



RECLAIMING THE
CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

THE GREAT TRADITION OF CHRISTIAN THINKING

A STUDENT'S GUIDE

David S. Dockery &
Timothy George

Series Editor: David S. Dockery

The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student's Guide

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SERIES PREFACE

RECLAIMING THE CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

The Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition series is designed to provide an overview of the distinctive way the church has read the Bible, formulated doctrine, provided education, and engaged the culture. The contributors to this series all agree that personal faith and genuine Christian piety are essential for the life of Christ followers and for the church. These contributors also believe that helping others recognize the importance of serious thinking about God, Scripture, and the world needs a renewed emphasis at this time in order that the truth claims of the Christian faith can be passed along from one generation to the next. The study guides in this series will enable us to see afresh how the Christian faith shapes how we live, how we think, how we write books, how we govern society, and how we relate to one another in our churches and social structures. The richness of the Christian intellectual tradition provides guidance for the complex challenges that believers face in this world.

This series is particularly designed for Christian students and others associated with college and university campuses, including faculty, staff, trustees, and other various constituents. The contributors to the series will explore how the Bible has been interpreted in the history of the church, as well as how theology has been formulated. They will ask: How does the Christian faith influence our understanding of culture, literature, philosophy, government, beauty, art, or work? How does the Christian intellectual tradition help us understand truth? How does the Christian intellectual tradition shape our approach to education? We believe that this series is not only timely but that it meets an important need, because the secular culture in which we now find ourselves is, at

best, indifferent to the Christian faith, and the Christian world—at least in its more popular forms—tends to be confused about the beliefs, heritage, and tradition associated with the Christian faith.

At the heart of this work is the challenge to prepare a generation of Christians to think Christianly, to engage the academy and the culture, and to serve church and society. We believe that both the breadth and the depth of the Christian intellectual tradition need to be reclaimed, revitalized, renewed, and revived for us to carry forward this work. These study guides will seek to provide a framework to help introduce students to the great tradition of Christian thinking, seeking to highlight its importance for understanding the world, its significance for serving both church and society, and its application for Christian thinking and learning. The series is a starting point for exploring important ideas and issues such as truth, meaning, beauty, and justice.

We trust that the series will help introduce readers to the apostles, church fathers, Reformers, philosophers, theologians, historians, and a wide variety of other significant thinkers. In addition to well-known leaders such as Clement, Origen, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Jonathan Edwards, readers will be pointed to William Wilberforce, G. K. Chesterton, T. S. Eliot, Dorothy Sayers, C. S. Lewis, Johann Sebastian Bach, Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler, George Washington Carver, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Michael Polanyi, Henry Luke Orombi, and many others. In doing so, we hope to introduce those who throughout history have demonstrated that it is indeed possible to be serious about the life of the mind while simultaneously being deeply committed Christians. These efforts to strengthen serious Christian thinking and scholarship will not be limited to the study of theology, scriptural interpretation, or philosophy, even though these areas provide the framework for understanding the Christian faith for all other areas of exploration. In order for us to reclaim and advance the Christian intellectual tradition, we must have some

understanding of the tradition itself. The volumes in this series will seek to explore this tradition and its application for our twenty-first-century world. Each volume contains a glossary, study questions, and a list of resources for further study, which we trust will provide helpful guidance for our readers.

I am deeply grateful to the series editorial committee: Timothy George, John Woodbridge, Michael Wilkins, Niel Nielson, Philip Ryken, and Hunter Baker. Each of these colleagues joins me in thanking our various contributors for their fine work. We all express our appreciation to Justin Taylor, Jill Carter, Allan Fisher, Lane Dennis, and the Crossway team for their enthusiastic support for the project. We offer the project with the hope that students will be helped, faculty and Christian leaders will be encouraged, institutions will be strengthened, and churches will be built up, and, ultimately, that God will be glorified.

Soli Deo Gloria
David S. Dockery,
Series Editor



THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT TRADITION

THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

There can be no Christian intellectual life without reference to the writings of the prophets and evangelists, the doctrines of the church fathers, the conceptual niceties of the scholastics, the language of the liturgy, the songs of the poets and hymn writers, the exploits of the martyrs, and the holy tales of the saints.

Robert L. Wilken, "The Christian Intellectual Tradition," *First Things* (1991)

All that is meant by tradition, then, is the faithful handing down from generation to generation of scripture interpretation consensually received worldwide and cross-culturally through two millennia.

Thomas C. Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy* (2003)

The calendars at the universities where we serve are filled with special events and activities, including dinners, banquets, receptions, and open-house gatherings. One of the privileges that is ours at the beginning of each semester is to invite new students to our homes, where we have opportunity to meet these young men and women and introduce them to other campus leaders. From these introductions, new relationships are started, and mentoring opportunities begin. At other times during the year, we open our homes for a seasonal open house, a gathering of faculty, staff, friends, donors, and trustees. On this occasion it is a treat to welcome them and introduce trustees to faculty, and staff to friends from the community.

A joyful moment occurs for us when an interesting conversation develops and a new friendship is formed. Those examples seem to me to symbolize and demonstrate what is involved in the experience of reclaiming the Christian intellectual tradition.

This book and the books to follow in this series, in some way, serve as hosts and hostesses to a two-thousand-year-old open house. We want to invite readers to join us in this conversation as we introduce Augustine and Clement and Alexandria, Erasmus and Luther, Lewis, Bach, Kepler, and Chesterton. We are hopeful that readers will join us in this enormously rich and immense conversation with people from different places and periods of times.

The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking will introduce readers to the distinctive way that Christians through the years have read the Bible, formulated doctrine, provided education, and engaged the culture. At the heart of this volume and others in the series is the challenge to prepare a generation of Christians to think Christianly, to engage the academy and the culture, and to serve church and society. We believe that both the breadth and the depth of the Christian intellectual tradition need to be reclaimed, revitalized, renewed, and revived to carry forward this work. We will seek to provide a framework to help introduce students to the great tradition of Christian thinking, seeking to highlight its importance for understanding the world, its significance for serving both church and society, and its application for Christian thinking and learning, which reflects the heart of Christian higher education. We believe that insights gained from the Christian intellectual tradition will provide guidance for many of the complex challenges that Christ followers face in this world.

In his 1986 autobiographical work, *Confessions of a Theologian*, Carl F. H. Henry, dean of twentieth-century American evangelical theologians, lamented that several Christian colleges and universities had started to veer away from the centrality of their work, by and large giving up the cognitive focus on Christian thought in

favor of Christian piety and activism. While we applaud all faithful efforts of Christian piety and activism, we believe Christian higher education has a distinctive role to play as the academic arm of the kingdom of God. We need not be forced to choose between head, heart, and hands while recognizing the important role of Christian higher education in engaging the great thinkers and ideas of history in order to frame our thoughts and responses to the issues of our day. It may well be that there is some connection with Henry's observation and that of the respondents to the 2011 survey of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. More than nine out of ten of the 2,200 Christian leaders in the survey prioritized secular thinking as the major threat to the Christian movement around the world in the twenty-first century.

In 1994 Douglas Sloan published a most insightful volume called *Faith and Knowledge* in which he explored the path by which faith and knowledge have come to be treated as two entirely separate spheres of activity in the modern university. He traces the developments in academic circles over the past two hundred years that have led most men and women to envision faith as essentially a private matter, leaving Christianity's truth claims inaccessible to, or impenetrable by, rational knowledge. For two thousand years, the large majority of Christians have considered the truths of the Christian faith to be foundational for human flourishing and for a right relationship with God. Most universities in Europe and North America, however, now see the work of discovering and communicating knowledge as something completely separated from any connection to the Christian faith, even though many of these academic institutions can trace their beginning days to a Christian heritage. Those who follow in these Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment trajectories have started to raise additional questions regarding these issues.

The result, according to Sloan's vivid account, reflects the sad perspective held by many modern people, including many

Christians, that human knowledge and faith are basically disconnected, functioning in two separate spheres. Thus, academic contexts of influence tend to exist without reference to matters of faith. Similarly, and most unfortunately, many Christians and Christian institutions live with a concept of faith that is separate from and devoid of any sense of cognitive content.

While the accounts from the Pew Forum, Douglas Sloan, and Carl Henry have no obvious recognizable connections and no chronological affinities, they all, nevertheless, are obviously related by the problem of the faith/knowledge or faith/reason dichotomy. If faith is understood only in pious or activist terms, separating head from heart and hands, then we lack the framework to engage the challenging ideas and issues of our time within a Christian vantage point.

What is needed is a way to explore these matters by “thinking in Christian categories,” to borrow a phrase from T. S. Eliot. Douglas Sloan’s work clearly reveals the widely held perspective that knowledge is a cognitive matter, while faith is not. The result is what George Marsden insightfully portrayed as higher education’s loss of the soul in its trajectory toward “established nonbelief.” We believe that an attempt to reclaim and advance the Christian intellectual tradition is a first step toward helping churches, Christian organizations, and Christian institutions of higher education in the twenty-first century from following that same trajectory. It is to the exploration of this tradition that we now turn our attention.¹

¹See Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco: Word, 1986); Douglas Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994); and also the June 2011 report from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. In addition, please see T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1940); and George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Similar concepts can be found in Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994); and his updated thoughts on these matters in *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011). As we move forward with our observations regarding the development of these thoughts in the first two chapters of this volume, much of the material has been adapted from David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992).

APOSTOLIC GUIDANCE

The apostle Paul, writing to the church at Thessalonica, urged the followers of Jesus Christ to “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thess. 2:15). Similarly, the apostle exhorted Timothy, his apostolic legate, to “keep . . . the pattern of . . . teaching” (2 Tim. 1:13 NIV). The history of Christianity is best understood as a chain of memory. Our effort in this study guide and in this entire series is to introduce our readers to the great tradition of Christian thinking, which reflects the recognition that we need to reconnect aspects of that memory chain.

Wherever the Christian faith has been found, there has been a close association with the written Word of God, with books, education, and learning. Studying and interpreting the Bible became natural for members of the early Christian community, having inherited the practice from late Judaism. Virginia Stem Owens has suggested that studying literature developed from the practice of studying and interpreting the Bible:

We in fact got the whole idea of literature as something to be taught and studied because we had already developed the habit with the Bible, the central text of Western civilization. At least ever since that category of teachers called rabbis sprang up in the Midrash, a collection of rabbinical commentary on the Hebrew scripture, we have been gnawing away at texts, chewing the gristle, sucking the marrow from the bones that are words.²

The Christian intellectual tradition has its roots in the interpretation of Holy Scripture. From the church’s earliest days, Christians inherited the approaches to biblical interpretation found in the writings of both intertestamental Judaism and the contemporary Graeco-Roman world. From this dual heritage, there is an observable continuity with the hermeneutical methods

²Virginia Stem Owens, “Fiction and the Bible,” *Reformed Journal* (July 1988): 12–15.

of the rabbis and Philo as well as of the followers of Plato and Aristotle. Yet, a discontinuity is also clearly evident as early Christianity established its own uniqueness by separating itself from Judaism and the surrounding Graeco-Roman religions.

BUILDING ON JEWISH TRADITION

Jewish interpreters, no matter how diverse their perspectives, found agreement on several points. First, they believed in the divine inspiration of Scripture. Second, they affirmed that the Torah contained the truth of God for the guidance of humanity. The biblical texts for the Jews of the first century were understood to be extremely rich in content and pregnant with plural meanings. Third, Jewish interpreters, because of their view that the biblical texts contained many meanings, considered both the plain or literal meaning and various implied meanings. Lastly, they maintained that the purpose of all interpretation involved translating the words of God into the lives of people, thus making them relevant for men and women in their own particular situations.

Building on these common commitments, the New Testament writers, by the use of numerous themes, images, and motifs, emphasized that the Scriptures find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The note of Philip's jubilant words, "We have found him" (John 1:45), was echoed by the Gospel writers as the way to interpret the Old Testament events, pictures, and ideas. The teachings of Jesus and the interpretive models of the apostles became the direct source for the trajectory that would become the Christian intellectual tradition.

THE BIBLE AS PRIMARY SOURCE FOR SHAPING THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

From the earliest days of Christian history, Christians have used the Bible in various ways. This rich heritage has shaped the

Christian tradition in both individual and corporate practices. Some of these include:

- 1) the Bible as a source for information and understanding of life;
- 2) the Bible as a guide for worship;
- 3) the Bible as a wellspring to formulate Christian liturgy;
- 4) the Bible as a primary source for the formulation of theology;
- 5) the Bible as a text for preaching or teaching;
- 6) the Bible as a guide for pastoral care;
- 7) the Bible as the foundation for spiritual formation; and
- 8) the Bible as the model for literary and aesthetic enjoyment.

Beginning in the second century, some of these uses of the Bible started to shape the early stages of the Christian intellectual tradition, which was shaped by a shared faith in the uniqueness and significance of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

LEARNING FROM THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS, THE SCHOOLS OF ALEXANDRIA AND ANTIOCH

At the close of the apostolic age, some marked changes began to occur. Primarily, the New Testament books were in the process of being recognized as Scripture. The relation of the New Testament to the Old Testament was a key question for the church in the second and third centuries. Marcion (ca. 85–160) and the Gnostics abandoned the Old Testament as a Christian book and re-created certain New Testament texts to suit themselves. Orthodox Christian leaders at this time focused on the need to counter the Gnostic proposal that the God of the Old Testament was incompatible with the God revealed in the New Testament. As texts were challenged, altered, and even abandoned, the church had to demonstrate on biblical grounds that the same God was revealed in both Testaments and that, therefore, the church should not abandon the Old Testament. We will amplify the church's response to Marcion in chapter 3.

The church's preaching understood the Old Testament Scripture in terms of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. This was evidenced in both the early Christians' attitude toward and reading of the Old Testament. They regarded the law and the prophets as well as the events and worship of Israel as part of the Christian tradition because they believed that these all testified to Jesus Christ. Paul, for example, in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, insisted that everything regarding Christ took place "in accordance with the Scriptures."

In many ways, the beginnings of the Christian intellectual tradition can be traced to the conversation between Philip and the Ethiopian, recorded in Acts 8. In the role of teacher, Philip asked the Ethiopian, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (v. 30). We hear this answer in verse 31: "How can I, unless someone guides me?" For nearly two thousand years, the search for understanding and guidance and the resulting explanations have continued in an ongoing conversation among the saints, represented by first-century Christ followers, third-century Neoplatonist thinkers, fourth-century theologians wrestling with the meaning of the Holy Trinity, eighth-century Irish missionaries, thirteenth-century Schoolmen, sixteenth-century Reformers, eighteenth-century pastor-theologian-philosophers, and twenty-first-century believers in the southern hemisphere. While diverse voices and varied emphases have obviously been offered, the conversation has continued with the hope of better articulating the confession of "one Lord," and "one faith" described by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:5.

As the church moved into the second century, following the death of the apostles, greater attention was given to the moral and ethical instruction of believers. As a result, what might be called a rather functional and practical reading of Scripture came to characterize the works of Clement of Rome (d. ca. 100) and Ignatius (d. ca. 117). Apart from the *Didache* (ca. 100–120), which was a teaching manual, and the *Shepherd of Hermas* (ca. 120–150), which

was more apocalyptic, the majority of works in the early decades of the second century were quite practical in their orientation.

During the latter half of the second century, the rise of heresies became so widespread that they provoked in the church at large a response that was to be of enormous significance for the history of Christian thought. The challenges involved: (1) a need to answer the Gnostics, demonstrating the continuity between the Testaments; (2) a need to answer the Montanists by showing the development, as well as the cessation, of revelation; and (3) a need to convince the Judaizers within Christianity, as well as Judaism in general, of the discontinuity of the two Testaments. The primary responses were the philosophical approaches of Justin Martyr (d. 165) and the more theological perspectives of Irenaeus (d. ca. 202) and Tertullian (d. ca. 220).

JUSTIN MARTYR

For Justin Martyr, both general and special revelation were the outgrowth of the *Logos*. Pagan philosophers, he claimed, possessed some aspect of the *Logos*, but Jesus was and is the true *Logos*, and the Bible contains the written residue of the *Logos*. Justin brilliantly linked the Old Testament to the New, the very antithesis of both Judaism and Marcionism, or what some refer to as Marcionite Gnosticism. Marcion's total rejection of the Old Testament was the exact opposite of Justin's commitment to the continuity of the Testaments. Drawing on the messianic prophecies from the Jewish tradition, Justin argued that Jesus clearly was the expected Messiah who fulfilled all of the Old Testament Scriptures literally or typologically. Thus Justin established his apologetic method on proof from prophecy. His writings, primarily his *Dialogue with Trypho*, served as a gold mine of information on second-century Christianity. In the *Dialogue*, Justin described his philosophical pilgrimage. He first attached himself to a stoic philosopher, and then he studied with a shrewd Peripatetic. He

later followed a celebrated Pythagorean, and finally he became a Platonist.³

It should be noted that Justin did not consider his turn to Christianity to be merely a next step in his journey. Justin did not just use Greek philosophy; he passed judgment on it. Only if the philosophical teaching was found to be in accord with Christian teaching did Justin acknowledge the philosophy as true.⁴ The *Dialogue* shows how Justin developed a Christian apologetic faithful to the early Christian creed or confession commonly referred to as “the rule of faith” (something similar to the Apostles’ Creed), how he engaged the philosophers of his day, and how he interpreted the biblical texts. Since the time of Justin, the dialogue between faith and reason, between faith and culture, has reflected two essential characteristics of the Christian intellectual heritage: (1) faith seeks understanding; and (2) intellectual inquiry invites a response of faith.

IRENÆUS AND TERTULLIAN

The church’s estimate of its theological norms underwent certain adjustments in the final decades of the second century. The distinction between Scripture and the church’s living tradition, as coordinated instruments in conveying the apostolic testimony, became more clearly appreciated, and a growing importance, if not a primacy, began to be attached to the latter.⁵ This development resulted from the great struggle between orthodoxy and the Gnostic heretics. This developing, more mature position was exemplified, with minor differences, in the writings of Irenaeus

³Robert M. Grant, “Aristotle and the Conversion of Justin,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1956): 246–48; Oscar S. Karsaune, “The Conversion of Justin Martyr,” *Studia Theologica* 30 (1976): 53–74.

⁴So claimed Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 20; Robert Wilken, “Toward a Social Interpretation of Early Christian Apologetics,” *Church History* 39 (1970): 437–58.

⁵See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 35–41.

and Tertullian at the end of the second century. Rowan A. Greer has incisively and helpfully summarized this period:

- 1) A Christian Bible was the product of the formative period of early Christianity (30–180). Before Irenaeus, we find the church struggling to define its Scriptures and to come to terms with their interpretation, but it was only by the end of the second century that the diversity of earliest Christianity had yielded to an ecumenical unity. The emergence of a Christian Bible became a central feature of that unity.
- 2) Basic to the task of the formative period was the transformation of the Hebrew Scriptures so that they served as a witness to Christ.
- 3) With Irenaeus we find the first clear evidence of a Christian Bible and also a framework of interpretation in what is often referred to as the church's rule of faith. The rule of faith, as a kind of creed or confessional statement, outlined the theological story that found its focus in the incarnate Lord.⁶

The authority of the church, the canon, and the church's faith had reached new heights by the beginning of the third century, but the inroads of Christian creativity were in infantile stages. We now turn to the creative genius of the Alexandrians, particularly the work of Origen (185–254). The third century saw the rise of schools, intertwined with classical learning, science, philosophy, and centers of art. The Christian intellectual tradition shaped by serious biblical interpretation began to develop and mature in the Schools of Alexandria and Antioch.

THE ALEXANDRIANS

Origen, born in Egypt, studied under Clement (ca. 150–215) in the School of Alexandria. He followed Clement, who will receive attention in chapter 5, as the leader and primary teacher in this

⁶James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 111–12.

school, a position he held for twenty-eight years while pursuing an ascetic and extremely pious life.

Origen's teaching reflected his love for and nurture of the individual Christians under his care. Origen's work was greatly influenced by the Neoplatonist thought he had learned from the father of Neoplatonic philosophy, Ammonius Saccus. Ultimately, Origen was a churchman who lived with the tension of his Neoplatonist philosophy, his creative biblical interpretation, and his commitment to the church's rule of faith. Origen maintained that biblical interpretation, theological formation, and philosophical engagement must be understood according to the rule of faith, which probably included the following items:

- 1) *A doctrine of God.* There is one God, the Father, who created the universe and governs it by providence. Worship is due to God alone, who gave the law to the Jews and sent his son Jesus Christ to redeem the world.
- 2) *A doctrine of Christ.* Jesus Christ, the Messiah whom the Old Testament foretold, was a man born of Mary, who as a virgin miraculously conceived him. In Palestine Jesus taught and performed miracles, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, and was buried. He descended into hell to liberate the righteous dead. He rose from the dead, appeared to his disciples, and ascended into heaven, where he reigns with God the Father. Christ will return to judge the living and the newly resurrected dead. Jesus Christ is divine and hence worthy of worship but not identical with God the Father.
- 3) *A doctrine of the Spirit.* God's Spirit inspired the prophets and apostles who wrote the Bible and continues to enliven believers.
- 4) *A doctrine of spiritual beings.* There are rational beings not confined, as we are, to earthly bodies. Some are angels who worship God and carry out God's commands. Others are demons—probably fallen angels—who follow the commands of Satan, their prince. The demons disguise themselves as gods, thereby deceiving the pagans into sustaining them with sacrifices, even as they seek to entice believers into heresy and sin.

- 5) *A doctrine of last things.* At the end of time, God will destroy the world he made. When this happens all the dead will resume their bodies, and Christ will then welcome the righteous into everlasting happiness and condemn the wicked, along with Satan and the demons, to everlasting torment.⁷

Origen's version of the rule of faith provided the third-century church with a response to the heterodox proposals from Marcion and the Gnostics. As Albert Outler has noted, Origen attempted deliberately in his articulation of the rule of faith to sum up all doctrinal points on which there was general agreement in the church.⁸ Origen clearly distinguished between what he designated as "necessary" doctrines, which the apostles "delivered" in plainest terms to all believers, and other doctrines. These necessary doctrines corresponded to the threefold baptismal formula of Matthew 28. Within Origen's discussion of these doctrines can be found all that is essential to the rule of faith as defined by the usage of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, and which even had traces in *1 Clement* (often referred to as Clement of Rome).

In *1 Clement*, however, the essentials of the rule of faith were not as systematized as in Origen's preface to *First Principles*. An obvious development and expansion of both the Christian intellectual tradition and the church's doctrinal expression took place between the time of *1 Clement* and Origen. The emergence of Marcion and succeeding Gnostics can account for this development as the church responded more vigorously with each generation to the challenges raised against Christian orthodoxy. We will explore these challenges in more detail in chapter 3.

⁷See Joseph Wilson Trigg, *The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), 13–14.

⁸See Albert C. Outler, "Origen and the *Regula Fidei*," *Church History* 8 (1939): 212–21; see also P. M. O'Clérigh, "The Meaning of Dogma in Origen," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition, I: The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, ed. J. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 201–16; and H. E. W. Turner, *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption: A Study of the Development of Doctrine During the First Five Centuries* (London: Mowbray, 1952).

The challenges to the rule of faith in the fourth century needed a more solid solution than the creative legacy of Origen could fully provide. Because the Gnostic systems made Christ an intermediary rather than a creator, thus something less than God and still different from humanity, the rule of faith had to be expounded more clearly. By the end of the third century, the issues needed further definition and clarification.⁹ The biblical realism of this period tended to accentuate the historical and human aspects of Jesus, though his heavenly origin was not denied.¹⁰

During this time Arius (d. 336) attempted to maintain monotheism by asserting that Jesus, as God's Son, was lower than God the Father and indeed owed his existence to the Father's decision to produce the created order. This led to the Arian controversy, in which John 14:28, "The Father is greater than I," became a battleground text. Arianism was condemned at the Council of Nicaea (325), but the controversy continued into the next century until the Council of Chalcedon (451).¹¹

It was Athanasius (296–373), the leading opponent of Arius, who argued that theological talk about the nature of God could proceed only by the way of analogy. The crux of the debate focused around the description of Jesus as *homoousios* (meaning "of one nature or substance"), which allowed a proper differentiation between Jesus and the Father without necessitating an Arian subordinationism. The Arians had alternatively suggested *homoiousios* (meaning "of a similar nature or substance").

Arianism was declared heretical at the Council of Nicaea, with Athanasius defending his orthodox view by appealing to

⁹See Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition, vol. 1: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1974), 167–80.

¹⁰See R. V. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies: A Study in the Christological Thought of the Schools of Alexandria and Antioch in the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: SPCK, 1954), who notes that the two schools could not see they were contending for the same theological principles. What divided them was their philosophical and ecclesiastical differences.

¹¹See the informative discussion in Gerald L. Bray, *Creeeds, Councils, and Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 92–171.

the theological meaning of Scripture. Athanasius supported the idea of “one substance” (*homoousios*) as conveyed in Scripture in John 1:18; 6:46; 8:42; 10:30; and 14:10, even though the specific word, *homoousios*, is not found in Scripture.¹² The tensions of the fourth-century debates created opportunities for philosophical influences, which at times overshadowed and influenced the interpretation of Scripture. But as R. P. C. Hanson has concluded, “It is hard to deny that the doctrine of Athanasius was more faithful to the New Testament account of the significance of Jesus Christ than that of the Arians, whose fundamental trouble, one suspects, was that they could not believe that God really has communicated himself in Christ.”¹³

The writings of Athanasius have come to be regarded as the essential and definitive statements on the key Christological controversies of the time. Athanasius shaped the church’s understanding of the expanding rule of faith, which became the framework for the developing Christian intellectual tradition. The brilliant fourth-century theologian greatly influenced the three great Cappadocian fathers: Basil of Caesarea (ca. 329–379), his friend Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330–389), and his brother Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–395). In this splendid trio, orthodox statements about Jesus Christ and the Trinitarian God reached their climax. Because of the Christological debates in the fourth and fifth centuries, church leaders became more theologically oriented in their approach to reading Scripture. The consistent articulation of the church’s orthodox faith, coupled with pastoral concerns for the edification of the faithful, provided norms for the shaping and advancement of the Christian intellectual tradition.

¹²See Craig A. Blasing, *Athanasius* (Lanham, MD: University Press, 1992); David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1984), 98–109; Peter J. Leithart, *Athanasius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

¹³R. P. C. Hanson, “Biblical Exegesis in the Early Church,” *Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 1:453; see Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 4 vols. (repr. Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1984), 3:37–39.

THE ANTIOCHENES: AN IMPORTANT ADVANCEMENT IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

In order to describe the work of the School of Antioch in biblical interpretation, we will concentrate on Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428) and John Chrysostom (354–407), particularly the influence of Aristotelian thought and the place of typological interpretation in their approach to reading the Bible. While it can certainly be said that all Christian theology during this period was based on the interpretation of Scripture, especially was this the case for Theodore.¹⁴

Theodore's method of biblical interpretation was the purest representation of Antiochene hermeneutics. Theodore was the first to treat the Psalms historically and systematically while treating the Gospel narratives factually, paying attention to the particulars of transition and to the minutiae of grammar and punctuation. His approach can be described as "anti-allegorical," rejecting interpretations that denied the historical reality of what the scriptural text affirmed. Instead of an allegorical approach, Theodore and the Antiochenes, as Rowan A. Greer has suggested, preferred typological interpretation as the normative method for understanding the Old Testament texts.¹⁵

The great value of allegorical interpretation for the Alexandrians was that it made possible a theologically unified interpretation of the Bible as a whole. Theodore, attempting to present a unified theological exposition, viewed the Bible as a record of the historical development of the divine redemptive plan. Ultimately, this history must be understood from the perspective of the overall purposes of God to provide the setting of God's gracious act in Christ Jesus, by which the new age of salvation was realized. Theodore, the dedicated interpreter and teacher, was joined in his efforts by the gifted preacher John Chrysostom.

¹⁴See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 76–77.

¹⁵See Rowan A. Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia* (London: Faith, 1961), 94.

John Chrysostom gave primary attention to the literal, grammatical, and historical interpretation of Scripture. Like others in the Antiochene tradition, he was influenced by Aristotelian philosophy. Aristotle seemed more down to earth when compared to Plato's more other-worldly views. Chrysostom, more than his Alexandrian predecessors, was aware of the human factor in Scripture and sought to do justice to the dual authorship of biblical revelation. Yet, he maintained that the Bible spoke with a unified voice.

Chrysostom, like Theodore and other Antiochene representatives, emphasized the historical meaning of the biblical text. While never articulating his approach in these words, it seems he was attempting to discover the intended meaning of the biblical author. Chrysostom rejected crudely literal interpretations of the Bible from both the Antiochene laity and the criticisms of the Alexandrians. He was cautious that no figurative expression in the Bible be misunderstood from either a too literal or a too fanciful interpretation.¹⁶

For Chrysostom, theology and hermeneutics were not theoretical exercises, but practical and pastoral. It is generally true that the Alexandrians looked for both a literal and allegorical meaning in Scripture, and the Antiochenes found a more historical and typological sense. The Alexandrians looked to the rule of faith, mystical interpretation, and authority as sources for shaping the Christian intellectual tradition. The Antiochenes looked to reason and historical development of Scripture as the focus for understanding Christian thought. These approaches set the stage for the widely influential and shaping work of Augustine.

¹⁶See Stephen Neill, *Chrysostom and His Message* (New York: Association, 1963); Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and His Time*, trans. M. Gonzaga, 2 vols. (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1959); and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Preaching of Chrysostom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).

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