the new dispensation, to explain how simply it connoted the manner in which the deity inhabited the human nature of the Christ and, by extension, how divinely he continues to inhabit his elect Church in the ongoing mystery of salvation :

Who can doubt that it signifies how the Word of God, being Life Himself, gives life to his own temple⁶⁴ and perfects it to incorruptibility, rendering it beyond its own natural limits as even greater than death. Thus the Fire blazes in the Bush, but somehow is made tolerable to the spindly and fragile branches. Just so the Godhead, as I have said, is made tolerable for the humanity. This was the Mystery that occurred in Christ, for the Word of God dwelt among us.⁶⁵

Cyril enthusiastically adopted this image, until well on in the time of the Nestorian crisis, when he realised its potential for being interpreted in a manner

60 The context is specifically echoing *Galatians* ch. 3, the Pauline doctrine of the Law as temporary Pedagogue.

61 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.9. PG 69. 413 B

62 Ex. 3.1-6. PG 69. 412D - 413A.

63 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.9. PG 69. 413B.

64 His body.

65 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.9. PG 69. 413D.

damaging to his insistence that the deity and humanity were seamlessly united in the One Christ, that is when the Antiochene theologians Andrew of Samosata and Theodoret began to accuse him of not giving the flesh of Christ any greater role than that assigned to it by the heretic Apollinaris, where it appears as little more than a medium of apparition. After this time, Cyril started to abandon the Fire-Bush imagery in favour of Christological symbols which connote mutual interpenetration, most notably the image of the coal suffused by fire, or the lily and its perfume.⁶⁶ His sense here in this early passage, however, is just the same as what he means in his later work. He is not dwelling on the separateness of the fire and the bush, the divinity and the humanity of Christ, rather their immediate presence to each other in a mysterious bond that exceeds natural comprehension. Cyril is not saying in this passage that he knows how it happened, he is simply saying that (unlike Moses) he knows what it signifies. The fleshly economy of Christ, for Cyril was always a profound mystery escaping human logic, but he saw theology's proper task as expounding the effect of the economy of salvation in the life of the church. Moses, therefore, is not criticised for not being able to understand, he merely stands as a symbol of the inability of the Law to grasp the power of a new theophany and a new covenant in Jesus. It is a mystery that is related to the old dispensation: for Moses encounters the angel of God, a type of the Logos himself, but the result is that he is unable to approach until he has taken off his sandals. And this, Cyril says, he cannot do, for the real meaning of the revelation was that he had first to divest himself of mortality and corruption (the dead skins) before he could see the deity. His only method for divesting himself of mortality (and here Moses shifts to become a symbolic type of Israel) was the divine cult, but the blood of animal sacrifices could never effect something so ontologically profound.⁶⁷ It could only be effected (he implies) by the economy of the Logos incarnate and the true divine cult which follows from it (Cyril intends the Eucharist and its moral and ontological implications which is so central an aspect of his incarnation theology).⁶⁸

His conclusion to this argument forms the peroration to his third Moses triptych, and once again it culminates in an invitation to the 'Synagogue' to enter into the 'holy ground' of the Church. First they must set aside the shadow of their adherence to the Law - but the essential matter, for Cyril, is clearly one of cult. Laying aside the old ways which are dead skins, and mortality, an entrance into the church will promise to be an entrance into the holy place, and a discovery of life. It

66 *Scholia on the Incarnation*. 9-10. (E.T.) McGuckin. (1994) pp. 301-302.

67 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.9. PG 69. 416C. (Yet again Cyril is working out of Heb. 10. 1-5).

68 See, for example, E. Gebremedhin. *Life-Giving Blessing. An Inquiry into the Eucharistic Doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria*. Uppsala. 1977.

is, again, an indication that a chief friction point of Church-Synagogue relations in Alexandria in his time, turned on the question of the practices that marked off the various communities from one another (fasting and food laws, and festal celebrations) which were themselves synopses in daily custom of the respective adherences of those local communities: to Moses, or to Christ. It is this generic context of missionary evangelisation, and theological apologetic, which undergirds most of Cyril's thought:

It is necessary that those who wish to understand the Christ Mystery should first set aside that cultic ritual of shadows and types which is incapable of overcoming either corruption or sin. Only then shall they understand, and only then can they enter onto the holy ground, which is the Church. Those who can not renounce this cult of the Law are still held captive to corruption, as Christ himself so clearly demonstrated when he said: 'If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man, or drink his blood, you shall not have Life within you.' (Jn.6.53).⁶⁹

His final words concluding the first book of Exodus *Glaphyra* have about them the character of a general peroration to a set of detailed preached exegeses. It marks off the first book from the others that follow, and suggests that Book One was conceived separately, characterised by its more detailed preached exegesis of the text. In the later books, not only is there less close attention to verse by verse development in the Exodus narrative, but Cyril's treatment of the figure of Moses is less attentive too, and the latter's symbolic value is slightly altered, as we shall briefly note. Here, however, in this significant peroration to all three Moses exegeses, Cyril reveals a significant motive of his preaching: an attempt to evangelise the large sections of the Alexandrian populace who were hovering between allegiance to the Synagogue or to the Church. If we can give any weight to his words in the earlier peroration of this same book, that some of these people are: 'even now in these latter days being convinced by the mystical arguments of the Church',⁷⁰ we might even envisage that these preached interpretations of Exodus, suggesting how Moses prefigured the life which Christ brings, may have been part of his catechetical offerings to a group of Jewish baptismal candidates in Alexandria in the early decades of the Fifth Century. His invitation is once again set in clearly Pauline terms drawn from Galatians, whose own context was the contrast drawn between being locked in to sin and death under the Pedagogue of Law, and brought to liberation through Baptism.⁷¹ Cyril's final invitation is clear and unambiguously addressed to the 'Synagogue' conceived on the widest term at

⁶⁹ *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.9. PG 69. 416 D.

⁷⁰ *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.5. PG 69. 397C.

⁷¹ cf *Galatians.* 3.22-28.

the end of the first book in the passage we have already noticed: it is invited to lay off its Mosaic sandals of corruption and approach the life-giving grace of Christ who shall initiate it into the presence of God.⁷²

This triptych, then, represents Cyril's most extended treatment of the Moses' type where he is, generally speaking, most positive about the Christological parallels involved. The reason for this, I suggest, is perhaps the context of pre-baptismal catechesis which may have formed the immediate occasion of this particular section of his exegeses in Book One of the *Glaphyra on Exodus*.

The type of Moses figures on many other occasions in Cyril's works, mainly in scattered allusions, but there are only two other places where one notices a definite lingering on the Moses typology for its own sake, and they are: Book One of the *Commentary on Isaiah*, and the *Commentary on John*, where the Gospel's own interest in Mosaic Christology predetermines Cyril's attention.

The appearance of Moses in the midst of a commentary on Isaiah⁷³ is somewhat unexpected. Cyril takes his cue from the Isaian denunciation of the festivals of Israel, and his point is quite clear: Moses stands as a type of Prophet and Lawgiver. His legislation on the festivals of Israel, however, is not of enduring significance. The later prophet Isaiah shows how clearly the system of ancient cult can go astray, and so Moses only had authority for a limited time. Now that the new dispensation has dawned, the old prophets (Moses especially) must be subordinated to the words of the new prophets. The explicit depiction of Moses as Pedagogue for Christ, makes us clearly understand that it is the Mystagogue Paul he is referring to, taking his cue, once again, from *Galatians* ch.3. Moses, if rightly understood, is predicting the end of his own law by commanding the people to hear the Gospel:

Hear, then, the word of the Lord, and observe the Law of God. This means : understand for yourselves the true signification of these oracles of the good news.⁷⁴ This is what Moses commanded who was our preparatory teacher before Christ, and we can see how all the sense of the divine commandments has a bearing on that Mystery which is in Him. But know this, he tells us, that it is pleasing to God to bring to a fulfilment all these things which you now study in shadows and types.⁷⁵

72 *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1. 9. PG 69. 416D-417A. Translation given in fn. 29.

73 *Comm in Isaiam.* Bk. 1 Orat. 1. (concerning *Isaiah* 1. 10-14). PG 70. 33C - 36A.

74 Making a pun that the prophecies were foreshadowing the Gospel good news.

75 *Ibid.* PG 70. 33C.

The cultic context of several arguments shows Cyril at his most acerbic, surely addressing a Christian audience here, and demanding that even the authority of the Law itself called for a cessation of the observance of sacrifices. It is perhaps an indication that the problem complained of by Origen, that is Christians observing Jewish religious kosher practices, is still a factor in Alexandrian church life. It is certainly an intellectual defence of the current imperial legislation, reinforcing Constantine's ban on animal sacrifice generally. It leads Cyril to his most explicit statement about the radical discontinuity of the Old and New. When the new dispensation dawns, the old becomes 'pointless folly':

For even though Moses did speak about holocausts and sacrifices, this manner of cultic ritual was still displeasing to God. These things were set in the Law so that the people could be led by type and shadow to the truth, until the times could be fulfilled when God could be pleased by proper service. He did not speak this way in regard to sacrifices alone, for as the mentality of those under his pedagogical care was very limited so he led them by the hand, by means of the types and shadows of the letter, until they came to truth. But when the times were fulfilled, when the beauty of the truth was destined to shine forth, then did the type become pointless, and the shadow become folly.⁷⁶

In short, Moses, if correctly understood, is in the process of deconstructing himself. Cyril's Moses typology is quickly losing the positive element it possessed in the earlier books of comment on *Exodus*. The same process, if not negativising, at least neutralising the typological force of the symbol, can be discerned in the several references to Moses throughout Cyril's *Commentaries on the Minor Prophets*. In almost every instance in which he appears, Moses' role of leader and mediator is contextualised in a negative setting. In the *Hoseah Commentary*, Cyril notes how Moses was called to lead the people to the Promised land, but they rebelled and both they and he died without gaining it. As such they were a symbol of how Israel has been rejected by God in favour of the Church.⁷⁷ Realising how this does not give a particularly good typological base for Moses' leadership, Cyril goes on to explain how his role as leader was positively fulfilled in his general 'prophetic' vocation, that is in his function as teacher of virtue and as one who tried (unsuccessfully) to call a rebellious people back to the right path. In his inability to effect their conversion, however, Moses foreshadowed Israel's rejection, and the election of the gentiles, who shall not be scattered as Israel has been if they remain obedient.⁷⁸ In the *Micah Commentary* Moses is again depicted as a supreme

76 Ibid. PG 70. 36A.

77 Comm in Oseam. 109. PG 71. 236D.

78 Comm. in Oseam. 110. PG 71. 238D-240A.

example of how prophets in general heard the word of God addressed to them.⁷⁹ Here, once again, Moses has shifted from being a type of Christ, to being the chief symbol of prophetic charism in general, and this approach can be noted in many other instances.⁸⁰ The real (and reductionist) significance of this ostensible praise of Moses *qua prophet* is revealed when Cyril, in the *John Commentary*, radically qualifies the prophetic vocation as something that pales into insignificance as a temporary charism compared to the abiding enjoyment of the Spirit's indwelling given to the 'least' of the Christian disciples in the Christ mystery:

The Spirit was in the holy prophets in the form of a specifically rich illumination and initiation, one that was designed to instruct them in what was to come, and give them the knowledge of hidden things. But as for those who believe in Christ, we affirm that there is not just an initiation from the Spirit, rather an indwelling of that Spirit who takes up his home therein. This is why we are rightly called the temples of God. Not one of the holy prophets has ever been called a temple of God.⁸¹

The general track throughout the *Commentary on John* is one where Moses' function is depicted as having had a limited validity for a time, but now has been replaced by the work of Christ. Cyril takes his lead from John 1. 17-18 which returns like a *leitmotiv* on several occasions in his text, but is announced most resonantly in Bk. 3 of the Commentary. Here, Moses' mediation is described as a dim type of that of Christ, though he did not 'see' the deity. The Word of God, however, was able to effect a true mediation because of his divine nature, and as a mediator between God and humanity he became ideally fitted for the task in his incarnation. Moses was as a servant in the economy. Christ's order of mediation is substantively different.⁸² He is the free and natural son who admits others into Sonship by adoption - something which is the very heart of the economy, the 'Mystery of Christ', as Cyril conceives it.⁸³ A mediator must be able to access both factors in the equation, and only the Son could approach the deity as the Divine Word, and all humanity as Word made flesh.⁸⁴

79 *Comm. in Michaeam* 4. PG 71. 644B.

80 *Con. Julianum* 54.8 PG 76 900C ; *Comm. in Joannem* 10. PG 76. 1004C; *Comm. in Isaiam* Bk. 1.5. PG 70. 220D; *Comm. in Isaiam* 2.4. PG 70. 469A;

81 *Comm. in Joannem*. 5.2. (Jn. 7.39). PG 73. 757AB.

82 A recurring Christological argument of Cyril's cf. *Comm. in Joannem* 10.14. PG 73. 1045C; *Ibid.* 14.5-6 PG 74. 192AB; *De Trinitate* 3. PG 75. 853C; *De Recta Fidei ad Theodosium* 40. PG 76. 1193B.

83 'Adoptive Sonship' is Cyril's biblical synonym for depicting the Theosis which the Logos brings on the race through his incarnation.

84 Cyril is working out of Paul once more (Rom. 8.15; Gal. 4.5); See also *Con. Julianum* 1.3. PG 76. 668B; *De Adoratione in Spiritu et Veritate*. 1.8. PG 68. 580A. For a systematic analysis of 'Adoptive Sonship' in Cyril. cf. L Janssens. 'Notre Filiation divine d'après S. Cyrille d'Alexandrie.' *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*. vol. 15. May, 1938, pp. 233-278.

And so, as an icon of mediation, Moses can be understood as an ancient type of Christ who ministered godly commandments to the children of Israel. But the mediation of Moses was that of a servant. The mediation of Christ was that of a freeborn son and far more mystical in character, since he attained the status of a mediator wholly naturally, being able to relate both realities: humanity whose mediator he is, and also God the Father. For he is by nature God and the selfsame is man, since he became incarnate, and was made like us.⁸⁵

The very terms of this passage are, yet again, clearly taken from Paul, for here Cyril is working out of Hebrews chapter three which contrasts Moses as a servant and Christ as a son. Throughout the *John Commentary*, however, it is notable how the negative aspect of Moses' functions are stressed. There is a veritable series of negative aspects of Moses' role: Christ does not give the wine of the wedding in Judaea, for example, but in Galilee. This is a symbol how the Law of Moses is no thing of joy, but the new wine of the new covenant is given in the land of the gentiles.⁸⁶ Again, Moses' law was severe and condemnatory in character, a glad-some aspect of Christ's work has been to liberate the Church from it.⁸⁷ Again, Moses gave the Law but it had a condemnatory character. Christ's economy of salvation ends this time of gloomy shadow and gives the truth.⁸⁸ Or, although Moses preached the mystery of Christ in many figures,⁸⁹ his mediation was only of a very limited type, designed as a 'medicine' for a time of weakness and suffering (astheneia). This is its limited typological character.⁹⁰ Or again, Moses' mediation gains a nominal (or merely figurative) sonship for the children of Israel, for he served as mystagogue when he baptised Israel in the mysteries of the cloud (Spirit) and waters of liberation. Even so, this type gives way to a fuller reality, for the Church is baptised not by a mere creature but by the divine Lord himself, and as they are baptised into a mediator of a wholly different kind to Moses, so the Christians gain a Sonship which is no longer figurative but 'true'.⁹¹ 'Cast off the type,' he says, 'those of you who have been delivered into the truth.'⁹²

Continuing this negative typological characterisation elsewhere, Cyril notes how Moses cannot lead the people up the mountain of theophany, as this is solely a function of Christ the supreme mediator⁹³ His incredulity is severely punished

85 Comm. in Joannem. 3.3. PG 73. 429BC.

86 Comm. in Joannem. 2. PG 73. 228D-229B.

87 Comm. in Joannem 2. PG 73. 252A-C.

88 Comm. in Joannem. 1. PG 73. 173C.

89 Comm. in Joannem 3. G 73. 425C- 428A.

90 Comm. in Joannem.3. PG 73. 429A.

91 Comm. in Joannem. 1.13. PG 73. 156CD; *Glaphyra in Exod.* 1.3. PG 69. 497A-C; Ibid. PG 69. 512B-D; *Comm. in Isaiam* 1.1. PG 75. 604D-605A.

92 Comm in Joannem. 3 5. PG 73. 425D.

93 *Glaphyra in Exod.* Bk. 3. PG 69. 508A-509B.

by God, when he is not allowed to enter the Promised Land.⁹⁴ The entirety of the Old Dispensation, summated by the figure of Moses, is a twilight shadowy time when truth could not be fully grasped. When the Christ comes into the world in his incarnation⁹⁵ all is made clear - not least the enigmas of the ancient scriptures.⁹⁶

All in all, then, the Moses typology in the exegetical writings of Cyril of Alexandria, comprises a complex set of messages. Cyril clearly takes the macro-structure of his 'Mosaic' theology from Paul in every significant episode. Even when he is commenting on the *Gospel of John*, Paul is never far from his mind. He uses, however, the terms of the argument in *Hebrews*, *Galatians*, and *Colossians*, to sharpen the polemic noticeably. His received tradition (not least from Origen) is one where Moses is clearly a type of Christ the Mediator, but Cyril wishes to divest this typology of significant 'application' in ways comparable to the manner in which the *Gospel of John* and *Hebrews* themselves applied a Mosaic Christology in order to argue Christ's essential 'incomparability' to Moses. There were, perhaps, similar contextual grounds for the Johannine, late Pauline, and the Cyrilline Mosaic theologies. All appear to have been forged in the local context of communities where a significant level of friction existed on a cultural and theological level between the Church and the Synagogue. In Cyril's case the one notable difference in tone to the manner in which he generally and consistently deconstructs the traditional Moses typology, occurs in the first book of *Glaphyra on Exodus* where he was possibly addressing Jewish catechumens. Otherwise it is interesting to see how time and time again he feels it necessary to stress the discontinuities between the Old Dispensation and the New, especially in matters of cultic practice. His doctrine of shadows to realities is a radical one - not so much about adumbration, but actual obscuration which is only illuminated retrospectively when the light of the new Apostolic writings allows the interpreter to see the inner meaning of the old texts that otherwise have merely an historic or moral signification. Cyril's treatment is almost wholly concerned with the spiritual meaning (*Theoria*). As such he is primarily interested in explicating the 'Mystery of Christ' from the enigmas of his text and, accordingly, he ultimately finds more in the Moses story from which he wishes to dissent (when speaking from a purely Christ-typological basis) than he wishes to affirm.

94 *Comm. in Joannem* 3. PG 73. 452A.

95 Here Cyril applies the Johannine phrase 'I have come as Light into this world' to signify the ending of the obscurity of the Old Dispensation, of the 'Mosaic letter.'

96 *Ibid.* PG 73 509A.

Moses' primary significance in the Second Temple midrashim that formed the context of the New Testament writings, was as a Seer of God, and Mediator of the Covenant, both things the Alexandrian exegetical tradition, in Cyril's hands, discounts. The encounter with God in the Old Dispensation is, for Cyril, fundamentally a partial encounter with the Logos himself, and to draw the contrast with the full encounter with the Logos which humanity receives in and through the incarnation of the Logos, in the person of Christ, becomes the entire point and goal of Cyril's exegetical work. In this context the ground is too narrow to develop a positive typology, and from the perspective of his view on Moses we see more the radical discontinuities drawn than any lingering on the positive values.

This, in a real way, reflects the political condition of the respective Jewish and Christian communities in Alexandria in Cyril's time. He, and his uncle Theophilus before him, mark a real dividing point between Hellenistic religion (at least in the city) and Christian praxis. This aspect of Church history, involving the often violent destruction of pagan shrines in Egypt, has frequently been studied. In the relation between the Alexandrian Synagogue and the Church, a battle fought less on the streets than in the struggle for the high ground of correct biblical hermeneutic, we also find a distinct parting of the ways. Cyril's use of the Moses typology, for all its ostensibly positive aspects, ultimately represents this.