

Just *Deserts*: Losing Origen and Gaining Retributive Judgment in the Hagiographical
Literature of the Early Byzantine World

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ABSTRACT

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The rise in production and distribution of Christian Hagiography in the Early Byzantine Empire points towards a unique moment in Christian History. The role of the saint was moved from the margins to a central and dynamic position within the church hierarchy and broader religious landscape. Meeting the pagan claims of power and prestige, hagiographers crafted a saint that was more retributive than the earlier martyrologies and histories. The ascetic took on a role that was more akin to God's agent than suffering stranger. The deserts of Syria, Palestine and Egypt become the territory of struggle against a world that had fallen out of step with God's will, but was slowly being corrected. This research looks for reasons as to why this prominent form of literature became more deliberately retributive through its progression toward the sixth century. A major focus of the argument will be the influence that Origen had on Christian theological interpretation. Beginning with a section on Origen, this research will move on through the five most prominent hagiographical compilations in late antiquity. In the end, it will show that each of these hagiographers' relationship with Origen's teaching and subsequent communities yielded a particular flavor of hagiography on a spectrum of retributive justice. Finally, it will take into account the influence that the development of a structured system of law under Justinian had on the religious outlook of various later works.

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Introduction: Retribution and Power in Hagiography

“Not only was the end of all things to be hoped for, which he says was still unknown to him, but also the likeness to God, which will be conferred in proportion to the completeness of our deserts.”¹

Few stories could have captured the early Christian imagination so acutely as the death of Ananias and Sapphira. Faced with an opportunity to give all of their earnings to the apostles, they falter, and the consequences are rendered expeditiously. The community was surely dumbfounded, as were all those un-churched who believed the remarkable story. Who from this group of loyal followers would have guessed that God’s providence, which had seemingly forsaken his Son in the midst of crucifixion and made no recompense to his punishers, could articulate a murder with such expedience over a seemingly trivial claim? In this text lies the first Christian formula for a rich and widely attested paradigm of divine retribution that was re-crafted over several centuries through the narratives of the holy person in late antiquity.

This dissertation traces the origins and attestations of divine retribution found

¹ Origen, “De Principiis,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, trans. Philip Schaff, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Grand Rapids, Mich: T. & T Clark; Eerdmans, 1989), 3.6.1.

within the genre of late antique Greek and Syriac hagiographical source material.² This project will argue that these rather ubiquitous elements go beyond didacticism, playing a pivotal role in claims to religious authority, providential assessment, theological maturation and the wider development of Christian literary style. With the rise in popularity of holy literature surrounding individual holy persons, came the flow of punitive elements necessary for conditioning hearers within and outside of the community. Utilizing examples from the major hagiographical compilations of early Byzantium, this dissertation will explore the development of divine retribution in Christian literature from Palladios of Galatia, Theodoret of Cyrrhos, Cyril of Scythopolis, John of Ephesus and finally, John Moschos. As a foundational introduction to the theology that will be explored throughout these works, an initial chapter on Origen of Alexandria will precede the chapters focused on these collections. Finally, a chapter on the Emperor Justinian I will close out the discussion of retribution and justice in the hagiographies of early Byzantium. However tempting it is to imagine direct lines of influence from ancient contexts, this project will attempt to avoid direct and simplistic correlations in the hope of showing the unique developments that hagiographical literature represented. By maintaining this distinction between Byzantine Christian literature and its forbears, one is better able to distinguish the riff from the intricate harmonies developed in these religious narratives.

² I have chosen these languages as loci of interest based on their importance in Eastern Christianity and because of their rich tradition of literary transmission and interaction. Sebastian P. Brock, *From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions Between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 1999), 152.

Questions:

In preparation of this project's itinerary, several questions have emerged that served as guideposts to its successful completion. The foundational question is: Why does hagiography develop as it does, with a rise in usage of punitive themes and a deliberately retributive tenor? Since this project is the first focused scholarly assessment of these topics in Christian hagiography, the case must be made that these topics are sufficiently pervasive to merit such research. To this end, each chapter contains a significant amount of primary source material from the hagiographies. In order to properly answer the primary question it will be necessary to reach back before this rise in hagiography as the most prominent form of literature and assess the influential literary forebears that undoubtedly affect this late antique movement. Scripture and its interpretation play a major role in this aspect. But scripture was more than just the New Testament for these writers, it was the Old Testament as well, and how the hagiographer navigated scripture as a foundational urtext, prescriptive narrative, or literary partner in the crafting of saints' lives tells us a good bit about the broader reception of theologies and its influence on the wider Christian community.

This dissertation will ask, What was theologically at stake in the promulgation of a particular style of Christian literature? Do these theological traditions constitute enough of a foundational influence to justify the development and reception of the genre? If not, What factors are linked to its transformation and appeal? Finally, what was the effect of a shift toward retributive themes in hagiography for the later Byzantine world.

Problems:

Three problems lie at the foundation of these research questions and all are oriented toward various kinds of reception. A cursory reading of widely available hagiographical texts leaves the reader wondering why there are such strong themes of divine retribution running throughout various strains of the literature. The common response has been to dismiss these elements as residue from an unscientific age or as didactically oriented styles. If it is true that these simply operate to lend credence to the moral direction, then the question of why these elements rose in popularity comes into focus.

The second problem is the reception and designation of the broader field of hagiography. The working definition of what literature 'hagiography' encompasses, varies between Saints' lives, improbable biographical renderings, literature containing divine action, and finally, literature that claims divine inspiration. This catch-all category desperately needs delineation. By focusing on a particular aspect of the literature, like retribution, part of the broader structure of hagiography can be better understood.

A final important issue is the need for translation and assessment of a deep archive of Byzantine Christian hagiography. In the first millennium of Christian history, hagiography exists as the largest and most influential genre of literature.³ The majority of this literature remains untranslated from Greek and Syriac in archives and edited

³ This claim depends to a certain extent on how literature is categorized. The fact remains that it would be difficult to find a more influential, available and imitated genre of literature in this period. Kennedy holds hagiography as "the most popular literary form of the Byzantine period." George Alexander Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors* (Princeton, N.J:

volumes. While this research project has chosen not to move in the direction of translation, it is hoped that a study of important theological themes within hagiography will further ignite a broader scholarly interest in the field. Given the broad swath of literature that this research has chosen to engage, spanning the five major compilations of hagiography from Late Antiquity, it has been necessary to utilize recent translations of the material in English. At times, when it seemed beneficial, I have given the Greek, Latin or Syriac to aid the reader in thinking about the original terminology.

The purpose of this study is to examine early Byzantine hagiography as a medium for the development of Christian theological concerns, primarily as they relate to the teachings and influence of Origen of Alexandria. A second, equally important aspect, is the assessment of hagiographical renderings as descriptors of not only the author's predilections, but also wider communal concerns. With this new tool – which is the assessment of the author and community's interest in retribution – we can analyze later works and authors, like Cyril of Scythopolis, in consideration of how they relate to the theme. Like a litmus test of sorts, the historian can use this theme to understand where particular authors and their audiences resided on the larger issues of providence, scriptural analysis, theological orientation, and in relation to particular heretical authors. Going beyond whether an author was Origenian or not, we can start to assess texts for their more obscure and enigmatic properties. As shown in the chapter on John of Ephesus, re-reading retribution as a theological development associated with Origen which burgeoned in the hagiographies, helps us to more clearly articulate John's program in writing the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*. Rather than seeing him as a

Princeton University Press, 1983), 210.

Monophysite bent simply toward retributive themes, we can see him as an agent of the imperial court, grappling with a providential understanding of society that was melting Origen's theological notions from the diptych of Byzantine Orthodoxy, while inscribing a model of ascetic agency in line with the designs of Justinian I.

This study aims to not only explore this fascinating development of retribution in the hagiographies, but also to model what the analysis of this theme can offer to historical renderings. Instead of wondering whether Cyril of Scythopolis was Origenist leaning, we can assess his texts from the perspective of retributive engagement and place him on the spectrum of Origen sympathizers. In Cyril's case, the overt denunciation of Origen says less about his theology than his style of hagiographical writing, which was far different from the vengeance oriented compilations of John of Ephesus and John Moschos. Finally, the themes of retribution in these hagiographies and the stories they tell about the development of early Christianity have a wide-reaching impact on the middle ages through the development of law, theology, and literature. They represent a conduit of divine power – namely Providence – from the ancient scriptures through the persecutions and martyrdoms to the middle ages.

Review of Literature:

The term *hagiography* comes about in its current English form during the nineteenth century. Prior to its occurrence in the English language, the Bollandists were the main purveyors of academic work on the subject. In 1607 Heribert Rosweyde organized a trajectory for the study of holy literature by publishing his *Fasti sanctorum quorum Vitae in Belgicis bibliothecis manuscriptae*. Later, in 1615 Rosweyde published the

Vitae Patrum. His plan was to publish a volume for every day of the year. Rosweyde's interest in publishing all hagiographical texts was not warmly received by everyone since it would expose those texts that were considered absurd and without historical value.⁴ This massive enterprise was to direct the path of the young Jesuit, Jean Bolland, who was sent to Antwerp to complete Rosweyde's project in 1630.⁵ Bolland set the agenda for the next four centuries by envisioning a collection that took into account more than just the normative textual variety of saints' lives. He envisioned a comprehensive project with the goal of examining every mention of a saint whether on paper or stone or simply known through popular acclaim.⁶ Bolland's first two volumes of the *Acta* were published in 1643. Since then the project has developed from strictly Latin texts into the broader array of languages in which these sources are extant.⁷

The most famous Bollandist of the last century was Hippolyte Delehaye. Well known for his erudite treatises on the subject, Delehaye's work remains the last great effort to categorize and synthesize hagiography as a cohesive whole.⁸ When Delehaye approached the subject of hagiography, his concern was to delineate the intention of the author. He critiques those who would question an author's historical accuracy when

⁴ "des textes non seulement sans valeur historique, mais contenant des legends saugrenues" Baudouin de Gaiffier, *Recueil D'hagiographie* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1977), 261.

⁵ M. D. Knowles, "Presidential Address: Great Historical Enterprises I. The Bollandists," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 8, Fifth Series (January 1, 1958): 150.

⁶ Flor Van Ommeslaeghe, "The Acta Sanctorum and Bollandist Methodology," in *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. Sergei Hackel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 155.

⁷ Van Ommeslaeghe, "The Acta Sanctorum and Bollandist Methodology," 156.

⁸ For Delehaye's contributions see Hippolyte Delehaye and Bollandists, *Cinq Leçons Sur La Methode Hagiographique* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1934); Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Work of the Bollandists Through Three Centuries, 1615-1915* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1922); B. Joassart, *Hippolyte Delehaye: Hagiographie Critique Et Modernisme* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 2000).

that may not have been the author's intent.⁹

Delehaye notes that beyond intention, there is the question of what level of veracity a narrator of story is capable of achieving. He explains:

It must be admitted that apart from exceptional circumstances the average man is not endowed with the intellectual vigour necessary for such a task. The habit of analysing one's sensations and of controlling the slightest impulses of one's soul to such an extent as to be habitually on one's guard against the natural tendency to mingle what one imagines with what one knows, is the privilege of very few. Even those who, thanks to natural gifts and a superior training, rise above the average of their fellows, do not invariably make use of their special faculties.¹⁰

He appears to remove responsibility from all but the most intellectually engaged authors. Delehaye continues by giving examples of the sort of unconscious adjustments to which he is referring. He notes that someone retelling a story of a "sanguinary drama" describes "the various exciting circumstances to his friends with the most minute details, and nothing will appear to have escaped him that bears upon the criminal and his victim."¹¹ If, however, someone's life depends upon the testimony, the story undergoes a remarkable conversion:

But suppose this same man subpoenaed to give evidence at the assizes, and that on his deposition, given on oath, depends the life of a fellow-creature. What a difference between the two versions of the same event! At once his narrative

⁹ He explains, "The first question that should be addressed to an author the value of whose work one wishes to estimate, concerns the class of literature that he professes to produce, for it would be manifestly unjust to condemn, on the ground of historical inaccuracy, one whose only aim was to write a work of fiction. Certain hagiographic documents are clearly of this nature; they are parables or tales designed to bring home some religious truth or some moral principle." Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, trans. V.M. Crawford (Kessinger Publishing, 2006), 62. On the style of reading, whether for rhetorical panegyric or history, see Averil Cameron, "Form and Meaning: The *Vita Constantini* and the *Vita Antonii*," in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2000), 82. Cameron argues that the *Vita Constantini* is far closer to the *Vita Antonii* when read as the life of a holy man.

¹⁰ Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 14.

¹¹ Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 14.

becomes less clear and less complete, and is far from possessing that palpitating interest that he gave to it in private. This is simply because, under such solemn circumstances, we carry to a far higher point our scrupulous exactitude, and we are no longer tempted to indulge in the petty vanity of posing as important and well-informed. Hence it is that even the most veracious and upright of men unconsciously create little legends by introducing into their narratives their own impressions, deductions and passions, and thus present the truth either embellished or disfigured according to circumstances.¹²

In many ways Delehayé is attempting to show how it might be possible that a story could take on such variation by appealing to the nature of the human mind. This claim is not surprising, given the importance of theories surrounding the development of reason for Delehayé's preceding generation.¹³ If late eighteenth-century philosophy was geared towards liberating one's mind from the control of religious or political authorities, Delehayé's own position – a few generations later – would have to grapple with these claims. His deep religious commitment would have run counter to any theory that saw religion as an authority that impeded the intellect. As a result, Delehayé relied on the theory that humanity was incapable of controlling how the mind processed and assimilated information.¹⁴ Rather than religion as the hindering entity, it was the human psyche that stepped in the way of reason. Born three years after Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and dying only two years after him, it is hard to imagine that Delehayé (1859-1941) and Freud did not encounter a similar intellectual zeitgeist, as this period represented a rise in interest surrounding the development of the human

¹² Delehayé, *The Legends of the Saints*, 14-15.

¹³ Commonly referred to as the "Age of enlightenment."

¹⁴ See "Enlightenment" for the notion of the importance in overthrowing religious and political authorities. Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 266.

psyche.¹⁵ The claim Delehaye makes regarding the average human's inability to control how their mind assimilates and retells information based on the situation fits nicely with the Freudian notion that one's psyche was subject to greater influences than simply rational thought.

One problem that Delehaye seems to neglect is the importance these stories held for the believer in Late Antiquity. If one assumes that a single author was involved in the writing of a particular piece, it could be posited that these stories were of deep spiritual importance and integrated with devotion and explicitly organized theologies.¹⁶ If this is the case, then to relate these stories to the retelling of a "sanguinary drama" in order to allow for historical inaccuracies as Delehaye does, misses the point of how the majority of these hagiographies functioned.

Several scholars have undertaken studies of hagiographical texts and translations in the last century. In 1948, Elizabeth Dawes and Norman H. Baynes edited a volume of three Byzantine Saints.¹⁷ The introduction states, "These simple biographies of three Byzantine saints should speak for themselves: they need no lengthy preface or elaborate

¹⁵ Delehaye even quotes a study in Psychology regarding group dynamics. He cites "Lazarus und Steinthal, *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, Berlin, Leipzig, i., 1860 - xix., 1889. A book by G. le Bon, *Psychologie des Foules*, Paris, 1895, treated from a very special point of view, contains, together with notable exaggerations, some useful remarks." Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 16.

¹⁶ Of course, the same could be true for a communally remembered story. Delehaye comments on group dynamics as a compounding factor with regard to historical inaccuracies. He explains, "This commonplace experience [of supplying inadvertent change to a history as a narrator] becomes much more interesting and more fraught with consequences when it is indefinitely multiplied, and when, for the intelligence and impressions of the individual we substitute the intelligence and impressions of a people or a crowd." Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, 16. On devotion, Krueger's work in *Writing and Holiness* expertly exemplifies this theory. See Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East*, illustrated edition (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Elizabeth Dawes and Norman Hepburn Baynes, eds., *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary*

annotation. A brief introduction will suffice.”¹⁸ There appears to be some assumption that the reader would understand how these figures and their super-human ascetic qualities could be understood – perhaps through faith.¹⁹ The editors go on to explain, “If for you a world where miracles happen is hopelessly and irredeemably repellant, East Rome will remain a closed book.”²⁰ The style represented by Dawes and Baynes, quickly fell out of favor with the wider scholarly community. Readers wanted more attention to the problems surrounding these narratives. A simple acknowledgment that these were difficult for some modern readers to categorize would no longer suffice.²¹

When Peter Brown wrote *The Cult of the Saints* in 1981, he sought to correct the two-tiered system that had long been promulgated by historians of late antiquity. Supported by Hume, Gibbon and Delehaye, the notion that a rise in attention to saints and their literature was a movement of a less sophisticated “popular” religion had dominated thinking for two centuries. Brown reconfigured commonly held ideas by questioning if there was such a divide between the elites and the “vulgar” masses that was in flux and influencing rationality as Hume had posited.²² Brown points out that Delehaye had likened the intelligence of the masses to the intelligence of an infant.²³ Rather than lazily marking this period as the natural successor to the era of Pagan

Biographies Translated from the Greek (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1948).

¹⁸ Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, ix.

¹⁹ This is not to say that the work is not valuable. The introduction points out several aspects of saintliness, including the function of mediator, which would have a long scholarly tradition.

²⁰ Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, xiii.

²¹ To get a sense of how these compilations have evolved in tone, especially in the Western context, see Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, eds., *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

²² Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 15.

prominence, Brown posits a change that requires deeper work. He explains:

I wonder whether it is any longer possible to treat the explicit breaking of barriers associated with the rise and the public articulation of the cult of saints as no more than foam on the surface of the lazy ocean of "popular belief." For the cult of saints involved imaginative changes that seem, at least, congruent to changing patterns of human relations in late-Roman society at large. It designated dead human beings as the recipients of unalloyed reverence, and it linked these dead and invisible figures in no uncertain manner to precise visible places and, in many areas, to precise living representatives. Such congruence hints at no small change. But in order to understand such a change, in all its ramifications, we must set aside the "two-tiered" model. Rather than present the rise of the cult of saints in terms of a dialogue between two parties, the few and the many, let us attempt to see it as part of a greater whole--the lurching forward of an increasing proportion of late-antique society toward radically new forms of reverence, shown to new objects in new places, orchestrated by new leaders, and deriving its momentum from the need to play out the common preoccupation of all, the few and the "vulgar" alike, with new forms of the exercise of power, new bonds of human dependence, new, intimate, hopes for protection and justice in a changing world.²⁴

Brown's reconfiguration of the field opened the way for a wide variety of interesting questions about how Christianity developed and changed in this period.

Several interesting books emerged after Brown's study in 1981. The first, part five of "The Transformation of the Classical Heritage" series, which was edited by Peter Brown, was *Biography in Late Antiquity* by Patricia Cox. Hoping to problematize the category of *aretalogy* and utilize "Graeco-Roman biography," Cox focuses on two examples: Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* and Eusebius's *Life of Origen*.²⁵ Two models of holiness are possible from Cox's perspective. She posits that the holy man was crafted through an authorial prism orienting the subject toward divine sonship or godlikeness.²⁶ With these categories in mind, Cox proposes that the authorial prisms, "worked to

²³ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 17.

²⁴ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 21-22.

²⁵ Patricia Cox Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 4.

reflect the motivations and historical concerns of the biographers themselves."²⁷ The author's intent, however, is not just conscious manipulation, but "a reflection of the author's deep sense of himself" being worked out in "shades and nuances" resulting in the "characterization of his hero as holy man."²⁸

Several other texts weigh in on the subject of hagiography in the mid-nineteen-eighties. Alison Goddard Elliott completed *Roads to Paradise* in the final hours of her life. It was later edited in her honor by Charles Segal. Her text proposes literary models for assessing hagiographical themes. Beginning with martyr stories and moving to what she terms romance models, Elliott invokes the familiar "monomyth" structure of Joseph Campbell.²⁹ Beginning with motifs of departure and moving through the downward journey, the heroes rise again in the ascent to paradise. Working with the two categories of myth, Elliott explains, "Men need both kinds of heroes, those who are above suffering and are able to face pain and adversity with laughter, and those who suffer and weep, and triumph all the same. The martyr is the first kind of hero and the ascetic the second."³⁰ Her work is geared toward the location of literary themes rather than history.

In 1983, George Kennedy released his third volume of *A History of Rhetoric*. His unique study, tracing rhetoric from Greece in volume one to Rome in volume two and finally to *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors*, is profoundly informative. In his

²⁶ Patricia Cox Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 134.

²⁷ Patricia Cox Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 135.

²⁸ Patricia Cox Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 136, 147.

²⁹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2d ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968).

³⁰ Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover, NH:

section on “Christianity and Rhetoric,” he explains:

Christianity has a distinctive rhetoric which originated in Jewish attitudes toward God, and speech found in the Old Testament and which reflects the radical theology taught by Jesus and his apostles. Christian rhetoric presupposes the intervention of God in history and through the Holy Spirit in the minds of men. For the classical ethos of the speaker it substitutes divine authority given canonization in the Scriptures and the revelation accorded to the Church; for probable argument as a basis of proof it substitutes proclamation of the kerygma, or divine message, but preserves the forms of inductive and deductive argument; for supporting evidence it turns to miracles and the acts of martyrs; and for pathos the Christian orator threatens damnation or promises eternal life. Christian rhetoric has distinctive topics and a distinctive style based largely on the language of the psalmists and the prophets.³¹

Kennedy’s characterization of Christian rhetoric is direct and defensible. When he moves into a discussion of the life of Saint Anthony and other hagiographical sources, however, his argument necessarily grapples with the available forms. He states, “Athanasius’ model for Anthony is John the Baptist, or at times even Christ (e.g., 58) but the biography is an encomium and shows the influence of classical encomia, such as Xenophon’s life of Agesilaus. It utilizes some of the structural principles of panegyric (e.g., 67) and shows some signs of familiarity with progymnasmatic forms, such as the chria and the prosopopoeia.”³² The model might be called a hodgepodge of rhetorical forms, or, as this dissertation will maintain, it may signal a new development. Kennedy goes on to explain that Christians took up classical rhetoric on an unprecedented scale in the latter half of the fourth century.³³ He attributes this to several factors:

Christianization of the state, subsequent exhibition of Christian and public virtues,

published for Brown University Press by University Press of New England, 1987), 14.

³¹ Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors*, 180.

³² Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors*, 210.

³³ On monastic interest in the classics, see Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, 3rd ed (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 112-150.

Christian realization of a share in Hellenistic history, Neoplatonists' allure of Christian thinkers to dialectic and rhetoric, and the need for dialectic to combat Arianism and other heresies.³⁴ The move toward usage of certain Hellenistic rhetorical forms cannot be denied, however, the outcome of such predispositions should signal hybridization rather than imitation.

In 1985, Evelyne Patlagean attempted a structural analysis of Byzantine hagiography. Her project, aimed at overcoming the interest in positivist methods, called them "insufficient and wasteful."³⁵ She was referring to the interest of generations of scholars lifting historical 'facts' from the larger narratives.³⁶ Patlagean proposed three main models that are superimposed on the literature: *demonic*, *scriptural*, and *ascetic and moral*.³⁷ Her concept proposes a theoretical spectrum in which pure historiography and pure hagiography are at either end. This structure is useful for Patlagean in viewing the two concepts as complementary rather than oppositional in their aims to enlighten a socio-historical study of late antiquity.³⁸

Similar to Elliott, Thomas Heffernan's *Sacred Biography* attacks the topic from a literary foundation. In a compelling chapter, Heffernan points out a disconnect that the modern reader has with the medieval biographer. From his perspective, moderns read with the empirical biographical model of the post-enlightenment era. He explains,

³⁴ Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors*, 214-215.

³⁵ Evelyne Patlagean, "Ancient Byzantine Hagiography and Social History," in *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, ed. Stephen Wilson, First paperback ed (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 101.

³⁶ She explains, "When used to the exclusion of any other [method], it substitutes for the dynamic coherence of a living work a fictive chimera in which cock-and-bull stories and reliable observations are inexplicably mingled." Evelyne Patlagean, "Ancient Byzantine Hagiography," 101-102.

³⁷ Evelyne Patlagean, "Ancient Byzantine Hagiography," 105.

“Such an empirical view, although it gave us much of value, misunderstood and misrepresented the idea of history which sacred biography claimed for itself. Contemporary scholarship in sacred biography has been heir to both the insight and the blindness of those historians since Gibbon who have studied saints’ lives.”³⁹

Caroline Walker Bynum acknowledged in *Jesus as Mother*, that the history of spirituality “has abandoned detailed study of most of the material medieval people themselves produced on the subject of religion in favor of far more intractable sources.”⁴⁰ Her signaling of the important move toward hagiography has had a profound effect on medieval studies. James Geary pointed out Bynum’s influence and noted in 1994 that “Not only have hagiographic texts received frequent, close scrutiny from medievalists for years, but they have moved from the periphery to the center of the scholarly enterprise.”⁴¹

Much of the scholarly work that has dealt with hagiographical literature has taken place in the Latin medieval context or the literature closely aligned to prominent issues in contemporary Christianity.⁴² As an example, one of the issues which

³⁸ Evelyne Patlagean, “Ancient Byzantine Hagiography,” 109.

³⁹ Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1988), 39.

⁴⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 5.

⁴¹ Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Cornell University Press, 1994), 10.

⁴² Here I would highlight the instance of St. Anthony. As the most famous ascetic in popular tradition, he is co-opted by “Western” studies due to his influence through St. Augustine of Hippo. For an example of a decidedly Catholic/Western study on Saints that makes this shift from Greek origin to translated Latin influence see Lawrence Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 1st ed (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 17. On the importance of Anthony for Augustine, see Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 153.

hagiography lends itself to is the discussion of saintly women.⁴³ Whereas much of the history of Christianity largely has excised the female body, hagiography remains a space where gender is often confused and reconfigured.⁴⁴ Other projects have focused on the most influential of Christian thinkers and texts.⁴⁵ Medieval hagiographies have found a rich reception among centers of comparative literature and history, as well as various praxis oriented religious contexts.⁴⁶ Hagiography has moved forward in prominence in Western medieval studies, but the Eastern Byzantine hagiographies remain a field less tended, however fertile it may be.

Studies have continued to emerge sparsely on particular figures and movements

⁴³ See Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, trans., *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, Updated ed., with a new pref (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996); Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (London: Mowbray, 1987); Lynda L Coon, Katherine J Haldane, and Elisabeth W Sommer, eds., *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990); Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt, eds., *Images of Women in Antiquity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983); Jo Ann McNamara, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* (Psychology Press, 1983); Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: De La Maî Trise Du Corps à La Privation Sensorielle, Ile-IVe Siècles De L'ère Chrétienne*, 1re éd (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1983); Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Life-Styles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, 350-450* (London: Routledge, 1995); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

⁴⁴ An excellent selection of so-called transvestite nuns, a popular theme from the fifth to the ninth centuries in Byzantium, includes St. Mary and St. Matrona of Perge in the first two chapters of Talbot's collection. Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium*, 1-64.

⁴⁵ Carolinne White, ed., *Early Christian Lives: Life of Antony by Athanasius: Life of Paul of Thebes by Jerome: Life of Hilarion by Jerome: Life of Malchus by Jerome: Life of Martin of Tours by Sulpicius Severus: Life of Benedict by Gregory the Great* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1998).

⁴⁶ Although the wealth of work in Medieval Latin is too great to explore here, I would mention a few important entries. See Michael E. Goodich, *Lives And Miracles Of The Saints: Studies In Medieval Latin Hagiography* (Ashgate Publishing, 2005); Thomas Head, ed., *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York: Garland Pub, 2000); Jitse Dijkstra and Mathilde van Dijk, *The*

that were predominantly captured by Byzantine hagiography. Of particular note is Derek Krueger's work on Symeon the Holy Fool, and his subsequent text, *Writing and Holiness*.⁴⁷ The latter embodies some of the style that I envision for this dissertation. Working between several sources, Krueger argues for a devotion-oriented model of composition. Although my research will sustain different conclusions about the significance of hagiography in this period, this style of essay is compelling and informative.

Of final note in this overview of literature is the work of Gary Trompf, who stands alone as the only scholar to attempt a sustained study on retributive justice in early Christian historiography.⁴⁸ Beginning with a broad survey of the concept of retribution from ancient tribal society – east and west – to the Hebrews on through to the Greeks, Trompf sets the stage for a look at how Christian historians dealt with the topic of retribution. He traces the theme from the author of Luke-Acts on through to Augustine, Sulpicius Severus and Orosius. His notion that “elements of retributive logic...keep reappearing” in the “non-Greek-speaking East, and beyond Byzantine borders,” bespeaks his interest in finding the theme in every culture.⁴⁹ He critiques a perspective that would hold Christianity as geared toward the forgiving rather than the retributive, as exemplified in Luke-Acts.⁵⁰ In his chapter on Eusebius and Lactantius, Trompf notes that Origen's work harked back to Philo, allegorizing and spiritualizing

Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West, illustrated edition (Brill, 2006).

⁴⁷ Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Krueger, *Writing and Holiness*.

⁴⁸ G. W. Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography: Narratives of Retributive Justice* (London: Continuum, 2000).

⁴⁹ Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 330.

the Hebrew traditions of divine retribution.⁵¹ Passing quickly over Origen he acknowledges the writing of *consolatio* literature which hoped on the martyrs' restoration in "a final cosmic *dénouement* to compensate for their persecution."⁵² In his treatment of Theodoret of Cyrros, he rightly acknowledges that his work on providence is largely geared toward resolving matters "post-mortem rather than [in] historical conditions."⁵³ He then moves on to the more historiographical works of Theodoret, giving little weight to his hagiography.

Differentiation:

The proposed dissertation will pick up on some of the Bollandist styled interest in further cataloguing the field of hagiography. It will question, with Delehay, what truly constitutes hagiography. Rather than trying to delineate how it is that an individual could claim such implausible stories, however, the dissertation will attempt to look for the broader trend in these stories, connecting the communities and their reception of these narratives. Allowing for some assessment of the broader genre and its significance both historically and in modern scholarship, the study will give more to the field than a simple translation of texts, as Baynes and Dawes modeled. The project will take seriously Brown's call to demarcate the movement as something more significant than simply a "popular" Christianity being worked out among the "vulgar" masses. Avoiding the simplicity of attaching hagiography to the uneducated mass's desire for

⁵⁰ Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 47–50.

⁵¹ Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 114.

⁵² Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 115.

⁵³ Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 216.

divinely inspired moral direction, this dissertation will recognize the development of Byzantine hagiography as a place holder for a wider historical development. Things occurred in this movement that were far more significant than a “popular” rendering of aristocratic influence.

The project will move past Cox’s ready reliance upon Greco-Roman biographical precedents. Attempting to explain hagiography through centuries-old rhetorical terminology only confuses the categories. While influence is certainly profound, something new appears to be happening in the Byzantine development of the literature. In this same direction, Kennedy’s direct lineage to ancient Greek rhetorical forms will be problematized along the lines of hybridity in Byzantine models. While mythological structure is a compelling notion, Elliott’s reliance on the Campbell monomyth obfuscates the intricacies of late antique notions of providence. One can snap any story to the grid of the monomyth, but the delicate balance of belief and literary development is lost in the process.

Taking into account the impact of Patlagean and structuralist theory regarding the usefulness of hagiographical source material for social history, the project will examine if and how retributive motifs operate as an overarching structure within the material. The project will stop short of a structuralist rendering in order to notice how these elements are perceived and promulgated, and whether their development signals a broader change in the reception and transmission of narratives concerning divine power. That is to say, a recognition of structures at play that are neither actual nor imagined is welcome, but it will not drive the remainder of the argument.

Heffernan’s model is compelling, especially in his critique of modern

sensibilities clogging ancient understanding, but stops short of asking the deeper questions concerning broad historical developments of early Byzantine religion. The planned project will avoid too heavy a reliance on antecedent literary models, restrain the impulse to relate it to stylish literary comparisons, and aim to contribute a solid historical analysis of hagiography within the Byzantine world.

Finally, in relation to Trompf, this work goes beyond the historian's rendering, looking not just at Theodoret's Church History, but his hagiographical works. It will ask whether one gets a different treatment of theology in hagiography than in historiography. We can surmise that much could be said in the life of a saint that could not be said in the historical recounting of an event like a council or coronation.⁵⁴

Contributions:

This dissertation will contribute to the field in two main areas. First, by utilizing a theme that has been largely overlooked by scholarship, this project should have immediate influence.⁵⁵ Aside from Trompf, recent publications on the theme of divine vengeance in Christian literature have been geared mainly toward invested theologians and practitioners.⁵⁶ In the area of scriptural interpretation, the theme is similarly bound

⁵⁴ Trompf calls him the "ecclesiastic's historian, going on to lay out documentation of the Nicene Creed and other refutations of Arian positions." Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 220.

⁵⁵ As Walter Vogels notes in his review of H.G.L. Peels' text, "Peels has written the best existing study on the vengeance of God, an often shocking and disturbing biblical theme which perhaps for that reason has been avoided in the past or written off as primitive." Walter Vogels, "Review: The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 3 (October 1, 1996): 518.

⁵⁶ See Erich Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?: Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

to theological arguments of the Old and New Testaments.⁵⁷ Moving the argument into early Byzantium merges the themes of theological investigation and historical development in the Christian context.

Secondly, the project will contribute to the area of Byzantine history. By asking questions associated with how holy literature was envisioned, produced and received, this dissertation adds a significant chapter to the field of hagiographical studies. Broadening the focus from a specific figure, such as Antony or Symeon, to themes like punishment and divine retribution allows for a necessary survey of several texts and figures. With this foundation more can be directly said regarding the influence these themes and texts exercised in the development of Christianity through to the middle ages. In contrast to Baynes and Dawes, et al., a unifying theme promotes a broader assessment that will influence future historical studies in the areas of history, theology, religion and comparative literature.

Limitations and Delimitations:

With so much available literature falling into the genre of hagiography, this study will necessitate a strict research program. I have decided to focus only on Byzantine literature in Syriac and Greek, and more specifically, only the most historically influential hagiographical compilations. One significant outlier is the *Apothegmata Patrum*, which is excluded primarily for its lack of specific author. As we

⁵⁷ See especially George E Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); H. G. L Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995).

will see in the treatment of these hagiographies, the author is a very important factor.⁵⁸

The project could easily be extended to Latin and medieval sources, but would certainly dilute the specificity that a tighter circle of exploration allows. Martyrological sources will be avoided since they maintain a distinct flavor of repression and persecution that disguises later providential developments. This allows the study a scope of research that settles mainly on Eastern Christian literature from the third century to the end of late antiquity.⁵⁹ This could easily be called the golden age of monastic hagiography.

Chapter Summaries:

The project is comprised of seven chapters. Chapter one surveys Origen's thought and influence on the notion of restoration, *apokatastasis*, and the allegorical reading of scripture. From there the chapters run in chronological order, beginning in chapter two with Palladios of Galatia and *The Lausiatic History*. Chapter three assesses Theodoret of Cyrrhos's *History of the Monks of Syria*. Chapter four focuses on Cyril of Scythopolis and his work on *The Lives of the Palestinian Monks*. Chapter five moves forward to John of Ephesus's work, *The Lives of the Eastern Saints*. The last compilation of hagiography comes in chapter six which deals with *The Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschos. Chapter seven re-examines the sixth century through the impact of Justinian and his notion of justice in the law. A final concluding section will summarize salient points made throughout the chapters.

⁵⁸ That being said, using the analytical tools we have already discussed, the project could easily be extended to assess the sayings of the fathers according to their retributive stylings.

⁵⁹ The dates associated with this endpoint are contested. Sustained Muslim conquest of the Eastern Mediterranean in the mid-seventh century serves as a helpful bookend.

Chapter 1

Origen: Justinian's "Nemesis" or a sixth century scapegoat

By the time Justinian took the throne in Constantinople in 527 C.E., Origen's teachings and those who were accused of following them had already been marked as problematic and verbally condemned by an influential group of ascetics and theologians. Concerns over Origen's teachings of restoration, *apokatastasis*, his interpretation of the Logos, and his allegorical model of interpreting scripture had deeply challenged and shaped the previous three centuries of Christianity.⁶⁰

There were two major historical periods in which the distaste for Origen's teachings rose to a feverish pitch. The first controversy which took place at the end of the fourth century was the better documented of the two.⁶¹ The conflict likely began when Epiphanius of Salamis began to make note of the many points in Origen's thought that he deemed heretical, specifically his reliance on allegorical hermeneutics.⁶² John, Bishop of Jerusalem, was unwilling to condemn Origen, regardless of Epiphanius's request, but it was not long before a petition was circulated, in 393, concerning Origen's

⁶⁰ Origen was known for far more than the problems he caused for later generations of theologians. His influence on scriptural exegesis was profound and his accomplishments were numerous, including a substantial library in Caesarea. For more on this see Anthony Grafton, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁶¹ Source material comes from Epiphanius of Salamis, Theophilus of Alexandria, Rufinus, Jerome, Sozomen, Socrates, Palladius and the Coptic *Life of Apa Aphou*. John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 1st ed, *The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), "Origenist Crises," 163.

⁶² McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, "Origenist Crises," 163.

censure.⁶³ Jerome, who had been a student of Origen's, swung his support against him, perhaps seeing "the wind was changing."⁶⁴ He and Rufinus squared off, Rufinus in support of Origen and Jerome against him. John of Jerusalem remained steadfast in his support of Origen. When the controversy reached Egypt it became embroiled in a conflict with monks and their relationship to canonical authority, just as it had in Palestine. Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria eventually condemned the writings of Evagrius Ponticus – a champion of the Nitrian monks and student of Origen – when his city was rioted by protesting monks. According to McGuckin, "So began an association of Origen, Origenism, and monastic traditions derived from Evagrius, which would run on into the sixth-century Origenistic crisis."⁶⁵

The second period of conflict emerged in the sixth century and is partially related in our work with Cyril of Scythopolis since he is one of the primary sources for the conflict. Once again, the genesis of the conflict was not Origen's writings but those of

⁶³ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, "Origenist Crises," 164.

⁶⁴ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, "Origenist Crises," 164.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Clark covers the issues in a range of thinkers, starting with Evagrius Ponticus and including Epiphanius, Theophilus, Jerome, Shenute, Rufinus, and in relation to Pelagianism. Clark holds that the Origenist controversy was resolved in one aspect through the culmination of the debate between Augustine and the Pelagians. In this, "Augustine's theory of original sin becomes the functional equivalent of Origen's notion of the precosmic sin and "fall" of the rational creatures." Clark notes that in the midst of this debate, there is "neither a stable personal identity that can be definitively labeled Origen nor a uniform set of doctrines that can be called Origenism.

Even though Clark embarked on a journey to find the "purely social understanding of the Origenist dispute," she wound up relying on theology and ascetic spirituality in her treatment. In a similar manner, my research relies not simply on the networks or social fabric of the third through the sixth centuries, but rather also upon the reading of asceticism through the lens of theological authors who had been influenced by the developing controversies. This created authors with intentional stylings of ascetical representations, and teaches the historian more about hagiography than any in depth assay of the socio-political could. McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, "Origenist Crises," 165, Elizabeth A Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton

his disciple, Evagrius Ponticus. The conflict, as noted in chapter four, was partially due to intellectual freedom and partially ecclesiastical authority.⁶⁶ Two categories of monks emerged as supporters of Origenist ideas, the *Protoktistoi* (or “First-Createds”) and the *Isochristoi* (or those equal to Christ).⁶⁷ The Protoktistoi saw the Isochristoi as “scandalously reducing Christ to the ranks of the created souls.”⁶⁸ The Isochristoi accused the Protoktistoi of “elevating a ‘created soul’ (of Jesus) into the Trinity as a fourth person of the Godhead.”⁶⁹ The animosity came to a head when the Protoktistoi appealed to the emperor through Pelagius, the papal Apocrisarius, and in 543 C.E., he presented a dossier to Justinian which included the *Letter to Menas*, an appendix with selections from Origen’s *Peri archon*, and a list of anathemata.⁷⁰ It is unclear exactly how the history proceeds from this point. We can be sure, however, that Justinian was aware of the issues at play and was concerned enough to include them in the eleventh anathema of the *Three Chapters*.⁷¹ McGuckin maintains that “Origen was condemned at the council mainly as a figure who synopsized the sixth-century Isochristoi, who themselves were predominantly following Evagrian themes and speculations. The conciliar “condemnation,” however ill targeted, nevertheless had the immediate effect of devastating Origen’s text tradition and its reception for later Christian ages.”⁷² The condemnation of Origen with the fifteen anathemas in 553 C.E. is commonly

University Press, 1992), 6.

⁶⁶ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, “Origenist Crises,” 165.

⁶⁷ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, “Origenist Crises,” 165.

⁶⁸ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, “Origenist Crises,” 165.

⁶⁹ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, “Origenist Crises,” 166.

⁷⁰ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, “Origenist Crises,” 166.

⁷¹ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, “Origenist Crises,” 166.

⁷² McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, “Origenist Crises,” 166.

understood as the final push to end the Origenist controversy that had spanned the preceding centuries.⁷³

In his preface to the XV Anathemas of the Synod condemning Origen at the Council of Constantinople 553 C.E., Philip Schaff details the difficulty in arguing definitively for the inclusion or exclusion of them within the conciliar proceedings. They do not appear in all the versions of the conciliar texts and seem as though they emanated from an imperial household Ekthesis after the council finished. We can render a picture of the sixth century church under Justinian's influence that was eager to put away the complicating philosophies of Origen with finality. We will now turn to these Anathemas in more detail, thinking about how they related to the monastic movement broadly and the construction of hagiographical compilations specifically.

The first anathema is short and explicit: "If anyone asserts the fabulous pre-existence of souls, and shall assert the monstrous restoration which follows from it: let him be anathema."⁷⁴ As noted earlier in the chapter on Cyril of Scythopolis, one of the sticking points of Origen's theology was this Platonic pre-existence of the soul in which it resided in God's realm in perfect harmony. Sin was that which caused separation and it was the physical world that acted as a sort of training ground for the soul to overcome that sin. The natural Neoplatonist ending to this was restoration to that realm of God. This theological position caused problems for any community that was eager to see judgment handed down in immediate, temporal acts of God. These acts, which were

⁷³ Daniël Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy: a New Perspective on Cyril of Scythopolis' Monastic Biographies as Historical Sources for Sixth-century Origenism*, Studia Anselmiana 132 (Roma: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 2001), 22.

⁷⁴ Philip Schaff, trans., "Anathemas Against Origen," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.

often rendered as foreshadowing the punishments in the afterlife, were far from plausible for a thinker like Origen. From Origen's perspective, the struggle in this world that the soul had to endure in order to be trained in righteousness fit nicely with a worldview that included the church facing persecutions from its ruling civil leaders. If God was always acting in immediacy to implement justice and serve comeuppance, how could the soul learn its lessons? Moreover, where was God's action in the decades of persecution that Christianity had suffered?

A church in persecution would have trouble believing God acted with the same immediacy as the ancient Israelites experienced. Origen's own father was executed for his Christianity when Origen was just seventeen, during the Great Persecution of 202 C.E.⁷⁵ With this in mind, could Origen envision a Christianity that took the ancient scriptures at their most basic textual and narrative values, where God broke into the world with a retributive justice akin to the Abrahamic stories? Moreover, could he envision his own father's mutilated body in the resurrection? As a result we see Origen's theology espouse the notion of a Spiritual Bodily resurrection, rather than some physical body. Also, his reliance on providence has a different flavor than later theological thinkers. God is at work, but he is at work in the training of the soul, not in the correction of social inequalities. The loss of his father at such a tender age and his mother's prevention of him following in his footsteps, certainly had a profound effect on his own theology and the developing theology of Eastern Late Antique Christians

14 (Edinburgh: Grand Rapids, Mich: T. & T Clark; Eerdmans, 1989), 615.

⁷⁵ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), "Origen of Alexandria," 243.

more broadly.⁷⁶

In all of this, it is wise to remember that the views which were critiqued by Epiphanius, Justinian, et al., were not necessarily those which the Origenists actually held.⁷⁷ This line of critique is then expanded further in that those views which the Origenists held were not necessarily true to Origen's thoughts. For our purposes, it is enough to acknowledge some of the similarities between Origen and his later followers in two primary aspects: spiritual resurrection, and *apokatastasis*. The first anathema speaks of the theory of restoration. Several of the subsequent anathemas critique the notion of a spiritual pre-existence and a subsequent denial of bodily resurrection. As shown below in the treatment of Origen's *De Principiis*, the final restoration is upheld—even if it does not explicitly call for the total restoration of all souls equally. Moreover, Origen spends a significant amount of time delineating exactly what he means by the “spiritual body” that is going to be resurrected.

In the Origenist conflicts we are witness to the clash of two very different views on how God was thought to work in the world. One side held that God worked with immediacy, punishing wicked folks for their sins and rewarding the good. The other side held God's action in a more complex system of providence wherein the good could suffer and the evil prosper, but God's will would never falter in the final adjudication. Scriptural interpretation is of utmost significance in these debates due to the models they promulgated. The Old Testament saw overt and immediate retribution as a natural

⁷⁶ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, “Origen of Alexandria,” 243.

⁷⁷ This can be seen throughout Christian history. Examples abound in Irenaeus and the Gnostics, Arius and the Arians, among others. Hombergen asks, “Should we assume that the hostile summaries of “Origenist” theology do accurately represent *their assimilation* of Origen's

fact in this world which was created and orchestrated by the YHVH. Origen took a more subtle approach connecting salvation and pedagogy into a timeline of life that was less predictable in the short term, but perfectly synchronized from the teleological perspective. Even sinners were worthy of restoration, though it might take them longer to accept the proximity to God that the less worldly soul enjoyed. As we work through these compilations of hagiography spanning the centuries of theological speculation over Origen's work, we see a divide growing between these two types of providence. It is not a sharp divide. Rather, it is a slower separation that traced the arc of Origen's condemnation from community to community. Reading Palladius's *Lausiac History*, side by side with John Moschos or John of Ephesus's work, the progression is clear. Christianity, and in particular the stories of the ascetics, had become increasingly retributive, culminating in Justinian's crushing blow to Origen and the notion of universal restoration. The scope of judgment was contracted from somewhere, ever-after, to the here and now, rendered judiciously by Emperor and ascetic alike.

Origen or Origenist?

As mentioned above it is difficult to know if we are getting a true read of Origen's material in the extant documents. It is worth noting that even if we could be sure of the accuracy in Origen's writings, this would in no way convince the historian that the later "Origenist" communities approximated something close to his belief system. Influence is irrefutable, but like most later innovators, the Origenist monks had applied what was beneficial to their understanding, picking out those bits which were problematic and

influence?" Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 27.

applying the most compelling bits with regard to their *sitz im leben*. To call the two the same theology would be overly simplistic, and yet we can easily look for aspects that appear to have continuity. Most are in agreement that what we read of Origen in the later controversies differs at significant points from Origen's original teaching.⁷⁸

Hombergen argues that very few of the five charges "put by Cyril into Cyriacus' mouth," can be associated with Origen's teachings, although they align nicely with Evagrius and the fifteen anathemas of Justinian from 553 C.E.⁷⁹ This further confirms Origen's distance from the Origenist conflict, as well as places Cyril close to Justinian and the anti-origenist movement of the sixth century. We should not, however, confuse his knowledge of the anathemas with a ready acceptance of them. As mentioned in chapter four on Cyril, his relationship with these ideas is complicated.

Theodoret of Cyrus also played a role in the later Origenist conflict. Hombergen argues that since Theodoret's work was appended to a new *libellus*, given by the anti-Origenists to Justinian, we can assume that they were attacking the Origenists and simultaneously hoping to diminish the fallout their own party might incur.⁸⁰

If, as Guillaumont suggested, the condemnation of 553 was more closely associated with Evagrius of Ponticus than it was with Origen, is the argument that hagiography as a type of literature changed in and according to this period because of Origen's anathematization moot? The reality is that regardless of whose hand was more clearly represented in these anathemas, the naming of them was rooted in Origen and

⁷⁸ Hombergen calls it "extremely difficult to delineate precisely these, "Origenist" movements and to establish accurately their relation to the Alexandrine master whose name they bear." Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 22.

⁷⁹ Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 271-283.

thereby embedded in the theologies of Origen that were not consonant with the Orthodox Church's assessment of theology in these periods. It matters less who the specific language of these ideas belonged to than the fact that they were associated with Origen, and at least for our specific loci of interest were rooted in Origen's ideas. The three specific aspects we are concerned with are the restoration of the soul, the style of reading scripture, and the notion of providence – or how God operated within history. These are not distinct ideas, but rather deeply reliant on each other in any development of a theological position. Indeed, it is difficult to affirm any of them without affirming some aspects of all three. Without an allegorical reading of scripture one is faced with a rather harsh and judgmental God, who was more interested in punishment than restoration. If one discounted the restorative aspects, it made providence impotent to effect any meaningful change in the Christian life, and so on. While Origen's providence was far different from our later hagiographers, this was probably attributable to the timing of his life in the midst of persecutions. One wonders how his theology might have changed in a different setting; Would his providence have been pushed toward the immediate and would the intensity of his allegorical interpretation been toned down? We can obviously never know, but it is worth thinking about how world circumstances affected Origen's views and how they continued to do so for our later hagiographers and Justinian.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 322.

⁸¹ Hombergen notes that this was part of the problem in the rise of the Origenist conflict, that they "attacked Origen without a sense of history." Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 24.

Spiritual Bodies and Punishment in the Afterlife?

In considering Origen's teaching on the restoration, we can look at *De Principiis* translated from Rufinus's Latin, where he philosophizes on that important judgment day.⁸² In his section, "On the Resurrection, and the Judgment, the Fire of Hell, and Punishments," Origen looks closely at what it means to have a body in the physical world and in the next life. He asserts that humans will have bodies in the afterlife, but they will be transformed from the "condition of indignity to one of glory," by becoming spiritual bodies.⁸³

The view of the body as spiritual body in the afterlife was as controversial as it was scriptural. The spiritual body was that entity which would reside either close to the unity and harmony of God, or be "clothed with dark and black bodies after the resurrection."⁸⁴ It is somewhat unclear from this work whether Origen was supporting a notion that the unbelievers would be fully converted to the highest levels of light and glory that those dedicated lovers of God would attain. He cannot disregard punishment outright, for it certainly plays a role in the scriptural projection of a judgment day. Origen would scarcely uphold a system of belief that directly conflicted with scripture; for him scripture was the source of this salvific knowledge of God. We learn from *De Principiis* that Origen believed in punishment, just not the lakes of fire that were

⁸² We have this text thanks to Rufinus's translation into Latin. There are some greek fragments attested by Jerome and Justinian's versions. Hombergen posits that "it is very probable that, at least in some important cases, Jerome and the redactor of Justinian's florilegium were the ones who distorted Origen's thought." Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 23 fn. 6.

⁸³ Origen, "De Principiis," 2.10.1.

⁸⁴ Origen, "De Principiis," 2.10.8.

popular in the imaginations of some monastic teachers.⁸⁵ The punishment he conceptualized was precisely the shameful and unholy deeds, the sins themselves, which would be conjured up by the mind and cause the mind to accuse itself. He explains:

When the soul has gathered together a multitude of evil works, and an abundance of sins against itself, at a suitable time all that assembly of evils boils up to punishment, and is set on fire to chastisements; when the mind itself, or conscience, receiving by divine power into the memory all those things of which it had stamped on itself certain signs and forms at the moment of sinning, will see a kind of history, as it were, of all the foul, and shameful, and unholy deeds which it has done, exposed before its eyes: then is the conscience itself harrassed, and, pierced by its own goads, becomes an accuser and a witness against itself. And this, I think, was the opinion of the Apostle Paul himself, when he said, "Their thoughts mutually accusing or excusing them in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel." From which it is understood that around the substance of the soul certain tortures are produced by hurtful affections of sins themselves.⁸⁶

So it is that the punishment is not some temporal chastisement, or worldly pain – such as fire or starvation – put upon the afterlife and multiplied for effect. Rather, once the soul returns to contact with God, it will become aware of purity vis-à-vis the filth of sin, and be pricked by the sense of loss that accompanies imperfection in the sight of God. Almost as if a theater of one's actions were replayed, only one's mind was now exposed to God and as such could not help but feel real remorse for the transgressions. The punishment was not separate from the sin; it was the sin.⁸⁷ Moreover, there was no punishing God wielding imagined vehicles of torture. Rather, it was one's own memory

⁸⁵ We acknowledge Moschos's treatment of one monk's vision of a river of fire. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, trans. John Wortley (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 44.

⁸⁶ Origen, "De Principiis," 2.10.4.

⁸⁷ For a contemporary example of this notion, see the influential story of Reverend Carlton Pearson on "This American Life," December 16, 2005. <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/304/heretics>

that served as the punisher.

After exploring so many hagiographical stories in these five compilations, it is easy to see how Origen's notion of punishment was persuasive in monastic life. The monk, having sequestered himself was subject most of all to the assaults of the mind. One might even read the majority of the demonic attacks as none other than personal demons attacking the psyche of these athletes in faith. It is hard to read the *Life of Antony*, without wondering if his demons were only his personal thoughts: concupiscence, greed, and hunger; these were desires that would not easily dissolve, no matter how far into the desert one trekked.⁸⁸

Origen, bound by scriptural support of punishment for the wicked, goes into significant detail about how this punishment might operate for those who do not escape their sins. In one of the more beautifully articulated sections in *De Principiis*, Origen continues:

You will ask indeed whether, in the case of those who have been entangled in the evils arising from those vices above enumerated, and who, while existing in this life, have been unable to procure any amelioration for themselves, and have in this condition departed from the world, it be sufficient in the way of punishment that they be tortured by the remaining in them of these hurtful affections, i.e., of the anger, or of the fury, or of the madness, or of the sorrow, whose fatal poison was in this life lessened by no healing medicine; or whether, these affections being changed, they will be subjected to the pains of a general punishment. Now I am of opinion that another species of punishment may be understood to exist; because, as we feel that when the limbs of the body are loosened and torn away

⁸⁸ Antony's life is deeply concerned with overcoming the demons. Any number of chapters would exemplify it. A good instance is seen in section thirty-six: "The assault and appearance of the evil ones, on the other hand, is something troubling, with crashing and noise and shouting – the sort of disturbance one might expect from tough youths and robbers. From this come immediately terror of soul, confusion and disorder of thoughts, dejection, enmity toward ascetics, listlessness, grief, memory of relatives, and fear of death; and finally there is craving for evil, contempt for virtue, and instability of character." Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 36.

from their mutual supports, there is produced pain of a most excruciating kind, so, when the soul shall be found to be beyond the order, and connection, and harmony in which it was created by God for the purposes of good and useful action and observation, and not to harmonize with itself in the connection of its rational movements, it must be deemed to bear the chastisement and torture of its own dissension, and to feel the punishments of its own disordered condition. And when this dissolution and rending asunder of soul shall have been tested by the application of fire, a solidification undoubtedly into a firmer structure will take place, and a restoration be effected.⁸⁹

If a person is of a more sinful nature – different from that Christian who commits a few sins over the course of their life – a more intense punishment is acknowledged. It is not, however, the punishment of some otherworldly torture. Rather the punishment is the *recognition* of one's separation from harmony, and the subsequent desire to regain unity. One imagines that the longing represented by this separation is quite intense – Origen likens it to the separation of limbs from a body.

Origen builds his theology around the purpose of some type of restoration in the coming life with God. It makes beautiful sense in the Neoplatonic structure of procession and return. The soul processes from God, only to eventually take part in a return to its former state.⁹⁰ This notion is compelling until one reads a gospel text like the one in Matthew 25:41, which explores the judgment day scene. Jesus says, "Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."⁹¹ Eternal fire certainly has a ring of finality to it. Origen does not miss a step, however, acknowledging this fire as the fire with which God burns away sin, purifying the soul in order to be joined to him. He then asks, if a

⁸⁹ Origen, "De Principiis," 2.10.5.

⁹⁰ For a contemporary of Justinian's take on this procession and return, see Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

⁹¹ NRSV Matt. 25:41

painful or unpleasant drug is at times useful for the body, “How much more is it to be understood that God our Physician, desiring to remove the defects of our souls, which they had contracted from their different sins and crimes, should employ penal measures of this sort, and should apply even, in addition, the punishment of fire to those who have lost their soundness of mind!”⁹² He continues to explain that:

The fury of God’s vengeance is profitable for the purgation of souls. That the punishment, also, which is said to be applied by fire, is understood to be applied with the object of healing, is taught by Isaiah, who speaks thus of Israel: “The Lord will wash away the filth of the sons or daughters of Zion, and shall purge away the blood from the midst of them by the spirit of judgment, and the spirit of burning.” Of the Chaldeans he thus speaks: “Thou hast the coals of fire; sit upon them: they will be to thee a help.” And in other passages he says, “The Lord will sanctify in a burning fire” and in the prophecies of Malachi he says, “The Lord sitting will blow, and purify, and will pour forth the cleansed sons of Judah.”⁹³

Two aspects of this stand in stark relief from the later hagiographical stories. On one hand there is the notion that God’s vengeance is “profitable for the purgation of souls.” This concept is in line with a life that is geared toward training the soul to conquer specific sinful behaviors. I think Origen would be reluctant to call a plague, earthquake, or other unfortunate instance God’s vengeance, unless it had some pedagogical aspect to it. Rather God’s vengeance is that which God employs in purifying the soul after life. The second notion worth noting is the “healing” aspect of the fire. This is not fire for pain, but rather, fire for purification – a burning away of the rotten flesh so that the body may be spared. Origen likens it to a physician, amputating as needed in order to save the remainder.⁹⁴

⁹² Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.6.

⁹³ Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.6.

⁹⁴ Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.6.

The story is slightly different for a class of individuals Origen deems “unbelievers.” Three instances in Matthew use the term “outer darkness,” as a place that unbelievers are bound and cast.⁹⁵ The passage Origen is referring to in this section is likely Matthew 25, where the story of the master who gave his servants talents is explained. The clue is in Origen’s remark concerning those who had received some gift of the Holy Spirit, “whether by baptism, or by the grace of the Spirit, the word of Wisdom, or the word of Knowledge, or any other gift, has been bestowed upon a man, and not rightly administered, i.e., either buried in the earth or tied up in a napkin.”⁹⁶ As the story in Matthew maintains, the steward who hid his talent in the ground is bound and thrown into “outer darkness.”⁹⁷ Origen explains that when the gift is taken back from the soul, “the other portion which remains, that is, the substance of the soul, will be assigned its place with unbelievers, being divided and separated from that Spirit with whom, by joining itself to the Lord, it ought to have been one spirit.”⁹⁸ Even in this case Origen acknowledges that the good part of the soul, that which was “made in the image and likeness of God,” is separated out from the part that “through its fall by the exercise of free-will, was assumed contrary to the nature of its original condition of purity.”⁹⁹ This part “as being the friend and beloved of matter, is punished with the fate of unbelievers.”¹⁰⁰ Origen then turns to the notion that each believer in the Church, regardless of how humble, is said to have a guardian angel attending to him. By the

⁹⁵ Matt. 8:12, 22:13, 25:30

⁹⁶ Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.7.

⁹⁷ Matt. 25:30

⁹⁸ Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.7.

⁹⁹ Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.7.

¹⁰⁰ Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.7.

soul's disobedience, the angel, who admonishes continually, may be removed from the disbelieving part of the soul. Again, this notion would have considerable mileage amidst the monastic communities. Monks' souls were in constant struggle against demons of various types – both spiritual and mental. The notion of an angel attached to each soul and watching out for its every step, was very attractive theology. This angel not only admonished the soul, but always beheld “the face of God the Father,” allowing for connection in a world that seemed so alienated from the divine.¹⁰¹

Origen next turns to this concept of “outer darkness,” explaining that it is not so much a place without light as a place of ignorance “beyond the reach of any light of the understanding.”¹⁰² In like manner, the bodies of the afterlife will reflect the holiness of each soul. The saints will receive “bright and glorious” bodies, while the wicked “who in this life have loved the darkness of error and the night of ignorance, may be clothed with dark and black bodies after the resurrection, that the very mist of ignorance which had in this life taken possession of their minds within them, may appear in the future as the external covering of the body.”¹⁰³ Origen closes out with the remark, “Similar is the view to be entertained regarding the prison.”¹⁰⁴ He is positing that those who have lived in the bounded life of sin, as if in a prison in their lives, may obtain bodies that are also not completely free in the afterlife.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.7.

¹⁰² Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.8.

¹⁰³ Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.8.

¹⁰⁴ Origen, “De Principiis,” 2.10.8.

¹⁰⁵ Although different for several reasons, not the least of which is the notion of the binding and loosing by the Church's hierarchy rather than the actual holiness of the soul, we are reminded of a story Moschos tells of a monk who was punished with excommunication for having requested and accepted money from his worldly brother to buy a shirt. The monk died while under punishment and this greatly grieved Pope Gregory. He drafted a letter of forgiveness to

The notion of a gradation in the afterlife stands in some conflict with Origen's later notion of God being said to be "all in all."¹⁰⁶ Origen envisions the soul's journey back to God in its spiritual body, as a rejoining of God's likeness to the unity that is in Christ and the Father. He explains:

When all which any rational understanding, cleansed from the dregs of every sort of vice, and with every cloud of wickedness completely swept away, can either feel, or understand, or think, will be wholly God; and when it will no longer behold or retain anything else than God, but when God will be the measure and standard of all its movements; and thus God will be "all," for there will no longer be any distinction of good and evil, seeing evil nowhere exists; for God is all things, and to Him no evil is near: nor will there be any longer a desire to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on the part of him who is always in the possession of good, and to whom God is all. So then, when the end has been restored to the beginning, and the termination of things compared with their commencement, that condition of things will be re-established in which rational nature was placed, when it had no need to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; so that when all feeling of wickedness has been removed, and the individual has been purified and cleansed, He who alone is the one good God becomes to him "all," and that not in the case of a few individuals, or of a considerable number, but He Himself is "all in all." And when death shall no longer anywhere exist, nor the sting of death, nor any evil at all, then verily God will be "all in all."¹⁰⁷

The connection to the monastic life is obvious and compelling. Monks sought to live in such a way that God's order of goodness would be re-established on earth in such a way that returned to that concept of the Garden of Eden. This was a time when God was all, was in all, and there was no need for the inclusion of knowledge of good and evil. Monks strove to accomplish these deeds on earth, by living lives according to that

be read over the dead monk by the higoumen of the monastery where he resided. That evening the elder saw the monk in a vision and asked him if he was dead and where he had been up to that day. The monk replied, "Truly, sir, I was in prison and I was not set free until yesterday." Origen would have been far more concerned with the holiness of the monk, rather than the Church's pronouncement on his soul. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 192.

¹⁰⁶ Origen, "De Principiis," 3.6.1-9.

¹⁰⁷ Origen, "De Principiis," 3.6.3.

ancient plan wherein the will of God and humanity existed in perfect harmony – more accurately, they were not separate, but the same will. The order this produced in the monastic life could be seen in glimpses as the monk slowly converted his world back to the beautiful creation God intended, drawing bits of the afterlife into the present one. We see this in the subservience of lions, the happiness of the soul amidst all types of struggle, the removal of anger and strife, and the utter joy one felt in complete loss of self in the divine. There was no longer need for sex, food or sleep; these things were only worldly things which clouded the mind of the pure soul on its trajectory back to unity with God. In reading Origen’s works, we are reminded of Cyril’s acknowledgment that these teachings were persuasive and the roots of these ideas were in need of the most thorough weeding. As with most influential ideas, they take hold in various ways regardless of how quickly or meticulously they are anathematized. The fact that Origenism causes controversies and is denounced in two separate eras, divided by more than a century, speaks to this fact.

Origen completes his section on the end of the world with a treatment of how the spiritual body differs from the body sown of flesh. Working within this concept, he treats the problem of death as well. It was a major consideration for any theological position that was interested in affirming some type of total restoration: How does death figure into this final restoration, especially considering its characterization in the gospels as a power to be overcome? For this, Origen calls on the ultimate power of God to restore it:

The last enemy, moreover, who is called death, is said on this account to be destroyed, that there may not be anything left of a mournful kind when death does not exist, nor anything that is adverse when there is no enemy. The

destruction of the last enemy, indeed, is to be understood, not as if its substance, which was formed by God, is to perish, but because its mind and hostile will, which came not from God, but from itself, are to be destroyed. Its destruction, therefore, will not be its non-existence, but its ceasing to be an enemy, and (to be) death. For nothing is impossible to the Omnipotent, nor is anything incapable of restoration to its Creator: for He made all things that they might exist, and those things which were made for existence cannot cease to be.¹⁰⁸

Once all evil, including the hostility and stubbornness which came about through free will, is burnt away by God's fire, all are capable of being recaptured and restored.¹⁰⁹

On Scriptural Interpretation

Origen has a significant amount to say on the question of how scripture came about and to what extent it was divinely inspired. In a section of *De Principiis*, Origen lays out his proofs concerning the nature of Scriptures as "divine" and "inspired by the Spirit of God."¹¹⁰ Origen begins by acknowledging Moses's role as "legislator of the Hebrew nation," and Jesus Christ as "Author and Chief of the Christian religious system."¹¹¹ As if foreshadowing the developments Justinian makes in the sixth century, his next lines are surprisingly pertinent. He states:

For although there have been numerous legislators among the Greeks and Barbarians, and also countless teachers and philosophers who professed to declare the truth, we do not remember any legislator who was able to produce in the minds of foreign nations an affection and a zeal (for him) such as led them either voluntarily to adopt his laws, or to defend them with all the efforts of their

¹⁰⁸ Origen, "De Principiis," 3.6.5.

¹⁰⁹ In many ways this reminds one of the gnostic notion of light being recalled to the high God. The Gospel of Thomas speaks of this light, captured in each person. "His disciples said, 'Show us the place where you are, for it is necessary for us to seek it.' He said to them, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear. There is light within a person of light and he (or it) lights the whole world. When he (or, it) does not shine, there is darkness.'" Bart D. Ehrman, "Gospel of Thomas," in *After the New Testament: a Reader in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 240.

¹¹⁰ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.1.

¹¹¹ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.1.

mind. No one, then, has been able to introduce and make known what seemed to himself the truth, among, I do not say many foreign nations, but even amongst the individuals of one single nation, in such a manner that a knowledge and belief of the same should extend to all. And yet there can be no doubt that it was the wish of the legislators that their laws should be observed by all men, if possible; and of the teachers, that what appeared to themselves to be truth, should become known to all. But knowing that they could by no means succeed in producing any such mighty power within them as would lead foreign nations to obey their laws, or have regard to their statements, they did not venture even to essay the attempt, lest the failure of the undertaking should stamp their conduct with the mark of imprudence.¹¹²

It is as if Origen was writing as a contemporary, critiquing the emperor who would stamp his theology with anathemas. Regardless of this anachronism, it is interesting to think about the importance that both lay on the scripture as a source of divine power and insight. Whereas Justinian reads himself into the lineage of the kings of Israel, as leader of God's chosen people, Origen reads his community allegorically into the same genealogy. The differences are significant, however, since Justinian expected that God was working with immediacy while for Origen it was enough to know that God's plan was working in the world, no matter how dissonant this was with one's experience.

The difference between the two was a matter of perspective as much as it was one of theology. Standing on top of the world, Justinian couldn't possibly understand the deeper nuances of providential awareness that Origen was grappling with. As Origen explains in the next few lines, there are "countless individuals who have abandoned the laws of their country, and those whom they had believed to be gods, and have yielded themselves up to the obedience of the law of Moses, and to the discipleship and worship of Christ; and have done this, not without exciting against themselves the intense hatred of the worshippers of images, so as frequently to be exposed to cruel

¹¹² Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.1.

tortures from the latter, and sometimes even to be put to death. And yet they embrace, and with all affection preserve, the words and teaching of Christ.”¹¹³ The view from the bottom, through the dense fog of incongruous providence, called for an adjusted perspective on how one identified with the scriptural stories. The acceptance of Christ could subject one to all kinds of unpleasant experiences. For Justinian, entering into commitment to Christ was gaining assurance that God was going to make a way through all sorts of problems, be it plague or revolt. For Origen, who contemplated joining his father in martyrdom, the embracing of Christ meant different things. The differences between these two were stark.

Like Justinian, Origen holds up as proof of God’s inspiration, the progress Christianity made amidst the “punishment and death of its worshippers” enduring “tortures of every kind.”¹¹⁴ And yet, from Origen’s perspective, Christianity continued to thrive in its own way. We can take Origen’s positive perspective on Christianity’s growth to mean that he saw it as still growing and spreading in a world that was set against it.

As with all of Origen’s works, he does not shy away from the most difficult logical hurdles that his positions create. Instead, he attacks them head on – as in the case of the question of kings of Judah. He explains regarding Jesus, “What, then, are we to say of this, which the prophets had beforehand foretold of Him, that princes would not cease from Judah, nor leaders from between his thighs, until He should come for who it has been reserved (viz., the kingdom), and until the expectation of the Gentiles should

¹¹³ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.1.

¹¹⁴ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.2.

come?"¹¹⁵ Citing the destruction of the temple and the lack of any priesthood or magisterial figure in the line of Judah, Origen then flips the prophecy to prove his own point. Because no princes and leaders have come from Judah since Christ, he must be the fulfillment of this prophecy. The proof of this being the "multitude of those who have believed in God through Christ out of the different nations."¹¹⁶ Rather than connecting Christianity to the lineage of ancient Israelite kings, for which there would be no visible example, Origen is left to interpret the scriptures in a less literal manner. Justinian, as king of the Roman Empire, could work the interpretation in a different direction.

We catch a glimpse at God's providence at work in Origen's theology, however muted it may be. In discussing the development of scripture and its relation to historical developments, Origen remarks concerning God's proximity and power as represented in the gospels. He states, "Moreover, he is at hand, who in the book of Job is said to be about to destroy the huge beast, who also gave power to his own disciples to tread on serpents and scorpions, and on all the power of the enemy, without being injured by him. But if any one will consider the journeys of Christ's apostles throughout the different places, in which as His messengers they preached the Gospel, he will find that both what they ventured to undertake is beyond the power of man, and what they were enabled to accomplish is from God alone."¹¹⁷ Origen ends up affirming something closer to what Theodoret of Cyrros posits concerning God's action in the early years of Christ's establishment of God's Kingdom. The supernatural and phenomenal actions

¹¹⁵ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.3.

¹¹⁶ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.3.

that the apostles took part in were from God, but that does not mean God was acting in the same way now. Providence is at work for Origen, it just lacks the external proofs necessary to make it bright with meaning. Origen's notion of providence is something hidden, veiled from most human understanding that lurks beneath the surface of everyday events. It was a worldview that was inspired by events such as the persecution of his father, and his own struggles with the worldly powers that would eventually take his life.

As mentioned above, Origen took seriously the notion that scripture was divinely inspired; it held all the majesty and mystery of God, waiting to be searched out and offering treasures at every turn for the engaged contemplator.¹¹⁸ All one needed to experience Divine inspiration was to spend some time reading the scriptures. Origen explains:

If any one, moreover, consider the words of the prophets with all the zeal and reverence which they deserve, it is certain that, in the perusal and careful examination thus given them, he will feel his mind and senses touched by a divine breath, and will acknowledge that the words which he reads were no human utterances, but the language of God; and from his own emotions he will feel that these books were the composition of no human skill, nor of any mortal eloquence, but, so to speak, of a style that is divine. The splendour of Christ's advent, therefore, illuminating the law of Moses by the light of truth, has taken away that veil which had been placed over the letter (of the law), and has unsealed, for every one who believes upon Him, all the blessings which were concealed by the covering of the word.¹¹⁹

The notion that one's own emotions will feel the touch of divine breath is somehow connected to humanity's relation to the Divine in the previous realm. That all were once

¹¹⁷ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.5.

¹¹⁸ As he states, "the weakness of our understanding is unable to trace out the hidden and secret meaning in each individual word, the treasure of divine wisdom being hid in the vulgar and unpolished vessels of words." Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.7.

connected to God certainly plays a role in Origen's concept of how scripture is able to mystically teach the soul. The baseline connection was not lost with the soul; it was simply that the signal was partially blocked, allowing for fuzzy reception of God's transmissions.¹²⁰

Origen subsequently turns his discussion to providence. It is a natural move for one who has claimed that God has so inspired scripture and the corresponding history, attuning it to his will. As with all claims of providence, Origen has to make sense of God's often confusing manner in ordering the world. Justinian's prefaces need far less support for his claims. His proof was his position, taking part in the crafting of these prefaces from his throne room in the imperial palace. God's providence was on display like never before in the sixth century. Territories were acquired; Christianity was spreading; the very un-Christian academy in Athens was closed, and Roman law, rife with inaccuracy and confusing nuance, was finally falling under God's purview. Origen's perspective was different, however. Few of the external signals that Justinian and other later theologians enjoyed were so visibly exposed to his era of thinkers.

Origen explains:

For although it is certain that all things which exist in this world, or take place in it, are ordered by the providence of God, and certain events indeed do appear with sufficient clearness to be under the disposal of His providential government, yet others again unfold themselves so mysteriously and incomprehensibly, that the plan of Divine Providence with regard to them is completely concealed; so that it is occasionally believed by some that particular

¹¹⁹ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.6.

¹²⁰ As Origen notes, "But if the sense of the letter, which is beyond man, does not appear to present itself at once, on the first glance, to those who are less versed in divine discipline, it is not at all to be wondered at, because divine things are brought down somewhat slowly to (the comprehension of) men, and elude the view in proportion as one is either sceptical or unworthy." Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.7.

occurrences do not belong to (the plan of) Providence, because the principle eludes their grasp, according to which the works of Divine Providence are administered with indescribable skill; which principle of administration, however, is not equally concealed from all. For even among men themselves, one individual devotes less consideration to it, another more; while by every man, He who is on earth, whoever is the inhabitant of heaven, is more acknowledged.¹²¹

The ability to interpret the scripture for the understanding of God's power was contingent on the individual. The pool of evidence was a bit murkier for Origen than it was in the middle of the sixth century. God worked in mysterious and incomprehensible ways, and it was a challenge for the human mind just how history connected with God's ways.

Origen goes on to make an argument for the validity of scripture based on the model of divine providence. He explains that if one can assert its existence, without comprehending its "workings or arrangements by the powers of the human mind," then one cannot believe divine inspiration of scripture is non-existent "because the weakness of our understanding is unable to trace out the hidden and secret meaning in each individual word, the treasure of divine wisdom being hid in the vulgar and unpolished vessels of words."¹²²

Origen closes this section with this thought: "Many, not understanding the Scriptures in a spiritual sense, but incorrectly, have fallen into heresies."¹²³ He does not unpack this statement in this section, but we can think about what it means for the broader development of Christian theological understanding. As stated earlier, Origen's model of scriptural interpretation was less literal than later thinkers. For him it was an

¹²¹ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.7.

¹²² Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.7.

¹²³ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.7.

enigma that needed solving. The clues for the solution were present in the scriptures, but it was up to the human – with the power of God’s guidance – to sort out the answer to the mysteries of how scripture should be interpreted and how that related to God’s providence in the world. It is no accident that Origen’s proof of divine inspiration in scripture relies on a concept of divine providence. Both were mysterious and yet heavily weighted with meaning for the Christian life. The danger in scriptural interpretation was not so much a misreading of Luke against John, or James over Romans, but rather that one would take scripture too literally, effectively missing the real teachings which were available only in the “spiritual sense.”¹²⁴

In Origen’s treatment of the proper way to read scripture he cites certain groups who fall into the category of mis-readers. Not surprisingly, the first group he mentions are the Jews.¹²⁵ Origen explains:

The Jews, in fine, owing to the hardness of their heart, and from a desire to appear wise in their own eyes, have not believed in our Lord and Saviour, judging that those statements which were uttered respecting Him ought to be understood literally, i.e., that He ought in a sensible and visible manner to preach deliverance to the captives, and first build a city which they truly deem the city of God, and cut off at the same time the chariots of Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; that He ought also to eat butter and honey, in order to choose the good before He should come to know how to bring forth evil. They think, also, that it has been predicted that the wolf – that four-footed animal – is, at the coming of Christ, to feed with the lambs, and the leopard to lie down with kids, and the calf and the bull to pasture with lions, and that they are to be led by a little child to the pasture; that the ox and the bear are to lie down together in the green fields, and that their young ones are to be fed together; that lions also will frequent stalls with the oxen, and feed on straw. And seeing that, according to history, there was no accomplishment of any of those things predicted of Him, in

¹²⁴ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.7.

¹²⁵ As seen in the criticism leveled against Jews in Cyril of Scythopolis and John of Ephesus, a favorite straw man was Jewish belief. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991), Sabas, 36; John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, trans. E. W. Brooks, *Patrologia Orientalis* 82 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 16.

which they believed the signs of Christ's advent were especially to be observed, they refused to acknowledge the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ; nay, contrary to all the principles of human and divine law, i.e., contrary to the faith of prophecy, they crucified Him for assuming to Himself the name of Christ.¹²⁶

Several aspects of this quote stand in relief concerning the reading of the monastic literature from our hagiographers. First, Origen is critiquing a literal reading of the scripture along the lines that if one was to read literally, they should look for a reconfiguration of all creation, to the point of ridiculousness. The lion would never pasture with the calf and bull, nor would it shift its appetite to the straw found in the "stalls with the oxen."¹²⁷ But this is precisely the sort of reordering certain monks hoped for in their lifetimes. That hagiography attempts to support this culmination of scripture matched to historical events makes clear that the monks were not only reading scripture in this literal light, but that the broader Christian communities, to which these hagiographers were writing, also favored this type of reading. We will encounter many monastic vignettes that support this type of reading. Perhaps most pertinent are the stories of lions behaving as domestic animals or helpful members of the community. Lions keep monks warm at night, carry goods on their backs, and obey various commands as if fellow brothers in the community.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.8.

¹²⁷ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.8.

¹²⁸ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 167.

Moschos's story of a monk who brought two lion cubs into church for an object lesson is pertinent here. The monk states, "If we kept the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ...these animals would fear us. But because of our sins we have become slaves and it is rather we who fear them. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 18. Also, a story occurs in chapter one-hundred seven, when a lion is profoundly anthropomorphized. The lion is accused of killing the ass which he cared for. He shows remorse and eventually returns the ass and three camels to the elder, helping him again to fetch water for the monastery. Moschus appends an explanation for the prolonged anthropomorphizing: "This did not take place because the lion had a rational soul, but because it is the will of God to glorify those who glorify him – and to

Another connection is the transformation of a beast from carnivore to herbivore. A story from Moschos is worth relating here, since it gives insight into the monastic notion that the world was slowly being transformed according to scripture, but there were hiccups and setbacks along the way. In chapter One hundred sixty-three, Moschos tells of Abba Paul the Greek and his feeding of a lion. The full detail of the passage is worth quoting:

One day when I was with Abba Paul the Greek at his cave, somebody came and knocked at the door. The elder went out and opened to him. Then he took out and set before him bread and soaked <peas>, which he wolfed down. I thought it must be some stranger; I looked through the window and saw that it was a lion. I said to the elder: "Good elder, why do you feed that animal? Explain to me." He said: "I have required of it that it harm neither man nor beast; and I have told it to come here each day and I will give it its food. It has come twice a day now for seven months – and I feed it." Some days later I met him again, when I wanted to buy some bottles for he occupied his hands by making bottles. I said to him: "How are things, good elder? How is the lion?" He answered: "Badly," and I asked: "How so?" He told me: "It came here to be fed yesterday and I noticed that its muzzle was all stained with blood. I said to it: "What is this? You have disobeyed me and eaten flesh. Blessed Lord! Never again will I feed you the food of the fathers, carnivore! Get away from here." He would not go away, so I took a rope, folded it up into three and struck it three blows with it. Then it went away.¹²⁹

The worldview Moschos represents here is one which took seriously the scriptural notion that God would be transforming the world creature by creature, making the lions as docile as pets and removing all fear from those creatures who saw them as threats to survival. We catch a glimpse of this transformation in Abba Paul's feeding of

show how the beasts were in subjection to Adam before he disobeyed the commandment and fell from the comfort of paradise. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 107. The story is obviously related to another in Cyril, where an ass and lion pair up for similar duties. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas, 49.

¹²⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 163.

the lion the “food of the fathers.”¹³⁰ The vegetarian diet was known for having good effect on mind and body in the ancient world. It kept the monk from gluttonous desire, and at the same time required none of the killing that carnivorous delights made necessary.¹³¹

It does not surprise us that the lion eventually returns to his carnivorous habits, given Moschos’s worldview. The monk, like the lion, was in a process of change that could be neither speedy nor complete in this world. Stories like this upheld the monastic interest in literal readings of the scriptural texts, while affirming the entropic realities that seemed to insinuate themselves into the worldview of these communities. This is not to say that the monks did not hope for order in the world, but rather that it often slipped away at the slightest push of fleshly concerns and influences.

Origen has a very specific way of reading the scriptures that gives attention to nuances in the text as points of communication between God, via the holy spirit, and humanity. The text contains not only those stories which actually happened, but also a host of stories that were manufactured in order to edify the Christian in his reading. Origen explains, “Since, then, it was the intention of the Holy Spirit to enlighten with respect to these and similar subjects, those holy souls who had devoted themselves to the service of the truth, this object was kept in view, in the second place, viz., for the sake of those who either could not or would not give themselves to this labour and toil by which they might deserve to be instructed in or to recognise things of such value and importance, to wrap up and conceal, as we said before, in ordinary language, under the

¹³⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 163.

¹³¹ One is reminded of Mani’s apprehension at plucking the fruit from the tree and hearing its

covering of some history and narrative of visible things, hidden mysteries.”¹³² For those who are deeply engaged – here we can think of certain communities of our ascetics – the scripture is a wealth of knowledge at every interpretive turn. For those who are not dedicated to its hidden mysteries, it is read literally and many of the deeper meanings are actually obscured. Origen goes further to claim that the “law of truth, even of the prophets, is implanted in the Scriptures of the law, each of which is woven by a divine art of wisdom, as a kind of covering and veil of spiritual truths; and this is what we have called the “body” of Scripture, so that also, in this way, what we have called the covering of the letter, woven by the art of wisdom, might be capable of edifying and profiting many, when others would derive no benefit.”¹³³ For those who look beneath the literal reading there is a wealth of benefit that others will not gain.

Origen bases this concept of reading on the fact that the scriptures contain such contours of incongruity at all. If this really was God’s law, written by God, we would expect it to be perfectly harmonious, complete and lacking any discontinuity. Given the reality of scripture which is full of overlapping narratives and unbelievable tragedies, one has to question whether God was involved at all in the inspiration of the document. The natural progression for someone who believed God’s hand was active in making scripture meaningful and perfect in its imperfections, would be to acknowledge these interstices and ruptures as markers of God’s message. Origen explains his thinking:

But as if, in all the instances of this covering (i.e., of this history), the logical connection and order of the law had been preserved, we would not certainly believe, when thus possessing the meaning of Scripture in a continuous series,

cries.

¹³² Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.14.

¹³³ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.14.

that anything else was contained in it save what was indicated on the surface; so for that reason divine wisdom took care that certain stumbling-blocks, or interruptions, to the historical meaning should take place, by the introduction into the midst (of the narrative) of certain impossibilities and incongruities; that in this way the very interruption of the narrative might, as by the interposition of a bolt, present an obstacle to the reader, whereby he might refuse to acknowledge the way which conducts to the ordinary meaning; and being thus excluded and debarred from it, we might be recalled to the beginning of another way, in order that, by entering upon a narrow path, and passing to a loftier and more sublime road, he might lay open the immense breadth of divine wisdom.¹³⁴

The role of the Holy Spirit in this, as preserver of “the coherence of the spiritual meaning,” was to locate those points in the text where the historical events could be “adapted to spiritual meaning,” and compose “a texture of both kinds in one style of narration.”¹³⁵ If the Holy Spirit came upon a moment where the narrative was not conducive to the spiritual meaning, it was his job to insert “certain things which either did not take place or could not take place; sometimes also what might happen, but what did not.”¹³⁶ Filling in words few or many, depending on the need of the situation, the Holy Spirit crafted meaning in the scriptural texts. By acknowledging those points in the scripture where the texts lack utility for interpretation or “are judged to be impossibilities” as points of deeper meaning, the Christian is able to ascertain “a meaning worthy of God in those Scriptures which we believe to be inspired by Him.”¹³⁷

Although Origen focused much of his allegorical interpretation on the Old Testament, he believed that the model was equally applicable to the New Testament. In the writings of the evangelists and apostles many things were included to recall the attention of the reader “by the impossibility of the case, to an examination of the inner

¹³⁴ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.15.

¹³⁵ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.15.

¹³⁶ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.15.

meaning.”¹³⁸ These cracks in the facade of the text were not, however, meant to be difficult to find. Rather, Origen claims that “it is very easy for anyone who pleases to gather out of holy Scripture what is recorded indeed as having been done, but what nevertheless cannot be believed as having reasonably and appropriately occurred according to the historical account.”¹³⁹

With Origen’s interest in Platonic thought, we are reminded of a passage in the *Republic*, in which Plato speaks of “summoners,” παρακαλουντα, which are included to spark deeper thought in the reader.¹⁴⁰ Book seven states, “The ones that don’t summon the understanding are all those that don’t go off into opposite perceptions at the same time. But the ones that do go off in that way I call *summoners* – whenever sense perception doesn’t declare one thing any more than its opposite, no matter whether the object striking the senses is near at hand or far away.”¹⁴¹ This was certainly an influential notion in Origen’s writing.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.15.

¹³⁸ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.16.

¹³⁹ Origen gives the example of Jesus being taken up by the devil to view the kingdoms of the world. He states, “The same style of Scriptural narrative occurs abundantly in the Gospels, as when the devil is said to have placed Jesus on a lofty mountain, that he might show Him from thence all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. How could it literally come to pass, either that Jesus should be led up by the devil into a high mountain, or that the latter should show him all the kingdoms of the world (as if they were lying beneath his bodily eyes, and adjacent to one mountain), i.e., the kingdoms of the Persians, and Scythians, and Indians? or how could he show in what manner the kings of these kingdoms are glorified by men?” Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.16.

¹⁴⁰ Plato, *Platonis Opera T. 4* (Oxonii: e Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1962), *Republic*, Book 7, Sections 523 B–C.

¹⁴¹ I am grateful to Erik Kenyon for this observation. Plato, *Platonis Opera T. 4*, *Republic*, Book 7, Sections 523 B–C.

¹⁴² Origen’s debt to Platonic thought was substantial. See Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, “Christian Soteriology and Christian Platonism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Biblical and Philosophical Basis of the Doctrine of Apokatastasis,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 61, no. 3 (August 1, 2007): 313–356.

Origen goes on to give some examples of just how far the text can be strained at times when one thinks deeply about it. As an example, he raises the Matthean text where Jesus tells his followers to pluck out the right eye if it offends. Origen remarks, “This precept also in the Gospels must be accounted among impossibilities, viz., that if the right eye “offend” thee, it is to be plucked out; for even if we were to suppose that bodily eyes were spoken of, how shall it appear appropriate, that when both eyes have the property of sight, the responsibility of the “offence” should be transferred to one eye, and that the right one?”¹⁴³ The point he makes is worth considering. If it was a vision of some carnal delight that was offending one, why would plucking out one eye fix the problem? Moreover, as any reader of the hagiographies knows, it is not simply the vision of the eye that troubles the monk, but also the vision of the mind in memory. Plucking out the eyes, let alone only the right eye, would not fix such a problem.

This particular passage is also relevant to an earlier section in Moschos wherein an anchoress plucks out her eye because it has caused a young man to desire her. The story is undoubtedly based on a literal reading of the Matthean passage. If Origen’s theological stance concerning the reading of these problematic passages had not been severed from these monastic communities we might have seen the anchoress remove herself from the vision of the young man, or even pluck out the image spiritually by associating herself with death or destruction, as other similar stories relate.¹⁴⁴ Instead, the literal reading of the text holds sway in the mind of this young anchoress as she gouges out her eye in the boy’s presence – a further example of how quickly Origen’s

¹⁴³ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.18.

¹⁴⁴ See John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 19, 39.

allegorical reading had been dismissed.

Origen uses the same model for biblical interpretation as he does for the concept of how the afterlife functions regarding the body and soul. The basic or physical understanding of the scripture coincides with that most elementary aspect of human life, the surface level in which most souls live and breathe on earth. As the first body dies and the spiritual body is resurrected, so also can one go beyond the physical understanding of the scriptures tapping into the spiritual side of understanding. Origen explains, "This point, indeed, is not to be passed by without notice, viz., that there are certain passages of Scripture where this "body," as we termed it, i.e., this inferential historical sense, is not always found...but where that which we termed "soul" or "spirit" can only be understood."¹⁴⁵ For Origen, a proper interpretation is one which goes beyond the simplistic narratives of the scripture and looks for the shading around these characters and stories which provides the deeper dimensional understanding. He notes regarding the basic interpretation, that the "spiritual" interpretation is "when one is able to point out what are the heavenly things of which these serve as the patterns and shadow."¹⁴⁶

On Law and relation to Justinian

The differences in perspective between Origen and Justinian might be seen most clearly in their treatment of the law. Whereas Justinian saw his compilation and correction of the law as a culmination of God's law carried forward through the Roman

¹⁴⁵ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.12.

¹⁴⁶ Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.13.

imperial perspective, Origen took God's law as a simple starting point for the interpretation of that more important law, the spiritual law. The two perspectives could not be further from each other. Origen gives us an excellent example in his treatment of the muzzled ox who threshes the corn. He cites Deuteronomy 25:4, and 1 Corinthians 9:9 ff., wherein the New Testament shows that a simple reading of the law would make God's focus the oxen rather than the more profound notion that as an oxen is not precluded from partaking in the fruits of his work, so also we humans have hope in our work.¹⁴⁷ The obvious problem with a reading like this, is that it is perennially hard to manage. With each new generation of believers, new interpretive strategies and meaning could imbue the text. This model could inject a vivacity into biblical interpretation, allowing some maneuverability in theological understanding which Origen championed. This is precisely the kind of imprecision, however, that was feared and loathed in the later monastic writings against Origen. We will see later a conversation in Cyril of Scythopolis where Cyril challenges a monk with the Origenist citation of Gregory's notion that it is good to 'Philosophize about the world, matter, the soul, the good and the evil rational natures, the Resurrection and the Passion of Christ; for in these matters hitting on the truth is not without profit and error is without danger.'¹⁴⁸ Origen relates the understanding of the law to this, it is not so static and

¹⁴⁷ He states, "For we find the expression, "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." And afterwards, when explaining what precept ought to be understood by this, he adds the words: "Doth God take care for oxen? or saith He it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written; that he who plougheth should plough in hope, and he that thresheth, in hope of partaking." Very many other passages also of this nature, which are in this way explained of the law, contribute extensive information to the hearers." Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.12.

¹⁴⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 253.

literal as it has been – and would be – interpreted. There were more spiritual concepts to understand and relate to the Christian life than the conspicuous readings. In support of this notion, Origen cites Paul and his critique of the Galatians for not fully understanding how to interpret the law:

And writing to the Galatians, and upbraiding certain individuals who seem to themselves to read the law, and yet without understanding it, because of their ignorance of the fact that an allegorical meaning underlies what is written, he says to them in a certain tone of rebuke: “Tell me, ye who desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons; the one by a bond-maid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bond-woman was born according to the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants.” And here this point is to be attended to, viz., the caution with which the apostle employs the expression, “Ye who are under the law, do ye not hear the law?” Do ye not *hear*, i.e., do ye not understand and know?¹⁴⁹

Conclusion

The theologies of Origen and Justinian were obviously different, as three centuries of social change were sure to cause. Certain foundations, such as the providence of God and the importance of scripture for interpreting one’s world, coincide nicely with each other as deeply influential concepts in both thinkers. The results of these concepts, however, were vastly different for each and their communities of influence. For Origen God’s providence was mystical and hidden, while Justinian saw God’s hand working in phenomenal and temporal ways. Scripture was a direct line to God for both of our figures, Justinian read it as simple, overt narrative of God’s will on earth, while Origen read it as symbolic narrative, replete with disjunctions and hidden interstitial messages from the Holy Spirit. Origen’s scripture is one full of possibility for interpretation. Even

the most literal of categories like “Israel,” in Origen’s hands become signifiers of later communities of the “spiritual” kind.¹⁵⁰

Origen’s notion of retribution is extremely muted compared with later theologians. His allegorical model allowed for a reading of scripture that could adjust and interpret the harsher concepts of God’s vengeance. Justice was the soul acknowledging its lonely and estranged position vis-à-vis the presence of God. Sins acted as their own punishment once the soul returned to that higher perspective and placement in the realm of God. There was little need for fear of eternal judgment and torture, for God, who was omnipotent, could save even the most evil souls. For those who were too ignorant to see, they would remain in their ignorance, never tasting the fullness of God’s presence and glory. This reversal of retribution was impossible to see if one read the scriptures on their most basic and literal level, for God was a vindictive and harsh God, accordingly. It was only through the reinterpretation of these scriptures on a deeper level that the loving Father of Jesus would emerge.

Origen’s treatment of the law as embodying deeper meaning would have made for an uneasy tension in the world of Justinian and his sixth-century teams of legal historians. The law was something eternal for Justinian, natural to human and animal alike, and yet ordained by God to be inscribed by the Israelites and later by Romulus and Remus, finally culminating in an ordained empire lead by God’s chosen king. These notions were hard to square with a thinker who saw the law as a symbolic marker for the deeper meaning that God was trying to teach the embodied soul.

¹⁴⁹ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.13.

¹⁵⁰ Origen, “De Principiis,” 4.1.22-23.

Chapter 2

The *Lausiac History* and the origenist crisis

Do you wish to be bishop?"

I (Palladios) said: "I already am."

And he: "Where?"

I said: "In the kitchen and shops, over the tables and pots. I examine them, and if there is any sour wine I excommunicate it, but I drink the good."¹⁵¹

A conversation between John of Lycopolis and Palladios

Few hagiographers craft such an interesting and engaging series of stories as Palladios of Galatia, Bishop of Helenopolis. His playful quips read as pertinent and funny today as they ever did. Scratching beneath the surface of this opening confabulation, above quoted, we get a sense of how Palladios saw his role as collector of monk's stories. His was a plucking of the sweetest smelling flowers of monastic life for a theological bouquet that reminded one of a particular time and place. Similar to a flower's natural habitat and climate, so too are the stories that emerge in the *Lausiac History*. They are particularly Origenian, and rooted not so much in the fields of

retribution and phenomenal power, but in the otherworld-oriented life of the desert ascetic. Excommunicating the sour “wine” and imbibing the good, Palladios leads the reader, as the principal *paidagogos*, on a journey aimed at self-discovery and theological delineation.

As Robert Meyer correctly notes, the *Lausiatic History* of Palladios of Hellenopolis is one of the two most important sources for early Egyptian monasticism.¹⁵² The other, of course, is the *Life of Antony*.¹⁵³ Both works were written by highly connected political figures, and show themselves to be deeply connected to rhetorical purposes. For the *Life of Antony*, it is hard to separate the monk from Athanasius’s Anti-Arian propaganda.¹⁵⁴ In the case of the *Lausiatic History*, we are faced with a similar scenario, but with different issues at stake. Palladios is commissioned to write his history of the monks by one Lausus, who was the royal chamberlain for Emperor Theodosius II.¹⁵⁵

Palladios’s Life

Palladios, a pupil of Evagrius of Pontus, was born in Galatia sometime in 363 or 364 C.E.¹⁵⁶ He spent some time training with various hermits before setting out in 388 C.E. to learn about the heroes of Egyptian monasticism.¹⁵⁷ He stays in Egypt for almost twelve years learning of and writing about the monks surrounding Alexandria all the

¹⁵¹ Palladios, *Palladios: The Lausiatic History* (New York: Newman Press, 1964), 35.10, p.102.

Textual citations will be given in Chapter and subsection first, when applicable, then followed by page number in the volume.

¹⁵² Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 3.

¹⁵³ Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*.

¹⁵⁴ Section 69 speaks of Antony’s anger over the Arians claiming that he held the same views as them. Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, 69, p.82.

¹⁵⁵ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 4.

way to Cellia, where he stayed for nine years.¹⁵⁸ In 400 C.E., he heads to Palestine for health reasons where he is consecrated bishop of Helenopolis, likely by John Chrysostom.¹⁵⁹ Because of his association with Chrysostom, he was eventually exiled by the Emperor Arcadius to Egypt. He returns to Galatia in 412 C.E. and the timeline for the rest of his life is less sure.¹⁶⁰ We can, however, accept a date of 419-420 C.E. for the *Lausiaca History*. Whether the Letter to Lausus, Prologue and Foreword are accurately attributable to Palladius is less important than the *vitae* which he presents. Our purpose here will be to explore Palladius's presentation of the saints and think about to what extent he was influenced by Origenian thought.

It should be noted, that the text undergoes an extensive reworking in various manuscripts. As Dom Cuthbert Butler notes, "So popular was it that no respect whatever was felt for its text: it was re-written, re-arranged, enlarged, shortened, paraphrased, combined with kindred works, without any scruple. Thus every known process of corruption-revision, interpolation, redaction, intermixture of texts – has had free play among the MSS. both of the Greek texts and the versions."¹⁶¹ Harvey cites Turner's 1905 article on Palladius's work, where he points out the manuscript variants that indisputably cut the four instances of Palladius's acknowledgment of Origen.¹⁶² Through these details we can be relatively certain that Palladius was Origenian leaning

¹⁵⁶ Palladius, *The Lausiaca History*, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Palladius, *The Lausiaca History*, 5.

¹⁵⁸ Palladius, *The Lausiaca History*, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Palladius, *The Lausiaca History*, 5.

¹⁶⁰ It perhaps included a trip to India, if one accepts his authorship of "*Epistola de Indicis gentibus et de Bragmanibus*." Palladius, *The Lausiaca History*, 6-7.

¹⁶¹ Palladius, *The Lausiaca History*, 9.

¹⁶² C.H. Turner, "Review of Butler's *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*," *Journal of Theological Studies* no. 6 (1905): 346.

and that the subsequent history of the *Lausiac History* was considerably manipulated along the lines of Origenist issues.

In the Foreword to Palladios's lives of saints, we get a sense of the purpose he has in setting down a work such as this. Our author explains, "It is written for the emulation and imitation of those who wish to succeed in the heavenly way of life and to take the journey which leads to the kingdom of heaven."¹⁶³ As any good hagiographer would, Palladios is passing on a record that will "help...those who read it."¹⁶⁴

Throughout the work, Palladios maintains a tone which is thoughtful and realistic. A perfect example is on one occasion when he remarks concerning Serapion's hunger. He states, "As the fourth day came on he was exceedingly hungry – for hunger, if it is not voluntary, is terrible, especially if it is accompanied by misbelief."¹⁶⁵ His frankness is unexpected and arresting at times, but adds a certain warmth to the glow of the ascetic's life.

On another occasion, we read of a monk named Pior who vows never again to see any relatives. After fifty years his sister calls for him to visit and he is conflicted over the situation, as any brother might be. Deciding to ease her mind, he travels to her and his presence is announced. Pior takes up his place outside her door and calls out with closed eyes, "You there! Look here! I am Pior your brother. Here I am. Look at me as long as you like."¹⁶⁶ The playfulness of this situation is unavoidable. Is the monk breaking his vow? Certainly. But he is not breaking the technical details of it. Palladios

¹⁶³ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, Foreword, 1, p. 17.

¹⁶⁴ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, Fwd., 4, p. 18.

¹⁶⁵ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 37.5, p. 106.

¹⁶⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 39.2, p. 115.

allows for the messiness of human frailty, giving the reader some insight into the harshness of the ascetic life, but tempering it with the flavor of lived reality.

Witnessing of two types

The shift from red martyrdom to white martyrdom, a shift from witnessing with one's death to witnessing with one's life, is well documented as early as *The Life of Antony*.¹⁶⁷ This rhetorical shift, mimicking the shift away from persecution, is important for understanding how retributive language finds its way back into the literature of Christianity. As noted, the Old and New Testaments have a significant amount of retribution worked into their literary foundations. When Christianity makes the shift from the empowered, miracle-wielding Jesus movement of Acts, to the horrific martyrologically driven period of the Roman persecution, one is left with scant literature that supports a reading of divine power as a phenomenal and instant force. One particularly poignant example from this period comes from Cyprian's twenty-second letter. He writes, "And so, my very dear brother, send our greetings to Numeria and Candida. [We grant them peace] in accordance with the command of Paulus and of the other martyrs whose names I add: Bassus (died in the mines), Mappalicus (under interrogation), Fortunio (in prison), Paulus (after interrogation), Fortunata, Victorinus, Victor, Herennius, Credula, Hereda, Donatus, Firmus, Venustus, Fructus, Iulia, Martialis, and Ariston--all by God's will starved to death in prison."¹⁶⁸ The stunning

¹⁶⁷ Antony "was there daily being martyred by his conscience, and doing battle in the contests of faith." Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, 47, p.66.

¹⁶⁸ Cyprian, *The Letters of St. Cyprian Vol.1*, trans. George W. Clarke (Paulist Press, 1983), Letter 23, p. 107-108.

realization that Christians were starving to death in prison is hard to reconcile with a God that would act so quickly and violently against the enemies of the church in Acts 5, where Ananias and Sapphira serve as the most prominent example. Peter Brown points out that these martyrs did not even merit a public death.¹⁶⁹ How does a Christian community grapple with such change? Shifting from the darling of God to the forsaken enemy of the state in one generation deeply affects a community's theology. The development of a theology such as Origen's, which was keen on reading the Old Testament as allegory, makes sense for a community that has members starving to death in jail cells – presumably crying out for God's justice. It would be hard to relate the stories of God's immediate retributive justice in the lives of the Israelites, to the current, dismal situation facing God's new "chosen" people. When the tide of persecution begins to recede, the martyrologies take up messages like the one we hear from Palladios, remarking, "I was deemed worthy to see for myself the revered and devout countenances of those who had already perfected themselves in the arena of piety."¹⁷⁰ The hearkening back to the language of persecution is contingent on a concept of providence that was rooted in allegorical readings and a patient respect for God's timing in justice.

Palladios's monks

The first figure that one encounters in the Lausiac History is that of Isidore. Well known as a supporter of Origenist ideas, Isidore is presented in a curious way.

¹⁶⁹ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Columbia Classics in Religion (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 141.

Palladios enters into his description of his lifestyle with some details about his dress and then makes an odd statement. He explains, “He was so tenderhearted and peaceful that even his enemies, unbelievers that they were, revered his very shadow because of his great goodness.”¹⁷¹ This extraordinary description raises some questions about Palladios, Isidore and the broader notions of hagiographical writing in this period, especially as it relates to retribution. On one hand, Palladios is intent on showing that Isidore was peaceful, but on the other hand he has his enemies revering “his very shadow.” This is a strange mixture of fear and love, which is best approximated by the notion of reverence. The monk operated in both circles. He was close to God through his practice and as a result had access to God’s ear; this was certainly to be feared.

If we remove ourselves one layer from the story, we start to get a picture of our author crafting a holy man literarily that had not existed with so much respect in earlier decades. In reality, pagans had little respect for these smelly ascetics.¹⁷² Palladios, writing under Theodosius, was witness to a considerable amount of struggle with supporters of the old Religion. Figures like Symmachus or Celsus, who Origen saw fit to respond to, had little respect for the burgeoning movement.¹⁷³ The ascetic was a nuisance to these pagan leaders, more deserving of a beating than any reverence a figure like Palladios might suggest.

¹⁷⁰ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, Fwd., 5, p. 18.

¹⁷¹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 1.2, p. 31.

¹⁷² The name calling went both ways, however. See Arnobius of Sicca’s description of rotting and decaying statues. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*, *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage Ser Vol. 42* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 206–207.

¹⁷³ Origen relates that Celsus portrayed the Christians as simple and barbaric, as well as misquoting their claims to foolishness. See Origen, “Against Celsus,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*:

On the other hand, the monk was fully human and living in the midst of humanity – regardless of how ideologically far the desert felt from the inhabited world.¹⁷⁴ The monk's care for and identification with the poor and downtrodden of this world were worthy of admiration and love. Palladios approximates this reverence, which could bloom in the direction of either fear or love through many of his monks' lives.

Throughout Palladios's work, there appears to be the notion that God will act in one's life, but we lack any real examples of how God does so in any sort of retributive manner. In support of this, Palladios relates that Isidore left no will at the end of his life, leaving no money or property to his virgin sisters. Of this he says, "He who created you will regulate your life as He has ordered mine."¹⁷⁵ One gets the impression that he believes in God's action in the lives of the Christian believer, but it is nowhere near as explicitly portrayed as in the miraculous stories of Theodoret of Cyrrhos (Chapter 3), or John of Ephesus (Chapter 5).

The first enemy depicted in the Lausiak History comes to us in the story of Dorotheus, with whom Palladios stayed three years until he fell ill and had to leave. The enemy is none other than the devil himself in the form of a snake. Palladios sees an

Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, trans. Philip Schaff, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Grand Rapids, Mich: T. & T Clark; Eerdmans, 1989), II, XIII, p. 862, 874.

¹⁷⁴ Brown notes, "In Egypt, the antithesis between desert and settled land – between ἔρημος and οἰκουμένη – was stark enough in reality (the rainfall of Egypt is 1.1 inches per year) and absolute in the imagination of the Egyptians. The links between the holy man and society constantly yielded to the pressure of this great fact." Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 83. We must also remember, however, the claims of Athanasius that Antony turned the desert into a city. See Chitty's excellent study, Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995).

asp in the well where they drew water and comes back to Dorotheus with concern over the quality of the water. Dorotheus responds, "If the devil sees fit to turn himself into a serpent or a turtle in every well, and falls into our drinking supply, shall you forever remain thirsty?"¹⁷⁶ With this comment he goes on to drink from the well, defying the logic that it might hurt him. This first protagonist would challenge the holy ascetic in various ways. Similar to Anthony's tormented existence, the monk's most acute struggles in Palladios's text were with supernatural enemies. This notion of reading a moment, like the finding of a snake in the well, as a clue leading the monk to a broader understanding of his battle against the devil, is right in line with Origen's allegorical model of reading.

The third story in the history continues to support the notion that there is no immediate retributive model in place for Palladios or his community's theology. He relates the story of Potamiaena, a graceful "slave of someone or other during the time of Maximian the persecutor."¹⁷⁷ The story tells of how her master, after repeated attempts at seducing her, handed her over as a Christian to the prefect of Alexandria with some bribe money to break her of her "rigorous virtue."¹⁷⁸ After her arraignment before the tribunal she is sentenced to torture including being thrown into a cauldron of hot pitch. The judge gave her one last chance saying, "Either depart and be subject to the desires of your master, or be assured that I shall order you to be submerged in the cauldron."¹⁷⁹ She responded in defiance, denouncing him as a judge and saying, "By the head of the

¹⁷⁵ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 1.4, p. 32.

¹⁷⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 2.4, p. 33.

¹⁷⁷ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 3.1, p. 34.

¹⁷⁸ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 3.2, p. 34.

king whom you fear, I beseech you, order me to be slowly submerged into the cauldron, if you really decide to punish me, so that you may know the endurance which is bestowed upon me by Christ, whom you know not.”¹⁸⁰ At this moment, the reader is ready for God’s hand to intervene on behalf of this lovely soul, and given a reading of the later hagiographical material, we fully expect her to be rescued. Palladios continues, “And being let down little by little over the space of an hour, she died as the boiling pitch reached her neck.”¹⁸¹ Where is God’s retribution for this righteous slave? In this case, Palladios is concerned only with highlighting her virtue, and not with the judgment of those wicked torturers who snuffed her life.

The passage is particularly notable for its improbability and what that communicates to the ascetic. The woman would have died in the first few minutes of a torture so horrendous, and yet Palladios keeps her alive until the pitch reaches her neck. It heightens the intensity of the story while inspiring the monk to persevere in the smaller sufferings they were facing. We might also question the master’s choice to have her tortured with her virginity intact. In all likelihood the situation would have been reversed. The theme of deliverance is of little import for Palladios, his was a theology steeped in persecution and distanced from the concept of a God who would mete justice in the temporal world.

The fourth story related in the *Lausiac History* is of Didymus the blind. Palladios explains that his blindness did not hinder his ability to interpret the Old and New

¹⁷⁹ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 3.3, p. 34.

¹⁸⁰ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 3.4, p. 34–35.

¹⁸¹ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 3.4, p. 35.

Testaments “word by word...[surpassing] all the ancients in knowledge.”¹⁸² Palladios goes on to tell of the monk’s foreknowledge of Julian’s death. He quotes Didymus, “One day as I was thinking about the life of the miserable Emperor Julian, about his being a persecutor, and I was sorely troubled and had not even tasted my bread up to the time of late evening, because of my thoughts, it so happened that as I sat in my chair I fell asleep and I saw in ecstasy white horses running with soldiers and proclaiming: ‘Tell Didymus, Julian died today at the seventh hour; get up and eat,’ they said, ‘and send word to Athanasius the bishop that he too may know.’”¹⁸³ Didymus explains that he made note of the hour and date and later found out that it coincided. A similar story is told in Theodoret, but we get a different flavor in how the death is accomplished. Theodoret tells of Julian Saba’s actions in precipitating the Emperor Julian’s death. Instead of some foreknowledge like Didymus gained, Julian Saba takes it upon himself to pray for ten days – presumably for the death of the Pagan Emperor. He returns “manifestly buoyant in his thoughts, for he showed a face beaming with delight.”¹⁸⁴ In Theodoret’s text we get the strong impression that Julian Saba was able to cause the death of the Emperor through his sustained prayer, although the text is not explicit. In Palladios, we see a monk simply receiving word of his demise, yet having little power to adjust the outcome. The active versus passive modes of monastic living regarding retributive justice are plainly evident in the comparison of these two stories. These are two monks living at the same time in different parts of the Empire, both hoping for the

¹⁸² Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 4.2, p. 35.

¹⁸³ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 4.4, p. 36.

¹⁸⁴ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R.M. Price (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 2.14, p. 30.

same thing. The difference is less a matter of efficacy in prayer, however, than efficacy in explication of God's power from the perspective of the hagiographer. Two different stories relate two different theologies about how God was understood to be working in the world.

Theologians

If we pull back from the monastic examples a bit, allowing theologians to speak on the subject, we see the difference explained not by story but by rhetoric. Certain theologians were ready to connect God's power with that of the Old Testament, seeing the Roman empire as a natural descendant of Israel. This perspective is most eloquently given to us by Lactantius, the great advisor of Constantine I. His worldview is one which has fully imbibed the imperial ascension of Christianity, and it is exemplified in his concept of God's providence:

Behold, all the adversaries are destroyed, and tranquillity having been re-established throughout the Roman empire, the late oppressed Church arises again, and the temple of God, overthrown by the hands of the wicked, is built with more glory than before. For God has raised up princes to rescind the impious and sanguinary edicts of the tyrants and provide for the welfare of mankind; so that now the cloud of past times is dispelled, and peace and serenity gladden all hearts. And after the furious whirlwind and black tempest, the heavens are now become calm, and the wished-for light has shone forth; and now God, the hearer of prayer, by His divine aid has lifted His prostrate and afflicted servants from the ground, has brought to an end the united devices of the wicked, and wiped off the tears from the faces of those who mourned. They who insulted over the Divinity, lie low; they who cast down the holy temple, are fallen with more tremendous ruin; and the tormentors of just men have poured out their guilty souls amidst plagues inflicted by Heaven, and amidst deserved tortures. For God delayed to punish them, that, by great and marvellous examples, He might teach posterity that He alone is God, and that with fit

vengeance He executes judgment on the proud, the impious, and the persecutors.¹⁸⁵

This clear and articulate description of God's action in the past and present befits a writer who could claim a relationship with the emperor. We might juxtapose Origen's thoughts on similar subjects from his treatise on Prayer. He explains, "Everyone, then, that asks God for the things of the earth and what is small disobeys Him who bids us ask from God for the things of heaven and what is great, and who does not grant favours that are of the earth and small."¹⁸⁶ Origen goes on to liken these earthly gifts to "shadows" of the real things in heaven. In the following chapter, Origen further explains his position:

For all material and corporeal things, whatever they be, have no more value than a feeble and fleeting shadow. They can in no way stand comparison with the saving and holy gifts of the God of all. What comparison can there be between material wealth and wealth *in all utterance and in all knowledge*? And who but a madman would compare health of the flesh and bones with health of the mind, strength of soul, and balanced reasoning? All this, when regulated by God's word, makes of the sufferings of the body but a tiny scratch, or even something less than a scratch.¹⁸⁷

Origen considered the problems of this life to pale in comparison with the glory of residing close to God in heaven. To this end, he does not discount that good things may happen on earth – and even as a result of ascetic practice – but these should not be expected or even compared to the heavenly reward. Particular instances in this life no more proved God's providence than tragedies disproved it. It was fruitless to even

¹⁸⁵ Lactantius, "Of the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, trans. Philip Schaff, vol. 7 (Edinburgh: Grand Rapids, Mich: T. & T Clark; Eerdmans, 1989), 1, p. 691.

¹⁸⁶ Origen, "On Prayer," in *Prayer; Exhortation to Martyrdom*, trans. John Joseph O'Meara (Paulist Pr, 1954), 16.2, p. 61.

¹⁸⁷ Origen, "On Prayer," 17.1, p. 63.

count earthly things as rewards, for they could not compare with the smallest of heavenly treasures.

When we do see retribution handed out in the *Lausiac History* it often takes the form of a punishment that is revealed to a monk prior to the instance and while surely associated with God in that it is supernaturally oriented, it rarely comes about through a holy person's adjuration. The monk appears to be capable of foreseeing and identifying a punishment, but rarely causes it. This strikes it from the possibility of resembling any form of immediate retribution.

In the story of Macarius of Egypt, Palladios tells of an Egyptian man who had consulted a sorcerer in order to get a woman to love him or "cause her husband to throw her out."¹⁸⁸ The sorcerer accepted the money and the challenge and saw fit to change her form into that of a broodmare. The woman's husband enters his chambers to find a horse in his bed and is overwhelmed by the situation. He is somehow aware that she is his wife, but cannot get her to speak or eat. When, after three days of no food, the husband becomes worried for her health, he thinks it best to lead her to the desert where the monks might help. Arriving outside of Macarius's cell, the brothers inquire about the situation. When Macarius is consulted, he admits that he has already been informed of the situation through revelation and has been praying for her. He pours water on her and she turns back to her human form. After feeding her, Macarius explains that this deed was able to be accomplished on her because she had not joined in the Mysteries of Communion for five weeks.

¹⁸⁸ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 17.6, p. 56.

It is not altogether clear if this is a punishment, or simply a lesson about leaving one's self open to magical incantations. The tone is not one of retribution but rather explanation of how the cosmos works and what the dangerous effects of not protecting one's self with the Eucharist might be. The woman is not changed into a horse because she missed communion, but rather because a man wanted to have her for himself and put a curse on her. She could have protected herself from this, but in all likelihood she would not have been punished in the immediate moment for not attending communion. The two just happen to conflate for the pedagogical moment that Macarius and Palladios seize upon. They want Christians to honor the sacrament.

Palladios tells of another instance in the life of Macarius of Egypt where the monk foretells what will eventually befall his disciple. Macarius explains to the younger monk, "Listen to me, brother John, and heed my warning. You are being tempted, and it is the spirit of avarice that is tempting you. For I have seen this, and I know that if you are patient with me, you will be perfected here and glorified, *nor shall the scourge come near thy dwelling*; but if you do not listen to me, the end of Gieza, whose sickness you now suffer, shall come on you."¹⁸⁹ After Macarius dies, John was disobedient and some fifteen to twenty years later, he comes down with elephantiasis. The text states that this happened "when he had robbed the poor."¹⁹⁰ It appears that the two were connected, especially with the reference to Gieza, but the connection is not as overt as so many other hagiographical examples. Rather than Macarius calling down some curse, he simply acknowledges the prophecy that he has been given and passes it along in

¹⁸⁹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 17.4, p. 55. The reference is to Gehazi, who takes Naaman's offering against Elisha's wishes. For this greed, Elisha puts Naaman's leprosy upon him.

warning to his disciple.¹⁹¹ One would like to think that if John had forgone his avarice, he would have avoided this bodily punishment. Regardless of whether this foresight precluded his free will, the punishment occurs some fifteen to twenty years after his initial disobedience to Macarius. It is connected to his robbing of the poor, and in this way is retributive, but it also lacks the immediacy of Elisha calling out the bears or inflicting Gieza with leprosy. This punishment fits with the broader scheme of how the cosmos and God will eventually punish, according to his time, those who transgress his people and guidelines.

Indicators of divine favor

We should be careful, however, not to associate disease and struggle only with those who have sinned. Palladios tells the story of a monk named Benjamin who is likened to Job. Benjamin was eighty years old and an active healer of others' infirmities. About eight months before his death, Benjamin contracted dropsy and his body swelled up with "incurable sickness."¹⁹² Palladios visits the man and explains that another person's fingers could not reach around one of Benjamin's swollen fingers. Looking away from the horrid sight, the men prompt Benjamin to say, "Pray, my children, that the inner man not contract dropsy; for this body did not help me when it was well, nor

¹⁹⁰ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 17.4, p. 55.

¹⁹¹ There appears to be a hierarchy of gifts that the ascetic receives in Palladios's work. Some are given the gift of prophecy, others the gift of healing. In the story of Ephraem, Palladios relates that the monk "was deemed worthy of the gift of natural knowledge. The knowledge of God succeeded this, and finally blessedness." Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 40.1, p. 116.

¹⁹² Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 12.2, p. 48.

has it caused me harm when faring badly.”¹⁹³ The monk’s appeal to the inner life over the outward physical life is right in line with ascetic focus. What is particularly interesting in this case, is Palladios’s final comments on the situation. He explains, “For eight months, then, a very wide seat was set out for him on which he sat all the time. He was no longer able to lie down, because of other needs. Even in this great sickness he cured others. I felt that I must tell about this sickness so that we might not be too surprised when some accident befalls just men. When he died, the door jambs were pulled down so that his body could be carried our of the house, so great was the swelling.”¹⁹⁴ In the midst of these stories of saintly living, we come upon a moment when suffering is incomprehensible and does not appear to be followed up with a return to glory like the story of Job. The suffering is abhorrent and any person looking for meaning in it would be lost for words. Palladios’s response simply approximates an acceptance that sometimes bad things, or accidents, happen to just people. This concept of providence is deeply discordant to most hagiographical writings after Palladios.¹⁹⁵ The point of hagiography, in many works, is precisely to show God’s power being worked out in the lives of the holy ascetics. For a saintly figure like Benjamin, who was still healing in the midst of his sickness, to fall to such a painful disease seems counter-intuitive to a program that counted God’s providence as even remotely close to

¹⁹³ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 12.2, p. 48.

¹⁹⁴ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 12.3, p. 48.

¹⁹⁵ For Palladios, providence was something that worked to show the monk the right path to take in a situation. The example of Paul the Simple shows this feature at work. Upon returning from the field without warning, he catches his wife “carrying on shamefully” with another man. Palladios maintains that this was providence that allowed him to see the way which was best. Paul remarks, “Good, all right, it does not matter to me. Jesus help me, I will have nothing more to do with her. Go, have her and her children, too; I am going off to be a monk.” Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 22.1, p. 77.

immediate and temporal. There had to be another answer for the strange turn of events that sometimes befell God's chosen people.

In searching for answers to this question of how to read a situation that was not always so straightforward, one is reminded of the great allegorical model which dominated early Christian theology. Of primary importance in this model were the teachings of Origen of Alexandria and his many commentaries concerning proper exegesis of scripture. Origen did not shy away from the difficult passages of scripture, instead he pushed deep upon the problems of Providence and its necessary friction with free will.¹⁹⁶ This spirit of struggle for meaning in everyday life, vis-à-vis the scripture, is evidenced in Palladios's own recollection of Abba Pambo and his style of teaching. Palladios holds that Pambo spoke his final words to Origen and Ammonius concerning his lifestyle in the desert.¹⁹⁷ He goes on to explain that "Origen and Ammonius bore additional witness by telling us this: When asked about a scriptural phrase or some other problem, he [Pambo] would never answer on the spur of the moment, but used to say: 'I have not found it.' Often a period of three months would go by and he had not given an answer, saying that he had not comprehended it. So they accepted his answers as though they were from God Himself, approved and shaped by His will."¹⁹⁸ It is hard to imagine a literal reading of any story taking the space of three

¹⁹⁶ He attributes only those things which are "good" to God's providence, unless providence includes the things which result from his arrangements. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Second Edition (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 7.68.

¹⁹⁷ Origen surfaces again in the story of Juliana, the Cappadocian who took Origen in during "the insurrection of the pagans" and kept him for two years. Palladios relates that he read the details from a very old book by Symmachus in which Origen had written of its provenance and his relation to Juliana. Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 64.1, p. 146.

¹⁹⁸ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 10.7, p. 45.

months to delineate. In this way, the monks carry on a tradition of reading scripture that is far more meticulous and deliberate. The scriptures were enigmas needing to be carefully parsed in consonance with life as it was lived out in the temporal sphere.

The reliance on Origen as a prominent interpreter of scripture is nowhere more evident than in Palladios's treatment of Ammonius. He states that Ammonius had committed the Old and New Testaments to memory and knew some six million verses of "Origen, Didymus, Pierius, and Stephen."¹⁹⁹ No anti-Origen leaning hagiographer would have included such details in his collection of saints. We can start to assess Palladios as a respecter of Origen and the legacy of his teachings. As we continue further into the Lausiac History, one can start to piece together the allegorically oriented readings of scripture as they related to life situations. When, like Benjamin, life dealt an unexpected blow, it was not the position of the Christian to accept it as punishment from God, but rather to examine the deeper nuances of how God's providence might be working in and through such a peculiar moment. This broader notion of how the incongruent temporal sufferings and struggles might be aligned with a convincing theology of God, is evident throughout Palladios's brand of hagiography. We see prophecy utilized to ameliorate situations and manipulate behavior far more often than to speed retributive justice. The goal is to restore not to retaliate.

Punishment

¹⁹⁹ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 11.4, p. 47. We read a similar comment concerning Sylvania, the nun, who "turned night into day going through every writing of the ancient commentators – three million lines of Origen and two and a half million lines of Gregory, Stephen, Pierius, Basil, and other worthy men." Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 55.3, pp. 137-8.

It is worth noting that the desert was not without its punishments. The lifestyle of the monk was punishing enough, including starvation, asexuality and various forms of bodily harm.²⁰⁰ Broadening our focus from the individual body to the communal body, we see the implementation of extreme punishment administered by the Abbot to control and train his community. Palladios writes of the whips which hung on the date palms inside the church upon Mt. Nitria. He explains, “Now one is for backsliding monks, another for any robbers that attack, the third for any robbers that happen by. All transgressors who are sentenced to a lashing are made fast to a date palm, and are freed when they have received the requisite number of lashes on the back.”²⁰¹ The punishments related by Palladios, however, are punishments doled out by superiors for transgressions committed. Later hagiographers would move away from examples of monk on monk punishment, exchanging it for a model that was geared toward the correction of the outsider, whether that was the heretic, misguided emperor, pagan invader, or otherwise. With this shift came a reliance on previous scriptural examples, which were read in a far more literal manner. Stories like Ananias and Sapphira and Elisha and the bears are looked to as examples of how God’s chosen holy persons could conjure divine retribution in real time.

In the story of Macarius of Alexandria, we read of a monk who sought the harshest of ascetic practices from others and would implement them in his own life. Upon hearing of Tabennesiote monks who ate uncooked food during Lent, he began to

²⁰⁰ These ranged from passive forms such as reluctance to bathe or attend to wounds, to the more active forms of strapping large chunks of steel to the body. A good example of this comes to us in Theodoret where Ammianus punishes himself with a metal contraption. Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 4.6, p. 52.

eat only raw vegetables for seven years.²⁰² His practices were continually developing as his mind gave license through creativity. On one occasion, the monk faces a particularly interesting problem in his treatment of a mosquito. Palladios relates:

Early one morning when he was sitting in his cell a gnat stung him on the foot. Feeling the pain, he killed it with his hands, and it was gorged with his blood. He accused himself of acting out of revenge and he condemned himself to sit naked in the marsh of Scete out in the great desert for a period of six months. Here the mosquitoes lacerate even the hides of the wild swine just as wasps do. Soon he was bitten all over his body, and he became so swollen that some thought he had elephantiasis. When he returned to his cell after six months he was recognized as Macarius only by his voice.²⁰³

This moment in Palladios's collection is particularly poignant in relation to the theme of retribution. It appears that the monk's avoidance of revenge was on par with the other more notable sins of concupiscence, greed, or pride – which are most mentioned in the hagiographical material. The notion that revenge was something that needed to be excised from the monastic mind is an original and curious aspect to be included here. Palladios's hagiography has little interest in exploring the comeuppance and retributive models of justice that are found in later material. To what extent this material is avoided is not clear until we encounter Macarius of Alexandria. Palladios is not just inadvertently overlooking stories about revenge in his work, he is consciously avoiding a model of life that seeks retribution in his portrayal of these monks. In thinking about scriptural models that might support this, one might consider the words of Paul in Romans 9:19-20. Paul explains "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for

²⁰¹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 7.3, p. 40.

²⁰² Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.1, p. 58. He would also take only as many morsels of bread from a jar that could fit in his hand. The mouth of the jar being rather small, he often had to let some go in order to pass the narrow neck, which he likened to a toll-collector. It would not let him pass without giving some up. Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.2, pp. 58-59.

the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.'"²⁰⁴ It is not hard to see how a monk could consider revenge to be something that is out of their purview. The monk's task was to turn the other cheek, to live a life of equanimity that subverted any attack or desire for retribution. When Macarius swats the gnat who bit his foot, he realizes his mistake and quickly applies penance in order to correct for his thoughtless and hasty action.

In a curious reversal of theme, the story of Macarius later relates that he kills an asp, who had bit him.²⁰⁵ Taking the serpent in his hands by the two lips he tore the animal apart saying, "If God did not send you, how did you dare come?"²⁰⁶ The reader wants to relate the two beasts, the gnat and the snake. How could he punish himself so severely for exacting revenge on the gnat and not on the asp? There is no mention of any moral equivocation over his treatment of the snake. One way to make sense of this moment is to connect the snake with the symbol of satan as tempter and punisher of the righteous first man, Adam. Another influential text was certainly the longer ending of Mark, wherein Jesus tells his followers that they will be able to drink poison and pick up snakes without bodily harm.²⁰⁷ This theme is picked up in the first *hagiography*, of

²⁰³ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.4, p. 59.

²⁰⁴ NRSV Romans 9.19-20

²⁰⁵ A later story from Palladios relates that Elpidius was stung by a scorpion while he was chanting Psalms. He simply stomped on the creature and continued singing, "having no regard for the scorpion's bite." Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 48.2, p. 131.

²⁰⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.10, p. 61.

²⁰⁷ They are also able to heal people who are sick. The text states, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will

Paul in Acts, where he is attacked by a snake without harm: "Paul had gathered a bundle of brushwood and was putting it on the fire, when a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, 'This man must be a murderer; though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.' He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm."²⁰⁸ Finally, there is the fact that encounters with snakes were a regular occurrence in the desert, especially for these holy monks who crept in and out of caves for shelter from the blistering sun. Noting these references in the New Testament, we are still amazed at the strength with which Palladios imbues his holy man. It is possible to see this as trust in providence, and yet we should be careful not to push this solution too far. This could teach a monk of God's power, or could teach a monk that the worldly death was not worth fearing. Palladios likely falls somewhere in the middle of these two points.

Regardless of how one reads these animals and their relation to the holy ascetic, the connection between the stories of God's power and providence must be accounted for in the text. Within the story of Macarius we see an acknowledgment of the magicians' powers in Egypt carried on through to the contemporary monastic worldview.²⁰⁹ Palladios retells the story of how Macarius desired to enter the garden tomb of Jannes and Jambres. He explains that this tomb had "belonged to the magicians

not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Mark 16:17-18, NRSV

²⁰⁸ Acts 28:3-5, NRSV

²⁰⁹ The connections between ancient Egypt and the Late Antique monastic life are often overt. When a virgin dies in a women's monastery, her body is laid on the river bank and ferried over

who had power along with Pharaoh back in the old days.”²¹⁰ After traveling nine days into the desert, leaving reeds to mark his way home, Macarius awoke to find that the demon who had been following him had collected the reeds and placed them near his head where he slept.²¹¹ Macarius realizes that “God had permitted this for his own further training, so that he might not place trust in reeds, but rather in the pillar of cloud that led Israel for forty years in the desert.”²¹² Again the reader is reminded of just how important the ideological connection with the ancient Israelites was for these desert-dwelling monks. Upon encountering the tomb, the demons rushed forth to ask what his business was in coming to the tomb. The demon, whose similarity to Legion in Mark 5 is uncanny, asks, “What do you wish, Macarius? What do you want, monk? Why did you come to our place? You cannot stay here.”²¹³ Macarius coolly responds that he wanted to “go in, look about, and then leave.”²¹⁴ This cannot be read but as an appeal to the power of the holy man over and against demons. The hagiography from Palladios’s stylus, is translating the power of the monk into the mainstream, but doing so in a manner that promotes a fearless ascetic ideal that enjoyed the protection of God’s hand in the midst of satan’s tempters. It would not be long before this concept of providence was insufficient in capturing the imagination of the Christian readership.

by the monks to the common cemetery. The imagery is reminiscent of the ferrying in the Book of the Dead.

²¹⁰ He continues to explain that “Since they held power for a long time they built the work with stones four feet square. They erected their monument there and put away much gold. They even planted trees there, for the spot was damp, and they dug a well, too.” Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.5, p. 59.

²¹¹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.6, p. 60.

²¹² Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.7, p. 60.

²¹³ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.7, p. 60. Legion asks Jesus, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” NRSV Mark 5.7

²¹⁴ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.7, p. 60.

This theology of power, as laid out by Palladios, had been carefully crafted to lack revengeful tones. According to our hagiographer, God was active in his care for the monks, but rarely as retributive as the God of the Old Testament.

On another occasion in the story of Macarius of Alexandria, we encounter a situation in which a punishment is being applied for sins that were committed. Palladios comes upon a monk who was lying outside of Macarius's cell. The man, a priest from the village, had a cancer that was eating away at his head so much so that the bone from the top of his skull was showing through the skin. Palladios calls out to Macarius on the man's behalf saying, "I beg of you, be merciful to him and give him an answer."²¹⁵ Macarius replied, "He is not worthy to be cured. This was sent to him as a good lesson. If you want him cured, persuade him to refrain from saying the Mass; for he was both indulging his lust and exercising the priestly function, and for this he is receiving this lesson, and God is healing him."²¹⁶ The man agrees to stop sinning and Macarius laid hands on him to heal him. In a few days he was cured. The punishment, which is being applied by God, is capable of being reversed by the monk as God's agent. Although the monk has the power to remove the cancer, it is not clear if he has the authority to apply the punishment utilizing God's power. Given Macarius's own stance on the punishment of a biting gnat, it is difficult to imagine that he would partake in such a revengeful capacity. It appears that the monk was more of a bystander than an active wielder of divine justice. Macarius was nonchalant about the man's cancer, since it was a punishment meted for the man's sin. Like his own punishment of

²¹⁵ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.19, p. 64.

²¹⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 18.20, p. 64.

himself when he killed the gnat out of revenge, Macarius accepts this as a normal part of how the cosmos functioned.

A final story from Macarius's life serves to reinforce the notion that monks were not considered powerful actors in proving God's providence through retribution. Palladios notes that at one point in Macarius's life, he was being troubled by "schemes of vainglory."²¹⁷ It appears that the demons were suggesting that Macarius go to Rome and heal the sick in order to "promote the designs of Providence."²¹⁸ This notion sounds completely agreeable to later hagiographical authors. To show God's power being worked out in everyday life through healing the sick was an admirable function of the holy person. Macarius, however, sees this as a call to sin, for him it is a plunge knee-deep in the sticky problem of pride. Realizing the trouble that could come from this endeavor, Macarius falls on the threshold of his cell with his feet outside and declares, "Pull me and drag me, O demons, I shall not go on my feet. If you can drag me, then I shall go."²¹⁹ After lying there until evening, he got up and was attacked by the demons again. Filling up a basket with sand, he put the weight on his shoulders and shuffled about the desert attempting to subdue his desires. When a local man, Theosebius, sees him, he inquires as to what he is carrying. Macarius replies, "I am molesting my tempter; he is uncontrollable and tries to throw me out."²²⁰ After some time, Macarius returns to his cell, "his body having been beaten into subjection."²²¹

²¹⁷ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 18.23, p. 65.

²¹⁸ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 18.23, p. 65.

²¹⁹ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 18.23, p. 65.

²²⁰ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 18.24, p. 65.

²²¹ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 18.24, p. 65.

That Macarius would bristle so much at playing the role of an empowered healing monk in order to display God's providence is deeply connected to Palladios's own program of theology. This was not a phenomenally oriented theology that took pains to display itself in vignettes of power. Instead, it was more deeply connected to the post-apostolic age of persecution, wherein Christians showed their grit by facing trouble and sickness, hardships and pain, rather than calling on the deity or holy person to solve such adversity. Ease was associated with sin. A solution to a problem was no great solution for these monks of Palladios, it was only a way of parlaying desire into deeper sins. The steadiest path was that of discomfort and struggle, for it was there that one knew they were fighting the proper battles for the faith.

In the story about Moses The Ethiopian, Palladios relates a fascinating series of events that took a man from the life of brigandage to the life of submission to Christ.²²² Moses, who was "notorious and well-known" for his ability to attack and rob, was accompanied by his companion in evil, "the demon who had been with him from his youth." Moses eventually comes to his senses and converts himself and brings his demon companion to "open recognition of Christ."²²³

On one occasion, four robbers happen upon Moses's cell and try to rob him. The story seems set for some type of divinely ordained retribution, either on Moses for his past life, or for the robbers who are attacking this holy man. Palladios relates that Moses

²²² Another story relates that Capiton lived fifty years in the caves "four miles from the deme of Antinoe and he did not descend from his cave or approach the Nile River." Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 58.4, p. 139.

²²³ What this means is not altogether clear. It is not likely that there was ever hope for true conversion of a demon. It seems the best Palladios could relate is that he openly acknowledged Christ. Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 19.3, p. 68.

tyed the four robbers together “like a package,” and carried them to church like a “bundle of straw.”²²⁴ Moses explains to the brethren that since he cannot hurt anyone, he does not know what to do with the robbers. The robbers convert, citing Moses’s own conversion as a model.

Although a perfectly appropriate hagiographical rendering of conversion, this story conveys an image of the monk as one who would never stoop to harming another human being. The power to stop the robbers is not even attributed to God, but rather to the great strength of the renowned brigand. The story’s strength is garnered from the conversion of a man, from a vindictive and careless robber to a conscientious monk who would not harm someone, regardless of their harmful intentions.

Moses’s physical power was not without limit, however. As witnessed later in a story relating a demon’s attack, Moses is left as “one who was dead.”²²⁵ One evening, while leaning over the well, a demon hit him across his loins with a cudgel. The next morning Moses was still lying there lifeless when someone picked him up and took him to Isidore, the priest of Scete. Isidore takes Moses to the church and he convalesces for a year, in which his “body and soul scarcely regained strength.”²²⁶ When Moses finally began to heal, Isidore admonished him, saying, “Stop contending with demons and do not bother them, for there are limits in bravery as well as in ascetic practice.”²²⁷ Moses obstinately replies that he will not stop until his “fantasy of demons ceases.”²²⁸ The priest, seeing his stubbornness, says, “You were subject to this for your own good, so

²²⁴ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 19.4, p. 68.

²²⁵ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 19.9, p. 69.

²²⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 19.9, p. 70.

²²⁷ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 19.10, p. 70.

that you might not boast of overcoming passion."²²⁹ Here we see another story supporting the monastic life that is trained through struggle but disconnected from immediate comeuppance. The demon never receives a retaliatory blow or a forceful message relating God's power. Instead, we see the monk taking his lumps and learning his lessons the physically demanding way for which the desert was best known. Just as Jesus had struggled mentally and physically against Satan, so too, Palladios's monks struggle against the tempting demons who reside in these deserted places.²³⁰

Revenge

On one occasion, Palladios includes a description from Cronius concerning what punishment of sinners will look like. The quote, taken from Antony describes a model of punishment that is wholly otherworldly. Antony explains:

For the space of a whole year I used to pray that the place of the just and the sinners be made known to me. And I saw a great giant, high as the clouds, black, with hands outstretched to heaven, and under him a great lake the size of the sea, and I saw souls flying just like birds. And as many as escaped his head and hands were saved, but those that were cuffed by his hands fell into the lake. A great voice came to me saying: "Those are the souls of the just; the souls you see flying into paradise are saved. Those others which are swept into hell are those who followed the desires of the flesh and their own revenge."²³¹

Two aspects of this quote are particularly interesting to our research on retributive themes in the desert. The first is associated with punishment in general. Of the many

²²⁸ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 19.10, p. 70.

²²⁹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 19.10, p. 70.

²³⁰ The teachings of Evagrius and Leontius support the idea that these demons were associated with the sins and struggles that had caused the *nous* its initial fall from God's presence. David Beecher Evans, *Leontius of Byzantium: An Origenist Christology* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, Center for Byzantine Studies, trustees for Harvard University, 1970), 97.

²³¹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 21.16, p. 76.

stories presented by Palladios, we have a paucity of punishment motifs. This particular example is rare and otherworldly by nature. It does not speak of retribution in real time, but rather the punishment that awaits the sinners who do not take seriously the call to holiness in this lifetime. The great black figure is certainly some sort of arch demon or satanic figure who grasps at the souls who attempt to fly away from the lake of hell.²³²

The second intriguing aspect of this quote from Antony, is the final line concerning the ones who are swept into hell. They are described as souls which “followed the desires of the flesh” and “their own revenge.” Clearly revenge plays a significant role in how one comports oneself in this world. Here it is akin to following the desires of the flesh and is associated with going to hell. Origen would have certainly had problems with the notion that souls suffer in hell for their actions. For Origen, God was not the relentless judge of the Old Testament, but the loving Father of the New Testament. Souls that had sinned would face those sins, but their punishments would only be the realization that they had sinned and the accompanying sadness that came from the acknowledgment of separation between the human soul and the Divine will. The soul’s journey into the present world already represented an initial separation from God. Palladios is accepting some of the restorative aspects of Origen’s thought, while developing a post-death judgment theology that fits with some of Jesus’s teaching.²³³

The curious inclusion of those who “follow the desires of...their own revenge,” as a

²³² One is reminded of the icon at St. Catherine’s monastery at Mt. Sinai, wherein the demons grasp at the souls, attempting to pull them down from the ladder of ascent.

²³³ Here I am thinking about Christ’s acknowledgment of a judgment day in Matthew 25. He states, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people

prime indication of one's sin, is indicative of the charged nature of this theme in Palladios's context. None of the other four major hagiographical collections that our study invokes give revenge such a prominent place in the hierarchy of severe sins. Why it functions so prominently in Palladios but not in other later hagiographies, is deeply connected to how influential Origenian thought was on the author and his community.

In one of the few truly retributive stories in the *Lausiac History*, revenge is threatened against a demon who refuses to leave his host. Paul the Simple commands the demon to leave but the demon curses him and Antony all the more. Paul finally states, "You are going to leave or I will go and tell Christ. Jesus help me, if you do not leave, I will go tell Christ now and woe to you what He will do."²³⁴ The tone of this threat of retribution is somewhat off-putting. We might liken it to a fifth-grader's threat to tell the teacher on one of his playmates. There is no specificity about how Christ would handle the situation and the threat seems to have none of the power of later hagiographical exorcisms. Upon closer examination, however, we might read it as a precursor to the powerful agency that the monks enjoyed in John of Ephesus's *Lives*. Palladios is arguing that the monk knows Christ well enough to call on his power if need be. The story manifests Christ's reign over the spiritual world while acknowledging the monk's position as a friend of Christ. This vignette also resonates with a story of failed exorcism in the Gospels.²³⁵ Here again, Jesus has to be called upon to finally remove the demon from the child.

one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left." NRSV Matthew 25:31-33

²³⁴ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 22.11, p. 80.

²³⁵ I am grateful to John McGuckin for this insight. The text relates, "Someone from the crowd

The demon, who refuses to leave, pushes Paul into a situation of navigating God's power in the present world. Would Paul have the power to call on Christ and achieve his desired end to the situation? The story proceeds to tell of how Paul gets his end accomplished. Palladios explains, "Paul went out of his lodging at high noon – now the heat in Egypt is not unlike the Babylonian furnace – and he stood on the rock of the mountain and prayed, saying: 'You see, Jesus Christ, You who were crucified under Pontius Pilate, that I will not come down from the rock, or eat, or drink, until death overtakes me, unless You cast out the sprit from the man and free him.'"²³⁶ This strange formulation of invoking Christ's power over the temporal, marks out the difficulty Palladios had in making sense of God's providence in the here and now. In order for Paul to utilize Christ's power, he has to challenge him with his own life. We wonder why Christ's power would be so hard to summon for one of these holy friends of Christ? One would think that their wills would be in line with each other, especially when it came to casting a demon out of a man. The text does specify that this was no

answered him, 'Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.' He answered them, 'You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.' And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.' Jesus said to him, 'If you are able! – All things can be done for the one who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!' After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' He said to them, 'This kind can come out only through prayer.' Mark 9:17-29

ordinary demon, but rather “the very Prince of Demons.”²³⁷ It is also interesting that in the initial conversation between Paul and Antony, Antony declares that he cannot cast the demon out of the man because he says “This is not my duty, for I have not yet been deemed worthy of power over the ruling order (of demons), but this is Paul’s task.”²³⁸ Paul also initially demurs at the call to rid the man of the demon. He asks why not Antony, to which Antony replies, “I have no time...I have other work to do.”²³⁹ One sees the delineation of will and power in both the holy man and God. Antony decides not to cast out the demon because he is not able and because he has other things to do with his time. In the case of Paul, it appears to be a decision as to whether he will take on the project initially. From there it is a matter of sourcing or goading the power out of the divine in order to restore the man’s life. In all of this, the reader comes away with the impression that it is not clear for either Palladios or the holy monk, how God’s power functions in the world and whether it was fully available to those who chose this life of extreme practice. This will prove far different from the later hagiographies of Theodoret of Cyrros and John of Ephesus.

Palladios’s history eventually turns to the story of Stephen, a Libyan, who resided on the Marmarican and Mareotic coast for sixty or so years. Stephen was particularly well known for his ability to heal all kinds of afflictions. People sought him out for healing and inevitably left cured. According to some followers of Ammonius and Evagrius, Stephen eventually succumbed to a “terrible ulcerous condition known as

²³⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 22.12, p. 80.

²³⁷ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 22.9, p. 79.

²³⁸ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 22.10, p. 80.

²³⁹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 22.10, p. 80.

cancer.”²⁴⁰ Although he was capable of curing others, he had no ability to cure himself. For this reason he was under the care of a physician and actually undergoing a surgery when the monks visited him. They explained that he “showed no sign whatsoever of pain” when “his members were being cut away like locks of hair.”²⁴¹ The disturbing and inspiring scene causes Palladios to launch into a quote that deals with the question of God’s providence and its seemingly misplaced force. Palladios quotes Stephen’s visitors, saying, “While we were grieving at this and were appalled that a person who lived a life like his should suffer disease and such surgical remedies, he told us: ‘My children, do not be hurt by this. Of all the things god does, not one is done out of evil intent, but all are for a good purpose. It may well be that my members deserve punishment and it would be better to pay the penalty here than after I have left the arena.’”²⁴² Harkening back to a theological position put forward by Origen, we hear support for the perspective that God could not be held responsible for the evil things which happen in this life. Origen attributes only those things that are “just and right” to God’s providence, unless providence includes the things which result from his arrangements.²⁴³ Origen quotes Celsus:

Are not all things indeed administered according to God’s will, and is not all providence derived from him? And whatever there may be in the universe, whether the work of God, or of angels or of other daemons, or heroes, do not all these things keep a law given by the greatest God? And has there not been appointed over each particular thing a being who has been thought worthy to be allotted power? Would not a man, therefore, who worships God rightly worship

²⁴⁰ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 24.2, p. 83.

²⁴¹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 24.2, p. 84.

²⁴² Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 24.3, p. 84.

²⁴³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.68, p. 451.

the being who has obtained authority from him? But it is impossible, he says, for the same man to serve several masters.²⁴⁴

Origen's response is to question the simplistic treatment Celsus gives on the topic. He notes that to attribute good things to God is acceptable, but to also attribute evil things is to go to far. He explains, "We also have to make a similar distinction concerning providence, and say that there is an element of truth in the statement that *all providence is derived from him* when providence is the cause of what is good. But if we are saying without qualification that everything which takes place is according to the will of providence, even if anything evil occurs, then it will be untrue to say that all providence is derived from him – unless perhaps one were to say that even the accidental results of the works of God's providence were caused by the providence of God."²⁴⁵ The distinction Origen makes is between those things which are a part of God's plan and those sins and the consequences of evil which "God does not prevent" from happening.²⁴⁶

Palladios is also concerned to show that the evil befalling this monk was not from God's punishment or his lacking vigilance, but rather was a function of the difficulty that this world presented to Christians. The juxtaposition is curiously overt in this story and indicates that Palladios had spent a significant amount of time contemplating this unsettling turn of events. For Stephen, it appears to be enough to acknowledge that it is better to suffer some punishment in the present life than to carry that punishment over to the afterlife. His description of this world as an "arena" is

²⁴⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.68, p. 451.

²⁴⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.68, p. 451.

²⁴⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.68, p. 451.

particularly telling of the ascetic experience in Palladios's narratives. Palladios, for his part, adds a final line to Stephen's story. He explains, "Now I have told this so that we may not be puzzled when we see holy people falling prey to sickness."²⁴⁷ The lack of justice in this world should not be blamed on God, but rather accepted as a part of the larger structure of providence which is worked out only on God's timeline and according to God's preferences. This, of course, seems to fly in the face of monks who continually heal and cast out demons, unless, those demons and maladies are considered a part of the fallen world which is in need of God's correction. The question remains, why would this fickle God correct some and not others?

The story of the nun, Piamoun, contains a standard literary trope that gets picked up in several other hagiographies.²⁴⁸ When faced with an invading person or army, the monk prays that God would freeze them in their places.²⁴⁹ When Piamoun's village was faced with the fear of invading men from other more powerful villages, the elders go to her and beg her to go and make peace with the men. She refuses to go out to them, but relies instead upon prayer. Standing the whole night, she prays, "Lord, who judges the world, whom nothing unjust pleases, now when this prayer reaches You, may Your power fix them to the place wherever it may find them."²⁵⁰ With this the men became fixed to their location and could not budge. The men find out why this has happened and they send for forgiveness, suing for peace. The story ends there, and in this vignette

²⁴⁷ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 24.3, p. 84.

²⁴⁸ It is found in Theodoret's work as well as John of Ephesus.

²⁴⁹ The story is relatable to that of Gaddanes, who faced attacking Jews. When the assailant raised his sword, his "hand was withered up and the sword fell from him." Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 50.1, p. 132.

²⁵⁰ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 31.3, p. 91.

we see the closest approximation of later hagiographical examples of retribution.

However, the facts – or the lack thereof – lead us to consider that this was not retributive in the least. Rather than punish the men, she was simply stopping them from invading her village. The men are hindered from doing harm through her calling upon God to serve up some phenomenal show of solidarity with her, as a holy person, and her village, because of their proximity to her.

Some notes on Comportment:

The way a monk lived his life in the desert was equally important for pedagogical reasons as for saving one's soul. Palladios continually reminds the reader of the proper comportment that a monk would have in living out his years. At the end of the story of Posidonius, Palladios remarks that "he did not try bread for forty years, nor did he hold a grudge against anyone for even half a day."²⁵¹ This line, a throwaway of sorts compared to the marvelous feats of others, indicates a value that is deeply significant in the monastic life. The monk was to be above anger and feelings, tending toward *apatheia* in all that they encountered. It is difficult to think of a monk engaging in any real comeuppance or retributive justice when they were to let all of those feelings of anger and interest fall away as quickly as they mounted the ascetic psyche. Posidonius's claim that he never held a grudge, not even for one-half of a day, supports this model of monastic teaching. In a later vignette, Diocles states, "Mind divorced from the thought of God necessarily falls into desire or anger."²⁵² Palladios renders Diocles's explanation

²⁵¹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 36.7, p. 105.

²⁵² Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 58.3, p. 139.

with, “desire was beastlike, but anger was demonlike.”²⁵³ The avoidance of holding grudges is deeply connected to the theology of retribution. Although they are not perfectly aligned, particularly in the case of punishment being enacted outside of the monks’ concerns over it, there is a clear connection between the maintenance of some sort of ledger of wrongs vis-à-vis true forgiveness. Later, more retributive hagiographers would hold that monks act as vicars of God’s judgment, in this way holding onto the wrongs which had been committed towards them and others until necessary amends could be made.²⁵⁴

The monk’s ability to undermine normal hierarchies of power is particularly acute in several of Palladios’s stories. These ascetics were not concerned to play by the world’s standards and in flouting them, they find a new source of power that is as controversial as it is efficacious.²⁵⁵ On one occasion, Palladios tells us of Serapion, who boards a boat headed for Rome without having paid for his journey. All of the sailors thought that the others had collected his fare. When, after not eating with the crew, he is found to have not paid, the crew asks him, “How can you come without money for travel? Where will you get the fare for us? And what do you have to eat?”²⁵⁶ To which, Serapion calmly replies, “I have nothing. Take me back and throw me out where you

²⁵³ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 58.3, p. 139.

²⁵⁴ This is perhaps most evident in John of Ephesus’s story of Habib, in which Habib acts as God’s agent in the punishment of the wealthy landowner. John explains, “when he spoke God would perform in action everything that he said without delay, because he saw his zeal and readiness and the keenness of his purpose.” John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, p. 8.

²⁵⁵ James Francis has done some very intriguing work on how the ascetic was able to subvert by means of his virtue. Most prominently, it is the monks refusal to rely on patronage systems or to value the worldly goods that make social structures malleable. James A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-century Pagan World* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

²⁵⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 37.11, p. 108.

found me!"²⁵⁷ Palladios acknowledges that there was no sense in turning the ship around and losing the time and money spent thus far on the journey, but he does not acknowledge how lucky Serapion is in not being thrown overboard. The story explains how a monk got away with passage by ship with no money, but it also explains some of the economy a holy man could count on in his navigation of social mores. No sailor would venture the murder of a holy man for fear of what power they might actually harbor, or at least what power they might have access to through their proximity to God. At the same time, we see absolutely no retributive response from the sailors, except for frustration in having to share their food with the man.²⁵⁸ When Serapion lands at Rome he meets up with Domninus, a disciple of Origen, who was known for having cured sick persons who laid upon his bed after his death.²⁵⁹ The inclusion of this monk and his connection to Origen's disciple in Rome, gives us further indication of Palladios's theological leanings.

As mentioned previously, the subject of retribution can often be bound to some sort of satisfactory feeling in the human mind.²⁶⁰ When an enemy receives their due, the comeuppance they deserve, humans commonly are faced with feelings of relief and even delight over the equalizing of life experiences. It was no different for the monks of the desert. Palladios gives the reader an instance of this phenomenon especially concerning what was riding on the monks' attainment of his virtuous goals. In the story of Evagrius, we learn about how he was struggling with his contemplation of desire for

²⁵⁷ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 37.11, p. 108.

²⁵⁸ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 37.11, p. 108.

²⁵⁹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 37.12, p. 108.

a woman of the highest social class. She loved him too and this made the situation all the more serious. The text relates that Evagrius “perceived plainly the magnitude of the disgrace and the delight which heretics would take in his transgression, and he prayed humbly to God to put some impediment in his path.”²⁶¹ Although one might argue that this fear of pleasing one’s enemy should be the least compelling impetus in the life of faith, it is undoubtedly connected to the human struggle for righteousness in a world replete with disparaging onlookers. Whether the satisfaction in the defeat of one’s enemies was more prominent in the monastic community, or their detractors, is up for debate. We catch a glimpse of it here in Evagrius’s story. For him, it is one of the main reasons behind why he will not let himself fall into the grip of concupiscence. From the opposite side of things, later, less Origenian leaning monks were often portrayed as very interested in their enemies getting their due. It was proof that God was still in control and moreover, that he had properly sided with his faithful followers. Palladius’s representation of so many instances when God does not seem to equalize the immediate temporal existence with such care, leaves us wondering about the development of theology between the *Lausiac History* and later hagiographical compilations.

Evagrius, concerned to fix this predicament in which he found himself, takes to prayer and before long is given an angelic vision. The vision involves his being chained with iron collars on his neck and hands. Not knowing why, he suspects it is because of his relationship with the woman. He engages the angel who tells him it will not be safe for him if he stays in Constantinople. Evagrius responds, “Let God free me from this

²⁶⁰ The notion of *schadenfreude*, or joy in another’s suffering, is a closely related theme to retribution and justice. The human mind is naturally comforted in the defeat of its enemies.

predicament, and if you still see me in Constantinople, know that I would undergo this punishment without complaint."²⁶² After swearing on the Gospel, he regains consciousness from his *ekstasis*. Holding the oath as real, even though it was in a vision, Evagrius sets off to Jerusalem.

It is not long before Evagrius is faced with the opportunity to return to his former life by forgoing his habit and changing his manner of speech. "Intoxicated with vainglory," Evagrius was in need of some corrective attention. Rather than punish Evagrius, Palladios holds that God "checked him" by bringing a fever upon him that lasted six months. It is noteworthy that God's actions in this moment are not retribution for his shirking of oath or responsibility, but rather viewed as a means of restoring the monk to his proper life. Eventually Melania helps him to heal by hearing his confession and praying that he be given "a lease on life."²⁶³ In a matter of days Evagrius was restored to health and off to Nitria in Egypt, where he remained for two years before entering the desert.

Evagrius gained some literary fame for his writings, including *Controversies*, or "the arts to be used against demons."²⁶⁴ His own struggle with the demons was legendary, causing him to stand naked in a well over an entire night, just to overcome the temptation of the flesh. Palladios relates that he was "beaten by demons and sorely tempted by them times without number."²⁶⁵ His whole life appeared to be a struggle,

²⁶¹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 38.3, p. 111.

²⁶² Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 38.6, p. 112.

²⁶³ The greek text states, "προσεύχομαι ἵνα δοθῇ σοι ἑκομίας ζωῆς" Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 38.9, p. 113.

²⁶⁴ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 38. 10, p. 113.

²⁶⁵ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 38.12, p. 114.

which was supported by his own admission near his death that it was only the third year of his life that he had “not been tormented by carnal desires.”²⁶⁶ Again we witness lives that gain little reprieve in this world from their struggles with sin and fleshly desires. This world was a workshop for the soul, and it would not be released until it had been shaped by the years of struggle that pertained to its own program of salvation.

In his section on saintly women, Palladios gives the reader an indication of how he felt about Jerome. He explains concerning Paula, “A certain Jerome from Dalmatia stood in her way, for she was well able to surpass everyone else, being a genius of a woman. He thwarted her with his jealousy and prevailed upon her to work to his own end and purpose.”²⁶⁷ This curiously vitriolic aside, catches the reader off guard.

Examining the details further, we find that Jerome had critiqued Palladios, accusing him of “preaching and teaching the ‘heresy of Origen.’”²⁶⁸ Again we see how Origen’s teachings serve as a theological dividing line in this text.

Social Justice:

In several hagiographies, the reader is exposed to the motif of holy man as corrector of social wrongs. He acts as judge to some, community organizer to others, but always on behalf of the one who is wronged by either a robber or cheat. In the story of Innocent, we read of an elderly woman who was missing her sheep and came to him crying, for help. Innocent goes with the woman to the place where she lost them and he

²⁶⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 38.13, p. 114.

²⁶⁷ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 41.2, p. 118.

²⁶⁸ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, Footnote 320, p. 198. cf. Jerome’s *Ep.* 51.9 and *Dial. adv. Pelag.* Prol. 2.

prays, presumably for someone to confess. The young men, who robbed the woman, kill the sheep when they find out Innocent has been called in to help. When no one confesses to the crime, Innocent watches the air and notices that a crow alights somewhere in the vineyard and takes a piece of meat off in flight. Upon following the crow to the location of the sheep, the young men fall down and confess to having killed it. Then “they paid the just price for it.”²⁶⁹ What is remarkable about this story is that there is no retribution for the men’s actions. They are not required to do penance; the story makes no mention of them being shunned by the community or never again being able to eat lamb or wear wool. The men simply pay the just price for the loss and the story is over. The message is clearly geared towards the shrewdness of the monk, rather than the justice served to the woman. Even with this as the focus, however, the story is hardly very affirming of God’s providence or power. The monk has no intuitive knowledge of where the sheep was lying. He has no vision of how the sheep was taken. Rather, he watches the birds and reads what any worldly detective might – that if a crow has found some raw meat in the middle of a vineyard, this might be the place to start looking for the lost sheep.²⁷⁰

In the following vignette, concerning the life of Philoromus, we read of the monk’s interaction with the hated pagan Emperor, Julian. Palladios relates that Philoromus used to “speak up to him boldly.”²⁷¹ Julian responds by punishing the old

²⁶⁹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 44.5, p. 121.

²⁷⁰ There certainly seems to be some deeper level of meaning to this story since all of the elements carry significant meaning for early Christians.

²⁷¹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 45.1, p. 122.

monk. He has him shaved and cuffed about “by mere boys.”²⁷² This, Palladios notes, the monk endured as “nothing unusual” and “even thanked Julian for it.”²⁷³ The monk is punished for his obdurate attitude and bold remarks, but unlike the later hagiographies, there is no mention of Julian’s receiving his due. The passage simply goes on to explain more deeds of the monk.

Giving Demons and the Question of Providence

In the story of Innocent, we read of the three years that Palladios knew him before he went on to become the famed priest of the Mount of Olives. Innocent had a son named Paul from his marriage while serving as a palace dignitary under Emperor Constantius. When the boy wronged the daughter of a priest, Innocent cursed him by praying to God saying, “O Lord, give this man a spirit that he may no longer find a chance for sinning against the flesh.”²⁷⁴ In so doing, he called on God to “give” his son a demon who would occupy his mind and punish him, keeping him from sin. This extraordinary story seems to highlight the familial orientation of the monk away from blood lines toward the kinship of the kingdom of God. If we think of this curse as protecting the daughter of the priest, this holds true. However, if we consider that this was the only way Innocent could conceive of helping his son stay clear of sins of the flesh, then it would be a means of saving the boy’s eternal soul. The notion that God would “give” the demon to the boy certainly should be parsed out concerning the dominant theology of the day and Palladios’s own bent. God could rarely be accused of

²⁷² Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 45.1, p. 122.

²⁷³ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 45.1, p. 122.

giving a demon to someone. Palladios surely means that he allowed the boy to be possessed by the demon, for his own good. Here again, however, we come up against a question of power and providence. Could God's plan really include the giving of demons to some of his followers? A later segment of the *Lausiac History* concerning Chronius and Paphnutius would seem to affirm this notion.

Chronius and Paphnutius

Palladios tells of two monastic heroes named Chronius and Paphnutius in his forty-seventh story. In explaining the remarkable spiritual powers Paphnutius had, he explains that he had the gift of "divine knowledge of Sacred Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament."²⁷⁵ Even though Paphnutius had never read the words, he could explain them, presumably according to God's own intent in having them set down to writing. Again we see the importance of proper scriptural interpretation among the ascetics. It was insufficient to simply read the scriptures and assume they could be taken on face value, as many post-Origenian thinkers did. Real insight allowed for one to interpret the enigmatic stories for the people of faith. This skill, coupled with his prophetic gift, made him a primary source for Palladios and his fellows, Evagrius and Albanus. Palladios relates that they sought to learn from Paphnutius "why brethren should go astray, or leave, or be frustrated in the proper life."²⁷⁶ Palladios continues with a list of instances that support this question:

²⁷⁴ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 44.2, p. 120.

²⁷⁵ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 47.3, p. 125.

²⁷⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 47.3, p. 126.

For it happened in those days that Chaeremon the ascetic had died sitting up and was found dead in his chair holding his work in his hands. And again another brother was covered up while digging a well. Still another who was coming down from Scete died from lack of water. Then, too, we have Stephen, who fell into shameful libertinism, and also the story of Eucarpus and of Heron of Alexandria, as well as Valens of Palestine and Ptolemy the Egyptian in Scete. Then together we asked why it was that men living in the desert sometimes are deceived in their minds or are wrecked by lust.²⁷⁷

This most honest and intense question gives the reader an indication of Palladios's own personal and communal struggle with making sense of God's providence. Indeed, for any truly faithful person, it would be hard to reconcile an all-powerful creator and the slipshod care that he sometimes rendered for his most devout athletes of spirituality.

Paphnutius responds to Palladios's inquiry in a lengthy account of God's providence:

Everything that comes about is one of two things, that which God approves or that which He permits. Everything that happens which is in accordance with virtue and the glory of God happens by His will. Now, on the other hand, things harmful and dangerous, accidents and falls, those occur with God's consent. Now his consent comes about reasonably; for it is impossible that one who thinks and acts rightly could fall into disgrace or into the trap of demons. Then those who seem to practice virtue but have a debased purpose, or have the fault of acting to please their fellow men or the vice of a willful imagination, these also fall into errors, as God abandons them for their own good, so that through the symptoms they may perceive the change and so correct themselves in both intention and act.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 47.4, p. 126.

²⁷⁸ He continues, "For at times people sin in the will, acting with evil intent, but at other times they sin in conduct also, when they act through corruption or in evil fashion. Now it often happens that an evil man with a bad intention gives alms to young women for an evil end. On the other hand, it is a quite praiseworthy thing to give succor to an orphan, to a solitary, or to one who practices the ascetic life. It is also possible for one to give alms with a right intention to the sick or the aged, or to those who have lost money, but to do it sparingly and with grumbling; the intention is right, but the act is not worthy of the intention, for the merciful man ought to give alms *with cheerfulness* and with generosity." Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 47.7, pp. 126-7.

The lesson, which is reminiscent of Origen's response to Celsus, goes on for several pages, attempting to firm up a theological position that understands God to be fully good and acting temporally in only two major ways—either to bring about blessings, or to allow things to happen which will reform the wayward human. God's abandonment is for the sake of "their own good" so that they might correct their actions and intentions. The flavor of these punishments is not retributive but reformatory. They rarely acknowledge God as acting to smite a person or inflict a disaster of some sort. Instead, they allow that God lifts his hand from the proceedings and allows the world to run amuck until order is again imposed either through his gifts of mercy and grace, or through humanity's self-correction. Palladius is careful to note that human agency is capable of avoiding disgrace and the traps of demons, if only one "thinks and acts rightly." Whether this solves the problem of God "giving" Innocent's son a demon is up for debate. From Palladius's perspective it would certainly seem that God only needed to remove his directing hand in order for demons to fill the gaps in the souls that the absence of God left. This may indeed be considered "giving" to Palladius and Innocent.

In thinking about the *Lausiac History* as an Origenian leaning text about monks' lives, a problem develops with regard to providence. As proven by so many stories already encountered, we can locate a theology that is not at all interested in thrusting judgment oriented retribution into the lives of the desert dwellers and their communities. But, at the same time that Origen—and Palladius—are reluctant to look to God for temporal punishments and corrective measures, they are eager to attribute every good and restorative measure to God's providence. Origen states in *Contra Celsum*:

A religious man will not suppose that even a physician concerned with bodies, who restores many people to health, comes to live among cities and nations without divine providence; for no benefit comes to mankind without God's action. If a man who has healed the bodies of many or improved their condition does not cure people without divine providence, how much more must that be true of him who cured, converted, and improved the souls of many, and attached them to the supreme God, and taught them to refer every action to the standard of His pleasure, and to avoid anything that is displeasing to Him, down to the most insignificant of words or deeds or even of casual thoughts?"²⁷⁹

How is it possible to assert every good deed as part of God's providence and yet denounce every negative aspect of the cosmos as disassociated from God's action? The answer, which is certainly tied to the notion that God is all good, is found in the New Testament in James 1:17, which holds that "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." But if God is willing to act for good, why does it seem that so many instances slip by God's guard? This argument is one which Henry Chadwick quotes from Sextus Empiricus in his footnote concerning Origen's denunciation of those who discount providence based on "earthly circumstances of bad and good men."²⁸⁰ Sextus Empiricus holds that, "When anyone argues that providence exists from the order of the heavenly bodies, we oppose him with the argument that frequently the good suffer evil while the wicked prosper, and by this reasoning we conclude that providence does not exist."²⁸¹ The question of how and why God acted in the temporal world was as important for Origen as it was for Palladios and later hagiographers like Theodoret of Cyrrhos and John of Ephesus. How one answered this

²⁷⁹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.9, pp. 12-13.

²⁸⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Footnote 3, 1.9, p. 13.

²⁸¹ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, vol. 273, Loeb Classical Library. Greek Authors (London: W. Heinemann, 1933), I.32.

question was a key into how one read and interpreted the scriptures, as well as that world of literature upon which the scriptures took their cues.

Along these lines of inquiry, Chronius and Paphnutius go on to texture the life of a monk who may be of superior abilities, but does not attribute them to God or uses them for an end other than the “good end itself.”²⁸² This monk is in real danger of thinking more highly of himself than he ought and because of this, God abandons him “completely” and he is “given over either to shameless conduct or to shameful experiences.”²⁸³ It is from this abandonment, which seems to approximate punishment, that the monk learns through struggle that they have been prideful. Chronius and Paphnutius go on to explain, “Because of the resultant humiliation and shame they slowly rid themselves of the pride they have in their pretended virtue.”²⁸⁴

Palladios was keen on showing that the struggle that might become of sin or transgression was deeply connected to the eventual transformation that would occur in the punished being. The monks continue to explain exactly how this might work, “For when a person is swollen with pride and magnifies the charm of his own speeches, and attributes his charm or the abundance of his knowledge not to God but to his own ascetic practices or his own knowledge, then God removes the Angel of Providence from him. When the angel is removed, then he is distressed by the Adversary and brags of his own natural ability, and thus falls into impurity through his overweening pride.”²⁸⁵

²⁸² Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 47.8, p. 127.

²⁸³ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 47.8, p. 127.

²⁸⁴ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 47.8, p. 127.

²⁸⁵ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 47.9, p. 127.

This Angel of Providence is somehow related to God's care of the monk's life. It would seem to suggest that evil is waiting to distress everyone who is not watched over by God and his Angel. As soon as the Angel is removed, the human falls into distress and impurity through pride. The model this recommends for understanding life, is that God's constant care is ever present, fending off the adversary and sinful human predilections. When God wants to correct the human life, he simply abandons the person by removing his Angel of Providence, and it is through this measure that the person is incentivized to change. This is a far different picture from the notion that God set the world in motion and it runs accordingly with a few divine intrusions here and there.

Later in this section, Paphnutius and Chronius bring up the character Job in relation to this discussion. The text relates, "Now this is why these people are abandoned; so that the virtue which was hidden might be made known, as was Job's virtue when God answered him, saying: "Wilt thou make void my judgment? And condemn me, that thou mayest be justified? For you were known to Me, who see[s] the hidden things, but you were not known to men, who suspected that you served Me for riches. I brought on this crisis, I cut off the riches in order that I might show them that your philosophy is pleasing to me."²⁸⁶ The connection here to Job, who is severely punished for little reason except to prove his faithfulness, is a compelling and problematic inclusion. The story of Job holds little resolve for the contemporary reader. In the end his life was simply a proof of God's power and a testimony to the faithfulness of God's servants. Punishment for the sake of punishment here is hardly in

line with Palladios's program of restitutive abandonment. For Palladios, some good has to come from it. In this case it is the good of those who now understand that Job does not serve God for the riches he provides. The example is compelling in that it proves God's ability to withdraw when God wants, but problematic in that the punishment is not for the personal restoration of Job, but for proving to others, outsiders to the intimacy of Job and God, whether that be the Ha-Satan or Job's friends. This type of punishment is strong in John of Ephesus, but rarely summoned in the pages of Palladios. The *Lausiac History* goes on to relate Paul's experience in being "abandoned, tossed about in misfortunes and buffetings, and in various tribulations."²⁸⁷ What the Job story needs is some allegorical interpretation to make sense of it.

If we turn to the *Philocalia* of Origen, we encounter his treatment of Paul's struggle and of "good" and "evil" things in the life of the believer. Origen explains:

And is it not foolish to make such a point of the ills of life, and to boast of those who suffer from them? For if tribulations are evil, and the Apostle speaks of rejoicing in tribulations, it is clear that he rejoiced in evil things; but this is foolish, and the Apostle was not a fool; and it follows that such exercises of the Apostle as he speaks of were not evil; being pressed on every side he is not straitened; he is perplexed, yet not unto despair; tempted, but not killed; thought to be poor, he maketh many rich, and supposed to have nothing, he possesses all things; for the whole world of wealth belongs to the believer, and not an obol to the unbeliever. And further, they who suppose that according to Scripture there are three kinds of good and three kinds of evil, have to face another fact, viz. that the righteous are ever in the midst of evils, for the word of prophecy says truly, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." And they who suppose certain things to be evils might not unfitly remember what befell Job, to whom after that he had nobly borne the trials which compassed him about, the Divine word says, "And dost thou suppose that I dealt with thee for any other purpose than that thou mayest appear righteous?" For if Job is shown to be righteous no other way than through this and that befalling him, how can we say that the causes of his appearing righteous are evils to him? And it follows that even the Devil is not an

²⁸⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 47.14, p. 129.

²⁸⁷ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 47.15, pp. 129-30.

evil to the holy man. At all events, the Devil was not an evil to Job, for all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.²⁸⁸

Origen's treatment is foundational for Palladios. He cites Paul's example of struggle in tribulation and moves on to quote the exact passage concerning Job that God speaks from the whirlwind in Chapter forty, verse eight. The struggle that Job underwent was not evil at all, according to Origen, but rather proof of his righteousness. And this could only be understood as a blessing when administered from God's hand.

Later in his section on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, Origen touches on this passage again. He states, "Observe here that God humbles and tries, in order that what is in each man's heart may be known, inasmuch as it lies deep and is revealed through tribulations. And such is the declaration of the Lord to Job in storm and whirlwind: 'Dost thou think that I have dealt with thee for any other purpose than that thou mayest appear righteous?' He did not say, 'That thou mayest *be* righteous,' but, 'That thou mayest *appear* righteous. Righteous he was even before his trials, but God would have him show his righteousness by what befell him.'"²⁸⁹ God uses the punishments to show Job righteous even though he already knows he is.

Palladios closes out his section on Paphnutius and Chronius with a final quote from the learned pair. They state, "From this, then, we may know that it is impossible for anyone to fall into sin unless he has been abandoned by God's providence."²⁹⁰ This hopeful, but complicated statement affirms God's powerful will but also the surety that

²⁸⁸ Origen, *The Philocalia of Origen: a Compilation of Selected Passages from Origen's Works, Made by St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Basil of Caesarea* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 26.5, pp. 219–20.

²⁸⁹ Origen, *The Philocalia of Origen*, 27.9, pp. 233–34.

²⁹⁰ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 47.17, p. 130.

the monk might have in avoidance of sin if only they do not let themselves be tempted by sin.

Removing the Fruit of Sin

In parsing out God's providence, we take account of the many ways God's power acts in the ascetics' lives. A common motif in the securing of justice or retribution is the prayer to God for action that would otherwise be impossible to achieve. In later hagiographies this is exemplified in the monks who pray that Julian would be removed from power, or that Arius might leave the churches alone. In both instances, recorded in Theodoret of Cyrrhos, the offending figure loses his life shortly after the monk petitions God's help. In one of the final stories of the *Lausiac History*, we encounter the story of an unnamed nun who accomplishes a remarkably powerful, if unpalatable deed. The nun, who had practiced asceticism for ten or so years, finds herself enticed by a harper and ends up bearing the man's child. As time passed, she began to regret her fall so deeply that her state of repentance led her to an attempt to kill herself by starvation.²⁹¹ She then prayed, "Great God, who tolerates the evil of every creature and wishes not the death and loss of those who stumble, if You desire me to be saved, show Your wonders in this present situation and take away the fruit of my sin to which I have given birth, so that I may not hang myself or throw myself overboard."²⁹² Palladios relates that the child died not long afterwards.

²⁹¹ Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 69.3, p. 150.

²⁹² Palladios, *The Lausiac History*, 69.2, p. 150.

This fascinating story was certainly better received in a world where child mortality rates were exponentially higher than what they are today.²⁹³ Even so, the request the woman makes is arresting for the contemporary reader. The child was not a product of rape, but genuine desire, according to the text.²⁹⁴ How could this mother pray for her own child's death? Moreover, how could God grant this death? The model of prayer for death is common, but it is rarely used to control one's personal mistakes. It is commonly oriented outward toward a stubborn and dangerous force that is threatening Christians and their way of life. If we read the child as a threat to the ascetic's way of life, perhaps the model fits, but equating the Emperor Julian to an unwanted child is hardly equitable. In the end, it seems, that God chooses his ascetic over the young child. Again we see a desert dweller putting God to the test and offering an ultimatum. The story is reminiscent of the aforementioned Paul, who forces Jesus to choose between himself and the demon.²⁹⁵

In Palladios's seventieth vignette, we read of a lector named Eustathius, who was falsely accused by the daughter of a priest, who had become pregnant. Eustathius maintained his innocence throughout the questioning, responding to the Bishop's inquiry of "You will not confess, you wretched and miserable man, glutted with impurity?" with "I told you that it was not of my doing. I am innocent of any design

²⁹³ Elizabeth Clark notes "In an era in which (so demographic studies suggest) every girl who lived to childbearing age would have had to produce about five children to keep the population constant, ascetic propaganda might sound decidedly threatening." Elizabeth A. Clark, "Antifamilial Tendencies in Ancient Christianity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 3 (January 1, 1995): 371.

²⁹⁴ Although we should be wary of assigning too much social power to this woman. Regardless of how much equality Palladios promotes, the circumstances of men and women were not at all similar. On the value of the female ascetic for learning of virtue, see "Juliana" in Palladios, *The Lausiaca History*, 64, pp. 145-46.

upon her. But if you insist on hearing something, even if it is not true, then I did it.”²⁹⁶

After being deposed, Eustathius asks to marry the woman, but instead of living with her, he put her in a monastery of women. When it was time for the baby to be born, Palladios notes “The decisive hour had come. Sighs, pangs, labors, visions of the underworld – and still the child was not born!”²⁹⁷ After days of suffering turned into a week, the woman, “in hell with her pain” confessed to having accused the lector falsely.²⁹⁸ The father of the girl hears this and keeps the news for two more days, “afraid of being condemned as an informer.”²⁹⁹ The bishop sent for the lector asking him to pray for the child’s delivery, but Eustathius did not reply. The father came to the church and prayed, but the baby was still not delivered. Finally, the bishop went to Eustathius and entered his cell saying, “Eustathius, arise, and make loose what you closed.”³⁰⁰ The baby was delivered immediately after he and the bishop prayed.

This story highlights many of the themes that we will encounter in later hagiographies, but does so with a rather soft edge. Neither the woman or the child dies here, and Palladios relates that it was all done “to teach a lesson to the one who made the false accusations. From this we may learn to devote ourselves to prayer and to know its power.”³⁰¹ The power of the monk in prayer to effect change in the temporal world for purposes of comeuppance is rarely portrayed in Palladios’s work. This instance, however, reminds one of the later hagiographers like Theodoret, who were keen on

²⁹⁵ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 22.11, p. 80.

²⁹⁶ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 70.2, p. 151.

²⁹⁷ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 70.3, p. 152.

²⁹⁸ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 70.4, p. 152.

²⁹⁹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 70.4, p. 152.

³⁰⁰ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 70.5, p. 152.

seeing real power effect real change. Even with this model of retribution in place, we see a definite slant toward reformation of the individual. Although this story is the closest Palladios gets to punishment for sin – with the monk pushing the limits so far that Palladios makes a remark about the young woman’s mortality – it is still oriented toward correction rather than retribution.³⁰²

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Palladios renders a hagiographical compilation that was deeply reliant on the theology of Origen. From his connections with Old Testament themes he crafts a holy person who reinvigorated the traditions of Israel’s power over and against the Egyptians in his struggle against the demons in their pagan tombs. Figures like Job and Paul, yield their palpable struggles in lending credence to the holy person’s struggle to understand God’s fickle-seeming providence. Although one wants to see the powerful prestige of an Elisha figure, calling out curses and cures as a man of God, Palladios’s monks are more bystanders than active wielders of divine retribution. His is an intellectually reserved treatment of the monastic world. In the spirit of Origen, who would never read a difficult scripture at face value, Palladios’s monks operate on deeper levels of engagement with providence than the overt and simplified models of immediate retribution. How much this is due to their own proximity to the age of persecution is debatable alongside Palladios’s own penchant for stories that are far more restorative than retributive. At times the lesson is left to be explained, such as

³⁰¹ Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 70.5, p. 152.

when the healer of many falls sick. At other times, the lesson appears to be as simple as courage in the face of certain and horrific death, like the young woman being immersed in a cauldron. In either case, the holy person does not become the immediate and phenomenally oriented controller that later monks do.

As to the monk's power in this world, we are left with two ghastly examples of how one might entice God to act in one's favor. In the story of Paul, we see a monk who bargained with his life for God's power to remove the demon. Similarly, the nun who threatened God with suicide to rid herself of her unwanted child found her bargaining power in the sacrifice of her own body. Neither story would come close to making the pages of later hagiographers like John of Ephesus. From his perspective, these ascetics would clearly have been wanting in proximity to God if they had to resort to such dire tactics to correct their world. We see in Palladios a genuine grappling with what it meant to claim God's providence was at work in the physical world, complete with all of the problems and messiness with which this human life was fraught.

Palladios's monks are not unacquainted with punishment. His explanation of the whips which hung from the date palms in Nitria, or the struggle that various monks endure in the process of learning a lesson, bespeak a harshness in the desert that could touch the deepest and most stubbornly rooted sinfulness in the monk's soul. Palladios's concern, however, is rarely for the details of punishment, focusing instead on the reforming and educational nature of what the monk endured. Except for a few instances Palladios takes every story in the direction of restoration.

³⁰² Palladios states, "The young lady did not die," as if it was inevitable after so much pain and torment. Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 70.4, p. 152.

Palladios's highlighting of the Origenist monk, Isidore, or the detail of his own tutelage under the great Origenian teacher, Evagrius, gives us an immediate indication of how he will read certain moments in the monastic life. As with all hagiographies, however, the reader should be more focused on the storyline, than the headlines that accompany them. Palladios treats these stories, plucked with care from the broader oral history, as pedagogical moments in the development of Christianity. They are there to teach the reader how to avoid revenge like Macarius and the gnat, and seek rather the restoration of a monk even after a life of brigandage, as in the case of Moses the Ethiopian. Constructing his saints within the Origenian worldview, Palladios gives us a deeply beautiful rendering of how faith operated in the absence of steady and immediate power, relying instead on the restorative justice available through human love and God's eventual providence.

Chapter 3

On Providence and Beautiful Order: Gregory of Nazianzus and Theodoret of Cyrros

The phrase, “That is beautiful” is often used to describe a harmonizing principle. Plato had concluded that “balance” was inherent in any form that approximated beauty.³⁰³ In a similar manner, the Christian – and also the pagan – perspectives on cosmic affairs, sought the beauty of symmetry in action and reaction. For every misdeed a fitting punishment was sought. The beauty of the cosmos depended on retribution

³⁰³ For more on this connection of Plato to the fourth and fifth century theologians, see J.A. McGuckin, ed., “Editor’s Preface,” in *The Concept of Beauty in Patristic and Byzantine Theology: Beauty and the Transcendent* (Theotokos Press, 2012), 7–11. For an overview of some leading theologians’ concepts of beauty, see J.A. McGuckin, ed., “The Eros of Divine Beauty in St. Maximus the Confessor (c.580-662),” in *The Concept of Beauty in Patristic and Byzantine Theology: Beauty and the Transcendent* (Theotokos Press, 2012), 170–191; J.A. McGuckin, “The Beauty of the World and Its Significance in St. Gregory the Theologian,” in *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. John

and justice.

“Beauty” emerges as the description for a multitude of scenarios ranging from *schadenfreude*—that pertinent German term for joy in another’s suffering—to a genuine appreciation for the perfect ordering of a series of life events. By what force these events unfold in such remarkable ways varies according to one’s concept of how the universe functions: whether by serendipity, or divinely ordered retribution. Many early Christian communities witnessed the ordering of events as the imprint of the beauty of God on everyday life. The earliest Christians who faced martyrdom and myriad other earthly tortures were more likely to question whether God was interested in ordering the immediate world or the world to come. The New Testament is predominantly focused on an apocalyptic perspective that was less concerned with an immediate intervention of God’s power. We can perhaps see a natural extension of this in the Persian Martyr Acts of the fourth and fifth centuries, which focus on identification with the suffering Christ.³⁰⁴ The fact that these take place in “Syria,” a geographical location deeply related and even overlapping at times the boundaries of modern Iraq and western Iran is significant for our study. Theodoret’s monks have direct interaction in the narratives with Persian kings, like Sapor.³⁰⁵ Theodoret’s monks do not, however, help to increase the blood of the martyrs that would eventually culminate in God’s

Chryssavgis, First edition, *Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought* (Fordham University Press, 2013), 34–45.

³⁰⁴ This is evident in Brock’s translation of Mar Ma’in’s life, where the author recounts in detail Christ’s crucifixion, and also the fact that he called out to his Father while being forsaken. This was an important detail in identification for the martyr. Sebastian P. Brock, *The History of the Holy Mar Ma’in with a Guide to the Persian Martyr Acts*, Gorgias Press (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 22–23, p. 24.

³⁰⁵ See section on James of Nisibis.

destruction of earth. Rather, his monks offer μαρτύριον³⁰⁶ of God's power in the temporal setting. Later communities of Christians, those who had found favor with the Emperor were perhaps more intent to show that God's will extended into the everyday. Far from happenstance, the revealing of life's twists turned on the axis of God's providence. Everything was properly ordered in the universe according to the divine plan, even when that plan could be confusing.

The term 'comeuppance' is rarely used today. Its antiquated sound connotes a tone of longsuffering in judgment. Although the examples utilized in this chapter are often more expeditious, many maintain a comfort with the notion that judgment often occurs within God's rather than humanity's timeframe. In general, it is an excellent term for any situation in which one sees a person receive what is deemed appropriate to his or her actions. As we will see in the chapter on Justinian, this is "Justice."³⁰⁷

This chapter will begin with a treatment of Gregory's theological stance on providence then move ahead to the figure of Theodoret. Gregory's perspective is of deep importance for the development of hagiographical literature in three ways. First, his treatment of providence is foundational for later Christian writers, including Theodoret. Second, his concepts on how one should read the scriptures – especially as they relate to philosophical freedoms in delineating truths – become a significant rallying point in the later Origenist crisis which Cyril of Scythopolis covertly explores.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Or "evidence."

³⁰⁷ "Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas ius suum cuique tribuens." Paul Krueger et al., *Corpus juris civilis* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1888) Foreward, Liber Primus, Tit. 1.

³⁰⁸ He cites Gregory in his argument with the monk, Cyriacus, over how one could think about theological issues and scripture. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 253. I say covertly because he both explores the theological issues and debates at length while hinting at

Third, he edited the *Philocalia* of Origen at Basil's monastic estate at Annesoi in 361 C.E.³⁰⁹ His fingerprints are all over the later theological developments, even though he is rarely mentioned. We are fortunate to have the quote from Cyril, which confirms that he was not only still being read, but his notions were influential in the development of ascetic theology deep into the sixth century.³¹⁰

To any student of early Christianity, the pairing of Gregory and Theodoret will seem odd given Theodoret's relation as student to Diodore of Tarsus, and Gregory's public falling out with Diodore during his loss of the throne of Constantinople in 381.³¹¹ This, however, was just the final chapter in their shared history. Gregory was a part of Diodore's party, but was perceived as letting down the Antiochenes in the council of 381. Gregory's connection to the Syrian church could also be seen through his time in Cappadocia and his own respect for Eusebius of Samosata.³¹² Diodore was a junior disciple of this same circle, loyal to Eustathius of Antioch, the first president of the Council of 381. Their complicated relationship might bespeak disjunction if one was to focus only on the *minutiae* of the later political landscape. Both of these thinkers, however, were champions of Nicene Christology and can be examined not only for a high level theology, but also more generally for their influence on contemporary

his own questions concerning their validity. His own treatment of retribution in the stories he tells is rather restorative in the end.

³⁰⁹ McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 151; Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: the Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 748.

³¹⁰ I am grateful to McGuckin for the insight that Gregory was the most read theologian in Byzantium until the high middle ages, representing the most extant manuscripts.

³¹¹ For a comprehensive perspective on the intricacies of this political fallout, see John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 229–370.

³¹² Eusebius had called Gregory to Constantinople to give his Orations.

Christian belief.³¹³ In terms of the investigation of the themes of providence and judgment, they make a very interesting pair. They are not at all the same, but they pair nicely, as something sweet often couples with something salty. It will be up to the reader to decide which one is the 'saltier' of the two.³¹⁴ Their combination gives us a depth of flavor in the beauty of Christian comeuppance.

Comeuppance is an important and ubiquitous theme in ancient narrative. It has been given little attention in the study of early Christianity and is thus worth examining in its own right.³¹⁵ In the context of Gregory and Theodoret, it gives the historian an indication of how the beauty of God's providence was understood by educated Christian bishops, and their less educated communities of followers. I will argue that the notion of Beauty in the ancient world is translatable in terms of order and symmetry to the Byzantine context—particularly in the works of Gregory of Nazianzus. Utilizing Gregory and Theodoret of Cyrrhos, I will show that there were two possible scenarios available to the late ancient mind: immediate comeuppance and otherworldly

³¹³ Here I would point toward Gregory's Episcopal homilies as well as his influential Theological orations. Theodoret is best known for his *History of the Monks of Syria* and also for his *Church History*. Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R.M. Price (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1985); Philip Schaff, *A Select Library of Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, Rufinus: Historical Writings*, vol. 3, 2 (New York: The Christian literature company, 1892).

³¹⁴ Gregory's bitterness at losing the throne of Constantinople is well documented. McGuckin cites the poems written on his way back home and over the subsequent few years in Nazianzus which showed his need to "vent his feelings." McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, 371.

³¹⁵ The genre of Byzantine Hagiography is also an under-utilized resource in the study of Early Christianity. For an overview of relatively recent developments in the field, see Stephanos Efthymiadis, *Hagiography in Byzantium: Literature, Social History and Cult*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2011), 151-171; Stephanos Efthymiadis, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, Ashgate Research Companion (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

comeuppance.³¹⁶ Both had their place and both contributed to the Byzantine notion of a beautifully ordered cosmos. With this paradigm in mind, we will ask how the retributive vignettes that Theodoret writes in his *History of the Monks of Syria* or the *Religious History (Ascetic Life)* relate to the burgeoning interest in Origen and the subsequent controversy to which his name was ascribed.

Beauty in the ancient world

One can find the term ‘beauty’ carefully considered in a large number of Platonic works. Several of the well-known dialogues, including *the Symposium*, *the Republic*, *Phaedrus* and even *Timaeus* deal with beauty as an important notion in understanding

³¹⁶ A fascinating story that highlights the struggle with immediate versus otherworldly punishment is found in the *Paralipomena* of Pachomius. Here one reads a heart-wrenching story concerning a monk who was buried without psalmody. Encountering the funeral procession on his way to another monastery, Pachomius orders the brothers to stop singing psalms and to strip the brother’s clothes from his body and burn them. The family of the brother, obviously distraught over the situation, asks Pachomius why he is punishing him. Pachomius responds, “Truly brothers, I have more compassion for the one who lies here than you have; and I showed more care for him, as a father, when I commanded this to be done. You care for this visible body; I struggle for his soul. Indeed, if you sing psalms for him, he will receive more punishments to account for the psalm, for he departed without having with him the power of the psalms. If you want to add to his eternal sorrows, sing psalms for him; but he will suffer more pain then because of the psalm and he will curse you. Because I know what is expedient for his soul, I take no care of his dead body. If I allow you to sing psalms, I will be found, in the sight of God, someone who pleases men, because for the sake of human satisfaction I have disregarded what was expedient for the soul which is going to be punished in judgment. God, who is a fountain of goodness, seeks pretexts which he can seize to pour forth on us the streams of his grace. If then we, who have been found worthy by God of being skilled in the art of his divine healing, do not apply the appropriate aid for each suffering, we are rightly called despisers, as it is written, *Behold, you despisers, and wonder marvelously, and perish*. For this reason I entreat you: that his punishment may be lightened.” This fascinating passage intrigues the listener as to what the monk might have done that would cause him to be so dishonored by Pachomius. The liminal nature of the holy man aids in navigating the delicate transition from the immediate to the otherworldly. Armand Veilleux, trans., *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2 (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 25–27.

the highest aspects of wisdom.³¹⁷ Beauty is held up as an ultimate virtue next to love, knowledge and excellence. The Platonic form of beauty was something that was naturally imbued with order and symmetry. Any type of disorder or deformity was considered a disjunction between the entity and the excellence of god.³¹⁸

Plato's *Timaeus* (30b) supports the idea that the world is beautiful because it was created by god. The text relates:

What is perfectly good can accomplish only what is perfectly beautiful; this was and is a universal law. So the god took thought and concluded that, generally speaking, nothing he made that lacked intelligence could ever be more beautiful than an intelligent product, and that nothing can have intelligence unless it has soul. And the upshot of this thinking was that he constructed the universe by endowing soul with intelligence and body with soul, so that it was in the very nature of the universe to surpass all other products in beauty and perfection. This is the likely account, and it follows that we're bound to think that this world of ours was made in truth by god as a living being, endowed thanks to his providence with soul and intelligence.³¹⁹

Because the god is perfectly good, in Plato's scheme, he is only capable of creating beauty. This worldview that readily accepts creation and the natural structure of the cosmos as a beautiful and balanced entity was highly influential on later Eastern Christian thought.³²⁰

As Plato describes how the world was fashioned, he readily embraces geometry as

³¹⁷ There are many more, but these instances serve as a solid foundation for later NeoPlatonic influence.

³¹⁸ There is some room for thinking that divinity in Platonic thought is a somewhat fluid concept. When I refer to 'god' here I am referencing the *demiurge* or the highest creating being in Platonism.

³¹⁹ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Waterfield, Robin (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³²⁰ Here I distinguish between the East and the eventual turn – in the West – toward a theology of sin as the predominant descriptor of an ugly and fallen creation. These, of course, are not straightforward categories.

a telling aspect of how the *Kosmos*³²¹ was ordered. Arguing that there is beauty in particular shapes, such as the particular scalene triangle, which in the combination with itself forms a perfect equilateral triangle. These arguments from geometry to positions about the nature of beauty and creation sound strange to the modern reader, but they begin to show the emphasis that Platonic thought laid on symmetry within creation.³²²

For the Platonists, creation was a chaotic mess that needed order imposed upon it. The initial elements were in need of structure and this structure naturally came from god. Timaeus explains to Socrates:

To repeat, then, one of my original assertions, the god found the four bodies we've been talking about in a chaotic state and made each of them compatible with itself and with the others, in as many ways and respects as they could be proportionate and compatible. For at that time none of them had its characteristics, except by chance, and in fact none of them had the slightest right to be called by the names that are now used of it and the others — 'fire', 'water', and so on. So he first imposed order on them all, and then he created this universe of ours out of them, as a single living being containing within itself all living beings, both mortal and immortal. He himself was the craftsman and

³²¹ The very word means 'beautiful'.

³²² *Timaeus* states, "We have to decide, then, which are the most beautiful bodies that can be created. There should be four of them, and they must be dissimilar to one another, but capable (in some cases) of arising out of one another's disintegration. If we succeed at this task, we'll know the truth about the generation of earth, fire, and the bodies that act as proportionate means between these two extremes. For we will never agree with anyone who claims that there are or could be more perfect visible bodies than these four, each after its own kind. So we should do our best to construct our four substances, each of outstanding beauty, and to reach a position where we can claim to have adequately understood what they are like. Of our two triangles, the isosceles one is essentially single, whereas there's an infinite number of right-angled scalene triangles. What we have to do, then, if we're to start properly, is select the most beautiful of this infinite plurality of scalene triangles. If anyone can demonstrate that his choice creates more beautiful structures, we'll welcome our defeat, not resent it. But until then our position is that there is one that is the most beautiful, and surpasses all other scalene triangles, and that is the one which is a constituent of the equilateral triangle, with two triangles making the equilateral one as a third. It would take rather a long time to explain why, but if anyone challenges our claim and finds that we were wrong, we won't resent his victory. So these are our choices for the two triangles from which the bodies of fire and the rest were constructed — the isosceles, and the one whose essential property is that the square of the longer side is triple the square of the shorter side." Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, 53e-54b.

creator of the divine beings, and he gave his own offspring the job of creating mortal beings. In imitation of their father, once they had received from him the immortal seed of soul, they proceeded to fashion a mortal body in which to enclose it, and to assign the whole body to be its vehicle.³²³

One can envision this Platonic notion of god as a craftsman (*demiourgos*) and harmonizer, a god that creates order from chaos. Whether or not god acts to organize everyday life in such a manner, the imposed basal structure god provides pokes through the fabric of creation, allowing one to glimpse the divine hand.³²⁴

Gregory of Nazianzus

Gregory of Nazianzus was a consummate theologian. He was classically trained – as many prominent Christian theologians were in that age – and was able to incorporate his knowledge of rhetoric and philosophy into his writings. While a prominent churchman, Gregory was also no stranger to the ascetic life – whether through direct participation or connection to the ascetics that surrounded the countryside of Nazianzus. He was known simply as “The Theologian” to later generations, and was well regarded for his style in poetry and prose. Gregory can be seen to maintain rules of rhetorical style even in his *Funeral Oration for his Sister Gorgonia*. He explains, “We have omitted most of the details in order to keep some due proportion in our discourse, and not to seem greedy for her praise.”³²⁵ Brian Daley comments in a footnote to this

³²³ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, 69b–c.

³²⁴ This is precisely the language used in Theodoret’s treatment of *pronoias*. He states, “Behold the providence of God itself breaking through each part of creation, manifesting and proclaiming itself and all but shouting through these elements, your mouths closed that are agape and your unbridled tongues bridled.” Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, Ancient Christian Writers no. 49 (New York, N.Y: Newman Press, 1988), 1.14.

³²⁵ Cited in Brian Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 8.19.

translation of Gregory's orations that, "As in the traditional conception of virtue, so in the ideals of rhetorical style, proportion and self-restraint were considered by the Greeks to be the key to excellence and beauty."³²⁶ Gregory embodied these considerations of rhetorical style in his nearly 17,000 lines of poetry.³²⁷

Gregory's connection to the Platonic worldview is well documented in his use of Plotinus as well as a range of other classical thinkers.³²⁸ This crafting of his intellectual heritage took place when he studied in Athens, prior to his work as priest and bishop. While Gregory utilized the notion of order in his rhetorical style, he also incorporated it into his own theology. His is a theology that is deeply connected to order and comeuppance. In *Oration Fourteen*, Gregory states:

The events of this present life are of a different form and have a different moral purpose, although all lead in the same direction; surely what seems to be unfair to us has its fairness in the plan of God, just as in the physical world there are prominent and lowly features, large and small details, ridges and valleys, by which the beauty of the whole comes into visible existence in their relationship to each other.³²⁹

For Gregory, God would ultimately be the judge of what is fair and what is unfair. Like the prominent hills in comparison to the lowly valleys, so too, are humans raised to points of prominence while others struggle below. In a great example, Gregory's own political trajectory would be impeded for reasons that he could not or would not

³²⁶ Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, fn. 60, p.214.

³²⁷ Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, p.1.

³²⁸ John Whittaker, "Proclus, Procopius, Psellus and the Scholia on Gregory Nazianzen," *Vigiliae Christianae* 29, no. 4 (December 1, 1975): 309-313. On his classical influence McGuckin states: "The explicit references in Gregory's writings to the classical authors are wide ranging and impressive. Anaxilas, Apollonios of Rhodes, Aratos, and other poets of the Palatine anthology, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Callimachos, Demosthenes, Diogenes Laertios, Evagoras, Heraclitus, Herodotus, Hesiod, Homer, Isocrates, Lucian, Lysias, Philo, Phocylides, Pindar, Plato, Plutarch, Sappho, Simonides, Socrates, Theocritus, Theognis, and Thucydides." McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, 57.

comprehend.

As with most great theologians of the early church, there was little outward recognition of any internal struggle over one's position on given issues. The rhetorician is always a wise master, rarely a doubtful seeker. Accordingly, truth claims are usually absolutes in ancient religious literature and responses to opponents were often accompanied by vitriol and violence.³³⁰ If one did not succeed in persuading a broader group of bishops about one's claims, then the recourse naturally fell to God. One hears a familiar tone in this *Oration (14) on the Love of the Poor* to Gregory's future struggle in his deposition from the seat of Archbishop. His penchant for poetry allows a more introspective look at his feelings about what had transpired in Constantinople before and after the council of 381. Gregory shows "a high degree of self-examination of all that had gone on in the turbulent time of his administration" and felt he had "nothing to reproach himself for under the eyes of Christ."³³¹

Gregory could see the struggle in his own life (ascetical/political/familial/personal) as perfectly aligned with the disordered world of which God alone could make sense. He explains:

It is, after all, very much within the skill of the Craftsman (*demiourgos*) if he should adapt the occasional disorder and unevenness of the material realm to achieve the purpose of his creation; and this will be grasped and acknowledged by all of us, when we contemplate the final, perfect beauty of what he has created. But he is never lacking in the skill of his art, as we are, nor is this world ruled by disorder, even when the principle by which it is ordered is not apparent

³²⁹ Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, Oration 14.31.

³³⁰ One of the more violent examples came during the Easter Vigil services of 380. "A concerted attack was made on the Anastasia [Church]...a crowd of monks and nuns from the city together with assorted troublemakers forced their way into the house Church. They let fly a hail of stones." McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, 257.

³³¹ McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus*, 372.

to us.³³²

For Gregory, human eyes were simply incapable of grasping the true beauty of what God was accomplishing in the world. If something looked out of alignment, it was only because it was not being seen for its true purpose. The “final, perfect beauty” will be grasped by all, but only after the confused order of the world is translated by a grander perspective. He continues:

Recognize the source of your being, your breath, your power of thought, and (greatest of all), your power to know God and to hope for the Kingdom of Heaven, for equality with the angels, for the vision of glory – which now you have only “in a mirror and in riddles,” but which someday will be more perfect and pure – for the chance to become a child of God, a fellow-heir with Christ, even (I make bold to say) *to become yourself divine*.³³³ From where do all these gifts come – and from whom? Just to mention the small and obvious things: who gives you the ability to look on the beauty of heaven, the course of the sun, the cycle of the moon, the multitude of stars, and the harmony and order that rules in all these things as in a lyre, always remaining the same? To witness the passing of the hours, the changes of season, the turning of years, the equal measures of day and night; the products of the earth, the abundance of the atmosphere, the breadth of the sea as it constantly flows yet remains, the depths of the rivers, the blowing of the winds?³³⁴

Of particular interest is Gregory’s acknowledgment that the beauty of heaven is associated with the “course of the sun” and “the cycle of the moon.” These correlate to the harmony and order that rules “as in a lyre.” He connects the regular patterns of his early Platonic training to the natural world. The lyre, with its measured vibrations, accompanies the image relating the order of harmony with the order of the universe. For Gregory, the physical, social and spiritual worlds rest in a careful – though not

³³² Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, Oration 14.31.

³³³ My emphasis. Details like this are significant in connection with later Origenian thoughts on retribution and restoration.

³³⁴ Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, Oration 14.23.

always apparent – balance adjudicated by God.³³⁵

In his *Evening Hymn*, Gregory touches on the beauty that God creates out of his ordering of matter. The passage is reminiscent of Timaeus's lines quoted above.³³⁶

We bless you now, at twilight,
My Christ, God's Word, God's brightness
From light that knows no dawning,
And steward of the Spirit –
Your threefold radiance woven
Into one strand of glory!
You have abolished darkness,
Forming, on light's foundation,
A world that light embraces,
Shaping unstable matter
Into a stable order –
This beauty that delights us.³³⁷

Beauty is a natural outcome of properly ordered nature. When God sets his hand to correcting the surging elements that make life unappealing, humans can witness the true beauty of order in the cosmos. This concept of divinely ordered correction is also deeply influential on the hagiographers of the early Byzantine world.

Comeuppance in Hagiography: Theodoret's Phenomenal Monks

Many of the most interesting and informative monastic hagiographies come not from the Egyptian desert, but rather from the wilderness of northern Syria during the

³³⁵ Theodoret maintains a nearly identical position. He asks, "What visible object seems to you to lack order? What phenomenon appears to be wanting in design? What part of creation is lacking in harmony? Or beauty? Or size? What object lacking harmony in its movement has given birth to this impiety in you? Consider now at least, if you have not done so before, the nature of visible objects, their position, order, situation, movement, rhythm, harmony, gracefulness, beauty, splendor, utility, charm, variety, diversity, changeability, their regular return to the same place, their permanence in corrupt natures." Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 1.13.

³³⁶ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, 69b–c.

³³⁷ Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 167.

fourth and fifth centuries. Theodoret wrote many influential works in his tenure as Bishop of Cyrrhos, however, most interesting to our topic is his *Religious History* or *Ascetic Life*. In this collection of thirty-three saints, Theodoret carefully describes the monks' lives and the virtues that made their stories worth recording. This dissertation will necessarily select portions that are particularly interesting for our topic. In the words of Theodoret, "We shall not work through the whole course of their actions, since a whole life would not be enough for such writing."³³⁸

In the *History of the Monks of Syria* or the *Religious History (Ascetic Life)*, Theodoret examines the ascetic life in terms of order and harmony. He explains, "Although the (*demonic*) enemies have an invisible nature, they could not master a visible body subject to the necessities of nature; for its charioteer and musician and helmsman by holding the reins well induced the horses to run in proper order, by striking the strings of the senses in rhythm made them produce sound that was perfectly harmonious, and by moving the rudder skillfully put an end to the blows of the billows and the blast of the winds."³³⁹ Like the divine craftsman who orders the elements of the world, the ascetic orders his own internal elements, aligning them to avoid discord. The image of turning one's rudder in order to sail with the wind supports Theodoret's argument that the visible body only struggles when it goes against the natural harmonies created by God. This beauty of internal harmony in the ascetic life, he argues, is often besieged by

³³⁸ He continues, "Instead, we shall narrate a selection from the life and actions of each and display through this selection the character of the whole life, and then proceed to another....The account will proceed in narrative form, not following the rules of panegyric but forming a plain tale of some few facts." Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Prologue 8, p. 7.

³³⁹ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Prologue, 6, p. 6.

worldly circumstances that require the ascetic to engage with disordered humanity.³⁴⁰

Using Theodoret's image one could envision the ascetic sailing with the wind in the midst of many misdirected and struggling ships fighting against the wind. And yet, the order so intrinsic to the ascetic life had the possibility of quickly becoming compromised.³⁴¹

Retribution is a prevalent theme in early Byzantine hagiography. In many instances, it is the very reason a text is called hagiographical. By claiming God's action through or in conjunction with the holy person, literature that would have otherwise been considered historical narrative is diverted into the hagiographical category. In every instance of comeuppance there is an interesting, and, at times uneasy, conflation of God's power with human concerns. Both work together to harmonize and order human existence.

A primary example of comeuppance and its relation to cosmic order comes from Theodoret's treatment of James of Nisibis. James is perhaps best known as the saint who beseeched God to "grant what would benefit the churches," regarding the great

³⁴⁰ Abouzayd has a brief discussion of attacks against the hermits but stops short of explicitly connecting the theme with retribution. He relates a few of Theodoret's retributive anecdotes and states that Theodoret "took some interest in such stories," but does not develop the idea further. Shafiq Abouzayd, *Ihidayutha: Study of the Life of Singleness in the Syrian Orient from Ignatius of Antioch to Chalcedon 451 A.D.* (Aram Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies, 1993), 153-156.

³⁴¹ Theodoret's ship imagery goes even further in his discussion of providence. He explains, "For the Creator directs creation and has not left the ship of His making without a pilot, but is Himself both the shipwright and the One who planted the raw material, both causing it to grow and building the vessel, and He continues to hold the rudder. And the proof of this is the circle of so many years and the vast span of time which, far from destroying the ship, has preserved it safe and sound, revealing it not only to primitive men but to recent generations." He also uses ship imagery in 10.11. Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 1.19, 10.11.

heretic, Arius. James brings about Arius's death through prayer.³⁴² Theodoret explains in a very famous narrative:

While in a disgusting and stinking place that wretch was evacuating the refuse from his gluttony, he evacuated its receptacle as well; so with his inwards dissolved and ejected along with his excrement, the miserable creature instantly breathed his last and underwent this most shameful death; called to answer for his stinking blasphemy in a stinking place and slain by the tongue of the great James.³⁴³

In this remarkable example of comeuppance, Arius receives a fitting punishment for his crimes against the church. Theodoret offers well-crafted wordplay with his retelling of the story, comparing Arius's teaching itself to excrement.

In his section on Sapor, Theodoret similarly explores the possibility of engaging in punishment of the outsider while leaving the door open to future conversion. The text tells of Sapor, the third century Sassanian king, and his interest in sacking the city of Nisibis. Theodoret proceeds to tell the story as if it were ultimately a showdown

³⁴² As so often happens in the hagiographies, it is not simply a matter of prayer, but a particular formula for prayer which involves certain actions. In this case, James encourages his compatriots to "mortify themselves with fasting and simultaneously for seven days to beseech God to grant what would benefit the churches." These methods of procuring God's favor were deeply embedded in the psyche of the practitioner in late antiquity. Bowes explains this phenomenon: "Rituals undertaken to harm others were generally regarded as magical and roundly condemned by the ancients, but other kinds of rituals were not so clearly defined. For instance, the great recipe books of private rituals preserved in the Egyptian sands are typically termed the 'magical' papyri. Yet there is often very little to distinguish these 'magical' texts from the thousands of votives in public shrines or scrawled prayers on city walls: both were undertaken by everyone from the emperor to the lowliest slave, always at time of need, and both took as many forms as did life's hardships – from business troubles or headache, to a bug-infested house. The rituals might involve prayers, the collection and/or sacrifice of special plants or animals, or the inscription of a text on an amulet or metal sheets (*lamellae*) in which the words themselves, frequently a god's secret name or a particular combination of letters, would serve as agents of power. All of these rituals were attempts to harness and control a world saturated with divine presence by using arcane knowledge, traditional prayers, and sacrifice." Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.10; Kimberly Diane Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 45.

³⁴³ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.10.

between the Christian holy man James and the pagan Sapor.³⁴⁴ Faced with the onslaught of elephants and eventually a river redirected against the city walls, James takes action. When “they all begged the man of God to appear on the wall and rain down curses on the enemy; he agreed and went up, and seeing the innumerable host besought God to send on them a cloud of gnats and mosquitoes.”³⁴⁵ This of course sent the animals running in all directions and caused enough confusion to inhibit the attack. Theodoret explains in the next section:

I myself, in addition to this, am also filled with admiration at the way James, when applying a curse, did not ask for the introduction of thunderbolts and lightning, as the great Elijah did when each of the commanders of fifties came to him with his fifty....Therefore he did not ask for the earth to gape under them nor did he call for the army to be consumed with fire, but rather that it be wounded by those tiny creatures and, recognizing the power of God, at some later date learn piety.³⁴⁶

What does this passage tell us about providence in the ancient world? I would begin by pointing out Theodoret’s tone in the passage. His is not the concerned tone of one who

³⁴⁴ James is called upon by his city to deal with the invading army. His role as mediator of the divine and patron of the city recalls the link between language of benefaction and divinity. Schor explores this link in Theodoret: “Both gods and patrons were called “protectors” (*prostatai*), or “benefactors” (*euergetai*). Both were praised for their “favor” (*charis*), or their “generosity” (*philanthropia*). Christians like Theodoret often noted the differences between God and humanity, but they still described both God and patrons with the same words. If anything, they added to the conceptual overlap....The linguistic link between patronage and divinity was then enshrined in formal doctrines. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, philosophers asked how the distant, perfect gods could do anything for humanity. Their answer was to posit human-divine mediators. Some such mediators were forces in the unseen world, such as heroes and *daimones*. Others were divinely inspired humans, true philosophers and prophets, for example. Neoplatonists variously ranked the mediators and explained the mediation process. But all of these figures were described as advocates or as dispensers of “grace,” by people using familiar social vocabulary. By the fifth century, Christians had their own lists of mediators, including angels, prophets, apostles, martyrs, dead ascetics, and living holy men.” Adam M. Schor, *Theodoret’s People Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 48 (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2010), 182.

³⁴⁵ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.11.

feared the demise of his religion or God. He acknowledges that ultimately God is capable of maintaining a symmetry of justice that surpasses his own immediate historical perspective. Did Sapor deserve death? Perhaps, but it was not something that Theodoret felt he could question. From his perspective, it was not necessary to kill Sapor because a greater plan was undoubtedly at work. In this instance we see the phenomenal power of God at work, but with a softened edge of retribution. God's goal was not simply to destroy Sapor for his pagan lifestyle or threatening of Christian lives, but, from Theodoret's perspective, to allow for his eventual conversion and possible restoration to the Christian community and perhaps even God.

In another section of his work, Theodoret tells the story of James of Nisibis being duped by a group of fraudulent mourners. Asking for money to bury their friend, James helps them by praying for the man's soul and asking God to count him worthy of the choir of the righteous. At his prayer, the man's soul left his body, effecting death. When his friends realized he was dead they quickly returned to James explaining the situation and begging for forgiveness. James responds by restoring the man to life. In his commentary, Theodoret relates this deception to the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. He has no problem relating the power of the apostle to the power of James, but has to account for the implacable harshness of the apostle, since James graciously brought the man back to life. About this he explains, "while the divine Apostle did not release the dead from their misfortune – for terror was needed in the first stage of proclaiming salvation – James, who was full of the grace of an Apostle, both applied chastisement as the occasion demanded and then swiftly revoked it, since he knew this

³⁴⁶ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.13.

was what would benefit the wrongdoers.”³⁴⁷ In this ‘economic’ manner Theodoret justifies the harshness of the Apostle vis-à-vis the mild actions of the saint. This story in particular should give the reader pause concerning the Origenian theological position. Whereas Theodoret writes that James returned the man to life, we can see a flouting of any retributive model that was at work in the Old or New Testaments. Perhaps God had been retributive in the stories of old, like the case of Ananias and Sapphira, but he was not interested in maintaining the same level of harsh retribution that was exemplified in so many ancient stories. Instead, Theodoret’s God was a God who was interested in pedagogical initiatives on the part of the holy ascetic. His job was to teach and correct, allowing for a significant amount of forgiveness and, hopefully, eventual restoration to God’s community or kingdom. A second Origenian aspect that is pertinent in this story is the manner of reading scripture. Although we might expect to hear an allegorical read of Ananias and Sapphira and the harshness with which the Apostle responds to their lie, snuffing out their lives, we instead hear Theodoret’s simple and literal reading of the account. His description of the event makes sense of the harsh retribution along the lines of it being an earlier time in which God’s will required harsh lessons to teach the community. That time was not this one, however, and Theodoret’s stories aim to show the reader this fact.

This raises the question of why Theodoret would only be partially disposed to the theology of Origen. I would argue that the contemporaneous nature of Theodoret’s writing with the first Origenist fallout, disallowed any type of scriptural reading that favored the symbolic over the literal. Moreover, his own penchant for restoration is

³⁴⁷ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.9.

always couched in a harsh phenomenal action of retribution. James kills the man who fooled him, but then brings him back to life. Sapor is allowed to live, only after being humiliated and defeated by the holy man. One wonders whether James's judgment was misplaced? His sparing of Sapor likely cost Nisibis thousands of lives. On the other hand, his death wish was reserved for a fellow Christian, Arius, who was on the way to reconciliation with the Church. In both instances, James exemplifies a comeuppance that is swift and faithful to his design, if not completely congruent case to case.³⁴⁸ His closeness to God appears to conflate the source of power utilized in his judgment. It appears to always come from God, but it is contingent on the holy man's adjuration.

Theodoret appears to be something of a hybrid in the transition from a culture of theological understanding that was simultaneously persecuted and growing, to a culture in which Christianity enjoyed a position of prestige and power unparalleled by other religious movements. His literature tells the story of a God who acted in far greater power with far quicker results, exploiting his interest in the temporal world. It was a return to the stories of old, where holy men had power to heal and curse, and yet it stopped short of the harsher aspects of the New and Old Testaments. We can wonder why Theodoret's own leaning was toward the restorative aspect of this theology? Did he value Origen's teachings? Or was he simply soft when it came to God's retribution?

The connection between Origen and Theodoret is somewhat of a mystery. Some, like Robert Hill, have argued for his influence, citing the tradition of the school of Antioch, even if he does not directly acknowledge Origen as a source.³⁴⁹ Heidl has

³⁴⁸ By "design" I am acknowledging the influence of the author, Theodoret, in his subject.

³⁴⁹ He states, "Clearly, in the composition of his *Commentary*, Theodoret had more on his desk

argued for Theodoret's commentary on Genesis as a direct line of connection from Origen through Theodoret to Novatian.³⁵⁰ The case for direct influence is complicated by the fact that many early theologians utilized exegetical styles of previous theologians, at times even mimicking their opponents' styles. This makes the argument for reliance based on usage of scripture, a rather thin argument.³⁵¹

Theodoret ends up playing a significant role in the middle of the sixth century when the anti-Origenist faction and their enemies jockey for imperial support from Justinian. As explained in greater detail in the chapter on Origen, the Three Chapters were a collection of writings by the prominent "two-nature," Syrian theologians Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ibas of Edessa, and Theodoret of Cyrrhos.³⁵² Justinian's hope was to unite the Monophysites with the Eastern Chalcedonians, both of whom were strongly Cyrilline, over the posthumous condemnation of the Syrian opponents of Cyril.³⁵³ Hombergen argues that in Justinian's pre-synod letter, "Origen was played off against Theodore of Mopsuestia, but also, and especially, Evagrius against Theodoret."³⁵⁴ The sides were being populated and the lines of division drawn. Bishops

than the biblical text in its various forms, even if he was prepared to identify the latter sources more openly." Theodoret of Cyrus, *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Psalms* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 18.

³⁵⁰ György Heidl, *The Influence of Origen on the Young Augustine: a Chapter of the History of Origenism*, (Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies; 19) (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 254–261.

³⁵¹ If the usage of scripture in similarly unique ways gives us an indication of reliance, Hill's work on the Antiochene "school" supports its treatment of scriptural exegesis as something distinguishable from "other schools." Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 253.

³⁵² "Three Chapters Controversy" in McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 331.

³⁵³ "Three Chapters Controversy" in McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 331.

³⁵⁴ Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 318–319.

would soon either find themselves on a side, or jump to another, depending on their circumstances.³⁵⁵ In Justinian's *ekthesis* the first part was composed of the *Kephalaia gnostica* from Evagrius. The second part contained the refutation of the Evagrian-Origenist speculations. Hombergen notes that the remarkable aspect is that this refutation is comprised "almost exclusively of quotations precisely from Theodoret of Cyrus."³⁵⁶ Hombergen argues that this was a strategy employed by the Anti-Origenists who were in support of Theodoret of Cyrrhos and the Three Chapters. Theodore Ascidas, defending Origen, had used his political power to push forward an attack on the Three Chapters, which resulted in an imperial edict.³⁵⁷ The anti-Origenists engaged in a campaign defending the Three Chapters from Theodore Ascidas, but when it failed, they dissociated their party from it, instead choosing to focus on Origen, but utilize Theodoret's writings to support the evidence against Evagrius in the *anathemata*.³⁵⁸ In this way Theodoret is both utilized and condemned. His writings against Cyril of Alexandria are the focus of the thirteenth of the fourteen *anathemata* which were promulgated against the three chapters.³⁵⁹ Justinian struck a balance, including "some approved passages" from the anti-Origenist *libellus*, in his own letter to the pre-synod on Origen, Evagrius and Didymus.³⁶⁰

The result of these political maneuverings is a rather confused perspective on what

³⁵⁵ The changing of sides in support of other theologians was a well documented occurrence. McGuckin points out Jerome's earlier switch of support. McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, "Origenist Crises," p. 164. Hombergen notes numerous "conversions" in footnote 320. Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 322.

³⁵⁶ Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 320.

³⁵⁷ Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 321.

³⁵⁸ Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 321.

³⁵⁹ Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, fn. 409, p. 224.

³⁶⁰ Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 322.

was really at stake. Was it simply political factions at work on the Emperor and hoping to gain political ground? There is no question that much could be gained by being in the Emperor's camp, or rather, having the Emperor in yours.³⁶¹ Throughout these deliberations one gets the sense that Justinian, like previous emperors, was more concerned with peaceful prosperity in his empire, than he was with delineating the right theological answer to any number of emerging conflicts.³⁶² We might support this notion with his hiring of John of Ephesus, a well-known Monophysite, to handle his conversion of the pagans in Syria.³⁶³

For our purposes in thinking about Theodoret's relationship to Origen, we are left with a rather uneasy mixture of direct support coupled with direct refutation. This is not, however, atypical. Even Origen's most faithful disciples, such as Gregory of Nazianzus or Evagrius radically alter their master's work. Given the vast amount of literature both wrote, and the distance of time between them – let alone the historical developments in that time period – it would be easy to find support for both cases. Indeed, the support mustered from Theodoret's writings against Evagrius were focused on proving his reliance on the philosophers Pythagoras, Plato and Plotinus.³⁶⁴ A closer look at Theodoret's actual theologies, as worked out in the hagiographical texts and commentary will give us a better handle on where he stood in relation to his "school"

³⁶¹ It seems as though Justinian's allegiance moved toward whichever direction the most recent party pushed – offering libelli against the Origenists and then against the Three Chapters.

³⁶² One thinks of Constantine's continual push for unity at Nicaea 325.

³⁶³ For more on this see the chapter on John of Ephesus.

³⁶⁴ Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, fn. 315, p. 320. See also Franz Diekamp, *Die Origenistischen Streitigkeiten Im Sechsten Jahrhundert Und Das Fünfte Allgemeine Concil* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1899), 95–96.

and the remarkably influential writings of Origen.³⁶⁵

Theodoret makes some distinction between reading the Old Testament and reading the New Testament. These are different entities from his perspective. For one, God acted with an intensity that was not present after Christ's arrival. He tells another story of James, who was traveling in Persia, the frontier empire which abutted the Roman empire near Nisibis, when he came upon some girls who were washing their clothes in a stream near a spring. Rather than reflect modesty, the girls stared at James "with brazen looks and eyes dead to shame," and refused to let down their tucked-up clothing as the holy man passed.³⁶⁶ James, the consummate educator, sees this as an opportunity to correct. Rather than lecturing the young women about modesty, he decides to "display God's power opportunely" through a miracle.³⁶⁷ He curses the spring, which dries up the stream and then proceeds to curse the girls with premature grey hair. The girls, who now looked like "young trees decked in spring with leaves of autumn," ran into town to tell of the situation.³⁶⁸ The townspeople beg James to reverse the sentence and he agrees, returning the spring to working order. When the girls do not return, however, "he let the punishment stand, as a lesson in self-control, a reason

³⁶⁵ I struggle with the notion of "school" in attributing theological positions to individuals centuries apart and under very different worldly influences. I am reminded of Adam Becker's argument concerning the interest we have as historians in applying the moniker "school" to various movements. Becker critiques the employment of "a school paradigm either to condemn it [the School of the Persians] as a bastion of heresy or to laud it as a besieged stronghold of orthodoxy." Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, Divinations (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 61.

³⁶⁶ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.4.

³⁶⁷ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.4.

³⁶⁸ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.4.

for good behavior, and a perpetual and clear reminder of the power of God.”³⁶⁹

Theodoret takes the opportunity of James’s encounter with the girls to examine the possibility that the holy man could have been harsher in his judgment. He reminds the reader of Elisha and the bears in 2 Kings 2:24, and states that by “applying a harmless correction that involved only a slight disfigurement he gave them a lesson in both piety and good behavior...while possessing the same power [of Elisha], he performed what accorded with the gentleness of Christ and the new covenant.”³⁷⁰ God’s power to correct and order social interactions is accessed and deployed easily from his holy man, James, and not in the vengeful manner of an Old Testament instance, but rather with gentleness. Theodoret’s saints act with power in immediacy, but are also prone to reverse their judgments in the interest of converting souls and teaching lessons about the gentleness of Christ.

Theodoret’s concern is always for the holy person’s representation of the divine truths in “real accuracy,” but also in real palatability.³⁷¹ He states, “for the initiates of the sanctuary of the spirit know the munificence of the Spirit and what miracles he works in men through that agency of men, drawing the faithless to a knowledge of God by the mighty working of prodigies.”³⁷² Those who disbelieve his stories, will not “believe either in the truth of what took place through Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and considers a myth the working of miracles that took place through the sacred

³⁶⁹ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.4.

³⁷⁰ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.5.

³⁷¹ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 8.

³⁷² Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Prologue 10, p. 8.

Apostles.”³⁷³ Theodoret obviously believed in a literal reading of scripture. He was not interested in questioning whether God’s power was really capable of rendering apostolic miracles and feats of holy prophets. This is evident in his hagiography, which is continually geared toward the phenomenal and immediate acts of power in the world. When he speaks of how this power is apportioned to the holy person, however, we get a bit of connection to an Origenian concept, that those who were capable of deeper connection to God, the holy spirit would show greater gifts of knowledge, and in Theodoret’s case, power. He states that the agency of the Spirit in this capacity is reliant, however, on the individual’s piety, giving “greater gifts to those with more perfect resolve.”³⁷⁴

Julian Saba

When Julian hears of the trouble that his namesake, the Emperor Julian, is making for his fellow Christians, the holy man is moved to action. In a similar manner to James of Nisibis’s disposal of Arius through seven days of prayer, Julian takes a full ten days of prayer before he returns in a rather satisfied manner to his followers. Theodoret relates that Julian’s mood changed and he immediately concluded his prayer being “manifestly buoyant in his thoughts, for he showed a face beaming with delight.”³⁷⁵ Theodoret is reluctant in this instance to attribute Julian’s death to Julian Saba’s prayers, although it is clear that they are somehow connected here. Julian Saba remarks, “The present occasion, my friends...is one for gladness and delight; for the

³⁷³ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*. Prologue 10, p.8.

³⁷⁴ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Prologue 10, p. 8.

impious man has ceased (to use the expression of Isaiah), and paid a penalty worthy of his presumption."³⁷⁶ He goes on to state, "This is why I am rejoicing, as I see the churches he made war upon exulting, and observe that the miscreant has received no assistance from the demons he honored."³⁷⁷ It is hard to not read some type of *Schadenfreude* here, in Julian's rejoicing over the emperor's getting his due, and not receiving help in his time of need. There is certainly some contrast to be noted between Julian and Arius on the one hand, and Sapor on the other. It appears that Theodoret's monks repay those who are too far gone with intense retribution, however, for those who have a chance of conversion he allows for a softer educational form of punishment. In the end of this section, Theodoret withholds direct attribution – even though he leaves the door open to that interpretation – of Julian's death to the monk's prayers, instead calling it a "foreknowledge" that Julian "enjoyed at the slaying of this impious man."³⁷⁸ We should not overlook the connection Theodoret makes between the Christian joy these monks enjoyed in the downfall of the enemy. It was a beautiful outlook on life, one that saw the ordering of the cosmos according to God's and Theodoret's monks' plans.

In a later section, Julian is called upon to deal with a man named Asterius, who "was craftily advocating falsehood and using artifice against the truth."³⁷⁹ Julian calls on his fellow opponents of Asterius to have confidence and pray. Once again, after entreating God, Asterius receives an illness which causes his death one day before a

³⁷⁵ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 2.14, p. 30.

³⁷⁶ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 2.14, p. 30.

³⁷⁷ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 2.14, p. 30.

³⁷⁸ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 2.14, p. 30.

festival in which he was going to address a crowd and promulgate his heretical stance.

Animals

Comeuppance is not strictly limited to human beings in the stories of Theodoret. On several occasions the holy person takes the opportunity to “deal” with an unwanted creature which has encroached on the holy person’s territory. When Julian was out for one of his normal six-mile walks in the desert, he and his companion come across a snake.³⁸⁰ Julian later explains that when the serpent came upon him to devour him, he made the sign of the cross with his finger and it died.³⁸¹

A similar trope occurs in the story of Marcianus when he is praying in his cell. A serpent makes its way down the wall to bite the holy man. Eusebius, Marcianus’s charge, cries out in fear. Again, the serpent succumbs to the power of the sign of the cross. In this instance it is accompanied by the breath of Marcianus, which caused a dissipating reaction akin to burning.³⁸² The serpents, or other animals that get in the way of the holy person’s everyday work meet the same fate as those humans who intentionally hinder the holy actors.

Action without anger

Theodoret’s retributive schema is both harsh and restorative. The example of

³⁷⁹ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 2.21, p. 34.

³⁸⁰ The text states “fifty stades.” Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 2.4, p. 25. See also Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, fn. 3, p. 35.

³⁸¹ This is in sharp contrast to a later monk named Limnaeus, who was bitten ten times by the snake he met. Instead of applying the sign of the cross to the snake, he applies the sign to his wounds. Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 22.5.

David, one who lives his life without anger, challenges the paradigm of the monk who acted with immediate power in troubling situations. According to Theodoret, David is able to lead his flock of one hundred and fifty men for forty-five years without any wrath or anger.³⁸³ Relating his own fascination with the man, Theodoret travels to meet him in order to give a first hand account.

In the midst of Theodoret's conversation with Abba David, a subordinate leader of the monastery interrupts the guests' conversation on philosophy and the evangelical life, berating David and saying, "his gentleness was harmful to everyone and calling his consummate philosophy not forbearance but folly."³⁸⁴ Theodoret explains that David's ability to stave anger while faced with the insolence of the man who was second in command of his monastery was proof of his "gentleness of soul."³⁸⁵ It is difficult to square a passage such as this with the broader retributive flavor of Theodoret's examples. The cool tempered superior doesn't engage in retribution like the numerous holy men who precede him in Theodoret's account. One might venture a guess that Theodoret was intent on displaying the spectacular power of the ascetic. To not beat or chastise a subordinate monk for such an affront would have been unthinkable in the rule-oriented communities that dotted the Syrian hills. Any abbot who could show such impressive restraint was worth a small section in the wider collection.³⁸⁶ On the other

³⁸² Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 3.7, p. 40.

³⁸³ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 4.9, pp. 53-54.

³⁸⁴ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 4.10.

³⁸⁵ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 4.10-11.

³⁸⁶ One might posit that this lack of retribution was more associated with being inside versus outside the community. Placing this model on the story of Arius and James brings up some interesting problems regarding insider/outsider status. Arius is of course a Christian, albeit a heretical one from Theodoret's perspective, while he was outside communion at the time of his death, he was on his way to some form of reconciliation. How genuine or meaningful this

hand, it could also further support the notion that Theodoret was caught somewhere in the middle of retribution, and restoration coupled with forgiveness.

In the seventh book of Theodoret's history, we read of a remarkable situation in which a dead man rises up to accuse his attacker. In the story a man witnesses a trader amassing riches by selling his wares at a village fair named Imma. As the wealthy trader leaves for his journey, the robber attacks him and murders him with a knife. The story has very little to do with the holy monk Palladios until the robber places the body in front of the door of the holy man, Palladios. Upon finding the body of the dead trader and a throng of people – including the robber – shouting accusations at him, Palladios calls upon God to help sort the injustice out. Theodoret relates:

Surrounded by such a crowd, the wonderful man, looking up to heaven and passing beyond it in his thought, besought the Master to expose the falsehood of the calumny and make the hidden truth manifest. After this prayer, he took the right hand of the outstretched man: "Tell us, young man," he said, "who struck you this blow? Point out the perpetrator of the crime and free the innocent from this wicked calumny." Word responded to word, gesture to gesture: the man sat up, looked round the people present, and pointed with his finger at the murderer. A cry went up from everyone, astounded at the miracle and deploring the calumny that had been committed; stripping the murderer, they even found the knife, still red with blood, and also the money that had caused the murder. The godly Palladios, who was already remarkable, naturally became, as a result of this, still more remarkable, for the miracle was sufficient to show the man's familiar access to God."³⁸⁷

God's justice is ultimately worked out through Palladios's ability to see past the finite limits of humanity. He first succeeds in this by "passing beyond" heaven in his mind and secondly by perceiving the possibility that God, who surely works in the space

reconciliation was to Arius, Constantine or the other critically engaged leaders of the Church is up for debate. What can be said here is that these examples give no clear model for retribution in Theodoret's accounts.

³⁸⁷ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 7.3.

beyond human life, might use the departed for one more purpose. In this case, it is the pointing out of the murderer by the hand of the murdered. It is left to us to wonder why this murderer chose to pin such an egregious crime on the holy man. Was the holy man the only one who did not have an alibi? If, like most monks, he had little interaction with the outside world, he would also have little possibility of finding someone to corroborate his innocence. What Theodoret shows, and the murderer clearly was about to learn, was that holy men had a “familiar access to God” that was enviable in a loosely ordered rural society such as Syria.³⁸⁸ There is no mention of what happened to the murderer, but we can presume that he was punished according to his crime.

When Theodoret treats the history of the famous Aphrahat from Persia, we are faced with a story that, like so many hagiographies, sounds too good to be true. Akin to the unbelievable rebuke that the Emperor’s accept from St. Antony, the Emperor Valens is “out-argued” by Aphrahat when he questions his role as a holy man who should be sequestered but has chosen to travel to the military drill-ground to meet with the “adherents of the Trinity.”³⁸⁹ Aphrahat replies that similar to a young girl who helps to extinguish the fire at her father’s burning house, he too has chosen to come to the aid of his Father’s house since it was Flavian who started this fire. He rebukes Valens, “If you blame me for deserting my solitude, blame yourself for having cast these flames into the house of God and not me for being compelled to extinguish them.”³⁹⁰ Of course, one seriously questions the validity of any impertinent remark from a monk to an Emperor. While the monk occupied an extraordinary class of individuals who were significantly

³⁸⁸ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 7.3.

³⁸⁹ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 8.8.

freer because they were not beholden to any patronage-oriented social strictures, this class also had little protection from a simple and expedient execution.³⁹¹ The monk speaking up to power is a literary trope that can be seen as early as Diogenes of Sinope asking Alexander the Great to move from blocking his sunlight in Diogenes Laertius's writings.³⁹² The story of Aphrahat is worth noting in relation to the later stories of Habib in John of Ephesus, where the monk is questioned concerning his motive in coming out of the monastery to help the cheated land owners.³⁹³ We can distinguish John's later story from Theodoret's in the social change that the monastic institution underwent from Valens to Justinian. Whereas in this story the monk's political and legal role is questioned by the emperor, we can posit that given Justinian's proximity to John of Ephesus, the later story of the monks working in society as legal representatives was now wholly sanctioned by the emperor.

The reader further faces an interesting question regarding the notion of retributive justice in the case of Valens. Why were James of Nisibis and Julian Saba able to squelch the lives of a heretic and emperor, but not Aphrahat? Something of the power that these holy persons were able to wield seems to have disappeared when it comes to Aphrahat. It is hard not to attribute this lack of power to the unwieldy nature

³⁹⁰ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 8.8.

³⁹¹ On the ascetics' relative freedom in the face of social rules, see Francis, *Subversive Virtue*. In contrast one might consider the swift murder of the six high-born cousins and two half-uncles of Constantius in 337, at Constantine's death. Although there was far more impetus to protect the rule of the bloodline than the honor of the Emperor, one could hardly imagine an Emperor with enough power to ask for the heads of any followers, putting up with too much insurrection from a dirty old ascetic.

³⁹² Alexander says, "'Ask of me any book you like.' To which he [Diogenes] replied, 'Stand out of my light.'" Diogenes Laertius, *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Volume II, Books 6-10*, trans. R. D. Hicks (Loeb Classical Library, 1925), 6.38, p. 41.

³⁹³ See chapter on John of Ephesus.

of Valens's power. With almost a fifteen-year reign, he could hardly be slotted into a hagiographical account like Julian Saba's defeat of Julian, who reigned not even two years. There is no doubt that Nicene leaning monks tried to pray the Arian Valens away, but their entreaties were less successful in this case.

A delicately described narrative follows the relationship of Aphrahat and the Emperor Valens in Theodoret's work. Although the holy man was unable to defeat Valens intellectually, a couple of stories serve to explain perhaps why Aphrahat was capable of speaking with such impudence and not receiving punishment. It seems that Valens was alerted to the power of Aphrahat when one of his trusted eunuchs fell upon an ill-fated death. The eunuch, who had persecuted Aphrahat "even to the extent of threatening him with death," jumped into a pool of boiling water, thinking it had already been mixed with cool water for his bath.³⁹⁴ He boiled to death before anyone found him. Theodoret relates that "as a result fear fell on the emperor and on all those in arms against piety; the story echoed throughout the city of how that wretch had paid the penalty for his insolence against Aphrahat, and all continued to hymn the God of Aphrahat. This prevented the man of God being exiled, despite the pressure of his enemies; for in his terror the emperor rejected those who advised this and held the man in awe."³⁹⁵

In a subsequent story, Aphrahat healed the emperor's treasured horse when it was stricken with a disease. The horse handler, who had been entrusted to correct the horse's disease, brought the problem to Aphrahat and he made the sign of the cross

³⁹⁴ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 8.9, p. 77.

³⁹⁵ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 8.10.

over some water that they raised from the well. The water was fed to the horse and Aphrahat took the occasion to consecrate oil and anoint the horse's belly. The handler attempted to keep his entreaty to Aphrahat a secret, but Valens eventually gets it out of him. The emperor "agreed that the man [Aphrahat] was remarkable...but persisted in raging against the Only-begotten until he became a casualty of a fire lit by barbarians and did not even receive a burial like servants or beggars."³⁹⁶ The holy vengeance in which Theodoret's characters engage so freely seems stunted or at least complicated in these stories. Whether this is Theodoret trying to stretch the history to match the holy man's actions or simply a less compelling and more nuanced proof of God's retributive action is unclear. Perhaps it is a mixture of these two. Every hagiographer navigates the uneasy line between history and lore. Theodoret's own interest in dealing with prominent figures such as Emperors and at the same time struggling to meld their well-known histories with the tales of God's providence makes for a variable output in these story lines. What one expects to occur often does not and it leaves the hagiographer grappling—as in so many instances above—for reasons why God's justice gets worked out the way it does. God was starting to make his actions evident to Christians everywhere through immediate retribution, and yet the punishments are not presented as a cohesive narrative. Unlike Origen, who was saddled with a worldview that could only claim the gradual spread of Christianity as proof of God's providence, Theodoret could claim Christian emperors and monastic miracles, but only so far as the historical accounts allowed. He would have certainly wanted Valens's reign to have ended earlier than it did, but his hagiographical accounts show God working in the lives of the

³⁹⁶ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 8.12.

monks regardless of who was in power. It was this complicated perspective on providence that makes Theodoret so interesting and important for the broader developments in hagiographical literature and the burgeoning crisis over Origenian theological issues.³⁹⁷

The partial nature of this providence is directly related to scriptural interpretation for Theodoret. This is most evident in a section from Aphrahat's chapter where he details the unhappy situation that "the people of God" (Nicens) found themselves in after Jovian's short reign.³⁹⁸ Theodoret explains:

The people of God, lamenting these unseasonable ills, sang the psalm of David, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Sion." But the rest of the song no longer applied to them; for Aphrahat, Flavian, and Diodore would not allow the harps of teaching to be hung up on the willows, nor permit them to say, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in an alien land?" Instead, on the hills and on the plains, in the city and in the suburbs, in their homes and in the squares they sang the Lord's song continually. For they had learnt from David that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." Again they had heard the same prophet saying, "Bless the Lord, all his works, in every place of his dominion." They had also heard the inspired Paul urging "that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger and quarreling." And the Master himself, speaking with the Samaritan woman, had made distinctly the following prophecy: "Amen, I say to you, woman," he said, "that the hour is coming and now is, when neither in this place nor in Jerusalem but in every place will they worship the Father." After this teaching, they persevered in bearing witness both at home and in the square, "in public and from house to house," in the apostolic phrase, and, like excellent generals, in arming their own men and shooting down their opponents.³⁹⁹

Theodoret's citation of Psalms 137 stops short of the passage in verses eight and nine

³⁹⁷ Another important point of connection occurs in the question of bodily resurrection. Theodoret explains that if one's body, "enjoyed the use of speech," it would ask not to be separated from its mate, the soul, which God joined to it above. Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*. 9.30 p.129.

³⁹⁸ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 8.5-6, pp. 74-75

³⁹⁹ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 8.6, p. 75

that state, “O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!”⁴⁰⁰ We can, however, hear this happiness in the voice of Julian when his namesake is killed in battle. The retributive nature of this psalm is important for Theodoret, even if the outcome should prove different. Rather than lamenting the loss of Jerusalem – which defeat Theodoret does not accept as applicable – he and his community were hopeful that God was going to act in power, bringing all of the world into proper worship of the Father. Theodoret connects scripture in particular ways that he finds support his broader themes of God’s providence being slowly unfolded in the cosmos. In a sense this is a reading of scripture that directly connects his community to those Israelite communities of old. At the same time, he adjusts the picture when necessary to make room for a new chapter concerning God’s power in action. To what extent this is an allegorical reading of scripture is debatable. He certainly thinks the spirit gives deeper insight into the message of scripture to those who are more fully engaged or closer to God. The power of God also imitates this knowledge, allowing for remarkable feats by those who count themselves most clearly aligned with his will.

In chapter fourteen of Theodoret’s history one reads the story of a monk who practiced his holy life inside the village without any loss of efficacy. On one occasion, the holy man Maësymas learns that the village leader, Letoius, was causing hardship for the peasants by demanding crops from them with “more severity than was needed.”⁴⁰¹ Maësymas attempts to correct the situation by exhorting him to kindness. In

⁴⁰⁰ NRSV Psalms 137:8-9

⁴⁰¹ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 14.4.

the end, however, it takes more than verbal admonishment to change Letoius's ways. As he climbs into his carriage filled with goods, he finds that his muleteer is unable to make the carriage move. Peasants from the town attempt to help him move the wheels but they appear to be stuck as if "fastened with iron and lead."⁴⁰² One of Letoius's friends (εὐνοστέρων) alerts him to the holy man's curse.⁴⁰³ Given the broader context of Theodoret's stories, it is interesting that the language used here is of the holy man putting a curse on the village leader. In so many instances throughout this collection the holy man is working in the opposite role. People come to have curses removed from their lovers as well as curses in the forms of demon possession.⁴⁰⁴ Letoius takes his friend's advice and falls prostrate at Maësymas's feet "clasping his dirty rags" and begging "him to relax his anger."⁴⁰⁵ In another fascinating shift of power, Maësymas accepts the request, "transmitting it to the Master" and the wheels were released from their bonds.⁴⁰⁶

Maësymas operates as a curse giver perhaps as much as his holy compatriots act as curse lifters. Of significance in this example is the fact that there is no mention of where the curse derives. We can presume that Maësymas called on God to curse the carriage's wheels and make them stick. Theodoret does not mention this, but given Maësymas's appeal to God to lift the curse, it would seem that he only acts as the

⁴⁰² Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 14.4.

⁴⁰³ Price brings this across as "well-wisher," while Canivet, et al., hold "amis." Theodoret, *Histoire Des Moines de Syrie: Histoire Philothée*, trans. Pierre Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen, vol. 2, Sources Chrétiennes no 257 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1979), 14.

⁴⁰⁴ There are demons who are forced by "magical charms" into possession. As well as cursed lovers such as the husband of a noblewoman who "had been bewitched by some magical enchantment and became hostile towards the wife yoked to him in lawful wedlock," Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 13.11, 8.13.

⁴⁰⁵ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 14.4.

intermediary here. The language of him “transmitting,” (προσενεγκὼν) Letoius’s contrition to God would suggest that it was ultimately God who decided the outcome. At the same time, if Maësymas had not transmitted the message, would the curse have been lifted? Again, we marvel at the role these holy persons play in the economy of punishment, and are intrigued by Theodoret’s power coupled with reversal and restoration.

All of the other curses that are mentioned in Theodoret’s *History* seem to come from magical sources or some other demonic connection. Is there some overlap or slippage between the curses of God and the curses of man and demons? If one accepts the fact that humans were incapable of conjuring up these magical occurrences without the help of some supernatural being, then we are left with a model of action that is contingent on the same pool of divine or otherworldly power. The practitioners of magic call on their powers and Theodoret’s monks call on God.⁴⁰⁷

Many of the miraculous actions that occur surrounding the holy man, fall into a category of hindrance, incapacitation or crippling. As in the example of the carriage wheels that simply will not move, God seems to act in a way that is provisional rather than unalterable. Even though some acts seem quite absolute, at times even these are reversed, as in the case of the young man who while feigning death had his life snuffed

⁴⁰⁶ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 14.4.

⁴⁰⁷ Far more could be said here regarding the importance of magic in Late Antiquity and the role it had in challenging and developing the power of the Ascetic. See Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” 96; *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, *Late Antique Archaeology* v. 6 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 401–476; *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, *Groningen Studies in Cultural Change* v. 1 (Leuven; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2002); David Frankfurter, “The Perils of Love: Magic and Countermagic in Coptic Egypt,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 3/4 (July 1, 2001): 480–500; Mary Depew, “Reading Greek Prayers,” *Classical Antiquity* 16, no. 2 (October 1, 1997): 229–258.

out and then returned. It is more often the case that the holy man's interests are protected by less final means.

An excellent example of this comes to us in the story of Aceptsimas, who was well known for his taciturn behavior. He took his privacy to an even deeper level than his peers by creating an oblique hole in his cell by which he would receive his food. It was common for a monk to limit interaction to such an extent as receiving sustenance on every other day – or more rarely – from someone who would leave it for them or hand it through a small hole in their door.⁴⁰⁸ Aceptsimas was so careful not to interact with others that he would only draw water once a week and then only in the dark. On one occasion a nearby shepherd saw the form moving in the dark and worried that it might be a wolf – since he was doubled over with heavy iron and moving close to the ground – picked up his slingshot to end the creature's life. In this instant his hand lost all movement and he was incapable of slinging the stone. After the man had drawn the water and returned, the shepherd realized his mistake. One might consider the story over with this line, but Theodoret goes on to explain that the man "repaired to the retreat of virtue" in order to relate what happened and "beg forgiveness."⁴⁰⁹ For the shepherd this was clearly a sin that needed rectification.

The modern reader wonders why this action would even be considered a sin? The shepherd did nothing malicious; he acted out his role with perfect respect to his occupation. Two things might signal the intensity of the situation. On one hand, it is

⁴⁰⁸ Many monks participated in extreme dietary practices. Theodoret relates that Macedonius ate barley only for forty years until he became ill and knew that the only way to continue his battle for the faith would be to take some bread for his health. Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 13.3.

possible that the shepherd was worried that he had offended the holy man. Indeed, it was not uncommon for a person to fear these holy men.⁴¹⁰ If his hand went lame, clearly God knew and perhaps even the holy man knew. No one wanted to be on the wrong side of the holy man. On the other *hand*, it is possible that Theodoret is eager to show us an economy of holiness that is affected by behavior whether intentional or not. God's power, and its placement in the holy man, were not to be taken lightly. Even an accidental misunderstanding could be considered sin and have grave consequences.

One is reminded of the ill-fated Uzzah who reached out his hand to steady the ark of the covenant in Second Samuel chapter 6.⁴¹¹ Although he was doing his job as one who drove the oxen with his brother Ahio, his inappropriate action cost him his life. Stories such as these certainly circulated in the late antique mind. God was the Father of Jesus but he was also the vengeful God of Israel. Theodoret's work falls directly in a time of transition between these two notions. He is working with a retributive, scriptural God who acted in power and immediacy, as well as the loving Father of Jesus who was keen on forgiveness and restoration. Origen's influence was certainly felt on this restorative side, waiting to see just how God was going to bring about the salvation of a figure like Sapor. The connection goes deeper to a worldview that – as mentioned above with regard to Valens – struggled with exactly how God was going to solve the

⁴⁰⁹ Theodoret of Cyrros, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 15.2.

⁴¹⁰ See the story of Habib, where the man's "knees knocked together in fear." John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, trans. E. W. Brooks, *Patrologia Orientalis* 82 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 10.

⁴¹¹ "When they came to the threshing-floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God struck him there because he reached out his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God." NRSV 2 Sam. 6:6-7.

enigmatic situations that were facing God's people. Of course Theodoret had the benefit of writing his account from a later date, looking back on the historical developments, and yet the footing of his community was still not completely firm. Controversies raged over the nature and person of Christ throughout his life. These conflicts, regardless of their intensity, had a different flavor than the persecutions that swept the empire in Origen's life. God was slowly building his kingdom on earth, even if it seemed the wrong faction was in power at any given time. The "Jerusalem" of these Christians – related in Psalms 137 – was not lost. It was simply in a period of refinement and transformation that was completely within God's purview. And yet, things had not progressed so far as the luxurious perspective that Justinian enjoyed. Theodoret was making sense of a period of transition in the fourth and fifth century Christian Church as it slowly fleshed in the body of its skeletal power structure in the imperial realm. The bones had been set by Constantine I and Theodosius I, but the structure needed mass in order to prevent its toppling under any pressure. With regard to hagiography, the themes had shifted from martyrdom to retributive justice. God's power was becoming far more evident in the lives of the ascetic communities.

In a later segment of Aepsimas's life, he is faced with a curious onlooker who took the opportunity to climb a tree near his enclosure. Hoping to receive some perspective on how Aepsimas utilized the hours in his cell, the man instead received "the fruits of his presumption: with half his body paralysed, from the crown of his head to his feet."⁴¹² In order to circumvent another from gaining the same punishment,

⁴¹² It is interesting to note that only half of his body is paralyzed. There is a similar story in John of Ephesus about Habib's adversary. See John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 10.

Acepsimas had the tree cut down, whereupon the man's punishment was remitted. Here the holy man's program of practice was protected from someone who would examine it from the outside. The programs of holiness were always private ventures between God and man, which is why Theodoret's treatment of such is an anomaly as much as a boon to the historian. It is no surprise once again, that the man's paralysis dissipates after the tree is cut.

In the recounting of the life of Maron, Theodoret touches on an interesting aspect of his writing: that remembrance of the story is tantamount to a tomb or other physical space. In this section about the bitter war that rose between different communities over the body of the saint, Theodoret explains, "We ourselves reap his blessing even at a distance; for sufficient for us instead of his tomb is his memory."⁴¹³ The remembrance of the saint is considered equally beneficial as the physical presence of his spent earthly form because one only gains benefit through memory as reminder of how one should live a godly life. In another sense, it could be that Theodoret actually believes the memory of the saint has as much beneficial power as his physical emblems. Does the remembrance or retelling of a saint's life somehow procure the blessing of the saint in a similar manner as touching the relics? At the end of chapter twenty-five, Theodoret states, "So concluding at this point my account of these men, and asking in return for the gift of their blessing, I shall proceed to another narrative."⁴¹⁴ There is clearly some kind of economy between the hagiographer and the saint. Theodoret retells the story and asks for something in return, the gift of their blessing. Later hagiographies would

Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 15.3.

⁴¹³ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 16.4.

put a firmer emphasis on the actual physical emblems and space, but it is interesting to think about the way that Theodoret conceptualized his task in writing down these saints' lives. It was more than a simple recording of deeds, it was a crafting of *topoi*, both literary and physical that produced mnemosynary results in the life of faith.

In a related story about St. Peter The Galatian, Theodoret relates how his girdle was used in his childhood to heal disease. He notes:

For cutting his girdle in two – it was broad and long, of thick twined flax – he put one half of it round his own waist and the other half around mine. My mother often put it on me when I was ill and often on my father, and thereby expelled disease; and she herself used this remedy as a means to health. Many of her acquaintance who had discovered this constantly took the girdle to help the sick; and it everywhere gave proof of the power of his grace. Consequently, someone who took it stole it from the givers, showing no consideration to his benefactors. In this way we were deprived of the gift.⁴¹⁵

Stories such as these are not uncommon. Relics and emblems of the saints were readily circulated after death to procure various boons. What makes this an interesting section in Theodoret is his subsequent comment. He states, "After thus blazing forth and illuminating Antioch with his rays, he passed from the contest, awaiting the crown laid up for victors. I myself, who enjoyed his blessing when he was alive, beg also to enjoy it now, and so bring this account also to an end."⁴¹⁶ Hinting at the fact that perhaps the retelling of the Saint's story is akin to holding a relic in one's hand, Theodoret attaches his hope for divine favor to the conclusion. There certainly seemed to be power in revisiting these stories of holiness.

Theodoret writes of the story of Abraham, the bishop and monk of the city of

⁴¹⁴ Theodoret of Cyrros, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 25.2.

⁴¹⁵ Theodoret of Cyrros, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 9.15.

⁴¹⁶ Theodoret of Cyrros, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 9.16.

Carrhae in Mesopotamia.⁴¹⁷ Acting in a similar fashion to our monks who doled out the justice of God with confidence, Abraham spent much of his days sorting lawsuits in his town. Theodoret explains, “No wrongdoer went away victorious over justice through audacity; to the wronged party he always accorded the just man’s portion, making him invincible and stronger than the one who wanted to wrong him.”⁴¹⁸ In this interesting passage, the reader learns some of the underlying aspects of God’s judgment according to Theodoret. God would not allow someone to harm another without some justice. In this justice, especially as doled out by the holy man, God’s interest was to reverse the power dynamic so as to teach and accord retribution to the involved parties. One person would go home justified, the other would go home educated. This section seems to be a half step in the direction of the Justinianic program we see in John of Ephesus. The Bishop, who was also a monk, played the role of adjudicator in his small town.

In book twenty-one of his work, Theodoret shifts to saints that were still alive while he was writing. The first person he chose to explore was James of Cyrrhestica. After examining several aspects of his life and recounting the great works that he accomplished, Theodoret shifts the narrative to a description of his struggle against the Marcionites in Cyrrhos. Making it his primary chore, James tried “to pull...out by the root” all of the “thorns of impiety” that Marcion sowed in the territory surrounding Cyrrhos.⁴¹⁹ Theodoret is distraught over the treatment he has received in return for his vigorous correction of the local communities. He states, “But those who received these attentions from me ‘instead of loving me (in the words of the prophet) calumniated me,

⁴¹⁷ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Ch. 17, fn. 1, p. 125.

⁴¹⁸ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 17.8, p. 123.

and return it against me evil for good, and hatred for my love.’ They tried to make war invisibly by using magic spells having recourse to the cooperation of evil demons.”⁴²⁰

Theodoret goes on to explain that a wicked demon addressed him in Syriac one evening saying, “Why, Theodoret, do you make war on Marcion? Why on earth have you joined battle with him? What harm has he ever done to you? End the war, stop your hostility, or you will learn by experience how good it is to stay quiet. Know well that I would long ago have pierced you through, if I had not seen the choir of the martyrs with James protecting you.”⁴²¹

In this fascinating passage the demon acts as an agent to the Marcionite communities. This is no doubt an attempt on the behalf of the orthodox communities of Theodoret to color their opponents as practitioners of wickedness. The saints mentioned here act as protectors of the one who holds their powers. In this particular case it is intriguing to find that it is not the stories or personal relationships of the saints that protect Theodoret, but rather a few relics that hold particular power. Theodoret explains, “I realized that by ‘the choir of martyrs’ was meant the flask of oil of the martyrs, with a blessing gathered from very many martyrs, which was hung up by my bed; and under my head lay an old cloak of the great James, which for me had been stronger than any defences [sic.] of steel.”⁴²² This moment gives the reader some insight into why the bodies of the saints were fought over at their deaths. These men had real earthly powers and their personalities lived on, long after their earthly bodies had given

⁴¹⁹ Theodoret of Cyrros, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 21.15.

⁴²⁰ Theodoret of Cyrros, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 21.15.

⁴²¹ Theodoret of Cyrros, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 21.15.

⁴²² Theodoret of Cyrros, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 21.16.

up the fight.⁴²³ For all of the talk of spiritual power and commemoration in text, it is clear that the physical still held a place of centrality that soared as high as the imagination could fly it.

Near the end of the section on James of Cyrrhestica, Theodoret takes an opportunity to dispel some of the criticism that was circulating regarding James's rudeness. Given his choice to not wall himself in and keep the public out, he found it difficult to transition from meeting with pilgrims to his regularly scheduled prayer times. Theodoret relates:

I myself have had a discussion with him on this matter. I told him that some people were upset at being driven away without even a blessing. "It would be proper," I said, "for those who come for this and make a journey of many days to depart not in vexation but full of joy, to feast the ignorant with stories of your philosophy." He replied, "I did not come to the mountain for another's sake but for my own. Bearing the wounds of so many sins, I need much treatment, and because of this I beseech our Master to give me the antidotes to wickedness. How, then, would it not be absurd and utterly senseless to break the sequence of petition and make conversation with men in between?"⁴²⁴

James goes on to reason that it would be absurd for a servant to neglect his master according to his own whims. In this way he justifies his desire to ignore those who have sought him during the time of prayer.⁴²⁵ His focus is singular. In many ways it is

⁴²³ On the continuation of one's presence in the form of relics, see the passage on John the Baptist, Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 21.20.

⁴²⁴ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 21.33.

⁴²⁵ This is very similar to the monk Zebinas. Theodoret relates that "He would say but a few words to those who came in to see him, for he could not bear to draw his thought down from heaven; as soon as he was free of them, he would again address supplication as if he had been separated for not even a short time from the God of the universe." Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 24.1. On the other hand there is Asclepius, of whom it is said "at the time he was numbered with the brethren who inhabit the village, to have embraced the ascetic and disciplined life, and to have derived no harm from mixing with the multitude. Therefore, for having been prominent in each life, both the social and the eremetical, he will with good reason receive the honor of a double crowning." Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 25.1.

surprising to hear this blatant of a denouncement of altruism. Indeed, in many of Theodoret's stories about the monks his main thrust is to highlight the selfless acts of piety that promote the wellbeing of others. In support of James's behavior, Theodoret mentions, "It is characteristic of lovers to overlook everyone else and cleave to the one they cherish and love, to dream of him by night and think of him by day. It is, I think, for this reason that he is annoyed when, in the middle of the contemplation he longs for, he is prevented from being immersed in the beauty he loves."⁴²⁶

In book twenty-two Theodoret touches on a relation between the ascetic and Job, the Old Testament man of God who was put to a series of grueling tests. In telling the story of how Limnaeus met a serpent and was bitten ten times before "it had satisfied its rage," Theodoret offers an explanation of why he thinks God would allow such a thing.⁴²⁷ He explains, "I am therefore of the opinion that the God of the universe allowed the beast to rage against his sacred body in order to reveal undisguised the endurance of the godly soul. We see this same dispensation of His in the case of noble Job. He allowed him to be submerged by many and varied waves, through a wish to display to all the wisdom of the pilot. How else would we know the courage of the one and the endurance of the other, if the adversary of piety had not been given room to shoot all kinds of arrows against them? Therefore this is sufficient to teach the endurance of the man."⁴²⁸ Theodoret's struggle with God's choice in this moment is telling of his broader stance on God's providence. In this time of struggle between various factions of Christianity and the continual concern over alternating allegiances of

⁴²⁶ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 21.34.

⁴²⁷ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 22.5.

the emperors, Theodoret desires to put forth a record of how God has acted through and on behalf of his champion athletes for the faith. From the standpoint of the modern reader, it is easy to dismiss much of what Theodoret claims as folk literature written from a genuinely interested perspective.

In comparison with Job, we see a real question surfacing for the contemporaries of Theodoret. How could God, who is supremely powerful, allow one holy man to suffer while another is given the power to overcome particular adversities? Job is an excellent example here and Theodoret uses it subtly and effectively. It had always been a mystery how God chose to take action in the material and spiritual world. This case is no different. The interesting aspect here, however, is that Theodoret's predominant claim throughout his work is that God favors the holy athlete and showers blessings on those who seek him. These claims are hard to make sense of in the face of virtual abandonment.

The fact remains that Theodoret's stories are not as neat as they could or should be. Why would a God who was quick to act in so many ways forgo helping his monk who faced a lowly serpent? One might argue that the inclusion of stories that seem to run counter to his message speak to Theodoret's accuracy in recounting the events, or perhaps that it shows him to be a master of literary architecture so in tune with his future audience that he tackles incongruity to make his point all the more solid? The answer to this problem is best addressed by a look at Theodoret's own notion of Providence.

Theodoret took the time to draft an entire work on Providence, wherein he attacks

⁴²⁸ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 22.6.

the various problems that this theology raises in the lives of the believers. The text works through proofs as varied as the harmonizing beauty of the universe and God's imprint on it and everyday life, to the question of how God used the Jews in his development of the earth and Christianity in particular. Theodoret argues in his final pages of the work that Jewish opposition actually "Helped the Christian Faith."⁴²⁹

In a passage that is reminiscent of Origenian thought, Theodoret claims that God loves mankind and not merely just "the race of the descendants of Abraham."⁴³⁰ Accordingly, God has used this race to lead "all tribes to a knowledge of Himself."⁴³¹ Theodoret does not follow through to claim that all people will eventually be restored, but he does let the notion of total knowledge linger in a way that is reminiscent of Origen's reading of the passages concerning "every knee" which will bow and "every tongue" which will confess.⁴³²

In his final section, Theodoret makes a comment regarding how one should deal with those actions of providence which are overt versus those which are hidden. There is no question for Theodoret that all are ordered by God's power, it is just not yet clear for the human how these things work together in God's plan. He explains, "Reverence what can be seen of the divine plan and do not trouble yourself about what is hidden. Await a full knowledge of these things in the life to come. When we are divested of the passions we will attain to perfect knowledge. Do not imitate Adam who dared to pick forbidden fruit. Do not touch what is hidden, but wait patiently on a full knowledge of

⁴²⁹ Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 10.58 p.152.

⁴³⁰ Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 10.54 p.151.

⁴³¹ Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 10.54 p.151.

⁴³² Romans 14:11

these things in God's good time."⁴³³ Like monastic thinkers before him, Theodoret returns to the notion of Adam, but this time not for an imitation of the Edenic moment of proximity to God, but rather to caution against making the same mistakes Adam made. He tells the reader to refrain from scratching at the surface of things not revealed. Instead the Christian should accept the mysteries as part of God's plan, giving thanks for those things which are revealed and understood about God.⁴³⁴

Theodoret explores the notion of keeping the inquisitive nature of human minds under control with his likening of God's providence to the Sun. This image is also the one used by Origen in *De Principiis*, Theophilus of Antioch's *Ad Autolyicum* and Gregory of Nazianzus's *Orations*.⁴³⁵ Theodoret explains further:

For we know that those who try to look at the sun longer than necessary do not enjoy what they desire but weaken their sight and instead of deriving light from it behold darkness. The human spirit is obviously confused in the very same way. For often, misled by curiosity, it tries to discover what support the earth has, what is its foundation, on what is it upheld, or again of what nature are the highest heavens, and what exists outside the universe, but far from reaching a successful conclusion to such investigations man is filled in the end with great confusion and doubt.⁴³⁶

Human desire to understand God when it is not shown or sanctioned by God, results in confusion rather than knowledge. This is a considerable change from Origen and Gregory, who considered the philosophizing aspects of the human mind a benefit, even if they fumbled around in the darkness a bit.

In Theodoret's treatment of providence in the New Testament, he uses the

⁴³³ Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 10.62 p.154.

⁴³⁴ He states, "Do not say: What is this, or what is that? For all things were made to supply a need." Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 10.62 p.154.

⁴³⁵ *De Principiis* 1.1.6 (SC 252.98), *Ad Autolyicum* 1.2, *Orations* 28.3 (SC 250.106). Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, fn.3, p.210.

examples of Peter and John who in the midst of suffering were still able to proclaim the “gladness of soul.”⁴³⁷ Faced with torture and struggle, they chose to see it as limited to this world rather than the next on which they hoped. Theodoret explains in further detail:

But the day would not be long enough for me to collect all such statements of this great master of those who strive after perfection. If, then, those who have attained every kind of virtue and reached the summit of perfection, far from being annoyed at the storms in the sea of life, continue to rejoice as if they were borne on a favorable wind, and try not to inquire too closely into these happenings, but to sing the praises of the Pilot even when breakers surge up, gales and squalls lash them, and the sea is in a turbulent swirl, why should you, who are out of the reach of the sea and on dry land, not out on the deep, jibe at what happens, why should you praise the contestants and criticize at the same time the One who is conducting the contest? For it is proper, I take it, that those who marvel at the virtue of these contestants should also cherish their judgment. Now they regarded any misfortune endured in preaching the Gospel as the greatest blessing – slaughter, stoning, burning, affront, reviling, imprisonment, hazards on land and on sea, in cities and in the country, at the hands of friends and of strangers.⁴³⁸

Considering how this relates to Theodoret’s hagiography, we see his development of a theology that allowed for confusing signals, yet was still attuned to God’s message. The saint operated with real earthly power at times, and these were ostensibly times when God chose to have his providence exemplified in tangible ways. As in the case of James climbing up on the wall at Nisibis, God’s power was at work to stop Sapor on this occasion, but at a later date the city is overrun and many lives are lost. From Theodoret’s perspective, it is enough to highlight God’s gift of power in the first instance, while knowing enough not to start poking around in questions of why God did not act at a later date to protect this city. Theodoret, however, seems to be unable to

⁴³⁶ Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 10.2 p.135.

⁴³⁷ Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 10.10 p.138.

stop himself from raising some possibilities for how one could read the situation, offering the possibility that God hoped to convert Sapor.⁴³⁹ The model of hagiography fits neatly with his notion of providence. Moreover, it is in direct congruence with his concept of retribution. God's salvation was not simply for a chosen race, but for all who could and would choose to come under its canopy of protection. That is not to say that this canopy was always the most protective in the temporal world. The above treatment of the New Testament would prove otherwise. At the same time, it appeared to Theodoret that God was beginning to act in immediacy in ways associated with times of old. He does not hesitate to draw a direct line of comparison from James to Peter in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, or to Elisha and the bears. God was working in the world on the same trajectory that he ever was. Nothing had changed except for the type of revelation that God thought best to display in any given time period. Theodoret saw God's power at work in a way that Origen and Palladios did not, and yet he was still geared toward a similar restorative impulse in the end. God's providence was not overt, but hidden and mysterious, acting to bring about salvation in ways the human could not hope to understand.

Theodoret believed that justice would prevail, it was only a matter of time from the Christian's perspective. Along these lines he explains:

Do we see some virtuous men living in glory, honor and respect? Let us do reverence to the One who established virtue as a prize or goal, and proclaimed it as right and just. Do we see others espousing the good life with equal eagerness but not attaining to the same good name among men? Let us not be perturbed, my friend, but rather trust that they who strive earnestly for the prize of endurance will be proclaimed for so doing in the world to come, as we have said

⁴³⁸ Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 10.11 p.138-139.

⁴³⁹ See above.

in the preceding discourse. And let us not hurl blasphemous words against providence.⁴⁴⁰

This is not to say that justice would necessarily show itself in this life, but rather that it would come about, either in this life or the next, according to God's own plan and timeline.

This raises the question of punishment in Theodoret. It is clear that certain punishments are worthy of swift action on God's part. Here we can think of Arius or Aphrahat's persecutor. Yet Theodoret is reluctant to speak at too much length about the punishment. Instead he simply says that each will "stand at the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may reap what his mortal life has earned, good or ill, according to his deeds."⁴⁴¹ In an earlier section, Theodoret goes into more detail about how the punishment of some in this life is proof that there is an afterlife. If there was not, God would not be just in his actions. The passage is lengthy, but worth quoting in full:

When we see both types of people ending their days – those in high standing and those who are quite worthless, members of the common herd – let us consider once more that He has prepared another life in which to reward, according to their deserts, those who have lived the good life. Indeed He has already unmistakably honored some of them by making their crowns of virtue manifest. But the fact that not all men appear illustrious and distinguished in the present life reveals the reality of a future life. The honor given to some is a sign of God's justice. The fact that not all virtuous people get equal returns is a proof of a future life, and strengthens the expectation of the things to come. For this reason the Ruler of the universe does not broadcast in this life the names of all the virtuous, nor does He reprove all who live in sin. He singles out some for vengeance, revealing the justice of the verdict, hoping thereby to alarm the others, and He rouses them to repentance. In not destroying all who do evil He gives us another proof of a future life. If there is no life after our departure from here below, those who are reprovved in this life are done great injustice and those who are not escape due punishment. Quite clearly, too, those who devote themselves to philosophy are done a great injury for they reap no utility or

⁴⁴⁰ Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 10.6 p.137.

⁴⁴¹ Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 9.43 p.133.

recognition from their study, while others who lead a similar upright life enjoy great renown. But to call the Fount of Justice unjust is the last word in blasphemy and transcends the extremes of folly. Now if the Ruler of the universe is just, as indeed He is, if He sees everything that is done, if He judges fairly and maintains in equilibrium the balance of justice even when it wishes to be upset, it is a manifestation of His loving mercy and not of any injustice. For there does exist another life in which those who here escape punishment will pay the due penalty, and those who enjoyed no return for their efforts at virtue in the present life will obtain the reward of their strivings. Perhaps you find yourself in agreement with me.⁴⁴²

Theodoret refrains from any direct speech here of what punishment looks like in the afterlife. Instead he focuses on the reward some will receive and others might miss according to their actions. Indeed, laying it directly alongside Origen's treatment of the afterlife in *De Principiis*, it is possible to see definite points of connection. Origen, too, believes in a punishment, it is simply not the eternal torture in fire that so many others have posited. Rather it is the soul reaping its due in the form of regret for separating itself from God. Moreover, God's punishment in this life is not without purpose. As Theodoret explains, God hopes "to alarm the others" through the singling out of some "for vengeance."⁴⁴³ If punishment in the afterlife is something akin to separation from God for Theodoret, then the theologies are surprisingly closely aligned. The major difference being that God was acting in more overt and phenomenal ways in the era of Theodoret. For this reason, Theodoret has to make sense of retributive justice that takes place in the present life. As is seen in his many hagiographies, he does this by associating it with God's interest in teaching the rest of the world. There is almost always room for reversal, and there is never an instance that does not function to teach or train someone according to God's plan—even if that plan is obscured in the present.

⁴⁴² Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 9.21-23 p.125-126

There are numerous stories in the Byzantine hagiographies of holy men engaging in raw retributive actions against those who cross them or the God they serve. I have selected many of the preceding passages precisely because they are so complicated. Substituted for the harsh judgment the ancient reader expected to (wants to?) hear, is the tender pastoral care for a 'could be' Christian soul that God may indeed see fit to conquer one day. Although the stories of immediate retribution, seen in James of Nisibis's own action praying for the 'solution' to the problem of Arius, indicate the theme of symmetry and a return to order, so do the less harsh examples of James and Sapor or James and the deceiving mourners.

Neil McLynn has noted that Gregory's treatment of life's inequalities has a different feel than Theodoret's vignettes of holy men. McLynn explains, "Gregory's first person perspective creates one obvious difference between *de vita sua* and Theodoret's biographies. The humiliating defeats which Gregory describes, where his persecutors 'caw in triumph' over him (*de vita sua* 1926), seem very different from Theodoret's studies of 'power in action.' However, Gregory was not conceding real defeat: like any other 'athlete of Christ' he knew that his competition would not be won in this world."⁴⁴⁴ McLynn is right that Theodoret's examples deal largely in immediacy while Gregory languishes.⁴⁴⁵ I would nuance the argument slightly, however, given the

⁴⁴³ Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 9.22 p.126

⁴⁴⁴ Neil B. McLynn, "A Self-Made Holy Man: The Case of Gregory Nazianzen," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, no. 3 (1998): 464.

⁴⁴⁵ "The enemies who 'nodded and whispered' (*Carm.* 2.1.1. 548) at Gregory will not have been his brother's creditors, but resentful sceptics at home who relished the humbling of the aspirant holy man's spiritual pride (*Carm.* 2.1.1 561). In reply, Gregory raised the stakes dramatically, outdoing any criticism that can conceivably have been voiced against him with a lurid picture of himself, wallowing miserably in slime 'or below the earth, in a yawning pit' (*Carm.* 2.1.1. 501-2); after which he swiftly forgets his avowed renunciation of self-righteousness and proceeds (in

example of James of Nisibis. He does not see the need to condemn the enemy in every circumstance. Theodoret allows that some things, including the possible conversion of a ruler like Sapor, could wait on God's final imprint on the situation. We should also acknowledge here that Theodoret had certain facts to deal with in his narrative. If James had been able to kill Sapor as a result of his prayers, Theodoret would surely have swung the commentary to match.

It is possible to draw a direct line from the Platonic notion of beauty as constituted by order straight through to Gregory. Whether the claim can be extrapolated to other early byzantine writers such as Theodoret is a moot question. One can be sure that the proper ordering of the natural world and, more importantly, the interactive personal world of the Christian, was something that was deeply connected to the concept of beauty. As the example of Gregory makes clear, comeuppance was something that was not always immediate but was always a sure eventual prospect. God's extra-temporal perspective could be counted on to correct for any earthly inequalities, rendering beauty from imbalance.⁴⁴⁶ Theodoret's examples of holy persons rectifying worldly situations that had fallen out of balance with God's plan show an attention to the details of how God could be counted on to restore beauty to his creation. This was certainly a

a development which recalls *Oration 2*) to confess the pain in his heart when he contemplated wicked men who were thought to be good, those lying sepulchres who 'reek inside of putrid corpses, while gleaming outside with whitewash and charming colors . . .' (*Carm.* 2.1.1. 513-17). Gregory cuts down both himself and his enemies to their proper size, trembling beneath the 'great eye' which saw into their minds, and before the prospect of the 'purifying fire' that would judge their deeds." McLynn, "A Self-Made Holy Man," 471-472.

⁴⁴⁶ At times this perspective is approximated by the holy person. In the fascinating story of Abraham and Maro, Maro is seen criticizing his brother for taking part in healing and casting out demons. Maro eventually explains that he is wary of demons choosing to leave their hosts precisely when holy men think they are healing them. His concern is to see behind the layer of trickery that the visual represents and protect the ascetic from being "puffed up and arrogant."

theological update to a Christianity which had moved past the days of martyrdom and maltreatment but had yet to show how it could function as the religion of late antiquity *par excellence*. For that, it would need to show that it could explain and maintain cosmic order, in ways comparable to the avenging fates of the old gods of Rome, and could secure the victories that the old gods had repeatedly shown possible to pagan eyes.⁴⁴⁷ Hagiography was the Christian vehicle of choice for such an endeavor.⁴⁴⁸

Conclusion:

Does this answer our question as to whether one can create a theology of beauty that is contingent on comeuppance. The literature of Hagiography would say so. Either every ancient monk and common person was greatly interested in vengeance, or the theme of comeuppance played a more influential role in the theology of the cosmos. If every wrong action was sure to meet its due, if every unfair situation was sure to be righted, then all was balanced in the world. God was truly in control and the *Kosmos* was beautiful by being in a perfectly symmetrical state. For the Byzantine Christians these stories were living proof that their world had meaning and that the random actions of the evil ones would only manifest themselves as disorder until such time as

John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, p. 66.

⁴⁴⁷ The pagan religions of Rome and Christianity were long in uneasy competition. One is reminded of the struggle for divine authority on the battlefield of Diocletian when the *haruspices* are unable to find the proper markings on the livers of the sacrificed animals. P S. Davies, "The Origin and Purpose of the Persecution of AD 303," *Journal of Theological Studies* 40, no. 1 (April 1989): 78-79.

⁴⁴⁸ Dal Santo has noted the possibility of a "dissenting current" towards the saints' cult at the end of the sixth century, stemming from "a more generalized anxiety about the saints and their miracles." See Matthew Dal Santo, "Scepticism Towards the Cult of Saints in Early Byzantium," in *An Age of Saints?: Power, Conflict, and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity*, Brill's Series on the Early Middle Ages v. 20 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 133.

God was ready to order them according to his will. Disorder, chaos and injustice would only rattle out of tune for so long, until harmonizing providence would inevitably press them into beautiful symmetrical tones.

In the postscript to Theodoret's work on the Monks of Syria he writes about the meaning of Divine Love and its role in the lives of the saints. In a particularly pertinent section he explains that the love of wisdom is a source of all kinds of power for the practitioner. This love of *sophia*, is not a distraction from God, but rather the true source of God. The text relates:

Virtue, or philosophy, is an abiding good. It overcomes the hands of the robber, the tongue of the slanderer, and the showers of darts and spears of the enemy; it does not become the victim of fever, nor the plaything of a storm, nor the casualty of shipwreck. Time does not remove its power, but increases its power. The substance of it is love for god. It is impossible for one who does not become fervently enamored of God to succeed in philosophy. But rather, this thing is itself called 'philosophy' (friendship with wisdom), since God is, and is called, Wisdom....Therefore the true 'philosopher' [friend of wisdom] could appropriately be called the 'friend of God'. The 'friend of God' despises everything else and looks at the Beloved alone. He puts serving him before all the rest together; he says, performs, and thinks only those things that please and serve the One he loves, and abominates everything that he forbids.⁴⁴⁹

For Theodoret, the love of wisdom was far more than an impersonal study or academic pursuit. Philosophy was the love of wisdom as found in God. Given our earlier acknowledgment that Theodoret is related to Origen from several angles, it is interesting to think about how this love of philosophy was received in the later Origenist controversies. When Cyril of Scythopolis speaks to Cyriacus and challenges him concerning the Christian's pursuit of philosophy, he signals the importance of this

⁴⁴⁹ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Epilogue, 15.

theme for the broader debate over Origen.⁴⁵⁰ It was not simply a question of whether all souls were originally with God and would eventually return to God, but was rooted in whether the Christian had license to pursue philosophy – especially of the Platonic varieties – in deciphering truths about God’s existence and activities in the cosmos.⁴⁵¹ For Theodoret, like Origen, philosophy becomes the source of power for overcoming those enemies who would seek to do personal or spiritual harm to the people of God. However, the outcome of this power looked very different for these two thinkers.

Peter Brown, in his influential article, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” offers a model for how the holy man operated within an Eastern society where *οικουμένη* and that ideological *ἔρημος* “were not sharply contrasted.”⁴⁵² The Syrian ascetic, of which Theodoret writes so extensively played a role that embodied the model of Late Roman patron as much as magician, judge, priest, *παιδαγωγός*, and *πνευματικὸς πατέρ*.⁴⁵³ The holy man certainly appeared to play so many of those roles, acting as the go to for nearly every situation in Theodoret’s work. The problem that develops in this reading of the holy man, is the question of just how much *δύναμις* the holy man could wield from the divine. The question, which Brown seems to bypass, is prominent in Theodoret’s tales. Why does James of Nsibis only visit a half-

⁴⁵⁰ He asks the old monk, “Father, what of the views they advocate? They themselves affirm that the doctrines of pre-existence and restoration are indifferent and without danger, citing the words of Saint Gregory, ‘Philosophize about the world, matter, the soul, the good and the evil rational natures, the Resurrection and the Passion of Christ; for in these matters hitting on the truth is not without profit and error is without danger.’” Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 229.25, p. 253.

⁴⁵¹ Cyriacus responds, “They have not learnt them from the God who spoke through the prophets and apostles – perish the thought – but they have revived these abominable and impious doctrines from Pythagoras and Plato, from Origen, Evagrius, and Didymus.” Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*. 230.11-15, p 253.

⁴⁵² Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” 83.

punishment on the invading Persian king? Theodoret's answer, which we have noted several times, is the notion that God's providence was bigger than any one instance and humans simply could not go around second guessing the divine will. Ignoring the deeper theological issues that are at play in these stories renders the holy man as an actual figure of power, rather than the hagiographer's construction of a figure of power. These are two very different beings. Of course, Brown's argument is more focused on connecting the role of the holy man with that of earlier rural patrons (προστάτης).⁴⁵⁴ But the question of why and where Theodoret gained the language and source material to construct this image is left unattended. For that we must look to the gradual development and denunciation of theologies like Origen's. If it was simply a matter, as Brown proposes, of transference of social duty onto the holy figure, then why can we not see the same imagery and accompanying narratives in a writer like Palladios and his *Lausiaca History*. Could it really be the separation of twenty years between these two writers that caused such developments? Or, was it as Brown posits, the difference between Syria and Egypt, where the οἰκουμένη had to be taken with the ascetic and was far less linked to the ἔρημος?⁴⁵⁵

There is, however, another factor that might weigh even heavier on the hagiographical output of these decades and the subsequent centuries; that is Origen. The power of the holy man to act as magician, healer, judge, was only possible within a theology that read the scriptures as literal and directly aligned with the ages in which these monks lived. For all of Theodoret's connection to Origen, this aspect showed the

⁴⁵³ Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," 99.

⁴⁵⁴ Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," 85.

least overlap. Theodoret's reading of Ananias and Sapphira is simple and literal, "terror was needed in the first stage of proclaiming salvation."⁴⁵⁶ He does not look for allegorical interpretations, or for the "spiritual" Ananias in James' story. Rather, James acts with the same power as the apostles, only now there was room for reversal, "since he knew this was what would benefit the wrongdoers."⁴⁵⁷ Some of the restorative tones of Origen remain, but certain aspects have been aggressively excised from Theodoret's theology. If we accept a Theodoret as author, as much as historian, we can easily see his fingerprints on the many vignettes of power in ascetic practice. There is no doubt that Brown is right in positing that the holy man played a larger role than popular religion making its way into the elite classes, the question we must ask is whether this was a described or prescribed move from Theodoret's perspective. With this in mind, it makes the later hagiographies of figures like John of Ephesus, all the more pertinent to how Justinian saw or hoped to see the holy man functioning within society – both in the hills of Syria and within the walls of Constantinople.

Origen argues in the preface to *De Principiis* that the New Testament was recorded in such a way as to allow for two types of interpretation, the simple and the more profound:

Now it ought to be known that the holy apostles, in preaching the faith of Christ, delivered themselves with the utmost clearness on certain points which they believed to be necessary to every one, even to those who seemed somewhat dull in the investigation of divine knowledge; leaving, however, the grounds of their statements to be examined into by those who should deserve the excellent gifts of the Spirit, and who, especially by means of the Holy Spirit Himself, should obtain the gift of language, of wisdom, and of knowledge: while on other

⁴⁵⁵ Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," 83.

⁴⁵⁶ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.9.

⁴⁵⁷ Theodoret of Cyrrhos, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 1.9.

subjects they merely stated the fact that things were so, keeping silence as to the manner or origin of their existence; clearly in order that the more zealous of their successors, who should be lovers of wisdom, might have a subject of exercise on which to display the fruit of their talents, — those persons, I mean, who should prepare themselves to be fit and worthy receivers of wisdom.⁴⁵⁸

It is clear that both Origen and Theodoret thought they were interpreting the scripture on the deeper level. From Theodoret's perspective it was his acknowledgment that things had changed and God was showing a different side or style of his power at work in everyday life. For Origen, Ananias and Sapphira was surely in need of deeper interpretation than that.⁴⁵⁹ For all of the rich interpretive texture that a text like this could offer, one is surprised to find that Origen has little to say about it. Certain aspects of scripture simply did not pass his basic rule that "nothing unworthy or unbecoming may be perceived in that divine and ineffable substance," which was God.⁴⁶⁰

Putting this notion of power in conversation with the multiplicity of examples that Theodoret has rendered in his history of the monks, one begins to understand how it is that writers felt comfortable sustaining arguments that involved the foretelling of the future, or the usurping of Imperial power, or moreover, the precipitation of such massive events as ending a heretic's life. The power of the saint was in its most simple form the power of God. The saint had access to such powers precisely because of their closeness to God. Working back from this notion, one realizes that every story is an

⁴⁵⁸ Origen, "De Principiis," preface, 3.

⁴⁵⁹ As I make this point, I must also acknowledge that Origen largely avoids the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. For example, in *Contra Celsum*, he comments on nearly every other chapter and on both sides of the story at the end of Chapter four and the latter portions of chapter five, but not on verses 1-28. He skips from 4:32 to 5:29. See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Second Edition (Cambridge University Press, 1980), "Index of Biblical Passages," p. 528.

⁴⁶⁰ Origen, "De Principiis," II.6.2, p. 650.

affirmation of proximity to the Divine. Of course, this is no great realization for the attuned reader. It is simple to see that these stories are meant to prove power in the face of adversity. The question for this study is why the theme of comeuppance or retributive justice is so prominent? And moreover, why did this retribution in Theodoret nearly always find a way of getting reversed.

It seems that proximity to God could easily be shown in a saint's ability to heal sickness or foretell calamity. So much of Theodoret's tales center on justice and retribution that it brings forward the question of why these are such prominent themes. When the political and religious meet in the unstructured field of ascetic practice, a desire for specificity in power and personal proximity to the divine become essential markers of orthodoxy in practice. These caves and pillars are the battlefield of allegiance and belief. Not only allegiance to a particular religion, but a particular stripe of belief in that religion. The proof of justice and retribution play out easily in these narratives offering the reader a political landscape that fits with Theodoret's orthodox beliefs. The inclusion of the question of Origen in the reading of Theodoret's work is an essential one for understanding his precise notion of God's providence. Theodoret was grappling with a restorative model of salvation being worked out in a world of necessary and phenomenal divine power. It was necessary for two reasons. First, it had to outstrip the pagans and heretics in their claims of proximity to God and second, Christianity was transitioning ever further into its role as favored religion of the empire. The days of waiting for God's justice in the afterlife were slipping away, and Theodoret gives us a window onto the social and theological transformation that this transition precipitated.

Chapter 4

Cyril of Scythopolis: Dabbling Origenist or vehement accuser?

Cyril of Scythopolis is an important voice in the monastic literature due in large part to his geographical point of interest. Although the Egyptian monks can claim several interested authors, the monks of Palestine can only claim Cyril as their most important of very few sources.⁴⁶¹ Beginning his account in 405 and ending it in 558, his work covers a central period of importance for our interest in the development of hagiography and its relation to retributive themes.⁴⁶²

In Cyril of Scythopolis's works, we read stories about retributive moments in monks' lives that approximate the representation we see in Theodoret of Cyrrhos.⁴⁶³ The monk is shown to be deeply in touch with the power of God, and yet as fair and forgiving as every human hoped God would be. The retributive aspect in these works is evident in the monk's resorting to violent smiting of his opponent or subordinate. This

⁴⁶¹ Other sources include John Moschos and Sophronios of Jerusalem. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, xi–xii.

⁴⁶² His perspective is particularly interesting because it covers the two origenist crises and is writing about them from a subsequent perspective.

⁴⁶³ Binns notes that this is just one of the works utilized by Cyril. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, li.

takes various forms, depending on the whim of the monk or God's creativity. Once the judgment has been applied, however, it is then often reversed to show that justice has an educational aspect within it.

This chapter will highlight the particularly retributive themes that surface in Cyril's hagiographical work. Bringing each instance to light, we will assess how severe the judgment and retribution are presented and attempt to answer where Cyril's theology of providence and judgment lean, especially as they concern Origen's influence.

Upon reading Cyril's harsh criticism of Origenist leaning monks and the mayhem they cause in the desert, one might be persuaded to think that his own theological stance was against Origen's influence. In reality, like so many theologians before him, Cyril ends up espousing many of Origen's teachings while denouncing the agitating issues of his day. This paradigm, in which a teacher is denounced and embraced simultaneously is less rare than one might think in late antiquity. We might be fooled into thinking that in order to get the truest sense of one's beliefs – or a broader stroke depicting the theological shifts of the day – we should mark those who are anathematized and do our best to reconstruct their teachings and worldviews. This should give the historian the clearest insight into the landscape of belief. From another perspective, however, we find these literary markers to be too simply constructed, so as to buckle under the weight of any true examination. It is for this reason that a basic treatment of historical writers like Sozomen, Socrates, et al., does not give us the clarity that we desire in this world burgeoning with hagiography. Rather than believe Cyril's treatment of the Origenists as final and perspicacious, we should examine his stories for

how they assess and deal with various contexts. Hagiography tells us something more plainly by allowing us to see what they argue without their rhetorical arguments. If one wants a true sense of what Cyril is doing, we should not listen for which camp he defends, but see what he does in the treatment of his subjects. We should not ask who the hagiographer anathematizes, but rather, how they present God's handling of a failing monk. This is where one gets the most insight.

Like Cyril, one can denounce Origen at every turn, but whether or not an author is Origenian can be seen more accurately in how they handle the material theologically and exegetically. If, like Cyril, most of one's stories are restorative in the way they mete punishment only to reverse it for pedagogical reasons, can we really think of Cyril as condemning these aspects of Origenist thought? It was essential to his political positioning to be anti-Origenist, but that did not necessarily mean that his theology followed suit. What about the small cues he gives the reader about his own struggle in resisting the attractive qualities of Origenist teachings? Taken together, these details tell a different story than the one Cyril promulgates. The point, however, is not to disprove Cyril's claims, but rather to see how retribution is worked out in a semi-Origenist, politically astute, cosmopolitan theologian like Cyril, who was writing a retrospective on a very tumultuous period in Palestinian monastic life. This will yield a good deal of fruit in thinking about how this hagiographical literature changes over time and through the hands of so many differently situated authors. We turn now to Cyril's text.

Cyril crafts his hagiography around seven main figures. Within the stories of these figures, Cyril connects the monks' actions to particular situations and historical personages. In Cyril's treatment of Euthymius, several situations arise in which this

monk flexes his powerful spiritual muscles in order to teach a lesson. Section eighteen relates the story of an Asian monk named Auxentius. In the course of his time at the lavra, the monastery began to gain in income and outreach and this blessing multiplied the community's needs, resulting in the acquisition of mules.⁴⁶⁴ Auxentius was asked by the steward to take the office of muleteer, but declined the offer.⁴⁶⁵ As one might imagine, there was not a lot of room for demurring when one's duties were appointed in the monastery. Euthymius summoned Auxentius saying, "Listen to me, my child, and accept this office."⁴⁶⁶ But Auxentius cites his unfamiliarity with the local language and region, and his fear of fornication and distraction over the excitement of the position.⁴⁶⁷ All of which would hinder his ability to enjoy tranquility in his cell. Euthymius did not accept this rejection, telling Auxentius that he would beg God not to let these fears harm him. The man still refused and this angered Euthymius. Cyril explains:

Euthymius became irate and said, "I have given you, my child, the advice I believe to be to your benefit. Since you persist in your refusal, you will now witness the reward for disobedience." Immediately Auxentius was seized with demonic trembling and fell to the ground. The fathers present interceded for him with the great man [Euthymius], and the elder said to them, "Now before your eyes is fulfilled the divine word that says, 'Every wicked man stirs up rebellion,

⁴⁶⁴ The Palestinian Lavra was comprised of a group of anchoretic monks living in close proximity to each other, thus forming a sort of community. It was different from the Pachomian Coenobion in the freedom the monks retained in their ascetic practices. C. H Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001), 5–6.

⁴⁶⁵ Quotes are from Price's translation, unless otherwise noted. Citations from Cyril will include the figure (ex. Euthymius) and chapter from that vita, followed by the page and line number in Schwartz's critical edition. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 18, 28.16.

⁴⁶⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 18, 28.23.

⁴⁶⁷ It is not clear whether this fornication would be with locals outside the monastery or with the animals. See Peter Brown for a note on John Climacus's acknowledgment of Bestiality with the Monastery's donkeys. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 230. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 18, 29.1.

but the Lord will send him a pitiless angel.'" On being further importuned by the fathers, the compassionate elder took him by the hand and raised him up, and sealing him with the sign of the cross restored him to health.⁴⁶⁸

Euthymius acts swiftly and directly from his anger to teach the monk a lesson. The air of long-suffering is notably missing from this situation. When Euthymius does not get his way – and here we could be reading this as *God's way*, for his judgment on the man is binding – his actions are immediate and physically retributive. It takes his fellow monks' persuasion to reverse the retribution served to Auxentius for rejecting his requests. This situation is disjunctive with the stories found in Palladios's work on several accounts. First, it is done from a point of anger. So many of Palladios's stories champion the monk's ability to control his anger and not lash out in the midst of a struggle. Second, it does not appear that Euthymius is even considering the situation didactically, but rather as a serving up of justice. It is only after the other monks persuade Euthymius to be compassionate, that he restores Auxentius to health. This results in Auxentius changing his mind and accepting the role of muleteer – and perhaps more importantly, his role as subordinate to God and Euthymius's will. Cyril notes that after the punishment, Auxentius accepted the role "with joy and alacrity."⁴⁶⁹ This change of heart does not appear to be Euthymius's goal in the beginning. Rather, he is interested in exemplifying the Lord's "pitiless angel."⁴⁷⁰ Cyril's monks hold a different stance in relation to retribution. It is a quick and merciless show of force, followed by a persuasion to relent and mitigate the punishment. We see this in numerous of Theodoret's monks, particularly when figures like James of Nisibis bring

⁴⁶⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 18, 29.11-21.

⁴⁶⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 18, 29.25.

people back to life or reverse their harshly applied sentences.

A later story of Euthymius's interaction with two monks, Maron and Clematius, who made plans to leave the lavra under cover of night, further elucidates how power and retribution coincided in the strong rule of an Abbot. Euthymius summons the monks and explains at length:

“Everywhere we need protection by God’s help, wherever we are. For Adam⁴⁷¹ broke the commandment of God in Paradise, while Job kept it while sitting on a dung-heap....We ought not to admit evil thoughts that insinuate into us a feeling of resentment or loathing towards the place where we are and towards our companions, or implant accidie or suggest moving to other places, but we must at all times be on our guard and oppose the mind to wiles of the demons, for fear that our rule be subverted by change of place. For just as a plant that is constantly rebedded cannot bear fruit, so a monk does not bear fruit if he moves from place to place. So if someone resolves to do some good in the place where he is, and is not able to, he should not suppose that he could accomplish it elsewhere. For it is not the place that is in question but the character of the intention. As proof of my words, hear the story told me by some Egyptian elders. A brother who belonged to a cenobium in Egypt was constantly moved to anger. In his despair he left the cenobium and settled in a place on his own, reasoning that through not having contact with anyone but being a solitary the passion of anger would leave him. One day when he filled his jar with water and put it on the ground it toppled over, filled a second and a third time, it toppled over again. The brother, tricked by the devil, lost his temper with the jar and grabbed hold of it and smashed it.” At these words, Clematius, as a result of satanic temptation, burst into laughter.⁴⁷²

The irreverence is too much for Euthymius to handle and he begins to berate the young monk for his insolence. Euthymius relates this disrespect as “dangerous” and a “source

⁴⁷⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 18, 29.18.

⁴⁷¹ The interest in somehow recapturing the original form of Adam is an interesting aspect of the literature. In an earlier vignette, Cyril relates the power of Euthymius to live with “carnivorous and poisonous animals without being harmed by them.” This is related to the notion that when “God dwells in a man and rests upon him all beings are subject to him, as they were to Adam before he transgressed God’s commandment.” Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 13, 23.9.

⁴⁷² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 19, 30.13-31.8.

of all the passions."⁴⁷³ After reproving his behavior, Euthymius left them for his inner chamber and Clematius "fell to the ground, seized with trembling and shuddering."⁴⁷⁴

We can surmise that Euthymius does nothing for the monk by the fact that Maron gathers Domitian and some of the other venerable fathers to go in and intercede on behalf of Clematius. Euthymius "yields" and "raised up the outstretched man, and by the sign of the cross ended his convulsions and stopped the chattering of his teeth."⁴⁷⁵ Rebuking the monk for not watching himself with "all eyes" like "the cherubim," he dismissed the monks in peace having "rebuked and counseled him with this teaching, and strengthened and instilled fear in the rest by this example."⁴⁷⁶

This story reaffirms Cyril's understanding of Euthymius as a harshly retributive monk. In both instances the monk applies a judgment in response to a monk's actions, and then lets it lie until he is persuaded otherwise. It is notable that the other monks do not try to reverse the punishment Euthymius applies. Maybe they simply know the limits of their power. We can surmise that to intervene between God's chosen holy man and the meting out of his retribution would undermine the economy of holiness and hierarchy of power.⁴⁷⁷ Euthymius again acts out of anger and has to be talked out of his

⁴⁷³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 19, 31.14.

⁴⁷⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 19, 31.18.

⁴⁷⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 19, 31.24.

⁴⁷⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 19, 32.3.

⁴⁷⁷ The notion of an "Economy of Holiness," first came about in a conversation with Jeff Childers at an AAR meeting. The notion is upheld by many examples, but perhaps most specifically in Cyril during a story of Abba John the Solitary, who would not give his blessing to an Aposchist boy (he opposed the Council of Chalcedon), nephew of Basilina. On Aposchists, see Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism: A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 107-8; Yizhar Hirschfeld, Richard Valantasis, and Vincent L. Wimbush, "The Founding of the New Laura," in *Asceticism* (New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 1995), fn. 41, p. 271. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, John the Hesychast, 23-24, 219.13.

retributive measures. It would be easy for Cyril to have left out the restorative aspects of these stories. The monks act in defiance and receive their due, as so many monks had before them. In each situation, however, Cyril shows the community restoring the monk to health and even affirming that the abbot was a “compassionate” monk – although either of the stories would indicate otherwise. It is the community of fathers that appears to be compassionate in their intervention on behalf of the punished monk.

Cyril relates a story about Aemilianus, a monk who had given in to the temptation of the demon of fornication. Euthymius, catching a whiff of the “demonic stench,” calls out to the demon, “god will confound you, you impure spirit.”⁴⁷⁸ The man falls to the ground, foaming in a “demonic frenzy.”⁴⁷⁹ At this occasion, Euthymius calls for light to be brought in, and he tells them a story concerning a brother who he had heard about from some Egyptian elders. In the course of the prelude, Euthymius explains the danger of men who are thought holy by all, but hold secret stirrings in their hearts like Aemilianus. According to the story, a man with second sight entered the village and found that the saint was ill and “all the citizens affirming with tears” related, “If this saint dies, we have no further hope of salvation; for we are all protected through his intercession.”⁴⁸⁰ The man hurried to get a blessing from the man. As he approached the suffering man, he saw in the eye of his mind⁴⁸¹ “the devil of hell with a fiery fork inserting the fork into his heart and with many tortures pulling at his soul; and he heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Just as his soul did not give me rest for a single day, so you

⁴⁷⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 24, 36.20.

⁴⁷⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 24, 36.22.

⁴⁸⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 24, 37.7.

⁴⁸¹ See Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, Revised

too are not to stop pulling at his soul and torturing it.”⁴⁸² The story ends there. There is no indication that the man was ever released from his torment for having deceived the community and transgressed before God. Euthymius turns back to the foaming Aemilianus and explains, “This brother whom you see has been allowed by God to be mastered by the devil in order to teach you and many others self-control. But let us entreat God, who has applied corrective not capital punishment, to free his creature from the plot of the impure and pleasure-loving spirit.”⁴⁸³ The demon leaves Aemilianus after Euthymius prays and it fills the room with the stench of burning sulphur.

This notion that God has the choice to apply corrective measures or capital punishment is an interesting support of the notion that Cyril is operating somewhere on the spectrum of appreciation and denunciation of Origen. In one sense, the story of the Egyptian monk supports a God who is highly retributive, calling for eternal suffering for deeds committed. On the other hand, Aemilianus’s situation – foaming in demonic frenzy – offers the possibility of another more restorative form of punishment. By applying a correction rather than the final capital punishment, the monk and community can all be educated through Aemilianus’s struggle. This theme, which leans toward the didactic and restorative, has deep roots in Origenian thought and reminds the reader of Theodoret and Palladios’s work, more than that of John of Ephesus.

In the following section on Euthymius, the community is faced with a drought that causes the fathers of the lavra and Theoctistus to ask Euthymius to intervene with God. With empty cisterns and no prospect for water, Euthymius refuses, explaining

(Cistercian Publications c/o Liturgical Press, 1992), 71–79.

⁴⁸² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 24, 37.16-17.

“Through this correction God wants to teach us self-control.”⁴⁸⁴ As Euthymius was about to set off for the utter desert, he hears great crowds gathering to beseech his intercession concerning the drought. Euthymius replies:

What are you seeking from a man who is a sinner? I, my children, because of the quantity of my offenses cannot pray over this with confidence of being heard. God, who fashioned us, is good and benevolent, and “his pity extends over all his works.” But our sins stand between us and him. We have obscured his image and defiled his temple by being slaves to a variety of lusts and pleasures. We live in cupidity and envy, and are ourselves abominable through hating each other. This is why in his anger he has brought this correction upon us, so that, disciplined by it and bettered through repentance, we may approach him in fear and he accordingly may hear us.⁴⁸⁵

Given Euthymius’s own penchant for anger, it is not surprising to see him quote God’s anger at his people as a cause for the drought and subsequent suffering. The people entreat Euthymius all the more at his refusal and he eventually succumbs to the pressure. During his prayer heavy rain begins to fall on the people.

God is represented here as a formidable protagonist, deeply interested in retribution and far from approximating the *apatheia* that the monks of other hagiographies aspired to attain in their lives. He was not immovable, but rather deeply entrenched in the everyday dealings of his people, ready to visit punishment or torture on the soul that would not heed reproof. This model of divinity certainly has some things going for it. It is highly teachable, in that it can be used to scare people into submission. More importantly, however, it is in line with the Old Testament scriptural patterns that we see regarding Israel as a chosen people and YHVH as their interested and overbearing God. These models do not mesh easily with a Neoplatonic God who is

⁴⁸³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 24, 37.20-26.

⁴⁸⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 25, 38.8.

immutable and interested only inasmuch as creation will eventually attain to God's harmonizing perfection.

One might certainly ask if the question of relation to Origen is significant enough to make from the types of retribution we see prescribed and related in Cyril's texts. The connective tissue becomes overt in a section of Cyril's where he speaks "On Doctrines."⁴⁸⁶ Cyril begins the section, which falls under Euthymius's life, by explaining the monastic zeal that was present for issues of doctrine within these communities. Cyril explains that the Abbots John and Thallelaeus told him of Sabas's interest in Euthymius's enthusiasm for the doctrines "even though he was constitutionally endowed with great gentleness and moderation of spirit."⁴⁸⁷ We immediately suspect some panegyrically fueled motive, having read of Euthymius and the seemingly short fuse of his temper. Cyril goes on to note that Euthymius "rejected every heresy opposed to the correct account of the faith, and that he detested with a perfect hatred the following six heresies especially: he loathed the Manichaean abomination; and when those of Origen's persuasion, numerous at that time especially in the region around Caesarea, came to him with a show of piety, he combated courageously their myth of a preexistence of minds, he completely refuted, and with ridicule, the consequent monstrosity of a general restoration, and he pilloried the godless and impious doctrines that these tenets give birth to."⁴⁸⁸ It is not clear from this portion of the text what these "godless doctrines" are, but one can piece together what was at stake for the Origenists

⁴⁸⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 25, 38.15-25.

⁴⁸⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 26, 39.18 ff.

⁴⁸⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 26, 39.23.

⁴⁸⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 26, 39.24-40.1.

during this time.⁴⁸⁹

On one occasion, Cyril tells us, a monk named Theodotus decides to steal the endowment of the monastery of Euthymius. This was no small amount as Cyril relates that father Stephen was able to leave it six hundred solidi from his family property.⁴⁹⁰ As the safes were opened in the Sacristy to allow Caesarius to venerate fragments of the “all-holy Cross,”⁴⁹¹ Theodotus helped himself to the gold treasure. The superior did not notice the gold missing, which surely says something about his otherworldly focus, and he shut the safes in a hurry, trying to move Caesarius along. Theodotus absconded under the false pretense of criticism for the monastery’s spirituality and made his way to Jerusalem.⁴⁹² Not wanting to take the entire sum with him, he hid it under a rock and took only fifty solidi in to hire some beasts of burden. When he returned to the spot where he left the remainder, a “terrifying snake” came out and pursued him.⁴⁹³ The next day he was foiled by the snake again. On the third day “some bodiless power in the air assailed him, struck him as if with a cudgel and knocked him down on the road half dead.”⁴⁹⁴ Some passers by picked him up and took him to a hospital. After a bit of time

⁴⁸⁹ Elizabeth Clark well achieves this in her third chapter. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 85–158.

⁴⁹⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 48, 68.33. On the value of a Solidus in the time of Gregory the Great, Brown notes, “At the bottom of the scale, a blind man, Filimud, received an annual food allowance that amounted to half a solidus a year.... Three thousand refugee nuns settled in Rome received each a pension of two solidi. This was as much as a member of the classical plebs of Rome had received in foodstuffs each year from the annona.” Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2001), 60.

⁴⁹¹ There were numerous claims to the power and proliferation of these fragments. Calvin’s well-known critique exemplifies the dubious provenance of many of these important relics. See Jean Calvin, *Treatise on Relics* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2008).

⁴⁹² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 48, 69.26.

⁴⁹³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 48, 69.33.

⁴⁹⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 48, 70.5.

at the hospital, where his pain increased daily, a “hallowed appearance” came to him in a dream and “said to him angrily, ‘It will be impossible for you to rise from this bed unless you return the stolen money to the monastery of Euthymius.’”⁴⁹⁵ Theodotus confesses shortly afterward and shows Abba Leontius where he hid the money. Cyril notes that the snake made no appearance and let Theodotus “go scot-free, without worrying about the money he had squandered.”⁴⁹⁶

This story shows a type of retribution that is oriented exclusively to the divine. It is not the monks who call down punishment, but rather God’s hand which orchestrates a corrective punishment on the robber, Theodotus. Even after Theodotus is found, he is not punished by the monks for his activity, rather, the issue is forgiven, if not completely forgotten.⁴⁹⁷ A monk who would risk the livelihood of such an important monastery because of his selfish desire, would certainly be worthy of more severe retributive action. In Cyril’s story, the retribution is corrective rather than punitive, and certainly muted compared to other more vivid hagiographies.⁴⁹⁸

Thomas, who lets Theodotus go, was superior for eight years. Leontius, who was the subsequent superior, was head of the monastery when Cyril enters.⁴⁹⁹ When Cyril speaks of his own move to the monastery of Euthymius, he acknowledges that his mother gave him some sound advice. She told him to submit all of his decisions concerning his spiritual welfare to the solitary Bishop, John. She explained that her fear

⁴⁹⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 48, 70.11.

⁴⁹⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 48, 70.21.

⁴⁹⁷ One could hardly imagine a monastery readmitting a monk like Theodotus, but forgiveness was a deeply valued theme in the struggle for perfection which accrued so many spiritual casualties.

⁴⁹⁸ John of Ephesus has numerous scenes in which robbers are punished for their actions.

was “that you be carried away by the error of the Origenists and so lose the basis of your stability.”⁵⁰⁰ This curious fear concerning the loss of his stability is an interesting inclusion. In this instance, we do not hear Cyril denouncing the Origenists outright, but rather acknowledging his mother’s discomfort and fear regarding their teachings. Cyril is giving the reader some autobiographical texture. Knowing his own background, as one who was initially persuaded by the Origenist movement, it is a significant inclusion – especially in its present form, lacking most of the vitriol reserved for heresies of the faith. Binns notes that his mother’s concern was “clearly well-founded, for Cyril shows himself sympathetic to the teachings of the Origenist group and has to have the error of this way of thinking firmly demonstrated by Cyriacus.”⁵⁰¹

In section fifty-eight of Euthymius’s life, Cyril tells of the villagers of Pharan and their relationship to the power of Euthymius.⁵⁰² The story, which is deeply retributive, sheds some interesting light on the theology of Cyril regarding how God functions in justice, especially through the holy site of the deceased Euthymius. On this occasion, two men agreed to combine their animals for grazing. The poorer man gave his ten animals to Cyriacus to graze with the combined flock. When the poor man came under some financial pressure, he decided to sell his animals. Requesting his livestock be returned to him, the poor man received only eight of the ten original animals from Cyriacus. Cyriacus denied that the man had given him ten animals and mediators were brought in to settle the dispute. The solution of an oath sworn by Cyriacus was finalized

⁴⁹⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 48, 70.24.

⁵⁰⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 49, 71.25.

⁵⁰¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Intro. xliii.

⁵⁰² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 58, 79-80.

and the poor man requested that the oath be taken at the tomb of St. Euthymius. On the proposed day, the two set off to the monastery. When they set eyes on the monastery, the poor man “felt a hesitation on seeing his opponent giving himself up to perjury and said to him, ‘Come, let us go back, brother. See, I have become convinced during the time we have spent getting as far as here.’”⁵⁰³ But Cyriacus refused, being obstinate in his error.⁵⁰⁴ Entering the monastery, the man swore on the tomb and left without any consequences to his actions. Cyril explains what then unfolded:

After one day had elapsed, in the second night around the sixth hour, he [Cyriacus] was lying alone in his own house, awake and engrossed in futile thoughts, when he suddenly saw the door of his house open of itself and an aged monk come in, shining with light and lighting up the house, accompanied by five younger monks and holding a rod in his hand. With stern voice and grim look the apparition said to him, “Tell me, you reprobate among men, what did you come and do at the monastery of Euthymius?” when the other was reduced to silence, finding nothing to say in defense, the saint said to the younger men, “Lift him up.” They immediately seized him and four of them stretched him out. He gave the rod in his hand to the fifth and said, “Beat him and say, ‘No, you perjurer! No, you cheat! Do not despise the forbearance of god.’” As he was being tortured by further beating, the saint said to the one administering the beating, “Well done!” And taking him by the hair, he said to him, “Have you now learnt, you impious wretch, that there is indeed a God who repays each person according to his deserts? Behold, this night we require your soul from you, and the things you have stolen, whose will they be? Since you have despised the patience and long-suffering of God, you have laid up for yourself this store of wrath, so that all may learn from your example to defraud no one and not to give themselves over to oaths at all, even if they intend to speak the truth.”⁵⁰⁵

When the torturers finally leave the man, he calls out to his neighbors who put him on an ass and send him to the monastery, where he has requested to go and confess his sins. They showed the monks his back which looked “as if repeatedly struck by whips

⁵⁰³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 58, 80.13.

⁵⁰⁴ Cyril notes that the poor man had recounted this directly to him. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 58, 80.13.

of ox-tendon."⁵⁰⁶ Cyriacus was unable to lie down because "his stomach was loose, he discharged blood, and his mouth constantly vomited."⁵⁰⁷ The villagers, unsure of what to do with the man, departed and on the following day, he died. Cyril closes with a brief note, "a lesson to those intending to commit perjury."⁵⁰⁸

This deeply retributive story is unique among Cyril's stories in that the man receives death for his actions. Several other aspects are worth noting, including the element of wealth and poverty, which is prevalent in the stories of John of Ephesus's saints.⁵⁰⁹ The monk is clearly connected to a care for the poor vis-à-vis the wealthy, who would take advantage of them.

The sequence of retribution is not immediate in the story, as one might expect from the examples of Ananias and Sapphira, or some other biblical text. Rather the man thinks he has gotten away with the injustice, making his way back home before he is faced with punishment. It is curious that Cyriacus is not smitten with a lame body, or the pain of an ulcer, but rather the monk himself comes back to visit punishment on the man. We might certainly ask whether he was in physical form or some other hybridized form between the physical and the spiritual afterlife. Cyriacus receives physical punishment for his worldly actions from a spiritual being that could clearly operate in both venues. Byzantine notions of the afterlife were divided along the lines of Saint and everyday person. The Saint remained active in the afterlife, whereas any ordinary human simply fell "asleep," waiting for the judgment day.

⁵⁰⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 58, 80.17-81.11.

⁵⁰⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 58, 81.20.

⁵⁰⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 58, 81.25.

⁵⁰⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 58, 81.27.

Taking this story even further, we might wonder if Euthymius is involved precisely because the oath was taken at his tomb. Did Euthymius come back to remove or rectify the false oath that had been taken on him? The fact that he actively heals and punishes from his tomb makes his history all the more powerful and proliferative for a hagiographer like Cyril. We might also wonder why he waited a day to beat him? Moreover, why it was that Euthymius did not engage in the violence personally, only standing over the man and ordering the blows that would lead to his death? What we have is Euthymius acting as powerful saint-patron, ordering lesser beings – in this case some angelic beings – to do the beating. If we connect the story to the earlier vignettes of Euthymius, we might also wonder if this is the culmination of Euthymius’s vengeance, now being wielded from within God’s kingdom in the other world. In the previous stories, Euthymius is always pulled back from his harshness by the compassionate fathers who surrounded him. Now that he is removed from their influence, his retribution can stand in full verve, once administered. Was Euthymius always more in line with God’s retribution? It is possible he is simply working within a framework of secular law that meted more severe punishments for defrauding the poor, than disrespecting one’s elders. The clean lines of vengeance that Cyril envisions through the saint’s cult of Euthymius, is one that fits nicely with the notion of the afterlife that we have already mentioned. The saint had to be woken by some oath being declared on his tomb, or some other connected human activity that would require his adjudication. His statement to Cyriacus, “Have you now learnt, you impious wretch,

⁵⁰⁹ In particular the stories of Habib, the first monk he treats.

that there is indeed a God who repays each person according to his deserts?"⁵¹⁰ is reminiscent of the kind of judgment that was conceived of in the final day of judgment. We envision the monk holding the half dead man's head up by his hair and reveling in his punishment, but ultimately, it was a story about not crossing the monk, who still operated in temporal proximity concerning various matters. Returning to the question of how God's punishment is meted, it is troubling that Euthymius plays such a prominent role. Surely he is the agent of God's will, in Cyril's mind. But, why not have God's punishment roll out in the afterlife? Why not exemplify a punishment by demons or some other faceless force in the world? Replaying the sight of the holy Euthymius and his band of angelic thugs beating a man to death for lying about two goats, is hardly the picture of loving forgiveness that most monasteries would want to ascribe to their founding member, but it is a picture of a powerful ascetic transcending the boundaries of death to order and correct the world. In this story we see a tinge of the transition from a restorative to a retributive theology. It is always the monk's subordinates who show the compassion that the Abbot should have embodied. When Euthymius is finally free of his constraining influences, his vengeance culminates in irreversible forms. Either Cyril is teasing out his own perspective on how God's justice differs from human justice – holding up Euthymius as one who acted with the same righteous and non-corrective fervor that God does – or he is indicating through subversive ambiguity his own struggle with the stories of Euthymius's relentless actions. It should also be noted that in all of these hagiographies, the author is caught somewhere between the story as told by the monks, the audience who would

⁵¹⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 58, 81.5.

eventually receive these stories, and the theological landscape that would craft these stories into the pedagogical narratives that ran longitudinally through the rest of Christian history. At various times, certain factors weighed heavier than the others, but they were always a necessary component of literary production in the late antique world. For Cyril, whose hundreds of other stories highlight the restorative aspect of Christian faith, we might suppose that this particular treatment of Euthymius ran up against the pre-existent set of hagiographic stories collected around his shrine in Palestine. Cyril plucks the most interesting and provocative for his collection. Perhaps it is Cyril's inclusion of a moment of dissent among the fathers after Euthymius's application of judgment that indicates Cyril's own program of selection in bringing this story to life.

A less harsh example is given of a man who stole the silver urn from the tomb of Euthymius. After attempting to run with it, the thief found that he could not cross the boundaries of the monastery. So he walked up and down the distance for some thirty miles before he was found "completely immobilized and in a manner nailed down in front of the monastery."⁵¹¹ Immobilization is a favorite thematic tool of the hagiographer and saint. Whether utilized on a marauding pagan, or simple village thief, God's power was efficacious at holding a physical body in *stasis* for the sake of the holy person. In some instances this was the punishment, in others it was simply a means of detaining the individual until justice could be served. For this robber, it served as his punishment and he was sent on his way with supplies from the monastery because "he was in

⁵¹¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 59, 82.4.

need.”⁵¹²

The power of Euthymius’s grave as pilgrimage site is no less important than his cell was during his life. Cyril notes that “not only when he was in the flesh did he work miracles among men, but even after his death, when he was united to the angels, he performs great marvels among us; though existing in a superior state, he has not left us, but cherishes and cares for us with assistance even greater than before.”⁵¹³ The level of care offered by the deceased holy monk was of value to the community in a few ways. First it offered continuity with his program of leadership and theological leanings. Second, it was of deep value to the construction of the notion of afterlife for these communities of faith. In thinking about the previous question of where Euthymius resided, we can propose the answer that he was not waiting in the grave for the judgment day, but actively working from his heavenly abode – in the company of God – on behalf of his community and all those who called on his name. Presumably, the man who stole the urn had considered its value well beyond its simple weight in silver. These emblems had symbolic and spiritual value that went well beyond their metallic fair market value. Euthymius, still an active player in his economy of holiness, was controlling his worldly assets from his seat in the afterlife.

In his closing remarks on Euthymius, Cyril acknowledges that the fifth holy ecumenical council was gathered at Constantinople during this time and it “anathematized the doctrines of Origen and Nestorius.”⁵¹⁴ He explains that the original inmates of the New Lavra espoused the doctrine of Origen and were expelled from the

⁵¹² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 59, 82.11.

⁵¹³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 60, 82.19-23.

community. It was at this time, when other orthodox fathers were transferred from the monastery of Sabas to the New Lavra to take the place of the Origen supporting monks that Cyril himself came to the New Lavra and began to work on his composition of the saints' lives. Ultimately, it was Euthymius, who, in a dream, gave Cyril "the grace of opening his mouth in fitting speech" from a silver ointment-jar with a probe. Cyril recounts, "the texture was that of oil but the taste was sweeter than honey."⁵¹⁵ So he was ordained for the task of 'remembering' the saints through his literary crafting of their lives.⁵¹⁶

Cyril on Sabas

Cyril introduces Abba Sabas with a sincere depth of admiration. As the many stories of his upbringing are unfolded in narrative, we see the interconnectivity with Euthymius and recognize stories that were told in the previous vita from Euthymius's perspective.⁵¹⁷ The first retributive story that Cyril relates is in Sabas's interaction with some Saracens who came upon them in the desert of Roubâ. Sabas, and his fellow monk, Anthus, are faced with a single Saracen from the group who was sent to challenge them and test them before the others joined him. The monks ascended "to God with the eye of the soul" and prayed to be delivered from the situation.⁵¹⁸ The

⁵¹⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 60, 83.9.

⁵¹⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 60, 84.15.

⁵¹⁶ Remembering could take many forms in this literature, from condemnation to panegyric. These modes varied wildly from what one might consider "accurate" about a historical situation.

⁵¹⁷ Here I am thinking about the story of the two in the desert and Euthymius's digging for water to cure young Sabas's thirst. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 11, 94.29.

⁵¹⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 14, 97.13.

approaching man was swallowed up instantly by an opening in the earth, which was witnessed by the other Saracens. The invaders fled immediately and Sabas's power is unmistakably presented as the most formidable in the Palestinian desert.

Cyril's treatment of Sabas is deeply interested in theological positions relating to the maintenance of orthodoxy. In the section describing Sabas's building program, we begin to get a sense of the varied communities which worshipped together in this area. Cyril writes that Sabas secured money for and built hospitals, cells for visiting monks, as well as the "church of the mother of God and ever-virgin Mary."⁵¹⁹ In his explanation of the space, Cyril notes that the Armenians who had felt cramped in their previous space of the little oratory, were now able to conduct psalmody in the great church. They were, however, encouraged to switch over to the Greek language for the divine mysteries. It is in this section that Cyril notes there were some who attempted to add "who was crucified for us" to the Trisagion hymn. This complicating aspect, associated with Peter the Fuller and Eutyches, makes its way into the narrative of Sabas. It is significant for our purposes because it signals the lead up to the broader theological controversy of Sabas and the monks who supported the ideas of Origen.

In one story, Cyril speaks of Sabas's stint in a cave that was inhabited by a lion. It appears that Sabas was facing some seditious behavior in his communities where he served as exarch of a community of lavras and anchorites and the cenobium of Castellium. Taking his leave, he settles in a cave that was the home of a lion. The lion returned in the evening and began to tug at his habit, hoping to make Sabas leave. Sabas conducts his night psalmody, for which the lion waited outside, and then

explains to the lion that “The cave is spacious enough to provide plentiful lodging for both of us, for we both have one Creator. As for you, if you want, stay here; if not, withdraw. I myself was fashioned by the hand of God and privileged to receive his image.”⁵²⁰ This segment seems to be of deep symbolic meaning for Cyril and Sabas. When faced with sedition in his own monasteries, Sabas is forced to leave and yet he encourages the lion to stay, citing that there is room for both of them, regardless of their difference because they are both God’s creatures. The lion, however, “felt some kind of shame” and withdrew from his cave, leaving it to the holy Sabas. The import of this story becomes all the more focused when Cyril turns to his next section concerning Sabas’s life. The revolting forty men who had forced Sabas out, had now become sixty and they were not eager to receive him back. Finally, Sabas returns with the blessing of the archbishop and the men agree to leave, but only after they destroy Sabas’s tower.⁵²¹ They then set off to start a new lavra. Sabas eventually obtains a pound of gold from the patriarch and loads his animals with provisions to give to the men who had split off from him. After five months, he had built them a church and bakery.⁵²² When Agapêtus becomes superior of the New Lavra, he finds four monks, “who whispered in secret the doctrines of Origen.”⁵²³ Cyril remarks that they were only “pretending to be a Christian and simulating piety” while holding “the doctrines of the godless Greeks, Jews, and Manichees, that is, the myths concerning preexistence related by Origen, Evagrius, and

⁵¹⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 32, 117.9.

⁵²⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 33, 119.10.

⁵²¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 36, 122.24.

⁵²² Sabas was getting on in age and was now sixty-nine years old. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 36, 123.24.

⁵²³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 36, 124.24.

Didymus.”⁵²⁴ Agapêtus expelled the men from the Lavra, and they went off to the plain, “to sow their pernicious weeds there.”⁵²⁵ Later, Nonnus and his companions, who were accused of “fomenting the doctrines of Origen” ask to be readmitted to Agapêtus’s community. He meets with the archbishop and Sabas and explains that he would rather leave the community to them than to have them mixed in and corrupt it. When Agapêtus dies, a certain Mamas becomes superior. At this juncture, the Origenist monks return and insinuate themselves back into the community. Cyril’s acknowledgment of the struggle within this lavra and his subtle citing of it through the symbolic rendering of Sabas sleeping with the lion, points toward the gravity of the situation for these desert ascetics. They felt that Origenist ideas were not simply a new way of thinking, but a pernicious influence that would ruin their communities if given the chance. Desiring to rid themselves of the problem, they became increasingly focused on the nuances of these tenets and began rooting them out of the community. Would there be room for such a lion as Origen in the cave of the “orthodox”? They were, after all, both from one creator’s hand and striving to live in one space. Ultimately, the Origenists, like the lion, would make their way off to find a new home.

If we take Cyril’s words as accurate, we can imagine the problem that a small group of collaborators could pose to a community that was trying not to let their ideas flourish. The fact that this small group posed such a problem speaks to the persuasive nature of the theology associated with Origen. His was a model that made much sense to the late antique mind. It tackled issues that the bible was silent on and built on the

⁵²⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 36, 124.25-125.1.

⁵²⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 36, 125.4.

platonian ideas that were pervasive in their influence of the New Testament and subsequent mediterranean communities.

In one of the more retributive moments in Sabas's story, we encounter a monk by the name of James, who was interested in founding a lavra near the cistern of Heptastomus.⁵²⁶ The fathers were not eager for him to do this for several reasons, including the fact that there would be a rival lavra in the same district as the originating lavra. James opposes the intervention of the fathers into his plans and ignores them. Sabas explains to the monk, "My child, I am giving you, the advice I judge will benefit you. But since you persevere in disobedience, you will learn by experience that Scripture says truly, 'Every wicked man stirs up opposition, and the Lord sends a pitiless angel against him.'" ⁵²⁷ After Sabas utters these words and takes his leave, James was "seized with a terrible shivering and fever and was tormented by the disease for seven months."⁵²⁸ As James realized this affliction was going to take his life, he asked to be brought before Sabas in order to "receive forgiveness before dying."⁵²⁹ The text continues, "When with difficulty he managed to open his mouth and say, 'Forgive me, father,' the saint said, 'God will forgive you.' Giving him his hand, he raised him up and told him to partake of the spotless mysteries. When he had done so, he immediately took food and recovered his strength, so that all were astonished at the sudden change in James. From then on he no more returned to that building."⁵³⁰

James's story is educational for the monks in the community. Although he is made

⁵²⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 39, 129.7.

⁵²⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 39, 129.29.

⁵²⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 39, 130.2.

⁵²⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 39, 130.7.

to suffer for his insurrection, his suffering lasts only as long as his obstinacy. When he repents, the punishment is lifted and he is restored to health. As in so many of these stories of immediate retribution, the lesson is not just for the individual but for the broader community, who “were astonished” at his recovery.⁵³¹ Rather than the starkest retributions which used suffering and death as the pedagogy of the community, we see a lighter hand, one which was more concerned with transformation than the finality of irreversible punishment. This raises, again, the question of just how connected these theologies were with the teachings of Origen. As mentioned above, there is strong evidence that the community was open to, and perhaps even readily persuaded by the teachings of Origen, as they were reiterated in this Palestinian context some centuries after his death. Had the restorative aspect of his theology taken hold, even if other details like the origin of souls had not? Based on the earlier examples in Cyril, we wonder if Cyril’s own stance is a bit ambiguous with regard to the broader teachings of the great Origen. As with so many examples of theological developments in early Christianity, communities are eager to condemn the man but allow the teachings to affect their theological models – if not overtly espousing them, at the very least adjusting them to fend off future attacks from these lines of thinking.⁵³²

The section on James continues with a final paragraph, explaining that men were sent to destroy James’s building and that Sabas, “took some capable monks of the lavra and built about five stades to the north of the demolished building an oratory and cells

⁵³⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 39, 130.14.

⁵³¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 39, 130.14.

⁵³² We see this in nearly all of the earliest struggles against heresy in the Christian tradition. If we take Arianism as an example, we see the church adjusting theological language and building

round it.”⁵³³ This detail does more than any other to support the notion that this was an economy of holiness that was deeply reliant on authority. Sabas condemns James’s construction because it was not part of God’s plan, causing him sickness and peril, but then rebuilds a nearly identical monastery less than a mile north of the one James attempted to build. It is hard to know whether this was Cyril’s – or Sabas’s – attempt to control detractors who would critique his actions in destroying a similar structure that was built for identical purposes, or if this was simply a reiteration of the authoritarian rule of Sabas in the desert. In either case, Sabas is championed as one who cares for the details of a small startup like the one he creates, taking care to “send some of the food to the monks there” when a festal meal was planned at the monastery.⁵³⁴

We get a confirmation of Sabas’s unqualified authority in the following section when Cyril tells us a story about James in his role at the guest-house. In preparing beans for the men who were going out to the desert to collect faggots, he prepared too much and over the course of two days threw the leftovers out of the window into the gorge below. Sabas went down and collected the beans and dried them, eventually preparing them as a meal later that year for James. Sabas, baits James into complimenting the meal by asking for forgiveness in not knowing how “to dress food well” so that he might enjoy it.⁵³⁵ James remarks that it was one of the best meals he had eaten in a long time. Sabas, seizing the opportunity to make his point, explains that it was the *pisarion* that he threw out the window and then admonishes James, saying “If a

out their theologies in order to guard against claims of a lesser Christ.

⁵³³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 39, 130.18.

⁵³⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 39, 130.27.

⁵³⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 40, 131.8.

man does not know how to run his own household, how can he take care of God's Church?"⁵³⁶ Cyril relates that James went off to his cell "much benefited," although we can imagine the man's frustration with the situation.⁵³⁷ To make matters worse for James, we are told that he later castrates himself in his cell in order to deal with his struggle against the demon of fornication. Unable to control the bleeding, James calls in his brothers and a doctor is summoned from the lavra. Sabas, adding insult to injury, expelled James from the lavra "as guilty of virtual suicide."⁵³⁸ Theodosius accepts the man into his community and eventually asks Sabas to take him back with a suitable penance. Sabas agrees and confines him to his cell, not allowing any monk to enter except the brother who was serving him. Sabas eventually received a vision relating James's forgiveness from God, and allowed him to come into the church. Seven days later, James dies "in joy."⁵³⁹ Monastic life was nothing if not intense. It was a battle pitched to the highest levels of human technologies and psychologies. For these monks, daily life was proof enough of the power of the enemy as witnessed in the prolonged struggle for the summoning of holiness in these *somata* which were so prone to spiritual defeat.

The training of the monk was influenced by particular theologies through proclivities toward certain practices and rites, or simply in the way that the superior responded to weak moments in the monk's life. Perhaps the most prominent theme in these hagiographies is that of transgression and result, since the life of the monk was

⁵³⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 40, 131.17.

⁵³⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 40, 131.19.

⁵³⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 41, 132.1.

⁵³⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 41, 132.19.

deeply embedded in the struggle for holiness. The equation was simple – by most accounts – though far more difficult to follow than to suggest. Sabas gives an erring monk a cell and states, “Be content with your cell, do not visit any other cell or go outside the lavra, exercise control over your tongue and belly, and you will be saved.”⁵⁴⁰ This was a guideline so simple as to be laughable. There were no major duties or learning to be accomplished, just the learning of control over one’s body. The monk, who was transferred by Theodosius to Sabas in order that he might find salvation, had allowed his anger toward an Ass, that was carrying his load, to lead to the retributive action of punching it in the face, causing its death. The monk needed to learn control; and what better way to learn this than the control of one’s “tongue and belly.”

The simplicity of life, however, often left monks searching for more. Fornication was a difficult demon to conquer in the desert as well as the city. In the story of the lion, Flavius and the ass, Cyril recounts another instance in which Sabas interacts with a lion in a peculiar way.⁵⁴¹ Noticing that the lion was in pain, he lifts his paw and removes a thorn that was causing him pain. The lion, in turn, “followed the elder during the season of Lent, performing kindly services.”⁵⁴² The strange story relates how Sabas called on a certain Flavius, who was his disciple, to serve him. Flavius had an ass, and when he had to do work away from the ass, the lion would “keep watch over his ass,” going “off with the halter of the ass in its mouth” and letting it graze or getting it water

⁵⁴⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 44, 134.25.

⁵⁴¹ There are numerous moments in the text when Sabas has interaction with lions. It is a prominent theme. See Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 12, 23, 39, 49.

⁵⁴² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 49, 138.27.

and bringing it back home.⁵⁴³ The servant lion continues these chores until one day when Flavius falls into fornication. On this day the lion ate the ass. Flavius realized that it was because of his sin and fled to his own property outside the monastery. Sabas, who had lost his ass and perhaps even his helpful lion, did not visit retribution on the monk. Instead, he conducted a lengthy search for Flavius. Cyril notes, “When by the grace of Christ he found him, he admonished and exhorted him, raised him from his fall and restored him.”⁵⁴⁴ In considering the impact Origen’s ideas may have had on a community such as this, it is interesting to think about the power of restoration as a means to conducting life in a monastery. The instances when restoration was not even considered for a monk who had fallen into fornication or other sinful ways are too numerous to list, it was a problem for every sexual being. Why then do we see a clear restorative model at work here? Although it would be too flimsy to point directly to the influence of Origen, there is certainly the possibility that his ideas had seeped into the fabric of human relations, effecting a small change in what one considered the climax of judgment, retribution or restoration.

Cyril writes a lengthy treatment of the theological problems facing the orthodox church concerning the doctrines of Nestorius and the council of Chalcedon. Sabas was sent to the Emperor Anastasius by Archbishop Elias, in order to aid the orthodox faith, which according to Cyril “at this time was tempest-tossed and endangered.”⁵⁴⁵ Sabas

⁵⁴³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 49, 139.5.

⁵⁴⁴ “ἀλλὰ πολλὰ ζητήσας αὐτὸν καὶ εὐρών τῆι τοῦ Χριστοῦ χάριτι καὶ νοθετήσας αὐτὸν καὶ παρακαλέσας καὶ τοῦ πτώματος διαναστήσας ἔσωσεν αὐτὸν” Cyril of Scythopolis, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. Eduard Schwartz (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1939), 139.16–18. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 49, 139.16–18.

⁵⁴⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 50, 141.15.

agrees and makes the journey, only to be shut out of the meeting with the emperor by the *silentarii*, who thought he looked too vile and poor to see the emperor.⁵⁴⁶ According to Cyril, Anastasius was a “lover of monks,” but he was deeply influenced by a certain Marînus, “a most unjust man.”⁵⁴⁷

When Sabas finally addresses the emperor, he thanked the emperor for removing the burden of the *collatio lustralis*.⁵⁴⁸ His next request was to remove the *superflua discriptio* which overburdened “the holy church of the Resurrection and the landowners of the holy city.”⁵⁴⁹ According to Sabas, “the *tractores* and *vindices* of the taxes of Palestine, exacting a hundred pounds of gold from poor and insolvent persons that could not be obtained, were compelled to transfer this exaction into the taxpayers’ syndicate in Jerusalem in proportion to the means of each member. When the hundred pounds of gold were apportioned in the manner related, the holy church of the Resurrection, the remaining revered places and the landowners were registered for *superflua discriptio*.”⁵⁵⁰ The emperor agreed to the abatement, but Marînus stepped in to dissuade him, calling the people of Jerusalem “Nestorians and Jews and unworthy of the emperor’s favors.”⁵⁵¹ The deal that the emperor had struck with Sabas was nullified. Sabas, filled with “the Holy Spirit” responded to Marînus, “Stop undoing the good will of the emperor, stop your war against the holy churches of God. Stop your great avarice

⁵⁴⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 50, 142.5.

⁵⁴⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 51, 142.20, 54, 146.5.

⁵⁴⁸ A tax instituted by Constantine that was levied on tradesmen, craftsmen and prostitutes. It was suppressed by Anastasius. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, fn. 68, p. 215.

⁵⁴⁹ It was a law redistributing tax responsibility from the poor. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, fn. 69, p. 215.

⁵⁵⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 54, 145.18.

⁵⁵¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 54, 146.10.

and wickedness, and be on your guard. For if you disregard me, in a short time you will cause yourself terrible misfortune and bring no small danger on His Majesty and the whole city. You will be stripped of everything in a moment of time, and your house will be burnt with fire.”⁵⁵² This bold response could be attributed to Sabas’s second sight, which allowed him to see the future. It is more akin, however, to calling down a judgment on the man for his actions against the monks. Retribution would be served to the “unjust man,” it was only a matter of time. Cyril notes that the prophecy given by Sabas “did not err: a few months later, as the result of a popular riot, the house of Marînus was burnt with fire and every detail of the saint’s prophecy was fulfilled.”⁵⁵³

After a lengthy section detailing the response of the monastic leaders to the emperor Anastasius, Cyril tells of a famine that tormented the area for five years. If the famine was insufficient pain, caterpillars and locusts also swarmed on the area, destroying all the trees and living things. The connection between locusts and retribution is not lost on this community of God. It was what accompanied Moses and the Israelites in the great struggle for freedom from the pharaoh. It was historically one of God’s choice vehicles for applying punishment to a community.⁵⁵⁴ Cyril connects the exile of Archbishop Elias to these events, citing that they occurred at the same time. He later remarks, “the people of Jerusalem said that these ills had descended on account of the sin committed over Archbishop Elias.”⁵⁵⁵ For Cyril there is no question that God is at

⁵⁵² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 54, 146.19.

⁵⁵³ Cyril cites this detail from his mother, Anastasia, who was married to Pompeius, nephew of the emperor. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 54, 147.9.

⁵⁵⁴ While only used once in the Old Testament, it is used in the most prominent story of Israelite communal development.

⁵⁵⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 58, 159.14.

work in the punishment of the world for sinful actions. The question is whether the punishment is meant to show retribution or spur restoration.

The following story explains how some shepherds “repeatedly pastured their flocks on the monastery estate and impudently demanded victuals.”⁵⁵⁶ As is common throughout Cyril, we imagine that a retribution will be applied whereby the shepherds will come to their senses and ask for forgiveness. In that moment, the punishment will be reversed, in order to further support God’s power and providence in the protection of the monks. The passage follows the pattern:

On learning this, the elder wrote to rebuke them [shepherds] and tell them no longer to go near the monastery. When they disobeyed, suddenly the udders of their animals stopped bearing milk, as a result of which the newly born kids and lambs were perishing of hunger. At this the goatherds, coming to their sense and reasoning that disobedience was the cause of the deaths among their animals, came at a run to the elder and, falling at his feet, promised him no longer to go near any of his monasteries. Accepting this undertaking, the elder uttered prayer on their behalf and sent them away with a blessing. When they returned, they found the milk coming forth without hindrance and, on inquiry, learnt that the milk had begun to flow and come forth at the very hour that the elder uttered prayer and blessed them. Filled with wonder, they gave glory to God.⁵⁵⁷

Conversion is deeply intertwined with punishment and education in these hagiographies. It was always necessary for the monastic community to educate their world in proper comportment toward the people of God, as well as proof of their proximity to this God that would work miracles on their behalf. Sabas and Cyril’s other saints rarely engage in the genesis of the miracle, but always seem to be there for its culmination and lesson.

Cyril comes back to the storyline of the Archbishop Elias and Emperor Anastasius

⁵⁵⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 59, 160.18.

⁵⁵⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 59, 161.2.

in the following section. During the summer solstice in 518 C.E., Elias was host to Sabas and some other leaders of the monastic houses.⁵⁵⁸ One day Elias did not meet them, as was his regular custom, after the ninth hour psalms. Elias finally emerges at the sixth hour of the night, only to decline food and explain that he does “not have the leisure.”⁵⁵⁹ Sabas pressed him for information and he responded in tears, “At this very hour the emperor Anastasius has died, and I must depart without fail after ten days and be judged together with him.”⁵⁶⁰ Of course, the foresight becomes reality. Elias falls ill eight days later and dies on the twentieth of July, in his eightieth year. Making note of the day, Sabas returned to Jerusalem and learned that “in the night of 10 July when blessed Elias had the vision, thunder and lightning enveloped the imperial palace, and consumed the emperor Anastasius and him alone.”⁵⁶¹ Anastasius fled in panic “from room to room, till the wrath of God overtook him in one of the bedrooms, hurled him down and killed him, a victim of sudden death.”⁵⁶²

Several aspects of this story are worth exploring. The fact that the two, who played nemeses to each other, have their deaths tied to each other is fascinating. Elias, who presumably is God’s true servant, according to Cyril, still has to stand judgment

⁵⁵⁸ He brought Stephen, superior of the monastery of Euthymius, and Euthalius, superior of the monasteries of Elias in Jericho. Sabas was eighty years old at the time. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 60, 161.3.

⁵⁵⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 60, 161.16.

⁵⁶⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 60, 161.20. John Moschos devotes his thirty-fifth chapter to Elias and states, “They said of Archbishop <Elias> of Jerusalem and of Flavian the Archbishop of Antioch that the Emperor Anastasios exiled them both on account of the holy synod of the fathers at Chalcedon: Elias to Eilat, Flavian to Petra. One day the two patriarchs revealed to each other that Anastasios had died that very day. ‘Let us go, too, to be judged with him’, they said, and two days later they went to the Lord.” John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 35.

⁵⁶¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 60, 162.8.

⁵⁶² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 60, 162.10. The story is also recounted by Moschos

alongside of Anastasius. In some strange way, their eternal fate is connected, if only by the relations they had on earth. If we remove the filter of *hagios*, and think of these as simply historical writings, we are tempted to question whether it was pure coincidence that these two champions of different theologies died within ten days of each other. For the community who would come later and consider their actions in hereticizing and anathematizing each other, it would be important for the chronicler to record some indication of how they died in order to assert theological orthodoxy in one case or the other. Cyril notes, "When Anastasius had died in this way, Justin, on succeeding to the throne, immediately issued decrees ordering all those exiled by Anastasius to be recalled and for the Council of Chalcedon to be inserted in the sacred diptychs."⁵⁶³ We cannot know what happened in the afterlife between God and the two leaders, but we can know, according to Cyril, how these two's deaths were navigated – one in fear and surprise, the other in peace and communion. Cyril notes that Elias communicated, prayed and said the Amen before "he fell asleep and rested in peace."⁵⁶⁴ The hagiography gives the reader all he needs to know about the orthodoxy of the two individuals.

On a later occasion, Sabas took the opportunity to prophesy regarding a wicked man named Silvanus. He stated, "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when the fifty-first Davidic psalm shall be fulfilled in the case of Silvanus by his being consumed by fire in the middle of the city."⁵⁶⁵ This moment later culminates in the Samaritan

in Chapter thirty-eight with slightly different details. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 38.

⁵⁶³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 60, 162.13.

⁵⁶⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 60, 162.2.

⁵⁶⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 61, 163.11.

revolt, which engrossed the area in so much strife that it was not safe for Christians to use the imperial highroads.⁵⁶⁶ Cyril notes that these Samaritans of Palestine “marshaled their whole race against the Christians” torturing and killing them, “butchering some priests, [they] roasted them together with remains of holy martyrs.”⁵⁶⁷ Silvanus, “coming as if peaceably to Scythopolis without an imperial order, was seized by the Christians and burnt in the middle of the city.”⁵⁶⁸ As a result of all this mayhem, Archbishop Peter asked Sabas to go to Constantinople and beg for remission of the taxes on First and Second Palestine because of the “murders and destruction” taking place.⁵⁶⁹ Sabas agrees and heads to the court of Justinian.

Sabas was warmly greeted by Justinian and his court. When the old monk entered the court “God opened the emperor’s eyes” and “he saw the radiance of divine favor in the shape of a crown blazing forth and emitting sunlike beams from the head of the old man.”⁵⁷⁰ Justinian ran to him and kissed his head with “tears of joy.”⁵⁷¹ He then pressed Sabas to go in and bless Theodora, his wife. The sequence that follows supports Sabas’s own theological predilections, but also his own fear and hatred of the female figure. He saw Theodora as representative of temptation and theological weakness. Theodora entreats Sabas to pray “that God grant me fruit of the womb.”⁵⁷² Sabas answers her, “God the Master of all will guard your empire.”⁵⁷³ The Augusta pushes him for her

⁵⁶⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 70, 172.12.

⁵⁶⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 70, 172.10.

⁵⁶⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 70, 172.20.

⁵⁶⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 70, 173.8.

⁵⁷⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 71, 173.23.

⁵⁷¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 71, 173.25.

⁵⁷² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 71, 174.1.

⁵⁷³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 71, 174.2.

exact request, but he would only again pray for God's glory to maintain her empire in "piety and victory."⁵⁷⁴ When pressed by the fathers as to why he would grieve her in this way, Sabas responds, "Believe, me, fathers, fruit will never come forth from her womb, lest it suck in the doctrines of Severus and cause worse upheaval to the Church than Anastasius."⁵⁷⁵

The storyline shifts a bit at this moment, away from the great deeds of Sabas in holiness, to the machinations of the Byzantine court in Justinian's reign. Given the interest that Justinian had in the construction of law, in particular, retributive justice, this connection is quite interesting.⁵⁷⁶ Cyril describes Justinian's response:

When the divinely protected emperor received from the godly old man the petition of the churches of Palestine, his anger against the Samaritans returned. He was roused into issuing a decree or law that Samaritan assemblies should cease, that they should be expelled from the whole country, and that they should not have the right of bequeathing to their coreligionists or making transfers to each other in the form of gifts; he also decreed the death penalty against them, specially their leaders guilty of lawlessness.⁵⁷⁷

As any good emperor of the byzantine world would, Justinian decrees a justice that is swift and merciless. He cuts off the lineage of wealth, effectively draining the power out of the movement or race of people in one generation. Moreover, his is not a justice that is interested in protracted trials in court based on the guilty persons' testimonies. Rather, he pronounces the death penalty for those involved. This is retribution at its most simple and punitive level. There is little interest in reform for Justinian. What

⁵⁷⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 71, 174.5.

⁵⁷⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 71, 174.11.

⁵⁷⁶ It becomes all the more interesting in relation to John of Ephesus and his role at court and subsequent writings on the saints of Syria.

⁵⁷⁷ "τοῦ τοίνυν θεοφυλάκτου βασιλέως δεξαμένου παρὰ τοῦ θείου πρεσβύτου... ἔτι ἐθέσπισεν ἀναιρεθῆναι αὐτούς καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς ἀρχηγούς αὐτῶν καὶ ἀτάκτους" Cyril of Scythopolis,

makes this text so enlightening with regard to Cyril and his interest in straddling didactic and punitive measures, is the final lines of this section. Cyril explains, “At this juncture, with the emperor ordering his execution, Arsenius disappeared for a time; but later he took refuge with the blessed Sabas, while he was still staying in the imperial city, and was baptized, both himself and his whole household.”⁵⁷⁸ Regardless of the harshness of Justinian’s decree, the reality of how humans – especially those who saw value in the restoration of humanity – interacted in the Palestinian deserts was often as removed as the Lavra was from the court of Constantinople. Their physical distance approximated their ideological distance. Cyril’s own acknowledgment of restoration in the face of Justinian’s restitution is telling of his stance in the Origenist controversy.

The Emperor Justinian summoned Sabas to his court while he was there and asked him to name his needs with regard to revenue for his monasteries. Justinian’s patronage model is a familiar act of exchange within the monastic model of late antiquity. He states, “For whichever of them you wish, ask for a revenue...and we shall provide it, so that they may pray for the state entrusted to our care.”⁵⁷⁹ The power of the monastic prayer was not insignificant. As so many hagiographies had attested in the previous three centuries, the prayer of the holy monks could wield God’s power in effective and immediate ways. No gifts in antiquity went without some form of recompense. The prayers of the monks were no different. Sabas responds with an alternative to Justinian’s suggestion. He replied:

Those praying for Your Piety do not need such a revenue, for their portion and

Kyrillos von Skythopolis, 174.12–18. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 71, 174.12–18.

⁵⁷⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 71, 174.23.

⁵⁷⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 72, 175.3.

revenue is the Lord, who in the desert showered bread from heaven and poured forth quails for a disobedient and refractory people. We however, all-pious emperor, for the support of the holy churches of Palestine request a remission of taxes, rebuilding of the sacred edifices burnt by the Samaritans, and assistance for the reduced and plundered Christians of Palestine. We also beg you to found a hospital in the holy city for the care of sick strangers, and to build and appoint the church of the Mother of God whose foundations were laid some time ago by our archbishop Elias, for this is specially appropriate for Your Piety; and on account of the inroads of the Saracens we beg Your Serenity to order the most glorious Summus to build at public expense a fort in the desert at the foot of the monasteries founded by your humble servant. I believe that God, in return for these five acts of yours pleasing to him, will add to your empire Africa, Rome and all the rest of the empire of Honorius, which were lost by the emperors who reigned before Your all-pious Serenity, in order that you may extirpate the Arian heresy, together with those of Nestorius and Origen, and free the city and the Church of God from the bane of the heresies.⁵⁸⁰

Sabas embodies the most innovative and powerful aspects of asceticism in his subversion of the normative desire for wealth from the emperor. He turns Justinian's offer on its head, explaining that the monks need no "such revenue" as he can offer because their revenue is the Lord. In like manner, they remove themselves from the patronage system upon which so much of late Roman and early Byzantine politics were built.⁵⁸¹ Sabas's interest is rather focused on the care of the downtrodden and the sick, as well as strengthening the protection that his monasteries would need in order to keep operating in the midst of Saracen incursion. His offer is for prayers and an acknowledgment – or foresight – that he would regain the lands held under Honorius. The deal was struck; Justinian had secured the prayers of those most holy and influential monks, who were active in the temporal workings of God's providence.

Cyril goes on to explain why Sabas mentions these three heresies in particular. The Arians are mentioned because they were ruling in the West. Nestorius was mentioned

⁵⁸⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 72, 175.4-176.1.

because some of the monks had been found to follow Theodore of Mopsuestia in their disputes with the Aposchists. Finally, Origen is mentioned because of a certain Leontius, “who was one of those admitted with Nonnus into the New Lavra after the death of the superior Agapêtus.”⁵⁸² In this context, Cyril notes that Leontius held the views of Origen in opposition to his claims of support for the Council of Chalcedon.⁵⁸³ Sabas expels both the followers of Theodore and Origen from his communities and asks the emperor to do likewise.

As the emperor began organizing his people to fulfill the requests of Sabas, the great monk “drew slightly apart” to recite the Davidic psalms. Jeremias, a disciple of Sabas, asked him, “Revered father, when the emperor is displaying such zeal in fulfilling your requests, why do you yourself keep to one side?”⁵⁸⁴ Sabas replied, “They, my child, are doing their work. Let us in our turn do ours.”⁵⁸⁵ While Justinian was fulfilling his role as leader of the Byzantine world, Sabas was fulfilling his role in maintaining proximity to God through his ascetic practice. Both were acting in part for the other, while serving God in their own constructed ways. One is reminded of the story of the Vine and the Elm from the *Shepherd of Hermas*. As the vine, which represents the poor, uses the elm to climb, the elm supports the vine in its practice. The end result of which is the production of fruit, mutually beneficial. Justinian calls on Tribonian to organize the support of the monks, while the monks produce the fruit of

⁵⁸¹ See Francis, *Subversive Virtue*.

⁵⁸² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 72, 176.13.

⁵⁸³ See Evans on Leontius’s own status as Origenist and Chalcedonian. Evans, *Leontius of Byzantium*, Conc.

⁵⁸⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 73, 178.17.

⁵⁸⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 73, 178.18.

righteousness.⁵⁸⁶ Cyril notes that after Justinian gave his rescripts to Sabas and sent him back to Palestine in peace, God gave the emperor “an infinite recompense by fulfilling the prophecy of the old man.”⁵⁸⁷ History upholds this detail, witnessing Justinian’s capture of Africa and Rome and his wielding of power over the Arian community. Cyril notes that he also “anathematized the heresies of Nestorius and Origen both by the edicts he issued and through the fifth holy ecumenical council lately assembled at Constantinople.”⁵⁸⁸

In the following section, Cyril tells of his personal connection to the great Sabas through his father and mother. This section reads like a prayerful recollection of his father’s words, relating their conversation when Cyril was deciding on joining Sabas’s lavra. We get an inkling of some struggle over which monastery Cyril would enter when he states, “At any rate, when I said that the New Lavra was also his [Sabas’s] foundation, particularly once the supporters of Origen had been expelled, you replied, ‘Yes, yes, I am well aware of the fact. But it is better for you to enter the lavra that bears his name.’”⁵⁸⁹ We gain some indication here of Cyril’s struggle between the Origenist leaning monks and those followers of Sabas. His father was clearly afraid that the Origenist influence had not yet left the New Lavra, and was fearful Cyril would embrace it. It is unclear whether Cyril was drawn to the controversy and its subsequent theological discussions, or genuinely believed that it had been rid of all its influence

⁵⁸⁶ Tribonian was “a prominent member of Justinian’s court.” He assisted in the compilation of the *Corpus Iuris*. This is a significant detail for our interest in retribution and recompense. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, fn. 104, p. 217.

⁵⁸⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 74, 178.22.

⁵⁸⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 74, 178.27.

⁵⁸⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 75, 181.7-8.

upon the expulsion of the Origenist leaning monks. We might suppose that his constant refrain is an indication of his deep interest in how these matters were put to rest.

Cyril goes into more detail concerning the controversy after relating the death of Sabas. As with most venerated leaders, Sabas makes arrangements for his own death, as if he knew the very hour of it.⁵⁹⁰ Sabas fasts for four days before taking communion and saying, “Lord, into thy hands I shall commit my spirit.”⁵⁹¹ Cyril states that Sabas was not dead, but only asleep, a familiar touchstone for early Christians. Cyril quotes, “The souls of the just are in the hand of God and death shall never touch them.”⁵⁹² His own support of bodily resurrection is indicated by a final comment on the matter where he states, “Certainly his body has been kept sound and incorrupt to this day. This I witnessed with my own eyes in the recent tenth indiction.”⁵⁹³ Cyril attributes this to God’s honoring of Sabas with “incorruption before the general and universal resurrection.”⁵⁹⁴ The spirit of Sabas, however, was “privileged with great access to God.”⁵⁹⁵ Cyril goes into some details proving this notion based on his actions after “sleep.” Sabas appears to several different people in visions, helping them honor their commitments, find burgled items, and even securing the safety of a Saracen camel as it fell into the gorge near the lavra.⁵⁹⁶

After relating a few of the more pertinent and interesting miracles that Sabas

⁵⁹⁰ Most did seem to have this knowledge.

⁵⁹¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 76, 183.1.

⁵⁹² Wisdom of Solomon, 3.1, Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 77, 184.10.

⁵⁹³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 77, 184.13.

⁵⁹⁴ This section gives us some clues into Euthymius and his actions in the afterlife. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 78, 184.19.

⁵⁹⁵ “πολλῆς ἠξιώται τῆς πρὸς θεὸν παρρησίας” Cyril of Scythopolis, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, 184.20. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 78, 184.20.

⁵⁹⁶ The story of the camel is particularly vivid. Sabas is seen riding the camel as it rolled down

performed after his death, Cyril carves out some space for a treatment of Sabas's successors and disciples. In particular, this account is geared toward the "Recrudescence of Origenism."⁵⁹⁷

When the monastery changes hands after Sabas's death, Abba Melitas took over as abbot. Cyril acknowledges that while it was flourishing at this time, "wolves were about to ravage it."⁵⁹⁸ The wolves were the followers of Origen's teachings and they were insinuating themselves into the highest reaches of church hierarchy, as well as converting the thinking of the lower monastic brothers rapidly. Nonnus and others made plain their own interests in this theology and "seduced into their own foul heresy not only all the more educated in the New Lavra but also those of the monastery of Martyrius and of the lavra of Firminus."⁵⁹⁹ The movement took hold in the Great Lavra as well. According to Cyril, Domitian, who was the superior of the monastery of Martyrius, and Theodore Ascidas made their way to Constantinople and through the recommendation of Leontius, attached themselves to Eusebius, gaining entrée to the emperor.⁶⁰⁰ Through these connections, Domitian received the see of Galatia and Theodore received Caesarea of Cappadocia.⁶⁰¹

After the death of Melitus, Gelasius came on as superior in 537 C.E.⁶⁰² He began to root out the movement by reading the work of Antipatrus of Bostra against the

into the gorge. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 81, 186.

⁵⁹⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 83, 187.29.

⁵⁹⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 83, 188.5.

⁵⁹⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 83, 188.20.

⁶⁰⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 83, 189.3.

⁶⁰¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 83, 189.7.

⁶⁰² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 84, 189.13.

doctrines of Origen.⁶⁰³ This incensed the Origenian leaning monks in the community. Eventually, forty monks were expelled for their beliefs in Origen's teachings or connections to the movement. These men joined the New Lavra, where the movement was centralizing its power. According to Cyril – who is not entirely impartial here – Leontius urged the monks to destroy the Great Lavra. First they attempt to include the monks at the monastery of Theodosius, but they are not receptive to the movement. This, according to Cyril, enrages the monks and they “sent to various places and collected pick-axes, shovels, iron crowbars and other tools of demolition, together with a work-force of peasants...they set off in utter fury to demolish the Great Lavra.”⁶⁰⁴ A darkness and mist settled on them with such thickness that at the second hour of the day, they lost their orientation and ended up at the monastery of Marcianus instead. Cyril notes that this miracle hearkens back to the miracles worked by God against the opponents of Lot and Elisha, whom he struck with blindness.⁶⁰⁵

The eventual condemnation of the doctrines of Origen comes about by way of Patriarch Ephraem of Antioch. When Ephraem and Eusebius arrive in Palestine to depose Paul of Alexandria, Leontius persuaded Eusebius to accuse Gelasius of splitting the community into two halves.⁶⁰⁶ Eusebius forces Gelasius to readmit the exiles from the Great Lavra or expel the brothers from the anti-Origen leaning side of the community. When he expels the anti-Origenist monks, they make their way to Antioch and expose Patriarch Ephraem to Antipatrus's work as well as the doctrines of Origen.

⁶⁰³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 84, 189.22.

⁶⁰⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 84, 190.20.

⁶⁰⁵ See Gen 19:11, 2 Kgs 6:18. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 84, 190.29.

⁶⁰⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 85, 191.8.

Ephraem responded with a “public anathema of synodical authority” condemning the doctrines of Origen.⁶⁰⁷

Hearing of this condemnation, Nonnus, Leontius, Domitian and Theodore, pressed Archbishop Peter to remove Ephraem’s name from the diptychs. Peter, seeing the oncoming storm of controversy sent for Sophronius and Gelasius to compose a petition against the Origenists requesting that Ephraem’s name remain.⁶⁰⁸ Peter in turn sent this to the emperor along with a description of the Origenists’ “innovations.”⁶⁰⁹ Justinian issued an edict against the doctrines of Origen and the synod signed off on it. Domitian and Theodore, caught in the moment, were forced to sign, but were distressed at the outcome. According to Cyril, Domitian learned that some of the Origenists had evaded signing the decree, and he “fell into distress and anguish and, cutting off his beard, separated himself from the catholic communion, and so died of dropsy in Constantinople excommunicate.”⁶¹⁰ Theodore, however, goes on to fight against the move against Origenism.

By February of 543 C.E., the edict against Origen was published in Jerusalem.⁶¹¹ All of the Palestinian bishops and desert superiors signed the edict, except for Alexander of Abila. A small group, including Nonnus, Peter, Menas, John, Callistus, Anastasius, and some others, withdrew from the New Lavra settling in the plain. When Theodore of Cappadocia heard of this, he forced the hand of Patriarch Peter to accept the men back

⁶⁰⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 85, 191.19.

⁶⁰⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 85, 191.28.

⁶⁰⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 85, 191.32.

⁶¹⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 85, 192.9.

⁶¹¹ “In the month of February of the fifth indiction in the eleventh year after the seat of our father Sabas.” Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 86, 191.13.

into communion with the following letter:

We beg Your Piety to satisfy Your minds with a modest assurance by making with all readiness a universal proclamation to this effect: "Every anathema not pleasing to god that has been made is to be abrogated, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." We shall be satisfied with this assurance, even though it lacks strict precision.⁶¹²

Peter eventually assents, and with the appointment of Peter of Alexandria and John Strongulus as chancellors, and John the eunuch as superior of the New Church, the Origenist movement began to gain ground in Jerusalem. Cyril covers the conflict in detail:

This gave Nonnus and his party greater confidence in proclaiming their impiety publicly and from house to house and in plotting various persecutions against the fathers of the Great Lavra. If they saw an Orthodox monk in the holy city, they would get some persons of the world to assault him and insult him as "Sabas's man," and so drive him from the holy city. When several of the orthodox fathers had been assaulted and war had started against the pious, the Bessi of the Jordan, incited by godly zeal, came up to the holy city to help the Orthodox who were being warred against. Open warfare was waged against the Bessi and the rest of the orthodox and, when they took refuge in the hospice of the Great Lavra, their adversaries descended on them suddenly, wishing in their utter fury, to kill the fathers. Finding the hospice secured, they broke open the windows with stones and mercilessly stoned those within. While the fathers were being besieged, a Bessan called Theodulus, finding a flail and taking it in his hands, slipped out of the hospice and scattered their adversaries unassisted, although they were around three hundred. He took care not to strike anyone at all; but being himself struck by them with a stone, he fell, and died a few days afterwards. This quenched the war against the pious, except that the broken metal jamb of the sale room bears witness to this day against the savagery of those adversaries.⁶¹³

The intensity of the situation was palpable. Monks, like marauding gangs, were roaming the area looking for opportunities to attack their enemies or those who supported them. The struggle had taken on a new level of severity. There were now

⁶¹² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 86, 193.1-8.

⁶¹³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 86, 193.19-194.10.

battles and deaths to contend with—this was a long way from the quiet lives of prayer for which many of these monks had devoted themselves. The infusion of warlike actions into the situation only serves to inject questions of justice and retribution deeper into the questions Cyril is facing in his treatment of these trying times.

The fathers of the Great Lavra beg Gelasius to go up to Constantinople to explain what has been happening around Jerusalem with the Origenist monks. Gelasius, who is reluctant, finally agrees and admonishes them not to “let settle with you any adherent of Theodore of Mopsuestia, who was a heretic, since our sainted father Sabas abhorred him along with Origen.”⁶¹⁴ Gelasius goes on to explain his own regret for having appended his name to the petition against Theodore of Mopsuestia’s anathematization. Theodore Ascidas heard of Gelasius’s arrival in Byzantium and blocked his access to the orphanage, patriarchal residence and palace. Gelasius, “fearing the intrigues of Ascidas,” left on foot for Palestine but died on the way.⁶¹⁵ The fathers of the Great Lavra then went to Jerusalem to request a new superior, but were expelled “with violence and blows on the orders of the chancellors.”⁶¹⁶

According to Cyril, “all had gone over to the Origenists, whether yielding to necessity or seduced by flattery or misled by ignorance or in fear of the power wielded by impiety.”⁶¹⁷ The last stronghold was the Great Lavra, and the Origenists set their sights on its control. Cyril notes that an Origenist named George was made superior,

⁶¹⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 87, 194.21.

⁶¹⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 87, 195.3.

⁶¹⁶ Most likely Peter of Alexandria and John Strongulus, but Cyril does not say. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 87, 195.9.

⁶¹⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 87, 195.13.

only after “extensive intrigue.”⁶¹⁸ In February of 547 C.E., under armed guard, George was seated on the throne of Sabas.⁶¹⁹ The anti-Origenist monks were scattered under his leadership until the tide turned, according to Cyril, by God working “a great prodigy” of such magnitude as the removal of Arius from this world.⁶²⁰ Cyril explains, “On the very day of the persecution in which they were expelled from the Great Lavra, the chief of the enemy and general of impiety Nonnus was snatched from among men and seized by sudden death.”⁶²¹

The removal of Arius was a favorite hagiographical theme. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Theodoret links it to the prayer of the holy James of Nisibis.⁶²² Regardless of how it came about, it was deeply influential in the orthodox camps for its ability to affirm God’s interest and power coming to fruition for the right side in a heretical debate. As exemplified by Gelasius, only a few passages earlier, “sudden death” could come upon anyone. Cyril does not, however, read the death of Gelasius, the standout in the camp of anti-Origenist leaning monks in Palestine, as God’s providence siding with Origenian thought. As all hagiographies tend to do, the commentary is swung to match the reality. It is only after the fact that instances can be interpreted according to God’s providence. As Theodoret acknowledges, we might not always understand the situation, but we can be sure that God’s will is being done.

George, the Origenist superior of the Great Lavra, only lasted seven months. He

⁶¹⁸ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 87, 195.15.

⁶¹⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 87, 195.18.

⁶²⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 87, 195.26.

⁶²¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 87, 196.1.

⁶²² Theodoret of Cyrros, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R.M. Price (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1985), 1.10.

was expelled by his own community. It is interesting to note the discretion that Cyril uses in his treatment of the situation. He attributes his removal to “charges of profligacy and foul conduct.”⁶²³ Cyril states, “I shall gladly pass over these charges in silence, in order not to publish in my account things deserving deep silence and oblivion.”⁶²⁴ His restraint is admirable. Although he calls George a wolf, he is clearly not interested in dragging his name through scandalous retellings of his sins. Perhaps it was out of respect for the monk who had sinned and was in need of correction, or perhaps his own fear of attaching these stories of depravity to the Great Lavra of Sabas. In any event, he moves on to Cassianus, who ruled for ten months before dying in July of 548 C.E.⁶²⁵

Cyril closes out his history of Sabas by focusing on what he sees as the most important gift he leaves to the Christian faith, the monastic heritage. When Cassianus dies, Abba Conon is made abbot of the Great Lavra and he has a particularly unifying impact on the orthodox community living amidst the Origenist movement. Cyril notes that it was at this point that God, “who always exercises providence on behalf of his Church, dissolved the concord of the Origenists.”⁶²⁶ Cyril notes that the division came from those in the lavra of Firminus quarreling with those of the New Lavra over their doctrines, leading to “warfare against each other.”⁶²⁷ Cyril explains that a more comprehensive account – which is not extant – details all of the intricacies of the

⁶²³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 88, 196.5.

⁶²⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 88, 196.8.

⁶²⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 88, 196.16.

⁶²⁶ This is likened to the division of languages in Gen. 10:25, 11:9. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 89, 197.3.

⁶²⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 89, 197.9.

disagreements.⁶²⁸ Given the way Cyril considered this movement a weed which could insinuate itself in the life of the church, it is not surprising that the work disappeared. After all, these ideas, that all might be restored to Christ and that they might reign with him as Christ, were attractive notions to desert monks as well as particular communities of Christians spread throughout the empire.⁶²⁹

Cyril cites the “fissiparous impiety” of the movement by giving us some of the monikers associated with the divisions of the Origenist communities.⁶³⁰ He explains, “Whoever wishes may easily discover their impiety from the very names they give each other, those of the New Lavra calling those of Firminus’ ‘Protoktists’ or ‘Tetradites’ and those of Firminus’ naming those of the New Lavra ‘Isochrists;’ for each was allotted a name from the particular doctrines of their impiety.”⁶³¹

The fallout eventually takes shape in the ordination of many bishops in Palestine by Theodore of Cappadocia. His party, the Isochrists, “brought storms and waves against...that of the adherents of the most impious doctrine of the Protoktists, whose superior was Isidore.”⁶³² Isidore, giving up his position, and siding with Abba Conon, went up with him to Constantinople in 551/2 C.E.⁶³³

When Peter, the Archbishop of Jerusalem, died, the Origenist monks filled the position with Macarius. This caused war in the city and this was the last thing an

⁶²⁸ This is an extremely important detail, for this more comprehensive account was likely a victim of *damnatio memoriae*, either from one side or the other.

⁶²⁹ Price examines some of these divisions of belief in a footnote, no. 132, where he cites A. Guillaumont’s study. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, fn. 132, p. 219.

⁶³⁰ “ἀμφοτέρων πολυσχεδῆς” Cyril of Scythopolis, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis, Leben des Sabas*, 197.10.

⁶³¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 89, 197.16-18.

⁶³² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 89, 198.1.

⁶³³ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 89, 198.5.

emperor wanted. The goal of any emperor was to keep his people in peace, so that prosperity might take hold. Justinian surely did not want the task of rebuilding burnt churches or offering tax abatement because warring monks could not control themselves. When Justinian heard of the conflict, he deposed Macarius. Abba Conon and his party seized on this opportunity by proposing Eustochius, the administrator at Alexandria, to be the new bishop of Jerusalem.⁶³⁴

The fifth ecumenical council was called at Constantinople. Cyril notes that the main reasons were “a common and universal anathema was directed against Origen and Theodore of Mopsuestia and against the teaching of Evagrius and Didymus on preexistence and a universal restoration.”⁶³⁵ All of the bishops in Palestine “confirmed and approved” the acts of the council both “orally and in writing,” according to Cyril.⁶³⁶ The only outlier, Alexander of Abila, was expelled and “finally buried by an earthquake in Byzantium.”⁶³⁷ This minute detail nearly escapes the reader, when not focused on the growth of retribution in hagiography. It appears that Cyril has to show, even in this throwaway comment, that God’s providence will provide temporal judgment for those who do not fall into the orthodox schema.

With the hierarchy sufficiently curtailed, there was only the matter of the Origenist monks left to solve. Eustochius entreated them to change or leave, but they refused. Eventually he called in the *dux* Anastasius and expelled them from the New Lavra. In order that it not be refilled by the old monks, he transplanted one-hundred twenty

⁶³⁴ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 90, 198.19.

⁶³⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 90, 199.6.

⁶³⁶ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 90, 199.9.

⁶³⁷ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 90, 199.11.

monks from neighboring monasteries to the New Lavra. Cyril was one of the transplants. On the 21st of February, 554/5 C.E., the New Lavra was wrested from the Origenists' hands. Cyril closes his account on a positive note, citing that God had "rescued and redeemed us from the power of the Origenists," driving them "from our presence" and enabling us "to inhabit their habitations." God had transferred the "fruit of their labors" to those monks with the proper theology. The cave of Sabas no longer housed the lion of Origen's teachings, though from the same creator, these monks were very different animals.

The story of Sabas and his foundations' ongoing struggle for 'orthodoxy' against the Origenists is significant on several levels regarding the development of Christian hagiographical literature. First, it sets the stage for a theology that can move past the allegorical undermining that Origen's thought seemed to create in any claim of connectivity to the ancient scriptures. If, like Origen, one critiqued the destruction of Lot's wife for not following God's prescription to not look back, how was one to use this passage in its simplest form for the training of the monk.

The answer, could of course be that Lot's wife represented something deeper than an errant human. Origen explains, "Do we think there was so much evil in the transgression, that the woman, because she looked behind her, incurred the destruction which she appeared to be fleeing by divine favor? For what great crime was it, if the concerned mind of the woman looked backward whence she was being terrified by the excessive crackling of the flames?" He continues, "But because 'the law is spiritual' and the things which happened to the ancients 'happened figuratively,' let us see if perhaps Lot, who did not look back, is not the rational understanding and the manly soul, and

his wife here represents the flesh."⁶³⁸

Origen's tone here, which is far from retributive, calls into question the vengeance and punishment of God for someone who would do something so minor as look back in fear at the place from which one was running. After all, it was being destroyed from above by fire; it must have been quite a sight to behold – or try to ignore.

For a Christian world that was becoming increasingly entrenched in imperial power and Roman ideals which tended toward success in battle and overcoming peoples lying outside of the imperial purview, the suppression of ideas like those which accompanied the Origenists, was a natural development. Justinian with his reliance on law codes that proposed punishments fitting to every crime, was least interested in a theology or social code of restoration and forgiveness. His rule was foundational in adjoining Christian theology to a literal reading of how God's justice was meted in scripture and how it would be meted in his court and empire. The connections between God's providence and the subsequent growth of the empire were overt. These notions were hardly fathomable in the second and third centuries, when Origen was facing widespread persecutions of the Christian faith. Why the theologies of Origen re-emerge with such power in this time of high Byzantine Christianity, is a notable problem with important historical influence.

Abba Cyriacus

Cyril recounts his connection to Cyriacus as a fellow struggler against the teachings of Nonnus and Leontius, the leaders of the Origenists in the area. Cyriacus

⁶³⁸ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (CUA Press, 2010), 5.2.

responds to Cyril's message from Abba John saying, "Say to the one who sent you: Let us not be despondent, father, for we shall soon see the overthrow of nonnus [sic.] and Leontius in death and the expulsion of the rest of them from the New Lavra, in order that the genuine disciples of blessed Sabas may inhabit the New Lavra, once the false ones have been chased out."⁶³⁹ Here we have a connection between the heretical leaders of the Origenist movement and some type of judgment or retribution being summoned on account of their sins. Presumably the overthrow and death of which Cyriacus speaks is not the eventual falling asleep in which these venerable old monks partook. Cyriacus was sure that God was going to act in a corrective measure against the teachers of Origenian theologies.

In one of the most important passages in Cyril's work, he recounts his pressing of Cyriacus on the subject of the Origenists' teaching. The tone suggests that Cyril was persuaded by the Origenian model of philosophy paired with faith. He asks the old monk, "Father, what of the views they advocate? They themselves affirm that the doctrines of pre-existence and restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) are indifferent and without danger, citing the words of Saint Gregory, 'Philosophize about the world, matter, the soul, the good and the evil rational natures, the Resurrection and the Passion of Christ; for in these matters hitting on the truth is not without profit and error is without danger.'⁶⁴⁰ Cyriacus responds at length:

The doctrines of pre-existence and restoration are not indifferent and without danger, but dangerous, harmful and blasphemous. In order to convince you, I shall try to expose their multifarious impiety in a few words. They deny that

⁶³⁹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Cyriacus 11-15, 229.24.

⁶⁴⁰ "καὶ τὸ διαμαρτάνειν ἀκίνδυνον" Cyril of Scythopolis, *Kyriakos von Skythopolis*, *Leben des Kyriakos*, 229.31. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Cyriacus 11-15, 229.31.

Christ is one of the Trinity. They say that our resurrection bodies pass to total destruction, and Christ's first of all. They say that the holy Trinity did not create the world and that at the restoration all rational beings, even demons, will be able to create aeons. They say that our bodies will be raised etherial and spherical at the resurrection, and they assert that even the body of the Lord was raised in this form. They say that we shall be equal to Christ at the restoration. What hell blurted out these doctrines? They have not learnt them from the God who spoke through the prophets and apostles – perish the thought – but they have revived these abominable and impious doctrines from Pythagoras and Plato, from Origen, Evagrius, and Didymus. I am amazed what vain and futile labors they have expended on such harmful and laborious vanities, and how in this way they have armed their tongues against piety. Should they not rather have praised and glorified brotherly love, hospitality, virginity, care of the poor, psalmody, all-night vigils, and tears of compunction? Should they not be disciplining the body by fasts, ascending to God in prayer, making this life a rehearsal for death, rather than meditating such sophistries? But (the elder added) they did not wish to follow the humble path of Christ, but instead "they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless heart was darkened; saying they were wise, they became fools." The sower of all these tares and cause of these evils was Nonnus, who, taking advantage of the death of our blessed father Sabas, began to make his neighbor drink of a foul concoction, having Leontius of Byzantium as his assistant, champion and fellow-combatant. At first he seduced into his abominable heresy the more lettered, or rather the more unlettered, in the New Lavra. He was not satisfied with these monks, but strove to give the other monasteries of the desert a share in his own plague. What strategems did he not use to drag in as well poor lowly me? But God showed to me by revelation the filth of his heresy. What schemes did he not employ to communicate his evil teaching to the community of Souka? But he failed, since I by the grace of Christ warned and exhorted each one not to depart from the true faith. When he strove to make a supporter of his heresy – I mean Peter the Alexandrian – superior in our lavra and thereby to enslave the community, he did not succeed: on the contrary, the community bestirred itself and expelled Peter from being superior. Again, Nonnus shamelessly bestirred himself into setting up another Peter, the Greek, a supporter of the plague of Origen, as our superior, but the community was again stirred by spiritual zeal into expelling Peter from being superior; going to the lavra of blessed Sabas, it took for itself its present superior, Abba Cassianus, who is of Scythopolis by birth, orthodox, and adorned both in his life and in his teaching. It was then that we succeeded, with difficulty, in repelling the supporters of Origen.⁶⁴¹

This is the first real treatment of the doctrines of Origenism in Cyril's writings. A few things stand out regarding its presentation. First, Cyril gains the teaching by asking if

⁶⁴¹ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Cyriacus 11-15, 229.33-231.19.

there was really any harm in this sort of theological philosophizing. We can surmise that Cyril had thought about these things, and not only the teachings, but the wider reception of these teachings. He quotes Gregory of Nazianzus in *Ad Eunomium* 10, where he espouses this type of philosophical work as capable of erring “without danger.”⁶⁴² Whether Cyril is winding Cyriacus up, or simply presenting his own humble struggle with the debate is worth considering. In thinking about the presentation of the material to the reader of these hagiographies, it could function as a nice rhetorical lead in to the discussion, as much as a nod to the genuinely persuasive nature of these teachings. Given the lifestyle of the monk, with an abundance of time for study and thought, philosophical musings from Origen would certainly stimulate discussion and rumination in these monasteries. Moreover, the palatable nature of a theology that saw all of creation restored to God’s order was in line with some of the deepest sympathies of monastic life. Monks were struggling in the desert not simply for themselves, but for all of creation. Theirs was a battle against evil writ large, and their trophies were the lives of the faithful, restored through forgiveness in Christ. This coincided nicely with certain monastic theologies that were eager to re-envision the ascetic life as a purified life hearkening back to the garden of Eden. The continual reliance on themes of animals like lions, returning to their docile Edenic selves, is ubiquitous.⁶⁴³ Cyriacus even admits of his own temptation toward the ideas by expressing that he avoided them by a revelation from God. If indeed God was able to pull back the pious Cyriacus from espousing these beliefs only by a revelation, they certainly held some ideological power

⁶⁴² PG (36:25A)

⁶⁴³ Cyriacus himself has a lion who guards his herb garden. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*,

that resonated with the spirit of the times.⁶⁴⁴ The connections between a monastic theology that considered itself returning to a former self – more connected to God – and Origen’s doctrines of *apokatastasis*, had unique import for the monk. Since theologies espousing the idea of “return” to a more edenic-styled world were common, it made the teachings of the Origenists all the more easily embraced. The monk could not only hope for a redemption of the world, but also a redemption of the soul through a restoration of proximity to God.

Theognius the Bishop

Cyril’s short treatment of Theognius holds an interesting sequence of divinely ordained retribution. After being ordained bishop of a seaside town named Betylius, ninety miles from Jerusalem, Theognius is faced with a raging sea. As the waves threatened to destroy the town, the inhabitants fled to Theognius for help. Cyril notes that God “doubtless ordained this in order to chastise the inhabitants and display the divine grace of Theognius.”⁶⁴⁵ Going down into the waves, the bishop stuck a cross into the ground where the waves originally ceded their strength, and they returned to their normal patterns. The story is unique in that Cyril attributes the only two posts of reasoning that might make sense to the late antique mind. Either the people needed punishing or it was an opportunity for the Christian saint to show his power over the physical world. Nevermind the possibility of atmospheric depression or a severe storm,

Cyriacus 11-15, 232.5.

⁶⁴⁴ It is interesting to wonder, then, why it was stamped out with such authority in the following years? For a treatment of this, we will need to turn to the emperor Justinian and the broader landscape of late antique life. This will be undertaken in the following chapter.

these surges of water could only be attributed to God's hand. It gives us something of a foothold in thinking about how disaster was construed in Cyril's mind.

Leontius of Byzantium

If we connect Leontius of Byzantium with the Leontius that Cyril speaks about, a fuller picture of his theology emerges.⁶⁴⁶ Beyond the struggles with the personhood of Christ, but deeply connected in many ways, lies the theology of restoration, or *apokatastasis*. Understanding one's "being" as it related to the incarnation and eventual salvation was a significant philosophical problem for Christianity in the fifth and sixth centuries. Any persuasive language concerning how Christ's nature(s) was construed was sure to be met with a verbal sally of equal or increasing strength. As witnessed in Cyril's treatment of these theological showdowns, the disagreements often turned bloody and ran beyond the borders of towns and even regions, making their way to the emperor's ear on any number of occasions.

Deeply connected to this question of how humans "are," is the question of how salvation operated. In order to understand salvation, one needed a solid grasp of what this belief saved from as much as how one could access this agent of soteriological power. We get a relatively clear sense of how Leontius felt about these issues, which gives us some indication of the resistance to his claims, further fleshing in the outline of the debates surrounding Cyril's hagiographies. For Leontius, there were three main

⁶⁴⁵ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Theognius the Bishop, 242.30.

⁶⁴⁶ Evans argues that these two are indeed the same person. See Evans, *Leontius of Byzantium*, 2-3.

stages through which the “*noes nus*,” or pure intellects, would pass.⁶⁴⁷ The first is the present world, wherein the *nous* is outfitted with a body that is “perfectly conformed to the sin in which he first fell from the vision of God before the worlds were made.”⁶⁴⁸ In being given a body which coincided with one’s original sin, it was a natural starting point from which the human could conquer the temptations that had caused its original fall. This model had deep connection for the monks living in the desert. For theirs was a life intentionally lived in the battle for purification. Any monk setting out for the deserted tombs and valleys of Egypt or any other desolate place, was going out to face his or her own most troubling demons. The language still evokes the same imagery in contemporary usage. A person has to face their own demons, working through the mental and spiritual struggles that seem to plague the Christian life. It was no different in the fifth and sixth centuries. In much of the hagiographical literature, we hear of particular demons who tormented the monks. The demons are often called by their associative sins – the demon of fornication, pride, gluttony, etc. This concept begins to answer the question of why Origen’s teachings were so persuasive and hard to defeat, as Cyril often notes. They explained the core temptations of a monk’s life, fastening each vignette to a framework of soteriological struggle that explained so much. Passages like the Apostle Paul’s in Romans 7:5, explaining his struggle against the things he does not want to do but finds himself doing even so, make perfect sense in this reading. The human life was a period of testing, and these tests were designed to be difficult – for the goal was to succeed at the very things that were already known to be

⁶⁴⁷ Evans, *Leontius of Byzantium*, 97.

⁶⁴⁸ Evans, *Leontius of Byzantium*, 97.

points of weakness. For Leontius, and his followers, there is an overt connection between the demons and the shortcomings of the *nous*. This connection made real sense in the monastic context.⁶⁴⁹

Conclusions:

As to the question of whether Cyril was sympathetic to the Origenist movement, we can affirm – even in the midst of his antithetical statements – that he was. One could envision a young monk who was drawn to new theological ideas that hearkened back to one of the greatest philosopher-theologians of all time. When the controversy began to play out against his family’s allegiances and his most respected monastic heroes, like Sabas, it was clear on which side he would come down in support. That is not to say that he did not find value in some or even all of the teachings. If it had been so clear of an issue, he would not have left the clues in his dialogue over Origen with Cyriacus, or the deeper resonance of restorative function within the monastic institution.

We are left with the question of why so little literature recounting the history of the Palestinian monks is extant? How could this be the only extensive surviving document on the lives of the Palestinian monks? Cyril explains in his treatment of Nonnus and the members of the lavra of Firminus, that “The fissiparous impiety of both has been recorded at the present time in a more detailed and comprehensive account by

⁶⁴⁹ Leontius's threefold progression toward a vision of God, mimics Evagrius's movement through *πρακτική*, *φυσική*, and *θεωρητική*. The connection between Evagrius's *nous* Jesus Christ, and Leontius Jesus Christ is upheld, according to Evans's treatment of the material. If Leontius was using Evagrius's theological treatments, the connection to Evagrian thought on the subject of retribution and judgment gives us the middle stage between Origen and Leontius. Evans, *Leontius of Byzantium*, 99.

some men, dear to God, of our flock, receiving the refutation it deserves.”⁶⁵⁰ As with most lost literature from antiquity, it either fell from interest and was destroyed over time, or it was intentionally destroyed by one side or the other. A work such as this “comprehensive account,” likely covering in detail the Origenist philosophies that Cyril’s community was bent on rooting out, was surely removed from circulation by design. In thinking about why Cyril’s treatment of the controversy was saved, we can surmise that there were several factors. First, his treatment had value to the broader community as a record of the monks’ lives. Second, his treatment of Origen is critical enough to pass with the anti-Origenists. Was Cyril able to play both sides, subverting a desire to destroy the record of the Origenists’ teaching by his verbal anathematizing of Origen and his respectful treatment of the monks’ lives? If we allow for our findings in this chapter that support Cyril’s theology as some sort of hybridized version of restoration mixed with anathemas against Origen, we begin to understand Cyril as an author who was deeply committed to his craft. His task was preservation of not only the lives of the saints, but also the theological nuances – such as St. Gregory’s critique of the judgment on the philosophizing Christian – to give the reader a full picture of life in the monasteries of Palestine.

Cyril’s God is a God who always leans away from retribution, unless it is a reversible punishment that imports a heavy dose of educational training for the monk and the community. It is of course possible that Cyril left moments like his own questioning of the Origenist movement in the text to provide a guidepost for others who would question the same. If, however, it was solely for that purpose, we would

⁶⁵⁰ Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Sabas 89, 197.13.

envision a hagiographical treatment that matched this theological leaning. Whether “Origenist” or not, Cyril had embraced some of the basic ideas of Origen’s teaching. It was clear he was not alone. The subsequent hagiographies of John of Ephesus, would support a theology that attempted to remove Origenist concepts of restoration in the lives of the monks. These two contemporary authors, Cyril and John, give us an indication that the final shift was about to occur. Cyril is extant, due to his espousal of the anti-Origenist story line, regardless of where his theology lies. John, as we will see, infuses his hagiography with a sharp denunciation of these restorative models.

Chapter 5

Persuasive Punishments and Prescriptive Hagiography in John of Ephesus

The collection of fifty-eight short stories about monks and holy persons that is attributed to John of Ephesus has strong connections to Theodoret's style of presentation.⁶⁵¹ The stories come as snippets of lives presented to admonish some and promote the faith of others.⁶⁵² Written in the mid to late 560s, John retells the stories of

⁶⁵¹ With regard to the number of lives, there is the usual problem over variance in manuscripts. See John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, trans. E. W. Brooks, *Patrologia Orientalis* 82 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), Intro., vii-xv.

⁶⁵² John acknowledges in his introduction that, "by this means we opine that two beneficial results will be produced, one that when they see their good deeds they may also glorify their Father who is in heaven as it is written, and the second again, that, when the light of the narratives of their ways of life shines upon souls entangled in the vanities of this world and darkened by error, they may be enlightened by the light of their triumphs and be eager to imitate them, and to receive their patterns in themselves, in order that they may attain to their crowns, and hear with them the life-fraught call that says, "Come enter, ye blessed of my Father." John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, Author's Preface, PO 17:2.

the great ascetics who had championed the faith in Christ and lived out their years in close proximity to God. Like Theodoret, who continually records the importance or problems pertaining to particular theological figures, John touches on the major debates in Christology, but does so only tangentially. He rarely provides proofs for his Monophysite stance, focusing on the person who was caught up in these battles for the faith, rather than on the intricacies of the theological positions.⁶⁵³ His reluctance to touch on the details of these issues is due to several factors. This chapter will propose that John's own proximity to the Emperor and Empress complicate his position as a great defender of Monophysite belief. His hagiography functions to deploy a certain structure of ascetic comportment that is in line with the imperial program. Although his subject matter is the Monophysites and their struggle in persecution, this is not his goal. The treatment of the Monophysite struggles in the earlier sixth century is a means of connecting with a people, predominantly in the Syro-mesopotamian region, who identified with these storylines. We should not read John's work at face value, but look for the more nuanced meanings he is trying to convey by crafting a story that connects to a certain population and exemplifies monastic ideals that are directly connected to a sixth century worldview and theology. The worldview was that of an imperial agent, charged with the conversion of pagans and heretics in the borderlands of the empire. The theology is one which is decidedly anti-Origenist, and yet a melding of the two strongest factions at work in the capital of Justinian, Chalcedonian and Monophysite. The marriage of these two ideologies was symbolized by Justinian's own marriage to Theodora. They worked together while maintaining the appearance of separation. The

⁶⁵³ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, Intro., xiii.

reasons for this vary, but are certainly connected to a political perspective that hoped for unity and peace amidst much larger fears of decimation from plague, famine, and a host of invading peoples. Scholars, ancient and modern, have searched for solutions to this disjunctive marriage and the resulting religious and civil policies that seemed to be rooted in it. The following examination of John of Ephesus as imperial agent, Monophysite bishop, historian, and hagiographer, seeks to solve this problem in a less conventional manner. By examining John's theology as exemplified in his treatment of ascetical lives, we gain some perspective on what he hoped a new asceticism would look like in the coming centuries. For John, it was a movement that took seriously its history, but also converted that lineage of struggle into one of power and proximity to God. One could see the developing temporal power of God at work in society through various miracles, and moreover, through the immediate retribution that was parceled out through natural disaster, war and of course, the holy man of God. John marks a transition from the persecution oriented suffering of the Monophysites, as well as the blood martyrs of the earliest Christian church. His theology presents a monk who can wage war in the borderlands on God's behalf. Saracen or Jew, or whoever might attack, would witness the full protection of the monk and the bitter justice of God. We will ask if there is some connection here between Justinian's newly circulated compilations of laws, and their underlying theology which conflated imperial justice with divine justice, thus allowing for retribution to be meted by human agents as much as divine. Certain laws that promote the monk and the monastery to adjudicating status certainly support this notion. Moreover, the move away from an allegorical interpretation of scripture, which might question God's temporal and unmerciful judgment appears to be at the

heart of John's treatment of monastic life. For this, a brief examination of how the final anathematizing of Origen played a role in the broader development of ascetic ideals is necessary.

In all of this we get a picture of John of Ephesus, and indeed of Justinian and Theodora, that throws conventional perspectives into question. This chapter will not skirt the problem of John and Justinian working together – or Theodora and Justinian for that matter – as a strange occurrence in the historical records. Rather it will grapple with how these two could have possibly worked together given the overwhelming support that historians have given to the theological divide they represented. Something must give. Either Justinian was not so Chalcedonian, or John not so Monophysite, or perhaps the divide between the two was not so hotly contested as the ancient and modern historians have proposed. If the reader will allow a contemporary example, Christian factions in America argue and fight today, sometimes even rising to the level of physical struggle and sustained persecutions, and yet there is still a much greater enemy to be feared. That enemy is the fear of destruction of empire. A figure like John, deeply rooted in the capital, was less concerned with Chalcedonian success than with pagan destruction of Constantinople. This is not to say that he was not Monophysite in his views, nor that these issues did not occupy the minds of the Christian church throughout the empire in the sixth century. Rather, it goes toward explaining how Theodora and Justinian could maintain the relationship they did in the midst of what some theologians saw as the most intense rift in theological history.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵⁴ If we read John at face value, we get this perspective. Contemporary historians like Harvey also support this notion by highlighting the persecution and struggle in the sixth century.

Persecutions of the Monophysites waned during Justinian's rule, they were nothing close to the intensity of the Justins (I and II), which bookended his reign.

John's *Lives*

In his collection, John presents a diverse array of holy deeds carried out in a variety of situations. A significant number of his stories hinge on a retributive theme. The monks are often depicted as working to maintain their penitential and private lives, while navigating the invasion of the Huns, the persecution of the Chalcedonians, and the nagging question of how God's power is worked out in everyday life in Syrian Late Antiquity. Given that the monk had died to the self and was living solely according to God's will, one would imagine complete alignment and clarity in every situation. The reality was that monks were still living on earth and dealing with the forces of demons and their wily ways of deception. This seems to weigh heavily on John's account of their deeds. Whether he is accounting for the misdeeds that the monks sometimes succumb to—as in the case of James (below) who finds himself worshipping a demon in the image of Mary seated on the Bishop's throne—or simply stating the reality of persecution and struggle he has experienced to the best of his ability, one can only accept his word. John is not without bias, as one will notice in his treatment of all things Chalcedonian, but he is also very careful in his marking of passages that seem outlandish or ridiculous in their recounting. In all of these matters, the theme of retribution seems to slide neatly into place in nearly all of John's stories of saints.

This chapter proposes that the rise of this retributive framework is contingent on several religious and social factors with which John and his community were dealing.

As Susan Ashbrook Harvey has already noted, the community John writes about is in crisis both theologically and politically.⁶⁵⁵ They are faced with being overrun by invading forces and by a perceived deterioration of their Christianity on all sides. It is not uncommon to hear comments regarding the church as that which is “persecuted in every quarter.”⁶⁵⁶ The ascetics were extreme, but so was the fear this community had of God’s judgment for their sins. In nearly every case, the comeuppance that is wielded by or through the holy person is irreversible. The monk may mourn the swift judgment, but only so far as words, in that he cannot change the judgment which God has applied in the situation. The chapter will attempt to answer whether John considered these monks wielders of this power or simply bystanders, watching God’s will unfold. For answers to these questions and a deeper sense of how power and retribution were utilized in this context, we will turn now to John’s marvelous collection of Saints.

In his prologue to the saints’ lives, John explains that he is setting down the deeds that he has known and learned “in heroic and divine persons.”⁶⁵⁷ He attempts to add believability to his stories by claiming that he has “been an eye-witness in every one of their actions for a long time and a witness of the truth of them,” or he promises he “will in no case commit any [of them] to the memorial of my handwriting.”⁶⁵⁸ At several points in this introduction John uses the Syriac term *ganbr’* or “heroic” to describe the men he writes about in his collection. The term might seem a bit of a reach to use in

⁶⁵⁵ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

⁶⁵⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 24, PO 17:315.

⁶⁵⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, Author’s Preface, PO 17:2.

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⁶⁵⁸ Brooks notes that this cannot be taken as true because he includes Abraham of Kalesh who died before he was born. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, Author’s Preface, PO 17:2.

describing these hermits of the desert. Can one really think of these smelly old ascetics as heroes that would warrant a following? We are witness to a clash of culture between the new Christian ethos of asceticism and the old Hellenistic ideas of heroism. And yet John would have us believe these monks embodied the best aspects of both. What better tool could there be for connecting to a community than calling their monastic leaders “heroes”? For a closer treatment of this edifice, we will turn to John’s own analysis of the deeds of the holy men of Syria.

Habib

John’s first vignette is built upon the fantastic deeds of the holy man Habib. According to the narrative, Habib took over the monastery from his superior around the age of thirty. He had lived with him for twenty years. John relates that people feared the awesome power of Habib with such intensity that there was often no reason for Habib to even act. John explains, “And from that time the fear of the blessed man fell upon all men, so that many from fear, before he himself spoke to them, of their own free will made a remission.”⁶⁵⁹

Habib, who according to John, befits a “high place at table in the heavenly life,” akin to his placement in John’s work, was presented as one who was particularly close to God. As is reminiscent of Theodoret’s lines concerning the ascetics who had the most power, which was derived from proximity to God, John explains that, “when he spoke God would perform in action everything that he said without delay, because he saw his

⁶⁵⁹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:7.

zeal and readiness and the keenness of his purpose.”⁶⁶⁰

The extant opening sequence of stories appear to begin halfway through a tale about an owner of an ass and his assertion of rights in parchments for debts.⁶⁶¹ The man ultimately brought the parchments to Habib begging him for forgiveness. This concludes what is left in the manuscripts of the first story. John continues with a similar story which was clearly of less prominence to the first, but displays the theme of monastic power and divine justice in civil legal dealings, that the first one began.⁶⁶² This is due in no small part to the eventual judgment and death sentence that Habib calls for in its wake. John explains that there was an old man who had an ancient debt and he “used to plunder many people.”⁶⁶³ The plundered people told Habib of the man and he set out to speak to him. When the debt holder heard of this, he quickly gathered up his deeds and fled. Upon learning of this, Habib states, “Because his will was thus prepared to do evil toward these poor men, if God wills their deliverance, let them never see him again.”⁶⁶⁴ In the same night, the man died. Akin to Theodoret’s tales of the holy person calling for the death of a heretical teacher like Arius, or some other perceived enemy of faithfulness, Habib protects the poor by enlisting God’s justice in an immediate form. As if to show that more good became of this than just the man’s punishment, John relates that the man’s wife and children returned the deeds to their rightful owners. It is a story of God’s retribution, but also a story of legal adjudication and correction. The people receive back ownership of their land and the offending party receives

⁶⁶⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:8.

⁶⁶¹ χάρτης ܡܘܨܗܘܬܐ

⁶⁶² Of less importance only in that it was not told first.

⁶⁶³ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:8.

punishment.

It appears that Habib was greatly interested in matters of debt-remission, John says the fear of him spread as well as his fame among the poor. Habib was happy to be helpful to any widower or impoverished person who called on him for help. The subsequent story relates that some poor men beseeched Habib for help against another creditor who had kept the debts for several years. When the man hears of Habib's enlistment, he says, "Will not this fellow go and sit in his monastery and be quiet? For see! He comes out and wanders about to eat and drink."⁶⁶⁵ These inflammatory words were enough to send Habib reeling into self doubt about his assumed role between the solitary life and the social cause. Returning to his monastery he prays, "Lord who knowest what is in the hearts of all, if thou knowest that I came out in this business in order to eat and drink, forgive this man. And again, if thy grace knoweth that it is for the sake of thy name and for the sake of the deliverance of the wronged that I have come out, in order that this same thing may be made known to this man and to everyone else, do with him as thy grace knoweth how."⁶⁶⁶ With this "Grace exacted forthwith from the man requital for the old man," and the Lord "smote him, and half of him became withered, one of his eyes and one of his arms, and the whole of his side, and one of his feet, and he fell into grievous affliction."⁶⁶⁷ The punished man finds out that it is a punishment for his actions and immediately sends out intercessors asking that the saint pray for him. Habib responds through one of his disciples saying, "Go,

⁶⁶⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:8.

⁶⁶⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:9.

⁶⁶⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:9-10.

⁶⁶⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:10.

my son; we for our part will not close the door, and pray for him. But the rest of the sentence has gone forth against him, that he shall depart from life; and this we cannot reverse.”⁶⁶⁸ John presents Habib as a caring old man who would still pray for the health of the man, even though he precipitated his death directly prior to this. Whether this is cover for so harsh a judgment, or simply John’s attempt at showing the holy man as continually amenable and caring of all persons regardless of their pre-repentance activities is unclear. In the wonderful words, “as thy grace knoweth how,” John has pieced together the most careful and deliberate phrasing for a holy man who wishes one of his problematic neighbors would just vanish. We suppose that Habib gets what he is hoping for regardless of his veiled language of supplication. The community wanted to be rid of the man’s usury and what better way to show the providence of God coupled with the power of the holy man than for Habib’s prayer to result in death? This was not an immediate death. Since it came on gradually, withering only half of the man’s body, it gave him time to acknowledge the holy man’s power and his own sinful ways. This gradual but immediate judgment is of a perfect style for hagiographical representation. It promotes the power of God vis-à-vis any other claims of authority; it places this power squarely in the hands of God’s agents, and it is traceable only so far as the holy man, i.e., we don’t even know the name of the man who died. This is not to say that the story is false, but rather that it is untraceable, as are so many wonderful stories of religious movements.

When the debt-holding man died during the prayer of Habib’s disciple, the story spread quickly and according to John, “fear and the terror of him went out thenceforth

⁶⁶⁸ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:10.

in every place."⁶⁶⁹ The story is reminiscent of the death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. In both instances God's action to bring about death is administered through the association of God's chosen representatives, either the apostles or the ascetics. When word spreads, so does fear. This fear is closely aligned with our theme of retributive justice. Fear is useful for teaching in ways that tales of old men's piety is not. John certainly subscribes to the idea that God is willing and able to exact a similar punishment through his holy agents at any time necessary for the support of his providence.

We should mark here also, the critique that the man holds of Habib's activity in society. Asking, "Will not this fellow go and sit in his monastery and be quiet? For see! He comes out and wanders about to eat and drink," is a direct response on John's part to those who would question the monk's role as legal actor in society.⁶⁷⁰ Should the monk be ashamed for leaving his monastery? Should he not act on behalf of those who need his assistance, namely the poor and cheated in society? John portrays Habib as perfectly introspective, questioning his own role in earnestness, yet in the end showing God's blessing as much as God's power. The message rings through the hagiography with clarity. No longer would the ascetic be confined to the monastery. It was time for God's power to be made manifest in society and the ascetic was his chosen arbiter.

In his description of Habib, John quotes from Job, "Who hath contended with him and hath had peace?"⁶⁷¹ It is interesting that John chose to cite this quote from Job. It is not the normal citation of patience through worldly suffering, but rather an

⁶⁶⁹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:11.

⁶⁷⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:9.

identification with genuine power, as one who could not be contended with. Whereas one could conceive the ascetic, struggling with worldly pain and temptation identifying with the tormented Job figure, John of Ephesus twists the association. The quote would seem to align the holy Habib with God, rather than with Job. Of all the characters of the Hebrew scriptures, Job contends with more abuse and punishment than any other.⁶⁷² Indeed, numerous references to Job can be seen in ascetic texts. J.R. Baskin noted, Job occupies a prominent place in Patristic exegesis because of his embodiment of suffering as a means to salvation as well as a prefiguring of Christ.⁶⁷³ What is surprising, however, is the shift our holy man has made from suffering servant to divine agent.

In another story of Habib, John tells of an owner of a large vineyard who had spent a great deal of money on it. For three years hail had come down and destroyed his crops. When the fourth year came around, the man made an entreaty to Habib for protection. Habib asked the man why havoc was continually made of his vineyard. When the man explained that he did not know, Habib responded, "Know and see that it is consequently on account of your own sins that things which have not sinned are being chastised, that you may repent. But go make an oblation, and let us go there; and do...keep guard over yourself."⁶⁷⁴ In this curious formula, the man's possessions and other things "which have not sinned" were chastised by God for the man's own sin.⁶⁷⁵ In

⁶⁷¹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:11.

⁶⁷² See Wills, who looks for earlier ascetic motifs in stories such as Job. Lawrence M. Wills, "Ascetic Theology Before Asceticism? Jewish Narratives and the Decentering of the Self," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 4 (n.d.): 902-925.

⁶⁷³ J. R. Baskin, "Job as Moral Exemplar in Ambrose," *Vigiliae Christianae* 35, no. 3 (September 1, 1981): 222.

⁶⁷⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:13.

⁶⁷⁵ This model is evident and common in the Hebrew story of Joshua and Achan. See Joshua 7.

this instance the man is receiving his retribution in real time for the sins he has committed. In the following segment, the vineyard owner makes an oblation with Habib and a cloud quickly ascends before them, ready to rain down hailstones. Habib prays that the cloud would pass from the man and when the hail came it fell on all the surrounding land, but not the repentant vineyard owner's property.⁶⁷⁶ The man's faith in Habib is a testament to the ascetic's power to both punish and, in rare cases, forgive.

Further proving the legal aspects of the ascetic's role, Habib acts also as a protector of those who get caught in unfair business dealings. We read of the case of a poor widowed woman who teaches drawing to make ends meet. In due course, two of her students absconded without paying her the proper fee for her work. The old woman went to Habib looking for justice. Habib wrote a letter to the two cheating students and warned them not to use their skill until they had paid their proper fee. Of course, the two do not comply – that version of the story would hardly have made its way into this collection. The same day they begin to practice their art, one of the pupil's tongues was "seized with an impediment so that she could not speak at all, and the arm of the other withered and became like wood, and would not turn."⁶⁷⁷ The fee is immediately sent to the old woman and she is begged to go and repeal the judgment which was leveled on the two. Unlike the earlier instance of the wicked deedholder, Habib takes the necessary action to reverse the sentence. John states, "But [he] in order not to requite the evil-doer according to [his] evil-doing set forth incense and prayed and [made the sign over] them, and the bonds were loosened, while he cautioned them not to act

⁶⁷⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:14.

⁶⁷⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:15.

presumptuously against the word of God.⁶⁷⁸ The retributive actions of the monk, which at times are final, at other times stand only so long as the ascetic deems them necessary. The tenor of the stories, however, is far more intense than previous hagiographical compilations. Of the first several stories John relates, the holy monk has already effected two persons' deaths. This is not the soft handed retribution of Theodoret – which is nearly always reversed – but a new step in the direction of God's divinely ordained punishment in the temporal world.

Z'ura

John's second figure of interest is the holy man Z'ura. In one of the opening stories, John tells of how the Huns were descending on the holy man's area around 515 C.E.⁶⁷⁹ Z'ura was sent down to check on the monastery once it was thought that the Huns had passed through. Meeting a host of them on the way, Z'ura is singled out for attack by a Hun who had drawn his sword and was running to murder him. With the Hun's arm raised high to strike, Z'ura lifted his hand against him and said, "Ho! Move it no farther."⁶⁸⁰ The warrior's hand was impeded and stuck there in the air as a sign to any others who might attempt to do likewise. When the host had passed, Z'ura released the man's arm and he went on his way. Marking the threatening aspects of invading armies, John poises his holy man as more powerful than any foe.

According to John, Z'ura was made to give up his chosen post as a stylite by the

⁶⁷⁸ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:16. It is hard to know why he would rescind the sentence in this instance and not in others.

⁶⁷⁹ See footnote 2, John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:19.

⁶⁸⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:20.

synodite persecutors. Coming down from the column, Z'ura claims, "I will not rest till I go up to him who holds the royal authority, and testify to him before our Lord Jesus Christ concerning the persecution of the whole church, and concerning the distresses and the mockery of the saints in every place."⁶⁸¹ These were not empty words. Letters had preceded Z'ura and news had spread that a disturber was coming and "If he enters the city, he will turn the whole of it upside down."⁶⁸² Fear of the holy man spread all the way to the bishops and king. Moving out to meet him and settle the matter, the king called a synod to discuss the matters of difference between his bishops and the holy man.⁶⁸³ After both sides had argued for their positions, Z'ura denounced the king and recounted all of the deeds for which he felt the king guilty and explained that God would account on the Judgment Day for the distress of all Christians under his rule. The king responded in rage and struck himself on the breast saying, "You are apostates and corrupters, and the synod is true, and I will not consent to hear these things against it from you any more, and, if you were true men, God would show me a sign by your hands. And he who anathematizes the synod contends with his life."⁶⁸⁴ Exercising true retribution, Z'ura calls for a sign with the response, "The synod which divided Christ our Lord is anathematized not only by us, but also by the angels of heaven. And, since you seek a sign, by believers signs are not required; but the Lord will not show you a

⁶⁸¹ Z'ura's sending of letters ahead of himself is likened to the story of Ahab and Elijah. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:21.

⁶⁸² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:22.

⁶⁸³ Was the king in this passage Justinian? We can think so, given the later comment about the queen's villa.

⁶⁸⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:24.

sign outside you, but in your own self.”⁶⁸⁵ The king is smitten on his head a day later and “a fearful swelling covered him, until human shape was not recognized in him, insomuch that his wife, who was very cunning, hid him secretly in the chamber, that it might not be known to the city that he was already dead.”⁶⁸⁶ She sent for Z’ura to come and pray for her husband’s recovery. Z’ura, seeing the swollen and dead king, says, “Lo! The sign which you sought.”⁶⁸⁷ Z’ura says a prayer and restores the king to health, offering his warning that “This happened to you, because you tempted the Lord your God like an unbeliever, and sought a sign.”⁶⁸⁸ Z’ura first appeals to the judgment day to correct the king’s behavior, but when that does not work, the retribution takes on more immediate forms.

In a related story, a magistrate named Agapetus enlists the help of the recently “resurrected” king to put down Z’ura’s meddlings.⁶⁸⁹ The king, who is naturally reticent to go against him after his own deadly experience asks, “And what can I do to him? For he is a stubborn man who does not fear men.”⁶⁹⁰ Agapetus asks for the right to deal with him and the king agrees saying, “If you are stronger than he, do as you wish.”⁶⁹¹ Here the appeal to power is primary in assessing whether one was right. The victor would be made known only through the final outcome.

Agapetus sent Z’ura a message saying that he should come from where he was

⁶⁸⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:24.

⁶⁸⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:24-25.

⁶⁸⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:25.

⁶⁸⁸ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:25.

⁶⁸⁹ According to John, Agapetus was promulgating the serious blasphemy that “Mary the God-bearer should not be commemorated in the church at all, nor her likeness be found depicted anywhere.” John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:26-27.

⁶⁹⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:27.

⁶⁹¹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:27.

residing at the queen's villa on the other side of the Golden Horn, or else be banished from the country. Since it was the first days of the fasting period, Z'ura responded, "We have a law laid down for us by our true King, that we are not to receive anyone in these holy days, nor make answers; insomuch that our door is closed, and accordingly we are not free to answer either you or the king. But wait for us till the fifth day of the week when we shall open the door, and after we have opened it what God knows to be right he will himself perform between us. But for the present we will not voluntarily answer you; for if you seek to act with violence you know."⁶⁹² Of course this response enraged Agapetus and he sent the military forces by boat to seize him. Each time the cutter comes close to landing on the shore it is blown back by a strong wind. Finally, "something like a flash of lightning...smote their boat, and the bench was torn out of it from end to end, and it sprang away and mounted upwards as far as the eye can see."⁶⁹³ John relates that at this point Agapetus understood that it was "God's power which was contending on behalf of the blessed man."⁶⁹⁴

As Agapetus begins preaching his point of view to the king and people, retribution quickly finds expression. John explains that, "The Lord smote this man [Agapetus] in his tongue, and it grew long and protruded beyond his mouth and came down to his breast, making a fearful sight with great swelling, so that he was twice lanced in it, while terror and trepidation seized all who saw him at the sight of him."⁶⁹⁵ When the fifth day of the week came to pass – the day that Z'ura had determined he

⁶⁹² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:28.

⁶⁹³ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:29.

⁶⁹⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:29.

⁶⁹⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:30. Isaiah 57 speaks of the unrighteous

would give his answer – Agapetus died from his disease. This culmination brings up the most pertinent aspect of this story to our theme. John explains that, “Everyone was amazed at the blessed man’s words, how God wrought this miracle in him.”⁶⁹⁶ In essence, either our holy man foresaw that the man’s retribution would be visited upon him on a particular day, or he caused it to happen. The reader is left to wonder what could have happened if the man had stopped his blasphemies by the day that God would “perform what he knows.”⁶⁹⁷ Agapetus’s partisans surmise that the holy man must be using some type of enchantments to cause his death on the very day that he had predicted God’s judgments. One could imagine this rhetoric evolving from either side of the debate on a topic, depending on the outcome. If one’s opponent happened to predict judgment correctly, the outcome would have to be rendered as something other than God’s favor.⁶⁹⁸ In this instance, it was chalked up to the working of enchantments.⁶⁹⁹ In a curiously formulaic aspect that resembles ancient magical practices, John goes on to explain that Z’ura used to invoke the following words, “‘The Lord awaked like a sleeper and like a man who hath shaken off his wine, and smote his enemies behind him.’ Lord behold the blasphemies of presumption against thee, and

children of a sorceress and whore whose tongues stick out to mock the righteous.

⁶⁹⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:31.

⁶⁹⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:30

⁶⁹⁸ There is also an underlying connection between the Christian holy man, and the ancient miracle worker. Vakaloudi argues that in this connection “They can strengthen the angle that Christianity is the only acceptable religion and endowed with the power to create miracles, whereas the others are motivated by the evil demons and consequently their achievements can be explained as black magic, sorcery, and illusion.” Anastasia D. Vakaloudi, “Influences of the Religious Syncretism in the Early Byzantine Society,” *Jahrbuch Der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 53 (2003): 1.

⁶⁹⁹ Other definitions include witchcraft, magic and incantation. J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999), 160.

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'Be not quiet nor silent, O God; since lo! thine enemies make tumult, and they who hate thee have lift up the head against thy people;' besides the other things which the blessed man used to repeat in his prayer and over his incense."⁷⁰⁰ How different was the activity of speaking special scriptures over incense from the charge of an incantation? From an uninformed position, it was not recognizably unique. For the communities that saw these prayers as connection to the affirmation of the almighty, the difference was vast. The fact that a regular part of Z'ura's prayers invoked a piece of scripture calling on God to smite his enemies is certainly proof of the tumultuous times these Monophysite Christians faced.⁷⁰¹ It is also an affirmation of an abiding interest in retribution that the ascetic came to embody for John of Ephesus. We should note also the discerning of God's power from incantations. John was very interested in the conversion of pagan peoples to Christianity. That Z'ura's enemies attribute his work to incantations rather than God's power is of primary importance for John. He acknowledges these detractors in order to further solidify his point that it was God's power in God's people which was at work in this moment. Updating a history of magical incantations and their perceived, powerful outcomes in these communities, John shows Z'ura engaging in very similar behavior to the magician. He recites a formula that results in God's handling of the situation. This is a theological update to the magical hardware at work in the Syrian hills. The new software was none other than

⁷⁰⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:31-32.

⁷⁰¹ These might easily be connected to the Psalms of the Old Testament. We might also be reminded of the Old Testament paradigm wherein the holy man—in this case Elijah—is the suffering patron of the people against Jezebel and the wicked King Ahab. There is also significant resonance between Z'ura's calling forth of God's judgment and Elijah calling down God's power in defeat of the prophets of Baal. See 1 Kings 18-19.

the God of the Christian empire working in the same ways and through the same human means that antiquity had long associated with magicians and the “divine man.”⁷⁰²

Abraham and Maro

Turning now to other hagiographies from John’s compilation, this paper will assess how these ubiquitous elements of divine retribution go beyond didacticism, playing a pivotal role in claims to religious authority, providential assessment, and the wider theological changes in Christian literary style. Taken from the fourth chapter, the story of Saints Abraham and Maro the Brothers, conveys an interesting dilemma that faces the holy man and by default his hagiographer. I have chosen them specifically for the way they highlight the tension between a Christianity that is focused on actionable power and the role of the holy man in relation to the possibilities of that power. The brothers, who were born in a village called Kalesh, in Amida, are moved by zeal to enter a monastery in the territory of Ingila. The elder brother, Abraham, decided to stand upon a high stone column there after “he had broken himself for a space of ten years.”⁷⁰³ Seeing this, the younger brother Maro also ascended a column near his

⁷⁰² Morton Smith describes the difference between the *magus* and the *divine man*: “The term “divine man” carried none of the unpleasant connotations attached to “magus” – nothing of membership in a secret society, incest, worship of evil demons, human and other repulsive sacrifices, cannibalism, or barbarism. Consequently – and best of all – it did not make the man who bore it a criminal.” Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 1st ed (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 75. See also, Graham Anderson, *Sage, Saint, and Sophist: Holy Men and Their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1994); Gail Corrington Streete, *The “Divine Man”: His Origin and Function in Hellenistic Popular Religion* (New York: P. Lang, 1986); Charles H. Talbert, “The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Antiquity,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94, no. 3 (September 1975): 419–436.

⁷⁰³ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:57.

brother. John explains that Maro, “entered upon the road from the first mile and began to walk soundly.”⁷⁰⁴ As time went by and the brothers continued being “illustrious for mighty labors of abstinence,” they received gifts of the Spirit.⁷⁰⁵ The elder brother, Abraham, received the “power of working healings and driving out demons.”⁷⁰⁶ All seems normal here until we hear the words of Maro from the lower column. He states, “Sir, I will have nothing to do with things that gain very vain glory for someone but deceive certain persons.”⁷⁰⁷ At first the reader is puzzled by this antithetical stance. Any late antique person would have been more than delighted to witness or receive healing from a holy person. It was commonly accepted that a holy man was only capable of achieving such wonders by virtue of his proximity to God. This closeness was desperately sought by monks of all stripes. The stream of visitors and pilgrims continued for thirty-eight years until his brother Abraham, passed away.⁷⁰⁸ Maro took Abraham’s place to keep it from lying vacant and was quickly faced with the problem of acting as a holy man without performing miraculous feats. The Syrian holy person’s life was always conducted in two ways; there was the private pious aspect, and the public religious aspect.⁷⁰⁹ It is this latter form that Maro appears to take issue with.

⁷⁰⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:57.

⁷⁰⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:57.

⁷⁰⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:57.

⁷⁰⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:57.

⁷⁰⁸ The text here is incomplete. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:59.

⁷⁰⁹ Here I am thinking of ‘religion’ as that more formal, public binding of the people to each other or to God through expectation and precedent. Derrida is informative here when he states, “Between two readings or two lessons, therefore, two provenances: on the one hand, supported by texts of Cicero, *relegere*, what would seem to be the avowed formal and semantic filiation: bringing together in order to return and begin again; whence *religio*, scrupulous attention, respect, patience, even modesty, shame or piety – and, on the other hand (Lactantius and Tertullian) *religare*, etymology “invented by Christians,” as Benveniste says, and linking religion to the *link*, precisely, to obligation, ligament, and hence to obligation, to debt, etc., between men

As with most of our ascetics, there was real fear in falling into the grip of pride and arrogance. By his own admission, this is why Maro refuses to partake in healing and casting out demons. He is afraid that by engaging in these activities he will inadvertently be duped into thinking more highly of himself than he ought. He explains at some length:

You do not know the evil one's wiliness and deceitfulness. If I give way to these matters of sick and possessed persons, and allow them an opportunity of coming to me, lo! Fiends will at once go and seize women and girls and many persons, be it by means of a fever, or of ulcers, or of affection of the eyes, or of affection of the head...and will work in them without their knowledge, as if one were to say "Go jeer in the face of Maro," for, as soon as they bring them here, as if our own prayers were indeed powerful and mighty and drove out fiends, the fiends who have brought about these diseases will abandon them, and in their deceitfulness depart and withdraw, in order to carry out the wiles of their deceitfulness, and cheat us into having some such thought of ourselves as that we ourselves are indeed righteous and expellers of demons and healers of diseases, so that by this means we may be puffed up and be arrogant, so as to add disaster to disaster, and receive blows upon blows, and cease and remit these constant petitions to God for our sins, as if we were indeed righteous, and through the guilefulness of the demons' deceitfulness cease the rapid running on the road of repentance for our sins, and utterly sink in the stormy sea of sins.⁷¹⁰

It is certainly true that this could be John of Ephesus's retelling of a monk who was unwilling or unable to engage in the powerful acts expected of the holy man. I think the story points toward a larger struggle, however, that of power and providence in Late Antique life. As Maro indicates, the monk really doesn't know if he has power or if it is just some ploy on the part of the evil one. Of course, based on his ready acceptance that there was demon possession and that the demons involved had far more agency than one might expect – given the New Testament precedent of Jesus and Legion – the

or between man and God." Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," in *Acts of Religion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 73–74.

⁷¹⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:71-72.

question of whether a spiritual battle between good and evil was being worked out in the monastic sphere, was not even up for discussion. What was up for discussion, was whether the holy persons seemingly acting in concert with God's power were actually wielding that power and not simply holy buffoons?

To some extent, Maro's discomfort mirrors John's own careful tone regarding the believability aspects of his chosen holy monks. I think we can take Maro's voice as a marker for how important the question of power and providence was in the minds of his community. Not only were there persuasive examples of healing and comeuppance, but there was also real concern that these evidences of God's power in action might not be as conclusive as they seem. Working with this notion, it is interesting to consider the range of possibilities that were at play in these communities. Christianity had certainly become the religion of the Emperor and this shifted the focus away from martyrs seeking comeuppance in the afterlife, to a more immediate concern of Christian peoples at every level from the poor on up to the highest levels of political life. Was God going to act with the same immediacy on behalf of the Christian Roman empire, that he had in his actions for Israel in matters of war, for the early church in his reward of afterlife to the suffering martyrs, and for the Christian man or woman who desperately needed help in the immediate and dire circumstances that life so often threw one's way. Hagiography, and in particular the brand of hagiography that John of Ephesus was marketing, stepped in to answer these pressing questions. According to John, God wasn't going to stand by and let his people languish in the face of struggle. Whether against armies, demons or simply the local bully, the aim was to show that God was interested in Christian everyday life. We should note the problem of John's writing

about a community that had historically faced all kinds of persecution. This should not be wholly dismissed as a literary device, but rather as some hybridized entity which worked in two ways. First, it recorded the history of holy ascetics in a world which was set against them. This theme would pay dividends in the current world of pagan advance. Both instances showed a providence that operated in the immediate but at times left the community wondering how and when God's retributive justice would be served. The second way the theme of Monophysite persecution worked was to endear John's message to a community that was largely Monophysite themselves. They desired to hear the stories of the faithful monks now "asleep." It connected a contemporary community to John's broader message by working within a context that was palatable and even championed by his proposed audience. The message was that God's power was at work within the emperor and empire, and the monk, as agent of this powerful empire, was charged with expanding God's justice not just in the capital but the hinterlands as well.

John continues expanding on the works of Maro and Abraham but promises again to limit himself to those stories which he has "confirmed by the sight of my eyes as well as the written record, and not to repeat in writing what I have only heard, but the things that I have both heard and also seen."⁷¹¹ His attention to pruning his narrative of those stories that "are greater than the ears can bear," was likely appreciated by the ancient reader as much as the modern, for there were countless stories circulating of various provenances.⁷¹²

⁷¹¹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:65-66.

⁷¹² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:72.

The story turns to a certain magistrate who was taking advantage of the poor widows and orphans in the town. Maro hears the problems from the poor and calls upon the magistrate to make amends. In his entreaty, he explains, "But for my part I pity you, my son; since, however much God's justice turns away, it is impossible that it will not some time be roused against evil-doers."⁷¹³ He continues, "Neither yet think that this power of the saints before whom these poor people come and groan is a void thing; lest it be roused against you, and you and your house perish."⁷¹⁴ The man responded in arrogance, telling Maro, "Sit on your stone, and mind your own business."⁷¹⁵ As the magistrate took his leave of the holy man, Maro called out to him, "'Woe for you, my son! a pronouncement of wrath has gone out against you from heaven (for think not that I the sinner have cursed you; far be it from me). But repent and I with you will entreat God's justice for you, and perhaps you will be delivered.' But he became more hardened, and said: 'Let justice do what it likes.'"⁷¹⁶ At midnight a fire descended on the man's house from the heavens and consumed all of his property and furniture and everything in the house except for he and his slaves, who managed to escape naked. The man fell ill and died within ten days and his wife lost her eyesight and the property was plundered and destroyed. Some of the slaves ran away and some died.⁷¹⁷ Maro, weeping over the man's destruction, explains, "See, my sons, how the fiends destroy God's creation. How can we avoid shedding bitter tears for this poor

⁷¹³ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:73.

⁷¹⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:73. This is a clear indication of power found in the lives of those saints who had gone on to be with God.

⁷¹⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:74.

⁷¹⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:74.

⁷¹⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:75.

man, when we think how far the evil one puffed him up until he destroyed him, and even blotted out his memory from the earth.”⁷¹⁸ In the midst of this “justice” Maro maintains that it was Satan who was working to destroy this man’s life. Even though a pronouncement went forward from God, it seems as though God’s justice, and Maro’s pronouncement of it, had few options in the matter. As if butting up against an unshakable law, God’s retribution against the unholy magistrate was set. Ultimately, the blame goes to the evil one’s power in human life, but the governor of the punishment—like some valve on the flow of the evil one’s destruction—was God and his holy ascetic.

In the subsequent passage we get a different sense of judgment and punishment. It is no longer the evil one’s infliction, but God’s chastening retribution. In this story Maro’s eyes are opened to a revelation about the coming invasion of the Huns. He is overtaken with distress at what he will have to witness during their invasion and begins to cry aloud in suffering. When his weeping is heard by the others, a presbyter was sent to check on the holy man. Maro doesn’t easily disclose his vision but tells the brother to send for the brethren and pray, grieving for the end of his life in which he will have to see and hear such torment.⁷¹⁹ Maro then turns and explains, “My son, go and pray; because a sword has gone forth from the presence of the Lord, and slaughter has prevailed among the believers, and also over the churches and monasteries, because men have provoked God.”⁷²⁰ This curious moment of retribution, although it falls neatly in line with the previous picture of God acting in a remarkably restricted and uniform

⁷¹⁸ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:76.

⁷¹⁹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:79.

manner, is punishment by God, not by Satan. When the divine is provoked to anger, the outcome is regrettably swift. In this case, it takes just twenty days before the hosts of the Huns cover “the land of the East” in numbers that the Romans had not seen previously.⁷²¹ The majority of the monastery flees leaving only Maro on his column and three others, who felt safer in his presence than anywhere else. The Huns advanced, capturing some who were fleeing to the monastery and then made their way around the monastery as if they did not even see it standing there. The miracle of dodging this judgment is certainly connected to the notion that, in Maro’s words, “men cannot kill us, because ‘they who are with us are more than they who are with them.’”⁷²²

This story functions in several important ways for John. It upholds the sanctity and power of the ascetic over and above the pagan invaders. It exemplifies the retributive judgment of God on a community for not being righteous. And, perhaps most importantly, from a literary perspective, it allows John to assess an unfortunate invasion of the marauding Huns on a community that was ostensibly Christian. This is not a story geared toward the telling of ascetic struggle in Syria, whether Monophysite or otherwise, as Harvey has argued, it is rather the story of ascetic power in a venue of pagan punitive invasion, which was orchestrated by God.⁷²³ The message of the story is not to rally against the persecuting Chalcedonians, but rather for Christians to rally around the ascetic against any power – Hunnic, demonic or otherwise – that would

⁷²⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:79.

⁷²¹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:80.

⁷²² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:81.

⁷²³ Harvey argues extensively that John’s work was of primary import for Monophysite Christians who had been persecuted by Chalcedonians and that the primary goal of John’s work is to exemplify the strength of Monophysite asceticism amidst the turmoil of the sixth century.

challenge God's natural shaping of his providential will on earth.

God's providence and monastic powers operate on an uneasy landscape of confused jurisdictions: in both the physical and the spiritual. It is the perennial struggle between life and death, and the overarching theological structure which attempts to connect these conflicting bits. Was the ideal Christian one who forsook the physical for the spiritual, or one who could imagine a place on an apocalyptic timeline that connected or conflated the hopes of providence with the realities of everyday life? The reality is that no one would come to see a monk for healing who would simply turn the seeker away with the news that the whole world was ending soon anyway and they should not worry about their dying son. At the same time, it must have caused no small amount of internal struggle within the monk's mind concerning their own choices and their role as the healing holy man. The hybridized monk – one who was both in the world and out – was surely less consistent than one might hope, always balancing the needs of this life with the responsibilities for the next. Perhaps this is the brilliance of a figure like Maro and his story of struggle with healing; he mimics beautifully the inconsistencies that Jesus's account seems to exemplify – or should we say prescribe. It is a perfect example of being hopeful against evidence, waiting, watching, shunning deception, and constantly looking for God's hand to reaffirm the wait and the proper ordering of the world. This is best seen in Jesus's final night in the Garden of Gethsemane. Why would Jesus have to struggle prayerfully before his death if he was God? It was surely his humanity that was at work here. This struggle exemplifies the same two-sided situation that most monks in Syria experienced, being both in the world but not totally of the world. The struggle mimics that of the leading theological dispute

of the day. Was Christ of two natures, one human and one divine, or simply one nature operating in both capacities. John's monk, Maro, faces the same problems that the incarnated *Logos* did, operating as an agent of divinity and yet fully entrenched in humanity. This characterization gives us some insight into the providential awareness that we earlier noticed Theodoret was able to highlight in the sometimes confusing timeline of God's history.

Sergius

John tells a story of the blessed Sergius, who was a staunch supporter of the anti-Chalcedonian movement. John critiques this movement at several points, referring to their desire to make Jesus into two natures and thus the trinity into a quaternity.⁷²⁴ After a significant row in the front of the church in which Sergius grabs his opponents neck and beats him to the ground, the text explains that Sergius was seized, shaved and prepared to be sent to a certain monastic house in Armenia. The monastery to which he is sent is described as an abysmal place called 'tryz, which was even more fearsome than "the lowest dungeon in a prison."⁷²⁵ John goes on to explain that "anyone who was sent thither was thenceforth reduced to utter despair, on account of the boundless severity of sufferings which they used to inflict on the man who was sent to them; since they were very zealous for the tenets of the heresy, and they used to reckon it as an act of justice to torture believers; and accordingly they would stand over them like executioners not one or two or a hundred only, but each one of them would pull him

⁷²⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 5, PO 17:98.

⁷²⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 5, PO 17:104.

from his side and torture him (for they were about three hundred)."⁷²⁶ In this instance, the curious usage of the term "act of justice" suggests that these Chalcedonian leaning monks felt it was their duty to inflict God's justice immediately.⁷²⁷ The notion of God's justice being wielded by both parties against the other is all too familiar in the history of Christianity. John's own situation, as upholder of Monophysite claims and also the agent of the Emperor, casts an interesting glow on the situation. Historians have struggled over how he could act in both capacities.⁷²⁸ The language of justice increases the intrigue. Throughout the story of Sergius, John takes a pretty clear stance in favor of the holy man over against the Chalcedonian persecutors. When he says that the Chalcedonian monks considered their actions of torture to be acts of justice, however, he broaches a subject that seems to indicate an understanding that both sides were making the same truth claims in their pursuit of orthodoxy. The rhetoric could perhaps be scaled back here considering Sergius was "sent down" for having beaten up his opponent. It was obviously not a place one would want to live out their years in ascetic practice, but it could hardly be the torture pit the modern reader might imagine. Both sides were eager to see the hand of retribution active against their opponents – in this case taking matters into their own hands. The text is complicated since it would seem to support a purely Monophysite stance over and against the Chalcedonians. If we

⁷²⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 5, PO 17:104-105.

⁷²⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 5, PO 17:104.

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⁷²⁸ Susan Ashbrook Harvey notes that, "In 542 the emperor Justinian, champion of Chalcedonian orthodoxy, enigmatically chose John to undertake a campaign of conversion among the pagans and heretics still flourishing in Asia Minor. John's zeal for the task can hardly have served the Chalcedonian interests of the government, for it was while occupied in this way that he was consecrated titular bishop of Ephesus by Jacob Burd'aya, possibly in 558." Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 29.

acknowledge John's proximity to the "Chalcedonian" emperor and his broader portrayal of pagan problems, we get another interpretive option. John was showing that while Christian factions had divided the empire, and indeed the Chalcedonians had been merciless in their persecutions concerning these theological divisions, Christianity had a larger common enemy to consider. God's empire could only stand if the prayers of the holy, asking God, "may schisms and strifes be done away from within it [the church] until the end," were answered.⁷²⁹

Addai

Through John's writings we gain an interesting window onto the economies of power in the Syrian countryside. It was commonly understood that a person who had committed themselves to the life of solitariness, was largely uninterested in social interaction of any type. Once a man had given up his wife and children for a keener focus on God, friendly storytellers like John, were the least of the holy man's interests.⁷³⁰ We catch a glimpse of this in action when John tells the story of Addai the Chorepiscopus. Addai sought the ability to give to the poor but had nothing to give. In his effort to maintain the stores of the local monastery for the care of the poor, he implemented an idea he had to grow vineyards in the mountains near Cappadocia.⁷³¹

⁷²⁹ This is from the end of the stories of the two Johns, Tella and Hephæstopolis. See below, and John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 25, PO 18:540.

⁷³⁰ The chapter on Abraham the Recluse, gives us some insight into the hardship that giving up a family represented for the monk. Not least of which was the denigration of those who said, "If he had shut up his wife with him, he would be doing rightly." John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 7, PO 17:122.

⁷³¹ We are aware of this in part because of John's comment that Cappadocians came to buy wine here rather than trekking to Syria.

Three vineyards were eventually cultivated and Addai was able to outfit the regional inhabitants with wine and some money which he received from the sale of his wine. In order to avoid interaction with the community, Addai would wander the valleys tending to the vineyards and weeping while he prayed on bended knees.⁷³² John, eager to receive the saint's blessing, scopes out the old man's practices and lays in wait for him to come back and meet with his follower who would tell him if anyone had called upon him in his absence. John knew that the saint would flee if he saw him so he and his companion hid in a thicket fifty yards from where the old man met his companion. Addai made his way down the mountain and then stopped abruptly. John relates that it was "as if he scented the smell of us."⁷³³ Then he quickly ran down the mountain to get away. John's own intention in all of this was to gain his blessing and he shouted down to him, "Forgive us, father, and pray for us."⁷³⁴ John relates that he did not want to "vex and annoy" the old man, so he did not chase after him, but that his mind was "ardently bent on running and laboring after the good and precious merchandise of the old man's blessing at all costs."⁷³⁵ John, not willing to give up on his goal, states, "If I am here as much as two months, I will not depart from these mountains until I am blessed by the bondman of God."⁷³⁶ John gets his wish, eventually heading the man off on his path and trapping him. He asks the man to sit and speak to them, but Addai resists his numerous entreaties saying that they should go down to the monastery to rest and he will meet them there. John, wise to the old man's designs,

⁷³² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 8, PO 17:130.

⁷³³ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 8, PO 17:131.

⁷³⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 8, PO 17:132.

⁷³⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 8, PO 17:132.

refuses to go, knowing it is the old man's way of evading them and the conversation John is intent on having. After several suggestions from both sides, on how this meeting should be conducted, John gives in and asks Addai to pray for him. Addai responds with precisely the sort of enigmatic thoughts that we expect from the saint. Addai replies, "Do you pray for me the ungrateful. As for yourselves your earnestness signifies the direction of your will, that God may mingle his will with your will, and make your will his will. Pray for me."⁷³⁷ This beautiful response says so much about the holy man's life. In the midst of living life as one of God's champions of righteousness, the saint continues to think of others as higher than himself. Reversing the economy of holiness, Addai asks John to pray for him, citing that his earnestness bespeaks alignment of God's will with his own. In the midst of so many questions concerning proper orthodoxy and retribution in John of Ephesus's work, Addai raises the possibility that it is not only the holy man aligning his will with God's, but also God might mingle his will with a human's will and make his will the same as John's.

Abbi

In the reading of John of Ephesus, one notices the regularity of the stories that relate to some form of persecution and subsequent judgment. It is an important theme for the hagiographer. In the story of Abbi, John tells of a monk who would sit in the common chapel with head covered and his gospel text on his knees. Abbi only let light enough through his covering to read the singular passages that his heart sought. John

⁷³⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 8, PO 17:132.

⁷³⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 8, PO 17:134.

explains, “thus he would sit from morning till the sixth hour, with his face covered, and weeping; and he would not turn over a leaf, but generally had the book open at the beatitudes, or the parable of the virgins, or that of talents, or that of the banquet, or that of the rich man, or any place where the subject was that of *threats and judgment*.”⁷³⁸

The focus that many of these hagiographical stories have is on just that, threats and judgment. This line concerning Abbi, says something about a broader intellectual aspect of the monastic life. There was a continual focus on that which would produce tears. Whether through the touching of one’s heart through the beauty of scripture, or the torture of the heart by the remembrance of sins whose stains had yet to wash out, the monk’s bathing of every moment in tears is ubiquitous in these texts. It begs the question of whether these stories, or even these communities, which at times were solely focused on solitary lives conducted away from all societal interaction, were not somewhat bent toward the conflicts and subsequent resolution of those struggles that accompanied theological posturing? While living within the boundaries of the Roman Empire, they were engaging in the sharpest of counter-cultural movements. Why would Abbi focus his energy on these lines which were geared toward “threats and judgments?” There was something in the struggle which determined the life of the Syrian monk, and perhaps the ascetic in general. One wonders whether the internal struggle was sufficient for these monks? Is this why we see a reliance by many on the constant fodder of broken and difficult relations with the world that they had forsaken?⁷³⁹ If a monk wanted real solitude, he would need to seek the Egyptian desert,

⁷³⁸ My emphasis, John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 14, PO 17:215.

⁷³⁹ There are obviously layers to this argument that cannot be readily conquered. For every

rather than the Syrian “desert.” Brown and Harvey have both argued the notion that Syrian asceticism was primarily different from the Egyptian form in its terrain as well as communal focus.⁷⁴⁰ Given John of Ephesus’s continual interest in both sides of the ascetic life, the hidden piety of the single one, *ihidayutha*, and the public life of the ascetic in his community and also the capital, we wonder if the differences were so stark as Brown and Harvey have argued. They hold figures like Symeon Stylites, as exemplifying the communal aspect, on the outskirts of the capital high in the air for all to see. If we consider the many monks who chose to dive down into unmarked caves in the Syrian hinterland or flee from human contact, we might guess that John’s ascetics were less focused on the communal aspect. An excellent example of this comes to us in the story of Simeon the Mountaineer, who was about to take his leave of some pagans he found in the hills, when a sinking realization hits him that, “Perhaps it was indeed for this reason that God’s grace led me to the mountains here, in order that there may be salvation for these souls that are in the darkness of error.”⁷⁴¹ We might also think of Addai, who John relates tried to run away from contact with an outsider “as if he scented the smell of us.”⁷⁴² With these models in mind, we might very well consider the fact that Symeon’s progression to ever higher columns was indeed as concerned with

assumption we may make about their lives from the text, we must then remove ourselves another layer and think about these texts through the mind and hand of our compiler and storyteller, John.

⁷⁴⁰ See Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” 83. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 14–15.

⁷⁴¹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:236.

⁷⁴² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 8, PO 17:131.

removing himself from society as it was attaining a closeness to God.⁷⁴³ If we take John's work as descriptive, we get a view of asceticism that was both solitary and communal. This model works as well from the perspective of John as prescriptive in his telling of monastic stories. A good example of this comes from the story of James.

James

John tells the story of a monk named James who lived a life of such humility and intense asceticism that people possessed of demons would seek him out to be healed. It is difficult to decipher from the text whether it was the possessed persons or the demons who desired to be separated from their life of antisociality. They were such a disruption to the community that the elders at the monastery implored James to go out and deal with the many wailing people outside the gate. The "fiends" would say, "James bound us and brought us here; and we cannot depart before he releases us."⁷⁴⁴ It would seem from this line that it was the demons who were dragging their hosts out of some necessity to see the holy man. James, attempting to live a life of solitude in his community, sends the possessed people off to wait for him, lying down, in the nearby martyr's chapel when he could not deal with them immediately. Eventually, the host of people becomes such a nuisance that James has to withdraw from his community. John implies a curious amount of agency to the demons when he explains, "and so he

⁷⁴³ See Theodoret and Antonius, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, ed. Robert Doran, Cistercian Studies Series no. 112 (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1992); David Frankfurter, "Stylites and Phallobates: Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria," *Vigiliae Christianae* 44, no. 2 (June 1, 1990): 169.

⁷⁴⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 15, PO 17:222.

withdrew under the instigation (I believe) of the demons themselves."⁷⁴⁵ There is a clear connection here between James and the earlier Saint Maro's indignation over the people's attempt to acknowledge him and his brother as a great healer. John attempts to display the craftiness of the power of demons which goes beyond the simple visual display of power. It was not so much about who won a particular battle, in this case the casting out of many demons in possessed persons, but rather who won the war. For John, the loss of the holy man from his community was far more dangerous to the cause of Christianity than was the impressive healing of many people cause for celebration.

This notion is played out in the conclusion of the story where John explains that James and his companion moved to another monastery in the direction of Hamimtha, "to a certain village called Beth Musika."⁷⁴⁶ There the multitudes of possessed people continued to seek him out until one day the evil one "contrived a method of making a mockery of these blessed men."⁷⁴⁷ According to the text, the demons took an attractive⁷⁴⁸ young woman who was there to be healed and clothed her in "awe-striking forms of phantasmal rays."⁷⁴⁹ Seating her on the Bishop's throne, they filled the chapel with "phantasmal forms, as if forsooth they were angels of God."⁷⁵⁰ When they had positioned the young woman in the glory of lights and fantastical forms, they went and awoke the two holy monks and said, come quickly and "take incense...and haste to the martyrs' chapel; for the holy Mary the God-bearer has been sent to you, with a great

⁷⁴⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 15, PO 17:224.

⁷⁴⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 15, PO 17:224.

⁷⁴⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 15, PO 17:224.

⁷⁴⁸ The text relates that she was "of worldly appearance."

⁷⁴⁹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 15, PO 17:225.

⁷⁵⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 15, PO 17:225.

host of angels; and she has sent us for you, come straightway."⁷⁵¹ The monks, seeing her amazing form, fell on their faces and ultimately submitted themselves to the demon who explained, "I myself am Mary the Mother of Christ; and my son sent me to you, because he saw your righteousness and your love toward him, and that you are perfect in your modes of life; and he commanded me to ordain you, and that you should receive the priesthood from me because of your virtuousness. But come approach and receive it."⁷⁵² The men bowed before the demon and received the presbyterate from it. The demon admonished them to "perform the functions of your priesthood."⁷⁵³ At this moment the demons could not control themselves and they let out their laughter in delight at their successful trickery.⁷⁵⁴ Then the possessed girl began to laugh at them also. At this the monks fell in shame and fled the place where they were continuing their struggles of ascetic piety. Eventually they are prescribed three years of penance from John of Tella and are admitted back to communion.

This fascinating story highlights the deceptive nature of perceived reality and the price a monk might pay for not properly assessing every moment as precisely as

⁷⁵¹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 15, PO 17:225.

⁷⁵² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 15, PO 17:226.

⁷⁵³ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 15, PO 17:227.

⁷⁵⁴ There is another similar moment of trickery represented in the *Lausiaca History* of Palladius. Here, in the story of Valens, the monk is deceived by the demon's disguising himself as the Saviour. The text states, "He appeared at night in a vision of a thousand angels carrying lamps and a fiery disc in which, so it seemed to Valens, the Saviour had taken shape, and an angel approached Valens, saying: 'Christ has loved you because of your way of life and your liberality to Him, and He has come to visit you. Leave your cell now, and you have only to retire to some distance to behold Him, kneel down to do homage to Him, and then go back to your cell.' So he went out, and when he saw marshaled in line those who carried lamps, and the Antichrist himself about a stade or so away, he fell down and adored. The next day he became so obsessed again that he went into the church and told all the assembled brethren: 'I have no use for Communion, for I saw Christ this very day.'" Palladius, *Palladius: The Lausiaca History* (New York: Newman Press, 1964), 25.4-5.

possible. The tone of the section is worth noting in consideration of John's overall theme. It was antagonistic not to other factions of Christianity, but rather the pagans who threatened to subvert and control God's holy ascetics in Syria. John acknowledges the monk's role in casting out demons as an important one, but also is warning the monks not to strike out on their own away from the protective gaze of the community. Some demons could fool these two in their outpost, but would not have dreamed of fooling an entire community with the same phantasmagoric scene. The monks role was somewhere between the solitary life and the engaged communally interested life. This comes through most clearly in the following story of Simeon.

Simeon the Mountaineer

In the life of Simeon the Mountaineer, John tells us the story of a monk who came upon an isolated mountain community by happenstance. Simeon was known for having no relations except with God, due to the fact that he wandered in the rugged mountains of Karhe near Melitene. A regular mountain man, he extols the virtues of breathing "pure air."⁷⁵⁵ John records Simeon's acknowledgment that God "always gives aliment also in all varieties for the sustenance of the body, and again to the soul also besides, in accordance with its nature and after the pattern of its airiness, he gave spiritual life according to its spirituality, and again besides these things his graces like a watchful guardian stands carefully over our life by night and by day and delivers and guards us from mishaps and from all detriment that evil things may chance to do."⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:230.

⁷⁵⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:230.

This acknowledgment of God's care and providence fits easily with the theme of power and utility that John displays in his work. For Simeon, God's power and action were as close as the "pure air" of breath that fills the lungs – and equally sustaining.

John tells the story of how the lone mountaineer came to tell him, and others, these great things which were inspired by "ecstatic contemplation of the glories of the heavenly beings."⁷⁵⁷ Simeon used to spend eight months in caves on the mountains and then make his way down to a monastic convent for the harsher winter months. On one occasion he happened upon a community perched on a mountain near the Euphrates River. He was surprised to find cattle and other domestic animals there and substantial homes scattered about in the terrain. Simeon inquires about the community from some shepherds that he sees who inform him that, "We found our fathers living in this way on these mountains; and, inasmuch as we were born on them, lo! we also live on them."⁷⁵⁸ Simeon asks the men how they are able to assemble in God's house and hear the holy scriptures and partake in the mysteries of "his body and blood" if they live here in such seclusion.⁷⁵⁹ The men answer with laughter saying, "How, blessed sir, does the oblation that a man receives profit him? For what is the oblation?"⁷⁶⁰ Simeon shakes with fright at this uninformed comment and is moved to tears for them, asking if they are Christians or Jews.⁷⁶¹ The men, picking up on the old man's intensity, replied that they were Christians but that they had only heard the scriptures from their fathers and

⁷⁵⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:231.

⁷⁵⁸ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:233.

⁷⁵⁹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:233.

⁷⁶⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:233.

⁷⁶¹ A rather unfortunate binary for describing one's faithfulness in John of Ephesus's literature.

never had seen them.⁷⁶² Describing the people as worse off than animals, Simeon begins to take his leave when a realization strikes him. He states, "Perhaps it was indeed for this reason that God's grace led me to the mountains here, in order that there may be salvation for these souls that are in the darkness of error."⁷⁶³ Simeon resolves to stay in the area and win the souls for God. He comes upon a village and sees a little church which raises his hopes. Inside, however, is a dilapidated and dusty chapel. Simeon decides to stay there and calls on the villagers to bring to him everyone who lives in the hamlet the next morning. When the people arrived, Simeon inquires as to their practices. The people respond that they had no way of knowing any better since they had no access to priest or scripture. Simeon asks them to fast for a week and reconvene with him after breaking bread together on the first day of the week. When they return, he inquires after the children of the community and whether they have been made a part of the covenant and received tonsure for orders of monasticism. The people respond that they have not because they have little time left after tending to the goats. Simeon then takes it upon himself to separate out those who were unable to keep themselves from blasphemy, fornication and murder. This is where the story takes a very interesting turn.

Simeon calls on the people to bring all of their children with them to the church the following Sunday. Arming himself and a companion from the group with a razor, he dismissed the parents saying, "Allow all the little ones to receive a present today,

⁷⁶² The men say they live like animals on the mountains and Simeon replies that the animals are better off because they "remained as the Creator created them." John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:235.

⁷⁶³ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:236.

and we will bless them and speak with them...and thus they may remember it as long as they live."⁷⁶⁴ To the little ones he explained, "You will receive presents, and we will mix them for you. Remain all of you."⁷⁶⁵ Ninety children remained and Simeon shut the doors and separated out one-third of them from the group. The remaining sixty he secured up in a separate room. Simeon then, "soothing them with blandishments," shaved the boys and girls who he had selected. He then released the sixty boys and girls to see their siblings and friends and run home to tell their parents what had happened. Some mothers, obviously shaken by the event, declared that their sons should not be called sons of the covenant and lashed out at Simeon. He accepted the abuse, laughing through their wrathful response. Simeon replied, "They are yours, my sons; they are not going to destruction; they are being presented to Christ, while they are yours."⁷⁶⁶ Two parents stood out, however, saying, "We will not present one of them to Christ." Simeon explained that he had "marked out this plot in Christ's name to his glory." Claiming himself free from sin, Simeon continues, "He who separates a soul from it and takes it out that he may bring it back to the world, Christ will not resign that soul in this bodily life, because it is his and has been marked in his name. I for my part have testified to you; you know."⁷⁶⁷ The significance of tonsuring children was twofold. It insured a harvest of monks and monastic leaning laypersons in the next generation, while securing a theological foothold for a particular community. Given John of Ephesus's inclination towards exaggeration of conversion numbers, it is not surprising

⁷⁶⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:242.

⁷⁶⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:242. He was indicating some type of drink or food with this.

⁷⁶⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:244.

village. John relates that “all these mountains also had been brought into subjection, and they trembled to commit any breach of order, lest the old man should hear it and separate them from the fellowship of men, or that he should curse them.”⁷⁷² It is difficult to read this last line and consider Simeon’s role as anything less than the powerful wielder of curse that he approximated. Even though he is careful to distance himself from curse language in the previous section, it is clear that this is how the people in his community understood his role. The bitter retribution which the old man calls forth is hard to imagine and even harder to accept as part of the plan for spreading the gospel of Christ. The story remains, however, unapologetically presented by John of Ephesus as an example of how the holy Simeon lived his life and utilized the power of God. One might give Simeon the benefit of the doubt in that perhaps he knew God’s retribution would not even wait a week before it was carried out. The alternative, that somehow Simeon called this disaster into being with his words, is less palatable to the modern reader. The more pressing question, however, is whether it was palatable to the ancient hearer. The message comes through clearly in both contexts. One should not question or challenge the authority of the holy man who was more than just a hermit operating in his own tiny cell in a distant monastery. The holy man was now acting as clergyman, abbot, and above all, now, governor of this little town. The ascetic was no longer limited in the power he could wield in retribution and reform. A mountainous community that was verging on pagan belief, was fertile ground for John’s punitive monks. What the ascetic accomplishes on earth is synonymous with God’s will and should be taken as such. Imagining one’s self in the role of these parents, witnessing the guerrilla tonsuring

⁷⁷² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 16, PO 17:246.

tactics performed on a child, we struggle with the resulting blatant and disproportionate retribution. The reality is, that John portrays monks like Simeon in order to teach value in this world and the lives that existed here only so far as they promoted the kingdom of God. If these two boys' lives could rectify a community's sinfulness, then they were necessary casualties. This was the reality of Simeon and his fellow monks' worldview in John of Ephesus's context.

Addai and the Transient Monk

John tells the story of a monk in chapter eighteen who had moved without permission from his former monastery to a new one. When asked if he had been properly released from his institution, he answered in the affirmative and thus was admitted to the new community. All seemed to go along smoothly until a plague came and claimed eighty-four lives from that community alone.⁷⁷³ The transient monk falls ill as well, but does not get well or go on to die. Instead he stays in his miserable state for ten days. The monks, who had the practice of laying the Gospel text on sick monks' chests, which was meant to either send the monk on or heal them, were frustrated to find that neither happened when the practice was attempted with this monk. The community turned out to weep and pray over the sick monk, asking, "Lord, great is thy mercy. Sufficient is this torture for this man. Let thy mercy persuade thee on his behalf, God who carest for thy creation."⁷⁷⁴ They then turned to the man inquiring, "Is it

⁷⁷³ It is unclear whether the man had some influence on the plague coming. It seems as though John thinks these were separate incidents since he speaks about what "commonly happened" during these outbreaks. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 18, PO 17:261.

⁷⁷⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 18, PO 17:263.

because you are conscious in your soul of grievous delinquencies that you are dying and departing from life, and only torture remains for you in the bodily life?"⁷⁷⁵ One of the senior monks standing there suggested that the man's soul might be hindered by an impediment "proceeding from the word of God."⁷⁷⁶ The tortured monk was able to acknowledge this with a nod of his head and it was decided that they would appeal to God for the acceptance of this man's impediment on one of them, that they might take it and make amends for it with the archimandrite from his former monastic house. Then a deacon named Addai rose and knelt near the bed saying, "If God be willing to grant me life till I go and make the release, I will under the security of all my fathers take this soul's impediment upon myself."⁷⁷⁷ At the moment the words left Addai's mouth, the tortured monk's soul was released from his body with a great cry. Addai traveled quickly and fulfilled his promise for the man.

This fascinating vignette gives us a look into the types of strictures that a monk was up against in his acceptance of the rule. The monk was bound to his word and in a strange metaphysical way, his soul was bound to both his body and his actions. Sin had a way of binding one's life to punishment and in this structure of force God seems to act with regularity. Although the monks beseech God to release the man from the pain, God's judgment is not affected. In this expiation-oriented construct it required someone who would take on the man's impediment and make amends for it. John never states what the man was required to do, but it was not enough that the elders of the monastery prayed for its dismissal. One senior official remarks, "If we were accepted as

⁷⁷⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 18, PO 17:263.

⁷⁷⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 18, PO 17:264.

ourselves making the release in place of the man who laid the bond, we have done so many times.”⁷⁷⁸ The tone suggests that certain bonds were capable of being corrected, but in this case God does not allow for the man’s immediate forgiveness.

Zacharias

The story of Zacharias gives the reader some insight into the turmoil that the monk, and John, saw as pressing issues in the Syrian hillside. As noted in each instance, John’s monks are powerful, working miracles when need be.⁷⁷⁹ What can we look for as the impetus to show God’s power working with immediacy in the lives of the Christian communities John explores? The answer comes to us from the monk Zacharias. When asked to speak by John, he asks, “Why my son do you require me to speak? Lo you see that Christianity has vanished from the earth, and religion has been forgotten, and vanity and error have prevailed. And now what have we to speak, except to weep for the decadence of our generation (ge’nos), since even we, who are in name Christians, enjoy the shelter only of this name, while all the ordinances of Christianity are far from us? And now suffer me to weep for my life, and pray for me.”⁷⁸⁰ The man continues to explain that the kingdom of God has been suffering from violence since the days of John the Baptist.⁷⁸¹ This notion that Christianity was waning and suffering under

⁷⁷⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 18, PO 17:265.

⁷⁷⁸ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 18, PO 17:264.

⁷⁷⁹ Contra Harvey, who sees John’s monks as less miraculous. She states, “In fact, these stories are notable for the standard hagiographical fare they do *not* include: the ascetic nagged by boredom or distracted by lust. Indeed, these sins are the product of too little activity and too much isolation. More pointedly, John presents no miracles for answers.” Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 144.

⁷⁸⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 19, PO 17:267.

⁷⁸¹ Depending on one’s perspective this might simply be its inception.

persecution is of primary significance to the development of our theme of providence and retribution. Communities that felt threatened, were prone to ascribing temporal disasters to God's judgment or corrective guidance. If a group felt that they were directly in step with the providence of God, there would be no reason to surmise that God was punishing them. This notion relies upon a worldview that was not solely focused on the monastic houses. The invasion of the Huns was not the result of the monks' sins, but rather the sins of the broader region. If it had anything to do with the monks, it was their inability to properly align their regions with the righteousness of God—for which they all would pay dearly. We see this in Simeon the Mountaineer's considerable interest in converting the semi-Christian community he happens upon into full conformity. If we connect this to Justinian's perspective, as exemplified in his prefaces to his law books, there appears to be some dissonance. Justinian saw his work as perfectly in line with God's will. At the same time, however, there was abiding concern over the stability of the empire amidst so many invading forces and deteriorating internal conflicts. Here we see John of Ephesus entering to prescribe a monastic vision that would work in the frontiers to convert and stabilize an empire that could not adequately control its borderlands.

Thomas of Armenia

The give and take of sin and responsibility for wrong action resulted in something of an economy of salvation that is best exemplified in the story of Thomas of Armenia. In John's telling of the story, Thomas inherits an extreme amount of wealth from his

father who held the office of the satrapy in the districts of Syria and Armenia.⁷⁸² When Thomas was to take his post as governor, he requested that the king free him from the responsibility. At this juncture, Thomas realized that none of this wealth could do anything for his father's soul once he was released from this world. He explains:

My father, who acquired all this dignity and greatness and property and riches, has left everything, and out of all his house and his riches and his property and his office nothing has gone with him except sins only; and I therefore now, if I stay and add to my father's property to the same extent as he did, and to the same extent a thousand times over, shall presently die as he did, and it will become the property of others, and perhaps it will become the property of men who are prodigal and vicious and fornicators, and they will squander it in evil fashion; and to me what will come from it except hell and eternal torment, since neither has all this been amassed by justice or by righteousness, but by plundering and cheating the poor?⁷⁸³

Taking this realization to heart, Thomas began giving to the poor from whence the fortune had originally been taken. When he gave the money he would "in private grasp the receiver, and in private fall on his face before him weeping and beseeching him to entreat God to accept his purpose, and absolve his father also."⁷⁸⁴ His formula for access to God required the help of the righteous. He would state, "Since you, my brothers, have not provoked God by robbery and injustice, entreat him on our behalf, of whose wickedness there is not end, that he may be reconciled to us, and have mercy upon us in the great day; since even this which we are giving comes from the blood of the souls of the poor and of the indigent, and of orphans and of widows."⁷⁸⁵

Thomas appears to understand that even though his father had done wrong, he was not without the possibility of help. Although Thomas's own position regarding

⁷⁸² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 21, PO 17:284.

⁷⁸³ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 21, PO 17:286.

⁷⁸⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 21, PO 17:287.

God was tenuous, he could call upon those who were not guilty of his same sins to speak on his behalf.⁷⁸⁶ In this way both are cared for in a symbiotic, eleemosynary relationship akin to the Vine and the Elm of the Shepherd of Hermas. This notion relates well to a previous passage about the lives of Mary and Euphemia. In this section Euphemia honors the passage from Matthew 25 when in judgment, the people ask, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?”⁷⁸⁷ Euphemia states, “Is it well that you thus sit yourself while slaves stand and wait upon you, and enjoy a variety of tastes in dainty foods and in wines, and of pure bread and splendid rugs, while God is knocked down in the street and swarms with lice and faints from his hunger, and you do not fear him? and how will you call upon him and he answer you, when you treat him with such contempt? Or how will you ask forgiveness from him? Or how can you expect him to deliver you from hell?”⁷⁸⁸ It is this economy of relationship that Thomas embodies in his giving.

Thomas takes his asceticism to great lengths, never lying down to sleep or allowing water or oil to fall on his body. John relates that his legs became as “charred columns, being thick and black” and discharging “a large quantity of matter” that he was unconcerned with washing off.⁷⁸⁹ Ultimately he is banished from the area as a leader of the non-Chalcedonian community. He took up residence in the mountains and lived out his years there as a monastic founder and leader. His example of correcting for

⁷⁸⁵ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 21, PO 17:288.

⁷⁸⁶ This is a popular model of early Christian thought, most beautifully exemplified in the Vine and the Elm of the Shepherd of Hermas. In the story one reads of the poor living off of the rich as a vine lives off of an elm. Neither can exist without the other.

⁷⁸⁷ Matt. 25.37

⁷⁸⁸ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 12, PO 17:179-180.

those sins from which he would surely reap retribution is an interesting aspect to the broader model of comeuppance. As in the case of the tormented monk, who Addai helps, the comeuppance is inevitable and must be reckoned. Just as the rich will receive their due, so too will those persecutors of people who confess Christ. The movement of Thomas from urban center to hinterland, is an important theme for John of Ephesus. His work is as beneficial there as it was in the urban center. John does not give preference to one over the other in his work, as exemplified in the quoted section from Euphemia. The poor congregated in the cities, and they were in as much need of care as the mountain people of Syria and Armenia. The monk was called to serve and convert wherever that may be.

Simeon the Solitary

In the final story of John's first volume, he tells of a generous monk named Simeon the Solitary. Simeon had built some huts for a small community when he set out on his own. When the time came to encase the house with a gate, Simeon decided he should forgo this aspect so that "it will be open to Christ my Lord when he comes to me to enter my dwelling in the person of his bondmen simply and without impediment; that so he may grant me the blessing of his favour."⁷⁹⁰ Whenever Simeon had to leave his small hut, he would regularly leave the door open and the furniture set up for visitors. On the table he would leave moistened bread and wine and a cooked meal perchance a visitor came and needed sustenance. This acknowledgment and care for the poor was

⁷⁸⁹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 21, PO 17:291.

⁷⁹⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 23, PO 17:301.

particularly important to Simeon and he maintained these practices throughout his life.

On one occasion, two young men sought to take advantage of him and after they had eaten his food, they loaded up their packs with the rest of his goods and started on their way. Coming to the door, their feet became stuck and they were forced to stand there, incapable of moving, holding their packs upright until Simeon returned. When Simeon returned, they cried out for his forgiveness and Simeon prayed for them. Then Simeon said to the youths, “Knew you not, my sons, that I had committed this cell to Christ my Lord, and him nothing escapes? or know you not that, wherever Christ’s name is called, everyone who presumes to stretch out his hand and lay it upon anything has to deal with God the Judge of all?”⁷⁹¹ Again the power of God to bind and loose certain worldly entities is particularly powerful in these stories of comeuppance and judgment. God, as “judge of all,” is watching everywhere, utilizing his proxies to bring about justice for every person.

Towards a not-so Monophysite John of Ephesus

We have argued that Origen’s final condemnation left room for a more power filled, judgment final form of hagiography – with fewer restorative aspects. This resulted in a literary shift for non-Origenist leaning hagiography, especially as written by John of Ephesus. It took on a harsher retributive edge that was characteristic of Byzantine legal ethos. John’s hagiography was geared toward including monks in the program of law. They acted to administer justice, correct social inequalities and in rare

⁷⁹¹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 23, PO 17:304.

cases rule small communities through the fear of God.⁷⁹²

This is not to say that God's providence had been figured out, but rather that it was slowly coming around to match the Christian imperial sensibilities that Justinian embodied. John of Ephesus's focus is indisputably upon the Monophysites and we wonder how and why this could be the case given his own closeness to Justinian. Harvey is right on most accounts concerning John; his is a theology touched with hardship wherein the monk acts in both legal and supernatural ways. Where she sees a lack of miracles, I see a host of miracles slowly breaking into the fabric of life, bringing with them the proper vengeance and retribution of God's agents in society. John is telling the story of persecution of Monophysites, but doing so from the seat of the capital, with connection to the Chalcedonian emperor and with a purpose of showing how the ascetics could work with law, within this tumultuous period to bring about proper justice in the temporal sphere. His was a connection or taming of the reality through a new theological perspective on law and power in a new providential awareness.

The question emerges as to whether John could be operating between the two camps as a liaison of sorts? Justinian's plan was certainly to meld the two, making a peaceful and united Christian front over and against the rest of the world. Could he have engaged John in the capacity to write a history of monasticism that validated the recent sufferings of Monophysite peoples while affirming their role in the empire as agents of divine law and retribution?

Harvey has argued that John's actions for Justinian were "enigmatic" citing the

⁷⁹² Here I am thinking of Simeon the mountaineer.

different camps in which these two have historically been thought to reside. She explains, "In 542 the emperor Justinian, champion of Chalcedonian orthodoxy, enigmatically chose John to undertake a campaign of conversion among the pagans and heretics still flourishing in Asia Minor. John's zeal for the task can hardly have served the Chalcedonian interests of the government, for it was while occupied in this way that he was consecrated titular bishop of Ephesus by Jacob Burd'aya, possibly in 558. Still, his efforts on Justinian's behalf earned him the title Converter of Pagans. On missions through Asia, Lydia, Caria, and Phrygia, John claimed to have converted eighty thousand pagans and schismatics (notably Montanists) and received government aid to found ninety-eight churches and twelve monasteries."⁷⁹³ The fact that John is called "converter of pagans" and not "converter of Chalcedonians/Monophysites" is highly significant. John may not have served "Chalcedonian" interests, but that does not necessarily impute to John an animosity with Justinian. They had clearly come to some understanding of each other in the roles they played. This brings John of Ephesus out of the simplistic, poorly organized ascetic writer, he has been cast as by many historians, and into a role far more sophisticated in the Empire. Would it be such a stretch to think of John, fluent in Syriac and Greek, friend of Justinian and Theodora, and champion of Syrian Monophysitic asceticism, as a powerful and politically astute byzantine patron? His role was to bring two factions together through ascetic ideals mixed with a mission that was oriented in an outward direction. Harvey is, I believe, only partly correct in her assertions of his role. He is certainly building a community ideologically through

⁷⁹³ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography," in *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, ed. Lynda L Coon, Katherine J Haldane, and

hagiography, it is just not a community of Monophysites, but rather a community of Christians that were largely comprised of Monophysites. The difference sounds small but is of the utmost importance.

Ancient historians even weighed in on the mismatched royalty. Harvey cites Procopius's stance that, "the antithetical loyalties of the pair were in fact an illusion, that they purposely cultivated this appearance as part of a larger policy to divide and rule. 'They set the Christians at variance with one another, and by pretending to go opposite ways from each other in the matters under dispute, they succeeded in rending them all asunder.'"⁷⁹⁴ A nuanced view is heard from Evagrius Scholasticus, who Harvey notes as "a more cautious historian, who claims that the ecclesiastical policy of Justinian and Theodora was one that allowed them to divide the empire between themselves: by dividing their religious loyalties they gave way to neither, while ensuring that both sides were cared for financially as well as politically. But Evagrius indicates the complexity of the situation by adding that in matters of faith, fathers were opposed to sons, sons to parents, wives to husbands, and husbands to wives."⁷⁹⁵ We cannot accept either view without some reservation. They were surely not intent on destroying the empire with their divisive views, and yet, it is impossible to consider them as wholly divided on these matters without either lessening the severity of the debate or questioning their relationship. But if we think of them as foremost concerned with ruling a divided Byzantine state, the picture comes into focus. How better to rule a divided world? They could play off of each other with ease, moving both sides closer to

Elisabeth W Sommer (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 29.

⁷⁹⁴ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 80.

a common ground. To do this they would need agents like John of Ephesus. He was Monophysite and ascetic, but also shared the greater vision of a united and powerful Byzantine empire. Harvey cites Michael the Syrian, who reported “that John propagated Chalcedonian faith because he was acting at the emperor’s behest, and that he judged it a lesser evil than paganism or Montanism.”⁷⁹⁶ Although we might question whether he was in full support of Chalcedonian faith, Michael is certainly on to something.

The Monophysite persecutions, as recounted by John of Ephesus, were far more intense in Justin I’s reign. These are significantly softened by Justinian, who actually took a Monophysite leaning wife, Theodora. Moreover, he chose a Monophysite to lead his conversions of pagans in the borderland of Syria. This was Justinian’s way of pulling the empire back together after his uncle’s harshness. John was employed to craft a piece of hagiographical literature that served more purposes than simply highlighting the Monophysite plight of an asceticism in crisis – as Harvey suggests. He was being used by Justinian for a particular purpose – perhaps like his marriage to Theodora and her dabbling in the aid of Monophysites – he was using John to show that he was not as hardlined as his uncle and was looking for real restoration. We gain some sense of this in Justinian’s eventual circulation of the anathemas and his search for a common enemy everyone could rally against.⁷⁹⁷ John, Theodora and Justinian were all navigating a tenuous and somewhat disingenuous path between the Chalcedonians and

⁷⁹⁵ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 80.

⁷⁹⁶ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 82.

⁷⁹⁷ See Theodoret chapter where I discuss how Justinian uses Theodoret, who was to be condemned with three chapters, to support his condemnation of Origen.

Monophysites.⁷⁹⁸ What they had in common was a desire for God's powerful blessing and peace.

Theodora: Doting empress or actress extraordinaire?

Procopius is notorious for relating the "true" personality of Theodora the actress in his *Secret History*.⁷⁹⁹ His spurious treatment of the queen may only provide one point of truth, that she was an actress of some sort. Whether Justinian fell in love with her or chose her, is up for debate. Procopius attributes it to being smitten with "extraordinary passion."⁸⁰⁰ Perhaps Theodora was an actress, and as actors are prone to do, they can take on the most compelling roles. We can only speculate that Justinian chose her for her ability to play the part of Monophysite sympathizer and wife of the great Chalcedonian Emperor. Harvey notes that "Syrian tradition went so far as to rewrite altogether the history of the empress's notorious youth. The child of a circus family who grew up on stage as a sexual acrobat became the chaste daughter of a Monophysite priest in the eastern provinces, with whom the young Justinian fell in love while on a military campaign. Her parents, this story went, were alarmed by Justinian's Chalcedonian views and agreed to a betrothal only on the grounds that he would leave her faith unchanged."⁸⁰¹ Whatever the reader makes of these vastly different portrayals,

⁷⁹⁸ Harvey notes, "In fact, our subtlest picture of Justinian, and of the perhaps more elusive Theodora, emerges from the pen of John of Ephesus, who knew the royal family well. It is apparent in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* that John holds a heartfelt respect for both, regardless of official imperial policies – a situation the more profound for its circumstances." Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 80.

⁷⁹⁹ Procopius, *The Secret History: With Related Texts*, trans. Anthony Kaldellis (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2010), II.9.

⁸⁰⁰ Procopius, *The Secret History*, II.9.29.

⁸⁰¹ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 81.

it seems that there is some fluidity in the imperial palaces concerning the debate over the natures of Christ. Justinian did not appear to be as stringently opposed to his wife's position as we might imagine. Harvey notes that "Monophysite sources present a confused memory of the matter. Even some of the sources that record the persecutions offer praise for Justinian's religious activities."⁸⁰² She goes on to explain that "It is in relation to Theodora that John offers information on Justinian's nature. Not only did the empress act with the emperor's knowledge, but he himself sometimes patronized the Monophysites in the capital. He accompanied her on visits to the Monophysite holy men for religious instruction and, even after her death, continued to show concern for the welfare of the Monophysite community, especially in Constantinople, because of his love for her and devotion to her memory."⁸⁰³ Acknowledging this softer side of Justinian, it is hard to imagine him persecuting the Monophysites with any real sincerity.⁸⁰⁴ If this were the case, he would have had to start in his own palaces by some accounts of the situation.

Supporting evidence from the *Lives*

What can we make of the claim that John of Tella ordained 170,000 men into the

⁸⁰² Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 81.

⁸⁰³ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 82.

⁸⁰⁴ Harvey argues, "But the emperor's position was understandably affected by diverse concerns. His aspirations to regain the lost western provinces necessitated courting the papacy by advancing an official pro-Chalcedonian policy. At the same time, he took this crisis seriously as a theological problem. He rejected what he saw as the too easily categorized pro- and anti-Chalcedonian positions and sought a solution that could reconcile the language of Chalcedon with that of Cyril of Alexandria. He marked this idea with "conversations" he sponsored between Chalcedonians and Monophysites. Over the course of his reign his own theological writings progressed significantly towards this goal. Ironically, his final lapse into apthartodocetic heresy gave witness to deeply Monophysite leanings in his personal

Monophysite clergy? It was clearly an exaggeration, and from John's perspective a building up of the Monophysite ego through text. John quotes John of Tella stating, "I for my part have received a gift from God, and with it I am trading and am not negligent; and know this, that, as long as I am in the bodily life, and a hand is given me to extend to anyone that is in need, not you nor any earthly king shall hinder me from performing the service that the heavenly king has given me."⁸⁰⁵ Harvey notes that "John of Tella had been decidedly efficacious; if John of Ephesus exaggerates hopelessly in claiming that John ordained 170,000 men into the clergy, it is of little concern. Two irrevocable steps had been taken: first, a network of ecclesiastical leaders had been established, ensuring the renewed care of the Monophysite congregations; second, the precedent of an independently ordained Monophysite structure had been established. If the founding of the "Jacobite" church has traditionally been attributed to Jacob Burd'aya, it was in fact John of Tella who laid the necessary groundwork."⁸⁰⁶ It is possible to read this as a foundational moment for the Monophysite movement, but also, given the extreme exaggeration, possible to read this as John's hyping of the moment of John of Tella's life in order to further mask his own program in writing his hagiographical compilation.

Harvey speaks about John's treatment of John of Tella and John of Hephaestopolis, as a move to strengthen their authority "at a time when their activities

theology." Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 82.

⁸⁰⁵ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 102.

⁸⁰⁶ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 103.

involved a canonical and theological risk.”⁸⁰⁷ She cites the following passage as proof, “[John of Tella and John of Hephaestopolis] were complete and perfect in both forms of beauty [pastoral and ascetic]; and for this reason, though we seem to be passing from one subject to another, we did not think it alien to the excellent purpose to describe and hand down to remembrance for the glory of God that life which was practised by these men also.”⁸⁰⁸ If John of Tella dies in 538, and John of Hephaestopolis was his successor, but John of Ephesus was crafting the *Lives* in the mid 560s, how could John of Ephesus be looked at as strengthening their authority, unless she is noting some post-mortem authority.⁸⁰⁹ If we rather consider this as a nod to the Monophysite community concerning their struggle against the persecutions from the Chalcedonians, it better explains John’s inflation of the numbers of ordinations in his earlier section. This was not a text hoping to convince anyone that Monophysites were in control, they knew better given the years of struggle. It was, however, a text that would only have legs in the Monophysite community if it acknowledged the struggle and feats of this community, while crafting a purpose for ascetics going forward.

As the story of John of Hephaestopolis continues, a good tale is spun concerning how he had disregarded Theodora’s injunction to not ordain in the capital and had traveled secretly around the empire converting and ordaining in the name of the Monophysites.⁸¹⁰ Theodora’s concern as compared to John of Ephesus’s rendering of Theodora’s concern should be read in two different ways. Harvey reads Theodora as

⁸⁰⁷ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 103.

⁸⁰⁸ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 25, PO 18:527.

⁸⁰⁹ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 105.

not being able to control the movement of Monophysitic ordination. If we think of John as rendering a movement that was geared toward conversion and less interested in simply converting Chalcedonians to Monophysite views, we get a different perspective. John was summoning a character in John of Hephaestopolis that embodied the missionary stylings necessary to grow a Christian empire, while at the same time feeding the Monophysite community what they wanted to hear. If we consider the possibility that Justinian's own theological leanings toward the Chalcedonian perspective was more a function of connecting with the broader empire, and in particular the Western Church of Rome, we end up with a movement that promoted Monophysitism as much as Chalcedonism. Any building of the church would help to accomplish Justinian's goals of a Christian empire, especially when pagan forces were making inroads from the East and North of his capital. Justinian knew that in the end battle against the pagan would trump any internal Christian conflict. John of Ephesus supports this notion with a quote from this story of John of Hephaestopolis. He states, "In this time of [the church's] distress also [God] set up these two pillars of light [John of Tella and Hephaestopolis] in it to comfort it; by whose holy prayers may schisms and strifes be done away from within it until the end, Amen!"⁸¹¹ If John was simply interested in promoting a Monophysite community, he would likely not be calling for the ending of schisms and strifes, unless he thought the Monophysites had a chance of converting the whole world to their views. Given his proximity to the capital, thereby giving him a broader view of what was happening in the West, it is not likely this was

⁸¹⁰ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 25, PO 18:535 ff.

⁸¹¹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 25 PO 18: 540

his argument. Again, if we rethink this along the lines of a melding Christian sensibility of conversion, which Justinian undoubtedly hoped for, John's words calling for peace fit nicely.

Situating John of Ephesus amidst other hagiographical compilations

Harvey argues that in John of Ephesus the ascetic's use of spiritual power in the temporal world is not a secularization of a mode of action, but rather "John's ascetics display[ing] an outward manifestation of their inward spirituality."⁸¹² She continues, "Here the crucial issue is touched because John's Lives differ from those written by Palladios and Theodoret in a most fundamental way. For John writes at the time when the Chalcedonian-Monophysite dispute had reached its highest pitch. It is a time when the needs of the temporal world have become so pressing that the ascetic cannot afford the luxury of complete withdrawal."⁸¹³ This dissertation questions the differentiation of the hagiographers solely along the lines of social struggle. If this was the case then we would surely see a similar outgrowth of power in certain stories related by Palladios; take for example the woman who is slowly immersed in a cauldron of hot pitch. Does this sort of crisis of persecution for the faith not merit similar temporal action? There has to be another answer beyond social struggle. For that, I have argued, you must look to the deeper theologies that are at work, primarily exemplified in the denunciation of Origen. Harvey calls Palladios's treatment that which "praises a distant past," and calls Theodoret's tone, "removed" when he speaks of the Arian persecutions.⁸¹⁴ Harvey

⁸¹² Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 54.

⁸¹³ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 54.

⁸¹⁴ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 55.

argues that John has merged martyr with ascetic, creating a “physically fused presence.”⁸¹⁵ While this is a compelling notion, it does not make perfect sense with the power that is exemplified throughout John’s treatment of the saints’ lives. For example, if one considers the first monk John treats, Habib, we do not see a monk who is being persecuted, but rather one who acts with power to mete God’s judgment on the wealthy deed holder who was cheating his fellow citizen. It is confusing how this theme coincides with her argument for a monophysitic, persecution-oriented storyline. There is no question the persecution of the Monophysites plays a prominent role in the many narratives, but it is hardly the place to look for answers about why hagiography shifted from a Palladios or Theodoret styled hagiography that was so geared toward suffering on the one hand, and restoration on the other. Not including Origen as primary cause in this shift is discounting one of the most important aspects of this literature for the sake of cobbling a social-historical causation together.

Harvey acknowledges that Palladios and Theodoret both wrote “in contexts of ecclesiastical battle.”⁸¹⁶ She posits that Palladios chose to deal with this in his writing by “denying that there is any disagreement” since his “*Historia Lausiaca* describes a peaceful picture that hardly indicates the state of the Egyptian church at the time.”⁸¹⁷ Rather than explain away his style with the notion that he simply denied his ascetics were engaged in any struggle, we can posit another option if we take seriously the influence of Origen on these writers. For Palladios, a known Origen sympathizer, his treatment of struggle was to highlight the patient acceptance of the world as less than

⁸¹⁵ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 55.

⁸¹⁶ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 55.

perfect, and champion the ascetic who moved through the struggles with grace, hoping on another world where God would reward the Christian soul. To use our previous example of the young woman dipped in hot pitch, from Palladios's perspective God was not acting in the immediate forms that John of Ephesus and Theodoret would eventually claim. This first major compilation of hagiography still acknowledged a post-Christian period of persecution that was deeply discordant with a God who acted with immediacy in the Old and New Testament stories. Palladios was not ignoring the issues, he was applying a theology that was very different from that of John of Ephesus.

Harvey also treats Theodoret's hagiography in this section, explaining that he wrote in a "period of relative tranquility in his otherwise volatile career."⁸¹⁸ She continues, "His motives for writing it have been variously interpreted, but the work itself is calm and dignified and praises an asceticism of previously questionable validity in a literary format that grants it admirable respect."⁸¹⁹ Harvey's explanation for why Theodoret's style differs from John of Ephesus, is that he was not writing at a time when his proclaimed community was suffering. Two aspects of this require further questioning. One, Harvey herself acknowledges earlier in her text that John of Ephesus was writing from a period looking back on the more intense periods of Monophysite persecution and saw no hope of disseminating Monophysitism:

From the time of Justin I's accession in 519, Chalcedonian orthodoxy had been the only imperially sanctioned Christian confession. Although persecution against the Monophysites was intermittent thereafter (but most serious in the eastern provinces), by the time that John of Ephesus was writing any serious possibility of reconciliation had long passed. It was not John's intent to

⁸¹⁷ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 55.

⁸¹⁸ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 55.

⁸¹⁹ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 55.

disseminate Monophysitism to a wider audience through hagiography: such an activity was neither practical in the given political climate, nor, by the 560s, a concern for the dissenters against Chalcedon. The work is written for a specifically Monophysite audience; John's use of Syriac, aside from being his natural choice of language (or so we must presume), also specified his chosen readership."⁸²⁰

This was obviously not the highpoint of struggle in the Monophysite controversy, which Harvey seems to offer as a "crisis" which informed John of Ephesus's writing. In many ways it seems both John and Theodoret were writing hagiographies from less intense periods of their lives. Secondly, Theodoret's treatment of scriptural connection between the holy man and the prophets of old is very similar to John of Ephesus's treatment. Both styles accord swift and retributive actions in the name of God, yet Theodoret's is muted compared to John of Ephesus. Theodoret's holy man often reverses his initial judgment or corrects the situation with the aim of pedagogical implications. John's ascetics rarely reverse a judgment that has been proclaimed.⁸²¹ We can cite Habib's apologetic tone to the deedholder when he states, "We for our part will not close the door, and pray for him. But the rest of the sentence has gone forth against him, that he shall depart from life; and this we cannot reverse."⁸²² This type of retribution without reversal is a development on Theodoret's style and certainly worthy of deeper attribution than social struggle against the Chalcedonians.

This causes us to wonder why Harvey would claim there is not a "sense of unified ascetic vision that speaks to personal vows, public suffering, and religious unrest such

⁸²⁰ Harvey, "Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography," 40-41.

⁸²¹ Although there are instances of reversal and extreme forgiveness, this is not the norm. See story of Z'ura, who brings the king back to life, John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:25. See also the forgiven man in chapter 32. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 32, PO 18:586.

as that portrayed by John of Ephesus.”⁸²³ We might certainly agree with her from the perspective of John Moschos, who genuinely appears to be culling only the most “interesting” of stories without an overarching theme – or at least a theme that has any connection to Origenist debates and theologies. But, to call Theodoret and Palladios’s works lacking in ascetic vision concerning personal vows, or public suffering is questionable.⁸²⁴ Palladios and Theodoret’s works were both deeply concerned with suffering as attested by Theodoret’s continual return to the theme of why good things happen to bad people and the reverse.⁸²⁵ Both authors grapple with suffering in the present life of the ascetic and how to make sense of it according to providence.⁸²⁶

Harvey holds that the monks in John’s *Lives*, “have no wondrous solutions for the hardships at hand.”⁸²⁷ This is contrasted with Theodoret’s monks, who “never fail.”⁸²⁸ It

⁸²² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, PO 17:25.

⁸²³ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 55.

⁸²⁴ It is not clear what Harvey means by “personal vows” here.

⁸²⁵ See Theodoret, *On Divine Providence*, 6.4, 6.36, 6.42, 10.6. Also, Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 24.3.

⁸²⁶ Harvey argues that John of Ephesus was so focused on the realities of plague, famine, hardships of exile and imprisonment by persecutors, that he had little time to explore the histrionics of miraculous feats, or lust or boredom, upon which Theodoret and Palladios focus. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 56.

She also claims his work is a more human presentation, focusing on the troubles monks had in various situations. It is true that John’s focus is different than Theodoret and Palladios – after all, these were very different times. You can see the more human aspects of John’s ascetic in particular clarity in stories like that of Maro, where he complains of being forced into the role of healer and questions whether it is all just a farce meant to lead him into pride. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO 17:57. I think this same level of real grappling is also available in Palladios – especially in Palladios’s own playfulness in writing about himself as bishop of the leftover wine. See introduction to chapter two. We also get a good bit of real struggle in the monks’ lives, especially in the story of Evagrius who stumbles and is corrected by God and his fellow monks. Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 38.10.

Like the Syrian monks, Palladios’s monks are often seen working within their communities in various capacities. Innocent helps a woman find her stolen sheep and attain justice, similar to Habib’s actions in John’s work. Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 44.5.

⁸²⁷ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 56.

⁸²⁸ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 56.

is unclear how Palladios's struggling monks differ from John's struggling monks in her argument. Both are faced with internal and external struggles and navigate them the best they can.⁸²⁹ From the perspective of Origenian influence, however, we can argue that there was far more focus on the temporal power at work in John's stories. Whereas Palladios's monks were celebrated for their ascetic sufferings, John's monks are celebrated for their wondrous power over the world around them. She also notes that John had "no time" for miracles, lust or boredom.⁸³⁰ One wonders what category the healing of so many who came to see Maro, or the protection of John himself through the eating of lentils should be put in, if not miracles?⁸³¹ It is certainly a picture that is tainted by the Monophysite crisis that had faced the community, but it was not enough to rid John of a perspective that saw his ascetics as the natural culmination of scriptural power at work in the lives of the holy.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown a cross section of John of Ephesus's *Lives*, by highlighting the theme of power and the question of utility in retribution-oriented stories. Although a significant amount of variation is present in the scenarios, John's treatment of the saints' role in wielding comeuppance is surprisingly consistent. The monks commonly

⁸²⁹ An excellent example of this comes in Philoromus's struggle against the Emperor Julian. Palladios relates that Philoromus used to "speak up to him boldly." Julian responds by punishing the old monk. He has him shaved and cuffed about "by mere boys." This, Palladios notes, the monk endured as "nothing unusual" and "even thanked Julian for it." The monk is punished for his obdurate attitude and bold remarks, but unlike the later hagiographies, there is no mention of Julian's receiving his due. The passage simply goes on to explain more deeds of the monk. Palladios, *The Lausiak History*, 45.1.

⁸³⁰ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 56.

⁸³¹ Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 51. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 4, PO

are found straddling the divide between this world and the next. Regardless of their avoidance, they are forced to deal with situations and people that threaten their lifestyles and the safety and security of those around them. By the same token, John is showing the reader a monasticism that is deeply engaged with society, to an even greater extent than we have seen exemplified in Theodoret of Cyrrhos. Whether through bloodthirsty attacks or the leaching of wealth, humanity was always in need of corrective measures from the hand of God. The holy person acted as God's agent of sorts, wielding power in unsavory situations. Evidence points to the fact that some of these monks acted as though the power had been given to them and they doled out judgment as God's 'vicar'.⁸³² Other monks pray for God's action to be swift in bringing certain parties to justice. A third category could be those who simply acknowledge God's unhappiness with the situation and warn of his judgment. Although, rarely taking responsibility for the outcome, the monks always seem to be right in the middle of it. It should also be noted that regardless of whether the punishment is reversed or not, it is only ever reversed through the prayer of the holy person.

As to what could cause a community to be so bent on retribution, it is clear that theological turmoil and resulting persecution certainly played a role. Beyond that, the acknowledgment that at any time, life, as the community conceived it, could be shattered into bits by a marauding army of Huns or other ethnic group is a primary factor. This concern for the loss of what one has built seems to turn language away from love and forgiveness and toward the harsher spectrum of revenge and destruction. The

17:61-62.

⁸³² Here I am using this in the sense of "substitute" for God.

stories which recount the dismantling of monasteries seem to indicate the fear any Christian community would have of losing their ground and ultimately God's ground in the world of late antiquity.⁸³³ Just as a priest was responsible for his flock, so too did these monks consider themselves responsible for the maintenance and promotion of God's presence throughout the hills and countryside. To be sure, it was recounted as a presence which stood in perfect alignment with their brand of belief, Monophysite to be exact. But, as we have noted, John's own positioning and his numerous pleas for peace and an end to strife in the Christian kingdom, make suspect any argument for this work as a Monophysite apologetic. Although these allegiances were common all over the Byzantine world, we get a sense of something more important than whether Christ was of two natures. The empire was truly on the brink of something. That something could be longevity or utter destruction, and everyone from the Emperor to the *chora* monk knew it. The rise of retribution was clearly linked to concern that their world was on the edge of change and that this change did not align with the communal notions of providence which they had come to accept. This Eastern Roman world saw its destiny in the care and providence of God. It was their duty to convert the world, and it was God's duty to care for his people as he had done so many times before in the Old Testament. Nevermind the fact that the Jews had been removed from the equation. Christianity was the new Israel, and Justinian was the new David. God had returned from his slumber during Christian persecutions and was now wielding power in

⁸³³ This is best exemplified in the struggle that Sergius undertakes in burning down the Jews' Synagogue and their subsequent destruction of his huts. The feud continues through several iterations of destruction and rebuilding. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 5, PO 17:92-94.

human forms akin to the New Testament apostles.

This new model of providence sat nicely with a Christian world that was ready to put Origen and his allegorical reading of scripture behind them. Moreover, it was not interested in a theology that purported to bring one's enemies safely back into God's harbor of salvation. There was no longer need for second guessing God's retributive justice, it was at work in real time through the monastic life. Moreover, a simple and literal reading of scripture allowed for the full measure of God's punitive vengeance to be explored. If there was any question about the agency of such power, it could be witnessed summarily in the deployment of God's law through the Byzantine empire at work in the *lives of the Syrian monks*.

Chapter 6

John Moschos: A stylized approach or a true *Florilegium*?

John Moschos writes of the monks of late antiquity with particular attention to the minute details that made monastic life interesting and worthy of passing on to future generations. His project, a *florilegium*, or collection of flowers, is just that, a plucking of the finest and most pertinent stories for his project.⁸³⁴ This chapter will embody the spirit of John's work, by plucking our own bundle of flowers from John's work concerning retribution in the stories of the early Christian monks.

John's life spans the period directly following Justinian's rule. When Justinian dies in 565 C.E., John is just fifteen years old. He lives on to 619 C.E.. John enters our discussion of retributive themes in hagiography as the latest writer in our sequence of five, which includes: Palladios, Theodoret, Cyril, and John of Ephesus. His late date

⁸³⁴ John begins his work with the acknowledgment that "Out of these flowers I have picked the most beautiful, and woven a corona for you out of this imperishable and everlasting meadow,

would suggest that unlike Cyril, he was not tempted by the theologies of Origen, and perhaps was working with a theology that was closer to John of Ephesus than Palladios. When we start to read through his collection, we are not disabused of our suspicions. John Moschos's hagiography shows decidedly retributive themes on the whole; he trades a theology of restoration for judgment and comeuppance on a scale only comparable with John of Ephesus. Both writers are deeply familiar with their subjects, as well as the fallout surrounding the Origenist monks and the posthumous condemnation of the great Origen. The conflation of the two yields a collection of provocative stories that stand out among the literature of the ancient world, contributing a vivid picture of what God's judgment looked like in the eternal as well as the temporal worlds. These are stories with legs. They likely made their way to Moschos precisely because of their outrageous nature. Moschos, for his part, does his best to connect them to his broader pedagogical themes, while maintaining a collection that is interested in only the finest, most titillating bits of wisdom and lore. His model holds sway in hagiographic and synaxarion writing that continues into the high medieval period. The style is trimmed back with Symeon Metaphrastes's abbreviating work on the proliferation of hagiographies.⁸³⁵

The Stories

Turning to John's literature, we are struck by the very first story which recounts

my most faithful son, which I offer to you, and through you to everyone."

⁸³⁵ Symeon Metaphrastes, *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2006).

the life of John the Elder and the Cave of Sapsas.⁸³⁶ John the Elder was a saintly monk, who was counted worthy of appointment as higoumen of the monastery of Abba Eustorgius. When the archbishop of Jerusalem indicated his plan to John, the monk bristled at the notion, suggesting that he preferred to pray on Mount Sinai. The archbishop, understanding the stubbornness of the elder, suggested that John take a leave of absence and accept the office of higoumen when he returned. John set out for Mt. Sinai with his disciple and upon crossing the Jordan river, he was struck with a fever. Unable to walk, the two entered a cave and rested for three days. John was “scarcely able to move and burning with fever” when he saw in his sleep a figure who asked him where he wanted to go.⁸³⁷ To which John responded honestly about his desire to be at Mt. Sinai. The next night, the figure asked John in his sleep, “Why do you insist on suffering like this, good elder? Listen to me and do not go there.” When John asked who the man was, he replied, “I am John the Baptist and that is why I say to you: do not go there. For this little cave is greater than Mount Sinai. Many times did our Lord Jesus Christ come in here to visit me. Give me your word that you will stay here and I will give you back your health.”⁸³⁸ John agrees to stay in the cave and was “instantly restored to health and stayed there for the rest of his life.”⁸³⁹

This first chapter in Moschos’s treatment points toward the retributive nature of the supernatural forefathers in helping to correct monastic action in the cosmos. As with

⁸³⁶ Throughout the text, I will cite according to John Wortley’s numeration of the chapters. All quotations come from Wortley’s translation unless otherwise noted. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 1.

⁸³⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 1.

⁸³⁸ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 1.

⁸³⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 1.

earlier monks such as Euthymius, who operated from his own tomb in Cyril of Scythopolis's work, John the Baptist is linked in some way to the topography of his own physical life.⁸⁴⁰ It is only after John the Elder crosses the Jordan that John the Baptist begins to punish him physically for his choice to disobey the Archbishop of Jerusalem. The wayward monk's actions are corrected in real time by the supernatural forces of God's power being worked out in the physical realm. Although it is just the first chapter, the reader already has a sense of where Moschos lays value in relating the monastic life. His program is one of power, worked out in the lives of the ascetics to train sinners, as well as the later readers of his compilation. It has a very different feel from the earlier stories of Palladios. For Moschos, God was as vigilant and retributive through his holy representatives as he was through the prophets of old and the apostles in the stories of scripture. There was no interest in a deeper way of reading these moments; they spoke with authority in their simple and overt nature. John the Elder had made a mistake, and we, as readers, are witnesses to God's power correcting that mistake.

In a small paragraph that comprises chapter four, John identifies a certain Leontius of the community under Theodosius, of which John was likely a member. In it he includes a seemingly insignificant remark from Leontius: "After the new lavriotes were driven out of the New lavra I went and took up residence in the same lavra."⁸⁴¹ In a footnote, Wortley acknowledges that Derwas Chitty has covered this material in depth.

⁸⁴⁰ This is supported further by the following story in which it is John the Baptist who conveys God's message to Conon when he runs away from his monastery. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 3.

⁸⁴¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 4.

Chitty separates out the various Leontii, contra Evans, and holds that “Leontius, hegumen of St. Theodosius, told Moschos that he had gone to the New Lavra on the expulsion of the Origenists – therefore in Cyril’s company. Eustochius had been ousted from the Patriarchate in A.D. 563-4, and his rival Macarius restored to his throne on renouncing his Origenism.”⁸⁴²

The rather brief treatment that Moschos gives this figure, compared with the lengthy treatise on the Origenist controversy found in Cyril of Scythopolis should give the reader pause. It is possible that Moschos was wholly over the Origenist controversy, having seen it anathematized under Justinian and now just an insignificant detail regarding the monks in Jerusalem. On the other hand, we might suppose that Moschos, plucking only those flowers which had meaning for him and his community of listeners, would not want to waste space deciphering the history of such a complicated theological debate. Instead he focuses on the one detail that seems important from the story, the supernaturally focused detail of when Leontius enters the church for communion he saw “an angel standing at the right side of the altar,” saying, “From the moment that altar was consecrated I was commanded to remain here.”⁸⁴³ With this Moschos unveils some of his purpose in writing. He will avoid the major debates, instead focusing on the details which make these stories alluring.

⁸⁴² Chitty cites Leontius of Byzantium, Leontius, hegumen of Choziba, Leontius, Abbot of St. Sabas’ in Rome, and Leontius, hegumen of St. Theodosius. Evans held that perhaps some of these Leontii could be combined. If we hold earlier dates for Leontius of Byzantium, the comment that he “told us” from Moschos, would become suspect. Either this Leontius was one who lived long enough to relate his story to Moschos or our hagiographer is being generous with the verb “told,” perhaps communicated via internal records or oral histories could also apply here. Evans, *Leontius of Byzantium*, 2-3. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 144, 188.

⁸⁴³ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 4.

Chapter fourteen relates the story of a monk from the Community of Penthoucla, who struggled against sexual temptation. When it became clear that he was not succeeding in his battle, he decided to leave the monastery and eventually “went off to Jericho to satisfy his desires.”⁸⁴⁴ Moschos tells us that as he was entering “the den of fornication, he was suddenly afflicted with leprosy all over.”⁸⁴⁵ Rejoicing at this realization, the monk gave thanks to God saying, “God has stricken me with this terrible disease in order that my soul should be saved.”⁸⁴⁶ This curious story begins to “flesh in” the concept of how God worked in the physical world to correct and educate his holy followers. Moschos’s style differs considerably from the stories of Theodoret of Cyrros, Cyril of Scythopolis, or even Palladios, who would all be prone to attaching an addendum explaining that the leprosy left the monk when he changed his mind. We get no indication that the monk was healed of his leprosy, but rather carried it back to the monastery – or perhaps simply to his deathbed – “giving thanks to God” who had kept him from the sin of fornication.⁸⁴⁷ This may not follow the pattern of retribution, strictly speaking, but it does show God’s immediate and miraculous intervention in the life of a monk who was intent on transgression. Moschos is showing his proclivity towards stories that protect the human soul in the afterlife, regardless of how destructive these lessons are to the physical body. With no signs of reversal, the recompense or lesson, stands as a harsh condemnation or perfect salvation, depending on how one reads the story. Moschos’s own slant, supported by Abba Polychronios’s retelling of the story of

⁸⁴⁴ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 14.

⁸⁴⁵ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 14.

⁸⁴⁶ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 14.

⁸⁴⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 14.

the wayward monk, is that the monk rejoices in his lesson and “glorified God exceedingly.”⁸⁴⁸

In chapter fifteen, we read of some Hebrews whose hands are immobilized in the air mid-strike.⁸⁴⁹ As with several previous stories, dangerous enemies are often caught in place while engaging in an attack. The significance of these stories for hagiographers like John is that God acts in immediacy. Not before the attack making the two groups miss meeting each other, and not after the fact in correction of the deeds done, but directly in the moment when they would strike the holy monk.

Moschos tells the story of Abba Nicolas, who was on his way to perform a service at the Thebaïd. After setting out on the journey he and his two companions lost their way and wandered “far and wide” in the desert.⁸⁵⁰ The men ran out of water and went for days without it, when finally Nicolas and the others, fainting from thirst and heat flung themselves into the shade of some tamarisk trees. Nicolas relates the moment:

As I lay there I fell into an ecstasy and I saw a pool of water full to overflowing. Two people were standing at the edge of the pool, drawing water with a wooden vessel. I began to make a request of one of them in these words: “Of your charity, sir, give me a little water, for I am faint,” but he was unwilling to grant my request. The other one said to him: “Give him a little,” but he replied: “No, let us not give him any, for he is too easy-going, and does not take care <of his soul.>” The other said: “Yes, yes; it is true that he is easy-going but he is hospitable to strangers,” – and so he gave some to me and also to my companions. We drank and went on our way, traveling three more days without drinking until we reached civilisation.⁸⁵¹

This story, while not deeply engaged in retribution, does model the more stringent

⁸⁴⁸ This story, like so many in Moschos, passes through several hands. Moschos is telling it as related by Abba Polychronios, who obviously heard the tale from the monk or some other person. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 14.

⁸⁴⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 15.

⁸⁵⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 16.

notion of recompense within the monastic life. Presumably, if Nicolas had not been one who took care of strangers, the strangers would not have taken care of him.⁸⁵² John is likely hoping we will see these strangers as angelic beings, sent to care for the lost monks. The story gives us some of the tit-for-tat flavor of Moschos's hagiographical writings.

In thinking about other retributive and compensatory models in Moschos's own social and historical setting, we would be remiss to not consider the possibility of influence from the byzantine legal system. To what extent were the laws of Justinian, which were deeply reliant on compensatory statutes, influencing Christian theological notions? For that answer, a look at the prologues and compilations of legal statutes is necessary. As we will see in the final story of Wortley's translation of Moschos, Justinian had an important role in the lives of these monks and an abiding influence on the concept of how Christian justice operated both in this world and the next.⁸⁵³

On Fear

Chapter eighteen refers to a story in which a monk takes up residence in the cave of a lion on the Jordan river. On one occasion he found two lion-cubs in his cave and he bundled them up in his cloak and took them to church. He explains to his fellow Christians, "If we kept the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ...these animals

⁸⁵¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 16.

⁸⁵² The notion of the stranger is deeply influential on these monastic communities. In chapter twelve, Abba Olympios counts it as one of the three most important teachings for the monk. When asked for a word, Olympios responds, "Do not consort with heretics; keep a watch over the tongue and the belly and wherever you stay, keep on saying <to yourself> 'I am a stranger.'" John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 16.

would fear us. But because of our sins we have become slaves and it is rather we who fear them.”⁸⁵⁴

This passage contains several key ideas which relate to the broader development of monastic theology. On one hand, the notion of fear is a driving force in the physical world. It was useful for teaching as well as controlling human actions. It was what stood between humanity acting with impunity and humanity acting respectful to one another. In many ways it was the basis of the law, both of God and of the Roman Empire. God’s law relied on stories from the ancient Israelites of vengeance and punishment on an immediate as well as intergenerational scale – often visiting punishment on future generations.⁸⁵⁵ Roman law utilized the promulgation of edicts through various means and culminated the corrective activity in applying equal or greater – in many instances – punishment to the occurrences that transgressed socially constructed norms.

The monk’s construction of worldview was always concerned with the hierarchy of power. As mentioned earlier, the human was considered God’s highest form. It was only the perversion of humanity through sin, that brought about the disjunction of

⁸⁵³ See the following chapter for more on this.

⁸⁵⁴ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 18.

A relatable story occurs in chapter one-hundred seven, when a lion is profoundly anthropomorphized. The lion is accused of killing the ass which he cared for. He shows remorse and eventually returns the ass and three camels to the elder, helping him again to fetch water for the monastery. Moschos appends an explanation for the prolonged anthropomorphizing: “This did not take place because the lion had a rational soul, but because it is the will of God to glorify those who glorify him – and to show how the beasts were in subjection to Adam before he disobeyed the commandment and fell from the comfort of paradise. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 107. The story is obviously related to another in Cyril, where an ass and lion pair up for similar duties. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991), Sabas, 49.

⁸⁵⁵ One can see this most vividly in the slavery that generations are born into while in Egypt.

harmony amidst God's creatures. The underlying claim was that humans could return to that Edenic form of existence only after they had conquered sin and the fear that accompanied it. Humans were only fearful of lions because the world's hierarchy had been distorted. In like manner, this model could be applied to demons as they operated in these monks' desert. It was no small feat to move into a place occupied by demons.⁸⁵⁶ They could attack you mentally, or worse, physically, leaving you to die if help did not arrive.⁸⁵⁷ Was it enough to pray for deliverance from such evil apparitions? Some hagiographers hold yes, while some relate stories of seemingly insurmountable demonic power.⁸⁵⁸

Fear was capable of achieving significant results in the wayward monk's life. As related in the following chapter, number nineteen, Abba Elijah is trained out of his spirit of fornication through a vision of the afterlife. The story tells of how Elijah was living out his days in his desert cave when a woman showed up begging for some water. Upon inquiry, the woman identified herself as a fellow ascetic, living "a stone's throw from your cell."⁸⁵⁹ Elijah, though surprised at her visit, obliges her with some water from his bottle and sends her on her way. The story continues:

When she had departed, the devil began working against me on her account, putting lewd thoughts into my mind. The devil gained possession of me and I could not bear the flame of lust. So I took my staff and set out from the cave in the heat of the day, across the burning stones. It was my intention to search for

Exodus 12:40 states that the Israelites' sojourn lasted 430 years.

⁸⁵⁶ See Palladios's account of Macarius conquering the tomb of Jannes and Jambres. Palladios, *Palladios: The Lausiatic History* (New York: Newman Press, 1964), 18.5.

⁸⁵⁷ We might hold up the story of Moses being beaten at the well. Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 19.9.

⁸⁵⁸ As in the story of Paul and Antony, where Antony claims, "This is not my duty, for I have not yet been deemed worthy of power over the ruling order (of demons), but this is Paul's task." Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 22.10.

⁸⁵⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 20.

her and to satisfy my desire. When I had gone about a furlong, my passion reached a fever pitch and I went into a trance. I saw the earth open up and I fell down into it. There I saw rotting corpses, badly decayed and burst open, filling the place with an unspeakably foul stench. I then saw a person of venerable appearance who pointed to the corpses and said to me: "See, this is a woman's <body> and that is a man's; go and enjoy yourself and do whatever your passion dictates. But in return for that pleasure, take note how much labour you intend to destroy. Just look at the sort of sin for which you are prepared to deprive yourself of the kingdom of heaven. Oh, wretched humanity! Would you lose the fruit of all that toil for one hour's <pleasure>?" But I was overcome by the appalling stench and fell to the ground. The holy apparition came and set me on my feet. He caused the warfare to cease and I returned to my cell giving thanks to God.⁸⁶⁰

Elijah is shown a vision meant to strike fear into his soul. It causes him to correct his desire for sinful behavior. Although he does not appear to garner any punishment for his intentions in leaving his cell, he sees what sort of outcome his actions could yield. Elijah is shown a simple equation in his vision. He is allowed to do as he pleases, but the consequences would rob him of the kingdom of Heaven. The tradeoff, not worth the fulfillment of desire, allows the monk to overcome his concupiscence. Although retribution plays no actual role in Elijah's story, it looms large in the minds of Moschos's monks, who could stand to lose everything in a fleeting moment of gratification.

Chapter twenty-one tells a story of Abba Gerontios, higoumen of the monastery of Euthymios. Gerontius relates that he and two of his brothers were living as grazers near Besimon on the Red Sea. As they were making their way along the mountainside, they saw another ascetic along the shore who met up with some Saracens. They passed by the man, but then one turned back and "struck off the head of the anchorite."⁸⁶¹

⁸⁶⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 20.

⁸⁶¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 20.

Gerontios and his companions began to grieve for the man, and while they were still watching, a bird came from above and picked the Saracen up, and “carried him up into the air.”⁸⁶² Dropping him to the ground, it killed him, turning the man into carrion.

Stories of enemy attacks like the saracen above, are not uncommon in Moschos.⁸⁶³ Neither is the immediate retribution that they face. This story simply aims to protect the ascetic’s belief that God was present in the desert and would visit judgment in a swift and equal measure. In thinking about this story compared to others we have encountered, we cannot help but wonder why God’s bird would not have come sooner, plucking the saracen up before he lopped off the anchorite’s head? We can posit that while life in the desert did not always go the way the monk expected, he or she could always rely on God’s corrective measures to even the score. A major difference between Moschos and previous hagiographers, is the attention he gives to immediacy. It could be said that it is associated with his style of writing, plucking only the meatiest pieces from the legends and relating them tersely – sometimes in as little as one sentence. On the other hand, it makes clear Moschos’s theological program. There is not a single story in his work that does not show God’s interest in harmonizing the dissonance of this world through action either in the monk’s mind, immediate physical surroundings, or foretold notions of the afterlife. Most of his stories follow the model of immediate,

⁸⁶² John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 20.

⁸⁶³ Chapter ninety-nine tells of a Saracen who charged a monk named Ianthos, intending to kill him. The elder prayed, “Lord Jesus Christ, thy will be done,” and the earth immediately “opened and swallowed up the Saracen.” John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 99. On the other hand, Chapter one-hundred thirty-three tells of a Saracen who intended to rob Abba Anthony and was immobilized for two days. Finally, the man pleaded with Anthony, saying “For the love of the God whom you worship, let me go!” Anthony told the man to go in peace. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 133.

phenomenal retribution on behalf of the monks. His style is supportive of a developing hagiographical trend that was increasingly disinterested in restoration and had swung the direction of retributive justice. This movement in Christian literature would arguably not be reversed until the reformation, and even then it would not lose ground everywhere.⁸⁶⁴ There was something primal about believing in a God who had created the world and could act directly in adjusting the outcome of people acting within its bounds. Moreover, the birth of a legal system that acted to mete out equal and appropriate retribution for any sort of social wrong, was embraced by the Church's developing canonical structure; the reaches of which, would carry forward to today. The notion of turning one's cheek and dropping one's stone of retribution, had fallen by the wayside of a Roman ideal that often approximated *lex talionis*.⁸⁶⁵

Chapter twenty-six tells of a man named Theophanes.⁸⁶⁶ Coming to the cell of Cyriacos, Theophanes explained that he was in communion with the Nestorians in his own country. Cyriacos "besought him to separate himself from that noxious heresy," and went on to explain that "there is no other way of salvation than rightly to discern and believe that the holy Virgin Mary is in truth the Mother of God."⁸⁶⁷ Theophanes replies with a genuine critique, "But truly, abba, all the sects speak like that sir: that if you are not in communion with us, you are not being saved. I am a simple person and really do not know what to do. Pray to the Lord that by a deed he will show me which

⁸⁶⁴ Although it is not our task here, it is interesting to think about how far this retributive literature continues to be a primary genre, continuing into the late Medieval hagiographies.

⁸⁶⁵ More on this is explored in the section on Justinian.

⁸⁶⁶ A rather appropriate name, given the subject of the chapter.

⁸⁶⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 21.

is the true faith.”⁸⁶⁸ Cyriacos agrees to this with enthusiasm and tells Theophanes to wait in his cell. The next day, a person of “awesome appearance” took him to “see the truth.”⁸⁶⁹ Leading the man “to a dark and disagreeable place where there was fire,” Theophanes was shown “Nestorios, Theodore, Eutyches, Apollinarios, Evagrius and Didymus, Dioscorus and Severus, Arius and Origen and some others, there in that fire.”⁸⁷⁰ The list of names is a greatest hits from the previous five centuries, relating that if one sides with the wrong person or theology, they are deemed worthy of residence in hell, alongside the other stubborn heretics. The figure proceeds to explain to Theophanes, “For I tell you that if a man practise every virtue and yet not glorify <God> correctly, to this place he will come.”⁸⁷¹ Moschos displays a very basic and judgmental perspective on theological understanding. It is decidedly far from Gregory’s notion that one would not come to great danger in philosophizing about various theological ideas.⁸⁷² There was no room for error according to Moschos. If one chose unwisely, there would be judgment and condemnation in the afterlife – and perhaps even some more immediate consequences.

Chapter thirty tells of a rather loud, and annoying monk who was constantly bellowing in lamentation for the sins he had committed. As the people around him attempt to get him to desist his groaning and tears, he proceeds to tell them why he is so troubled. He and his wife were of the Severan community. Over time, she had been persuaded by an orthodox neighbor to convert. Upon learning of this conversion, the

⁸⁶⁸ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 21.

⁸⁶⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 21.

⁸⁷⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 21.

⁸⁷¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 21.

man broke into the neighbor's house, catching his wife with the host in her mouth. He grabbed his wife's throat and seizing the bread threw it up in the air and it landed in the mud. He then explained that "All at once I saw a flash of lightening take up the holy communion from the spot where it lay. And two days later I saw a black-faced one wearing rags who said to me: 'You and I are alike condemned to the same damnation,' and I said: 'Who are you?' The black faced one who had appeared to me replied: 'I am he who struck the cheek of the Creator of all things, our Lord Jesus Christ, at the time of his passion.'"⁸⁷³ For Moschos, this story is coupled neatly with the previous one which related the vision of the heretics in torment of fire. There was little room for restoration of the heretical person who had been condemned for his or her actions. Judgment appeared to be automatic and inevitable.

Not all of John's stories are focused directly on retribution.⁸⁷⁴ As any desert ascetic could tell you, Jesus was deeply interested in forgiveness. How the message of forgiveness gets parsed out in a culture of retributive justice is an interesting aspect of Moschos's work. In chapter thirty-four, Moschos tells of the Patriarch Alexander, Bishop of Antioch. The story told about the patriarch is that one of his secretaries stole some gold from him and fled to the Thebaïd with it. Moschos explains that the man was found "wandering around by the bloodthirsty barbarians of Egypt and of the Thebaïd."⁸⁷⁵ The men saw this as an opportunity, and "took him to the remotest corner

⁸⁷² Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Cyriacus, 12.

⁸⁷³ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 30.

⁸⁷⁴ A good example is in chapter sixty-eight, where Abba Theodosius says nothing about some thieves who steal his monastic cloak. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 68.

⁸⁷⁵ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 34.

of their land."⁸⁷⁶ Alexander ransomed his secretary for eighty-five gold pieces, and treated him with so much love and gentleness that a city dweller remarked, "There is nothing more profitable or advantageous for me than to sin against Alexander."⁸⁷⁷ Moschos also noted that when faced with slander from one of his deacons, Alexander prostrated himself before the man asking for forgiveness.⁸⁷⁸

It is a question whether Moschos includes these stories because they model proper behavior, or because they are so outlandish that they merit a place alongside supernatural visions and healings. Given the tenor of his broader work, the latter is more compelling. This type of forgiveness was certainly unique among the monks, and especially the hierarchy of the church. So much so that it is deemed worthy of space in *The Spiritual Meadow*.

Even in the midst of forgiveness or change it seems as if judgment is right around the corner. Moschos tells a story in Chapter forty of a monk who makes the right decision concerning the temptation of fornication, only to die shortly thereafter. The monk was considering taking advantage of a country-girl when her father left on a trip. Upon making his desires known to her, she dissuades the monk by explaining the type of judgment he would be bringing upon himself. Besides the normal loss of so many years of hard fought purity that the monk had striven for in the monastery, the girl makes it clear to the monk that he will also answer for her own life after she hangs herself. She explains, "If you disgrace me, <I swear> by Him who said *Thou shalt bear no false witness* that I will hang myself. Thus you will be found guilty of murder too, and in

⁸⁷⁶ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 34.

⁸⁷⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 34.

the judgment you will be judged as a murderer. Rather than become the cause of so much evil, go back to your monastery. You will have <plenty> to do in praying for me.”⁸⁷⁹ The girl’s strength dwarfs the perverse monk’s fortitude in abstaining from his desires. Going back to the monastery, he confessed to the higoumen, asking that he might never leave the monastery again. After three months, the monk died. It is possible that the girl’s foresight of punishment was somehow connected to the fact that the monk would die soon after, but more likely that the monk’s life was ended in connection with his faltering. The pedagogical aspect of the story is most recognizable in the girl’s words, which start to compound the evil that the monk’s thoughts had conceived. The remarkable story conveys the girl’s abhorrence at the situation and the monk’s weakness. It would have meant something to a monk listening with the same thoughts in his mind.

When Moschos tells the story of Thalilaios, he naturally connects it to the story of Arius, a favorite hagiographical rendering of a heretic who gets his due in the most distasteful of manners. Like Arius, Thalilaios is found dead in the bathroom. The only difference being that his head was in the drain and his feet were up in the air. It is hard to not think that some foul play was at work here, or at least a twisting of the facts surrounding his death. Moschos explains that it was due to his own “worship of idols” and subsequent buying of his way back into the priesthood of Constantinople after he was expelled by canonical vote.⁸⁸⁰ The man’s retribution is foul and, according to Moschos, fitting to his iniquities. He states, “He had gained for himself an equally well-

⁸⁷⁸ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 34.

⁸⁷⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 39.

matched eternal death as that which bore off Arius."⁸⁸¹ The deed, which as noted above, would have necessitated some physical presence of force, is attributed to the "angel who governed the Thessalonian church" and "the great martyr Demetrios."⁸⁸² Again we see the claim that saints and other spiritual entities function as God's emissaries for retributive justice in the lives of the unjust and unfaithful.⁸⁸³

In one of the funniest vignettes Moschos writes, we read of an elder who lived outside the city of Antinoë and had ten disciples with him there. One disciple in particular was "careless so far as his own soul was concerned," and often was told by the elder, "pay attention to your own soul, for death awaits you and the road to punishment."⁸⁸⁴ When the disciple died, the elder was distraught over what had become of him in the afterlife and wound up praying, "Lord Jesus Christ, our true God, reveal to me the state of the brother's soul."⁸⁸⁵ Going into a trance the elder saw "a river of fire with a multitude <of people> in the fire itself. Right in the middle was the brother, submerged up to his neck. The elder said to him: 'Was it not because of this retribution that I called on you to look after your own soul my child'? The brother answered and said the elder: 'I thank God, father, that there is relief for my head. Thanks to your

⁸⁸⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 43.

⁸⁸¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 43.

⁸⁸² John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 43.

⁸⁸³ Chapter one-hundred forty-five tells of a cleric who was leading a dissolute life. As his morality declined toward witchcraft and murder, the patriarch decided to do something. He sent his servant to the shrine of the holy martyr Eleutherios, in whose service the wayward cleric served as lector, and had him declare, "Holy martyr of Christ, The Patriarch Gennadios declares to you, through me, sinner though I be, that your officer is deeply in sin. You are either to reform him or get rid of him." The next day the cleric was dead. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 145.

We are also reminded of the monk Euthymius, who comes back to visit punishment on the perjurer who swore on his tomb. Cyril, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 58.

⁸⁸⁴ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 44.

prayers I am standing on the head of a bishop’.”⁸⁸⁶

This remarkable story gives us a rich sense of how retribution was constructed, assessed and controlled for in the lives of the monks and their subsequent hagiographers. We can only guess that the monks would have heartily laughed when they heard this story retold. Did the monks take such a vision seriously? Or was this a way of configuring retributive themes within a narrative that could be both palatable and pedagogical? Moschos’s literature hits the mark on both accounts. The stories were without doubt a joy to retell from community to community – especially with such a good punchline. More importantly, however, they said something about the natural economy of holiness between this world and the next.

There are numerous hagiographical stories which deal explicitly with the veneration of Mary as Mother of God. One of the more pertinent examples comes from chapter forty-seven. Moschos tells of an actor named Gaïanas from Heliopolis. During his shows Gaïanas would blaspheme against the *theotokos*. Eventually, she appeared before the actor asking, “What evil have I done to you that you should revile me before so many people and blaspheme against me?”⁸⁸⁷ Gaïanas blasphemed all the more and this cycle continued three more times. The situation came to a conclusion when “she appeared to him once when he was sleeping at mid-day and said nothing at all. All she did was to sever his two hands and feet with her finger. When he woke up he found that his hands and feet were so afflicted that he just lay there like a tree-trunk.”⁸⁸⁸

⁸⁸⁵ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 44.

⁸⁸⁶ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 44.

⁸⁸⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 47.

⁸⁸⁸ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 47.

The story is disturbing on several levels. It obviously means to put a stop to the denigrating language used concerning Jesus's mother. As we expect with Moschos, there is no indication that the punishment was reversed in any way. He goes on to explain, "In these circumstances the wretched man confessed to everybody (making himself a public example) that he had received the reward for his blasphemy. And this he did for love of his fellow men."⁸⁸⁹ The agent of retribution is none other than the Mother of God. Why she does not say anything is a curious inclusion in the text. She simply shows up and cuts off his appendages with her finger.⁸⁹⁰ The underlying bits that would help us make sense of this story are missing. We can conclude, however, that for Moschos, the agent of retribution is often the person who was wronged, or some other important historical figure who is tied to the physical location of the event in question.⁸⁹¹ They often act with patience, attempting to change the behavior before applying a judgment. It is worth asking why it was never Jesus or God who came in judgment of the wayward sinner. We can guess that their role was the final judgment, while these others applied punishment to the more immediate concerns. We might also surmise that God operated on a different level than the court of saints which surrounded heaven. It was as if an entire working village of saints and holy persons was employed in managing the world below. God resided above, managing the saints.

Many stories in Moschos have an educational edge to them that reminds the reader of Cyril or Theodoret. Although strictly speaking many of these stories are not

⁸⁸⁹ John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 47.

⁸⁹⁰ It is unclear whether she severs the use of the appendages or the actual flesh. Either would make sense with the following lines about his confession.

⁸⁹¹ Like John the Baptist at the Jordan River.

retributive, they do have a corrective pedagogical nature woven into them. There are several stories like the one in chapter forty-eight, in which Cosmiana, the wife of Germanos the Patrician, is inhibited by Mary and other women from entering to worship at the holy sepulchre of Jesus.⁸⁹² Once she had communion with the “holy catholic and apostolic Church of Christ our God,” and put away her heretical Severan tendencies, she was able to enter the place.⁸⁹³

This is not a story of judgment or punishment, but rather corrective teaching and so we should see Moschos’s text as embodying both the educational and retributive aspects. What is characteristic of Moschos’s work, as well as John of Ephesus’s, is his notion that once a judgment goes forth, it is rarely reversed. If Cosmiana had been obstinate in her beliefs and resisted the Mother of God’s gentle correction, she would surely have garnered a punishment that was fitting to her heretical leanings, and the result would likely not have been reversed. There was no way to undo the applied judgment from God.

This raises a serious question as to how judgment operated in the immediate afterlife—here we think of the follower of the elder in Antinoë, who wound up in a river of fire with only his head exposed—versus the final judgment of which Jesus

⁸⁹² John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 48.

⁸⁹³ A similar story occurs in chapter forty-nine in which the Duke of Palestine was inhibited from worship because of his sins and his communion with Severus. It is only after his acceptance of communion in the orthodox church that he is able to make entry into the Church of the Resurrection of Christ who is God. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 49. The Severan heresy centered around the teachings of Severus of Antioch (c. 465-538). An upholder of the anti-Chalcedonian monastic party, he was able to influence the Emperor Anastasios and in 512 he became the patriarch of Antioch. Deposed in 518 by Justin I, he lived thereafter in Alexandria and his work was deeply reliant on Cyril of Alexandria’s teachings. He was condemned at the Synod of Constantinople in 536, but his writings lived on in Syriac. McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, “Severus of Antioch,” 304.

would certainly play a more prominent role. Was each person judged immediately after their death? Many of these texts would seem to suggest this. The New Testament is particularly weighted toward a final judgment in which the dead and the living shall rise to meet their fate.⁸⁹⁴ It is possible that when a monk sees a vision of judgment, they are simply seeing into the future, as was commonly associated with spiritual progress in the ascetic life.⁸⁹⁵ Various hagiographical texts, however, seem to fall in sharp disagreement with this notion. If we consider the death and judgment of Emperor Anastasios as related by both Cyril and Moschos, we learn that the Archbishops Elias and Flavian go up “to be judged with him [Anastasios].”⁸⁹⁶ There would be no reason for the bishops to end life early if his judgment was going to take place at a later time. Along with the development of a broader theology of retribution and judgment, comes a fast-forwarding of Judgment Day. Sixth century Christians no longer had to wait until the second coming for their comeuppance to be served. Monks gave them visions of all sorts of ghastly punishments that were going on concurrently for those sinners, heretics and other perverters of proper theology.⁸⁹⁷

Chapter fifty tells the story of Abba George the Recluse and his vision of heaven. Abba Anastasios tells of an evening when he rose to beat the wooden signal when he heard George weeping. When asked what was the matter, George eventually replied:

How should I not weep, seeing that our Lord is not willing to be placated on our account? I thought I stood before one who sat on a high throne, my child.

⁸⁹⁴ Here I am thinking of fate as in that which is spoken concerning one’s future and not the predestination oriented concept of fate.

⁸⁹⁵ Monks often foretold their own deaths down to the day and sometimes hour.

⁸⁹⁶ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 35.

⁸⁹⁷ We remember the group of heretics, including Origen, shown to Cyriacos in chapter twenty-one. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 21.

Around him were several tens of thousands who besought and entreated him concerning a certain matter, but he would not be persuaded. Then a woman clothed in purple raiment came and fell down before him saying, "Please, for my sake, grant this request," but he remained equally unmoved. That is why I weep and groan, for I am afraid of what is going to happen to me.⁸⁹⁸

The next day at the ninth hour there was an earthquake that destroyed cities on the Phoenician coast. At a later date, George said, "Woe are we, brother, for we have not compunction, but live heedlessly. I fear we are at the gates <of perdition> and that the wrath of God has overtaken us."⁸⁹⁹ According to the text, the next day "fire appeared in the sky."⁹⁰⁰

This vision and following statement yield a vivid picture of the judgment that lurks behind the curtain of death in Moschos's text. Like the blaspheming man who repented and shared his story, George paints a picture that is untouched by restoration. The man did not get the use of his hands and feet back, and Jesus, on his throne in George's vision, is unmoved by the appeals of the many, even the woman in purple. It is hard to know whether she represents imperial power on earth, or the transference of that power to heaven, which would indicate that perhaps she was Mary. In the text, it appears that she has enough of a relationship with Jesus to ask him to grant it for her sake. Regardless of her appeal, Jesus is unmoved by the appealing masses. The imagery speaks to a theology of judgment and retribution that is untethered to the prayers of the saints. Once it is decided, there is no going back. This is far different from Theodoret's perspective, which always seems to find a way to reverse the punishment. Again, George is envisioning a punishment in the afterlife, but it is nevertheless quite

⁸⁹⁸ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 50.

⁸⁹⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 50.

influential on the immediate physical setting as portrayed by Moschos.

In contradistinction to the stories about lions in Cyril of Scythopolis, where the monk explains that they can live side by side as creatures of a common God, the lion that enters Moschos's pages is controlled through banishment. Chapter fifty-eight explains that Abba Julian the stylite had heard of a lion in the area who was destroying people, both strangers and natives alike. Julian called his disciple, Pancratios, and said, "Go about two miles towards the north and you will find a lion in its lair there. Say to it: 'The lowly Julian says: In the name of Jesus Christ the son of the living God, withdraw from this land.'"⁹⁰¹ The lion left the cave without delay and all "glorified God."⁹⁰²

If we consider the two stories, acknowledging that Cyril may have been likening the lion to the Origenists – or some other controversial group, we can think about what it means for Moschos that the lion is banished from the community. There is certainly the same appeal to some kind of control over these massive and dangerous beasts, but in the end there is no possibility of it staying and living peacefully among humans. In a similar way, we might think of Moschos's theology as one which is eager to rid the church of all theological misfits and stamp some sort of finality on this procedure. While this is certainly over-reading Moschos's text, it is uncanny how his treatment of even the lion in their midst mimics his broader theological stance, in the same way as Cyril's mimics his own.

Not all of the retribution that is recounted by Moschos is directly associated with God's hand. In chapter sixty, we read of an anchoress [μονάστρια] who was constantly

⁹⁰⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 50.

⁹⁰¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 58.

hounded by a young man who wanted to fornicate with her. After the situation progressed to an uncomfortable state, causing the woman to be inhibited on her way to prayer, she called him into her home and asked the youth what was so appealing to him. He explained that it was her eyes “which have seduced me.”⁹⁰³ Taking her shuttle in her hand she pierced her eyes and plucked them out in front of the young man. The youth was so distraught over what he had caused that he joined the monastery in Scêtê.

This horrific story works on numerous levels. It teaches the reader about the intensity of monastic dedication, while visiting a punishment on the young man who could not control his desires. The lesson the young man learns, likely continues festering in his mind for the rest of his life. In like manner, it is hard to rid the mind of the virtual imagery such a gruesome story yields. The details Moschos includes, like the usage of the shuttle, make the story believable and all the more arresting. It is a literal reading of the New Testament text in Matthew 5:27-30:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

There is no question that Moschos and his community read the New Testament in a literal and simple fashion. It is the only way a story like that of the anchoress, could be heard without revulsion. This was a direct affront to Origen’s reading of the passage, which interpreted it as the removal of a person from the community when they acted as

⁹⁰² John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 58.

⁹⁰³ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 60.

a stumbling block.⁹⁰⁴ Moschos saw his world as an extension of the Jesus community, complete with immediate comeuppance, like we see in Acts 5, and the final judgment looming so near to the monk's life that it peeks through the physical world in visions of judgment being currently meted. It was a community that believed the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:27-28 when he said, "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."⁹⁰⁵ Moschos plucks stories that embody the charged and expectant atmosphere of the sixth century, which was teeming with struggles ranging from plague to widespread earthquake damage.⁹⁰⁶

Post-Martyrdom?

Moschos cites a long passage from Abba Palladios of Alexandria in chapter sixty-nine. The topic concerns the struggle of the martyrs in this world and the connection that the contemporary monks have with these martyrs. Palladios gives the disciples a word:

Children, the time that remains to us is short. Let us struggle for a little <in this world> and labour, in order that we might have the enjoyment of very great things in eternity. Look at the martyrs, look at the holy men, look at the ascetics; see how courageously they persevered. We will ever wonder at the endurance of those whose remembrances have been preserved from time past. Everyone who

⁹⁰⁴ Origen, "Commentary on Matthew," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, trans. Philip Schaff, vol. 9 (Edinburgh: Grand Rapids, Mich: T. & T. Clark; Eerdmans, 1989), 13.24.

⁹⁰⁵ NRSV Matt. 16:27-28

⁹⁰⁶ On the plague, see chapter on Justinian. We hear of some of this damage due to natural disaster in chapter 50. George embodies the tenor of these passages, with his fear and intensity of repentance. See John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 50.

hears of them acknowledges with great astonishment the superhuman endurance of the blessed martyrs; how their eyes were plucked out; how the legs of some of them were cut off, others their hands, whilst some had their feet destroyed. How some were eliminated by raging fire whilst others were slowly roasted. How some were drowned in rivers, others at sea. How some were torn apart by carnivorous beasts like criminals whilst others were fed to birds of prey after suffering exquisite tortures. In brief, if it were possible to describe all the different tortures which were devised for their affliction, everything that the enemy, the devil, has inflicted upon the martyrs and ascetics who loved God, it would be seen how much they endured and how they have wrestled, triumphing over the weakness of the flesh by the courage of the soul. They attained to those good things for which they hoped by counting them more worthy than the trials of this earthly life. This provides a demonstration of the solid quality of their faith in two ways. On the one hand, that having endured a little, they now enjoy great benefits in eternity. On the other hand, that they so cheerfully endured the physical torments with which the adversary the devil afflicted them. If therefore we endure affliction and persevere, with the help of God, we shall be found to be friends of God indeed. And God will be with us, fighting shoulder to shoulder with us in the battle, greatly alleviating that which we must endure. My children, since we know what kind of times these are and what kind of labor is required of us, let us strive for the self-knowledge which is obtained by means of the solitary life. For at this stage it is required of us that we sincerely repent, so that we may indeed be temples of God. For it will not be honor such as the world gives that we will receive in the world to come.

We might expect to see some kind of treatment concerning why those ancient Christians were tortured in such a way. Where was God's providence? Moschos largely sidesteps this question, instead focusing simply on how the struggle in the monks' lives is reminiscent of the struggle those martyrs endured. Moschos declares that "God will be with us, fighting shoulder to shoulder with us in the battle, greatly alleviating that which we must endure."⁹⁰⁷ As mentioned in previous chapters and so vividly portrayed here in Palladios's words, one must wonder why God would allow so much persecution in that era. There is no question that every generation of Christians had claimed God's proximity, but this meant very different things to different generations.

⁹⁰⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 69.

For Moschos the shift is evident in the story that follows the detailing of the wide scale persecution. Palladios tells of his own conversion through seeing fire overtake and burn brightly in a monk's cell on numerous consecutive nights. When they checked to see if he was burnt up, they realized it was simply the fiery light of God being shown in the monk's cell. Palladios states, "I said to myself: 'If God so glorifies his servants in *this* world, how much more so in the world to come when He shines upon their face like the sun? This, my children, is why I embraced the monastic life."⁹⁰⁸ For Moschos, the notion that God was present, glorifying his faithful followers, is a strong theme. It is no accident that this passage follows closely the passage about the martyrs. The program Moschos is promoting is one of witnessing with one's life, but in full faith that God will not only visit punishment on the enemies of faith, but also will glorify the perfecting monks in this age as well as that to come. It is a careful navigation of the major historical roadblock – the age of the martyrs – to believing that God's providence worked as effectively and closely with the monks of his age, as it ever did for the apostles and for that matter his son Jesus and the prophets of old.

A true Florilegium?

Although the majority of punishments are never reversed in Moschos, there are instances when it is. Chapter seventy tells of a Mesopotamian monk named Addas the Recluse. When the countryside was being overrun by barbarians, he was eventually noticed poking his head out from his hollowed tree trunk. In like manner to other hagiographical attack scenes, the barbarian's arm is stuck in the air as he raises his

⁹⁰⁸ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 69.

sword to strike the old man. The man's comrades beg the elder in reverence to heal the man. Addas "offered a prayer and healed him and thus he dismissed them in peace."⁹⁰⁹

We would expect to see the monk give the man some long lasting punishment, but instead he lets him go in peace. In a later chapter Abba John expresses a supportive notion by quoting 1 Timothy 2:4, saying, "He desires not the death of a sinner but that he should turn to Him and live."⁹¹⁰

It is at points like this, and the following story about a murderer's moving words, that we start to wonder if this is truly a florilegium and has no deeper design. Moschos tells the story of a man who was arrested for murder and after being tortured was taken to be decapitated. As he was traveling to the place of execution he catches a glimpse of the monk who was following along to watch and a conversation ensued. The murderer begins:

"Well now, abba, have you no cell, sire, nor any work to occupy your hands?" The monk answered: "Of course I have a cell, brother, and also something to occupy my hands." The man rejoined: "Then why do you not stay in your cell and weep for your sins?" The monk replied: "Ah, brother, I am very negligent of my soul's health – and that is precisely why I am coming to see how you die, that by this means I might come <to have some> compunction." The condemned man said to him: "Go your way, abba; remain in your cell, sir, and give thanks to God who saved us. It was because he was made man and died for us that man dies no more the eternal death."⁹¹¹

The strangeness of the story is perhaps the very reason that it was recorded by Moschos. Indeed, if one came across such a tale, it would certainly be worth plucking for a bouquet of the most titillating narratives. We expect the monk to behave in a less inquisitive and voyeuristic manner. His jaded tone suggests a life lacking in any real

⁹⁰⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 70.

⁹¹⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 78.

feeling of urgency concerning his monastic duties. As such, he has come to see death first hand and perhaps remember the fear he once had that compelled him to become a monk. The usage of the first person plural pronoun, catches the reader off guard. The murderer has put himself on the same level as the monk. Perhaps it is because he recognizes a monk who has lost his purpose, or perhaps there is some conceptualization of salvation that went beyond the bounds of the perfect monks only. If the latter is true, we might have some indication of a theological perspective that is akin to Origen's *apokatastasis*, however it is not likely. Given Moschos's deep dependence on judgment and retribution, it would be hard to argue that this story means anything more to Moschos than a stirring tale of reversal, a striking flower for the bouquet, even if it didn't match all the others.

Fleeing retribution

In one of Moschos's more creative stories we read of a woman named Mary who was aboard a ship full of passengers. As the ship endeavored to proceed to its destination, it was hindered, while all the surrounding ships made headway with ease. The ship stayed put for fifteen days, upon which time the shipmaster began to pray to God for guidance. Eventually a voice, "of no visible origin" came to the captain saying, "Throw Mary out and you will make good way."⁹¹² The shipmaster delayed, trying to figure out who Mary was. Again the voice came, "I told you: throw Mary out and you

⁹¹¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 71.

⁹¹² John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 76.

will be safe.”⁹¹³ Calling out for Mary, a woman in her bunk answered the shipmaster and a conversation ensued in which the shipmaster acknowledged his own sins as the probable cause. She replied with a deep sigh, that it was in fact she who was the sinner. Mary went on to explain that after her husband had died, she was left with two children. A soldier living near her wished to take her for his wife, but when she indicated her interest, he balked at her two children from another man. Mary killed her children and sent him a message saying, “See, now I have none.”⁹¹⁴ The soldier, disgusted by her actions, vowed never to have her. Mary fled out of fear that she might be found out and lose her own life. The shipmaster related that he “still did not want to throw her into the sea just like that,” so he devised a plan in which he would get into the dinghy and see if the vessel would make progress, thereby affirming that it was actually his sin and not Mary’s who was causing the ship’s delay. Neither ship nor dinghy moved, so he told Mary to get in the dinghy. Upon climbing into the small boat, “it turned round about five times and then sank to the bottom of the deep.”⁹¹⁵ The ship then sailed the fifteen day journey in a record time of just three and a half days.

The story of Mary on the boat ends there, but the lesson goes on teaching to Moschos’s community. One could not simply run away from their sins. Retribution was going to follow the wicked, and there was little reason to attempt to flout its inevitability. A question remains as to why Mary’s retribution was not left for the afterlife? Of course, the answer would be that her punishment was also certainly going to take place in the afterlife, but the lesson that she brought to the present age was in

⁹¹³ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 76.

⁹¹⁴ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 76.

need of explication. For that, her life would need to be snuffed spectacularly, and the story would need to be retold.

The following chapter tells of three blind men who were chatting with each other at the Tetracylon in Alexandria.⁹¹⁶ The first man explains that he lost his sight on the seas as a sailor, where he developed ophthalmia. The next man explained that he lost his sight as a glassblower, being exposed to the fire. The last man told a story of how as a youth he had detested work and became a prodigal. Resorting to wicked deeds, he saw a “richly decked-out corpse being taken for burial,” and decided to rob it. Stripping the corpse of all its clothes except a shroud, he began to leave the sepulcher with his booty. As he was leaving, his “evil habits” said to him, “Take the shroud too; it’s worth the trouble.”⁹¹⁷ Turning back, the man removed the shroud and left the man naked. The man continued, “At which point the dead man sat up before me and stretched out his hands towards me. With his fingers he clawed my face and plucked out both my eyes. I cravenly left all behind and fled from the sepulcher, badly hurt and chilled with horror.”⁹¹⁸

This story, told from Moschos’s own experience with Sophronius, ends with a conversation between the two of them. Sophronius stated, “You know, abba, I do not

⁹¹⁵ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 76.

⁹¹⁶ A place made famous by Alexander’s bringing of the relics of the Prophet Jeremiah there. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 77.

⁹¹⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 77.

⁹¹⁸ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 77.

A very similar story occurs in chapter seventy-eight where another corpse speaks to her robber from the grave. She lets the man go after berating him for an extended period, with the accepted promise that he would become a monk. Although the outcome is meant to convert the man to real repentance, by forcing him to become a monk, the rest of the story falls in line with the immediate retribution model. Her detention of the man in the grave against his will seems to damage the man’s psyche, making him weep bitterly, having come directly to the monastery

think we should do any business today, sir, for we have gained much profit from what we have heard.”⁹¹⁹ Moschos then uses this moment as a platform to plainly relate his own stance on his work. He continues, “We had indeed benefitted <from that experience> and, having benefitted ourselves, we have written it down so that you who hear these things might benefit from them too. It is a fact that no evil-doer can escape the notice of God. We heard this story with our own ears from the very man to whom it had happened.”⁹²⁰

The particularly retributive leaning story serves as an important moment in Moschos’s text. He heard the story firsthand, and more importantly it serves as a pristine example of how comeuppance works in the lives of the wicked. God noticed all deeds, both evil and good, and repaid them properly along his own timeline. The most benefit going to those monks and readers of hagiography, who would hear the stories and learn something about how God’s justice was served in phenomenal ways, both immediate and otherworldly.

Retribution for stubbornness and the problem of heresy

In relation back to Origen and his heresy, Chapter one-hundred seventy-seven tells of a monk who wanted to live in the cell of Evagrius. The priest at the Lavra of The Cells told him that he could not stay in the cell, but the brother insisted saying, “If I may not stay there, I will go away.”⁹²¹ The priest explained, “My child, the fact of the matter

from the grave. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 78.

⁹¹⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 77.

⁹²⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 77.

⁹²¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 177.

is that a cruel demon inhabits that place. It led Evagrius astray, alienating him from the true faith, and it filled his mind with abominable teachings."⁹²² The brother insisted on staying there and the priest finally allowed him to do what he intended. After a week, the brother came to church and the priest was relieved to see that he was still intact. The next Sunday he did not show up for services, and upon searching for him, they found that he had hung himself in the cell. This story affirms the heretical nature of Evagrius through his connections to Origen, as well as continues to supply fuel to the fire of retribution in Moschos's texts. The monk is repaid what we can only assume was two weeks of mental torment followed by death for his brazen and misguided attitude concerning the priest's warnings. Moreover, it imbues the monks' actions in the desert with a seriousness that is not appreciated when all of the stories concern monastic besting of the demons.⁹²³ According to Moschos, Abba John is quoted as having said, "This cave is a wrestling-ring; it is a matter of give and take."⁹²⁴ What is surprising about Moschos's treatment of Evagrius here, is that he does not blame the individual. The story could be read as blaming a demon's influence, rather than any personal fault of Evagrius. Perhaps like the monk, Evagrius stayed too long in the "cave" of Origen causing his own wayward progression. Or perhaps, Origen was also just as pliable in the hands of a powerful demon's influence. In any case the message is clear. The monk should tread as carefully in the protection of his physical life as he should his eternal soul, never tempting the demonic powers that were always at work.

⁹²² John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 177.

⁹²³ An example of this might be seen in the story of Macarius conquering the tomb of Jannes and Jambres in the Egyptian desert. Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, 18.5.

⁹²⁴ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 181.

It was always important to remember the right side of orthodoxy, when engaging in such a high stakes game. Chapter one-hundred seventy-eight tells of a monk who, while a hard worker, was “somewhat indiscriminating in matters of faith.”⁹²⁵ Accordingly, the monk would take communion at any church where he happened to be. As the story goes, an angel of God came to him and asked him how he wanted to be buried, as the Egyptian monks do, or in the custom of Jerusalem. The monk had no answer and so the angel agreed to return in three weeks time to get his answer. The monk did some research, asking his elders what he should answer to the angel. The elder inquired about the monk’s predilection for churches, and learned of his open-minded attendance policies. He replied, “Never again should you communicate outside the holy apostolic Church in which the four holy councils are named: the council of the three hundred and eighteen fathers at Nicaea, that of the one hundred and fifty fathers at Constantinople, the first Council of Ephesus of two hundred, and that of the six hundred and thirty fathers at Chalcedon. And when the angel comes, say to him: ‘I wish to be buried according to the custom of Jerusalem.’”⁹²⁶ When the angel later inquires of the man, he replies as the elder tells him, and the angel takes his soul. This rather abrupt end to the monk’s life obviously did not set well with Moschos – so much so that he adds a final explanatory line: “This was done so that the elder would not lose his labour and be condemned as a heretic.”⁹²⁷ In previous works, communicating with heretical churches is worthy of significant judgment, and even here, it appears to be so, given that the monk stood to lose “his labour” if the angel had given him more time to

⁹²⁵ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 178.

⁹²⁶ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 178.

live and be judged a heretic through continual attendance of various churches.⁹²⁸ The fact that Moschos does not let the judgment of an ended life stand unexplained, only proves that Moschos's program is less tightly constructed, than we may have hoped. At times his stories hit with a weight and precision that is as finely measured as any hagiographical source. At others, Moschos's texts seem almost at odds with each other. A prime example of this is in the pendular attention he gives to retribution and then to forgiveness.

God's Oikonomia: The Eleemosynary and The Spiritual

At several points in Moschos's work we encounter stories that seem to trade on the holiness of the monk almost as if it is some type of wealth being redistributed, from God to the holy or from the holy person to the world. On one occasion an anchorite requested a New Testament for his own personal reading. Abba Peter, later Bishop of Chalcedon, gave it to an intermediary to give to the anchorite, but the anchorite would not take it for free. He insisted on paying Peter three gold pieces for it.⁹²⁹ Having no money of his own, he went off and worked until he could repay Peter for the volume. The monk sent the three gold pieces back to Peter but he would not accept it. Eventually the intermediary between these stubbornly generous holy men prevailed upon Peter by

⁹²⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 178.

⁹²⁸ On communing with the Severan Churches and being hindered from entering other churches, see John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 48, 49.

⁹²⁹ The number of three gold pieces emerges as a continual and symbolic theme throughout Moschos's work. It is likely an association with the trinity. Other numbers exist, but three gold pieces is by far the most used for any type of monetary interaction with the monks.

admonishing him “not to disdain the anchorite’s labour.”⁹³⁰

Appropriate payment for one’s goods seems to be associated with a model of life in these monastic stories, as they relate to a proper return on one’s spiritual investment. Ascetics had to be able to count on a God who would repay in fairness on the eternal side for what the monk achieved or lacked on the temporal side. This notion of recompense is foundational for a theology that espouses retribution. If, as Origen had speculated, the human being could hope for restoration without eternal punishment the entire system of retributive justice fell apart. Moschos, like others of his day, found security in a theology that meted that which was due to each according to their deeds. Origen’s theology was in direct opposition to this economy of punishment and holiness.

A pertinent story along these lines comes from chapter one-hundred eighty-three, where Abba Alexander the Cilician is attacked ten days before the end of his life by a demon. Obviously put out by this, the monk berates the demon for having chosen the weakest period of his life to attack him. He finally states, “However, I give thanks to God, to whom I am going, and to whom I shall make known the injustice which you inflict upon me by your merciless attacks upon me at the end of my life, after so many years spent in rigorous asceticism.”⁹³¹ There is the acknowledgment that not only will he be going to God, but that God is going to hear all about the demon’s untoward attack on the aging monk. God will even out the balance according to his justice. In all of these stories, retribution is tied up with some economic movement of power or spiritual capital. Endurance of ill-treatment for God’s sake was paid back exponentially in the

⁹³⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 134.

⁹³¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 182.

afterlife.⁹³²

Moschos tells of John the Eunuch's refusal to drink any liquid whatsoever. He lived off of bitter herbs and "those vegetables which had the ability of assuaging his thirst."⁹³³ After three years passed in this practice, he fell very ill. The doctor who was summoned tried to get him to drink, but he would not do it. So he ordered the man to be submerged to his thighs in a large vessel. After an hour, they were amazed to find his body had absorbed one of the four measures of water. Moschos explains, "This is the sort of thing the ascetics endured in gaining complete self-mastery, ill-treating themselves for the sake of God, in order to attain to the good things of eternity."⁹³⁴ Of course, one might be reluctant to engage in such behavior if there was not some proof that God's watchful eye was ever upon the monk, noting the details of their perseverance in the faith and tallying their works in heavenly 'coins.' This is precisely the point of so much of Moschos's work; it is proof of God's presence, caring for each 'sparrow' that fell in these desert contests.⁹³⁵

Destructive wordplay

Chapter one-hundred eighty-three tells of a monk named David and his encounter with a landowner in the Nile delta. David was one of a number of Scetiotes who went out to help estate owners reap their fields. In the heat of the day, David sat down in a

⁹³² We can think of the Lukan passage that promises "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." NRSV Luke 6:38

⁹³³ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 184.

⁹³⁴ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 184.

⁹³⁵ "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground

shack. When the owner finds him he exclaimed, "Elder, why are you not reaping? Do you not realise that I am paying you?"⁹³⁶ To which the monk replied, "I am waiting a little for the heat to abate so that you suffer no loss." The owner replied, "Get up and work, even if everything bursts into flames." The monk replied, "Do you want it all to burn?" The farmer replied, "Isn't that what I said?" Upon standing up from where the monk was resting, the farmer watched the field begin to burn. Amidst the farmer's begging for the situation to be changed, the monk replied glibly, "But he himself said that it should burn." The other monks talk David into stopping the fire, which he does, and according to Moschos, "Everybody was amazed and glorified God."⁹³⁷

We wonder if the owner of the field glorified God after half of his field was burned by an ornery monk, tired from the heat, and eager to seize on the poorly chosen words of his employer. In any case, this story continues to connect the spiritual capital to the worldly capital in direct ways. The monks work within the world economy, both to make ends meet as well as to support their own spiritual endeavors, translating worldly monies into heavenly ones. Everyone knew you could not take wealth with you, the monks acted as moneychangers of sorts, translating or transferring worldly wealth into the heavenly economy. This attention to wealth is reminiscent of the many stories in which one is saved or protected through holy eleemosynary actions.⁹³⁸ No story in

unperceived by your Father." Matt. 10:29

⁹³⁶ The rest of this conversation comes from John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 183.

⁹³⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 183.

⁹³⁸ Of particular interest is the story of the couple who gives fifty *miliarisia* to the poor. It is repaid in multiples by the couple finding a precious stone inside a fish. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 185. Each *miliarision* was worth roughly 480 *denarii* or *noumion*, or one-twelfth of a *solidus*. George Finlay, *Greece Under the Romans* (London: J.M. Dent & co., 1907), 455. Wortley holds that a *Miliarision* was 1/1000th of a pound of gold. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, Notes, "Currency," p. 231.

Moschos better exemplifies this than the short narrative about the Emperor Zeno, to which we will now turn.

Chapter one-hundred eighty-six tells of a Merchant named Moschos, who engages with a prostitute only to find out about her destitution and heartache over her imprisoned husband. He agrees to give her five pounds of gold to settle her husband's debts. Eventually, the emperor heard of the merchant's squandering of his merchandise and he seized his estate. Being sent to prison, the merchant is visited in a vision by the prostitute that he helped – but he does not recognize her. The two converse and she says she will speak to the emperor on his behalf. The next day the emperor is compassionate on the merchant and restores his property to him. The woman appears again to Moschos, and explains that she is the one he took pity on and respected. She then said, "So you see how kindly God deals with men. That is how you dealt with me, and I have extended my mercy towards you."⁹³⁹ The giving and taking of these virtues plays a direct role in the Christian's life as they navigate the worldly into the afterlife.

Hidden Piety?

The notion of an economy of holiness operates neatly within the confines of the gospels' teachings on how one should comport their self regarding charitable practices. At the same time, this teaching is directly at odds with Moschos's practice of recording these deeds. As is often referred to in Moschos, the notion that one should be a stranger in this world, living life in anonymity and caring for the poor and downtrodden with the hope of never being found out, is a primary motivator in the lives of desert ascetics.

It sits nicely with Jesus's teaching about the anonymity of giving for his followers. Jesus states in Matthew 6:1-4, "Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."⁹⁴⁰ With this in mind it is difficult to imagine how Moschos's writings could be seen as a positive step toward anonymity. They highlight the named and nameless ascetics – often going as far as describing their locations in lieu of their names – for their acts of mercy and wonder in the world. It would appear that they had already received their reward, either by telling their stories to those who were the intermediaries to Moschos, or through Moschos's rendering of them anew in this collection. Two factors certainly come into play for Moschos. One is the fact that these details were largely about monks who had already gone on to be with God. They were not looking for reward on earth in recording their great deeds. The other factor, which is substantial, is the allure of these stories as pedagogical tools for the Christian community. If there was no record of these great deeds, they would be known only by God. Moschos acts as a safety net of sorts, saving these stories and monks' names from complete historical loss. His purpose appears to be pedagogical as much as it is literary.

⁹³⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 186.

⁹⁴⁰ NRSV Matt. 6:1-4

Sins forgiven or blocked

Moschos includes a section about the Emperor Zeno in Chapter one-hundred seventy-five. The story has a rather unsure provenance, which is not surprising given the delicate nature of critiquing an emperor. Moschos writes, "One of the fathers told us this: that he [Emperor Zeno] wronged a woman by wronging her daughter."⁹⁴¹ The woman took her complaint to the mother of Jesus, Mary, at her Church. She prayed, "Defend my cause against the Emperor Zeno."⁹⁴² After many days, Mary appeared to her and said, "Believe me, woman, I frequently tried to get satisfaction for you, but his right hand prevents me."⁹⁴³ John adds that he was a good almsgiver.

The nature of this story, which is concerned with retribution over restoration, since it is unlikely that the woman's daughter could be restored to her former state, appears to be more of a lesson about almsgiving than justice. Somehow God and God's agents are powerless to inflict retribution on a person who has protected themselves with almsgiving.⁹⁴⁴ At the same time, it is all about avoiding God's judgment and retribution through acting according to his will in caring for the poor.

Demon Possession as Retribution

⁹⁴¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 175.

⁹⁴² John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 175.

⁹⁴³ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 175.

⁹⁴⁴ Baptism also had a protective aspect to it from God's judgment. This is best seen in the following chapter where a Jew who is about to die in the desert is baptized with sand by his comrades, and comes back to life enough to lead the group back to civilization. Regardless of this miracle, the church leaders decide to still baptize him "properly" once returned. John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 176.

Demon possession was a prominent theme for all of our hagiographers. In Moschos, however, the demons are used in a retributive manner by God to correct human action.⁹⁴⁵ Moschos tells the story of five virgins in a monastery who conspired to run away and find husbands. On the chosen night, when they were getting dressed to abscond, “all five of them suddenly became possessed of demons.”⁹⁴⁶ The women learned their lesson and never left the monastery again, continually saying, “We give thanks to God, the great giver of gifts, who has inflicted this chastisement on us to save our souls from perdition.”⁹⁴⁷

Another occasion occurred when Abba Nicholas came upon three Saracens and their prisoner, a “very handsome-looking young man, about twenty years old.” The prisoner cried and pleaded with the monk to ransom him. Nicholas offered several options to the Saracens, including offering himself in the man’s place and a ransom of their choosing. When the Saracens refused, telling the monk to be gone or “we will cause your head to roll on the ground,” Nicholas prayed to God that the man would be saved.⁹⁴⁸ The Saracens were immediately possessed by demons, drawing their swords on each other and cutting each other “to pieces.”⁹⁴⁹ The young man renounced the world, staying with Abba Nicholas for seven years, before going to his rest. In these stories demons are used to bring about corrective action in the life of the believer, and in the demise of the enemy.

⁹⁴⁵ Another instance occurs in Palladios. Palladios, *The Lausiatic History*, 44.2, p. 120.

⁹⁴⁶ John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 135.

⁹⁴⁷ John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 135.

⁹⁴⁸ John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 155.

Correction of others

Moschos tells a story of an elder who “was pure and holy” and “used to see angels standing to his right hand and to his left” when celebrating the eucharist.⁹⁵⁰ Moschos relates:

By the providence of God, there came to him a brother who was skilled in theology and it happened that the Elder offered the eucharist in his presence. The brother (who was a deacon) said to him: “Father, these things which you say at the eucharist are not in accordance with the Orthodox faith; they are heresy” <not Orthodox but *kakadox*>. Since the elder could see angels when he was celebrating, he paid no attention to what was said, and thought nothing of it. But the deacon went on saying: “You are at fault, good elder; the Church does not allow those things to be said.” When the elder realized that he was being accused and blamed by the deacon, the next time he saw the angels, he asked them: “When the deacon speaks to me like this, what am I to make of it?” They said to him: “Pay attention to him; he is giving good counsel.” The elder said to them: “Then why did you not tell me so?” They said: “Because God has ordained that men should be corrected by men,” and from that time forth he accepted correction, giving thanks to God and to the brother.⁹⁵¹

This fascinating vignette highlights the importance of the holy person’s role in the correction and perhaps even retributive justice that God had ordained for the world. We, like the old priest, wonder why the angels would not offer some type of correction, but rather wait to be asked about the inaccuracies. A story like this was certainly music to the ears of a heresiologist of any generation. To have a text, like this hagiography, that supported human intervention in the theological minutiae of other humans’ communities was a rare but desirable boon for the leaders of any orthodox minded church. It was a writ of full permission to critique and correct a fellow Christian’s behavior or ritualistic comportment.

⁹⁴⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 155.

⁹⁵⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 199.

⁹⁵¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 199.

Penance and the unshakeable sins

A theme that Moschos incorporated at several points in his text, was the unshakeable imprint of sin on the human life. Regardless of how pure a life the transformed monk tries to live, there are still sins that require some sort of retribution or sign of punishment. Chapter one-hundred eighteen tells of a monk who became a deacon and going out into the world to do his ministry, he “put aside the monastic habit and returned to the world.”⁹⁵² A long time later the monk happened to be near the monastery of Abba Symeon the Stylite and decided to go by and see the famous monk. Symeon, seeing the man, “knew him for a monk” and deacon and called out to his servant, “Bring the shears here” and “Blessed be the Lord! Tonsure that man there.”⁹⁵³ The man, Abba Menas, was seized with dread, knowing that God had singled him out in Symeon’s gaze. Forcing him to say the deacon’s prayer, Symeon ordained him and sent him back to Raithou, from whence he originally came. Symeon stated, “Believe me, child, you do not have to feel disgrace for this. The fathers will receive you with smiling faces and gladness at your return. Know this also: that God is going to put a sign on you that you might know that his gentle kindness has pardoned this sin.”⁹⁵⁴ Menas was welcomed warmly by his old community and one day while carrying “the holy and life-giving blood of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, one of his eyes suddenly came out.”⁹⁵⁵ Moschos explains, “By this sign they knew that God had forgiven him his

⁹⁵² John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 118.

⁹⁵³ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 118.

⁹⁵⁴ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 118.

⁹⁵⁵ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 118.

sin, just as the righteous Symeon had foretold."⁹⁵⁶

The punishment in this story is less of a lingering retribution than it is a confirmation of Symeon's pronouncement that God would pardon his sin. We wonder if any anomalous occurrence that happened after his return to Raithou would have affirmed the same prophetic utterance of forgiveness. The fact that there is some type of closure, and that closure takes place in a phenomenal and abrupt manner fits with Moschos's general themes of how God's providence and justice are worked out in the monk's life.

Another instance of lingering punishment occurs in the story of a Robber-Chief named David who later becomes a monk. According to the story, David "rendered many people destitute, murdered many and committed every kind of evil deed."⁹⁵⁷ Coming to his senses one day, "conscience-stricken," David left his band of brigands and knocked on a monastery's gate. The porter asked him what his business was, and David expressed his interest in becoming a monk. When the Abbot heard this, he tried to send him on his way, explaining the austere nature of the monastery. David insisted and so then did the Abbot, concerning his refusal. Finally, David said to the Abbot, "Know, then, that I am David, the robber-chief; and the reason why I came here was that I might weep for my sins. If you do not accept me, I swear to you and before him who dwells in heaven that I will return to my former way of life. I will bring those who were with me, kill you all and even destroy your monastery."⁹⁵⁸ The persuasive nature of the conversation is interesting enough, given the connection to retribution and its

⁹⁵⁶ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 118.

⁹⁵⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 143.

ability to change one's perspective on a situation. The story becomes even more interesting when David later speaks to an angel of the Lord, after he had labored successfully at the monastic life. The angel appeared in his cell and said:

“David, David; the Lord has pardoned your sins and, from this time on, you shall perform wonders <*sêmeia*>.” David replied to the angel: “I cannot believe that in so short a time God has forgiven me all my sins, which are heavier than the sand of the sea.” The angel said to him: “I did not spare Zachariah the priest when he refused to believe me concerning his son. <Lk 1:20> I imprisoned his tongue to teach him not to doubt what I said; how then should I now spare you? You shall be totally incapable of speech from this time onwards.” Abba David prostrated himself before the angel and said: “When I was in the world, committing abominable acts and shedding blood, I had the gift of speech. Will you deprive me of it by imprisoning my tongue, now that I wish to serve God and offer up hymns to him?” The angel replied: “You will only be able to speak during the services. At all other times you shall be completely silent” – and that is how it was. He sang the psalms, but he could say no other word, big or little.⁹⁵⁹

It seems as though David's inability to believe the angel's words are cause for his punishment concerning the use of his mouth. Initially forgiven and given the gift of performing wonders, David questions the immediacy of God's action. In this questioning, the angel's actions are to impose a further retribution that will cause struggle the rest of his days. The story is pertinent in that it both promotes a notion of God's speedy forgiveness, but also upholds God's immediate retribution. Moschos is reminding the reader that God's agent of judgment and forgiveness is not to be questioned; they are completely in line with the divine will and inseparable from the historicity of scripture.

Chapters one-hundred sixty-six and sixty-seven, contain a pair of stories that uphold the notion that sin is not so easily conquered through righteous living, as one

⁹⁵⁸ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 143.

⁹⁵⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 143.

might expect. The first story comes from Abba Sabbatios who tells of Zosimos's interaction with a robber who begged him to become a monk. Zosimos gave him instruction and a habit, but after a few days moved him to the community of Abba Dorotheos, near Gaza and Maïouma. The converted robber spent nine years there in monastic observance, finally coming back to Zosimos with regret. The story continues with the robbers words:

"Abba, have pity on me, sir; give me back my worldly clothes and take the monastic habit from me." Distressed by these words, the elder said to him: "Whatever for, child?" The other answered: "See now, father; as you know, I have been nine years in the community. I have fasted to the full extent of my ability; I have practiced self-discipline; I have lived under obedience with complete serenity and in the fear of God. I believe that, of his goodness, <God> has pardoned my many evil deeds. Yet every day I see an infant which says to me: 'Why did you slay me?' I see him in church, I see him in the refectory, always saying the same thing to me. The vision never leaves me untroubled for an hour at a time. This is why I want to go away, father. I must die for that infant, for I killed it without reason."⁹⁶⁰

The robber took off his habit and left the lavra. He was arrested the next day and beheaded. The story, which highlights the unwieldy nature of sin's consequences, shows the reader that not all actions were easily reversible. If we relate this to the story of the repentant robber above, who was forgiven after a short time, but failed to believe the angel who told of his forgiveness, we get a picture of monastic life that did not always make sense. God's providence had a way of working and that way was not always clear to the monastic followers who were trying to navigate it.

The following chapter tells of Abba Poemên the grazer, who received Abba Agathonicos from Castellium in his cave. At dawn, Poemên asked Agathonicos how he slept, to which he replied that he was freezing cold. Poemên stated that he had slept

rather warmly, even though he was naked. Upon inquiry, Agathonicos learned that the elder had slept next to a lion who came down to keep him warm. Then Poemên proceeded to tell him of how his death would come by way of wild beasts. When Agathonicos asked him why, he explained, “Because when I was in our homeland...I was a shepherd. I was hostile to a stranger who came by and my dogs devoured him. I could have saved him, but I did not. I left him to his fate and the dogs killed him. I know that I too must die in that way.”⁹⁶¹ Moschos states that three years later the grazer was devoured by wild beasts as he had foretold.

Again we see the unshakable nature of sin’s consequences on the life of the monk. Even though the man had given his life to God, his fate was sealed concerning his own death. Hearing the story of how the lion came to lay with him on the cold nights, we wonder if this was some kind of prolonged mental torture that he was enduring. If indeed he did believe he was to die by means of wild beasts, what could be more frightening than a lion showing up at your cave each evening? From the monks perspective, there was little better lesson than something that would keep the reality of death constantly before one’s eyes.⁹⁶² From this perspective, Poemên was living an anchorite’s dream.

⁹⁶⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 166.

⁹⁶¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 167.

⁹⁶² Moschos quotes an elder’s response to two philosophers in chapter 156: “How long will you cultivate the art of speech, you who have no understanding of what it is to speak? Let the object of your philosophy be always to contemplate death, possessing yourselves in silence and tranquility.” John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 156.

Conclusions

In thinking about how Moschos's text falls among the rest of the hagiographical compilations we have examined, we are left with a rather uneasy task. It is clear that he has little interest in fighting old battles concerning heresies and their founders. He passes over them with ease, citing only their name or connection to his narrative. In this sense, he is a first generation of writers past the issues of Origenism. He does not see them as hot issues that need sorting in his text. At the same time, his text is deeply influenced by the theological positions that preceded his own treatment of these saints' lives. Given the fair amount of non-retributive and loosely reconciling – if not restorative – stories that he relates, we might posit that the literature is taking a turn away from the apologetic and focusing instead on those stories that might move a listener to great works, a closer relationship with fellow monks and perhaps even a fearless entry into the afterlife, passing through God's judgment with less concern than most. When Moschos does speak of retribution, however, it is pitched to new heights of intensity and uninhibited evocation. We should also remember that Moschos is not simply writing this for monks. This was a piece of literature meant for a much wider audience. He chose to include stories that highlighted monks as powerful and funny, worldly and holy. Through his own admission that he was choosing only the most desirable narratives, we can better understand why he chose the stories he did. He was writing a hagiographical compilation that would hold sway for centuries to come and was free from the political and theological moorings that others could not escape. He does not limit himself to Monophysite issues or geographical areas, rather he moves freely in the genre, creating a captivating collection that was as fun to retell as it was to

hear the first time.

This said, Moschos's work is shot through with retributive themes that at times are so harsh and judgmental that they remind us of John of Ephesus's more extreme cases. At several points in Moschos's work the harsh realities of comeuppance and punishment are left in place, without any reprieve or forgiveness. We have discussed the possibility that this is largely oriented toward pedagogical purposes, and this detail is irrefutable. However, we should also note his freedom from the Origenist constraints of restoration. Moschos loves God's justice – even in its rawest forms – and it is evident throughout his work.

If we try and look for a consistent theme of retribution throughout Moschos, we are left fumbling with the forgiving monks who appear intermittently. This evidence supports a Moschos who had for the most part moved past the issues of Origen's influence, and utilized his name only to add flavor to the heretical lineup in hell. In this sense, Moschos embodies precisely the type of literature that he says he is going to write. Plucking only the most beautiful, outrageous, retributive and reconciling stories from the larger miscellany, Moschos sets down a canon of miniature *vitae* which would be carried forward into posterity. He achieves his goal, bringing together the sweetest smelling and most beautiful flowers for a bouquet that is as enigmatic as it is compelling.

The final chapter in Wortley's translation of Moschos tells of a Christian practice in Constantinople in which the leftover sacrament from the church of St. Sophia would be distributed to children in the community. The priest would send for the schoolmaster and he would bring the children to partake of it. It was no doubt a good work, caring

for the children of the city, as much as it was an acknowledgment of Jesus's words concerning the children in Matthew 18.⁹⁶³ On one occasion, the son of a glassblower came home and described his having eaten very well at the church that day. The boy's father inquired into the situation and became so angry with the boy that he threw him into the furnace. The mother, "moved by God," broke open the furnace doors to find her son unharmed. The boy explained that a woman in purple had come to him and given him water, telling him to not be afraid. The mother took the boy to the patriarch and explained what had happened. The text then takes an interesting turn. Taking the woman and child to the Emperor Justinian, the patriarch told him of the miraculous event. The text then states, "The most dear-to-God emperor ordered the Jew, the father of the child, to give himself up and urged him to become a Christian. When he would not be persuaded, he commanded him to be put in the furnace, saying: '<This is> because he put his son in the furnace'."⁹⁶⁴ It is with this final retributive moment in Moschos, that we turn our attention to Justinian and the law.

⁹⁶³ "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.'" Matt. 18:1-5 NRSV

⁹⁶⁴ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 243.

Chapter 7

Justinian, Law, and the Origenist influence

“He was, in addition to all that, quite receptive to slander and eager to inflict punishment. He never once decided a matter by investigating the facts but made his decisions known as soon as he had heard the slanderer. He had no qualms about writing orders for the sacking of villages, the burning of cities, and the enslavement of entire nations, and all for no good reason.”⁹⁶⁵

When Cyril of Scythopolis tells us the story of a poor man who was being cheated by Cyriacus, we get an insight into how legal issues were solved in early Byzantium.⁹⁶⁶ The two head off in search of the local holy man, Euthymius, and swear upon his tomb.⁹⁶⁷ The result was binding, to the point of death, and the poor man witnesses the immediate results of perjury. It was true that individuals in late antiquity often avoided the courts, calling on a magistrate or some other communal leader to designate a

⁹⁶⁵ Procopius, *The Secret History*, 2.8.28–29.

⁹⁶⁶ See chapter on Cyril of Scythopolis.

⁹⁶⁷ Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Euthymius 58, 80.13.

particular person, who would adjudicate a dispute.⁹⁶⁸ To pass every case through the courts of Constantinople would have been unthinkable. The people naturally turned to their local sources of justice. With the reign of Justinian, however, there came a twist on the old model of local justice. It was no longer simply between the disputing pair and their arbiter; it was now inclusive of the provident God of Christian scripture.

In her treatment of “Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian,” Caroline Humfress offers an interesting take on the language of providence found in the forewords to the three law documents. She states, “By ascribing the completion of this monumental volume to the ‘inspiration of heaven and the favor of the Supreme Trinity’ (*Digest Const. Tanta I*), and indeed by confirming the *Digest’s* authority in an imperial prologue issued ‘In the Name of Our Lord God Jesus Christ,’ Justinian effectively Christianized all the non-Christian classical juristic books contained within it.”⁹⁶⁹ Her point is well received, in that there was little hope of writing Christian laws that would be accepted with the same force as ancient Roman law.⁹⁷⁰ The volume alone, which included some 1,500 separate books containing some 3 million lines of text for the *Digest* alone, had overwhelming momentum.⁹⁷¹ Justinian’s program was not one looking to change the history of Roman law to meet the Christian sensibilities, but rather one

⁹⁶⁸ Maas also notes that a “529 constitution, included in Justinian’s Codex at 2.55.4, advises that even when such arbitration was undertaken less formally, the parties’ final agreement should be sworn on oath and then written down so that no one had any excuse for deceit later.” Caroline Humfress, “Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 180.

⁹⁶⁹ Humfress, “Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian,” 167–8.

⁹⁷⁰ Theodosius had already begun the process of codifying the Roman laws of the Emperors with his *Codex*. See Jill Harries and I. N Wood, *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity* (Bristol: Bristol Classical, 2010); Tony Honoré, *Law in the Crisis of Empire, 379-455 AD* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

which would happily inscribe a history with Christian providential markings, effectively making it Christian.⁹⁷² Indeed, this same aspect was at work in many early Christian readings of the Old Testament. Early writers were more concerned to “prooftext” than deal with the literature as any cohesive body. McGuckin argues that the usage of the ‘Old’ Testament, or Law and Prophets, was selective and “sampled for short phrases to illustrate an argument, highlight a sermon, or give an authoritative citational support for the author’s statement.”⁹⁷³ This method of piecemeal Christianizing of the Old Testament continued until Origen conceptualized a reading of scripture that could include both the Old and New Testaments, albeit with a stamp of superiority on the newer texts.⁹⁷⁴ Scripture had not yet taken on the more “legal” aspect that it would eventually come to embody.

We can push Humfress’s argument a bit further, and suggest that Justinian’s program was also one that took seriously the conformation of Christian agendas to political power in its prevalent forms. That is to say, now that Justinian’s Christianity had become fully aligned with Roman ideology and imperial power, it would need to mold itself into the legal constraints which its culture held as historically necessary and prudent. The model for justice in the Christian world was quickly being transformed from forgiveness and restoration to recompense and retribution. How complete a

⁹⁷¹ Humfress, Caroline, “Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian,” 167.

⁹⁷² McGuckin notes that in its new expression, it perhaps reiterated “for the world of his own age, the precise vision of what the Christian imperium would offer as an enduring sequence of imperial dynasties stretching out from Constantine to himself.” John Anthony McGuckin, *The Ascent of Christian Law: Patristic and Byzantine Formulations of a New Civilization* (Yonkers, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), 258.

⁹⁷³ McGuckin, *The Ascent of Christian Law*, 10.

⁹⁷⁴ McGuckin, *The Ascent of Christian Law*, 11.

transition this became is arguable. It is clear that a society like the one Justinian had envisioned had little room for thinkers like Origen. The connection between the two was not so simple as Justinian hereticizing a thinker whose name was attached to the roiling conflict among palestinian monks. More had to be at stake for a man like Justinian who considered himself a theologian as much as an emperor.⁹⁷⁵ How would a theology of restoration and forgiveness function within the confines of the broader Roman legal system? It was becoming clear that this theology would not even function within the monastic communities of the fifth and sixth centuries. If Justinian could have answered this question, we might have seen a significantly different outcome for the followers of "Origen," and perhaps even a difference in the concept of sixth century Roman justice.

Justinian's innovations might be seen as a moving forward with the law as much as a return to a past ideal. In support of this idea Humfress quotes from Justinian's Institutes, where he states, "Our pronouncement has completely redesigned the system and made it conform to the scheme of the Twelve Tables."⁹⁷⁶ She continues, "Once again, innovation was framed a return to the past."⁹⁷⁷ If we consider this idea within the broader development of Origenian thought and theological developments in the preceding centuries, we could make the case that Justinian's clamping down on the style of allegorical reading which Origen and his later namesakes were prone to do, was a development only in that it was a return to a more basic model of scriptural

⁹⁷⁵ McGuckin notes that Justinian was a "dedicated theologian whose vision of what Rome's glory involved clearly depended on extending Christian Orthodoxy to the limits of his jurisdiction." McGuckin, *The Ascent of Christian Law*, 261.

⁹⁷⁶ Humfress, Caroline, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 171.

understanding, one in which God's king, David, ruled his people according to God's own will. Again, Justinian's own ideological placement of his reign within the context of a simple and literal scriptural understanding allowed for connective tissue with the past that could hardly be questioned. It was God who had ordained his successful reign and was claiming kingdoms and territory for God's own glory. These ideas were only innovative in their return to simplistic identification and the requisite denial of deeper symbolic renderings.

Magic and Law, and Monasticism--which trumps all

Before examining Justinian's specific claims about his law compilations, it will be helpful to stop briefly in a related hagiography that comes to us from Zacharias Mytilene. The text, which is a treatment of the life of Severus, is fascinating for a few reasons. It gives us a window onto the rise in interest of studying the law in the legal centers of the period, Beirut and Constantinople.⁹⁷⁸ It also connects the law with a few very important themes for our study, Magic and Monasticism.

The Life of Severus gives insight into early sixth century life and the meaning of hagiography in this context. Severus, who was Patriarch of Antioch from 512 to 518 C.E., is important for our purposes on two levels.⁹⁷⁹ On one hand, he falls between the two main Origenist controversies, on the other, he represents the development of interest in law that was burgeoning in these decades. He and his hagiographer,

⁹⁷⁷ Humfress, Caroline, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 171.

⁹⁷⁸ McGuckin, *The Ascent of Christian Law*, 255. For a broader treatment of what the study of law looked like in late antiquity, in particular the vast array of source material available, see Jill Harries, *Law and Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 18.

Zacharias, were students of law in Beirut and relate their fervor for studying the law every day except for Sunday. Humfress notes, "In a nice piece of legalese, Zacharias justifies having Sunday off from the civil law because 'Sunday is the day that the same civil law orders should be consecrated to God.'"⁹⁸⁰

As far as the hagiography is concerned, its style does not fall into our category of compilations, and as a result has limited use for showing retributive themes at work in a broad cross-section of individuals. Its style, however, turned the corner on the conceptualizing of God's power at work in the immediate world, and for this reason is pertinent to Origen's theologies. One of the stories which supports this most overtly is that of Asclepiodotus and his barren wife. The story gives us some insight into the abiding Isis community and Christian apprehension over their power in the world. Zacharias relates that Asclepiodotus, being persuaded by the priest's interpretation of a vision of Isis sleeping with him, "had intercourse with the rock that had the shape of Isis," hoping that this would solve their problem.⁹⁸¹ When it did not, the priest suggested that he go and buy the baby of a priestess in Astu. The couple does this and returns pretending that they had the baby in their travels. The birth is extolled as a pagan miracle and Paralius and Athanasius, the Christian figures in the story, consider challenging the news. Paralius baits his brother Athanasius's investigatory imagination by proclaiming that she must have milk in her breasts if she has just given birth. The situation escalates, finally culminating in the destruction of the pagan place of

⁹⁷⁹ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 1.

⁹⁸⁰ Humfress, Caroline, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 173.

⁹⁸¹ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 19.

worship.⁹⁸²

The theme of struggle against paganism continues in the work acting as a foil for the holy movement of Severus and his community. Zacharias tells the story of a group of law students who had collected magic books from various places and were hoping to complete a rite in which, through the sacrifice of an Ethiopian slave, they might entice a demon to do their bidding, with the end game of compelling a chaste woman to sexual interest in the slave's master. Bringing the slave into the hippodrome, they were about to murder him when "God, who cares about the acts of men, saved the poor slave by making some people pass by."⁹⁸³ The sacrificers fled and the slave slipped away.

Perhaps most interesting for our purposes here is the response that comes from the master's relative, to which the slave fled for help since he was a "true Christian and fearing God's judgment."⁹⁸⁴ The insight this short description gives us is twofold. First, the fact that God acted in immediacy to save the slave's life is proof that this hagiography had turned the corner toward temporal and phenomenal divine action. Second, the description of the relative as "fearing God's judgment," tells us something about the motivating factors at play in Christian theological thought at this time. To fear God's judgment seems to be almost synonymous with being a true Christian. Origen would have shuddered at the thought of God's love becoming so twisted as to be represented only by retribution and fear. In the end, the man confesses to having the magic books and agrees to burn them, claiming that they were ineffective anyway.⁹⁸⁵

⁹⁸² Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 28.

⁹⁸³ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 58-59.

⁹⁸⁴ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 59.

⁹⁸⁵ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 62. There is, however, a touch of restoration at work in

As the bonfire was lit to consume the many volumes of magic confiscated by the Christians, people took turns reading out the contents before incinerating the pagan volumes. Zacharias recounts some of what he heard: “How cities should be agitated and nations terrified, and fathers armed against sons – against those to whom they have given birth, those who have been born from them! – and by which means legal unions and coexistence can be disrupted, and how, by force, one can abduct a woman who wants to live in purity toward unlawful love-making, or how to venture upon adultery and murder, or conceal theft, and how one can compel judges to pass a verdict of acquittal for oneself!”⁹⁸⁶ If one could gain acquittal from a judge through these magical works, the entire system of justice would be subverted. The connection between law and magic in this instance is overt. The two are deeply connected for Zacharias’s treatment of Severus.

Later in the work, Zacharias speaks of a situation in which some magic books were found and needed to be deciphered regarding their content. He continues, “He [Bishop John] gave us men from the clergy, and ordered us to examine the books of them all, the civil servants (*demosioi*) being with us, for the whole city was terribly upset by this, since they were indeed many who studied this kind of books in connection with law.”⁹⁸⁷ We can wonder what the connection between law and magic was exactly. Was it the need to account for magical deeds in the civil world that was pushing this movement? Or was it

this hagiography. In his section on Leontius, Zacharias states, “It was not easy for us, once we had stirred them up, to discipline them, but we held back their rage – for we ought rather to convert the souls of these [pagans] to the fear of God, as the law of God commands by saying: ‘I do not want the death of the sinner, but that he is converted and lives.’” Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 68-69.

⁹⁸⁶ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 69-70.

the connection that law had to the impact of divine action which fueled this interest. In many of our earlier hagiographies, we have encountered discussions of spells and magical incantations vis-à-vis those actions of God and God's agents, the ascetics.⁹⁸⁸ Magic appears to be inseparable in many ways from the demonic action that often accompanied it. As law meted out justice for action and was initially and ultimately associated with God's justice, was magic also relatable in its own relation to God's actions in the temporal sphere. That is to say, there was some connection between Magic and Law, Law and God, and therefore, God and Magic.

Zacharias writes the story of Chrysaorius, who along with his comrades attempted to steal the silver vessels and censer from the gullible warden of the martyrion. By deceiving the man into committing necromancy, they were eventually able to isolate the treasures from the man and abscond with some of them. God intervenes by shaking the ground before they are able to make off with the censer. When word spreads, the men flee variously. One man, Leontius, asks for forgiveness and is baptized. Chrysaorius uses other means to return to the city, buying his way back "with a great amount of gold."⁹⁸⁹ Thinking he had gotten away with the robbery, he eventually loads all of his wealth, magic books, law books, silver vessels, and his sons and concubine onto a ship in order to move them out of town – note here the connection of his magic books with law books and other valuable possessions. The ship sinks and it is attributed to God's retributive action. Zacharias explains, "Now that the ship sailed, in accordance with what the demons and astrologers had promised, to get away with what was on board,

⁹⁸⁷ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 66.

⁹⁸⁸ See Moschos, John of Ephesus, et al.

with the magic and its books, it went under, so that nothing of what Chrysaorius had stored on board the ship was saved. By such a capital punishment the God of the martyrs immediately punished this ignorant for not wanting to reconcile with him by repentance, and for not having kept the first capital punishment in mind, but having remained hardnecked, like Pharaoh."⁹⁹⁰ The retribution is immediate and this seems to be the point of what Zacharias is writing, especially as it relates to a vindication of Severus's reputation. At various points in the hagiography Zacharias reverts to a theme which he states in the beginning, that Severus has been wrongly slandered and he is attempting to set the record straight.⁹⁹¹ He goes further to explain why he would even consider including a story like this in his hagiography. The explanation is important for our themes:

Even if stories like this might seem unnecessary to write down, they bring an opportunity to refute magic and pagan error and that is why I thought it right to include them, for the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who surpasses the sophistication of wise men, and threw Pharaoh, with his wagons and mounted soldiers, and the wise men of Egypt, into the sea. Rather, they [the stories] will never be irrelevant to the point towards which we from now on, without any digression, are going, since it has sufficiently been demonstrated that this servant of God and high priest, Severus, was never caught with pagan sacrifices or magic, as the slanderer has dared to suggest. God's judgment will come already in this world, if he is alive, due to the calumny that he has spread and, in case he has departed from human life, in the court that nobody can deceive.⁹⁹²

The way Zacharias reads scripture is directly in line with a post-Origenian reading that saw all the details of the ancients as true and citable facts concerning God's power in

⁹⁸⁹ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 73.

⁹⁹⁰ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 74-75.

⁹⁹¹ It is set as a dialogue in which a man is disturbed by something he has read which directed "shame and calumny, blame and insults...at a certain philosopher [Severus]." Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 8.

the world. He sees the connection as so overt that he cites a local restoration of eyesight to a blind man as proof that God was performing many miracles and that a local ascetic named Esaias was functioning as a “second prophet Isaiah,” inheriting not only the name “but also his charisma.”⁹⁹³ His acknowledgment that they “will never be irrelevant” seems to confirm this reading. Switching from the scriptural connection and veracity to God’s judgment appears to be the next natural step for Zacharias. If God had not already acted to snuff out the slanderer’s life, he was certainly going to punish him in the afterlife. This read on justice and retribution is right in line with sixth century hagiographies like John of Ephesus and is supported by the same underlying theologies.⁹⁹⁴

The tension between the law and the church, which is evident in Beirut during this period directly prior to the full implementation of Justinian’s program, comes into relief in something Zacharias writes concerning Severus’s baptism. Evagrius pressures Zacharias to get Severus baptized, citing judgment for not having completed God’s will in saving the man. He reproaches Zacharias saying, “And if he does not share the holy mysteries or quickly receives the saving baptism, a severe judgment will fall upon you instead of him.”⁹⁹⁵ Zacharias turns this back onto Evagrius, citing some of the tumult he would cause because of his personal associations in the region.⁹⁹⁶ Evagrius eventually

⁹⁹² Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 75.

⁹⁹³ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 78, 83.

⁹⁹⁴ Zacharias is later chastised by Evagrius for having taught Severus about Christ but not encouraged him to be baptized. He states, “If he does not share the holy mysteries or quickly receives the saving baptism, a severe judgment will fall upon you instead of him.” He also cites John 3:5, saying “He who knows the will of his Lord and has not done it will be severely beaten.” Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 76-77.

⁹⁹⁵ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 76-77.

⁹⁹⁶ Zacharias was not communicating with the bishops of Phoenicia, but only those of Egypt and

agrees to be Severus's spiritual father and they head to the martyrion of Leontius in Tripoli. Zacharias explains the various attendees at the baptism. In the list he includes "the priest of the holy church of Tripoli."⁹⁹⁷ This figure is inconsequential except for the description Zacharias makes of him and his church. He states that the church, "was adorned with all sorts of treasures, and attracted the foremost of the divine nobility of this city – for he [the priest], too, had come close to God by good deeds, and honoured the grace of God more than the judicial art (*scholastike*)."⁹⁹⁸ In this period, the two disciplines, law and religion, are not totally aligned as they appear to be in the later prefaces to the law codes Justinian promulgates. Zacharias's depiction of Severus's ascetic discipline is that he is able to maintain his interest in law alongside his devotion to the church, not letting either slip in importance.⁹⁹⁹ In the course of the story, Zacharias verbally chastises himself for not being strong enough to carry on the monastic life and faltering. Here he cites a moment from his past when Peter [the Iberian] had the foresight to tell Plusianus the Alexandrian to get up and go tonsure his head, but told Zacharias to continue eating, somehow knowing that he was not cut out for the monastic life.¹⁰⁰⁰ Zacharias explains, "I devoted myself to the judicial profession (*dikanike*), for when it came to practice I proved to be just a boy, submerged in sins."¹⁰⁰¹

The juxtaposition of the law with the practice of monastic life in this text seems to

Palestine. Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 78.

⁹⁹⁷ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 81.

⁹⁹⁸ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 81.

⁹⁹⁹ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 82-83.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 89.

¹⁰⁰¹ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 89.

indicate that there was a direct line of progression from the legal life to the monastic.¹⁰⁰² Indeed this is just the path that Severus ends up following after he and Zacharias purchase togas and get started in their profession. Before beginning their careers as lawyers (*scholastikos*), Severus decides to travel a bit and worship at the holy city followed by a visit to Evagrius's companions. Ultimately, Severus exchanges his lawyering for the life of the solitary: "Instead of the toga he put on the monastic habit, and instead of law-books he was using the divine ones, and he exchanged the art of pleading (*dikanike*) for the sweat of monasticism and philosophy, in that divine grace, little by little, proclaimed him rhetorician of the fear of God, and anointed him to the high-priesthood of the great city of Antioch."¹⁰⁰³

Zacharias recounts all of the heretical figures that Severus treated equally in his renunciation.¹⁰⁰⁴ These included Apollinarius, Nestorius, and Eutyches. What we do not hear is a renunciation of Origen or any followers of his teachings. At the same time, there is no mention of Origen on the positive side either. Zacharias acknowledges having "the books of the great Basil, the illustrious Gregory and the other Doctors with me." These Doctors, he later explains are Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria. It is possible that the first

¹⁰⁰² Zacharias also cites a fear that his father would find out that he had joined a monastery and be angry. Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 88.

Maas notes that "Zacharias Scholasticus names four of his contemporaries from the law school at Beirut (including Severus of Antioch) who swapped their togas for the monastic habit, their study of books of civil law for holy scripture." Also, "Converts from law to theology did not leave their legal training behind; they applied it in the service of monastic establishments and the church. The historian Evagrius Scholasticus studied law during Justinian's reign and later joined the office staff of Gregory, the patriarch of Antioch (570-592)." Humfress, Caroline, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 179.

¹⁰⁰³ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 93.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Zacharias Mytilene, *The Life of Severus*, 103.

controversy cast a dim light on Origen's teachings, but he was not yet worthy of being framed as a heretic. This gives us some indication of how little interest there was in censuring Origen prior to his official condemnation. It was not a slow build of animosity, but one that seemed to align the interests of the emperor with a faction of angry monks.

Justinian's Legal System: Rendering every one his due

Justinian plays a significant role in the development of the retributive ethic in Christian literature. With his well-attested work in Byzantine law, he envisioned an empire that was deeply reliant on justice, and not just any justice, but God's retributive justice. For Justinian, his role was embedded in this system, as chosen operator of God's power on earth, it was his job to mete punishment that would be pleasing to God's providence. The law is often highlighted as Justinian's crowning achievement. From the time he assumed full imperial power, coinciding with his uncle Justin's death and just four months after his initial appointment as co-emperor on April 1, 527 C.E., it took him less than two years to publish the *Codex Justinianus*.¹⁰⁰⁵ The *Digest* (or *Pandects*) produced in 530, as well as the *Institutes*, were the result of some 2,000 works from earlier Roman jurists.¹⁰⁰⁶

In the first book of Justinian's *Institutes*, under the heading of *De Justitia et Iure*, we

¹⁰⁰⁵ *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.

¹⁰⁰⁶ *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 6. McGuckin notes that "*Digest* (derived from the Latin (*digerere*) meant 'The Systematization'; *Pandects* (derived from the Greek *pan dexesthe*) meant 'Encyclopedia.'" McGuckin, *The Ascent of Christian Law*, fn. 259. For a broad view of the development of the Roman law from 1000 BCE through modern Europe, see George

read a simple definition of Justice: “Justice is the constant and perpetual wish to render every one his due.”¹⁰⁰⁷ The notion could not be more aligned to our theme of retribution in the hagiographical material of late antiquity. In Justinian’s concept of justice, the two sound synonymous. Moving to the very next line we read, “Jurisprudence is the knowledge of things divine and human; the science of the just and the unjust.”¹⁰⁰⁸ Justinian’s concept of law is that entity within which God works to harmonize and equalize human life.¹⁰⁰⁹

Section three explains that there are three maxims (*præcepta*) of law, “to live honestly, to hurt no one, to give everyone his due.”¹⁰¹⁰ Focusing on this last bit, *suum cuique tribuere*, we get a sense of how justice is associated with retribution.¹⁰¹¹ This, of course, is not strictly geared toward negative *tribuere*, but as in the case of most legal action, when the first two *præcepta* of living honestly and hurting no one are not followed, the result is often the meting of punishment according to the crime.

The Institutes go on to delineate two main branches of law: that which is public and that which is private. The public is simply referring to the government of the

Mousourakis, *A Legal History of Rome* (London: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁰⁰⁷ “Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas ius suum cuique tribuens.” Paul Krueger et al., *Corpus juris civilis*, Foreword, Liber Primus, Tit. 1. Translations are taken from Sandars, unless otherwise noted. Thomas Collett Sandars, *The Institutes of Justinian with English Introduction, Translation and Notes*, 7th ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917).

¹⁰⁰⁸ “Jurisprudentia est divinarum atque humanarum rerum notitia, justi atque injusti scientia.” Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Lib.1, Tit. 1.1. Sandars notes that these definitions are lifted from the writings of Domitius Ulpian. Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Lib. 1, Tit. 1, and Intro. xxix, sec. 24.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Some have noted that Justinian’s laws are rather devoid of Christian influence at points. Most of the overt connection to Christianity happens in the forewords. See Alan Watson, *The Spirit of Roman Law* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 45.

¹⁰¹⁰ Indeed giving one “his due” could be considered as rewarding as much as punishing. Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Foreword, Lib. 1, Tit. 1.3.

¹⁰¹¹ Paul Krueger et al., *Corpus juris civilis*, Liber Primus, Tit. 1.3.

Roman Empire. The private, however, is broken into three lesser categories: natural law, the law of nations, and civil law.¹⁰¹² In the discussion of the first of these categories, natural law, the connection between all living beings, animal and human, is highlighted. Given the earlier interest of our hagiographers in exploring the themes of how humans relate to other living creatures, like lions, this passage holds an interesting point of prominence in the discussion of law. The passage states, “For this law does not belong exclusively to the human race, but belongs to all animals, whether of the air, the earth, or the sea....We see, indeed, that all the other animals besides man are considered as having knowledge of this law.”¹⁰¹³ There was some notion that all creatures fell under the order of these laws, they were not man made, but rather gleaned from life in the cosmos, under God’s watchful eye. The natural ordering of human life extended to the natural ordering of creation, for the signs of which so many monks attentively watched.¹⁰¹⁴

The following section of the Institutes explicates what role the emperor played in the creation and management of law. We get a sense of this in the final story of Moschos, where Justinian prescribes a punishment that he sees as fitting to the crime the Jewish glassblower committed in placing his son in a furnace. The text of the following section gives full power to the emperor making all that he declares by rescript

¹⁰¹² Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Lib. 1, Tit. 1.4.

¹⁰¹³ Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Lib. 1, Tit. 2. Sandars notes that Justinian is borrowing from Ulpian here, who supports the threefold division. He later borrows from Gaius, who combines the *Jus civile* and *Jus gentium*, allowing for a twofold division. Sandars also notes that the main theory had nothing to do with animals but rather looked to the “reason inherent in the universe and in man.” Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, 7.

¹⁰¹⁴ Several examples could be used here. For one, see Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 16, 232.15.

In contrast see Origen’s treatment of the scriptural notions like the wolf and the lamb in Isaiah

or edict into law. In some ways this supersedes all other laws, in other ways it abides alongside existing laws, operating as law only insofar as it pertains to a particular case.

The text states:

That which seems good to the emperor has also the force of law; for the people, by the *lex regia*, which is passed to confer on him his power, make over to him their whole power and authority. Therefore whatever the emperor ordains by rescript, or decides in adjudging a cause, or lays down by edict, is unquestionably law; and it is these enactments of the emperor that are called constitutions. Of these, some are personal, and are not to be drawn into precedent, such not being the intention of the emperor. Supposing the emperor has granted a favour to any man on account of his merits, or inflicted some punishment, or granted some extraordinary relief, the application of these acts does not extend beyond the particular individual. But the other constitutions, being general, are undoubtedly binding on all.¹⁰¹⁵

In essence, like God, the emperor can do what he wants when he wants and his will is the final deciding point. This should not and will not undermine the broader scope of the law, even if it does not square easily with it at times. As one would not question God's fickle will, so should the emperor be given the benefit of the doubt in his actions and judgments.

There appears to be a twinning of God's role as ruler of the Cosmos with the Emperor's role as ruler of the mentioned territories in the preface. The proximity of religion and imperium in the first few lines clearly indicates the connection: "IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. THE EMPEROR CÆSAR FLAVIUS JUSTINIANUS,"¹⁰¹⁶ The text goes on to list the realm in which this power resides, he writes as vanquisher of "THE ALAMANI, GOTHs, FRANCS, GERMANS, ANTES,

11:6. Origen, "De Principiis," 4.1.8.

¹⁰¹⁵ Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Lib. 1, Tit. 2.6.

¹⁰¹⁶ "IN NOMINE DOMINI NOSTRI IHESU CHRISTI. IMPERATOR CAESAR FLAVIUS IUSTINIANUS" Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Prooemium.

ALANI, VANDALS, AFRICANS, PIOUS, HAPPY, GLORIOUS, TRIUMPHANT
CONQUEROR, EVER AUGUST, TO THE YOUTH DESIROUS OF STUDYING THE
LAW, GREETING.”¹⁰¹⁷

The connective tissue between the Emperor and God becomes most overt in section two of the Prooemium, which states, “When we had arranged and brought into perfect harmony the hitherto confused mass of imperial constitutions, we then extended our care to the vast volumes of ancient law.”¹⁰¹⁸ This *consonantiam* hearkens back to the same harmony that was created out of the disordered world that Plato saw as the primal starting point for the *demiourgos*.¹⁰¹⁹ As covered in the chapter on Theodoret, this formation of order out of chaos was something only God was capable of achieving with any success. Justinian approximates God’s role of organizing principal concerning the law. He does acknowledge, however, that it is “through the favour of heaven” that they have achieved this work “that once seemed beyond hope.”¹⁰²⁰

Humfress notes the importance of the preface for determining “an imperial spin

¹⁰¹⁷ “ALAMANNICUS GOTHICUS FRANCICUS GERMANICUS ANTICUS ALANICUS VANDALICUS AFRICANUS PIUS FELIX INCLITUS VICTOR AC TRIUMPHATOR SEMPER AUGUSTUS CUPIDAE LEGUM IUVENTUTI” Paul Krueger et al., *Corpus juris civilis*, Institutes, Intro. Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Prooemium.

¹⁰¹⁸ Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Prooemium 2.

¹⁰¹⁹ Paul Krueger et al., *Corpus juris civilis*, Institutes, Preface, 2. “To repeat, then, one of my original assertions, the god found the four bodies we’ve been talking about in a chaotic state and made each of them compatible with itself and with the others, in as many ways and respects as they could be proportionate and compatible. For at that time none of them had its characteristics, except by chance, and in fact none of them had the slightest right to be called by the names that are now used of it and the others—‘fire’, ‘water’, and so on. So he first imposed order on them all, and then he created this universe of ours out of them, as a single living being containing within itself all living beings, both mortal and immortal. He himself was the craftsman and creator of the divine beings, and he gave his own offspring the job of creating mortal beings. In imitation of their father, once they had received from him the immortal seed of soul, they proceeded to fashion a mortal body in which to enclose it, and to assign the whole body to be its vehicle.” Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, 69 b-c.

on any relevant current events," a point well made by Somerville and Brasington.¹⁰²¹ Since Justinian never produced a collection of his new laws, the prefaces to his *Novellae* have been preserved, offering "a unique window through which to view concrete circumstances that prompted most imperial legislation."¹⁰²² Humfress cites the preface from *Novel 98*, where Justinian states, "When things are always the same and just so, complicated laws are not required, since simplicity and integrity are maintained unmixed with all complexity, and use is made of laws that are eternal and divine and require no correction; in the whirlpool and turmoil that we now experience, however, our affairs need the governing wisdom that comes from laws."¹⁰²³ For all of our explication of how God worked in the temporal world during Justinian's reign it is interesting to hear some perspective from Justinian himself. He was not an emperor whiling away his time on food and drink at his preferred villa. Rather, his administration was deeply concerned on several fronts, namely, wars, plague, legal development and complications, as well as the continual political considerations that a sixth century emperor had to face. Even in the midst of such imperial success, he still felt that he was in a "whirlpool" of turmoil.¹⁰²⁴

It can be said without hesitation that Justinian ruled knowing that God's providence was guiding his every step. This did not mean that everything would go

¹⁰²⁰ Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Prooemium 2.

¹⁰²¹ Humfress, Caroline, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 174. Robert Somerville and Bruce Clark Brasington, *Prefaces to Canon Law Books in Latin Christianity: Selected Translations, 500-1245* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹⁰²² If he had redistributed the law, the prefaces would have been reworked or removed. Humfress, Caroline, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 174.

¹⁰²³ Humfress, Caroline, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 175.

¹⁰²⁴ Humfress, Caroline, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 175.

smoothly for Justinian. In fact, after his early successes in war and building programs around the empire, things took a bit of a turn. Maas explains well the culmination of events:

The last decades of Justinian's reign continued to be disappointing, as the hopes of the early years continued to sour. The war in Italy dragged on. In 548, Theodora, who had been such an astute counselor and aide, especially in negotiations with the eastern anti-Chalcedonians, died. The dome of Hagia Sophia cracked in 557 and partly collapsed the following year. In 559 Slav raiders accompanied by an army of Huns reached as far as the walls of Constantinople, forcing Justinian to call Belisarius out of retirement to organize the defense. Earthquakes struck the empire, civil disturbances rocked Constantinople, and ambitious men plotted against the aged emperor. Even the peace treaty concluded with Persia in 561–562 required heavy payments of gold from the Romans."¹⁰²⁵

It seemed that God was not going to let Justinian slip into old age gracefully. Rather, he was receiving some of the struggle that any man of God could expect to encounter as he was tested and purified for the coming kingdom. The benefits of believing that one was securely within God's providence – especially from the post of emperor – were that every contour and struggle could be reinterpreted *ex post facto*. The examples we could draw on are numerous. From the Nika revolt, to the plague – both of which nearly claimed his life – Justinian began to believe that his vitality was divinely ordained.¹⁰²⁶ He was God's chosen, brought up from a Balkan village with peasant parents, raised to the purple and now something of an invincible hero in support of God's kingdom on earth. If we include the constantly invading armies on all fronts, earthquakes, and

¹⁰²⁵ Maas, "Roman Questions, Byzantine Answers," in *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 8.

¹⁰²⁶ Maas notes, "Justinian interpreted his survival as a sign of divine support. The intimate connection he envisaged between the imperial office and God would become a pillar supporting the Byzantine state." Maas, "Roman Questions, Byzantine Answers," in *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 7.

incessant theological struggle, we begin to understand how a leader like Justinian might consider himself an agent of God's purposes, charged with bringing peace, unity, and prosperity to a struggling physical world. These were no longer the times of God's chosen, struggling in jail, awaiting torture and hoping for martyrdom. Instead, Christianity saw much more similitude with the ancient Israelites, who, while struggling at points, could count on God's providence in immediate, phenomenal forms.

Justinian's affinity with other great kings of old, like David, went beyond simple comparison to the level of overt projection. This is perhaps best exemplified in a mosaic image on Sinai where King David's depiction below Christ's feet "bears striking resemblance to contemporary portraits of Emperor Justinian himself."¹⁰²⁷ The comparisons went beyond supposed physical resemblances, however, approximating something of a reworking of the ancient scripture from a Byzantine perspective. These were decidedly not the times of Christian subservience to a greater Roman machine. The tables had turned. Now it was a Christian Roman political world that could reconsider itself along the lines of an empire supported by God's providence and positioned to rule in ways more theocratic than autocratic.

With the continuing rise in power that Justinian perceived through his successful

¹⁰²⁷ Caner citing Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, pl. cxix, Solzbacher 1989, 267, and Andreopoulos 2002. Daniel Caner, *History and Hagiography from the Late Antique Sinai: Including Translations of Pseudo-Nilus' Narrations, Ammonius' Report on the Slaughter of the Monks of Sinai and Rhaithou, and Anastasius of Sinai's Tales of the Sinai Fathers*, Translated Texts for Historians v. 53 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 27; George H. Forsyth and Kurt Weitzmann, *The Church and Fortress of Justinian*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973); Rudolf Solzbacher, *Mönche, Pilger Und Sarazenen: Studien Zum Frühchristentum Auf Der Südlichen Sinaihalbinsel; von Den Anfängen Bis Zum Beginn Islamischer Herrschaft* (Altenberge: Telos, 1989); A Andreopoulos, "The Mosaic of the Transfiguration in St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai: A Discussion

campaigns and new resources came an increasing belief that all of these blessings were indisputably linked to God's favor resting with Christians. They were doing something right, and God was going to protect their placement from any pagan movement which threatened to unseat them. Regardless of how dicey the situation became, God had seen a way through for Justinian and this translated into broader theological themes that were taking root at long last in the minds of Christians throughout the empire.

Could the ancient scriptures finally be read in a literal, identity melding way? Perhaps one no longer had to apprise the congregation that God's power should be read in symbolic, allegoric models in order to get at the true meaning. The image of the priest claiming God's providence while persecutors loomed above the catacombs and outside the church doors could be filed away with the other images of questionable divine care like the starvation or murder of so many martyrs in the previous centuries. God's power was on display in ever-increasing visibility. There may not be a parting of the Red Sea, but God was not going to let an army defeat his chosen people – there was direct identification with ancient Israel, only this Byzantine tribe was no longer playing the whore to external deities.¹⁰²⁸

There was a trend developing in Justinian's era, which bent toward increased attention to biblical history in the liturgy.¹⁰²⁹ Meyendorff calls this, "historicization," and Krueger relates this to a mysticizing trend that saw the inclusion of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite's ideas concerning the earthly liturgy as a participation in the eternal

of Its Origins," *Byzantion* 72 (2002): 9–41.

¹⁰²⁸ Hosea 4:15

¹⁰²⁹ Krueger, "Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century," 295.

liturgy of heaven.¹⁰³⁰ Although he acknowledges this as a post-Justinianic development, the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus was certainly crafted in proximity to Justinian's reign and had made influential marks on the theological world of the high Byzantine court.¹⁰³¹

Krueger connects this rise in mystical connection with the liturgy to Romanos the Melodist. Best known for his beautifully personalized liturgical hymns, Romanos innovates in a significant way concerning the connection of the Byzantine worshipper to the ancient scriptures. Romanos arrived in Constantinople during Anastasius I's reign, and served as cantor in the Theotokos Church during Justinian's reign.¹⁰³² Krueger notes that Romanos was able to endow the liturgical events, like the night vigil, with meaning by using first person language and "temporal markers like 'today.'"¹⁰³³ He explains, "Through dialogue especially, Romanos is able to render the biblical action in the here and now....Romanos's hymns do not merely rehash the biblical stories but rather plumb their dramatic depths for the characters involved. In their turn, the poems invite the listeners to enter into the story by identifying with Christ's interlocutors, with Peter, Thomas, the sinful woman, even with Judas."¹⁰³⁴

If the liturgical hymns were swinging the direction of personalized projection onto the ancient biblical characters, we can surmise that Christian culture on the whole was also accessing these ideas on various levels and incorporating the connection of

¹⁰³⁰ Krueger, "Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century," 295; John Meyendorff, "Eastern Liturgical Theology," in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn and Jean Leclercq, Vol. 16 of *World Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1985).

¹⁰³¹ Rorem notes the "embrace of 'Dionysius' by orthodox Chalcedonians resulted most of all from the work of John of Scythopolis" who died circa 548 C.E., well within the time of Justinian's reign. Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: a Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14.

¹⁰³² He dies sometime after 555 CE.

¹⁰³³ Krueger, "Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century," 298.

identity. The assertion of a rise in attention to and identification with the biblical stories would suggest that prior to this period Christians felt somewhat alienated from biblical stories that held little meaning for them, or lacked a clear sense of continuity in how God was working in the world. One imagines it would be difficult to starve in jail and yet proclaim the type of joy David penned with his acknowledgment that his cup “runneth over.”¹⁰³⁵ The variation in the bible was certainly handy in these moments, when one’s life might be more similar to Job than King Solomon.

The introduction to Justinian’s *Digest*, is thoughtful and succinct. The goal was to compile the law in such a way as to “free their *constitutiones* (enactments) from faults and set them out in a clear fashion, so that they might be collected together in one *Codex*, and that they might afford to all mankind the ready protection of their own integrity.”¹⁰³⁶ This integrity would be contingent on the most important of details, that they be “purged of all unnecessary repetition and most harmful disagreement.”¹⁰³⁷ This goal, which is laid before Tribonian by Justinian, is no small feat.¹⁰³⁸

Justinian invokes Romulus, as a starting point for Rome and its construction of law.¹⁰³⁹ With this move he is attaching all of the lore and glory of ancient Rome to the present Byzantine tradition. The problems with this type of attachment become

¹⁰³⁴ Krueger, “Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century,” 298, 300.

¹⁰³⁵ Psalm 23:5

¹⁰³⁶ Watson, Alan, *The Digest of Justinian* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), Composition, Intro. I.

¹⁰³⁷ Watson, Alan, *The Digest of Justinian*, Composition, Intro. I. He later acknowledges that if repetition is found, it should be attributed to human error. Watson, Alan, *The Digest of Justinian*, Confirmation of the *Digest*, Section 14.

¹⁰³⁸ Origen, “De Principiis,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, trans. Philip Schaff, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Grand Rapids, Mich: T. & T Clark; Eerdmans, 1989), 4.1.8. See also Procopius, *The Secret History*, 13.12, 20.16–17.

¹⁰³⁹ See also Watson, Alan, *The Digest of Justinian*, Book I.2.2.

evident – almost as if Justinian catches himself saying too much about “Rome” and feels the need to articulate for posterities sake precisely which Rome he is referring to. He explains, “And by Rome we must understand not only the old city but also our royal one, which, with the favor of God, was founded with the best auguries.”¹⁰⁴⁰

The continual acknowledgment that this is not an undertaking that is done according to human desires, but rather in the name and glory of God, is an important aspect to these prefaces. The introductory section of the “Composition” begins with the following lines:

Governing under the authority of God our empire which was delivered to us by the Heavenly Majesty, we both conduct wars successfully and render peace honorable, and we uphold the condition of the state. We so lift up our minds toward the help of the omnipotent God that we do not place our trust in weapons or our soldiers or our military leaders or our own talents, but we rest all our hopes in the providence of the Supreme Trinity alone, from whence the elements of the whole world proceeded and their disposition throughout the universe was derived.¹⁰⁴¹

For Justinian, it was clear that his role was none other than God’s agent, as emperor, to institute justice in the worldly context according to the precepts of the divine. As mentioned in the *Institutes*, this justice was reckoned as giving everyone his or her due.

As if the new law was not already closely linked to the emperor’s designs, the first year students were no longer to be called “two-pounders,” but rather “New Justinians.”¹⁰⁴² In the introduction to the *Digest*, Justinian’s hand in this process is continually confused with God’s hand. The sentences switch back and forth between God’s providence and Imperial jurisprudence as if they were synonymous. The section

¹⁰⁴⁰ Watson, Alan, *The Digest of Justinian*, Composition, Introduction, 10.

¹⁰⁴¹ Watson, Alan, *The Digest of Justinian*, Composition, Introduction.

¹⁰⁴² Watson, Alan, *The Digest of Justinian*, Intro., The Whole Body of Law, 2.

labeled, “Confirmation of the Digest,” gives us a succinct example of this:

So great is the providence of the Divine Humanity toward us that it ever deigns to sustain us with acts of eternal generosity. For after the Parthian wars were stilled in everlasting peace, and after the Vandal nation was done away with and Carthage – nay rather, the whole of Libya – was once more received into the Roman empire, the Divine Humanity contrived that the ancient laws, already encumbered with old age, should through our vigilant care achieve a new elegance and a moderate compass, a result which no one before our reign ever hoped for or deemed to be at all possible by human ingenuity....Now for the Heavenly Providence this was certainly appropriate, but for human weakness in no way possible. We, therefore, in our accustomed manner, have resorted to the aid of the Immortal One and, invoking the Supreme Deity, have desired that God should become the author and patron of the whole work. We have entrusted the entire task to Tribonian, a most eminent man, (master of the offices) *magister officiorum*, ex-quaestor of our sacred palace and ex-consul, and on him we have imposed the whole execution of the aforesaid enterprise, so that he himself, with the other illustrious and most learned men, might fulfill our desire. Moreover, our majesty, ever investigating and scrutinizing what these men were drafting, amended, in reliance on the Heavenly Divinity, anything that was found to be dubious or uncertain, and reduced it to a proper form. Everything was completed, therefore, our Lord and God Jesus Christ vouchsafing the capacity to us and to our subordinates in the task.¹⁰⁴³

Not only was providence acting to win wars, but it was also acting to overhaul the legal system of the empire. It was as if it was all a part of God’s slowly unfolding plan to eventually raise the Emperor Justinian to the purple and have him rectify the legal system according to God’s own style of justice. It would be impossible for Justinian to separate his own will from the will of God – they acted in concert. They were author and agent, creator and upholder, both reigning over dominions in need of justice through law.

Some Pertinent Examples

The text of the *Digests* begins with an assessment of law, from Ulpian, as “the art

of goodness and fairness.”¹⁰⁴⁴ As a jurist, one’s role was to “cultivate the virtue of justice...discriminating between fair and unfair, distinguishing lawful from unlawful, aiming to make men good not only through fear of penalties but also indeed under allurements of rewards.”¹⁰⁴⁵ This rather fair treatment of the law is a positively oriented perspective – if a bit idealistic. That the law was not only responsible for cultivating justice, but also a force for making “men good” is certainly a hopeful line of thinking. In reality, the law was geared far more toward the punitive than the “allurement of rewards.”

In book four of the *Institutes*, we find the laws regarding *DE OBLIGATIONIBUS QUAE EX DELICTO NASCUNTUR*.¹⁰⁴⁶ This treatment of things *ex maleficio*, is most pertinent to our many hagiographical stories which arise “for example, from theft, from robbery, or damage, or injury.”¹⁰⁴⁷ Section five discusses the penalty for such theft. It states, “The penalty for manifest theft is quadruple the value of the thing stolen, whether the thief be a slave or a freeman; that for theft not manifest is double.”¹⁰⁴⁸ Justice, in these cases, appears to have a weightier side than simply everyone getting what is due them. The penalties carry a punishment that goes beyond simple restoration.

Book four, Title three, Section eight describes a scenario in which property is lost

¹⁰⁴³ Watson, Alan, *The Digest of Justinian*, Intro., The Confirmation of the *Digest*, Introduction.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Watson, Alan, *The Digest of Justinian*, I.1.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Watson, Alan, *The Digest of Justinian*, I.1.1.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Paul Krueger et al., *Corpus juris civilis*, *Institutes*, Liber Quartus.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Lib. 4, Tit. 1, Intro..

¹⁰⁴⁸ Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Lib. 4, Tit. 1, Sec. 5.

due to “want of skill.”¹⁰⁴⁹ We are reminded of the story of a monk in John Moschos’s text, who lost control of his mules and accidentally trampled a child. While this seems like an accident, and few would attach any form of judgment, the monk continually tries to get a lion to eat him for punishment. When it will not, he believes his sins were forgiven.¹⁰⁵⁰ Justinian’s descriptions of the law are explicit: “So, too, if a muleteer, through his want of skill, cannot manage his mules, and runs over your slave, he is guilty of a fault. As, also, he would be, if he could not hold them in on account of his weakness, provided that a stronger man could have held them in. The same decision applies to a person on horseback who is unable to manage his horse, owing to physical weakness or want of skill.”¹⁰⁵¹ There is little room for inadvertence here; the penalty would be applied even if one was considered too weak to control the animals.¹⁰⁵²

Heretical fallout in Justinian:

On the topic of being deemed a heretic, there was the spiritual fallout that one might face in their attempts to continue worshipping or communing with a particular group, but there were also significant problems on the civic side. Justinian’s laws make clear what was at stake in being declared a heretic. *Novel 131.14* explains:

We direct, moreover, that no heretic shall in any manner, either by lease (conduction), emphyteusis (perpetual lease), purchase or otherwise, receive any immovable property from any holy church or other venerable place. If anything of that kind takes place, the heretic who paid anything on that account, shall lose what he paid; the property shall be reclaimed for the venerable place from which

¹⁰⁴⁹ Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Lib. 4, Tit. 3, Sec. 8.

¹⁰⁵⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 101.

¹⁰⁵¹ Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Lib. 4, Tit. 3, Sec. 8.

¹⁰⁵² Other passages do speak of breaking the law by accident. As in the case of causing one’s death by accident. See Sandars, *Institutes of Justinian*, Lib. 4, Tit. 3, Sec. 3.

it was given, the manager of the house who gave such property to the heretic, shall be removed from his post of administration and shall be thrown into a monastery, and he shall be denied holy communion for a year, for having betrayed the Christians to the heretics. **1.** If an orthodox person alienates or leaves possessions on which there is a holy church, either by emphyteusis (perpetual lease), lease (conductio) or for any other purpose, to a Jew, Samaritan, pagan, Montanist, Arian, or other heretic, the holy church of the place shall claim the ownership thereof. **2.** If anyone of the heretics, among whom we number Nestorians, Acephali and Eutichianists, should dare to build a hiding place for his impiety, or Jews should construct a new synagogue, the holy church shall claim ownership thereof. **3.** If anyone lets out his possession on emphyteusis (perpetual lease), lease (conductio), or in some other way to such person, and the owner of the possession knew that he was giving it over to a heretic, the church of the city in whose jurisdiction the possession is, shall claim the income of the time specified in the contract. If the owner of the possession did not know that he was giving it over to a heretic, he shall, on account of such want of knowledge, be kept harmless, but the heretic shall in either case be shorn of his possessions, and his property shall be confiscated to the fisc.¹⁰⁵³

The outcome for having associated or conducted property with proclaimed heretical movements is severe. As with most Roman law, the outcome is deeply favorable for the offended party – in this case the church. We should note here also the role the monastery plays as detention center in this text. The connections to an argument for alignment of ascetic and legal agent, as presented in chapter five, are significant.

The Church stood to gain much from this association of religion and law. As is seen in *Novel 9*, where the church gains a prescriptive period of one hundred years. The law states, “All our judges, high and low, who are Christians and orthodox, shall enforce this law, and the violators hereof, must, in addition to celestial punishment, be in fear of the vigor of our law, and of the penalty of fifty pounds of gold. This law shall apply not only in cases which shall arise hereafter, but also to those already

¹⁰⁵³ Henry Blume, “Annotated Justinian Novels,” Database, *Annotated Justinian Code*, n.d., 131.14, <http://www.uwyo.edu/lawlib/blume-justinian/>.

pending."¹⁰⁵⁴ The original period of prescription was thirty years, but Justinian allowed for a lengthier statute of limitations in order to keep the churches from being "defeated by any such periods of time, especially in cases in which they have sustained (a loss of property) or in cases of debt (to them)."¹⁰⁵⁵ The church was now not only favored in heaven, but also on earth.

Some law graduates were directly engaged in the defense of the Church's interests. The *defensores ecclesiae* were mandated to act for the Church in criminal and civil cases.¹⁰⁵⁶ On the other hand, Christian clerics were already being used throughout Justinian's empire for various legal chores. Maas surveys well the legal roles of the bishop:

Bishops were expected to ensure that Christian slaves were released without price by Jewish, pagan, or heretical masters; they were ordered to hear (certain) cases where the provincial judge's neutrality or trustworthiness had been questioned. Likewise, they could sit in judgment over provincial judges themselves and report to the emperor where necessary; they were also expected to judge cases in cities or towns where there were no magistrates...Given this blurring of sacred and civil jurisdiction, it is little wonder that Justinian had to state explicitly that clergy and monks could not receive or collect taxes, nor could they act as agents for the transfer or alienation of public and private property or procurators in the conduct of civil litigation.¹⁰⁵⁷

The bishop and monk had taken on a new prominence in Justinian's reign and their power was not limited to the church and monastery. It extended into the countryside, the courtroom and wherever else civil business was conducted. Novel 8 speaks of Justinian's laws being "deposited in the Holy Church."¹⁰⁵⁸ The flipside to this was that

¹⁰⁵⁴ Henry Blume, "Annotated Justinian Novels," Novel 9.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Blume, "Annotated Justinian Novels," Novel 9.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Humfress, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 179.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Humfress, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 179.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Humfress, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 179.

Bishops read laws to their congregations.¹⁰⁵⁹

Conclusion: The Law and the Ascetics

With the rise in interest concerning the monk as a legal actor, passages like the one in John of Ephesus, where Simeon the Mountaineer tonsures the rural community's selected youth with impunity, begin to exhibit real texture. In many ways Simeon was now an agent of the Imperial court. His actions were sanctioned not only by God's retributive powers, but also by the Christian empire that was slowly converting the purview of the civic into that of the religious. We might also add that John of Ephesus had seen fit to include this story precisely because of its bearing on the role of the monk in the Syrian territories. The monk no longer needed to slowly accrue power through decades of outrageous asceticism, as in the case of Symeon Stylites. Rather, his power was afforded by his position in society. We see this most vividly on two different occasions. One example is in the story of Simeon the Mountaineer, who clashes with an entire town unabashedly. Any other village would have run that holy man out of town. John of Ephesus shows the monk in power, wielding God's retribution upon the mothers who would not yield their children to the monastic community. The second

¹⁰⁵⁹ Humfress, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 179.

Humfress also notes, "Moreover, this text was to be engraved upon tablets of stone and placed at the portals of the Holy Church, so that everyone could have the opportunity of reading it. Imperial legislation was placed in Christian churches and Gospel texts were housed in Roman courtrooms. In 531 Justinian became the first emperor to require that before any kind of Roman civil or courtroom process could begin, all the participants – litigants and legal officials alike – had to swear an oath of Christian faith, while touching a copy of the Gospels. Conveniently, Justinian had already ordered in 530 that the Gospels had to be placed in every Roman courtroom. The presence of the Gospels, stated Justinian, guaranteed the presence of God at every legal hearing. This radical innovation is one of the most striking aspects of Justinianic courtroom practice." Humfress, "Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian," 179-180.

pertinent example is in the story of Abraham and Maro. Maro, after verbally acknowledging his struggle with the notion of taking up his brother's prominent position as local healer and adjudicator, eventually accepts the position. John of Ephesus is showing the reader that the monk had a rightful claim to the powerful legal and social position in his society. Stories about justice and retribution within this world – as told by John of Ephesus – had meaning beyond the simple hagiographical motives of earlier writers, which were largely focused on building faith and teaching later generations of monks about spirituality. They were now exemplified as monks acting within the imperial vector of influence.

If we apply this model to the story of Habib, which is John's primary example of the monastic ideal, the story is imbued with meaning. It is no longer the story of a bold monk, but rather a monk sanctioned with legal and religious power, combined in perfect unity of forceful social control. Habib is transformed from a local activist to the agent of God and the imperium, correcting social ills and promoting peaceful living in the provinces. He is as much a provincial judge as the local holy man.

With this theme in mind, it is instructive to look back at Justinian's Novel 134.9, where we see an interesting inclusion of the monastery in the legal process. The section speaks of the guarding of women who have broken the law. It is geared toward the interest of protecting female prisoners from being raped or mistreated by their guards. The law states, "If she is accused of a very grave crime, she shall be thrown into a monastery or hermitage, or delivered to women by whom she may be guarded chastely and becomingly, until the case against her is proven; for then proceedings shall be taken which the law has fixed." This fascinating inclusion gives us reason to think that the

monasteries of the sixth century had taken on a far more legal-oriented function than in previous eras. Perhaps it was connected to the fact that monasteries had cells which could be locked, and some even slots in the doors where food could be passed.¹⁰⁶⁰ Regardless of their physical amenities for justice, they had that most important element, the monk, who was willing to act on behalf of the empire and God.

This concept of the monk as legal actor described in Justinian's laws would suggest that John was writing a text that was as prescriptive as it was descriptive. Peter Brown has adequately noted the role of the holy man as patron in the provinces.¹⁰⁶¹ What we are witnessing in the sixth century, however, is a shift from monk as patron, to monk as legal agent. As seen in the portrayal of Zacharias's Severus, the move from lawyer to monk was a natural progression for some. The ascetic embodied the stringency of the law codes with the holiness to back them up. As law and religion came closer together, the monk began to embody a civil role that matched their conflation. We should not believe that this model held sway, or that it was even as widespread as John of Ephesus might have us think. In the end, John's literature is describing an ideal functioning of the monk envisioned from a capital that had rid itself of Origen's theological troubles and was more geared toward retributive justice than any previous Christian era.

John of Ephesus's program in writing the *Lives of the Monks of Syria* was prescriptive and aimed at convincing the broader Byzantine society of Justinian's

¹⁰⁶⁰ See John of Lycopolis, who spent "thirty years in confinement, receiving the necessities of life from one who waited on him through a window." Procopius, *The Secret History: With Related Texts*, trans. Anthony Kaldellis (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2010), 13.12, 20.16-17.

¹⁰⁶¹ Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," 85, 91.

program to implement law – God’s law – as the baseline of all society, Christian and otherwise. They were now one in Justinian’s mind, and John’s work in hagiography was geared toward bringing the provinces up to speed. To restate this in another way, John’s role was as promulgator of Justinian’s legal notions through hagiographical means.

With this model in mind, we can look back at the story of Habib one last time. The cheating landowner’s critique of the monk says volumes about the undercurrents John was addressing. He complains, “Will not this fellow go and sit in his monastery and be quiet? For see! He comes out and wanders about to eat and drink.”¹⁰⁶² The critique is precisely what we might expect, and indeed what John of Ephesus expected from his audience. Should not the monk be more concerned with his practice of holiness, than with these local legal affairs? The answer, of course, was that God’s justice was at work through these monks and should not be questioned. It is evidenced in God’s raising of Justinian to the purple as much as in the taking of the deedholder’s life. Habib does his part to reverse the punishment with prayer, but he also notes “the rest of the sentence has gone forth against him, that he shall depart from life; and this we cannot reverse.”¹⁰⁶³ Justice trumped all other powers in the lives of these monks – each person getting his due. And this justice was ordained by God through the reinvigoration of law by Justinian.

¹⁰⁶² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:9.

¹⁰⁶³ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:10.

Conclusion:

Hagiography played a lively role in the lives of late antique Christians. From Egypt to Syria, and beyond, the holy person carved out a place of importance like a cave in the rocks of the deserts; it was meant to manifest a sense of permanence in the landscape of Christian practice. Settling into this role, the saint conjured up memories of scriptural pasts, flooded with meaning for a new and glorious kingdom of God. The monk was *magus*, divine man, prophet, judge, social activist, business person, community organizer, vintner, patron, recluse, theologian, friend of God, incarcerator, stranger, *ihidaya*, bishop, priest, missionary, healer, exorcist, and politician. In essence, the monk could be anything they chose, and yet this was not the whole picture. All of that which we read has passed through the hands of another, in most cases taking on the flavor and force of the hagiographer. These stories of monks in the deserts were dry and brittle, like so many papyri languishing in obscurity. Our hagiographers moisturize and revitalize these dessicated stories of monks, breathing new life into their *Lives*, and reorienting their narratives toward astute and pedagogical theologies of the author's world.

If we ignore the authorial for the historical details of the narrative, we wind up making claims about the history that are as insignificant now as they were in late

antiquity. These hagiographers' concern to bring across accurate historical detail was only as strong as the communal memories by which these stories would have to pass in order to be readily received. That is to say that even if a hagiographer like John of Ephesus had wanted to exclude a story from his record, it would only be possible if that story was not a part of the available cache of narratives in communal memory. This raises the notion of audience for our authors. Each compilation was geared toward a particular readership, and it is no longer enough to simply say these are records for the monastic communities to cherish and read. Most of our authors, while having clear connections to the ascetic communities, had another community – either real or imagined. To say that John of Ephesus was writing only for a persecuted Monophysite community would be missing the point. His work was for all ascetics, Monophysite and Chalcedonian, as well as an imperial court.¹⁰⁶⁴

The genre of hagiography was beautifully malleable in a way that scripture had never been. Origen had seen fit to correct for those aspects that were not consonant with his experience through the allegorical interpretation of its stickier narratives. Anything that seemed amiss was issued a new role in “calling out” or summoning the reader to a higher truth.¹⁰⁶⁵ Those who disapproved of Origen's exegetical moves were saddled with the chore of making sense of God's providence in the cosmos. This was no easy task, given the onset of plagues, earthquakes, theological disputes, invading pagan armies, and, for some, persecuting governments. Was the Byzantine Christian

¹⁰⁶⁴ We can wonder if his history of the persecution, which is now lost, was not a more historical account written for the Monophysite community. We might also consider the possibility that it is not extant for this very reason.

comfortable believing that they were the culmination of the kingdom of God, the natural concluding chapter to the people of Israel? From this perspective, it was possible to read the Old Testament as a period of growth for God's people. They fumbled around, misplacing their trust in other Gods and reaping the retributive judgment on a scale that only God could wield.¹⁰⁶⁶ Christians saw themselves as the natural inheritors of this lineage, baptized into the new kingdom of God, they were looking for God's providence at every turn.

It is hard to imagine a present and temporally active deity amidst the widespread persecutions Origen witnessed. His theology is necessarily touched by this reality. As time passes, and Christianity finds its way into the imperial palaces, Roman persecution falls off, leaving room for a more literal reading of the scripture of which Origen could not conceive. As Justinian saw himself in the lineage of King David, so too, did the monk begin to take on the roles of the great prophets, like Elijah and Elisha. It was even possible to reconsider Christ's words concerning the power that the apostles would carry with them in their missions throughout the world.¹⁰⁶⁷

With a pliable genre like hagiography, Christian writers could literarily envision a Christianity that approximated the scriptural patterns that were foundational for these communities. They no longer had to wait on God's power to become manifest; it was being manifested daily in the practice of these holy monks. As they drew near to God, like their apostolic forbears drew near through Christ, the power of the deity was

¹⁰⁶⁵ Plato uses *παρακαλέω* for this notion of summoning. It was certainly influential on Origen's concept of the text. See Plato, *Platonis Opera T. 4, Republic*, Book 7, Sections 523 B-C.

¹⁰⁶⁶ We can think of the many lost battles and periods of exile represented throughout the text.

¹⁰⁶⁷ See Mark 16.

accessed in the present. Gone were the days of being slowly submerged in a cauldron of pitch, God was powerful and ready to act through the saints on earth.

As to the question of why Origen's fingerprints are all over these hagiographical compilations, we might suggest two hypotheses. First, his theology of restoration was one that resonated in the lives of these monks. They envisioned a world that could hope to convert back into the paradise that God rendered in the Garden of Eden. This mindset, coupled with its underlying tone of forgiveness and hope, was attractive to the monk who struggled daily for his own salvation and that of others.¹⁰⁶⁸ Second, while his teaching was influential, it was fundamentally at odds with communities that sought God's power in the temporal setting. If an enchanter could bind a curse on someone – which it seems every person in antiquity believed – Why was God impotent to reverse that curse and punish the evildoer? Christianity was slowly changing and as the tide of Christian Imperialism swept in, Origen's theology was still tethered to the foundation of Christian suffering and otherworldly redemption.

As we read the hagiographical compilations we are struck by the shift from struggle in persecution – as represented by Palladios and to an extent Cyril – to the powerful retributive actions of Theodoret and the two Johns' monks. Christianity was distancing itself from a theology focused on worldly struggle, and moving in the direction of power in the cosmos. The monk was the natural agent of this power. He had tapped into the source by renouncing all worldly concerns, becoming like the angelic beings, unconcerned with food, sex and sleep. With this estrangement came

¹⁰⁶⁸ We get a sense of this attractive quality in Cyril's description of his theology taking hold in the Palestinian monasteries.

serious social power both in life and death. Since Christianity was now legal and aiding the development of law – both sacred and civil – the monks’ powerful social role necessarily took on the mantle of judge and civil servant when needed. It is fair to say that this was not a natural step for most monks; the number of stories about ascetics desiring to flee their social responsibilities is significant. They were not only sought for help in procuring payment for services, or locating stolen property, but they were also the primary means for healing in late antiquity. If we add the notion of salvific power, these monks’ become irresistible in their appeal to the Christian communities.

Rethinking the Retributive

Hagiographical compilations take a serious turn toward the retributive in the fourth through the sixth centuries. This project has limited its scope to those hagiographies which come to us in compilations for a few reasons. They allow the hagiographer some room to work literarily that a single *Vita* does not. Moreover, this process of selecting the most interesting narratives gives us an indication of what the hagiographer’s theological platform was comprised. Extrapolating from this data we begin to see an arc of development in our topic of choice – in this case retribution – and we can posit some social and theological developments based on these changes.

The fact that retributive justice becomes an important message in these hagiographies tells us much about the religious landscape of the early Byzantine Empire. Since we are privy to the rise of Christianity as religion *par excellence* in the state, we are automatically inclined to consider a sea change in belief concerning God’s providence in everyday life. If we read the hagiographies as indicating a broader

communal belief system, we can posit that Christians were ready for a religious narrative to match their rising social power. Instead of identifying with the suffering Christ, they were championing the glorious king. With the flourishing of temporal evidence of God's providence came the meting of God's punishment in real time. Wicked emperors lasted only as long as God needed them for his purposes and the monk was instrumental in ending their reigns.¹⁰⁶⁹ Those who read scripture literally knew that Christ was coming to judge humanity and the sheep and goats would be parted on the right and left. If God was powerful to act in aiding the sick or exorcising the demon possessed, then why not in punishing the unjust? Miracles in the form of immediate blessings were considered a bleeding over of God's beautiful afterlife into the present one. In a similar way, immediate judgment was God pulling closer the judgment day into the present. The only sticking point in this shift toward God's temporal power was the lingering theologies of Origen which had made their way into almost every theologian's thought and writings. This detail, which seems insignificant at first glance, explains why Origen comes up repeatedly in relation to these writers and their narratives. We can cite several facts in support of this. Palladios's texts have Origen edited out of their pages. Theodoret's work is used in Origen's final condemnation. Cyril gives over a significant portion of his chapters to the Origenist debate. John Moschos names him in his list of heretical figures imprisoned in darkness and fire.¹⁰⁷⁰ And finally, John of Ephesus writes in the court of Justinian, who seals

¹⁰⁶⁹ Here I am thinking of the several stories we have encountered about Julian and Anastasios.

¹⁰⁷⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 21.

Origen's fate as anathema to Christian belief. The connections to Origen are hard to miss.

Once Origen is out of the picture, our hagiographer can envision a saint who could call down God's judgment on any enemy of the church. As Peter precipitates the death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, so also does the monk Habib call down God's judgment on the wealthy man who held the deeds of the villagers. Not only can God's power be witnessed in immediacy, but the scripture can again be read on a basic and literal level. This step toward a more fundamental reading of the scriptures would hold sway over a millennium in exegetical practice.

The connection must be made between the condemnation of the theologian most associated with restoration and the rise of retributive narratives in the most ubiquitous style of literature in late antiquity. Moreover, this theologian is condemned by the Emperor who is touted the most instrumental legal innovator of the Byzantine world. The connection of Justinian's promulgation of justice as "each getting his due," and his condemnation of the most restorative theologian in the early church should not be missed. It is certainly too strong to say that Justinian's condemnation of Origen was a result of his interest in law. We can, however, see the two as relating a more widespread social change in the early Byzantine world that desired to see real and immediate retributive justice at work in "God's" earthly kingdom.

The Theology of Origen as litmus

This research project has aimed at showing that the literature of saints was a natural litmus for changing theologies – in particular with respect to the reading of

scripture and the development of providence and retributive themes. Going beyond the antiquated perspectives that held this literature as capable of being categorized according to literary style, genre, or type of miracle, our work has argued that culling texts from different centuries without direct connection to the author is misguided. Moreover, to claim that all hagiography fits into the mold of “popular” pietistic movements of the vulgar classes dismisses the nuance in these texts that makes them so conducive to modern historiography. Coupled with this critique is the elite position in which most of these authors reside. The hagiographers all write for a range of populations which included Emperors, Bishops and their Priests, Ascetics and their Abbots, and of course the lay Christians residing in the empire.

In the Origenist conflicts we witnessed the struggle between two very different views on how God was thought to work in the world. One side supported the notion that God worked with immediacy, punishing wicked folks for their sins and rewarding the good. The other side held God’s action in a more complex system of providence wherein the good could suffer and the evil could prosper. This latter group certainly believed in God’s eventual corrective force, however long one had to wait for the judgment day. Throughout Origen’s work, scriptural interpretation lay as a foundational support for these debates. Origen’s opponents saw the Old Testament exemplifying an overt and immediate retribution as a natural fact in this world which was created and orchestrated by God. This could be carried forward to the present in the lives of the faithful and most overtly in the lives of the champion ascetics. Origen took a more subtle approach connecting salvation and pedagogy into a timeline of life that was less predictable in the short term, but perfectly synchronized according to the

final judgment. This judgment was focused on restoration, rather than punishment, however, and punitive themes get reinterpreted by Origen in his work. The fire of judgment becomes that fire which burns away any lingering impurity in the soul. In Origen's model, even sinners were worthy of restoration, though it might take them longer to accept the proximity to God that the less worldly soul enjoyed. A theological distinction about providence develops from Origen's teachings that weighs heavily on the delineation of providence in the following centuries. It is not a sharp divide. Rather, it is a slower separation that traced the arc of Origen's condemnation from community to community. Reading Palladios's *Lausiatic History*, side by side with John Moschos or John of Ephesus's work, the progression is clear. Christianity, and in particular the stories of the ascetics, had become increasingly retributive, culminating in Justinian's crushing blow to Origen and the notion of universal restoration. The scope of judgment was contracted from somewhere, ever-after, to the here and now, and it was being rendered judiciously by Emperor and ascetic alike.

What the Hagiographies offer

I have argued that the rise of the debates over Origen's theology coincided with a spectrum of change in hagiographical style. Proof of this lies in the manuscript adjustments to the *Lausiatic history* and its subsequent impact on John of Ephesus. As noted in chapter two, Palladios's work was doctored after his writing to remove the name of Origen from it. In order to salvage the hagiography from being condemned for its Origenian influence Origen was simply excised. Besides his style, this might be the strongest indicator of John of Ephesus's reliance on Origen's work. We can posit with

Harvey that John of Ephesus had access to Palladios's work. If, as we suspect, it was of questionable theological validity given its connection to Origen, we have a direct support of John's work intending to correct an Origenist styled hagiography with one that was more retributive and fit better with the current state of theological interests. We should add that John was also writing according to his own tastes (and that of Justinian) excising Origen and his bits of theological influence. Palladios was too restorative, not retributive enough, and also surely undervaluing the temporal power of God in the lives of the monks. Since it holds true that Palladios was a follower of Evagrius, we can firmly place his theology in the Origen sympathizing camp. The close examination of his style does not disappoint. It is full of moments that the reader fully expects to turn toward retribution, but never do.

Having limited ourselves to five major hagiographical compilations, we see a spectrum of change in Christian literature as it was worked out theologically in the communities. This offers the field of Church History a few important arguments. First, it pulls hagiography out of a category of its own, showing delineation amidst the works. It is insufficient to label it all hagiography, or to think of certain regurgitated stories as simply literary tropes. Second, it offers the historian a new model of reading hagiography, by topic. By associating a particular topic, like retribution, to the theology of Origen and then witnessing both the theme and Origen's fingerprints throughout these works and their coinciding histories, we can better assess how the earliest compilations of hagiography functioned in Byzantium. The hagiographer was changed by the theological developments associated with Origen, and his program served to change further the theological world in which he lived.

This is most evident in Cyril's work, where instead of accepting Origen as anathema, he writes a compilation of hagiographies which are affected by the theology, thereby reigniting Origen's ideas from within these popular Christian stories of saints' lives. Rather than speculating as to how Origenist Cyril was, we can firmly place him in the Origenian circle based on his style of hagiographical representation. His own denigration of the Origenists is coupled with genuine questions about the value of philosophizing on scripture and the good it might yield. Some have read this as Cyril acting within the model of Church historian, exploring the details of the conflict for later readers. This would be a compelling argument until we unearth his reluctance to write any truly retributive narratives in his telling of the monks' lives. The added push from utilizing this dissertation's model, allows us to rethink Cyril as far more Origenist than previously considered. Little hints in the text begin to flourish as markers of deeper struggle with the anti-Origenist movement that Cyril was encountering. This model tells us as much about the texts and history as it does about the author and his intents in recording these narratives. In the end, none of our hagiographies are particularly free from the influence of the Origenist debate.

This research has intentionally bypassed the influence of ancient historians in favor of the hagiographers for a few important reasons.¹⁰⁷¹ As noted these hagiographies are an important and largely dismissed genre of historical data. Moreover, hagiography tells us something more plainly by allowing us to see what authors argue without the restraints of their rhetorical stylings and theological moorings. If one wants a true sense

of what an ancient writer thinks, they should periodically bypass what they are saying and look at what they are doing. We should not be asking who our hagiographers anathematize, but rather, how they envision God handling the situation of a failing monk or a recalcitrant local layperson. This is where one gets the truest answer. In the case of Cyril, he denounces Origen at every turn, but whether or not he is Origen-leaning in his theology can really be seen in how he handles the material. If like Cyril, most of one's stories are restorative, can we really think of him as condemning these aspects of Origen? It was essential to his political positioning to be anti-Origenist, but that did not necessarily mean that his theology followed suit.

By utilizing a structure like retribution in the hagiographies, we can apply this reading to hagiographies and decipher how influenced they were by Origenian thought. Even when it seems that the model is least informative, as in the case of John Moschos, it still gives us insight. Moschos does approximate a freer hand in his style, one in which stories of retribution are mixed with those of forgiveness. This then supports a position that holds Moschos as less interested or influenced by the Origenist debate. Unlike John of Ephesus, who was still focused on arguing against its restorative themes, Moschos had moved past these issues and his hagiography allows a bit more room for restoration. Even so, it is largely oriented toward the immediate power of God in and through the lives of the saints. This gives us a further indication of what Moschos's community was interested in hearing. His work is certainly not reminiscent of Palladios or Cyril. Could it be true that he was actually just plucking those stories

¹⁰⁷¹ The influence of the Historians is certainly worth examining. See Andrea Sterk, "'Representing' Mission from Below: Historians as Interpreters and Agents of Christianization,"

that were of most interest and edification to the Christian life? If so, it further supports a vision of John Moschos as further removed from the Origenist debate.

On the other hand, we have John of Ephesus, who we expect to be in line with Justinian and the anathematization of Origen. His work does not disappoint. It is rife with punishment meted by God and ascetic alike. I have argued that rather than seeing a figure like John of Ephesus as a theologian struggling amidst the crisis of Syrian asceticism, we should consider how the recent denunciation of Origen's theologies affected his own treatment of the saints' lives. As a writer in close proximity to Justinian, he would have had to craft a monastic image that was retributive, just, providential (here read in the temporal sense), focused on scripture as literal, and disinterested in any grand theme of restoration or equality in salvation.

This would suggest that John was writing a text that was as prescriptive as it was descriptive. We might even posit that it was more weighted toward prescriptive tactics, given the fact that his earlier work on the history of the persecutions is now lost.¹⁰⁷² While it is possible that John scrapped his previous work in favor of his new manuscript, it is far more likely that his recounting of the suffering of the Monophysites was not in line with the imperial ethos. In his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, John hits upon a perfect conflation of Justinianic theological programming, anti-Origenist styling, and Monophysitic reconciliation and remembrance.

Peter Brown has adequately noted the role of the holy man as judge in the provinces. Zacharias's Severus shows us an image of the monastic life as a progression

Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture 79, no. 02 (2010): 271-304.

¹⁰⁷² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, Intro. vi.

in holiness, moving past and leaving behind the law to attain a higher calling. John of Ephesus portrays the monk as approximating some sort of legal actor in line with the civil codes. He is monk-lawyer, not just one or the other. This is a major development in the sixth century. It means that John of Ephesus's program in writing the life of the monks of Syria was prescriptive and aimed at convincing the broader Byzantine society of Justinian's program to implement law, God's law, as the baseline of all society, Christian, Roman and Pagan.¹⁰⁷³ They were now one in Justinian's mind, and John's work in hagiography was geared toward bringing the provinces up to speed. In other words, John's role was as promulgator of Justinian legal notions through hagiographical means. The proof of this comes in the monk's role as seen from the first chapter of his work as adjudicator of disputes. We are reminded of the deed holder's questioning of the monk's role in coming out of the monastery to settle social issues. The ascetic is then defended by the immediate occurrence of God's justice or judgment in striking the man dead. The monk, Habib, is unable to reverse the punitive measures, but he was certainly capable of praying that God would "do with him as thy grace knoweth how."¹⁰⁷⁴

This overt exemplification of irreversible power in practice raises the question of why Theodoret's monks so often engage in similar retribution, only to reverse it again. Theodoret was on the fence. He falls directly in a time of transition during the first Origenist controversy. Whose side will he fall on? His hagiography is retributive with a soft edge. It chastises and it restores. The power is evident, as in a literal reading of the

¹⁰⁷³ Here I am distinguishing Pagan from Roman along the lines of its rural location, particularly as it relates to the borderlands of Syria which John of Ephesus speaks of in detail.

scripture, and we see this in his treatment of Ananias and Sapphira, but he is also interested in restoring. So he is unwilling to go over to a harshly retributive reading, but his scriptural analysis is already moving away from Origen's allegorical model. Theodoret's writings on God's providence go a long way toward supporting this reading. He accepted a view of God that was not altogether different from Origen's view. Both saw God working in indescribable and mysterious ways to bring about a proper ordering of the world. If at times the balances seemed unfairly weighted, it was only to teach the faithful a lesson, training the Christian soul in the way that was proper and efficacious in any particular generation. Theodoret's acknowledgment of God's remarkably retributive qualities in Elisha and Ananias and Sapphira are tempered in his own writings by his perspective that harsher paradigms were needed in those earlier iterations of God's unfolding plan.

Power in immediacy, as championed in retributive hagiographies, became the norm in later Byzantine society. It was not geared toward restoration as much as judgment and punishment. These lie in direct contrast to Origen. He was reluctant to look for God's immediate power in his persecution filled world, and at the same time believed that providence was still at work to train the soul back to unity with God.

In summation, I have used five of the most prominent hagiographical compilations to triangulate a shift in Christian literature toward the retributive. A major factor in this shift is the eventual removal of Origen and the subsequent shift away from language of restoration toward retribution. Allegorical understanding gives way to literal readings and the rise in law forms that mimic these retributive forms as built

¹⁰⁷⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 1, PO 17:9-10.

upon OT and NT literature. This goes on to support the notion of Providence as firmly rooted within the Roman/Byzantine state.

It is a large, but helpful, step to think about how hagiography and Origen helped to usher in the middle ages, so interested in law and retribution, penance and sin. A total reliance on these ideas for later developments would be foolish. To think, however, that they did not significantly influence the broader development of Christian thought and theological development would be negligent.

I propose that the falling out of Origenist theology, and subsequent development of a highly retributive style of hagiography, became a subconscious foundation for later thinking in Christian theology and hagiography. It was a literal reading of scripture coupled with an interpretive strategy that saw God's justice as deeply retributive rather than restorative. The role that hagiography played in this was as provider of tangible narratives with which to connect a theological and scriptural basis that held God as working in the immediate. Without this, these theologies would have stalled in the midst of defeat in battle and the resultant dwindling empire, plague, famine and a host of other factors.

Hagiography provided a venue for the working out of God's providence in the way that a literal reading of scripture proposed possible. On one hand, it allowed for the sustained removal of Origenian ideas. On the other, it doomed Christian theology to a period of history that could not see God as interested in immediately restorative aspects of faith, even though it could envision a God who worked to punish in real time. Can one hear the resonances of Martin Luther in this theology, as he struggled against the devil in life and in death, all the while fearing God's menacing judgment

and retribution?¹⁰⁷⁵ It is left for us to ponder how far the reaches of this theological shift influenced the middle ages and beyond.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

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Appendix A:

Appended stories: In line with Moschos?

Wortley includes a final twenty-four tales that were edited by modern scholars Theodor Nissen and Elpidio Mioni.¹⁰⁷⁶ Wortley notes in his introduction that there is no definitive urtext to reference and so one is left with accepting Jacques Paul Migne's edition in 87:2851-3116, which Wortley uses most heavily, or a later Patrologia Latina edition, 74:119-240 reprinted from Heribert Rosweyde's *Vitae Patrum* t.10, Antwerp 1615. It was based on a Latin edition by Ambrose Traversari (Fra Ambrogio, 1346-1439) and contains access to some Greek texts unknown to the Parisians.¹⁰⁷⁷ Wortley notes that Photios the ninth century Byzantine Patriarch holds Moschos's volume as containing three hundred and four stories.¹⁰⁷⁸ Aside from the manuscript tradition, one could easily see how these stories might be combined or separated to come up with varying numbers of chapters. A simple glance shows chapters sixty-two through sixty-five, and chapters one hundred thirty-one and thirty-two separately deal with the same figures, Abba Stephan and Abba Zachaios of Holy Sion. The chapters are particularly short and could easily have been incorporated into previous ones making for fewer chapters. On the other hand, there are many chapters which contain several different stories about the same figure, and some that are focused on a particular Abbot who then relates

¹⁰⁷⁶ Although Wortley explains that the text contains two hundred and thirty-one stories total, the numbering runs to two hundred and forty-three. He switches from Nissen's work to Mioni at 231, and perhaps there is some reason for his statement of only 231 stories, but he does not indicate what it is.

¹⁰⁷⁷ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, Introduction, xi.

¹⁰⁷⁸ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, Intro., x.

stories about several different figures or several different sayings, as in chapter one hundred forty-four where nine separate sayings or instances are recorded. In both cases the chapters could be split multiple ways, easily yielding three hundred and four chapters, or more. Wortley does not weigh in on the argument for inclusion of Nissen and Mioni's text, but nevertheless includes them at the end of his translation.

At first reading, the argument for inclusion of extraneous chapters does not seem compelling. Wortley even explains in a footnote, "Readers are reminded that the following tales are not found in any of the published texts of John Moschos's work, but that many of them may very well be included in the definitive edition when it appears."¹⁰⁷⁹ The speculation on some final and securely traceable urtext is hopeful at best. Given the wide variety of hagiographical vignettes available to modern scholars, and indeed to ancient scholars like Moschos, it seems an unnecessary problem. John surely had many stories he could have included but chose not to, as best related in his introduction concerning choosing the best from the fields of possible flowers. Moreover, any attempt at associating a particular style, is flouted by John's lack of a clearly defined or implemented program within his work. This is based on the assumption that the leanest text we have in Migne at least approximates Moschos's original compilation. As mentioned above, he swings from the retributive to the reconciliatory, from the harsh to the mild, all the while sidestepping any real attempt at dealing with the debates that were circulating at the time. Any argument for inclusion of a hagiographical story based on similarity to John's work is probably hopeful at best.

The appended stories are deeply retributive, beginning with a tale about Nestorios

arguing with Mary in closed quarters and eventually exclaiming, “I showed you, Mary: you bore a man, and no God!”¹⁰⁸⁰ He is smitten while on the privy, causing his bowels to gush out. The text relates, “the wretch suffered just retribution for his evil counsel and blasphemy.”¹⁰⁸¹ It appears that Arius has been plucked from the story and Nestorios inserted with a few specific changes. The end of the story relates the punishment to a saying in Jeremiah 22:18-19, where it speaks of being “cast out beyond the gates.”¹⁰⁸² The closing line relates, “The wretch brought upon himself a just retribution for his evil counsel and blasphemy.”¹⁰⁸³

Some advice to a brother who was thinking judgmental thoughts of his brothers comes to us in chapter two hundred forty-one. The elder said to the inquiring brother, “Quickly get yourself away from such thoughts and run towards the remembrance of that fearful day. See in your mind’s eye the terrible judgement-seat, the impartial judge, the rivers of fire, those who are being judged before the tribunal and most vehemently scalded in the fire; those impaled on swords, the relentless punishments, the chastisement which knows no end, the moonless night, the outer darkness, the worm which shoots arrows, the unbreakable fetters, the gnashing of teeth, the wailing which cannot be comforted.”¹⁰⁸⁴ This is hardly the restorative model we see in Origen, who took great pains to explain judgment and fire in the afterlife. Origen had been removed from the theological canon with which Moschos was working. “Relentless

¹⁰⁷⁹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, Footnote c. 237, p. 256}

¹⁰⁸⁰ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 220.

¹⁰⁸¹ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 220.

¹⁰⁸² John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 220.

¹⁰⁸³ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 220.

¹⁰⁸⁴ John Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow*, 241.

punishments” and worms which “shoot arrows” were the motivating factors that had replaced closeness to God and regret for sins.