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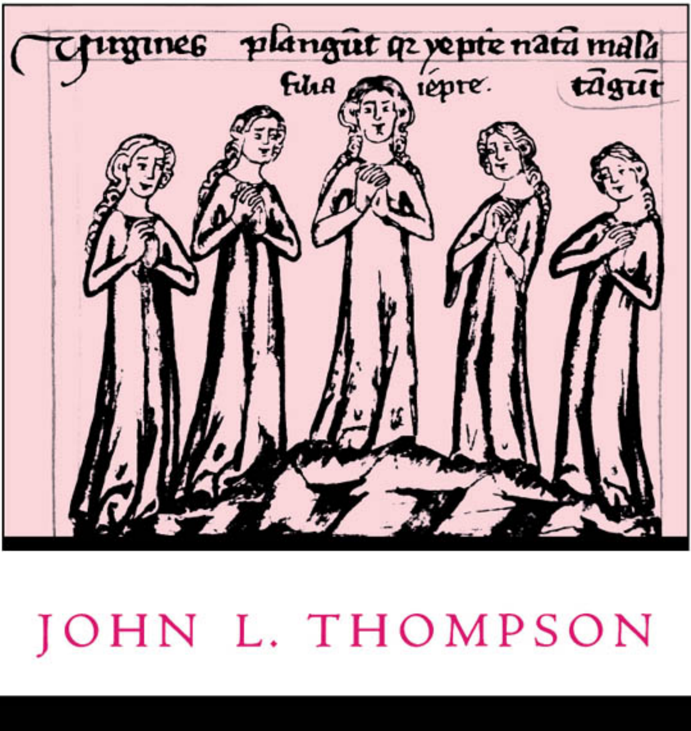
Writing the Wrongs

Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation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JOHN L. THOMPSON

Writing the Wrongs

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

For Marianne

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Acknowledgments

At the conclusion of a long project, there are innumerable loose ends to tie up on the way to publication. This one is the most agreeable—to look back over the journey and take stock of debts incurred and support received from institutions, colleagues, friends, and family.

First, the institutions. I am not a fast writer, or a fast much of anything. I am therefore especially grateful for institutional support that gave me time off from my faculty responsibilities, enabling me to think linear thoughts for whole days at a time. The Pew Evangelical Scholars Program funded a leave for 1994–95; a Lilly Faculty Fellowship extended my earned sabbatical in 1997–98; and the generous sabbatical policy of Fuller Theological Seminary contributed additional study time.

Scholars cannot work without libraries, so it is fitting that I thank first of all John Dickason and the staff of McAlister Library at Fuller Seminary, who obtained numerous obscure sources (including microforms and subscriptions to electronic resources) that made it possible to research European intellectual history in sunny Southern California. Thanks are also due to the staff of the Huntington Library in San Marino, California; to the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids; and to Terrance Dinovo and the Lutheran Brotherhood Library at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, which loaned numerous sets of microfiche sources freely and promptly.

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Various extracts from this book were read at a number of scholarly meetings, including parts of chapters 1 through 3 at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in 1994, 1995, and 1996; at the American Society of Church History in 1997; and at the Seventh International Congress for Calvin Research (Seoul) in 1998. Parts of those presentations later appeared in *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought* and in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. I owe a word of thanks to my respondents at these sessions, including Craig Farmer, John Farthing, Gerald Hobbs, Mickey Mattox, Elsie McKee, Barbara Pitkin, David Steinmetz, and Timothy Wengert, all of whom are far more than mere respondents, but also colleagues and treasured friends.

My work benefited from the generosity of other scholars, too. Robert Hill advised me on reading Chrysostom, as well as Pseudo-Chrysostom, and Irena Backus further informed me about the probable career of Pseudo-Chrysostom in various sixteenth-century editions. David Hunter helped me interpret some of Ambrosiaster's laconic prose. Arthur Holder and Michael Gorman apprised me of the relationship between Pseudo-Bede and Rabanus. Bernie Rabenstein and Edward M. Cook of Hebrew Union College verified references to David Kimhi in the great rabbinic Bibles of the early sixteenth century, and Stephen Burnett shared his fiche copy of the Pagnini Bible. Max Engammare allowed me to read one of Calvin's sermons on Genesis in advance of the appearance of the critical text in the *Supplementa Calviniana*, while Tony Lane was of inestimable service in discussing Calvin's sources.

Thanks are due also to other friends and sometime students, including J. Ted Blakley, who lovingly retouched the illustration of Jephthah's daughter; Cathy Eskew, who commented on my preliminary draft; and Diana Bailey, who checked page proofs. The most tedious details were addressed by my graduate assistant, Brian Ebersole, who must have thought he'd joined the Red-Headed League of Arthur Conan Doyle, for all the strange and actuarial tasks I pressed upon him, including paging through every leaf in the eighteen Migne volumes on Chrysostom, counting references to Genesis and Judges in a dozen or so volumes of Schneyer and Stegmüller, and checking notes and bibliography.

Finally, there are other important factors deserving of recognition. Two in particular exerted great influence over the pace of my work. I have already mentioned grants from the Pew and Lilly Foundations that probably hastened the appearance of this book by, oh, a decade or so. However, I must confess that the book was then delayed by maybe a year or two by the regular interruption of vastly more important matters. These were usually presented by my daughters, Allison and Annelise, in the form of urgent homework assistance, vital walks to school, crucial bicycle rides, the woefully needed renovation of a doll house, major construction work on the train set, soccer games in the front yard (mostly, they won), and, most important of all, the indispensable half hour of bedtime stories. That this book should be both so hastened and so delayed surely argues for the goodness of God, but I am grateful for these delays and for the growing companionship of these young women above all.

Writing a book can remind one of other sorts of debts, too. Spending several years intermittently reading and writing about women of the Old Testament, I inevitably came to think about a number of women who have shaped the course of my own life and faith, usually more profoundly than I appreciated at the time. They include Tillie Thompson and Tenia Lundberg; Jane Lundberg Thompson; Carol Korsmo and Linda Fallstrom; Katey Finney Barker, Janie Baldwin Baker, Lynne Mitchell Baab, Suzanne Hall Shelton, and Anita Dawkins; Mimi Dixon and Cathy Fuller; Libbie Patterson; and Mary Meye. Writing a book might seem like an odd way to say thanks and give honor to those who deserve such things, but I hope those who read their names here will know that I have not forgotten their friendship, wisdom, guidance, or love.

For the inspiration of this study, however, no one is more to be thanked than my wife and colleague, Marianne Meye Thompson. In April of 1993, at a restaurant in Pasadena, we discussed how I might study and bring to print the ways culture and mores can disrupt the nicest of exegetical theories, and she it was who derailed my intention to study the history of the interpretation of 1 Corinthians by suggesting a monograph focusing on the texts of terror. For that, and for years of academic collaboration, for the continued joys of shared parenting, for a mutual delight in creation and culture, and for service yoked together to the church, I am grateful. Unlike so many self-assured writers, both inside and outside of Christendom today, I would not claim to understand what it necessarily means to be male or female in modern (or postmodern) American culture; but I do believe I know what it means to share one's life and love with another mortal soul, and to behold in her the image, love, and grace of God. It is to Marianne that this book is dedicated.

La Cañada, California *J.L.T.*
May 1, 2000

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Contents

Abbreviations xiii

Introduction: Reading the Silences of Scripture 3

1 Hagar: Abraham's Wife and Exile 17

2 Jephthah's Daughter and Sacrifice 100

3 Four Expendable Women 179

Conclusion: Reading Scripture in the Presence of the Past 222

Bibliography 255

Index of Biblical Citations 273

Index of Biblical Commentators 275

Index of Modern Authors 279

Subject Index 283

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Abbreviations

ANF	*The Ante-Nicene Fathers.* 10 vols. Buffalo and Edinburgh, 1885–96, but frequently reprinted.
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis. Turnhout: Brepols, 1966–. CCCM references have been obtained mostly via the *Cetedoc Library of Christian Latin Texts* CD-ROM (third edition; Brepols, 1996), which often cites line number in lieu of printed page number.
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–.
CHB	*Cambridge History of the Bible.* 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963–70.
CNTC	Calvin's New Testament Commentaries. 12 vols. Ed. D. W. and T. F. Torrance. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959–72.
CO	*Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia.* 59 vols. Corpus Reformatorum, vols. 29–88. Ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss. Brunswick and Berlin, 1863–1900.
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. 85 vols. Vienna, 1866–.
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Paris, Louvain, 1903–.
CTS	Calvin Translation Society edition of Calvin's commentaries. 46 vols. Edinburgh, 1843–55. Frequently reprinted but variously bound; volume numbers cited here are relative to specific commentaries and not to the entire set.
EEC	*Encyclopedia of the Early Church.* 2 vols., continuously paginated. Ed. Angelo Di Berardino. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
ET	English translation
FC	The Fathers of the Church. 102 vols. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1947–.
LCC	Library of Christain Classics. 26 vols. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1952–69.
LCL	Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Volume numbers cited refer to collections of individual authors.

LW	*Luther's Works* [= "American Edition"]. 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia; and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–86.
NPNF	*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. 28 vols. In two series, denoted as NPNF and NPNF^2. New York: 1886–1900, but frequently reprinted.
ODCC^3	*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Third edition. Ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
OER	*Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*. 4 vols. Ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
OS	*Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta*. 5 vols. Ed. P. Barth and W. Niesel. Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1970–74.
OTP	*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 vols. Ed. James H. Charlesworth. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1985.
PG	Patrologia Graeca. 168 vols. Ed. J.-P. Migne. Paris, 1857–66.
PL	Patrologia Latina. 221 vols. Ed. J.-P. Migne. Paris, 1844–55.
Quasten	Johannes Quasten. *Patrology*. 4 vols. Reprint ed. Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1983–86. Vol. 4 ed. Angelo Di Berardino.
SC	Sources Chrétiennes. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1941–.
WA	D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe. 66 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883–1987.
WADB	D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Deutsche Bibel. 12 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1906–61.
WATR	D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Tischreden. 6 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1912–21.
ZSW	Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke. 14 vols. Corpus Reformatorum, vols. 88–101. Ed. E. Egli et al. Berlin-Leipzig-Zürich, 1905–.

A note on bibliography and citations: I have tried to avoid losing readers in thickets of Latin and Greek by including references to modern translations wherever possible. I usually consulted these translations when available, but I have not hesitated to alter them wherever I felt the original could be better represented. For those interested in the original texts, I have included references to more than one edition whenever such information came readily to hand. I have made no attempt, however, to regularize the orthography of my Latin sources.

It ought to be a joy for the historian to unearth
some fiber of humanity from a far-distant past,
and an even greater joy to succeed, perhaps,
in reproducing in its freshness (even if there
is no hope of making it live again except in
the memory) some ancient form of the life of
the mind whose beauty had been forgotten.
How much greater still would be the joy of
the Christian to succeed in restoring to the
understanding, esteem, and admiration of the
present generation a portion of its own heritage,
without disguising what is weak or obsolete.

Henri de Lubac

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Writing the Wrongs

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Introduction

Reading the Silences of Scripture

> Women are rarely mentioned in scripture. . . . They remain hidden in the shadows.
>
> John Calvin, 1554

If the women of the Old Testament were "hidden in the shadows" in Calvin's day, few today would grant that they and their stories remain so shrouded. The last third of the twentieth century witnessed a veritable eruption of interest in the women of the Bible, as in women's history and gender issues generally — all of which marks the still-rising tide from the "second wave" of feminism that broke in America in the 1960s. And although many essays and books in the '60s and '70s began to map the terrain for the discussions and investigations to follow, with respect to the women of the Old Testament, a landmark of sorts was set by Phyllis Trible's 1982 Beecher Lectures at Yale, which came to be published under the provocative title *Texts of Terror.*[1] Focusing on Hagar, Tamar, an unnamed concubine, and Jephthah's daughter — women who were, in turn, driven into the desert; raped; tortured to death; and sacrificially slain — Trible offered these women a memorial (complete with pen-and-ink headstones and epitaphs from scripture), seeking to redress in part the injury they received from their contemporaries and the neglect whereby later generations added insult. Arguably, Trible's study was upstaged only by her book's title, which has taken on a life of its own as a description for many other narratives where the God of the Bible seems not only to allow cruelty against women but even to abet it with a silence that looks all too much like complicity.

Hagar, Tamar, the Levite's wife, Jephthah's daughter — truly, these are horrific stories, and they are by no means the only ones the Bible has to offer. Their horror is compounded, moreover, by the apparent refusal of the biblical narrator to add a single word of condemnation or moralism or even explanation. Of course, the Bible's stark silences may actually heighten the impact of these sad stories, even as Trible herself suggests that the best response lies not in a technical analysis but in simply retelling and thus remembering the stories themselves: "Storytelling is sufficient unto itself."[2] Nonetheless, the question remains: How should such enigmatic tales, at once so cryptic and elliptic, be read and retold?

---

[1] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); see also idem, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

The answers given to that question are diverse, and they quickly draw these stories of marginalized women of the Old Testament into the much wider controversies of contemporary feminist theology. While few would dispute the sadness of these stories, there is less agreement over their wider significance, particularly when they are used as a springboard for a feminist critique of the Bible, or of the whole Judeo-Christian religious tradition, or of Western civilization in general. Trible's stated intention was to reject not the Bible but rather its patriarchy. Others, however, have shown decidedly less patience for her approach. Mieke Bal, for instance, faults Trible for (among other things) her attempt "to exonerate [God] from the scandal caused by male characters."[3] Similarly, Daphne Hampson, describing herself as a post-Christian feminist, quickly turns from criticizing Trible to ponder why anyone would even wish to bother re-reading these stories or grant any authority to the texts in which they appear, given "the extent to which this Christian story" — namely, the story of a God traditionally seen as male — "has harmed women."[4]

For critics such as Bal, Hampson, and many others, the cruelty perpetrated upon these Old Testament women is a predictable manifestation of the patriarchy embedded in the Bible and in all the strands of tradition and ideology that draw on the Bible as a resource or authority. But there is really no consensus even among feminists as to the proper response to the Bible's patriarchy: approaches range from those who believe these stories in the Bible can be explained or ameliorated or salvaged somehow to those who see the Bible and its adherents as sources of the larger problem of patriarchy and, as such, beyond reform.[5] "The feminist challenge strikes at the heart of Christianity," Hampson ominously warns. "The Christian myth . . . has rapidly been discarded by a large number of people, even in the last twenty years. Feminism will come to make it seem not only untrue but immoral."[6]

---

[2] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* p. xiii.

[3] Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 33–34 and 261 n. 48.

[4] Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 39–41, 45.

[5] Naturally, there are numerous positions between these two extremes. Many writers have tried to categorize the varieties of approach and agenda. Trible offers her own list (*Texts of Terror,* p. 3), as does Bal (*Death and Dissymmetry,* pp. 33–34). See also the more extensive typologies framed by (e.g.) Carolyn Osiek, "The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship,* ed. Adela Y. Collins (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 93–106; Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, "Feminist Uses of Biblical Materials," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,* ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), pp. 55–64; Mary Ann Tolbert, "Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics," in *Semeia* 28 (1983): 113–26; and idem, "Protestant Feminists and the Bible: On the Horns of a Dilemma," in *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts,* ed. Alice Bach (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990), pp. 5–23.

[6] Hampson, *Theology and Feminism,* pp. 1–2. Sakenfeld similarly notes how an "explicit emphasis on the depth and continuity of patriarchy highlights the many painfully oppressive portions of biblical material and makes painfully clear that the church has often perpetuated precisely those oppressive emphases" ("Feminist Uses of Biblical Materials," p. 64). A variation on the theme is offered by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, one of many who seek to recover a nonpatriarchal reading of Scripture at the expense of its interpreters: "The biblical text itself," she writes, may be "much less injurious to women than the traditional readings of Western civilization." See "The Bible and Women's Studies," in *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies,* ed. Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum (New Haven· Yale University Press, 1994), p. 24.

Such hostility to traditional Christianity and, in particular, to Christian patriarchy need not be read as a declaration of war, but it brilliantly underscores the way lines are often drawn between feminists on one side and defenders of Christian tradition on the other. And without a doubt, the proclivity of many feminist biblical scholars to employ a hermeneutic of suspicion[7] has provoked in turn many a suspicious response from the various quarters of conservative theology, whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. Some of these conservative scholars have tried to defend the Christian faith either by categorically attacking or stonewalling feminism, or by constructing an uncritical apology for the status quo—responses that in their own way may be just as disturbing and overdrawn as the attacks of the most radical feminists.[8] Despite attempts to frame mediating positions,[9] feminism and traditionalism have largely divided into opposing camps. So, while many feminists harbor a reasonable suspicion of Christian tradition, many traditional Christians harbor a reasonable suspicion of feminist criticisms. Parties on all sides fight for the right to define how the Bible ought to be read, and the stories of biblical women constitute but one of many fronts upon which these battles are played out.

Perhaps only fools would rush into such contested terrain. Nonetheless, the mutual suspicion that has arisen among the various modern interpreters of these troubling tales has served to furnish my own study with an important part of its inspiration. The other part, however, has been fueled by suspicion of a rather different sort—a suspicion that amidst all the armed rhetoric, something important is being overlooked. One may grant that the Bible does contain texts that, by modern standards at least, are androcentric, hierarchical, and prejudicial to the equality and dignity of women. That is not really at issue, for the history of Christianity, like most of human history, too often chronicles an unconscionable indifference to women. But have Christian interpreters always and uniformly *read* these texts so as to perpetuate patriarchy? Have they ever read the silences of scripture in ways that are *not* androcentric or detrimental to women? Have they paid attention to these stories at all?

Were one to read only modern discussions of these Bible stories, one could only assume the answer to be a resounding "no" on all counts, since no one credits these earlier interpreters for much of anything. But in reality, not a few ironies are at work here. To begin with, feminist historians and biblical scholars are deservedly praised for their labors on behalf of the matriarchs and other biblical women, as well as for their timely challenge to the entrenched androcentric tendencies of modern interpreters. Nonetheless, few feminist critics — indeed, few opponents of feminism — have expended any similar effort to search out the careers of these same women's stories in the history of interpretation. Instead, generalizations about the patriarchy of earlier commentators are set forth with virtually no evidence that these earlier commentators have been examined firsthand, or at all. Mieke Bal, for example, casually alludes to the "centuries of exegesis" of the book of Judges that "joined efforts to cover up what was no more felt as relevant."[10] Bal's own analysis of Judges is in many ways a marvelous tour de force, but the cover-up she alleges here is little more than an undocumented assertion. Yet her accusation does serve to illustrate the problem, namely, that no one has examined in more than a cursory manner exactly how premodern commentators deal with the women in these Old Testament tragedies. It may well be that the mistrust of feminist interpreters is appropriately directed at certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century exegetes, as well as at various editors of lectionaries and children's Bibles, for ignoring or suppressing these women's stories. But why rush to judgment also against our more distant forebears, whose writings are virtually unknown? At best, such an argument from silence can adduce no more than guilt by association.

---

[7] "Hermeneutic of suspicion" has come to describe any strongly adversarial or distrustful approach to a text that looks less at its propositions per se than at the author's (presumed) self-interest The term was coined by Paul Ricoeur to describe the withering indictment of religion (namely, as an illusion of one sort or another) delivered by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—the three so-called masters of suspicion. See Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), especially the section entitled "Interpretation as Exercise of Suspicion," pp. 32–36 The feminist application of this sort of suspicion is compactly stated by the title of J. Cheryl Exum's essay, "Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?" in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 65–90.

[8] Examples could be multiplied, but few rival the rhetorical flourishes of John Piper and Wayne Grudem, who are willing to compare even moderate Christian feminists to nineteenth-century defenders (*sic*) of slavery and who assert that feminism indirectly contributes to the rise of homosexuality by confusing sexual identity. See "An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. idem (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991), pp. 60–92, esp. 66, 82.

[9] Examples may be drawn from the typologies of Osiek, Sakenfeld, and Tolbert (n. 5).

It is similarly ironic that while moderns have begun to attend anew to the forgotten women of Scripture, few pause at all to listen to the voices of earlier readers of Scripture. Legions of Bible commentators from the Christian past are anonymously dismissed, either on a presumption of their patriarchy and misogynism or else on the grounds that their scholarship and insights were "precritical" and therefore supposedly of no interest. It is no surprise that modern readers find themselves provoked by the dissonance arising from stories in which women are treated inhumanely. It is surprising, though, that they should think they are the first to feel this way, for Christian interpreters through the centuries have regularly wrestled with the texts of terror, sometimes writing volumes "between the lines" of Scripture out of an apparent concern for the women in these stories. Indeed, many struggled with these texts in ways that seem to subordinate their patriarchal instincts to a far more existential concern with issues of justice, humanity, and women's dignity.

Unfortunately, the deliberations and musings on such stories that point to the church's "second thoughts" about women seldom appear in formal dogmatic constructions. Theological systems tend to homogenize the details of exegesis, or simply omit them, in order to establish a consistent dogmatic front. Commentary literature, however, often tells a different story, for the genre lends itself not only to the detailed scrutiny of individual verses and words but also to tedious digressions and wonderful sidetracks, as well as to gymnastic displays of curious exegesis, labored interpretation, special pleading, and — on top of it all — frequently astute insights and uncommon perceptivity. Probably no other genre of ecclesiastical literature can claim to have been so popular in its day (at least among intellectuals, preachers, and other Scripture scholars)[11] and yet so routinely overlooked by the theologians and exegetes of our own.[12] Yet there is reason to believe that these ignored and frequently inaccessible writings ought to be taken into account, especially by those interested in the marginalized women of the Old Testament.

---

[10] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p 7.

What I propose to offer, then, is a study of how the stories of Hagar, Jephthah's daughter, and the Levite's concubine were read by a selection of precisely those writers who, ranging from the first century through the sixteenth or seventeenth, are often lumped together as "precritical"[13] commentators. While in some ways it does not seem all that daring to claim that precritical interpreters might have something to say about the women of the Bible that ought to interest also modern readers, the modesty of the claim is complicated by the bitterness of the contest over these stories in particular — or, one might say, by the contest over whose reading of these stories is to be credited. As a historian, I do not expect to resolve the modern controversy, but I do hope to give a voice to other interested parties from the past. To that end, it becomes crucial here to explain my own method of inquiry and to comment also on the complexity of discerning or assigning motives to the writers I have studied.

The history of exegesis typically employs a method that is essentially descriptive and comparative. Theological writings of all kinds may be examined to ascertain which Scripture texts an author uses, how they are used or interpreted, what sorts of arguments are brought to bear in the course of interpretation, what resources or predecessors are used or neglected, and so on. Church historians sometimes like to assert that there are really no new heresies. That may oversimplify the facts, but one might still be allowed to suggest that new exegetical arguments are equally rare. Commentary literature in particular has never been noted as an inventive genre. One of the truly peculiar interests of historians of exegesis, then, is to track the *un*-originality of commentators, who are almost always aware of what their predecessors have said, and who thereby draw upon and build up a sort of "exegetical lore" — topics and insights passed from one exegete to the next, frequently with only the subtlest of acknowledgment. Indeed, commentators often praised by moderns as highly original prove to be far less so when one traces the thread of this exegetical lore, but the appropriate conclusion can be reached only by reading extensively among a commentator's forebears.[14]

---

[11] Arnold Williams makes a creditable attempt to answer the question "Who used the commentaries?" in chapter 2 of *The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis, 1527–1633* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), pp. 26–39.

[12] David J. A. Clines helpfully decries "the unspoken assumption that what is old in interpretation is out of date and probably rotten and the hidden implication that what is new is best"; see *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 181.

[13] This descriptor requires a word of comment, for the label — so redolent of the condescending "Dark Ages" — is assuredly not one that these writers themselves would have chosen. In fact, "precritical" would be better read as pre–"historical-critical" or pre–"higher-critical," insofar as "precritical" is coined only by implication, as the supposedly outmoded antithesis of the self-styled "critical" historical and scientific methods ushered in by the Enlightenment and especially by Kant. Unfortunately, not only are all these terms often quietly filled with a shifting set of Enlightenment and later modern assumptions (e.g., notions of the sufficiency or the limitations of human reason, the relativity of meaning, the absolute epistemological value of historical analogy, the irrelevance of authority or tradition as warrant, etc.), they are just as often, as technical terms, vague Precritical exegesis is perhaps best demarcated from later approaches not by its ignorance of textual problems in the Bible, but by its commitment to address those problems by staying "within" the text (using tools of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, as well as all available textual, linguistic, historical, and geographical data), as opposed to the tendency of "higher" criticism to explain problems by challenging the integrity or reliability of the biblical text itself. See Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); and Edgar V McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville· Abingdon, 1988), pp. 44–53 In this study, "precritical" will be used merely as a chronological locator for pre-Enlightenment writers and writings, without presupposing what sorts of "critical" insights and methods will be present or absent.

Although the modern controversies surrounding the texts studied here have understandably influenced the sorts of phenomena I have deemed significant, I have attempted to retain an essentially descriptive approach. At the most basic level, I have sifted through commentaries and related literature simply to find any mention at all of these women and their stories. Admittedly, it may seem a bit facile to herald with fanfare mere passing references to Hagar's exile or the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter. But in contemporary commentaries on these Old Testament texts and in published reviews of recent books about these texts, it has become a tiresome cliché to refer to these women and their stories as "neglected." Any body of evidence amassed to the contrary is therefore of some value in replacing generalizations with a more accurate picture of the history of interpretation. Indeed, it may prove to be the case that the complaint of neglect is to be lodged far closer to the present than off in the distant past.

Beyond this basic or "qualifying" level, however, precritical commentators make a variety of interpretative moves that furnish my study with matter for investigation. For although there are certainly many passing references to Abraham or Jephthah that are concerned with peripheral issues (with problems of biblical chronology, for instance), few commentators mention the women of these tales without pausing to address what very quickly become traditional exegetical problems and arguments — part of the exegetical lore. Moreover, their considerations are almost always tinged with an explicit concern for questions of praise and blame, with worries over right and wrong. In attempting to explain these perplexing biblical narratives to their readers, precritical commentators generally feel obliged to address certain set questions and to resolve discord by invoking a variety of traditional arguments and approaches. These questions and arguments and approaches together compose the manifold "exegetical moves" that interest us, and it will be worthwhile to review and illustrate some of the variations on this theme.

First of all, nothing would seem to complicate the interpretation of an Old Testament text like explicit *cross-references or proof-texts* in the New. Indeed, almost all of our stories feature characters who appear also in the New Testament and whose appearances there are always value-laden. Accordingly, Abraham is lauded in Romans 4, Hebrews 11, and many other places; Sarah is praised in 1 Peter 3; Lot is mentioned by Jesus without rebuke in Luke 17 and called righteous in 2 Peter 2; and even Jephthah appears on the roll of heroes in Hebrews 11. Hagar, on the other hand, has the dubious privilege of being styled by St. Paul as the mother of slave-children, that is, of those who are not free in Christ but are instead imprisoned under the law and destined to be disinherited. For Christian commentators, the inspired and apostolic texts of the New Testament exerted a powerful pull on the Old Testament, potentially offering them Scripture proofs ready-made to vindicate some and — as in the case of Hagar — to scapegoat others. So this is one exegetical move worth following: how do precritical commentators handle explicit and acknowledged intracanonical (that is, intrabiblical) textual conflicts? Do they resolve these stories' moral dilemmas with a trump card from the New Testament, or does the harshness and dissonance of the tale remain despite what one or another apostle may have written?

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[14] This argument is illustrated with admirable compactness by David C. Steinmetz, who also coined the term "exegetical lore." See his essay "Calvin and Abraham," in *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 64–78.

The enigmatic aspects of these stories are met with other kinds of cross-referencing, too. Sometimes precritical commentators appeal to *inside information* derived from elsewhere in Scripture. For instance, when Cardinal Cajetan (ca. 1529) eases the harshness of Hagar's exile by "discovering" in the text of Genesis 21 an abundance of provisions and servants, he is not being wholly inventive; rather, he is merely extrapolating some traditional insights from elsewhere in Genesis, namely, that Abraham was both very rich and very pleasing to God, and therefore he simply *must* have done the right thing. Some of this inside information may strike us as fanciful or wishful thinking; some, however, has stood the test of time. In any case, what is of interest here is Cajetan's perception that some sort of additional explanation is necessary or germane to a proper understanding of the story.

In similar fashion, precritical interpreters often supplement the story with *appeals to historical or lexical data,* much as commentators do today. Sometimes Sarah's anger in the wake of Ishmael's "playing" with Isaac (Gen. 21:9) is seen as churlish, but Jerome points out — apparently on the strength of rabbinic testimony — that the verb may well indicate not playfulness but idolatry. Again, some of this lexical data may seem frivolous, but it made a huge difference to commentators to know whether there were any real grounds to execute such summary justice upon Ishmael and his mother.

It thus becomes clear very early that ethical issues and case studies were important for traditional exegesis, and all the more so in view of the role the patriarchs and matriarchs played as Christian exemplars. In tracing the career of the texts of terror, it is therefore vital to study the *moral casuistry* that was often exercised in the normal course of exegesis. In all of these stories, there are characters who appear to act in ways that are flagrantly wrong — a point on which feminists and precritical commentators scarcely differ. Through the centuries, however, a variety of approaches were adopted and differing conclusions drawn; presumably these variations will mark out a continuum of judgments or opinions about the women in these stories as well. In any case, whether or not a particular commentator's casuistry is finally persuasive is not as consequential as the prior recognition that drives such casuistry, namely, that the story is deeply disturbing as it stands and the commentator feels constrained to address and resolve that dissonance. As we will see, some commentators seem perceptive where others are shallow; some are smug where others seem compassionate; and some appear gracious where others may well be merely embarrassed. But even where arguments fall flat, it is difficult to dismiss the turn toward casuistry as either a mark of indifference or an act of neglect.

Fortunately, in many commentators, there are other indications that their casuistry is more than an intellectual pastime. One such mark emerges from the way in which some commentators supplement their technical exegesis and ethical deliberations with *imaginative reconstructions*. It was in 1522 that Erasmus described paraphrasing as a "freer" form of commentary,[15] but long before he advanced that argument, many of his predecessors had intuitively grasped the same insight when they elaborated brief speeches in the biblical narrative into much longer orations. Sometimes their attributions represent speeches that a character such as Jephthah's daughter might easily have delivered, but didn't, on account of her putative strength of character. Commentators may also embroider the text so as to depict the inner conflicts of the women in these stories, just as Luther writes line upon line where the Bible is all but silent. Imagined discourse—whether styled as paraphrase, rejected rebuttals, or mental conversations—would seem to demonstrate that a commentator has tried to enter into the experience of a character in the narrative. Again, neither success nor cogency is guaranteed, but one must grant that the effort has been made.

Proof-texting, appeals to inside information or to historical and lexical data, casuistic analysis, and imaginative reconstruction illustrate some of the varieties of literal exegesis as the craft was practiced by precritical interpreters. As is well known, however, earlier Christian commentators were interested in more than the literal or historical sense of the inspired text. For them, there were also the various *spiritual senses* to weigh—allegory, typology, anagogy, and so forth.[16] Although one might not expect these figurative readings to address the problems raised in the historical narrative, the reality is far more complex: not only are there fascinating variations in the ways allegories and typologies are constructed from these texts, these figurative meanings often appear to comment very deliberately on the text's literal sense. Origen, for example, passes over St. Paul's allegory about Hagar to offer his own instead—an original allegory that changes Hagar from a symbol of rejection into a symbol of repentance. Yet the allegorical penitent whom Origen praises is clearly assembled from his remarks on the literal meaning of Genesis, and his allegorical construction thus underscores the dignity of the literal Hagar as well.

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[15] Epistle 1255 in *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P. S. Allen, H. S. Allen, and H. W Garrod (12 vols.; Oxford, 1906–58), 5:47.37–39.

[16] To be sure, even where modern interpreters are aware of the supposedly classical assumption about "the fourfold sense" of Scripture, much misinformation abounds. Not only did interpreters—whether patristic, medieval, or Reformation—often disagree about the names and number of the levels of meaning, they also allowed that not all Bible texts carried all four (or only four) meanings. This phenomenon is discussed and documented at length by Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'Écriture* (2 vols. in 4; Paris: Aubier, 1959–64), I/1:119–69; trans. by Mark Sebanc as *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 75–116 The taste for figurative exegesis, moreover, by no means disappeared with the rise of Protestantism, as is often supposed. See Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson, "The Significance of Precritical Exegesis: Retrospect and Prospect," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 335–45. The last-named volume also has a pertinent essay (pp. 23–60) by Karlfried Froehlich, "Johannes Trithemius on the Fourfold Sense of Scripture: The *Tractatus de Inuestigatione Scripturae* (1486)."

To the preceding list of "exegetical moves" one must add one more item, a category to be reserved for the truly unexpected, and perhaps even for the unexpressed. Sometimes such surprises seem to foreshadow modern challenges, as when Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1115) exclaimed that "even God" shares some of the blame for the death of Jephthah's daughter—an outburst to which Rupert's nineteenth-century editors self-consciously added an editorial *sic*. In similar fashion, Hugh of St. Cher (ca. 1250) dismissed Jephthah's defense of his vow as nothing but a deliberate and wicked lie, even though the scriptural text says nothing to that effect. It is evident that the very same silences that feminist critics have analyzed so perceptively are often just as suggestive for precritical commentators, and my own study has looked for the ways in which such silences are filled in or vocalized.

None of these exegetical moves necessarily offers an open window into a commentator's motive. In cases where texts of terror are cited to support or illustrate a thesis—say, to persuade Christian readers to pursue a life of rigorous virtue—exegesis is often subordinated to utility or rhetoric. When the genre is a commentary in the stricter sense, the writer's motive may be (then as now) simply to comment on every problem of interest in a given book of the Bible. Thus the stories of marginalized women may be addressed only because they are part of the chosen exegetical obstacle course. By the same token, many commentators are clearly fascinated by these stories, however they came to mention or explain them, and an equal number do not hesitate to express their outrage over the course of events narrated by the canonical text. Sometimes their indignation is explicit and focused; at other times the clues are more subtle. I have not hesitated to identify at least the appearance of motive wherever I have thought the commentator's own words provided sufficient warrant.

In studying all these exegetical moves, however, and in making my own, I have tried to bear in mind the caveat issued forty years ago by one of the grandparents of the history of interpretation. In the preface to his magisterial *Exégèse Médiévale*, Henri de Lubac warned:

> It is entirely legitimate, when one wishes to give an account of the present, to search through the past . . . for the earliest possible outlines, preparations, and anticipations. It is much less legitimate, if one wishes to know the past, to concern oneself with it from the outset only to detect those elements that bear some relationship to the present. One is thereby disposed to reject, before having understood its real significance, all that bears nothing immediately useful for responding to today's questions. In any case, to fail to consider the past in and for itself is to allow what is essential to elude us. It is, moreover, a form of contempt that is ultimately self-defeating.[17]

De Lubac's point is finely cut and instructive. He does not argue here that the past bears no relationship to the present, or that it sheds no light on the present, or that it offers nothing useful for today's readers. Clearly, it does all of these. But he is quite properly worried lest the concerns and issues of the present be allowed to pillage the past, to strip-mine the landscape for useful ore and discard the unfamiliar as so much slag. The danger is real. In considering how the stories of Hagar, Jephthah's daughter, and others were received and retold by premodern interpreters, the concerns of contemporary feminist critics — however urgent and cogent they be — might easily prove to offer not only a keen stimulus to conversation but also a powerful temptation to seek a quick and "useful" payoff, say, by dressing up these ancient writers as modern allies. I have tried to avoid this pitfall by reporting as globally as possible on all the viewpoints and interpretations I have found, particularly where values and opinions were likely to be greeted by moderns as strange or unattractive or even cruel. From such reportage it should become plain that although today's questions may have genuine antecedents in the past, the aims of precritical commentators are by no means the long-lost twin of any contemporary agenda. Nonetheless, as de Lubac urged, the writings of our forebears present not "childish babblings" but "serious thoughts, which are well worth striving to understand, even if we are not obliged to follow them."[18]

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[17] De Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale* I/1:16 (translation mine); cf. *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:xii.

Whatever else this book is, then, it is first and foremost an attempt to make available the history of how these texts about marginalized women have been read by precritical exegetes. It is my intention to chronicle how the Christian tradition, in the person of its Scripture scholars, has wrestled with some of the Bible's most opaque and offensive stories. The route is circuitous, for the exegetical history of these passages suggests that the Christian tradition displays far less consensus — and cultivates significantly more interest in the women of the Bible — than is commonly thought. At the same time, that history illustrates how the church's commentators have routinely been troubled by the very passages that modern readers, both women and men, have understandably found terrifying. I hope this inquiry will add color and definition to a part of the historical picture usually left in the shadows — namely, to the period between the gradual reception of the writings of Scripture as a canon and the emergence of the historical-critical approaches that have presumed to dominate academic biblical interpretation from the Enlightenment to fairly recent times. By scrutinizing the exegetical positions and practices of the past, we may well discover both a likeness and a difference there that illumine our indebtedness to our predecessors and thus also undercut our own claims to originality. In any case, this exploration should remedy at least some of the neglect with which these writers have been treated: for precritical commentators, too, have suffered from our stereotyping. The moment has long since arrived to move beyond shallow assessments and dismissals to a fairer appraisal of how precritical commentators grappled with some painfully difficult passages in their canonical Scriptures — with stories they found as sad and disturbing as we do today — and with silences that were no less challenging then than they are now.

Before turning to an overview of the longer chapters to come, it may be of value to recount the origins of this project. My interest in how the exegetical tradition has dealt with the women of the Old Testament was awakened more than fifteen years ago, when I began to investigate how Reformation and pre-Reformation commentators explained (or explained away) the many scriptural instances of women in apparent leadership roles in light of the New Testament proscriptions against such assertiveness. I learned then that "precritical" commentators often had much more to say on theological issues than did their modern counterparts. I also discovered that supposedly modern concerns about gender were regularly voiced even in the earliest commentaries, sometimes with verbatim agreements in the wording of the questions. For instance, the rite of circumcision as instituted in Genesis 17 has provoked much interest of late not only among anthropologists but also among feminists (both Jewish and Christian), insofar as it is an exclusively male-oriented ritual. Surprisingly, many precritical commentators were similarly troubled by the institution of a gender-specific sign for a covenant that by divine design included both sexes, and they wrote at length to explain — and not always explain away — what seemed to be a great incongruity.[19] Since these earlier investigations, I have continued to find fascination among the neglected commentators of the Christian tradition, who very quickly confirmed my hunch that they would indeed have much to say about these abused women of the Old Testament.

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[18] De Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale* I/1:15 (translation mine); cf. *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:xi.

In the three chapters that follow, I have attempted to report the encounter between these precritical biblical commentators and the stories of Hagar, Jephthah's daughter, and the Levite's concubine, and to do so in sufficient detail that readers can hear these commentators on their own terms and often in their own words. My procedure is fairly straightforward, in that I generally present the commentators in more or less chronological order, setting the stage usually with Philo or Josephus (who almost always exerted some influence on early Christian exegesis), then moving through the patristic period, the Middle Ages, and the era of the Reformation. I have consulted rabbinic views wherever possible, particularly with a view to the explicit Christian appropriations of midrashic and talmudic arguments that begin to emerge in the later Middle Ages. For the most part, I have focused on the various genres of direct biblical interpretation, including Bible commentaries and sermons, as well as ancillary works such as word lists, glossaries, and books of questions on Scripture. As already noted, formal dogmatic constructions (that is, works of "systematic" theology) do not reliably attend in detail to specific Bible stories, particularly Old Testament stories, and even less so in the case of women's stories. Exceptions do occur, admittedly, such as the excursus devoted to Hagar in Augustine's *City of God* — itself a notoriously excursive book. But in view of the limited number of pre-Reformation sources, I confess that I have welcomed and tried to follow almost all the leads that I have come across, especially when they led to alternative forms of treatment by ecclesial writers or theologians of note (for example, Abelard's *planctus* for Jephthah's daughter), though I have not cast my net so broadly as to include strictly literary treatments — again, with a few exceptions.[20] The one limit I have tried to observe with some consistency is to set a finish line somewhere in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Later writings are not without interest, but these portraits of marginalized women could easily be extended well beyond any manageable frame. If I can illustrate the richness of concern for Old Testament women through the sixteenth century — that century of such great ferment in theology, and the seedbed not only for so many ecclesiastical divisions but also for much ecumenical discussion today — my purpose will have been adequately fulfilled.

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[19] See my essay "'So Ridiculous a Sign': Men, Women, and the Lessons of Circumcision in Sixteenth-Century Exegesis," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 86 (1995): 236–56.

[20] The stories treated here are not as widely appropriated in medieval literature as they are in commentaries, though the situation changes dramatically in the later Renaissance; see (e.g.) the short list of pre-Renaissance treatments of Jephthah's daughter in Wilbur Owen Sypherd, *Jephthah and His Daughter: A Study in Comparative Literature* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware [Press], 1948), p. 10. I should also note that my investigation has drawn only on printed sources, a truly exhaustive study would need to consult the many commentaries and sermons that survive only in manuscript.

In constructing this study, I have tried to sharpen my examination of the history of the interpretation of these stories and to remain faithful to the origins of my inquiry by using contemporary feminist criticism as a dialogue partner. Rather than begin with a lengthy and abstract prologue on feminist biblical criticism and related issues, I have prefaced each biblical story (that is, each chapter) with an overview of recent feminist exegesis and criticism. In this way, readers will be free to turn directly to any one of the chapters, and — since the issues raised and considered there will be those that pertain directly to the biblical narrative at hand — most readers will perceive more immediately why a particular story has provoked various sorts of perplexity, offense, challenge, and critique. However, this book is not a primer on feminism or feminist hermeneutics or feminist controversies. Even as Phyllis Trible asserted that "storytelling is sufficient unto itself," so have I tried to give pride of place to the "secondary" stories — the metanarratives, if you will — constituted by precritical commentators' own retellings of Scripture.

For the same reason, I have tried to report these exegetical conversations in a fairly unadorned way. Obviously, another study might be written to identify and critique the interests and ideologies of the commentators themselves, but this is not that study. My principal interest lies simply in the responses of precritical commentators to these stories. I am drawn to this approach partly by the sage advice of Stanley Fish, that "one cannot keep in mind everything at once and still perform specific tasks,"[21] but I am driven still more by considerations of the sort expressed by Robert Alter, who said he tried to avoid interposing his own explications "between the reader and the text" on the grounds that it would constitute "a betrayal of [the reader's] trust to leave him with critical discourse in place of a text."[22] I, too, have tried to give the highest priority to documenting and articulating the texts and writers I have studied, indeed, to presenting them sympathetically and without feeling obliged to debunk their views or filter them through a mixture of sophistication and cynicism. My point is not that precritical commentators were somehow immune from the taint of self-interest or ideology, nor that their views and interpretations are somehow above suspicion. However, too quick a resort to the plethora of contemporary reading strategies runs a risk (above all else) of reductionism. Moreover, to bypass an initial reading that is, admittedly, more naive and less suspicious may well rob the reader of some real benefits — particularly that of seeing what unexpected features may lurk behind an otherwise patriarchal approach to the text of Scripture. In other words, while there is certainly a useful place for a hermeneutic of suspicion, the approach taken here suggests that suspicion be directed first of all at oneself and demands that—initially, at least—the text be trusted and heard.[23] Such a posture of listening may also allow the reader to appreciate how precritical exegetes, too, were armed with a variety of reading strategies that enabled them to look beneath the veneer of the story and address more disturbing issues. Accordingly, I have tried to reserve also my own analysis, opinions, and insights to the end of each chapter and to a somewhat wider-ranging discussion in the conclusion, where questions of ideology and reading strategies will be taken up retrospectively.

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[21] Stanley Fish, "Commentary: The Young and the Restless," in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 316 n. 6.

[22] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (N.p.: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 178–79.

Trible's book looked at four women. Subsequent studies have scrutinized the stories of many more of the marginalized women of the Old Testament, resulting in an impressive repertoire of criticism.[24] This study mostly follows up on Trible's original selection. I have not treated the rape of Tamar here, however, partly because that story typically draws commentators into discussing several other narratives of rape, and partly because I found it expedient not to have to amass the resources for yet another major section of the Old Testament—namely, the historical books (including 2 Samuel), as opposed to Genesis and Judges, which lie within what was often called the "heptateuch." On the other hand, I have supplemented my consideration of the Levite's wife in Judges 19 with a close look at the similar story of how Lot callously offered his daughters to the men of Sodom in Genesis 19. Many modern commentators see these tales as mutually influenced, if not a doublet. While precritical commentators offer no comparable speculation on the origins of these twinned tales, they instinctively see the stories' resemblance and often comment on both at once, so that the two passages shed light upon each other—and upon their interpreters.

In both the academic and the popular study of the Bible today, the landscape is marked largely by the crevasses that exist between a host of differing methodologies and approaches to the text. These approaches and "ways of reading" often diverge radically from one another. There are other chasms and divisions, too, including disagreements provoked less overtly by method per se than by competing ideological positions or conclusions. The source of these arguments (which often turn rather nasty) is not hard to discern, for the Bible is and has always been an immensely important and formative text. In other words, the Bible has always been seen as worth fighting over—or against. Much of the course of Western history was charted by those who thought they were conforming to a divine warrant derived from the Bible. Much of the course of contemporary Western society continues on a battle-borne trajectory in a struggle to preserve or dissolve this putatively biblical legacy. Yet few seriously attend to the long and continuous tradition of interpretation that stands between the Bible itself and today's partisan assertions about its meaning or meaninglessness, and the hard silences of Scripture are thus compounded by a thoughtless silencing of tradition. The burden of the chapters that follow is to see what may lie hidden within this neglected tradition of interpretation—within the intermediate past that links the Bible to now.

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[23] Others who follow the approach taken here have characterized it as a hermeneutic of charity, in contrast to a hermeneutic of suspicion; or as a hermeneutic of consent, in which the success of the interpreter's task is judged by its conformity and contribution to the interpreter's community. The latter term was advanced some time ago by Peter Stuhlmacher, in *Historical Criticism and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp. 83–91. George Lindbeck makes a similar point in "Scripture, Consensus, and Community," in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis. The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church,* ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 74–101, note also Raymond Brown's worries in the same volume over the use of "suspicion" as an exegetical tool in "The Contribution of Historical Biblical Criticism to Ecumenical Church Discussion," esp. p. 26. It is also worth observing that Ricoeur's original account in *Freud and Philosophy* envisioned the hermeneutic of suspicion as but one leg of a dialectic leading to reflection; the other leg entailed a hermeneutic of faith that, as Ricoeur observed, wishes "to describe and not to reduce" (p. 28). This dialectic, along with what Ricoeur characterized as a quest for a "postcritical faith" or "a second naiveté," has all but disappeared and the hermeneutic of suspicion seems more often wielded solely as a destructive and dismissive tool.

[24] Many such works will be mentioned in subsequent chapters, but especially helpful resources and surveys include Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994); *The Women's Bible Commentary,* ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992); and *The Feminist Companion to the Bible,* a multivolume series edited by Athalya Brenner for Sheffield Academic Press.

1

Hagar: Abraham's Wife and Exile

So Abraham . . . sent her away.
Genesis 21:14

Hagar has been described, and with good reason, as a "throw-away" character in the history of salvation.[1] Handmaid to Sarah, an Egyptian by birth, Hagar lived a life distinguished by her temporary eminence as the mother of Abraham's only son, Ishmael, the heir apparent to all the promises God made to Abraham — until the birth of Isaac upstaged Ishmael and his mother, and ultimately rendered them both outcasts and exiles. The story of Hagar and her son is told in Genesis 16 and 21, after which she virtually disappears from Scripture,[2] except, of course, for her cameo appearance in Galatians 4, where St. Paul uses the rivalry between Sarah and Hagar as emblematic of the contrast between the new covenant and the old. Even in Galatians, however, Hagar remains a foil who briefly highlights the drama of Abraham and Sarah and then disappears from view.

Many recent critics would suggest that Paul's account in Galatians 4 is emblematic also of something else, namely, of how Hagar's story has been read ever since. Indeed, when readers or commentators approach the Old Testament only for the sake of finding and celebrating the supposedly "central" story line — that is, how Israel was called forth as a people destined to live in covenant with God, of whom Abraham and Sarah were the first and founding parents — one can hardly be surprised to see Hagar routinely relegated to the wings of the stage to fill but a supporting role. She thus takes her place alongside so many other biblical figures whose lives and characters remain mostly unexamined for any independent significance or contribution. As Cynthia Gordon observes, "They appear briefly to provide conflict, present a negative model, or simply to move the narrative forward."[3] Barely glimpsed in passing, they are quickly replaced by other events and figures like them. One might claim that this sort of "reading for the center" is triumphalistic, but one could just as well call it merely careless or shallow, or even, in a precise sense, blinkered. It is one thing to acknowledge the centrality of Abraham and his descendants in the overall plot of the book of Genesis, but there is something amiss when the center is allowed to fill or erase the margins, especially when some of these apparently marginal characters may fairly claim to be the focus of God's benevolent concern in ways that parallel or even rival the divine attention paid to other, seemingly more central characters.

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[1] See Cynthia Gordon, "Hagar: A Throw-Away Character among the Matriarchs?" in *The Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 24 (1985): 271–77.

[2] Hagar is acknowledged only once more in the Old Testament, in the genealogy of Ishmael (Gen 25:12–18). Some scholars associate her with the Hagrites, a tribe of Bedouins mentioned in 1 Chronicles and Psalm 83

[3] Gordon, "Hagar: A Throw-Away Character?" p. 271.

Such is the case with Hagar. Part of the mission of feminist interpreters has been to read the Hagar stories at greater depth and with greater care, paying attention to the margins and posing the uncomfortable question as to why we have so blithely passed over Hagar's contribution to the biblical narrative, ignoring the wrongs done to her. Accordingly, before considering how Hagar's story was received by her ancient and medieval readers, I will review these more recent observations, analyses, and challenges in order to identify some of the sources of perplexity and controversy and so sharpen our subsequent focus for the precritical interpretations that follow.

Recent Feminist Interpretation of Hagar

Even a modest review of recent studies makes it quite clear that Hagar is truly a character of interest — to her readers, of course, but also (in the text of Genesis 16 and 21) to God. As feminists have noted, Hagar is described by the text of Genesis in terms that ought to have marked her as one of the Bible's preeminent heroes. To begin with, she was the first person in the Bible to be visited by an angel (16:7), as well as the first to receive an annunciation (16:11–12). Sarah, by contrast, is addressed by God only in rebuke (18:15). Hagar is also the only woman in all of Scripture ever to receive a promise of innumerable descendants (16:10). And, perhaps most striking of all, Hagar is depicted in Gen. 16:13 as boldly bestowing a name on God — "a power attributed to no one else in all the Bible." This remarkable list was drawn up some time ago by Phyllis Trible,[4] whose astute observations of Hagar's virtues and credits are routinely echoed more than expanded by many of the studies that followed in her wake,[5] though Sharon Pace Jeansonne notes that Hagar was also the only woman in the Bible to choose a wife for her son,[6] and several other writers see Hagar's flight from Sarah in Genesis 16 as a notable assertion of autonomy and self-empowerment. According to Delores Williams, "Hagar becomes the first female in the Bible to liberate herself from oppressive power structures."[7]

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[4] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, pp. 14–18, and esp. p. 28.

[5] Feminist and womanist literature on Hagar continues to grow. My discussion draws on the following selection: Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*, pp. 74–79, Athalya Brenner, "Female Social Behaviour: Two Descriptive Patterns within the 'Birth of the Hero' Paradigm," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. idem (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 204–21; Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, *Far More Precious than Jewels: Perspectives on Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), pp. 132–63; J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993), esp pp. 130–47; Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Jo Ann Hackett, "Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), pp. 12–27; Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), pp. 43–52; Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), pp. 33–41; Susan Niditch, "Genesis," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville. Westminster/John Knox, 1992), pp. 17–18; Nina Rulon-Miller, "Hagar: A Woman with an Attitude," in *The World of*

This last remark signals how Hagar's otherwise impressive credits are accompanied also by abundant misfortune. As Trible pointed out, Hagar was among the first biblical women to experience "use, abuse, and rejection."[8] Not only was Hagar marginalized by her status as a slave, she was further coerced into serving as a surrogate for the barren Sarah. But Hagar's success only alienated her mistress: she fled from Sarah's harsh treatment into the desert, where an angel of the Lord intervened and commanded her to "return to your mistress and submit to her" (16:9). A similar scenario developed after the birth of Isaac, many years later.[9] Sarah, apparently fearing that Hagar and Ishmael were contriving to rob Isaac of his primogeniture, ordered them banished. And, spurred on by a word of divine exhortation, a displeased Abraham complied (21:9–14). Hagar and Ishmael departed, woefully underprovisioned, and they escaped death in the desert only when God intervened.

Hagar's apparent journey into obscurity and ignominy is further complicated, however, by the Apostle Paul, who radicalized the story's contrasts. In Galatians 4, Sarah and Hagar represent two covenants, one based on faith in the promise, the other based on observance of the law; their sons represent two incompatible destinies, one consisting of spiritual freedom, the other of servitude. Nina Rulon-Miller, among others, has protested Paul's reading for eliminating the ambiguity of the narrative in Genesis and, in effect, for implementing the definitive rejection of Hagar that God had deferred. Both Hagar and Sarah are reduced to their roles as "seed-bearers" and recast to fulfill a "whore–madonna" stereotype. Inevitably, Sarah and Isaac are exalted, "while Hagar and Ishmael . . . are despised and rejected."[10]

Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives, ed. Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines (JSOTsupp 257; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 60–89; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Original Feminist Attack on the Bible (The Woman's Bible)*, 2 vols. (1895, 1898; one-volume reprint; New York: Arno Press, 1974), 1:39–44; Elsa Tamez, "The Woman Who Complicated the History of Salvation," in *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*, ed. John S. Pobee and Bärbel von Wartenberg-Potter (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), pp. 5–17; Aric Troost, "Reading for the Author's Signature. Genesis 21.1–21 and Luke 15.11–32 as Intertexts," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, pp. 251–72; John W. Waters, "Who Was Hagar?" in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 187–205; Renita J. Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy: Hagar and Sarah," in *Just a Sister Away. A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1988), pp. 1–19; and Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993). Also see Elie Wiesel, "Ishmael and Hagar," in *The Life of Covenant: The Challenge of Contemporary Judaism*, ed. Joseph A. Edelheit (Fs. Herman E. Schaalman; Chicago: Spertus College of Judaica Press, 1986), pp. 235–49.

[6] Jeansonne, *Women of Genesis*, pp. 51–52.

[7] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, p. 19. Remarks with similar bearing are voiced by Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 46; Hackett, "Rehabilitating Hagar," p. 24; Niditch, "Genesis," p. 17; and Troost, "Author's Signature," p. 264.

[8] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 9

[9] Some scholars see Hagar's story as a doublet, that is, as two versions of a single event; see, e.g., John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), p. 285; note the use made of this assumption by Hackett and Waters.

[10] Rulon-Miller, "Hagar: A Woman with an Attitude," pp. 79, 85.

Rulon-Miller's protest is but one of the many and diverse responses to Hagar's story on the part of feminist critics. Rereading the story in order to restore her long-denied renown and to vindicate her as unjustly wronged, Hagar's recent sympathizers have typically exonerated her by casting blame upon others, including both Sarah and Abraham, but also upon the implied narrator and even the deity, who seems to direct and endorse this tale.[11] Sarah's culpability is most easily told. As the persecutor of her own servant, she was the one person who might have intervened at any point to soften the outcome. Some of the harshest words for Sarah have come from womanist and other African-American critics, who find the conflict between Sarah and Hagar all-too-reminiscent of similar abuses of power between masters and slaves—between white mistresses and black slave women—in more recent American history.[12] Sarah is similarly faulted by Elsa Tamez, writing from a Latina perspective, as "egotistical and cruel."[13] But there is really little disagreement about Sarah's faults, at least on the surface of the story, and comparable complaints have been raised beginning at least a century ago with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and *The Woman's Bible*, and continuing through the present.[14]

Other critics lay more of the blame at the feet of Abraham. Here, too, *The Woman's Bible* was an early voice in protest:

> Abraham does not appear in a very attractive light . . . sending his child and its mother forth into the wilderness, with a breakfast of bread and water, to care for themselves. Why did he not provide them with a servant, an ass laden with provisions, and a tent to shelter them from the elements, or better still, some abiding, resting place. Common humanity demanded this much attention to his own son and the woman who bore him.[15]

If Sarah is a villain, then, she is not alone. Indeed, however much Abraham might hide behind his obligations to his first wife, or to God, nothing in the text indicates that he could not have tried to arbitrate the dispute or at least do more to assist Hagar and Ishmael. Susan Niditch thus updates Stanton's critique: "This passage is a difficult one in biblical ethics. Abraham cares not at all about the maid he has bedded, and Sarah is contemptuous of mother and child and would expose them to death. The author works hard to rationalize and justify the emotions and actions of Abraham and Sarah."[16]

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[11] Some writers, of course, simply argue that everyone in the story shares some blame; see, e.g., Darr, *Far More Precious than Jewels*, p. 133; "Wiesel, Ishmael and Hagar," p. 237.

[12] So Waters, "Who Was Hagar?" pp. 199–200; Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy," pp. 12–15; and Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, pp. 19–21. Waters further suggests (p. 203) that Hagar's status as a slave is open to question as being but a construct imposed by "the racial bias of the translators and commentators." Hagar's slave status is challenged on other grounds by Savina J. Teubal; see *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Tradition of the Matriarchs* (New York: HarperCollins, HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), pp. 49–62; idem, "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, pp. 235–50.

[13] Tamez, "Woman Who Complicated," pp. 11–12.

[14] Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, 1:41.

[15] Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, 1:40.

[16] Niditch, "Genesis," p. 18.

From this point, feminist analyses grow still more trenchant and more complicated, finding further targets for criticism not only in the characters' social context but also in the stance adopted by the narrator, as well as in God's apparent complicity. Thus Sarah and Hagar may be better explained not as two women typecast in quarrelsome roles but as two women trapped in a polygynous system not of their own devising, forced by circumstances to compete for the attention and favor of one man. Indeed, Athalya Brenner sees the two portrayed as "stereotypes of social maladjustment" and wonders if such brushstrokes betray the (male) gender of the narrator.[17] Esther Fuchs similarly suspects that by "foregrounding women's rivalry as the 'real' cause of their misery . . . [the narrator's] ideology shifts our attention away from the source of the problem to its symptoms, blaming . . . the female victims of polygyny for its unsavory aspects."[18] Cheryl Exum's analysis follows suit: just as patriarchy exploits the co-wives' envy so as to perpetuate their powerlessness, so also does the androcentric narrator offer "a picture of women as mean-spirited, deceptive, and untrustworthy"and hence as a threat to the patriarchal social order that must be contained and undermined.[19] The unflattering portrait of Hagar reflects a male-biased worldview—one that the narrator seeks only to reinforce.

In their willingness to challenge both the text's assumptions and the authority of its narrator, these particular criticisms are more sophisticated than anything one is likely to find among precritical commentators. Nonetheless, the most poignant comments are, arguably, those that remain within the world of the narrator yet stumble at how the conspiracy against Hagar seems divinely instigated at every turn. Not only is Hagar ordered back into harsh servitude by God in Genesis 16, a reluctant Abraham sends her packing in Genesis 21 only at God's explicit behest. John Waters thus wonders, "Why does Yahweh not offer her some kind of protection? . . . Is Yahweh immune from moral judgment? Should not Yahweh be judged by the ethical standards of the period? . . . Would it not be in the best interest of God to have Abraham demonstrate some humane treatment to Hagar and his son? It is inexcusable to put this mother and her son out with so little."[20] For Williams, God is clearly "no liberator" here.[21] Danna Fewell and David Gunn agree: "For the ethically sensitive reader such response is troubling: a god who shows arbitrary favoritism is a god who cannot be trusted. . . . God is clearly biased in favor of an ungenerous family, willing to send the innocent into the wilderness, willing to have Hagar and her son suffer for their redemption. God is fully implicated in this dispossession."[22] In addition to the inhumane terms of Hagar's exile, the peculiar wording of Gen. 21:16–17 troubles many. There, where Hagar's tears seem snubbed by God in favor of "the voice of the

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[17] Brenner, "Female Social Behaviour," pp. 220–21.

[18] Esther Fuchs, "A Jewish Feminist Reading of the Hagar Stories," p. 8 (an unpublished paper quoted by Darr, *Far More Precious than Jewels*, p. 155).

[19] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 134–36.

[20] Waters, "Who Was Hagar?" p. 200.

[21] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, p. 21. Similarly, Fewell and Gunn (*Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 46). "YHWH has much to learn about liberation!" Also Darr (*Far More Precious than Jewels*, p. 139): "Should we then conclude that YHWH sanctions abuse? Where is the God of the exodus, who liberates people from their oppressors? Where is Hagar's redeemer?"

[22] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 51.

lad," Trible sees the text as undercutting Hagar's motherhood.[23] Katheryn Darr looks at the same tears and sees things far worse:

> Who can read these words and fail to ache for Hagar and Ishmael? . . . Does Hagar cry out to God? Does she beseech YHWH to save her son's life? Would you? Would you appeal to the God who had ordered you back to bondage and beatings? Would you entreat the God who sanctioned your mistress's plan to expel you and your child, not so that you might be freed from slavery, but rather to safeguard the future of your oppressors? Would you implore such a God? Hagar does not. She weeps, but not to YHWH. And the Lord, it seems, does not respond to Hagar's grief.[24]

Clearly, there is much call for a theodicy on behalf of Hagar, but such an outcry should not be too surprising, for Stanton lodged the complaint a century ago.[25]

Hagar's feminist readers have a broader agenda, however, than merely to shift the blame in her story. They also generally recognize how Hagar has long served as a figure with whom many have identified — regardless of how the narrator of Genesis may regard her or how she was portrayed by St. Paul. Trible was quick to recognize this phenomenon.

> As a symbol of the oppressed, Hagar becomes many things to many people. Most especially, all sorts of rejected women find their stories in her. She is the faithful maid exploited, the black woman used by the male and abused by the female of the ruling class, the surrogate mother, the resident alien without legal recourse, the other woman, the runaway youth, the religious fleeing from affliction, the pregnant young woman alone, the expelled wife, the divorced mother with child, the shopping bag lady carrying bread and water, the homeless woman, the indigent relying upon handouts from the power structures, the welfare mother, and the self-effacing female whose own identity shrinks in service to others.[26]

The point is reiterated by Renita Weems and Elsa Tamez, both of whom see in Hagar an ancestress of so many mothers who have had to work as domestic servants,[27] and by Delores Williams, who also composes a litany to Hagar's contemporary magnetism.[28] Of special note, however, is Williams's emphasis on Hagar's extensive cultural significance for African-Americans:"For more than a hundred years Hagar — the African slave of the Hebrew woman Sarah — has appeared in the deposits of African-American culture. Sculptors, writers, poets, scholars, preachers and just plain folks have passed along the biblical figure Hagar to generation after generation of black folks."[29] Remarkably, while many focus mostly on Hagar's oppressed status, a few ultimately find in her an image of liberation. Tamez, for instance, agrees it would be natural for Hagar to think that "God [is] on the side of the oppressors," but she goes on to argue that God is actually looking out for Hagar and her child. Thus the story typifies God's action on behalf of the poor.[30] Weems draws a still wider lesson for her readers: "At some time in all our lives, whether we are black or white, we are all Hagar's daughters."[31]

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[23] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 26.

[24] Darr, *Far More Precious than Jewels*, p. 145.

[25] Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, 1:40: "But the worst feature in this drama is that it seems to have been done with Jehovah's approval."

[26] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 28.

[27] Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy," pp. 1, 17; Tamez, "Woman Who Complicated," pp. 10, 16.

[28] Williams adds: "Hagar's predicament involved slavery, poverty, ethnicity, sexual and economic exploitation, surrogacy, rape, domestic violence, homelessness, motherhood, single-parenting and radical encounters with God"; see *Sisters in the Wilderness*, p. 4. The same point is also made by Dorothée Sölle, "The Laughter of the Mistress, the Misery of the Slave," in *Great Women of the Bible in Art and Literature*, ed Emil Bührer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 37.

[29] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, p. 2.

A different but equally positive message is mined from this text by Gordon, who draws a parallel between the trials Hagar faced in ensuring the survival of her son and the ensuing trial of Abraham's faith in the *Akedah*, that is, the binding of his son, Isaac. Moreover, even though the book of Genesis attends (from 12:1 on) mostly to the covenant with Israel, the Hagar story reaffirms "G-d's infinite regard for all humankind and the universality of divine justice and compassion."[32] Of course, not all are this sanguine of the outcome. For Trible, things are not so rosy.

> [Hagar] experiences exodus without liberation, revelation without salvation, wilderness without covenant, wanderings without land, promise without fulfillment, and unmerited exile without return. This Egyptian slave woman is stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted for the transgressions of Israel. She is bruised for the iniquities of Sarah and Abraham; upon her is the chastisement that makes them whole. Hagar is Israel, from exodus to exile, yet with differences. And these differences yield terror. All we who are heirs of Sarah and Abraham, by flesh and spirit, must answer for the terror in Hagar's story.[33]

Thus it may well be that "Hagar foreshadows Israel's pilgrimage of faith," Trible concludes, but only "through contrast."

The case that feminist interpreters prosecute on Hagar's behalf, then, entails a recognition and remembrance of both her dignity and her unwarranted abuse. And it would seem, at first glance, that traditional exegesis has done neither of these well, for stories such as Hagar's disclose the patriarchal biases not only of the Bible but also of its would-be expositors.[34] Writing of rabbinic interpreters, Gordon has observed that few ever acknowledged the brutal treatment Hagar received, much less considered Hagar's possible moral or spiritual significance. "In general, the rabbis have rushed to 'blame the victim.' As with other such Biblical characters, there are attempts to present Hagar as fully deserving her outcast status and outside the purview of moral concern. Down to the present, the extraordinary lapses in justice, humanity, and trustworthiness are minimized or explained away."[35] Although Gordon's indictment of rabbinic interpreters will be revisited later on, her concerns are well worth keeping in mind as we turn to examine how Hagar fared among a larger sampling of precritical commentators. Will Christian expositors follow the same path by blaming Hagar, maximizing her vice while minimizing her virtue? More broadly stated, have the commentators of bygone days always been as neglectful — not to say heartless — toward Hagar as these modern critics seem to presume generally of Scripture and its traditional interpreters? Have Bible readers only so recently remembered Hagar? It is precisely here that my study finds its point of departure. What, in fact, did precritical commentators say about Hagar? Did they ignore her? Did they vilify her? We will seek answers to these questions, first, among the ancient and medieval commentators, and then in the commentaries of the Reformation era.

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[30] Tamez, "Woman Who Complicated," pp. 14, 16. Note analogous remarks by Hackett, "Rehabilitating Hagar," p. 24, Laffey, *Introduction*, p. 38; Niditch, "Genesis," p 18; Troost, "Author's Signature," p. 264; and Williams's rebuttal of Tamez, in *Sisters in the Wilderness*, p. 21.

[31] Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy," p. 17.

[32] Gordon, "'Throw-Away Character," p. 272. The parallels between Hagar's trials and Abraham's are especially striking in light of Wiesel's claim that midrashic tradition saw the *Akedah* as a punishment for the mistreatment of Ishmael; see "Ishmael and Hagar," p 247. But the text to which Wiesel alludes (*Genesis Rabbah* 55:7) makes no such causal connection, and although Darr repeats the claim, she cites only Wiesel's essay; see *Far More Precious than Jewels*, pp. 132, 150–51. For more general parallels, however, see the following note. For the view that the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael was actually a trial for Abraham, see n 49

[33] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, pp. 28–29 Hagar's "inverse adumbration" of the fate of Israel is argued on more extensive grounds by Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), chapter 10, esp. p. 97; also cf. pp. 123–24, 140. See also Frymer-Kensky, "The Bible and Women's Studies," pp 26–28

[34] This indictment is made both generally, as in Jeansonne's opening lines (*Women of Genesis*, p 1), but also specifically, as in Darr's irritation at Gerhard von Rad's favoring of Ishmael against his mother (*Far More Precious than Jewels*, p 140), or the similar bias Trible finds in Bruce Vawter's treatment of Abraham and Sarah (*Texts of Terror*, p. 31 n. 19).

Ancient and Patristic Exegesis: Reinventing the Allegorical Hagar

For the first major stage of our journey, I will examine Hagar's reception among ancient and patristic commentators. Actually, the earliest commentaries on Hagar may well be those discernible already within the books of the Bible. When Paul allegorically recast Hagar in Galatians 4, he provided an obvious case in point, but modern readers have found "intracanonical" commentary even within the book of Genesis itself.[36] Nonetheless, when early Christian readers went looking beyond the New Testament for help in explaining the Old Testament, they often consulted the writings of two first-century Jewish writers, Philo and Josephus. Accordingly, I will look first at Philo and some of his peers, then turn to trace the reverberations from Philo (and Paul) among patristic commentators such as Origen and Ambrose, along with several others. Not all early Christian writers, however, were fans of either Philo or allegorical exegesis, and so I will conclude this section with a survey of alternative and often more literal readings from other church fathers, including Jerome and Chrysostom.

Philo and the Philosophical Hagar

Although the earliest biblical interpreters pursue a variety of insights and agendas, the most intriguing conversation may well be the one begun by Philo, whose allegory of Hagar came to stand alongside that of St. Paul as another way of reading Genesis. Philo's comments on Hagar are scattered through almost a dozen treatises, but his views remain quite consistent and, it seems, influential.[37] As one would expect,

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[35] Gordon, "'Throw-Away Character,'" p. 271.

[36] Thus, Levenson thinks a cryptic allusion to Hagar's vindication may underlie the oracle about Joseph in Gen. 49:22–24 (*Beloved Son*, pp. 96–97). Similarly, in her chapter on the atrocities of Judges 19–21, Trible finds subtle commentaries in the arrangement of the canon and also later in the book of Hosea (*Texts of Terror*, pp 84–86).

[37] See the list of passages in Dorothy Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), p. 125 n. 17. The discussion that follows is drawn primarily from Philo's *De congressu quaerendae eruditionis gra-*

Philo's interest in the story of Sarah and Hagar is fueled not by a historian's agenda, but by that of a platonist and philosopher. Thus, at the conclusion of his investigations in *De congressu*, he cautions his readers against being misled by the literal storyline of Genesis: "When, then, you hear of Hagar as afflicted or evil-entreated by Sarah, do not suppose that you have here one of the usual accompaniments of women's jealousy. It is not women that are spoken of here; it is minds."[38] Philo is thus explicitly concerned not with the letter of the text, but with its spiritual or allegorical meaning. On this "higher" level, Philo interprets Abraham's wife Sarah as symbolizing virtue, while Hagar his concubine symbolizes not virtue but the "preliminary" or "encyclical" studies (grammar, history, music, geometry, rhetoric, and dialectic), which prepare one to attain virtue in its purest form and so serve as virtue's "handmaid."

Philo's allegory here is central to his pedagogical framework, but it also bears a number of implications for the image of Hagar. First of all, Philo's allegorical interpretation allows him to bypass the offense of Abraham's actual polygamy. Abraham did not take a second wife; instead, the account in Genesis describes how the soul (Abraham) is barren with respect to virtue or wisdom (Sarah) until it has been trained in the preparatory studies (Hagar). Philo has thereby dramatically changed the subject of the text, substituting timeless symbols for what the text presented as more or less historical personages. (Equally remarkable, by the way, is his willingness to attribute barrenness — allegorical barrenness, to be sure — not to the woman, Sarah, but to Abraham.)[39] As I will argue in a moment, it seems all but inevitable that the valuation of literary characters will be affected by their allegorical associations.

Second, Philo's allegory is capable of alternately exalting and denigrating the figure of Hagar. As a concubine she ranks below a wife, but on the philosophical level what Philo calls "encyclical instruction" is crucial and by no means to be despised, even if it stands second to wisdom or virtue. Philo's words here are particularly suggestive: "He . . . who gains wisdom by instruction *will not reject Hagar*, for the acquisition of these preliminary subjects is quite necessary."[40] As Philo's allegory continues, other disturbing aspects of the conflict between Hagar and her mistress are toned down, and there is little said of Hagar here (as also in several other treatises) except by way of commendation.[41] But Hagar fares less well later on, for Philo

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tia, but Philo's treatment of Hagar continues, albeit quite sporadically, in the three treatises that immediately follow in the sequence: *De fuga et inventione, De mutatione nominum*, and *De Abrahamo*. Most of this material appears more concisely in the *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesin* 3.18–38.

[38] Philo, *Congr.* 31 §180 (LCL 4:550–51).

[39] Philo, *Congr.* 4 §13 (LCL 4:464–65).

[40] Philo, *Congr.* 5 §24 (LCL 4:470–71), emphasis mine. His defense of "Hagar" here stands quite at odds with his application of Gen. 21:10 in the excerpt from *De cherubim* (below).

[41] Thus, when Abraham is told to "listen to Sarah" in Gen. 16:2, he is really listening to the voice of virtue. Hagar's contempt in Gen. 16:4 merely illustrates the limited perception of the intermediate arts and sciences. Sarah's "affliction" of Hagar in 16:6 is rather to be understood as the correction that wisdom administers to the lesser sciences. See Philo *Congr.* 13 §63, 25 §139, 28 §158 (LCL 4:488–91, 528–31, 540–41). *Quaest. in Gen.* 3.29 (LCL supp. 1:217) adds that Hagar's flight in Gen. 16:8 was impelled by a "reverential awe" and a sense of unworthiness to remain in the presence of virtue and wisdom. Sly's treatment of Hagar's flight (*Philo's Perception of Women*, pp. 129, 203) seems to have overlooked Philo's explanation here, somewhat at Hagar's expense.

knows the words of Gen. 21:10 as well as Paul did (cf. Gal. 4:30): "Cast out this slave woman. . . ." Accordingly, once virtue has been perfectly attained,

> then will be cast forth those preliminary studies which bear the name of Hagar, and cast forth too will be their son the sophist named Ishmael. The banishment on which they enter will be for ever, for the sentence of expulsion is confirmed by God when he bids the wise man hearken to the words of Sarah, who charges him expressly to cast forth the bondwoman and her son.[42]

At this point, however, one might well object that Philo's laudatory remarks were never intended as an encomium for the "historical" Hagar, but as an allegory of the progress of the philosophical soul from basic instruction to the attainment of perfect virtue. Philo himself regularly reminds his readers that he is not concerned with the literal meaning of the story. A brief excursus to unpack the issues here will serve us better now than later.

Even before Philo is interrogated about his historical concerns, one must register a caveat about the term "historical." Many modern interpreters would tend to think of the "historical" Hagar as the person whose story is hidden behind or under the literary text and recoverable only in part, if at all. By contrast, the precritical commentators studied here (and whose usage will govern our own) naively collapse the historical into the literal, so that the "historical" Hagar and Sarah and Abraham are all perfectly identical with their characterizations on the surface or "letter" of the narrative.[43] At the same time, however, that "letter" may well be narrating a parable rather than factual history, despite the verisimilitude that may deceive a careless reader! When Philo and the church fathers thus use allegory to bypass narratives that they find troubling if taken literally—say, Abraham's polygamy or the quarreling of Sarah and Hagar—usually their concern is not to deny that something "really" or historically happened, but only to deny that these events transpired in the unedifying manner that is literally depicted. Thus Abraham did take a second wife, properly understood. That is to say, the *taking* was real, or literal, or historical; the second wife, however, was none of these but only a metaphor for what Abraham really took: encyclical instruction, training for wisdom.

In Philo's case, the membrane between the literal or historical Hagar and her allegorical counterpart proves to be rather permeable. As other scholars have observed, Philo frequently blurs the line between the literal and the allegorical, shifting freely between his allegorical lessons and quasi-historical explanations of the characters' actions.[44] Although a wider reading of Philo would quickly reveal how he embraced many of the patriarchal values that prevailed in both his Hebrew and Hellenistic contexts,[45] he is clearly capable of portraying Hagar sympathetically, and it often seems that his positive regard for the allegorical Hagar has shaped how he articulates Hagar's actions and character even when his allegorical goals are out of the picture.[46] In other words, Philo's literal and allegorical exegesis are often connected by a two-way street: his allegory sometimes represents a flight from the letter, but it may also lead back to the letter. The fluidity with which Philo moved between historical and figurative interpretations is by no means unique: rather, he models what we may expect from later Alexandrians—Clement, Origen, and many disciples—and from allegorists in general.

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[42] Philo, *De cherubim* 2–3 §§8–9 (LCL 2:12–13). The text continues: "It is well to listen to the voice of virtue, above all when she sets before us such a doctrine as this, because the most perfect types of being and the secondary acquirements are worlds apart, and wisdom has no kinship with the sophist's culture." Encyclical study (Hagar) is useful when it leads to wisdom (Sarah), but when pursued as an end in itself it begets mere sophistry (Ishmael).

[43] The distinction is nicely put by David C. Steinmetz as between modern historical criticism's interest in *reconstruction* and precritical interest in the Bible's *self-presentation;* see "Divided by a Common Past: The Reshaping of the Christian Exegetical Tradition in the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997): 248.

[44] Samuel Sandmel has observed this with respect to Abraham in particular; see *Philo's Place in Judaism: A Study of Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1971), pp. 96–98. Dorothy Sly

Equally to the point, however, one may also argue that Philo's own intention and usage did not necessarily determine the later reception of his words. That is to say, Philo himself may well have had a low opinion of the "real" Hagar (though, perhaps significantly, he does not comment).[47] Yet the equanimity with which he often treated the allegorical Hagar may still have had an ameliorating effect on how the literal Hagar was later perceived. In any case, on the allegorical level, Philo clearly had no problem reading and even redirecting the biblical narrative so as to portray Hagar in a relatively flattering light.[48]

Josephus: Hagar as the Family's Foil

Before turning to an examination of early Christian commentary on Hagar, some notice should be taken of other early Jewish sources. The minor references to Hagar in *Jubilees* and in Pseudo-Philo[49] may be ignored, but attention must be paid to Josephus, who offers significant contrast to Philo. Hagar is mentioned twice in the *Antiquities*, in passages roughly paraphrasing Genesis 16 and 21. As is well known, Josephus's purpose in the *Antiquities* was to recount the history of the Jewish people in

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has similarly noted that Philo's treatment of Sarah and other Old Testament women "did not entirely eliminate the literal element" and so "an investigation of Philo's perception of women need not be restricted to material where he speaks of woman *qua* woman"; see *Philo's Perception of Women*, pp. 216, 218.

[45] See the judicious conclusions of Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women*, pp. 215–23.

[46] In *De fuga* 1 §§2–6 (LCL 5:10–13), for example, the honorable motive for the allegorical Hagar's flight is imputed also to the literal or historical Hagar, cf. n. 41.

[47] In other words, however much Philo displays the low view of women that would typify the first century, he remains capable of finding admirable traits in various biblical women. See Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women*, pp. 217–18, 221–23. As remarked earlier (n. 41), I think there is evidence that Philo is less hostile to Hagar than Sly would suggest.

[48] A useful contrast might be drawn here between Philo's mixed treatment of Hagar and his consistently negative portrayal of Ishmael ("the sophist"). See n. 42.

[49] Although O. S. Wintermute has observed that in the book of *Jubilees* (a work antedating Philo by two centuries) "the biblical account is frequently abbreviated to eliminate details such as Sarah's cruel treatment of Hagar in Genesis 16:4–14," little can be built on this remark. Not only does *Jubilees* 17 *not* omit Hagar's banishment (though the account displays no particular tendency), it is hard to detect any influence of *Jubilees* on early Christian exegesis, though *Jub.* 17:17 does characterize the exile of Hagar and Ishmael as one of Abraham's "tests"—a view with faint echoes later on; see *OTP* 2:36, 85, 90. The *Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo, likely a first-century work, extends to Hagar only the barest mention (*OTP* 2:313).

a way that would win the sympathies of his readers, both Hellenized Jews and pagan Greeks.[50] His characterizations of biblical figures are thus recast for the sake of those readers — a strategy that generally idealizes Abraham as national founder and hero, Sarah as his virtuous and unblemished spouse, and Hagar as a foil who serves only to set off the moral excellence of her master and mistress.[51] In the first passage, Josephus amplifies Hagar's insolence toward Sarah, whose severity is minimized, while Hagar's return to her mistress could easily be seen as her conformity to a pattern modeled by Sarah. For Josephus, virtue often seems quite straightforward: having been told by the angel that her plight stems from disobedience, Hagar thereupon becomes obedient (to God and to Sarah), returns, and is "forgiven" by "her master and mistress."[52]

With respect to the events depicted in the second passage (paralleling Genesis 21), Louis Feldman has pointed out three ways in which Josephus has groomed the biblical account to bring out the virtue of Abraham and his family, all of which also minimize the wrong done to Hagar.[53] First, Josephus depicts Sarah as having "cherished" Ishmael as her own son; only after Isaac's birth did she begin to worry about sibling rivalry and urge her husband to resettle Hagar and Ishmael elsewhere. Then, in his retelling of Gen. 21:11, Josephus's defense of Abraham implicitly admits the cruelty of the eviction. While the biblical text simply states that Abraham was "displeased" at Sarah's proposal to banish Hagar and Ishmael "on account of his son," Josephus tells us what Abraham was actually thinking, namely, that "nothing could be more brutal [πάντων ὠμότατον] than to send off an infant child with a woman destitute of the necessaries of life."[54] Where Scripture suggests that Abraham's resistance was moved solely by his love of Ishmael, Josephus draws the circle of Abraham's affections a bit wider and adds at least a passing recognition of the inhumanity of Hagar's exile. Finally, Feldman points out how "that pathetic scene (Gen. 21:16) in which Hagar lifts up her voice and weeps is completely omitted by Josephus, since it would apparently cast an unfavorable reflection on Abraham as pitiless."[55] Hagar thus remains a foil to the end. Nonetheless, Josephus's strategic glosses and omissions testify indirectly to his discomfort with the terms of Hagar's exile. Even if his subtle reworking of the narrative is really but his own exercise in denial, Josephus should still be credited as an early if perhaps unwilling witness to Hagar's raw treatment. Those later commentators who paused to worry over ethical implications might have found in Josephus a stimulus of sorts, if not quite a real precedent.

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[50] See Louis H. Feldman, "Hellenizations in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*: The Portrait of Abraham," in *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 133–37.

[51] In addition to Feldman (previous note), see James L. Bailey's essay in the same volume, "Josephus' Portrayal of the Matriarchs," p. 159; and Betsy Halpern Amaru, "Portraits of Biblical Women in Josephus' Antiquities," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 39 (1988): 144–48 Amaru concludes (p. 169): "Be it by reconstruction, rehabilitation or removal from the narrative, [all of Josephus's] women function either to enhance a male hero or detract from a male flaw"

[52] Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.10.4 §§189–90 (LCL 4:92–95).

[53] Feldman, "Portrait of Abraham," pp. 143–44.

[54] Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.12.3 §216 (LCL 4:106–7).

[55] Feldman, "Portrait of Abraham," pp. 143–44.

Early Christian Allegoresis: Hagar's Journey beyond Paul and Philo

Among the writings of the church fathers, it is difficult to find extended comments pertaining to Hagar. Although there are several patristic commentaries on Genesis, many are concerned exclusively with questions of creation and the fall.[56] Nonetheless, Hagar does make several brief appearances, some of which are properly exegetical in genre while others are poetic, polemic, or philosophical. In his recent study of the reception of Philo in early Christian literature, David Runia observes that Philo and Paul offered later Christian writers two distinct options, equally allegorical, for how to present and interpret Hagar, and each approach had its followers. Runia's analysis is a useful starting point. Here we will look at how Philonic interpretations of Hagar were developed by early Christian writers, then move on to examine Hagar in other patristic exegesis, both allegorical and literal.[57]

Interest in Philo's exegesis took root first and most naturally in his own city of Alexandria, that center of philosophy in late antiquity and the second city of the Roman Empire. It is therefore no surprise to find Philonic influence in the Christian Alexandrians of later centuries, including Clement, Origen, and Didymus the Blind, as well as in Gregory of Nyssa. Philo came also to Ambrose of Milan, far off in the Latin West, and then to Jerome and Augustine. But however much Christian allegorists were indebted to Philo, few were slavish in their imitation. In fact, at the hands of these Christian interpreters, Philo's allegory gradually underwent an evolution of sorts, if not a deliberate hybridization, so that it eventually came to coexist with the Pauline reading and with newer variations as well.

Clement of Alexandria. Our central question, of course, is not how Philo's exegesis is adopted, but the comparatively simpler question of how Hagar is portrayed or regarded. For this reason, Clement of Alexandria's explicit reliance on Philo for his allegorical account of Hagar is not nearly as interesting as Origen's. Clement's debt to Philo is credited explicitly in *Stromateis* 1.5.28–32,[58] where he cites Philo as an etymological authority of sorts and proceeds to describe Hagar as a symbol of secular learning or culture. His burden here, as in other treatises, is to argue for the value of Greek philosophy to the Christian faith, and his case clearly parallels Philo's in asserting the value of philosophy (Hagar) as "preliminary" to the acquisition of higher wisdom (Sarah). The key difference, as Annewies van den Hoek observes, is that where Philo linked wisdom to the law, Clement connects wisdom to Christ.[59] Still, Philo's ambivalent portrait of Hagar is essentially unchanged by Clement, who is, if anything, even less forthcoming about the literal Hagar.

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[56] Such is the case with Augustine's three commentaries on Genesis, as well as with the *Hexaemeron* of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*. Several other ancient commentaries are no longer extant

[57] David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 86. Runia cites Clement, Origen, Didymus, and Ambrose as following Philo, while Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Cyril, and Isidore of Pelusium follow St. Paul. My own reading has been governed less by a concern to trace the career of Philo than to trace that of Hagar, so that my perspective, my selection, and my findings all depart at some points from Runia's generalization here. Thus Ambrose, for example, may actually be placed in both camps at once

[58] Text in SC 30.65–69, FC 85:41–46, and ANF 2:306 Clement's works are difficult to date with precision; his life extended from ca. 150 to 214 (Quasten 2:5–6).

Origen. The successor of Clement as head of the catechetical school in Alexandria, Origen offers a rather enigmatic portrait of Hagar, one that incorporates Philonic and Pauline themes yet adds insights not found in any of these forerunners. Echoes of Philo are surely to be heard, first of all, in Origen's homilies on Genesis, which he probably preached around the year 240 in Caesarea in Cappadocia. In the sixth homily, addressing the scandal of Abraham's polygamy, Origen allegorizes the patriarch's multiple *wives* as multiple *virtues*, exhorting Christians to take as many of such "wives" (virtues) as they can.[60] Philonic echoes are even clearer in the eleventh homily, where various forms of "external" instruction are likened to "concubines" or "foreign wives."[61] However, Origen's tapestry is woven of other threads, too. In his seventh homily, Origen uses his professed puzzlement over Sarah's motive for objecting to Ishmael "playing" with Isaac — and over why Paul termed this "persecution" — as a rationale for reading the account of Hagar's expulsion spiritually, whereby the flesh (Ishmael) tempts or "persecutes" the spirit (Isaac).[62] The allegorical reading here represents an early contribution to a long discussion over the relationship between the "letter" of Scripture and its "spirit" — a discussion that often invoked Paul's difficult point in 2 Cor. 3:6 about how his own ministry under the new covenant was a ministry "not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."[63] Origen's cross-reference from Galatians 4 to 2 Corinthians 3 is meant, of course, to enrich and amplify the Pauline allegory, but it does not augur well for Hagar. Indeed, to conflate Paul's treatment of Hagar in Galatians with his words about how "the letter kills" would seem to make Hagar liable not only for the burden of the law but also for the "killing letter."

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[59] See Annewies van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the* Stromateis: *An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 3; Leiden: Brill, 1988), p. 46; idem, "Mistress and Servant: An Allegorical Theme in Philo, Clement and Origen," in Lothar Lies, ed., *Origeniana Quarta* (Fourth International Colloquium for Origen Studies, Innsbruck, 1985; Innsbrucker Theologische Studien 19; Innsbruck and Vienna: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), pp. 344–48; and Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, p. 139. Van den Hoek's book also discusses how Clement homogenizes, in effect, Philo's more differentiated allegory of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac (pp. 37–38).

[60] Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 6.3 and 11.1 (PG 12:197–98, 221; FC 71:126, 168–71). In the latter text, it is actually Keturah — Abraham's third wife — whom Origen has in view, but he explicitly generalizes his remarks to apply to all the cases of patriarchal polygamy. For the dating of Origen's Old Testament homilies, see Ronald E. Heine's introduction to Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* in FC 71, pp. 19–24.

[61] Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 11.2 (PG 12:222–23, FC 71:171). The motif of the "foreign wife" is one Origen could easily have found also in Clement; see van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo*, p. 37.

[62] See Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 7.3–6 (PG 12:200–203, FC 71:130–35). Origen's puzzlement, if not a conceit, might suggest that he was unaware of the rabbinic interpretations of Ishmael's "play" (to be discussed in connection with Jerome, below), despite his allusion to "Jewish fables" at the end of *Hom. Gen.* 6.3 (PG 12:198, FC 71:126).

[63] For a discussion of this text in a later context, see Karlfried Froehlich, "'Always to Keep the Literal Sense in Holy Scripture Means to Kill One's Soul' The State of Biblical Hermeneutics at the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century," in *Literary Uses of Typology from the Late Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Earl Miner (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 20-48.

What makes Origen's image of Hagar truly enigmatic, however, is that, having drawn such a potentially toxic connection between Hagar and the unspiritual "letter," he shows no interest in vilifying Hagar. Paul may think that Hagar symbolizes the old covenant, but Origen sidesteps any such conclusion. Instead of faulting Hagar, whether the historical concubine or the allegorical one, Origen allegorically disparages the *bottle* (of water) that Abraham gave to Hagar as she left. In this way Origen does not brand Hagar with the stigma of the law and the letter, but actually frees her from both: "The bottle of the Law is the letter, from which that carnal people drinks. . . . This letter frequently fails them, . . . for the historical understanding is defective in many things." The church, on the other hand, drinks from the fountain of spiritual interpretation — as does Hagar, it would suddenly seem! She thus emerges not as a scapegoat but as an exemplar of sorts. Like the Samaritan woman in John 4, Origen writes, Hagar has had her eyes opened to see the true well of living water, which is Jesus Christ. Apparently, she is no longer to be counted among the "carnal" Jews. Origen thereby both acknowledges and transforms the allegory of Galatians, so that the woman whom Paul once described as bearing children for slavery survives to become, against all expectations, a freeborn child of Sarah.[64]

There are many remarkable features in Origen's treatment of Hagar, yet neither the assured influence of Philo and Paul nor the allegorical method in general are factors capable of forecasting his conclusions. As one of Abraham's "virtues," Origen's Hagar is a first cousin to Philo's "preliminary instruction," and as one who knows the law in all its desiccation, she is clearly akin also to the Pauline Hagar. However, unlike Philo and Paul, Origen wrote an additional chapter, one that rehabilitates and Christianizes Hagar. Alongside her other roles, she now prefigures the church, the new people of God who have been rescued from the bondage of the law. Why does Origen go this extra mile? Although Origen's affirmation of Hagar in his seventh homily might be attributable simply to his delight in her assonance with the woman of Samaria, to the serendipity of seeing one well and one woman in another, it seems more likely that he is responding to textual clues in the narrative. After all, Hagar's story ends not with her ejection but with a gracious deus ex machina — with an epiphany that was literal before it was ever allegorical. And so it should be no surprise to discover that more than an inkling of the literal Hagar — the Hagar to whom God twice appeared and spoke words of promise and comfort — has crept back into what Origen began as allegory but ended as something more.

Didymus the Blind. The Philonic interpretation of Hagar is taken up again a century after Origen by yet another Alexandrian, Didymus the Blind (313–398), who consciously tries to harmonize Philo with Paul. Much like others influenced by Philo, Didymus depicts Sarah as representing "perfect and spiritual virtue [τελείαν ἀρετὴν καὶ πνευματικὴν]," while Hagar stands for the studies that are preliminary or preparatory to attaining virtue. His assertion of the equivalence of the Philonic preliminary studies with the Pauline "letter" and "shadow" is remarkable for underscoring so unambiguously the indispensability of literal exegesis—and thus also the indispensability of Hagar: "It is impossible to understand any of the spiritual or elevated doctrines apart from the shadow according to the letter or apart from the preliminary training of the introductory studies, for it is necessary first to have the children of the inferior [wives]."[65] Didymus's is an extensive commentary, and though his application of Philo largely conforms to lines drawn two centuries earlier by Clement,[66] he pays far more attention to the narrative's characters and details. As we will see in a moment, by commingling the Philonic and Pauline allegories, Didymus actually treats her as much more than a cipher or symbol, and by juxtaposing literal and spiritual exegesis he effectively draws the allegorical Hagar into an orbit coordinated with the literal concubine.

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[64] For this reason it is misleading to say without further qualification that Origen "follows Philo rather than Paul," as does Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, p. 171.

Didymus regularly signals when changing lanes from literal to figurative exegesis (his preferred term is "anagogy"), so much so that—when a discussion fails to receive either label—one may wonder if Didymus himself is undecided. It is nothing new to see Sarah's conduct praised throughout the events of Genesis 16,[67] nor to see Didymus take Hagar's contempt for Sarah in 16:4 as betokening the incongruity of pursuing lesser things after having beheld perfection, for these are both Philonic moves.[68] Yet Didymus finds much to praise in Hagar—and it often appears to be the literal Hagar who is in view. The handmaid's reputation is established by her angelic rescue in 16:7–8, and Didymus's opening remark inadvertently underscores the likeness of the literal Hagar to the allegorical Sarah:

> From these things one can see the virtue of Hagar [τὴν ἀρετὴν τῆς Ἀγὰρ] and conclude that she is not a woman easily despised, since an angel conversed with her and watched over her carefully and deliberately, just as God clearly willed . . . Nor is it unlikely that she was of good character [σπουδαίαν], seeing that she had been chosen by Sarah, that holy woman, to cohabit with Abraham. And her conciliatory disposition [εὔγνωμον] is evinced by her response, "I am fleeing from the face of Sarah, my mistress," in no way [speaking] evil of her.[69]

Evidently, the literal Hagar harbors a good deal of the "virtue" that the allegorical Sarah symbolizes. That much is argued by her heavenly visitor, but Didymus builds also on the blessing promised to Hagar and on her own response to the deity. To be sure, Hagar's promise—given here to the allegorical Hagar—is not as great as Abraham's, for although both are promised descendants beyond counting, only those of Abraham are likened to the stars, presumably indicating that the children of perfection are "luminous" while those of the preliminary studies (=Hagar) are not.[70] But when Didymus comes to reflect on Hagar's naming of God in 16:13, clearly he has returned to the literal Hagar, whose vision of God is to be explained by Matt. 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Didymus does not appear to shrink from the implication that Hagar the runaway must therefore be pure of heart; indeed, he has already prepared the way to this conclusion and goes on to generalize that God renders himself visible to all who do not disbelieve him.[71] In sum, the Philonic and Pauline allegories of Hagar are both embraced and transcended by Didymus's openhanded reception of the literal Hagar, and the laurels he places on her set a mark of respect that will not soon be surpassed.[72]

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[65] See Didymus the Blind, *Sur la Genèse*, vol. 2, ed. Pierre Nautin with Louis Doutreleau (SC 244; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978), p. 204, lines 236.8–12. Nautin's page/line numbers follow the papyrus codex; my references will also indicate pages in SC 244. My translation here builds on that of Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, p. 203. Didymus appeals to the allegory of Sarah and Hagar elsewhere to make the same point: "It is indeed impossible to understand the anagogic interpretation without first articulating the historical." See *Didymos der Blinde Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes Teil 5*, ed. M. Gronewald (Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen 24; Bonn: Habelt, 1979), pp. 276.19–22, as cited by Runia, p. 199.

[66] A point registered by Albert Henrichs, "Philosophy, the Handmaiden of Theology," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968): 449.

[67] Didymus's commentary on Genesis, recovered only in 1941, does not extend beyond the tattered fragment that addresses Gen. 17:1–6

[68] Didymus, *Sur la Genèse*, 237.8–12 (SC 244:206)

[69] Didymus, *Sur la Genèse*, 241.25–242.5 (SC 244:216) The ellipsis represents text missing from the papyrus; my translation has tried to incorporate the resulting fragmentary sentence. This quotation also ends with a defective line.

Gregory of Nyssa. As we proceed further with Hagar through the fourth century, the influence of Philo continues, but with increasing dilution, as may be illustrated by Gregory of Nyssa (as well as by Ambrose of Milan and Augustine). Evidence that Philo was well known to Gregory has been rehearsed by Runia, who further demonstrates that Gregory's use of Philo was never a matter of cut-and-paste.[73] One may assume, therefore, that Gregory would have familiarized himself with Philo's accounts of creation before he wrote his own in 379, and that he would have had further exposure to Philonic themes as transmitted by Origen. Nonetheless, Gregory's image of Hagar reflects more of St. Paul than of Philo, though it does so through an unmistakably Origenistic lens. Preaching on the baptism of Christ (probably on Epiphany 383),[74] Gregory delights to recall the typological antecedents of baptism, first among which he numbers the "well of living water" that God showed to Hagar in Genesis 21, by which both her life and her son's were saved. In this exposition, Gregory recalls the Pauline allegory and finds the story of Hagar's rescue a fitting image of the inadequacy of "the synagogue" to sustain itself fully, unlike Abraham and Sarah, who are "figures [τύποις] of the everlasting fountain."[75] Nyssen's sermon is thoroughly reminiscent at this point of Origen's seventh homily on Genesis and of the Christological reading of Hagar's well offered there, even as the typological Hagar drives Gregory's sermon more than the literal or historical Hagar. Nonetheless, the overlap of the allegorical and historical details—indeed, Gregory is keenly aware of such details as Hagar's dire straits and the poignancy of the final scene—

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[70] Didymus, *Sur la Genèse*, 244.21–245.2 (SC 244:222).

[71] Didymus, *Sur la Genèse*, 248.15–22 (SC 244:232).

[72] Didymus's treatment of Hagar illustrates an independence of mind, even as his mostly traditional and hierarchical account of gender and gender roles is mitigated by an allowance that women may achieve a measure of equality in "the spiritual order"; see Émilien Lamirande, "Le masculin et le féminin dans la tradition alexandrine: le commentaire de Didyme l'Aveugle sur la 'Genèse,'" *Science et Esprit* 41 (1989): 137–65, esp. 142–43; cf. 154–57, 164.

[73] Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, pp. 243–61.

[74] So Quasten 3:277.

[75] Gregory of Nyssa, "In diem luminum, *vulgo* In baptismum Christi oratio," in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, vol. 9, *Sermones Pars I*, ed. Gunter Heil et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1967), pp. 230.19–231.9; cf. also NPNF^2 5:521.

summons his hearers to listen anew and simultaneously humanizes his portrait of Hagar, albeit at the cost of further stereotyping the synagogue and the Old Testament people of God.

Ambrose of Milan. No church father used Philo as copiously as did Ambrose — so much so that he was heralded as "the Latin Philo" and as *Philo Christianus* by two of his nineteenth-century editors.[76] Much like Philo, Ambrose wrote a series of treatises on the patriarchs, though Ambrose's long treatise *De Abraham* — written within a few years of Gregory's sermon, above — resembles Philo's only in its second, allegorical book.[77] There, Ambrose presents two allegorical readings of Hagar. The first is mostly Pauline.[78] Sarah represents the church, while Hagar represents the synagogue — or, perhaps, all heresy — which begets servants, not free sons. Accordingly, while Hagar "encourages hope in this life, she does not hold onto grace as a perpetual possession." Under the influence of Galatians 4, Ambrose asserts that the severe words of Gen. 21:10 ("Cast out the slave woman") are the foundation of the church's "legal claim [*jus ecclesiae*]" against the synagogue.[79] Ambrose's second allegory is more indebted to Philo. Here he interprets Sarah and Hagar according to their moral or tropological significance, that is, as they symbolize features of the soul. Whereas Philo portrayed Hagar as the preliminary studies, which, while essential, remain subordinate to wisdom or virtue, Ambrose widens the contrast. For him, Sarah represents true wisdom or virtue; Hagar, mere wiliness, the wisdom of this world.[80]

In neither of his allegories does Ambrose display any interest in Hagar as more than a foil or cipher for his prosecution of two traditional arguments: one polemical, the other moralistic, and neither very original. In the more literal exposition found in his first book on Abraham, however, Ambrose seems more aware of the ethical dimensions of the story. Although Hagar is mentioned mostly in passing, it is worth recording Ambrose's admission that Sarah punished Hagar beyond reasonable measure.[81] To be sure, he seems convinced that there was no middle, conciliatory path for Abraham to walk between Sarah and Hagar: "Whoever wishes to vindicate the maidservant would exclude his wife."[82] And, later on, in treating the expulsion of Hagar, Ambrose invests the divine endorsement of Sarah's plan with almost proverbial status: "Better for the handmaid to withdraw than the wife, and better for the handmaid's son to be ejected than the freeborn."[83] Nonetheless, embedded within his remarks there is still an acknowledgment, at least, that the eviction of Hagar and Ishmael was a hard matter.[84]

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[76] As attributed to J. B. Aucher (1826) and L. Cohn (1896) by Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, p. 292.

[77] Maria Grazia Mara discusses the homiletical origin of the first book and the independence of the second (Quasten 4 156); the treatise has been dated from 382 to after 388.

[78] Ambrose, *De Abraham* 2.72–75 (PL 14:515f).

[79] Ambrose, *De Abraham* 2.72 (PL 14:515).

[80] Ambrose, *De Abraham* 2.73 (PL 14:515): "Sara virtus vera est, vera sapientia: Agar autem est versutia, tanquam ancilla perfectioris virtutis. Alia enim sapientia spiritalis, alia sapientia hujus mundi."

[81] Hagar, to be sure, is also faulted for her insolence and pride; see Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1.26 (PL 14:453)

[82] Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1.26 (PL 14:453). The full text reads, "Opto igitur ut hoc vitium nullus incidat; sed si quis inciderit, discat ancillam suam humiliare uxori suæ; ne dum vult ancillam vindicare, excludat uxorem."

If Ambrose seems to side consistently against Hagar, it is probably because he reads the episode through the spectacles of Paul—a tendency that emerges in the influential excuse he offers for Abraham's polygamy. Accordingly, what seemed to be Abraham's sin was actually prophetic, a mystery to be explained only much later, namely, when Paul wrote the allegory of Galatians 4. In other words, the entire nexus of events—from Abraham's polygamy, through the quarreling of his two wives, to his eviction of Hagar and Ishmael—was divinely orchestrated not so much for the participants but for later readers, as a prefiguration of how the church would come to supplant the synagogue.

Ambrose's argument proved momentous not only for Hagar but also for later exegesis. For Hagar, Ambrose's rationalization was deleterious, for by adding a layer of divine endorsement to Abraham's polygamy, he suspended all ethical considerations and inadvertently ratified Hagar's subsequent mistreatment. After all, what happened as a divinely arranged figure cannot be accounted a crime.[85] For later exegesis, Ambrose's "providential" argument for a typological reading would become a traditional explanation,[86] to be extended well beyond the apostolic warrant of Galatians 4 as a panacea for any number of troubling texts. From a hermeneutical perspective, the argument is at once a cunning and confusing crossbreed of the literal and the figurative: whereas allegory could be construed as independent of the letter and even as a denial of the historical narrative, Ambrose's "providential typology" insists on the historicity of the events and deeds narrated but divorces them from the usual ethical realm. For Ambrose, Abraham really took two wives and he really drove one into the desert. However, these otherwise heinous deeds were directed not by lust or cruelty but by God's plan to frame a grand, typological lesson.

Augustine's Allegoresis. A few of Augustine's writings contain allegorical comments on Hagar, but the influence of Philo is far less evident than that of Ambrose. Even then, he seems less interested in exegeting the text of Genesis than in ornamenting his various polemics. Accordingly, Hagar first appears in Augustine's reply to Faustus the Manichaean (397–398). Defending the polygamy of Abraham, Augustine invokes a mild version of the defense crafted by Ambrose: Hagar is essential to the saga only as "a figure of the Old Testament."[87]

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[83] Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1.65 (PL 14:466). He then turns to his audience and amplifies his remarks: "Quod si dubitaveris, si contempseris uxoris tuæ sententiam et si durum tibi visum fuerit, dicit tibi Deus quod dixit et Abrahæ; quod illi enim dixit, tibi dicit, et omnibus dicit." Amazingly, within a few sentences Ambrose draws forth as a general lesson that "casting out the slave woman" will contribute to one's wife remaining at home, safe and unriled.

[84] As is implicit in his phrase (in the previous note), *si durum tibi visum fuerit.* Ambrose does impute to God a measure of concern for Ishmael, though in fact Ambrose's speech assures Ishmael of no more than common grace: ". . . pluit super justos et injustos"! Hagar, however, is portrayed in this context essentially as a threat See Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1.65 (PL 14:467).

[85] Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1.28 (PL 14:454). Note, however, that this passage in Ambrose directly follows a paragraph in which he finds at least a mild note of rebuke directed to Abraham in the words of Gen. 17:1.

[86] See my essay, "The Immoralities of the Patriarchs in the History of Exegesis: A Reassessment of Calvin's Position," *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (1991): 9–46, esp. 18–21

In various anti-Donatist treatises (400–418), Hagar comes to symbolize all those whose relationship to the church is irregular, at best (another Ambrosian theme). Sometimes Augustine reiterates the ominous ejection formula of Gen. 21:10, implying that the Donatists (like Ishmael) have no part in the inheritance of Abraham.[88] At other times his remarks cultivate ambiguity, so that Hagar may be portrayed not only as the mother of "false Christians," who persist in carnal affections, but also—and in the same paragraph—as the mother of those who are brought to the true church through the insincere preaching of schismatics.[89] In yet another twist, Augustine likens the church's persecution of the Donatists to Sarah's "persecution" of Hagar in Gen. 16:6, then observes that there is also a countersuit to be brought, for Hagar's insolence in Gen. 16:4 could also be characterized as a persecution of Sarah! Augustine concludes that the Donatists of his own day prove nothing by alleging that they have been persecuted; the question turns rather on whether the persecution was righteous or unrighteous. Augustine obviously wishes to side with Sarah against Hagar, who once again represents the heterodox.[90] Augustine's use of Hagar to attack the Donatists could represent his own application of a reading found in the second book of Ambrose's *De Abraham*. In any case, "Hagar" is nothing more than a pretext for Augustine here, a hammer against his foes.

Finally, in books 15–17 of *The City of God*, where Augustine summarizes most of Old Testament history, Hagar appears early on in the company of Cain.[91] Together they people the earthly city, which images and foreshadows the heavenly city but which will ultimately be condemned to destruction. Later on, when Augustine recapitulates the Abrahamic history, the behavior of both Hagar and Sarah in Genesis 16 is compared unfavorably to the "temperance" of Abraham. Hagar's banishment is mentioned only in passing, en route to Augustine's assertion of the superiority of Sarah, who was never called a concubine.[92] Despite his many references to Hagar, however, she is never more than a cipher for Augustine, whose exegesis here is always driven by some extraneous polemical goal and barely if ever engages the literal narrative and the literal Hagar.

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[87] Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* 22.32 (PL 42:421, NPNF 4:285). In the following chapter, we will see how Augustine capitalizes on providential typology in a far grander manner to explain the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter.

[88] *De baptismo contra Donatistas* 1.10.14 (PL 43:117, NPNF 4:418).

[89] *De baptismo contra Donatistas* 1.16.25 (PL 43:123, NPNF 4:422).

[90] *De correctione Donatistarum* 2.11 (PL 33:797, NPNF 4.637). Augustine's argument is amplified in his eleventh sermon (*tractatus*) on the Gospel of John, esp. §§12–15 (NPNF 7:77–81). The expulsion of Hagar is actually but one of several typologies Augustine drew from the Old Testament for the sole purpose of justifying coercion of the Donatists; see Charles J. Scalise, "Exegetical Warrants for Religious Persecution. Augustine Vs the Donatists," *Review and Expositor* 93 (1996): 497–506. Maureen A. Tilley's recent study suggests that the Donatists preferred to identify themselves with the obedient but oppressed Israelites, as depicted in various biblical episodes, see *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997). Yet one can imagine otherwise. For instance, in a preliminary examination of seventeenth-century paintings from the Dutch Republic, Andrew Pettegree of the University of St. Andrews has found a number of sympathetic representations of Hagar, suggesting that those who were driven from the southern Netherlands to seek safety in the North saw their own experience mirrored in the story of Hagar's exile, even though they would have had theological reasons also to identify with the line of faith leading from Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac

[91] Augustine's famous distinction between the two cities is one place where many have seen Philo in the background, but the evidence remains ambiguous. See Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, pp. 327–28.

The Literal Hagar among the Church Fathers

So far I have presented mostly allegorical treatments of Hagar, using the dialogue between Pauline and Philonic precedents as an entree for later interpreters. We have seen that allegory can be *dismissive* of Hagar, presuming to expand upon her seemingly disfavored status in Paul; *sympathetic*, apparently in response to the divine favor she receives in Genesis; or *mixed*, as with Philo and a few of his closest followers, who underscore Hagar's secondary importance. Both Philo and Paul do have certain "pure" adherents among the church fathers, but we have seen more than mere partisanship, for a few interpreters — notably, Origen and Didymus the Blind — complicate the discussion not only by blending Philo and Paul, but also by drawing their allegory from the insights of literal exegesis. If it is possible to claim a correspondence between dignity or sympathy extended to an allegorical or symbolic Hagar and the dignity of the literal Hagar, such correspondence will probably emerge from the sort of conflated interpretations propounded by Origen and Didymus, that is, from the tacit influence of literal readings upon ostensibly figurative exegesis. Appropriately, we turn now to examine some early accounts of Hagar that are more strictly nonallegorical, including works by Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Procopius.

Jerome. A number of patristic writers followed the pattern — though not the content — of one of Philo's treatises, the *Questions and Answers on Genesis*. Hagar is considered in works so titled that survive from Jerome, Augustine, and Theodoret.[93] Jerome composed his *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* during the early 390s. Although Jerome's controversial debt to the exegesis of Origen is well known, his study here sets aside the allegorical interest he had acquired over a decade before. Jerome focuses largely on the meaning of Hebrew words, and it is only in Genesis 21 that his comments stray into our realm of interest. In addition to pondering how Hagar could have possibly carried Ishmael (as implied in 21:14), when Gen. 17:25 implies that the boy would have been at least thirteen years old, Jerome also addresses why Sarah might have taken such offense to see Ishmael playing with Isaac. "Playing" here could indicate that Ishmael was simply joking with Isaac about how the older brother would receive the primogeniture; or it might have the connotation found in Exod. 32:6, where "playing" occurs in the context of idolatry, so that Ishmael may have made toy idols (*idola ludo fecerit*). The latter, rather implausible, interpretation is significant partly because of its probable rabbinic origin (one wonders what other rabbinic readings Jerome may have known but declined to report), and partly because it also introduced Christian readers to the question of whether the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael was provoked by a more serious crime than one might otherwise believe.[94]

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[92] See Augustine, *Civ Dei* 15.2–4; 16.25, 34.

[93] In his somewhat similar work on Hebrew names, Jerome acknowledged precedents in Philo and Origen (CCSL 72:59, PL 23:771). Jean Gribomont notes that the genre was employed by Aristotle, Plutarch, and Porphyry, and applied specifically to biblical exegesis also by Eusebius and Acacius of Caesarea (Quasten 4:233). See below for Theodoret's contribution

Jerome also comments briefly on Hagar's weeping. Feminist critics have observed that although the Hebrew text of Gen. 21:16 says that "*she* lifted up her voice and wept," the following verse subtly undercuts Hagar when it states that "God heard the voice of the *lad*."[95] Jerome faithfully reports what he finds in the Hebrew, explaining that God heard the boy on account of the promise made to Abraham, but he goes on to describe Hagar's grief in more than cursory detail: "While the mother wept, miserably awaiting the death of her son, God heard the child concerning whom he had promised to Abraham, saying *but I will also make the son of your handmaid into a great nation*. Moreover, even the mother herself bewailed not her own death but her son's. Therefore God spared him for whom, truly, there had been weeping."[96] It is difficult to know just how much to make of the *igitur* ("therefore") that follows Jerome's account of Hagar's grief. Did Hagar's prayer or piety elicit God's mercy, perhaps? Jerome does not say, but before he moves on to the next pericope, he once more recognizes Hagar's anxious concern for Ishmael.[97]

Augustine and the Literal Hagar. Augustine's *Questions on the Heptateuch* (ca. 419) bypass Genesis 16 and devote only five questions to Genesis 21. There are no Philonic echoes here,[98] and the only question of interest to us asks why Abraham was distressed over the eviction of Ishmael, given that something like this had been prophesied to him (presumably, in Gen. 17:19–21). Augustine's exegesis here builds on a literal reading, suggesting that when Sarah ordered her husband to "cast out the slave woman," she spoke prophetically. To be sure, she may not have known her words were prophetic—perhaps she spoke out of "womanish passion"—but in either case Abraham does not seem to have realized that Sarah spoke in fulfillment of the earlier prophecy until he was later instructed by the Lord. Abraham's distress thus arose from misplaced parental affection. Despite Augustine's fondness for casting the allegorical Hagar as an antagonist, in this work she does not come to his notice at all, either as foil or villain. Rather, any consideration of her plight is upstaged by a "higher" agenda, namely, by Augustine's interest in how prophecy comes to pass regardless of human wit.[99]

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[94] Jerome, *Liber Hebraicarum Quaestionum in Genesim* 21:9 (CCSL 72:24, PL 23:967). For Jerome's irregular reliance on contemporary Jewish teachers and sources, see Dennis Brown, *Vir Trilinguis: A Study in the Biblical Exegesis of Saint Jerome* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), pp. 70–82, 167–74; Adam Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of the Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 176–91; and C. T. R. Hayward, introduction to *Saint Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 6–23. This midrashic argument from Exod. 32:6 appears in *Genesis Rabbah* 53:11 and elsewhere. The rabbinic treatment of these verses is summarized variously by Darr, *Far More Precious than Jewels*, pp. 142–44; Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (1909–38; reprint ed., Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968), 1:237–39, 263–66; Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), pp 156–60; and my pp. 53–60. See also n. 110.

[95] The LXX masculinizes the verb in 21:16. See Trible, *Texts of Terror*, pp. 24–26; and Darr, *Far More Precious than Jewels*, pp. 142–44. According to the rabbis (Darr, p. 146), Ishmael was heard because he prayed to Yahweh, whereas Hagar had prayed to idols.

[96] Jerome, *Quaest. in Gen.* 21:15–17 (CCSL 72.25, PL 23:968): "Flente enim matre, et mortem filii miserabiliter praestolante, deus exaudiuit puerum, de quo pollicitus fuerat Abrahae dicens *sed et filium ancillae tuae in gentem magnam faciam*. Alioquin et ipsa mater non suam mortem, sed filii deplorabat. Pepercit igitur ei deus, pro quo fuerat et fletus."

[97] Jerome, *Quaest. in Gen.* 21:18 (CCSL 72.25, PL 23:968): "Quod autem manu parentis tenetur, sollicitus monstratur affectus"

[98] It seems most likely that Augustine had firsthand knowledge of some parts of Philo, perhaps in a Latin translation, but it is also probable that some of his information came secondhand, from Ambrose. See Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, pp. 320–30.

John Chrysostom. At this point our survey turns back to the East, to the decidedly nonallegorical exegesis of two Antiochene theologians and one Alexandrian. Perhaps the longest single work on Genesis surviving from the patristic period is the series of homilies on Genesis delivered by John Chrysostom in Antioch in 388.[100] Taken as a whole, Chrysostom's homilies on Genesis are concerned to show God's kindness and consideration toward finite and limited human beings.[101] But the extensive narratives involving Abraham and Sarah are also driven by another of Chrysostom's themes, that of the harmony that ought to prevail between husband and wife. Hagar's story is often stretched between these two great themes, and the result is a study in ambiguity.

Accordingly, while sometimes Sarah and Hagar are jointly scored for the "womanish" behavior that stems from their "natural frailty," Chrysostom often tends to side with Sarah and especially with Abraham against Hagar. Twice he writes off Hagar's pride in Gen. 16:4 as simply epitomizing "the way servants are," and he stresses that Hagar—having had intercourse with Abraham on but a single occasion—had "no claim" on Abraham, who was concerned solely to keep Sarah undisturbed and to "tighten the bonds of peace and harmony."[102] Similarly, in treating the expulsion of Hagar, Chrysostom defends the fairness of Sarah's plan, so that, far from "acting unreasonably, she acted . . . so logically that even God agreed with the words she spoke."[103]

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[99] Augustine, *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum, libri septem* 51 (PL 34.560–61). Of the four other questions, q. 50 asks why Abraham celebrated Isaac's weaning, not his birth or circumcision (in a comment redolent of Origen [n 61, in this chapter], Augustine observes that the question is unanswerable unless one refers it to a spiritual weaning, à la 1 Cor. 3:2); q. 52 comments on how Ishmael can also be called "Abraham's seed"; q. 53 takes up Jerome's question (above) of Ishmael's age at the time of his exile and concludes that it is "absurd" to imagine Hagar literally carrying a boy who was fifteen or sixteen years old; and q. 54 argues that Hagar could "cast" such a boy under a tree only if we understand the words idiomatically, as a mental act whereby she simply tried to put the dying lad out of her mind (and Augustine also adds an apology for why the adolescent boy was not too old to cry when parted from his mother). In all these questions, Augustine's interests are really only philological.

[100] Quasten 3:434.

[101] See Robert C. Hill, introduction to *St. John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis*, FC 74 (Washington Catholic University of America Press, 1986), pp. 17–18, and the literature cited there.

[102] See Chrysostom, *Hom.* 38.4–5 *on Gen.* 16.4–6 (PG 53:355–57, FC 82 364–67).

But Hagar cannot remain just a "throw-away" character for Chrysostom. Having defended Abraham and Sarah, he then feels free to allow his homilies to exploit Hagar's story as more than a foil for the main narrative. And so Hagar is offered in both homilies as an example—and a positive one, at that—for Chrysostom's Christian hearers. In Genesis 16, Hagar is an example of God's loving care and providence for even the lowly. Of course, he adds, in this case God was concerned less to elevate the lowly than to honor Abraham's seed, which Hagar carried. Nonetheless, it does not escape Chrysostom's notice that Hagar was dignified by receiving an angelic vision. And in Hagar's encounter with the angel, Chrysostom highlights her truthfulness, her forthrightness, her contrition, her gratitude, her general good disposition, and how she gradually became "wiser" as a product of her trials. Indeed, it was precisely "on account of her being humble and deferential," Chrysostom tells us, that Hagar "was accorded such wonderful care." And Chrysostom can even turn the tables against Sarah when he cites her mistreatment of Hagar, in the face of which an "anguished" Hagar endured "great hardship."[104] All these are traits she models for Christians.

The same themes and ambiguities arise in the homily on Genesis 21. Sarah's "logical" plan has already been noted, but it should be added that although Abraham's "natural affection" had to be set aside in favor of a command from "the Lord of nature," Chrysostom nevertheless feels constrained to itemize for his hearers just what those natural feelings were. Specifically, Abraham felt that Sarah's plan to banish Ishmael and "the maidservant" was "severe, that is, harsh, repugnant, and oppressive."[105] To be sure, Chrysostom reads Abraham as all but wholly preoccupied with Ishmael: "It was not, you see, that he took much interest in Hagar; rather he was well disposed towards his son for the reason that he was then still in his youth."[106] Lurking here, however, is not Chrysostom's antipathy toward Hagar but his deep concern for Abraham's home and hearth: that is why Abraham must seem as warmly solicitous of Sarah as he is coolly dismissive of Hagar, namely, to preserve domestic harmony. Nonetheless, if Chrysostom construes Abraham as emotionally distant from Hagar (though by no means ethically detached), it is all the more striking to see him read God's feelings quite differently. Having been driven into the desert, Hagar found her supply of water exhausted, "her heart was breaking, and she was depressed with pain and her affection for the child." At this instant, "the merciful and loving God . . . had pity on the child"—and, Chrysostom adds—"he felt for *Hagar's* plight"[107]: "What loving kindness on the Lord's part! Far from ignoring her as a menial, he deigned to show her such wonderful concern for the reason that he had made the promise to the patriarch and the child was his."[108] Chrysostom probably does not see the irony in proclaiming God's care for Hagar, conditioned as it seems to be by the vicarious dignity Hagar derives from Abraham through Ishmael. And so the orator once again proceeds, unchecked, to offer Hagar as an example for Christian imitation — an example of reliance on God's grace and assistance in time of desperate trouble. Here, unfortunately, the homily's attention to the details of the text is derailed by Chrysostom's well-known propensity for excursus and moralizing.[109]

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[103] Chrysostom, *Hom. 46.1 on Gen.* 21:9–11 (PG 54:423, FC 87:5). In explaining Abraham's affection for Ishmael here, Chrysostom again stresses that Abraham was not concerned to take much interest in Hagar. Sarah is extolled as an exemplar of wifely patience in *Hom. 26.7 on 1 Cor* 11:2–16, but of petty jealousy in *Hom. 20 on Eph.* 5:22–33.

[104] Chrysostom, *Hom. 38.5–7 on Gen.* 16:6–11 (PG 53:357–59, FC 82·367–71).

[105] Chrysostom, *Hom. 46.1 on Gen.* 21:9–11 (PG 54:423, FC 87:5). ὅμως σκληρὸν αὐτῷ κατεφαίνετο, τοῦτ᾽ ἔστι, βαρὺ, φησὶ, καὶ ἐπαχθὲς καὶ φορτικὸν.

[106] Chrysostom, *Hom. 46.1 on Gen.* 21:9–11 (PG 54.423, FC 87:5).

[107] Chrysostom, *Hom. 46 2 on Gen.* 21:15–19 (PG 54.424, FC 87:6–7), emphasis mine.

A further remark on Hagar may be found in Chrysostom's homily on Galatians 4, where he ameliorates the grounds of banishment. In Gal. 4:29, Paul adds something not found in Gen. 21:9, namely, that "the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit."[110] Traditionally, such "persecution" tarred the reputation of both Ishmael and Hagar, but while Chrysostom acknowledges Ishmael's "tyranny" over Isaac, he also virtually neutralizes it. The events of this story were directed by God himself—otherwise, the punishment of exile would seem far more severe than Ishmael's brashness could have possibly deserved. The exile of Ishmael and Hagar was merely a by-product of God's intention to favor Isaac, and so to anticipate (typologically) the later inclusion of Gentiles into the Abrahamic covenant.[111]

Chrysostom's comments on Hagar offer modern readers a bit of everything, from traditional gender and class stereotyping to imaginative reconstruction of the characters in the narrative. And although the preeminence of Abraham in salvation history constantly upstages the lesser figures, including Sarah as well as Hagar, Chrysostom the pastor and orator cannot keep himself from being caught up in Hagar's own story as well. His homilies exploit and explore the emotions evoked by her poignant experiences. If his shorter expositions often seem quick to carp at Hagar, the more extended considerations in his homilies on Genesis showcase what might be termed his naive inconsistency, for there, after reiterating the Pauline perspective on the two women, he returns to redraw Hagar yet once more, so that as the curtain falls, she leaves the stage far less a villain for Chrysostom than truly a hero and an exemplar in her own right.

Theodoret of Cyrus. Another Antiochene, writing almost half a century after the death of Chrysostom, had occasion to consider Hagar in yet another series of questions and answers on Genesis. Theodoret's reflections, however, are not nearly as extensive as Chrysostom's homilies, and his overriding concern is to vindicate the virtue of the patriarch Abraham — against whom the images of both Sarah and Hagar suffer. Accordingly, his exposition of Genesis 16 preoccupies itself only with the problem of Abraham's polygamy, and the patriarch emerges as above fleshly desires and selflessly patient of the women around him, who display not only pride and impudence (Hagar) but also infirmity and petulance (Sarah).[112] At Genesis 21 a similar agenda is implemented on Abraham's behalf, and Hagar is virtually ignored. Nonetheless, Theodoret plainly worries over the terms of Ishmael's departure, for he specifies not only that the boy was of a tender age but also that Abraham supplied "neither menservants nor maidservants, no gold or silver," but only a little bread, a skin of water, and his mother.[113] The starkness of Ishmael's dismissal serves, for Theodoret, to backlight his father's faith in the earlier promise to make of Ishmael a great nation. In other words, since the God who had promised greatness to Ishmael was also the ratifier of Sarah's call for eviction, Abraham's faith inferred that God would somehow take care of the boy. The resulting picture mostly brushes Hagar aside, but it does not deny the grimness of the exile she shared with her son nor does it depict Abraham as devoid of love for his son, however cruel his actions may seem.

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[108] Chrysostom, *Hom. 46.2 on Gen.* 21 15–19 (PG 54:424, FC 87:7).

[109] The entire second half of Chrysostom's homily thus wanders into various events from the life of David in order to exhort his hearers against envy, returning only at the end to recall a few words from Gen. 21:20 along with the disarming confession that "It was at [this] point in the text, in fact, that the whole of our sermon lost direction"; see *Hom. 46.4 on Gen.* 21:20–21 (PG 54:427, FC 87 12).

[110] Explicit affirmation of the persecution of Isaac by Ishmael is not found in the Old Testament, the rabbinic arguments (mentioned in n. 94) cannot be documented prior to Paul but may well represent exegetical traditions that influenced his composition of Gal 4:29. See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians· A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids· Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 223–24

[111] Chrysostom, *Comm Gal.* 4:29–30 (PG 61:664, NPNF 13:35).

Procopius of Gaza. The first of the so-called Greek catenists or "excerpters," Procopius (465–ca. 530) was an Alexandrian in his theological predilections and manifestly hostile to Theodoret. Nonetheless, his comments on Hagar actually preserve a good deal of nonallegorical interpretation. To be sure, the reader must reckon not only with the textual disruption of the *Catena in Octateuchum* but also with the obvious fact that, as a catena, his work was meant to present a pastiche of previous interpretations.[114] For all that, Procopius's own voice seems to survive.

His account of Genesis 16 reiterates several familiar topics, including the usual defense of Abraham's polygamy as moved not by lust but sheerly by desire for offspring, and also the contrast commonly drawn between Abraham's union with Sarah and his mere use of the concubine. Hagar briefly exemplifies those souls which flee useful admonishments before Procopius moves on to consider Hagar's angelic encounter. Some interpreters, he reports, focus on the angel's mission on behalf of Hagar's descendants, while others think the angel was actually Christ — for what angel ever spoke with such authority or made such grand promises? In any case, Hagar's epiphany proves to be the lynchpin in her defense. "Hagar was no ordinary woman," he writes, "for she was deemed worthy of an angel's care and conversation."[115] Procopius then proceeds along a line charted earlier by Chrysostom, arguing that Sarah would not have given Hagar to Abraham if she had not been of good character and praising Hagar for her sincerity and good faith, her lack of hypocrisy, her restraint toward her mistress, and her general humility.

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[112] Theodoret, *Quaest. in Gen.* 67 (PG 80:175–76).
[113] Theodoret, *Quaest in Gen.* 72 (PG 80:179–182).
[114] The disruption is threefold, at the least. First, Procopius's original work was much longer; what now survives is actually his own epitome. Second, there is no critical edition: Migne's edition in PG 87 was fabricated by splicing three partial codices end to end. Third, Migne reproduces some passages in Latin for which there is evidently no fragment surviving in Greek Although none of the sections I read identified Procopius's sources by name, he is clearly familiar with most of his Greek predecessors. See Johannes Irmscher, "Procopius of Gaza," *EEC* 2:713; for an analysis of Migne's edition, see CPG 3, §7430.
[115] Procopius of Gaza, *Comm. Gen.* 16:7 (PG 87/1:353): οὐκ ἡ τυχοῦσα δὲ Ἄγαρ, ἀγγέλου κηδομένου καὶ λαλοῦντος ἠξιωμένη.

Hagar's role in Genesis 21, however, is more complicated, and there are obviously some unreconciled interpretations in Procopius's catena. At issue, first of all, is the matter of the moral rectitude of Ishmael and Hagar, especially as it might offer a rationale for their peremptory exile. Accordingly, Procopius finds it suggestive that while Scripture tells of festivals being held at the weaning of certain righteous men, such as Isaac (here) and Samuel, there is no mention of the weaning of Ishmael.[116] Some, moreover, think Ishmael was disowned by Abraham as God's judgment against his wickedness (πονηρὸν).[117] Procopius enlists the Apostle on the side of these interpreters by reminding his readers of Gal. 4:29 and its description of Ishmael as Isaac's persecutor. The final nail in Ishmael's coffin would seem to be Procopius's observation that the word for "playing" in Gen. 21:9 might rather designate fighting of some sort, even as some interpreters think Hagar was also infected with malice.[118] But all of these incriminations are counterbalanced by other views that Procopius reports. For instance, some hold that Ishmael was disowned by Abraham only on the basis of the divine promise that Ishmael would become a great nation — a reading that would regard Abraham as expressing not a judgment against Ishmael but rather his own faithful obedience to God. There is therefore no basis, as some allege, for a charge of inhumanity against Abraham. He sent the pair off with meager provisions and no pack animal because they were to be cared for by God. Under such circumstances, Procopius opines, a pack animal may well have been more of a burden than a blessing.

Procopius's words seem crafted to defend Abraham against certain nuances in Theodoret and, more distantly, in Chrysostom, who together can account for most of the views Procopius reports. But his rebuttal serves also to disclose his awareness of Abraham's ethical turmoil over the exile of Hagar and Ishmael — an event as "mentally excruciating" to Abraham as the apparent rejection of Israel was to St. Paul.[119] Admittedly, other random links follow in Procopius's catena, including an odd comparison that favors Isaac over Hagar and a moralized version of Origen's allegory about "carnal Israel" as a bottle run dry,[120] as well as Procopius's enthusiasm over what was "really marvelous," namely, that the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven to testify that God had heard the voice of the lad.[121] It would be a stretch to classify Procopius as a defender of Hagar, for his concern is much more with Abraham. Nonetheless, amidst his diverse excerpts he clearly fears that Abraham's reputation has been tarnished by the way he treated his handmaid and her son.

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[116] Procopius, *Comm. Gen.* 21.8 (PG 87/1:384).

[117] Procopius, *Comm. Gen.* 21:10 (PG 87/1:384).

[118] Procopius cites 2 Sam. 2:14 as a proof-text. My last two sentences (and the rest of this paragraph) draw on a long section that exists only in Latin (PG 87/1:383–86). Although the Latin translation of Procopius's Greek fragments in Migne is often unreliable and expansive, the transition between this Latin section and the preceding Greek excerpt is smooth, and the content here looks very much like a rebuttal of Theodoret.

[119] Procopius, *Comm. Gen.* 21:10 (PG 87/1.385–86): "Sicuti Agaris et Ismaelis exsilium excruciavit animum Abrahami," then citing the text of Rom. 9.2.

[120] Procopius, *Comm Gen.* 21:10, 15 (PG 87/1:385). Note that Procopius applies Origen's allegory of Hagar's bottle also to professing Christians who lag in their pursuit of perfection and worries lest their "water" be depleted.

[121] Procopius, *Comm. Gen.* 21:17 (PG 87/1:385)

Hagar's Vision as a Trinitarian Proof-Text — and Other Patristic Miscellanies

Like the allegorical treatments of Hagar, the more literal patristic interpretations offer a mixed account. For the most part, Hagar is not a discrete focal point for biblical commentators, with the fair exception of Chrysostom. There are a few other patristic references to Hagar, however, that are hard to categorize but that are probably best regarded as scraps of literal exegesis, that is, exegesis of the literal narrative in service of goals not as commonly embraced by interpreters today. These observations are worth mentioning largely as antecedents of later developments.

Novatian and Hilary. Hagar's vision and naming of God in Genesis 16 provoked curiosity for some for the way she is addressed by "the angel of the LORD" in verses 7, 9, and 11, whereas in verse 13 it is said that she gave a name not to an angel but "to the LORD who spoke to her." Although Didymus has a rather sensible discussion of how the title "angel" pertains to a function rather than to a specific being, others found the passage a useful resource for trinitarian discussion; reverberations from such issues may underlie Procopius's comments, above. However, much earlier, in the middle of the third century, Novatian cited Hagar's encounter with an "angel" whom "scripture sets forth . . . as both Lord and God" as proof that while it was indeed God who appeared to Hagar, the text is best understood as attributing this epiphany not to God the Father but rather to God the Son — a distinction intended by Novatian to refute the various heretics of his day who denied the full divinity of the Son.[122] Although his primary purpose was to defend a high Christology here, Novatian also attests in passing the authenticity of Hagar's visitation, without demurral of her gender or status. Elsewhere in the passage, moreover, he underscores that the theophany was specifically intended by God not only to rescue her and her son, but also as a comfort and a consolation for Hagar.

A similar application of the text was made, albeit more voluminously, a century later by Hilary of Poitiers and, a bit later still, by Gregory of Elvira (whom we will consider in conjunction with Isidore below). Although Hilary's *De trinitate* is specifically an anti-Arian work, with a more complicated structure than Novatian's work by the same title, Hilary's use of Hagar's divine visitations is almost certainly inspired by Novatian.[123] The application is virtually identical, namely, that the full divinity of the Son is attested by this and other Old Testament theophanies. And although the note of consolation struck by Novatian for Hagar is not so sounded by Hilary, each of these authors coordinates Hagar's theophany with that of Abraham: both the patriarch and his concubine argue in tandem for the divinity of the Son, and both are treated equally as credible witnesses and confessors. That no further qualification of Hagar's experience or value or character is appended to these polemical treatises suggests a general recognition — not a discounting — of Hagar's divine favor. In addition, such a recognition (however inchoate) may explain some of the dramatic impressions of Hagar registered a few centuries later.

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[122] Novatian, *De trinitate* 18.7–23 (CCSL 4:44–48, ANF 5:628). Quasten (2:217) dates the treatise as "well before 250."

[123] Hilary of Poitiers, *De trinitate* 4.23–27 (CCSL 62:125–132, PL 10:113–118, NPNF^2 9:78–79). The treatise was completed ca. 360, though the question of composition is complex; see Manlio Simonetti's remarks in Quasten 4:39–43.

Ephraem the Syrian. Another account that falls outside the usual exegetical categories derives from various references to Hagar in the fourth-century writings of Ephraem the Syrian, especially in his hymns.[124] Actually, it is less Hagar who appears there than "the sons of Hagar," in roles both threatening and promising. Thus, the first son of Hagar (Ishmael, of course, but not named) is portrayed as kicking at Isaac, who is a type of Christ, in one of Ephraem's *Nativity Hymns*.[125] "The sons of Hagar" are also denigrated in one of the *Epiphany Hymns*, where their having been circumcised is depreciated and they are categorized as belonging (eschatologically speaking) to the goats, not the sheep.[126] But in yet another hymn, the type by which Origen linked Hagar's well to Christ is interpreted as pertaining to baptism (much as Gregory of Nyssa did, not long after Ephraem), and here there is much rejoicing over the sons of Hagar, who, having been baptized, are no longer like the "wild ass" of Gen. 16:12 but are become gentle and peaceful.[127] These citations illustrate the association that had developed between Hagar and the various peoples and nations who were seen as her often unruly descendants — an association that was later extended to all Islamic peoples.[128]

Ephraem's mostly pejorative use of Hagar's son(s) in his hymns finds a curious echo in his commentary on Genesis. There, the rivalry between Hagar and Sarah in Genesis 16 is recounted mostly along biblical lines, but with two original additions. First, the confusion over whether Hagar was visited by an angel or by God is resolved by imputing to her a double vision: first she beheld an angel, then she saw God in the angel as "a vision within the vision," as Ephraem puts it. Second, the oracle given to Hagar is remarkably effective in resolving the domestic tensions. Evidently, once God has told Hagar (and, through her, Abraham and Sarah) that Ishmael will "dwell at the boundary of his kinsmen," no one in the threesome feels threatened anymore—that is, Hagar's son will live and prosper, but sufficiently far from Sarah's son—so Abraham proceeds to name the boy Ishmael "as he had been instructed by Hagar."[129] Taken together, Ephraem's references offer a benign reading of Hagar, both in her literal role and as a precursor of the church. Moreover, by positing a literal fulfillment of Hagar's typological role in her converted and baptized descendants, Ephraem contributes in his own way to the blurring of historical and figurative exegesis that we will continue to see develop.

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[124] Since the numbering of the hymns varies among editions, I have cited the hymns by edition and page. I have used both the translation in NPNF^2 13 and that of Kathleen McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist, 1989), hereafter cited as McVey.

[125] Ephraem, *Nativity Hymns* (#8, NPNF^2 13:243; McVey #13.17, p. 139). For the association of "the race of Hagar" with the "wild asses" of Gen. 16:12 in another of the nativity hymns, see #13.27 (NPNF^2 13:249) or McVey #18.28 (p. 164).

[126] Ephraem, *Epiphany Hymns* (#3.25, NPNF^2 13:271).

[127] Ephraem, *Epiphany Hymns* (#8.15, NPNF^2 13:278). See note 128.

[128] In his *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.38 (NPNF^2 2:375), Sozomen recounts a popular etymology according to which Ishmael's sons, because they were ashamed of Hagar's status as a slave, called themselves instead after Sarah, hence "Saracens" According to Sozomen, this is why they practice circumcision and observe some other Jewish customs, although they later fell into superstition, corrupting "the laws imposed by their forefather Ishmael" The legend is of interest especially because it imputes a good character to Ishmael, even if subsequent generations fell away — a notion we will see revived by Martin Luther. Sozomen also states (writing before 450) that "not long before the present reign" many Saracens converted to Christianity, and some such phenomenon might have inspired the line in the Epiphany hymn just noted. See also nn 140 and 197–99, in this chapter.

Hagar and Her Early Medieval Admirers

The Christian commentary literature of the early Middle Ages is often dismissed as unoriginal and derivative. The charge is not without its basis. A study of Hagar in the writings of this period reveals a heavy reliance, often verbatim, on Jerome and Augustine. But there is frequently more original reflection tucked in here than the ubiquitous chains of quotations from these two Fathers would lead one to believe, though the seams between originality and plagiarism are sometimes hard to detect. Here I will briefly survey the exegesis of three pillars of early medieval Christian erudition, who not only preserved the views of Augustine and Jerome but also added their own insights into both the literal and allegorical meaning of Scripture, thereby laying the groundwork for what would become, by the twelfth century or so, the basic tool of medieval Bible study, the *Glossa Ordinaria*. These scholars are Isidore (560–636), archbishop of Seville; the Venerable Bede (673–735), commonly known as the father of English history; and Raban Maur (ca. 780–856), student of Alcuin[130] and later abbot of Fulda and archbishop of Mainz.

Isidore and the Rehabilitation of Hagar in the West

Isidore's *Questions on the Old Testament*, so far as that work addresses Hagar, is almost exclusively concerned with Hagar's symbolic status. Drawing on an argument favored by Ambrose and Augustine, Isidore finds a rationale for both Abraham's polygamy and Hagar's eviction in these events' prophetic significance.[131] Accordingly, Isidore virtually ignores the literal or "historical" aspect of the story. What makes his account pertinent, however, is his ambiguous portrait of the allegorical Hagar, which recovered many overlooked aspects of the narrative in Genesis 21 and thereby helped restore the literal Hagar's reputation among the Latin readers of the West. Unlike Augustine but curiously redolent of Origen and Didymus, Isidore explores the symbolic significance of all the story's details — not just the bare eviction, but also the meaning of the boy's being placed on Hagar's neck, the skin of water, Hagar's wandering, and the boy weeping under a tree. Initially, one is struck by his repugnance for the Jews:

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[129] Ephraem the Syrian, *Comm. Gen.* §13.1–5 (FC 91:155–56; CSCO 153: 58–59 [Latin], 152:72–73 [Syriac]); on Genesis 21 he offers barely more than a paraphrase.

[130] One might have treated here also Alcuin himself (740–804), advisor to Charlemagne, later abbot of Tours, and a source of some note for the *Ordinary Gloss*. But Alcuin's originality consists only in his paraphrase or condensation of the words of others. Accordingly, he offers a defense of Abraham's alleged "adultery" that appears to rephrase arguments from Ambrose and Augustine, and he offers a slight development of Bede's account of Ishmael's prenatal naming (below). Every other comment on Hagar, however, draws verbally on his predecessors (including Augustine, Jerome, and Isidore), making it very difficult to find in Alcuin any evidence of his own point of view. Alcuin remains important only because of his impact on his best-known student, Raban Maur, for a few of the unattributed passages in the commentaries of Rabanus are in fact Alcuin's presumably independent digest of Ambrose and Augustine. See Alcuin, *Interrogationes et Responsiones in Genesin* (PL 100:515–66). The condensation or digest of Ambrose and Augustine is found in q. 171 (PL 100:538); the development of Bede occurs in q. 177 (PL 100:540). Other questions may be attributed as follows: qq. 172, 196–99, 219 (PL 100:538, 543, 547) are nearly verbatim from Jerome's *Quaest. in Gen.*; q 195 (PL 100:543) is Augustine's *Quaest.* 50 *in Gen.*; and q. 218 (PL 100:547) quotes Isidore, *Quaest.* 20.1–2 on Gen. 25:1 (PL 83:253), who paraphrases Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 15.34.

> The skin of water which ran dry signified [either] that Jewish purification would fail; or, their carnal teaching enclosed in dead skins, that is, in the flesh of the old humanity condemned for prevarication, which offers no refreshment nor quenches thirst but produces lukewarm vomit. That Hagar wandered in the wilderness with her son signifies that the synagogue and its people, expelled from its land, wanders over the whole world without priest or sacrifice, completely ignorant of the way, which is Christ.[132]

Polemical exegesis of this sort was nothing new, but Isidore's allegory takes an unexpected turn when he explains Ishmael under the tree as signifying those Jews who "seek refuge under the shadow of the wood of the cross." Ishmael's tears thus prefigure Jewish converts who, "weeping for their past errors," are heard and brought to Christ, the fount of living water.[133] To be sure, Isidore's remarks offered no real comfort to the Jews of his own day, but one effect of his interpretation is to ameliorate his picture of Hagar and Ishmael. No longer just symbols of rejection, they are now also figures of repentance.[134]

But there is more to note behind the scenes of Isidore's interpretation. Although Isidore of Seville was certainly widely read and immensely influential, especially for his encyclopedic *Etymologies*, he has little claim here to originality. In his forthcoming edition of Isidore, Michael Gorman identifies Gregory of Elvira as the verbatim source for the heart of Isidore's exegesis of Genesis 21.[135] Gregory's *Tractatus de libris sanctarum scripturarum* was composed late in his life, after 403 — a date derived from Gregory's probable reliance on the translation of Origen's homilies on

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[131] Isidore, *Mysticorum Expositiones Sacramentorum seu Quæstiones in Vetus Testamentum* 17.1, 20.1 on Gen. 21:9, 25:1 (PL 83:248, 253; hereafter cited as *Quaest.*). Again, partial credit also goes to St. Paul for this line of argument. For Augustine's use of the providential-prophetic explanation in this context, see *Contra Faustum* 22.16, *Quaest.* 51 *in Gen.* 21:9, *Civ. Dei* 16.34, and n. 87, in this chapter.

[132] Isidore, *Quaest.* 17.4 on Gen. 21:15 (PL 83:248)

[133] Isidore, *Quaest.* 17.5 on Gen. 21:15–19 (PL 83:249).

[134] Isidore goes on to find in the angel a likeness of Elijah, who (according to Malachi 4:5–6) would be sent as an agent of conversion — for Isidore, of the Jews. See Isidore, *Quaest.* 17.6 on Gen. 21:17 (PL 83:249).

[135] Publication arrangements for Gorman's critical edition of Isidore's *Expositio in Genesim* (entitled *Quæstiones* in PL 83) are still to be determined. As of this writing, his working text was available at http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/genesis/Isid_Gen.pdf (filedate: 31/8/99).

Genesis made by Rufinus in that year.[136] In other words, the similarity of Isidore's exegesis to that of Origen is not coincidental, for a paper trail connects Isidore to the uncredited Origen by way of Rufinus and Gregory.[137] One should also note, in fairness to Gregory, that his exposition is perhaps four times fuller than Isidore's condensation. Thus, when he expounds Hagar as a type of the synagogue, he not only interacts more deliberately with Galatians 4, he also brings to bear another Pauline argument about Israel, namely, that Hagar and Ishmael prefigure the "remnant" of Jews to be saved according to Romans 9–11. With help from Origen, then, Gregory uses Hagar and her son to prefigure both the rejected synagogue and the remnant who return to the cross of Christ with tears and repentance.[138] This is the central and Origenistic insight that Isidore would extract from Gregory, whose more detailed and cogent account he would also overshadow. Was anything lost in this eclipse? Perhaps so. Isidore's comments on Genesis 21 amount to a string of atomistic sentences, each of which concisely identifies what each biblical person or action signifies then promptly moves on. Though Hagar and Ishmael are introduced in their revised roles, as Christian converts and penitents, Isidore's laconic sentences seem rather perfunctory when compared with the more engaged discourse Gregory had offered.

The Venerable Bede and the Visionary Hagar

Bede's remarks on Hagar patch together verbatim quotations from the Fathers with his own rather original comments. Deferring to St. Paul, his commentary on Genesis 16 opens with a brief acknowledgment of the allegorical significance of Hagar and Ishmael—an interest that will consume most of his energies at Genesis 21—but turns quickly to a matter of historical significance, namely, defending Abraham from charges raised by his union with Hagar.[139] Bede continues addressing historical matters, drawing often on Jerome but supplementing him with other observations, such as Ishmael's status as the first to receive his name from the Lord prior to birth, or how Ishmael's descendants no longer dwell in the wilderness (as Gen. 16:12 was taken to imply) but nowadays possess Africa, most of Asia, and some of Europe.[140] The comments on Hagar's banishment are actually less interesting than these other asides. Bede quotes a single line from Jerome, then goes on to defend Sarah's desire to keep her son uncorrupted by bad company — which Ishmael was, as well as a persecutor, regardless of whether he used swords or flattery.[141] At the end, Hagar and Ishmael stand for all those who read "the old scriptures" carnally and "according to the letter," as well as for modern-day heretics and schismatics, whom the church, like Sarah, rightfully expels.[142]

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[136] Simonetti concisely retraces the textual trail (Quasten 4:85). Gregory's work was first published as *Tractatus Origenis* on the strength of a notation in one of the manuscripts, and the title is preserved (if not the attribution) in the critical edition, CCSL 69. Happily, the surest instance of Gregory's use of Origen is at Genesis 21, behind which lies Origen's seventh homily. The conclusion of Jean Châtillon (with respect to the questions on Genesis), that Isidore's verbatim borrowing from Origen was almost exclusively from Homily 13 on Gen. 26:15–33, must therefore be revised; see "Isidore et Origène, Recherches sur les sources et l'influence des *Quæstiones in Vetus Testamentum* d'Isidore de Séville," in *Mélanges bibliques* (Fs. André Robert; Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1956), pp. 540–41, 546

[137] Rufinus, of course, was at the center of a controversy that left a permanent stigma on the widely admired writings of Origen. For the simultaneous reception and decline of Origen in the medieval West, see de Lubac, "L'Origène Latin: La légende de la chute," chapter 4.3 in *Exégèse Médiévale, I/1*:257–74. Cf. Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Debate: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992)

[138] See esp. Gregory, *Tractatus* 3.27–31 (CCSL 69:25–26). In what amounts to a postscript, he also addresses the dual reference to Hagar's "angel" also as "God," using the text much as did Novatian and Hilary, to prove that the subject of the theophany was fully divine yet was not God the Father. Hagar was therefore visited by the Son of God, and the text refutes the modalist heresy of Praxeas and Sabellius. See *Tractatus* 3.32–34 (CCSL 69:26–27).

[139] Bede, *Libri Qvatvor in Principivm Genesis vsqve ad Nativitatem Isaac et Eiectionem Ismahelis Adnotationvm*, CCSL 118a:200 (also PL 91:158): "Quod autem ad rem pertinet gestam . " The defense of Abraham that follows is taken from Augustine, *Civ. Dei* 16.25.

Much of what Bede writes about the exile of Hagar and Ishmael merely rearranges his predecessors' insights. More unusual, however, is his discussion of the theophany Hagar received (in Gen. 16:11–14). Whatever Bede makes of the allegorical concubine, his account of Hagar's vision imputes to her astounding theological insight.

> It is clear from these words that Hagar was not able to see the face of the angel speaking with her, but only the posterior of the one going away from her. Nonetheless, *she knew* that this living one whom she had seen while absorbed in self-pity . . . was God or had come to her in the person of the living God. *But what wonderful discernment of the woman!* — or, better, not to be wondered at, since she belonged to the family of Abraham.[143]

Bede's encomium continues, stressing the acuity of Hagar's understanding. Thus "she understood" how the well was a sign of "the profound secrets" of God's merciful disposition, and she named it accordingly. Indeed, "she understood the sublimity [*altitudinem*] of the divine substance, always living and remaining without end or beginning, and from it she believed the well ought to be similarly named."[144] By any standard, it is no small word of praise to be described as understanding "the sublimity of the divine substance." Here is where one may wonder if the earlier role of

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[140] Bede, *Comm. Gen* 16:11, 12 (CCSL 118a:200, 201; PL 91.159). C. W. Jones, the editor of CCSL 118a, suggests that the commentary is therefore to be dated after 721, when the Saracens — "Ishmael's seed," for Bede — had reached France (CCSL 118a.ix–x). R. W. Southern observes that although Bede was not the first to identify the Saracens with Ishmael, it became "a commonplace of Western scholarship" after (and through) Bede; see *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 17, quoted in the introduction to CCSL 118a (p. ix, n. 19). See also n. 128 and nn. 197–199, in this chapter.

[141] Bede, *Comm. Gen.* 21:9–10 (CCSL 118a:238, PL 91:187). His ensuing comments develop the allegory from Galatians 4 in a judicious manner, taking pains to indict neither the Jews who lived before Christ nor the writers or writings of the Old Testament itself. Bede draws a favorable comparison between the laudable zeal of the Jews and the seeming good character of Ishmael prior to Isaac's birth. Only when Isaac came (that is, only when Christ came) did jealousy take over. Apparently Bede perceived "judaizing" as an ongoing threat in his own day; see CCSL 118a.242.1741 (PL 91:189) and CSEL 118a:ix–x.

[142] Bede, *Comm. Gen.* 21:9–10 (CCSL 118a:242; PL 91:190); cf. previous note Bede's comments on Genesis do not extend beyond this verse.

[143] Bede, *Comm. Gen.* 16:13–14 (CCSL 118a:201, emphasis mine), reading in part: "Mira autem feminae prudentia! — uel potius non miranda, quoniam ad Abrahae familiam pertinebat."

[144] Bede, *Comm. Gen.* 16:13–14 (CCSL 118a:201; PL 91.159).

Hagar's theophanies as trinitarian proof-texts somehow trickled down to Bede or, later still, to Raban Maur. In any case, his comments on this pericope conclude with a snippet taken from Jerome, to the effect that "the well of Hagar" lies "between the desert of Kadesh and Bered and may be seen today"—which Bede glosses with a final note of tribute: "and fittingly so [*et merito*], namely, as a testimony of her faith and confession."[145]

Raban Maur: Hagar the Contemplative

Initially, Rabanus's commentary on Genesis 16 looks no more promising than that of Alcuin, whom he begins by quoting, then adds two excerpts from Jerome. Sometimes he follows Jerome and Augustine verbatim; at other times he cites their arguments in the rearranged wording of Isidore. In any case, his comments on Hagar's banishment (as well as on Keturah and Hagar) are a permutation of traditional excerpts.[146] Rabanus's originality emerges elsewhere, in two curious passages—curious, because unusual comments on the same verses are offered (respectively) by Isidore and Bede, but they clearly did not furnish Rabanus with his material. In the first instance, he seems to follow Isidore by developing the allegory of Hagar and Ishmael venomously, characterizing the Jews as an "arrogant" people, "opposed to everything good," inciting persecution of the Christian masses, wandering the face of the earth, and "a burden to all."[147] But these unoriginal slanders suddenly stop and, as with Isidore, are challenged by a contrary interpretation: "Nonetheless," Rabanus interjects,

> I read in a certain treatise that Sarah the wife of Abraham is interpreted as the primitive church; but the Egyptian handmaid is the church of the gentiles [*Ecclesiam ex gentibus*], who, after she conceived the word of faith, despised the sterility of the synagogue. However, that the angel admonished Hagar to return to her mistress Sarah and be humbled under her hands signifies that the apostolic teaching [Rom. 11:18–21] admonished the gentiles lest they boast at the expense of the Jewish people.[148]

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[145] Bede, *Comm. Gen.* 16:13–14 (CCSL 118a:202; PL 91:159–60), quoting in part from Jerome's *Liber de Situ et Nominibus Locorum Hebraicorum*, s.v. "Barad" (PL 23:879).

[146] Raban Maur, *Commentariorum in Genesim Libri Quatuor* 2.18, 3.1, 3.7 (PL 107:543–45, 561–65, 579–80). Rabanus also cites passages from Augustine and Isidore that are altogether absent from Alcuin.

[147] Rabanus, *Comm Gen.* 2.18 on Gen. 16:12 (PL 107:544): "ipse populus ferocitate sua æmulus est et contrarius omnibus bonis, maxime cum Christianam plebem toto orbe invidia stimulante persequitur, et longe lateque dispersus circumvagando atque negotiando, incertis sedibus semper existens, omnibus oneri est."

[148] Rabanus, *Comm. Gen* 2.18 on Gen. 16:12 (PL 107:544): "Legi tamen in quodam tractatu . . ." While the exact identity of the treatise is still unclear, over a third of Rabanus's ninety-two words bear verbatim resemblance to the commentary on Genesis now attributed to Pseudo-Bede and compiled probably in Spain as early as 700; see Michael Gorman, "The Commentary on the Pentateuch Attributed to Bede in PL 91.189–394," *Revue Bénédictine* 106 (1996): 61–107, 255–307; and idem, "The Commentary on Genesis of Angelomus of Luxeuil and Biblical Studies under Lothar," *Studi medievali* 40 (1999): 559–631, esp. 619. However, Rabanus utterly neglects several allegorical elements found in the longer text of PL 91, even as he introduces material and proof-texts not found in Pseudo-Bede.

The line of allegory here represents a step beyond what we saw in Isidore and in Gregory of Elvira, who also saw Hagar as a symbol of more than reprobation and rejection. But where they saw Hagar as the archetype of converted Jews, Rabanus reports her as a type not only of the recalcitrant synagogue but also of the gentile church.[149] Clearly, the new interpretation of Hagar uncovered in this mysterious treatise fascinates Rabanus. Ultimately, however, he defers "to the judgment of the reader."

A second note of originality in Rabanus emerges in his exposition of Hagar's first encounter with an angel of God. Like Bede, Rabanus is specially struck by Hagar's theophany, but he is even more concerned to explain and extol the contemplative life. Rabanus likens Hagar's vision of the *posteriora* (Gen. 16:13, Vg.) of God to what Moses received when he asked to see the divine glory and was shown God's back but not his face (Exod. 33:18–23):

> Indeed, this is an appearance to her of that object of contemplation longed for by everyone who aspires to love God with all his heart, all his soul, and all his mind. For the sake of that object [*contemplandam*] he also builds up his neighbor, as far as possible, by the same love whereby he loves his neighbor as himself. But we may understand the *posteriora* of the Lord to be his incarnation, which in the fullness of time he assumed from the Virgin, and which now, in our present state of longing, we contemplate through faith and love, though in the life to come we will enjoy to the utmost an eternal contemplation.[150]

The implications for Hagar are fairly clear—and grand: she was blessed with the highest vision of God obtainable in this life. What is not made explicit, however, is whether Rabanus believes she also fulfilled the great commandments, alluded to above, by loving God above all and her neighbor as herself; and whether he thinks she saw (or foresaw) the incarnate Christ. All of these are possible implications. But there is no doubt that Hagar is being praised, even as the line between literal exegesis and allegory is, once again, blurred.

Like Bede, then, Rabanus finds in Hagar's angelic encounter a prism that reveals her to be many things: not just a rescued runaway, she is a precursor of gentile Christians and even a role model for the contemplative life. It is therefore ironic that Rabanus's next paragraph would eventually serve not to corroborate Bede's earlier tribute but instead to shoulder it aside.[151] Continuing to address the discipline of contemplation, Rabanus quotes the same snippet from Jerome (about the location of Hagar's well) but adds a different gloss, not *ad litteram* but *typice:* Hagar's well signifies the Scriptures, which God gave to instruct and correct us and so to render us "worthy of a perpetual vision of him in heaven." Both Bede and Rabanus thus embroider upon Jerome here, but only Rabanus's text will be taken up by the *Glossa Ordinaria*, possibly ensuring that Bede's distinctive testimony to Hagar's "faith and confession" would pass out of mind. And, in a further irony, Bede would be consigned to this oblivion not even in the name of Rabanus, but by the weightier authority of Jerome, to whom the *Gloss* attributed the entire passage.[152]

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[149] The same treatise also rehabilitates the image of Ishmael: "Indirectly, it could be said that a *ferus homo* [Vg.] is one who fights against demons and heretics and who resists vices." See Rabanus, *Comm. Gen.* 2.18 on Gen. 16:12 (PL 107:544).

[150] Rabanus, *Comm. Gen.* 2.18 on Gen. 16:13 (PL 107:545). The same exegesis of *posteriora Dei* as the incarnation of Christ, whereby God is able to be seen by mortals, occurs also in Rabanus's contemporary, Haimo of Auxerre, in his *Expositio super Genesim,* PL 131:88 (where the work is credited to Remigius of Auxerre). For the attribution of this work, see Burton Van Name Edwards, "In Search of the Authentic Commentary on Genesis by Remigius of Auxerre," *L'école carolingienne d'Auxerre: de Murethach à Rémi, 830–908* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1991), pp. 399–412; and idem, "The Two Commentaries on Genesis Attributed to Remigius of Auxerre; with a Critical Edition of Stegmuller 7195" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1990), pp. 125–56.

[151] For Bede's gloss, see n. 145, in this chapter.

The Harvest of Early Medieval Exegesis: Hagar in the Ordinary Gloss

With this survey of Isidore, Bede, Alcuin, and Rabanus, together with our earlier synopsis of Jerome and Augustine, we have gathered all the ingredients that would later be combined in the *Glossa Ordinaria.* Even though three centuries would elapse before the *Gloss* on the Pentateuch appeared, sometime before the middle of the twelfth century, there is almost nothing in the *Gloss* on Hagar that was not drawn from these six writers.[153] One can scarcely overstate the influence of the *Gloss* on the biblical understanding and preaching of pre-Reformation European Christianity: to have one's comments excerpted by the *Gloss* was a guarantee of exegetical immortality.[154] As we have just seen, however, the glossators were quite capable of leaving one of Bede's more interesting contributions on the cutting-room floor and, by and large, were only modestly drawn to the descriptions of Hagar that have captured our own attention. At Genesis 16, Jerome's philological explanations are fully represented; Rabanus's anti-Jewish allegory is included, but not his mysterious treatise; and Hagar's vision is expounded by Rabanus with his suggestive but indirect affirmation of Hagar's theological perception. The *Gloss* on Genesis 21 is dominated by all five of Augustine's *quaestiones* on the Heptateuch, together with Jerome's various comments on Ishmael's "play" as idolatry, the date of weaning, the age of Ishmael, and also his notice of Hagar's grief. The "mystical" interpretation in the *Gloss* is handled by Isidore (sometimes falsely credited to Bede), from whom are included both his "prophetic" defense of Hagar's expulsion and his allegory of the weeping Ishmael as a figure of converted Jews. In sum, many of the more sympathetic accounts of Hagar are missing, most notably Bede's. More to the point, perhaps, one wonders if the power and pathos of the biblical narrative was not itself dissipated among these exegetical catenae—partly from the reputation of the *Gloss* as a book of answers, partly from the absence of a single authorial point of view, and partly from the patina of superficiality built up by the frequent handling of these handy, self-contained excerpts.

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[152] Cf. Rabanus, *Comm. Gen.* 2.18 on Gen. 16:13 (PL 107:545) with the *Glossa Ordinaria* (PL 113:122).

[153] As is well known, the Migne edition of the *Gloss* is often incomplete, so I have compared it with *Biblia Sacra cvm Glossis, Interlineari & Ordinaria, Nicolai Lyrani Postilla & Moralitatibus, Burgensis Additionibus, & Thoringi Replicis*, 5 vols. (Lyons: [Gaspard Trechsel], 1545). The misidentification of citations is the same in both editions, though at one point Migne further misattributes an (unidentified) allegory on Genesis 16 to Jerome (PL 113.122).

[154] Of course, to state that the *Ordinary Gloss* dominated Scripture scholarship is only to note its popularity and longevity. Margaret T. Gibson has described the *Gloss* as "the junction between traditional patristic exegesis and modern scholastic method" and, as such, not only a venerable repository of the past but also a signpost of newer exegetical interests. See "The Place of the *Glossa ordinaria* in Medieval Exegesis," in *Ad litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, ed. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery Jr. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 5–27.

Some notice should be taken here of a companion piece to the *Ordinary Gloss*, namely, the *Glossa Interlinearis* — the short comments and glosses that were traditionally written or printed not around the Vulgate text but literally between the lines. In Genesis 16 and 21, about eighty such comments filtered into the story of Sarah and Hagar, amounting to just over four hundred words, many of them distilled from the same sources as the *Glossa Ordinaria*. As is usually the case, some glosses are but single words; others are a full sentence. Some offer literal definitions for terms; others build or signal whole complexes of allegory. In the case at hand, the majority of glosses in both chapters garishly embellish Paul's allegory from Galatians 4, dwelling at length — a compacted length, to be sure — on Sarah as a type of the church and of the grace brought by Christ and the New Testament, while Hagar represents the unbelieving, prideful, and persecuting synagogue. The glosses ricochet through all the usual stereotypes about the Jews' "insipid" and literal understanding of Scripture, their carnal sacraments, and their carnal relationship to Abraham. Much of this rhetoric serves also to denigrate Hagar and especially Ishmael, but there are a few literal glosses sprinkled in that are not steeped in polemic. Thus, the traditional puzzle at Gen. 21:17 over why God heard "the voice of the lad" when the text says it was Hagar who wept is given a quick and literal solution: *Flente matre pro puero*, which is to say that what God attended to was the voice of the mother weeping *for* the lad. The explanation of Hagar's vision and "eye opening" in Gen. 21:19 also harbors words of praise, for what she perceived in the "well" was, in truth, no less than the profundity of the sacraments.[155] Both of these statements float in blithe disconnection from other, harder-edged annotations, thereby reminding us of the atomistic and even random character of all the *Glosses*, as well as of the possibility of finding sympathetic characterizations of Hagar even in the midst of stereotype and polemics.

Hagar among the Rabbis: Ethical Worries

The medieval commentators I have been examining are largely unaware of the rabbinic treatments of Hagar, except for what was mediated by Jerome. That situation would soon change dramatically. Consequently, at this point our attention must turn to the Jewish exegesis of late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

The rabbis produced a voluminous body of literature that was often inaccessible to Christian scholars by virtue of their ignorance of Hebrew. Where it was known, it was either denigrated as the imaginings of "that carnal people" — much along lines already illustrated by the *Glosses* and their contributors — or else prized as an archaeological breakthrough.[156] Accordingly, rabbinic tradition influenced the

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[155] *Biblia Sacra cvm Glossis*, 1:76^{r}.

[156] The characterization of the Jews as *ille carnalis populus* belongs to Origen (p. 31), but it was seconded by Jerome and many others; see Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, "The Study of the Bible in Medieval Judaism," *CHB* 2:256. The archeological image is borrowed from Beryl Smalley, "The Bible in the Medieval Schools," *CHB* 2:218. Smalley also notes (here treating Andrew of St. Victor) how simply to report the views of Jewish commentators could itself be construed as "judaizing"; see idem, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), pp. 164, 173–74.

Christian study of Scripture in two ways: by attraction and repulsion. One must always be alert for possible dependence on rabbinic material on the part of Christian commentators, but it is worth wondering, at least, whether a Christian writer may have known particular rabbinic arguments yet preferred to bury them in silence. Some of the rabbis' readings of Hagar and Ishmael were markedly heavy-handed; to dismiss such arguments might indicate sympathy for Hagar, even where other evidence is lacking.

Prior to Nicholas of Lyra, however, whose use of the rabbis was both explicit and sustained, it is difficult to track or identify the Jewish sources used by Christians. Determining when and how various written sources might have become available (that is, in Latin) for use by non-Hebraists is one part of the problem. Another part, however, is that the Hebrew resources were by no means always written, for Christian writers regularly used Jewish "informants" in the course of composing their own theological works.[157] Moreover, once a bit of rabbinic lore entered the Latin-speaking mainstream, it could easily shed its pedigree and become common property. This could well be the case with Jerome's suggestion at Gen. 21:9 that Ishmael's "play" may have consisted in some form of idolatry. Having been introduced by so eminent a Christian exegete, this midrash took on Jerome's authority and from there lived a life largely untainted by its Jewish origin.

It is beyond my scope to discuss the details of Jewish-Christian relations, the development of a Christian Hebraism, or the general history of Jewish exegesis. But it is certainly worthwhile to pass in review the linguistic insights and other explanations that bear on the story of Hagar. No attempt will be made here to establish the origins or routes of transmission of the various rabbinic traditions, but it will undoubtedly shed some light on developments in the Christian interpretation of Hagar to take note of the best-known Jewish exegetical suggestions. We may begin with the midrash on Genesis.

Hagar and Ishmael in the Midrash: Hidden Crimes

Genesis Rabbah, as it is known, assumed the written form in which it comes to us in the late fourth or early fifth century,[158] which makes it roughly contemporaneous with Jerome. The work does not much flatter Hagar or her son, but there are a few recognitions of her dignity. For example, Hagar is identified as the daughter of Pharaoh—a gift to Sarah after Pharaoh (misled into thinking Sarah was Abraham's sister) had taken her for a wife. Pharaoh concluded it would be better for his daughter to be a servant in Abraham's house than a matron anywhere else. Notably, the midrash adds that Abimelech—who also tried to marry Sarah—gave Sarah *his* daughter, too![159] One of the rabbis also points out that Hagar was given to Abraham not as a concubine but as a wife.[160] And another series of comments eventually affirms that Hagar conceived in her first (and only) act of intercourse with Abraham, presumably to rebut the charge that Abraham's polygamy was motivated by lust. But the arguments then turn against Hagar. While Sarah is portrayed as solicitous toward the pregnant Hagar, the ingratitude of the concubine emerges in a line of gossip attributed to her, namely, that her own easy conception proved that the long-barren Sarah was in fact not a righteous woman. That, of course, was the source of Sarah's great indignation.[161]

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[157] Among the commentators directly examined here, Jerome and Cardinal Cajetan are most explicit about their use of informants, but the practice was by no means uncommon; see *CHB* 2:95, 144, 152, 214, 217–18, 264.

[158] Craig A. Evans dates *Genesis Rabbah* to 425–450; see *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), p. 133. H. Freedman puts the date about a century later; see his introduction to *Midrash Rabbah*, vols. 1–2, *Genesis*, third ed. (London: Soncino, 1983), 1: xxix; hereafter cited as Soncino. Jacob Neusner dates it in the late fourth century; see his preface to *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation*, 3 vols. (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 1:ix; hereafter cited as Neusner Although this midrash assuredly incorporates earlier traditions, it is the Christian reception and dissemination of these traditions that is of interest here.

Hagar's flight in Genesis 16 is provoked by Sarah's cruelty. The rabbis in *Genesis Rabbah* speculate variously that this mistreatment consisted in Hagar's being deprived of sexual relations (with Abraham?), or being slapped with a shoe, or being assigned humiliating duties.[162] There is also a brief remark (developed more explicitly by later Jewish commentators) to the effect that Sarah looked at Hagar with "the evil eye" and so caused her to miscarry the fetus.[163] The angel who confronts Hagar at the spring on the way to Shur occasions some consideration of how many angels there were, followed by comments on how common it would have been for Hagar to see angels in Abraham's household.[164] From here, attention turns to Ishmael, whose birth the angel foretells.[165] A final section returns to Hagar to address whether God ever converses directly with women, and there is clearly a preference to see God using intermediaries (such as angels) in his dealings with women, despite Hagar's confession in Gen. 16:13 that it was God whom she beheld.

In the midrash on Genesis 21, the argument cited most often by Christian commentators concerns the meaning of Ishmael's playing or "making sport" (v. 9), from which Sarah took such umbrage.[166] *Genesis Rabbah* cites four possible interpretations (one of which was noted by Jerome, above). First, "making sport" could denote fornicating, as it does in the accusation of Potiphar's wife against Joseph in Gen. 39:17. Second, it might refer to idolatry, for Exod. 32:6 uses the word in association with the worship of the golden calf. Third, the word occurs in 2 Sam. 2:14 to describe a "tournament" that degenerated into a battle, so possibly the word means to murder.[167] Finally, the word may simply describe how Ishmael mocked Isaac's claim to primogeniture. What, then, did Sarah see? Either she saw Ishmael seducing virgins and married women; she may have seen him "building little altars, hunting locusts, and offering them [in sacrifice]"; perhaps she saw Ishmael (the future archer) shooting arrows at Isaac in jest; or maybe she simply overheard him boasting that he would receive the inheritance of the firstborn.[168]

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[159] *Gen. Rab* 45:1 (Soncino 1:380; Neusner 2:146).

[160] *Gen. Rab.* 45:3 (Soncino 1:381; Neusner 2:148).

[161] *Gen. Rab.* 45:4 (Soncino 1:382; Neusner 2:148–49). Of course, Sarah also provokes her share of indignation, albeit not from Hagar but from the rabbis. The next section of Parashah 45 contends against Sarah's outburst in Gen. 16:5 ("May the Lord judge . . ") by citing eight character flaws typical of women, including greed, nosiness, laziness, envy, "scratching" and blabbing, thievery, and gadding about. Another rabbi asserts that on account of Sarah's outburst, forty-eight years were removed from her life.

[162] *Gen. Rab* 45:6 (Soncino 1:384; Neusner 2:152).

[163] This remark is actually intended to explain Gen. 16 11, where Hagar—already pregnant—is told that she "will" (future tense) bear a child. See *Gen. Rab.* 45:5 (Soncino 1.384; Neusner 2:151).

[164] *Gen. Rab.* 45:7 (Soncino 1:385; Neusner 2:152–53).

[165] There is considerable discussion of the prophecy that Ishmael will be "a wild ass of a man," etc., most of it contributing to a portrait of Ishmael as a cruel plunderer, a highwayman, and so forth; see *Gen. Rab.* 45:9 on Gen. 16:12 (Soncino 1:386; Neusner 2:154–55).

[166] Note that the Hebrew text of Gen. 21:9 lacks the phrase added by the LXX, "with her son Isaac."

Two observations may be interjected at this point. First of all, most of these ingenious suggestions are invoked precisely because the context of Gen. 21:9 is so vague. The Hebrew here—מצַחק (*mĕtzachēq*), a word bearing all the diverse connotations of the English "to play," and more—only contributes to the ambiguity. So the rabbis have attempted to define the term in Genesis 21 by drawing on its use in other, quite different, contexts. Many medieval and Reformation commentators will be troubled by this procedure and will reject these rabbinic suggestions, but they will not often manage to articulate a hermeneutical rationale. In defense of the rabbis, one must further observe that their eagerness to find Ishmael guilty of some horrific crime behind the text is surely a response to the asperity of Ishmael's punishment. It would be an overreaction, as Chrysostom had observed, to banish Ishmael and his mother solely on the grounds of a playground taunt; one can only infer that the rabbis are aware of this and that their exegesis represents some sort of compensation. Later commentators, who extend Ishmael's complicity also to his mother, may be read in the same light.[169]

The circumstances of the exile occasions mostly analogous comments. In particular, one or two rabbis wonder whether Abraham was not rather miserly in his provisions for Hagar and Ishmael. To be sure, the discussion in *Genesis Rabbah* seems to be satisfied with only a token of protest, but *Exodus Rabbah* raises the issue again and resolves it by attributing the stinginess of the otherwise generous patriarch to a resolve to punish Ishmael for the depraved and evil ways into which he had fallen.[170] Another question concerns how it was that Abraham loaded on Hagar's shoulders not only bread and water, but also the lad himself—a bit of a burden, given that Ishmael was, by the rabbis' reckoning, twenty-seven years old! The answer seems to be that Sarah once again cast "the evil eye," this time on Ishmael, rendering him so feverish that not only was he unable to walk but his thirst soon consumed the skin of water.

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[167] Procopius of Gaza also cited this proof-text to explain the passage (n. 118, in this chapter).

[168] *Gen. Rab* 53:11 (Soncino 1:470; Neusner 2:253).

[169] Another rabbinic argument that draws strong comments from Christian commentators addresses Sarah's exclamation, "Who would have said . . . that Sarah would suckle children?" Why the plural "children" rather than "a child"? *Gen. Rab.* 53:9 (Soncino 1:468; Neusner 2:251) has Abraham telling Sarah to call attention to the miracle of Isaac's birth: so "she uncovered her breasts and the milk gushed forth as from two fountains, and noble ladies came and had their children suckled by her." This rather exuberant bit of exegesis is watered down by the Talmud, which provides the version preferred by later exegetes such as Rashi. There, Sarah nurses other children in order to refute the calumny of some women that she bought Isaac, lactation being taken as proof of her motherhood. See Rashi on Gen 21:7 (citing the Talmud on Baba Metzia 87a), in *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*, 5 vols., trans. A. M. Silbermann and M. Rosenbaum (1934; reprint ed., Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, 5745 [1985]), 1:88; hereafter cited as *Comm. Gen.* Although the story does not bear directly on Hagar, it is worth tracking as an index of Christian awareness of Jewish exegesis, as well as for the parallel between the calumny of these "noble ladies" and Hagar's similar disdain for Sarah.

[170] *Gen. Rab.* 53:13 (Soncino 1:471, Neusner, 2:255); cf *Exod. Rab.* 1:1 (Soncino 3:2).

The rest of the comments on Genesis 21 continue to find fault with Hagar, though Ishmael is characterized more ambiguously. Accordingly, one rabbi takes Hagar's lament (21:16) as a sign that she was "a woman who impugned God's justice." After the angel showed her the well (in 21:19), Hagar filled the skin with water; here the midrash imputes to Hagar a weak faith, since she seems to fear the well may run dry.[171] On the other hand, God's rescue of Ishmael is defended on the grounds that he was, at the time of his suffering, a righteous man, however much he was later to persecute Israel (that is, in the person of his descendants). The curious sequel to Hagar's lament—that "God heard the voice of the *lad*"—demonstrates that God especially hears the prayers of the afflicted. Nonetheless, another comment finds in the description of Ishmael as an archer a testimony to his cruelty.[172]

Genesis Rabbah is not a monograph but a compendium of rabbinic opinion. Consistency is not to be expected. Without a doubt, some awareness of the disparity between Hagar's insolence and its punishment is woven into the midrash, but with a slender thread indeed. Its presence is often made known more by the exaggerated charges levied against Ishmael and his mother than by any real show of sympathy for either. Later rabbis, however, would not be so one-sided.

From Rashi to Sforno: Second Thoughts on Hagar

The midrash is one of the foundational authorities for medieval Jewish commentators, of whom the most influential was, arguably, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040–96)—Rashi, for short. The biblical commentaries of Rashi were esteemed not only by Christians of his own day but also by the Victorines, by Renaissance humanists such as Reuchlin and Sebastian Münster, and by the translators of the King James Version and its forerunners. But the greatest dissemination of Rashi was through Nicholas of Lyra's remarkably popular commentary in the fourteenth century. To be sure, neither Lyra nor Rashi was read uncritically by later commentators,[173] but it remains crucial to inventory what Rashi and his successors offered their Christian counterparts.

In light of the host of arguments assembled in *Genesis Rabbah*, Rashi's contribution to the Hagar stories might seem rather minimal. In Genesis 16, Rashi reiterates much of what *Genesis Rabbah* narrated, including Hagar's status as Pharaoh's daughter, Sarah's kindness toward her, her subsequent slander of Sarah, her miscarriage as a result of Sarah's evil eye, and much of the discussion about Hagar's familiarity with angels.[174] Likewise, in commenting on Genesis 21, most of the arguments are the customary ones. The four interpretations of Ishmael's "playing" are taken up unchanged from *Genesis Rabbah,* but Rashi brings to bear a different midrash, from *Tanhuma Shemoth*; thus, when Sarah's plan displeased Abraham "on account of his son," the source of grief was not only Abraham's parental affection but also his discovery that Ishmael "had taken to degenerate ways." Abraham's antipathy toward his depraved son also explains why he sent him out with only bread and water, and not silver and gold. Rashi reports one argument that was more or less denied by *Genesis Rabbah,* namely, that Hagar's "wandering" in v. 14 implied a return to idolatrous Egyptian practices.[175] The justification for saving Ishmael's life on the grounds of his momentary righteousness recurs, too, but his later unrighteous conduct is elaborated by Rashi's reference (again, prompted by *Tanhuma Shemoth*) to Isa. 21:13–14, which itself alludes to the Ishmaelites' refusal to relieve the Israelites' thirst when they were taken into exile.[176]

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[171] *Gen. Rab.* 53:13, 53:14 (Soncino 1:473–74, Neusner 2:255, 257). Against this excoriation of Hagar, however, one should note that *Gen. Rab.* 61:4 on Gen. 25.1 (Soncino 2:542–43, Neusner 2:334–35) identifies Abraham's third wife, Keturah, with Hagar, and derives from the root of *Keturah* a testimony to Hagar's piety, then proceeds to deny that Hagar's "wandering" (21:14) implies any immorality on her part.

[172] *Gen Rab.* 53:14–15 (Soncino 1:473–74; Neusner 2:257–59) Here again, the midrash on Genesis 25 adds a final footnote, for when Abraham dies, he is buried by Isaac *and Ishmael*—a sign that Ishmael paid the proper respect not only to his father but also to his brother; see *Gen. Rab.* 62 3–5 on Gen. 25:9 (Soncino 2:552–55; Neusner 2:345–46). Rashi amplifies this story (citing Baba Bathra 16b) by noting Ishmael's repentance; see *Comm. Gen.* 25.9 (p. 112).

[173] Chief among Lyra's critics was Paul of Burgos, a converted Jew (which is why Denis the Carthusian calls him "Rabbi Paul"), whose additions to (read "corrections of") Lyra were printed in later editions of the *Postils.* Similarly, although Luther's use of Lyra is extensive and often explicit—in marked contrast, for example, to Calvin—Luther seems to fault Lyra and the rabbis more often than he follows them.

Rashi's contribution to the exegesis of Genesis 16 and 21 can thus be summarized under three heads: first, he omits some of the more fanciful comments found in *Genesis Rabbah* ; second, he discusses certain lexical problems of the Hebrew text (not represented in the preceding discussion) with admirable discernment; and, third, he offers the reader a consistency in presentation that necessarily eludes a compilation such as *Genesis Rabbah.* The net effect for Hagar, however, was to perpetuate quite a number of unsympathetic rabbinic traditions — traditions that Christian commentators would be more likely to welcome from Rashi's hands than directly from midrashic sources, on account of the widespread respect for Rashi as a practitioner of literal exegesis.

If Rashi dismissed some of the more fabulous accusations against Hagar, his successors further qualified the remaining charges. Hagar's character thus came to appear less vile to the extent that Sarah and Abraham bore some of the blame. This point is acutely raised by Nachmanides (1194–1270), who finds here the roots of later discord. "Sarah sinned in afflicting her, and also Abraham for permitting it. God hearkened to Hagar's cry, and as a result her descendants persecute and afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah."[177] As David Berger has observed, Nachmanides's concession is even more amazing when one recalls the bitterness of medieval Jewish-Christian debates, in which Christians felt far freer to attack the morals of the patriarchs and so tar their blood descendants.[178]

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[174] Rashi, *Comm. Gen.* 16 (pp. 63–65).

[175] Rashi, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (p. 89); the editor attributes this comment to Pirke Rabbi Eliezer 30. For the argument in *Genesis Rabbah,* see n. 171 in this chapter.

[176] Rashi, *Comm. Gen.* 21 (pp. 87–90).

[177] Nachmanides, as quoted in *The Soncino Chumash,* ed. A. Cohen (London: Soncino, 1947), p. 76. See also Ramban (Nachmanides), *Commentary on the Torah: Genesis,* trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo, 1971), p. 213. The Ramban's indifference toward Hagar is argued by his reading of the divine "opening" of Hagar's eyes (in 21:19) as proof that she was not a prophet; see *Commentary on the Torah: Numbers,* trans. idem (New York: Shilo, 1975), pp. 257–58. Nachmanides's admission of the sin against Hagar still falls short of the view reported by Darr and Wiesel, that "early Jewish commentators" saw the *Akedah* as "punishment for the injustice committed by Abraham and Sarah"; see n. 32 in this chapter To the contrary, while the *Akedah* is at times attributed to some misdeed on Abraham's part, the rabbis can only guess at what the infraction was. Rashi suggests Abraham forgot to sacrifice a bull or a ram at some time or another (*Comm. Gen.* 22:1, p. 93; cf. *Gen. Rab.* 55:4); the Rashbam blames Abraham for making a covenant with Abimelech (*Soncino Chumash,* p. 118).

To be sure, while Rabbi Nachman's confession was echoed by none of his rabbinic colleagues, they do recognize the ethical dilemma in other ways, especially in their defense of Abraham's provision for the exiles. "Many are amazed at Abraham's behavior," wrote Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092–1167):

> They ask, how could Abraham chase his son out of his house? How could he send away mother and child empty handed? Where was his kindness? However, I am amazed at those who are amazed at Abraham, for Abraham acted according to God's dictates. Had he acted contrary to Sarah's wishes and given money to Hagar, then he would have transgressed God's command. However, ultimately, after Sarah's death, he gave gifts to Ishmael's children.[179]

That Sarah is to blame for denying Hagar further material aid is seconded by Nachmanides.[180] Curiously, Ibn Ezra goes on to explain that Abraham may, in fact, have given Hagar some gold or silver after all, despite the silence of Scripture here. In any case, he certainly provided "enough bread and water to last her till she reached Beersheba." Supplies ran short only because Hagar got lost[181] — a plea similarly voiced by Ibn Ezra's contemporary, the Rashbam, and possibly by Nachmanides.[182] Rabbi Sforno (a contemporary of Luther) pushes the argument just a bit further:

> This righteous man (Abraham) did not refrain from providing them with all their needs, as our Sages tell us, *God was with the youth* (verse 20) — this teaches us to am-

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[178] David Berger, "On the Morality of the Patriarchs in Jewish Polemic and Exegesis," in *Understanding Scripture: Explorations of Jewish and Christian Traditions of Interpretation*, ed. Clemens Thoma and Michael Wyschogrod (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1987), pp. 49–62. An earlier Christian commentator, Bruno d'Asti (d 1123), illustrates how an Origenist reading of Genesis 16 could be sharpened for polemical use. Bruno frames Hagar's encounter with the angel as a fierce exhortation to the Jews of his day to echo Hagar's confession (Bruno's paraphrase of Gen. 16:9, 13): "What you say is true, O teachers, . . . therefore I will return to the church, I will return to my mistress. Indeed, now I really see what I was looking at: I see Christ my Lord, I see the backside [*posteriora*] of him whose face [*anteriora*] I formerly despised." (*Expositio in Genesin*, PL 164:1992). Bruno's extended remarks imply that the allegorical Hagar was routinely sent to the battle lines of an active and ongoing Jewish-Christian debate.

[179] [Abraham] Ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Pentateuch, Vol 1: Genesis*, trans. H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver (New York: Menorah, 1988), pp. 218–19. Nachmanides adds the further amelioration that Ishmael must have repented, since his age is reported by Gen. 25:17 — usually a sign that one was deemed righteous (*Soncino Chumash*, p. 134).

[180] Nachmanides, *Commentary on the Torah* (trans. Chavel), 1:272: "All this occurred to Abraham because he had been commanded to do whatever Sarah said, and she commanded that he send him [Ishmael] away immediately, and it was at her command that he did not give them silver and gold, servants, and camels to bear them."

[181] Ibn Ezra, *Comm. Gen.* 21:1 (p. 219).

[182] Like Ibn Ezra, the Rashbam (Rabbi Shemuel ben Meir, 1085–1174) blames the lack of water on Hagar's "wanderings" (*Soncino Chumash*, p. 105). Nachmanides asserts that Abraham "did not let her want for anything, except that she naturally ran short of water in the desert" — a comment surely not meant to flatter Hagar, for he also insists that Abraham's grief "was caused not by the prospect of losing the woman but on account of Ishmael" (*Soncino Chumash*, p. 104). Nachmanides's comment about the water, however, is not attested by Chavel's translation (p. 271).

> plify the verse to include his asses, camels and laborers (*Bereishis Rabbah* 53:15). Therefore, they lacked naught except for water when they strayed in the wilderness, and once they found water he dwelled in the wilderness according to his nature, which was that of a . . . *wild ass of a man.*[183]

Sforno also proves more charitable toward Hagar herself. Even as Nachmanides had allowed that "God hearkened to Hagar's cry," Sforno asserts that when Hagar "called" the name of God in Gen. 16:13, she was actually displaying her piety by praising God and praying to him. The angel, moreover, having found her "ready for the divine vision," proceeds to warn her that her flight will take her from "a house of the righteous . . . to an unclean place of wicked people."[184] There can be no doubt, then, that not all rabbis felt compelled to vilify Hagar. One must therefore register at least a limited protest against Cynthia Gordon's earlier generalization, for not all rabbis "blamed the victim" or saw Hagar as unworthy of their "moral concern."[185] Their growing insistence on Abraham's care for the exiles is crafted not only to help exonerate him, but also as a way of recognizing and ameliorating the starkness of the biblical narrative as it stands. Medieval rabbinic commentators thus offered Christian interpreters a new and alternative exegetical tradition that, to the degree Christians were aware of it, could convey not only greater severity toward Hagar but also greater compassion—all of which could be mined, arguably, from the literal sense of the text.

Later Medieval Treatments of Hagar

The later medieval commentators disclose a landscape that is fairly familiar. My survey here will look primarily at the more influential writers, including Rupert of Deutz, Peter Comestor, Hugh of St. Cher, Nicholas of Lyra (along with the "additions" of Paul of Burgos and the "replies" of Matthias Döring), and Denis the Carthusian—a list that represents every century from the twelfth through the fifteenth.

Rupert of Deutz, Peter Comestor, and Hugh of St. Cher

Rupert of Deutz's massive Scripture commentary, *De trinitate et operibus ejus* (1113–16), is notable for two reasons that bear on Hagar. First, he may betray a more direct awareness of the rabbinic gloss on Ishmael's "playing" with Isaac in Gen. 21:9 when he reports that Ishmael's idolatry, "according to the Hebrews," consisted in making little clay idols.[186] Such an observation is of the same fabric as the suggestion in *Genesis Rabbah* that Ishmael had made "little altars," and while Jerome had long before recorded this argument in similar terms, Rupert's specific reference to *clay* idols adds just enough graphic detail to reopen the question of whether he learned about "the Hebrews" from some source besides Jerome.[187]

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[183] Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno (1475–1550), *Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Raphael Pelcovitz (New York: Mesorah, 1997), p. 105, italics original. Sforno's commentary was first published in Venice in 1567. His reference to *Genesis Rabbah* 53:15 is itself a rather free interpretation, for the midrash seems to be referring to Ishmael's later prosperity, not to Abraham's provisioning.

[184] Sforno, *Commentary on the Torah*, pp. 78–79.

[185] Gordon's comment is quoted above at n. 35 in this chapter.

[186] Rupert of Deutz, *De trinitate et operibus ejus libri xlii* 6.20 (PL 167.419). On the dating of *De trin.*, see John H. Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 131–34.

Second, Rupert exemplifies how St. Paul could be used not only to interpret Hagar but also to eviscerate the Genesis account of historical significance. As he begins his remarks on Genesis 16, Rupert explicitly invokes the testimony of St. Paul as proof "that herein lies written *not* the history of a people but rather heavenly and analogical mysteries."[188] One senses, however, that Rupert's motive (as with Origen) was also to dodge the unedifying nature of the narrative, for he is clearly uncomfortable not only with Abraham's polygamy but also with the celebration of Isaac's weaning, with Sarah's imperiousness toward Abraham, and with several aspects of Hagar's exile.[189] Hagar is thus reviled in the name of her allegorical twin, the synagogue. Her theophany, for instance, which Bede lauded, is assailed more for its mediocrity: Hagar (and the synagogue) beheld only the *posteriora* of God because that was the most they could bear. The new covenant, however, is a revelation of God's face, that is, of a spiritual (not carnal or literal) knowledge of God.[190] It comes as a surprise, therefore, to find Rupert criticizing Abraham — indeed, the historical Abraham:

> But how did he send away the handmaid? "He put bread and a skin of water on her shoulders, handed her the lad, and dismissed her." Was that rich man, who conquered the kings and was lord over 318 servants, thus so greedy that he should give his son . . . nothing beyond "bread and a skin of water," nor furnish even one little ass, but rather load the supplies on the mother's shoulders?[191]

The incongruity and inhumanity of Abraham's behavior clearly does not escape Rupert, though his solution will seem contrived: "These things which seem so ridiculous," he continues, simply demonstrate that "the letter is in service to the spirit." In fact, Rupert has merely revived the providential-prophetic argument that Ambrose and Augustine popularized.[192] Abraham's conduct would indeed be objectionable if he had literally acted as described, but Genesis 21 was actually written as a prediction of "things to come," namely, that the "synagogue" would be rejected by God and wander the desert. Read typologically, the story's details fit perfectly and all charges against Abraham dissolve: for if Abraham's apparent greed is not to be taken literally, it "literally" did not exist.[193] All the same, given Rupert's haste in explaining away this embarrassing episode, one wonders why he felt so constrained to mention it and even to frame the problem so sharply.

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[187] See *Gen Rab* 53:11 (at n. 168 in this chapter). Ishmael's "clay images" will be rehearsed later on by Peter Comestor and Hugh of St. Cher; Hugh essentially copies the Comestor, who has rather distantly paraphrased Rupert. Though Jerome's original report was missing from Isidore and Bede, it had been reiterated — with no clay added — by Alcuin, Rabanus, and the *Ordinary Gloss*, as well as by Haimo of Auxerre (PL 131:94). Haimo does not always merely copy his sources but can paraphrase and amplify them as well, thereby illustrating how an exegete might give the impression of an independent knowledge of Hebrew sources while actually using nothing but Jerome and other Christian predecessors. It is possible that Rupert also falls into such a category even here.

[188] Rupert, *De trin.* 5.24 on Gen. 16:1 (PL 167:419, emphasis mine): "Hoc loco testem Paulum citemus Apostolum, videlicet, quod non hic popularis historia conscripta, sed cœlestia sint cognata mysteria."

[189] Accordingly, Rupert interprets Abraham's union with Hagar — which God permitted but did not command — as an allegory of how "the old ceremonies" were conceded to Israel, not commanded (à la Jer. 7:21–23). When God tells Abraham to "listen to Sarah" in Gen. 21:12, it really signifies how the apostles listened to "the prophetic scripture," because Scripture (Rupert implies) never permits a man to obey the voice of his wife. And of Isaac's weaning he writes, "Why would the weaning feast be given or recorded, except for the beauty of the mystery? . . . If you follow the simple letter, these things are trivial [*lenia*]; but if you understand the interior spirit, there is much to tell of significance [*multum attinuit ad rem narrare*]." See *De trin.* 5.24, 6.19, 6.21 on Gen. 16:1, 21:8, 21:11 (PL 167:388, 418–19, 420).

[190] Rupert, *De trin.* 5.26 on Gen. 16:12–14 (PL 167:390). Cf. the similar vocabulary of Bruno d'Asti, Rupert's contemporary (n. 178).

[191] Rupert, *De trin.* 6.22 on 21:14 (PL 167:421), reading in part: "Ergone sic avarus fuit dives ille regum victor, trecentorum decem et octo vernaculorum dominus, ut præter *panem et utrem aquæ* nihil filio donaret, quem tristis ejiciebat, nec saltem unum illi asellum commodaret, sed ea *scapulæ* matris imponeret?" (Migne's italics).

Compared with Rupert, however, many other twelfth-century commentators find little reason to worry over Abraham's treatment of Hagar and Ishmael.[194] For instance, one might have expected more from Peter Comestor (so nicknamed because he seemed to have "eaten" the Scriptures), who drew on the recently completed *Glossa Ordinaria* for his own imposing and influential commentary, the *Historia Scholastica* (ca. 1169–73).[195] Although Beryl Smalley uncovered Peter's debt to Andrew of St. Victor for his knowledge of Jewish exegesis, his comments on Hagar make almost no use of the rabbis, aside from the reference to Ishmael's clay images, noted earlier by Rupert.[196] The Comestor does incorporate a novel apocalyptic motif, though, one that does not improve Ishmael's public image. Citing Methodius as his authority, he offers as a prediction that the sons of Ishmael will one day conquer the whole world: "They will kill priests, sleep with women, stable donkeys in the sepulchres of the saints—all because of the wantonness of Christians."[197] Actually, it is surprising that commentaries on Genesis do not more often contain such invective against the "Ishmaelites." Three quarters of a century before Peter Comestor wrote his *Scholastic History*, Pope Urban II had rallied Christendom for the First Crusade against "the impious Saracens," those children of Hagar and Ishmael, by invoking the cry of Sarah and St. Paul: "Cast out the slave woman and her son!"[198] But while fears of Islam and slurs against the warlike Ishmaelites are periodically voiced in other medieval and Reformation writings, such allusions are quite rare in exegetical works.[199]

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[192] See nn. 85 and 87.

[193] The implication of Gen. 21:14, that the adolescent Ishmael was placed on Hagar's shoulders, finds a similar solution: it simply teaches that the synagogue, "carrying only the literal sense of the law, pants under an unbearable burden." That Ishmael was finally heard and given water is referred to the still-distant future, when "the fullness of the nations is brought in" (Rom. 11:25–26). See *De trin.* 6.22–23 on Gen. 21:14–19 (PL 167:422).

[194] Some well-known commentators simply bypass the story: Hugh of St. Victor's sole annotation on Hagar is concerned only with the meaning of "her eyes were opened" in Gen. 21:19 (PL 175:53). A perfectly uncomplicated reading is offered by Guibert of Nogent (ca.1053/65–ca.1125), whose *Moralia in Genesin* is, as the title suggests, an allegory of the soul's spiritual or moral progress; his exegesis is thoroughly abstracted from the Genesis narrative, even more so than Philo could manage. Thus, the well in Genesis 16, for example, denotes those in whom the riches of wisdom and knowledge are found; Hagar's angel represents the divine inspirations or warnings that move us to seek this "well" (PL 156:133). Medieval sermons often moralized the story as an allegory of how the soul, with its offspring of good works, struggles against the body and its offspring of evil works; see Hartmut Freytag, "*Quae sunt per allegoriam dicta:* Das theologische Verständnis der Allegorie in der frühchristlichen und mittelalterlichen Exegese von Galater 4, 21–31," in *Verbum et Signum*, ed. Hans Fromm, Wolfgang Harms, and Uwe Ruberg (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1975), p. 30.

[195] See David Luscombe, "Peter Comestor," in *The Bible in the Medieval World*, ed. Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood (Fs. Beryl Smalley; Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p. 111.

[196] *Historia Scholastica* §56 on Gen. 21:9 (PL 198:1103). Cf. Smalley, *Bible in the Middle Ages*, p. 179. The very brief remarks of Andrew of St. Victor on Hagar would not, in any case, have added much. At Genesis 16 he reproduces the traditional borrowings from Jerome (found also in the *Gloss*) and elaborates Rupert's reflection on the *posteriora Dei.* At Genesis 21, he again borrowed from Jerome (or possibly from the *Interlinear Gloss*), as well as from Hugh of St. Victor. See his *Expositionem super Heptateuchum*, CCCM 53:63, 70.

All in all, the twelfth-century commentaries are rather plodding productions, at least with respect to Hagar. It is as if the *Glossa Ordinaria* set an irresistible and enduring precedent, as even the comments of the learned Dominican, Hugh of St. Cher, bear out. Writing in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, Hugh offers little more than the same sort of patchwork found in the *Gloss*—many swatches gathered from Jerome and Augustine, together with just a few original stitches. Among the lines of originality in Hugh is an odd gloss on Gen. 16:9, where Hagar confesses to the angel that she was fleeing from her mistress: "It's a wonder she didn't say 'from that old hag' [*vetulae illius*]."[200]

Nicholas of Lyra: The "Hebrew Truth" about Hagar

For anyone familiar with *Genesis Rabbah* or Rashi, the fourteenth-century "postils" of Nicholas of Lyra will not seem all that original.[201] Nonetheless, Lyra's commentary was widely read, in part because he popularized Rashi at a time when his readership was still fairly unfamiliar with Hebrew and Hebrew exegesis, but also because both Lyra and Rashi attended to the literal sense of Scripture at a time when the shadows cast by allegorical interpretation began to grow shorter. This reawakening of Christian interest in the literal or historical meaning of the Old Testament, documented from the twelfth century on by Smalley, was kindled long before Lyra by Rashi's independent pursuit of literal exegesis and furthered by other medieval rabbis. Still, however much the subordination of the various spiritual senses to the letter of Scripture was increasingly recognized, at least in theory, the letter of the Old Testament would remain largely out of reach until Christian exegetes recovered also an ability to read the "Hebrew truth" in the original tongue. For the vast majority of medieval theologians, Lyra's replication of rabbinic exegesis offered a guided tour of the otherwise inaccessible storehouses of Hebrew wisdom.

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[197] Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica* §49 on Gen. 16:12 (PL 198:1097). An early ninth-century Byzantine work refers to the unleashing of "the sons of Hagar" in similar fashion, as an eschatological sign; see the *Apocalypse of Daniel* 1:2, 3:8, 3:15, 4:5 (*OTP* 1:763–65).

[198] Urban II, *Oratio II in Concilio Claromontano Habitae De Expeditione Hierosolymitana* (PL 151:569), November 27, 1095

[199] The history of Christian discussion of the "Ishmaelites" is traced in fair detail by Jonathan E. Culver, "The Ishmael Promises in the Light of God's Mission: Christian and Muslim Reflections" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001).

[200] Hugh of St. Cher, *Opera Omnia in Vniversvm Vetvs & Novvm Testamentvm* (ca. 1230–35), 8 vols. (Cologne: Ioannes Gymnicus, 1621), 1:21^{v} Hugh also observes that "play" (Gen. 21:9) can bear good or bad connotations (1:27^{r}), and he denigrates Egypt (Hagar's destination in Gen. 21:14) as a place of "giddiness and error" (1:27^{v}). On the curious composition of Hugh's commentaries, see Robert E. Lerner, "Poverty, Preaching, and Eschatology in the Commentaries of 'Hugh of St. Cher,'" in *The Bible in the Medieval World*, pp. 157–89.

[201] The *Postilla* of Nicholas of Lyra (1270–1340) were composed from 1322 to 1330; the first printed edition appeared in 1471–73. My references to Lyra's *Comm Gen.* are taken from the 1545 Lyons edition (*Biblia Sacra cvm Glossis*, cited in n. 153)

All these new insights, however, could also threaten to overshadow the narrative that they were supposed to illumine. In just this way, Lyra's treatment of Hagar occasionally gets lost amidst all the philological details he reports. Still, as often as Lyra may get sidetracked by minutiae, his insights into both the plot and characters of the biblical narrative can also yield not haphazard or passing comments but rather a thoughtful analysis of the biblical narrative. In Genesis 16, Lyra's benevolence toward Hagar is unmistakable, though certainly also measured, especially when contrasted with her master and mistress. For Lyra, the "holiness" of Abraham and Sarah is a hermeneutical tool: Sarah justifies Hagar's surrogacy on the grounds that "so holy a man as Abraham" should not lack offspring, and Sarah's holiness makes it "unlikely" that her "affliction" of Hagar was unjust.[202] Hagar's own character, on the other hand, is truly mixed. Lyra happily reports the rabbinic speculation that Hagar was Pharaoh's daughter, and he goes on to underscore the handmaid's devotion to the household of Abraham.[203] Despite this commendable beginning, however, her temperament was simply not equal to that of her master and mistress, for "she was not confirmed in the good."[204] Yet Hagar was teachable. When the angel found her in the desert, Lyra describes her as acquiescing to the angel's chastisement and as humbling herself.[205] At this point we have returned, once again, to Hagar as the model penitent—only for Lyra, Hagar's repentance is not allegorical but simply history.

Hagar's character gets more complicated, however, as the story unfolds. The angel's announcement to Hagar that "the Lord has heard your affliction" is especially puzzling, and not only to Lyra. What was her affliction? Was it the death of her unborn child, Lyra wondered, as the rabbis suggested? There were many who objected to the rabbinic argumentation reported by Lyra. Modern authors may be appalled to discover that later (posthumous) editions of Lyra added an abundance of exegetical material from his severest critic, Paul of Burgos, as well as still more comments from Burgos's critic and Lyra's defender, Matthias Döring.[206] From the fifteenth century on, Burgos and Döring stood behind Lyra like a Greek chorus, and their disagreements are often highly informative. For Lyra, the rabbinic speculation about Hagar's miscarriage was useful because it explains the apparent future tense of "you will conceive," which would otherwise be a strange annunciation to an already-pregnant woman. Of equal moment, a miscarriage would also explain what Hagar's affliction was (that is, what God "heard") without implicating Sarah. Admittedly, that "affliction" might have been simply her renewed submission to her mistress, but the revivification of a fetus would further explain why Ishmael was named by God before birth — a rare phenomenon in Scripture, normally accompanied by some sort of miracle.[207]

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[202] Lyra, *Comm. Gen.* 16:4, 6 (fol. 66^{v}, 67^{r}).

[203] Lyra's comment on Gen. 16:4 is unclear as to whether the "devotion" was Hagar's or her father's, though her devotion is clearly directed here to Abraham (*eum*). Later on, Lyra seems to broaden the scope of Hagar's initial devotion to Sarah as well. See *Comm. Gen.* 16:4 (fol. 66^{v}, 67^{r}).

[204] Lyra, *Comm. Gen.* 16:4 (fol. 67^{r}): ". . . licet Agar esset prius bona, & deuota puella, quia tamen non erat in bono confirmata, . prorupit in quandam elationem."

[205] Lyra, *Comm. Gen.* 16:7 (fol. 67^{r}).

[206] Paul of Burgos (d. 1435) published his *Additiones* in 1429. The "replies" of Matthias Döring (also spelled Thoring, d. 1469) followed not long after, Burgos and Döring went on to engage in a "vivacious" debate, according to de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale* II/2:355–59.

Lyra has drawn from his rabbinic sources a string of plausible arguments that disclose a hitherto unknown dimension of Hagar's sufferings. But Burgos brusquely dismisses Lyra and the rabbis for having misread the tense of the verb: it is not future but past, "so to imagine an abortion or a revivification is unnecessary." Neither is it necessary to find a miracle to associate with Ishmael's naming, particularly given the contrast between his evil life and the more praiseworthy lives of others who were named under unusual circumstances.[208] Döring, however, disagreed: God clearly displayed great concern for Hagar. And, even granted that she deserved whatever she suffered at Sarah's hands, what else would merit so great a consolation if not a miscarriage? Burgos (says Döring) would thus turn the divine consolation held out in Gen. 16:11 into empty words.[209] What is to be noted here, amidst all this wrangling, is the determination of Lyra and especially Döring not only to exonerate Sarah but also to make sense of Hagar's consolation. And so Döring offers an even stronger affirmation of Hagar than Lyra: "The humbled woman prayed to the Lord and *she merited consolation from God,* who, as the interlinear gloss says, cares for the humble."[210]

Despite the fervor of the preceding debate, the significance of Hagar's consolation is surprisingly undermined by her treatment in the balance of these commentaries. Her vision of God receives a much different analysis at the hands of Lyra than it did from Bede. Lyra does not marvel that Hagar saw or named God. Instead, he reports that some Christian expositors think the angel appeared in human likeness; that *posteriora* indicates a knowledge (of God) that is at most indirect and indeterminate; and that some rabbis interpret Hagar's obscure exclamation in Gen. 16:13b merely as implying that she was used to seeing angels in Abraham's house. Lyra is far from fascinated by Hagar's vision, and his remarks are a collection of exegetical odds and ends. The only note more profound is struck in Döring's assertion that this "apparition" was no "small matter," in support of which he cited Hilary to the effect that

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[207] Lyra, *Comm. Gen* 16:11 (fol. 67^{r}). Other Old Testament examples include Isaac and Josiah (1 Kings 13:2); New Testament examples include John the Baptist and Jesus

[208] Burgos, Addition II to Gen. 16 (in Lyra, *Comm. Gen* , fol. 67^{v}); cf. preceding note.

[209] Moreover, "as the Hebrews say" (Doring observes), it would be pointless to tell Hagar that she "has" conceived, since her pregnancy was the indirect cause of her insolence and flight. Burgos should therefore concede the argument to the Hebrews, to the "Master of the Histories" (Comestor, though the issue is not addressed by him), and to the Postillator (Lyra) et al See Döring, Replica to Gen. 16 (in Lyra, *Comm. Gen* , fol. 67^{v}).

[210] Döring, Replica to Gen. 16 (in Lyra, *Comm. Gen.*, fol. 67^{v}; emphasis mine). I have found no such statement applied to Hagar in the interlinear gloss, but Döring may have in mind any of a number of Bible verses, such as Job 22:29, Ps. 18:27, Prov. 3:34, etc.

"he who appeared to Hagar was, by name, the angel of great counsel; and by nature, God."[211] But Döring's purpose in this passage seems far more to attack Burgos than to defend Hagar.

Lyra's account of Hagar's expulsion in Genesis 21 is also mostly a report of rabbinic arguments found in *Genesis Rabbah* and Rashi. Among the arguments that would have been new to Christian readers one may note the account of Sarah's nursing the neighbors' children; the interpretation of Ishmael's "playing" as possibly designating not only idolatry (as Jerome had related) but also murder or licentiousness; that Abraham was "displeased" not only with Sarah's plan but also with Ishmael's "evil disposition"; and that God spared Ishmael because of his momentary repentance and despite his later treachery.[212] There is no consideration of the exiles' slender provisions. Only the faintest awareness of the story's underside emerges, first, in Lyra's observation that it would not be fitting to send the boy away without his mother—a note of compassion?—and, second, in Lyra's aside that verse 17 constitutes the exiles' "consolation," though he leaves his reader to surmise how the announcement ("God has heard . . .") must have consoled them.[213]

Clearly, as represented by the threefold "conversation" between Lyra, Burgos, and Döring, the influx of rabbinic interpretations not only stimulated Christian thought but also provoked some rather agitated defenses. The implications for Hagar and Ishmael were mixed: some of the rabbinic ambivalence toward Ishmael and his mother as forebears of Israel's enemies survived and a few tokens of amelioration appeared, but the fairest assessment may well be that Hagar's own story (and, to a lesser extent, Ishmael's) was simply upstaged by the amazing "curiosities" of rabbinic exegesis.

Denis the Carthusian: Consoling the Literal Hagar

These Hebraic curiosities, however, often fell short of mesmerizing readers, and they were often far less prominent, if no less considered, in later commentaries. Such is the case with the fifteenth-century exegesis of Denis the Carthusian.[214] Like virtually all commentators on Genesis 16 and 21, Denis makes a variety of observations on the behavior and propriety of Hagar, Sarah, and Abraham. In the first episode, Denis clearly wants to defend Sarah against the charge of excessive harshness toward Hagar, but his defense ultimately takes a back seat to his account of Hagar's exemplary virtue. To begin with, he summarizes the quarrels between Lyra and Burgos over the rabbinic suggestion that Hagar was Pharaoh's daughter, which Burgos had dismissed as a work of fiction. Denis does not refute Burgos, but he does circumvent the objection: Hagar must have been a young woman of good character (*valde proba, notabilisque puella*), he avers, "because of the many handmaids whom she had, Sarah chose [Hagar] for her husband, above all the rest."[215] More remarkable still is Denis's comment on the contempt Hagar displayed toward her mistress after conceiving. It is possible, as some say, that Hagar's pregnancy led her to believe that the promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled in her. "Indeed," Denis then generalizes, "prosperity sometimes incites even good people [*bonos*] to a certain elation, audacity, and vainglory. For this reason, humility is especially commended in prosperity." From what precedes and follows this remark, it is clear that Hagar is not being contrasted to "good people" but is rather a case in point.[216]

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[211] See Döring, Replica to Gen. 16 (in Lyra, *Comm. Gen.*, fol. 67ᵛ), citing Hilary, *De trinitate* "about the middle of book 4"; see n. 123 in this chapter.

[212] Lyra, *Comm. Gen.* 21:7, 9, 11, 17, 20 (fol. 75ᵛ–76ᵛ). Not surprisingly, Burgos (fol. 76ᵛ) takes Lyra and Rashi to task for offering such implausible interpretations of Ishmael's playing; there is a range of meaning to the word, Burgos observes, but idolatry, murder, and licentiousness fall well outside it. Döring labors to refute Burgos and convict Hagar's son, but he offers little beyond the testimony of earlier authorities that Ishmael was guilty of idolatry and his final argument is drawn completely from silence, namely, that "it is not read that Ishmael nor any of his posterity persevered in the worship of the true God" (fol. 77ʳ). As we will see later on, in the case of Martin Luther, this same silence can also be read in Ishmael's favor.

[213] Lyra, *Comm. Gen.* 21:10, 17 (fol. 75ᵛ, 76ʳ).

[214] Denis's significance for us lies not only in his epitomizing of especially Augustine, Jerome, the *Ordinary Gloss*, Aquinas, Lyra, and Paul of Burgos, but also in his popularity in the sixteenth century: a copy of his *Opera* was in the library of Calvin's academy at Geneva, see Alexandre Ganoczy, *La Bibliothèque de l'Académie de Calvin: Le catalogue de 1572 et ses enseignments* (Geneva: Droz, 1969), pp. 104, 189.

Denis's further comments only confirm that his esteem for Hagar is original and deliberate, not derived. The reader can scarcely miss the commentator's rather wordy discomfort at having to fault Sarah for her harshness in the way she chastised Hagar's presumption: "Sarah acted justly," he insists, "although sometimes, perhaps, ever so slightly to excess." Indeed, he concludes, "it is not proper to excuse Sarah from venial sins."[217] His respect for Sarah is plain, but it does not obscure his awareness of Hagar's mistreatment. And once Sarah leaves the stage (in v. 7), Hagar emerges as a model of patience in suffering. Thus, Denis highlights how Hagar's "tribulation and lassitude" lead her to lift her heart up to the Lord, and the God of compassion honors her prayer by sending an angel to console her. Admittedly, Hagar may well have fled out of impatience or even pride. But when the angel, seeking to humble her, addresses her as *ancillam Sarai*, "handmaid of Sarah," Hagar responds appropriately: "Having heard this, Hagar, too, humbled herself and conformed herself to the angelic word: she called Sarah her mistress, whom shortly before she had held in contempt as her handmaid."[218] Similarly, in Gen. 16:11, where the angel announces that "the Lord has heard your affliction," Denis finds Hagar illustrating the more general truth of Deut. 4:29 ("You will find the Lord when you seek him with all your heart"): "If borne with equanimity, this affliction [in v. 11] — or any punishment inflicted for sin or some other cause — is true contrition of the heart. Indeed,

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[215] Denis the Carthusian, *Comm. Gen.* 16:1, in *Doctoris Ecstatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera Omnia*, 42 vols. (Monstrolii, 1896–1913), 1 235–36. That Sarah had many handmaids is probably inferred from the reference to Abraham's 318 servants in Gen. 14:14–15; see also Gen. 17:27 (but not 20:14).

[216] Denis, *Comm. Gen.* 16:4 (p. 237a).

[217] Denis, *Comm. Gen.* 16:5–6 (p. 237): ". . . quod Sarai juste fecit, quamvis fortassis in hoc aliquantulum interdum excesserit. Nec enim oportet Sarai a venialibus excusare." This is a small but significant departure from Lyra. In the same passage, Abraham is treated rather ambiguously — faulted at first for his sensual attachment to Hagar and joy in her conception, then exonerated for showing himself "immune from immoderate affection . . . for Hagar."

[218] Denis, *Comm. Gen.* 16:7–8 (p. 237b). Denis goes on to ponder why Hagar did not answer the angel's second question ("Where are you going?") and suggests that she was either too embarrassed or too distraught to reply.

God compassionately [*pie*] hears and cares for such affliction, [but] not for that which is received impatiently and borne unwillingly. But the affliction of Hagar in this flight was great."[219] In other words, in bearing her affliction with equanimity, Hagar has modeled true contrition, and that is why God heard her prayer.[220] Many of these themes echo the *Gloss* and its contributors, but, unlike many of his predecessors, Denis has drawn them together and added his own amplifications.

One should also note that Denis has at least some awareness of Hagar's remarkable act of naming God. Here is what he says:

> Through some name signifying a phrase or just a word, she names God. Indeed, God is accustomed to be known and named by his effects. Because God is himself the one mercifully safeguarding, consoling, and strengthening, that woman [*femina ista*] calls him by such a name, just as David in the Psalms: "my God, my mercy." As if to say, "You, God of all, who so considerately have regarded me, are my God, through special providence and your care for me."[221]

It is difficult to know whether Denis's circumlocution for Hagar here—*femina ista*—is meant to express wonderment, or condescension, or perhaps a mixture of the two. But it is clear that Hagar's act stands perfectly on a par with the better-known psalmodic activities of David, and this is surely no small commendation for an Egyptian slave whose gender Denis has certainly not forgotten.[222]

Denis's comments on Genesis 21 are somewhat less striking. He reiterates the debate over what was meant by Ishmael's "playing" with Isaac at verse 10, and his sympathies are less with Lyra (whose denigration of Jerome he dislikes) than with Burgos, who ruled out the more sensational interpretations of "playing" as idolatry, murder, or sexual lasciviousness.[223] More germane is Denis's statement that Sarah's plan to banish Ishmael and Hagar struck Abraham as, respectively, "unmerciful" and "severe."[224] Denis is also inclined to ameliorate the apparent slight at 21:16–17, where God seems to ignore Hagar's tears in favor of Ishmael's: even though 21:17 says that "God heard the voice of the boy," this may simply mean that God heard Hagar weeping *on her son's behalf,* though, to be sure, Ishmael was weeping too.[225] In any case, Denis's summary here makes a useful rubric for his entire literal commentary on Hagar: *omnia ista erant consolatoria verba* — "all these things were words of consolation."[226] Although the more arcane *topoi* of this unmistakably medieval commentary may at times camouflage such consolatory elements, there are many elements of Denis's exposition — including his cognizance of the pathos of Hagar's persecution and flight, as well as his appreciation of the equanimity and piety with which she faced death and which God honored with "words of consolation" — that clearly betray not only his subjective engagement with the text but also an affectionate identification with the character and ordeal of Hagar.[227]

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[219] Denis, *Comm. Gen.* 16:11 (p. 238a).

[220] It is hard to know whether to make anything of Denis's reportage of the debate over Hagar's miscarriage (recounted at n. 207 in this chapter). Burgos refutes the story, and Denis apparently sides with him here; see *Comm. Gen.* 16:11 (p. 238b).

[221] Denis, *Comm. Gen.* 16.13 (p. 239b).

[222] This section is followed by a long excursus, fueled by Lyra and the rabbis, on the meaning of the term *posteriora* in the LXX; on whether she was addressed by Abraham's guardian angel, or her own, or Ishmael's; and on whether Hagar was accustomed to angels. On the last point, Denis thinks it unlikely Hagar often saw angels because, among other reasons, "she does not seem to have been of sufficient sanctity"; *Comm. Gen.* 16.13 (pp. 239b–40b).

[223] Denis is keen to point out that these three interpretations offered by Lyra occur not only among Hebrews but also in Catholic writers, implying that these definitions of "playing" are neither new nor surprising; see *Comm. Gen.* 21:10 (p. 282), where his named Catholic sources include the *Gloss* and the *Scholastic History*. Ironically, the specific arguments he cites are, in fact, derived from Jewish sources, by way of either Jerome or Andrew of St. Victor (following Smalley, *Bible in the Middle Ages*, pp. 178–79). At 21:7 (p. 281b), Denis brushes aside another "fable of the Jews" from Lyra, that Sarah nursed other boys at Isaac's weaning.

[224] Denis, *Comm. Gen.* 21:11 (p. 283a), reading *inclementia* and *gravis*

Hagar in the Sixteenth Century

Although the exegesis of the Reformation era has often been characterized as having shaken off traditional views in favor of the unadorned Word of God, the reality is rather different. Sixteenth-century commentators were constantly in conversation with their patristic, medieval, and rabbinic predecessors, and many of these traditional views survive, albeit often in new forms. At the same time, these interpreters were also among the first beneficiaries of two recent developments: the printing press and, with it, the passion of Renaissance humanism to examine textual sources and authorities in their original form and tongue. As a consequence, the resources for biblical scholarship quickly multiplied, as did the ease of interacting with one's exegetical predecessors and contemporaries. In the era of the Reformation, a book's cost and availability was no longer yoked to a copyist's wage or agility; awakened piety opened the Scriptures to seek a word from the Lord and a word to preach; and the warriors in the day's theological conflicts returned to the Bible as their armory. For all these reasons, and more, commentaries proliferated, and commonly grew fat — as we will see. In this final section of my survey, I will examine various representatives of three of the centers of commentary production and consumption in the sixteenth century: Roman Catholics, the Reformed, and Lutherans.

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[225] Denis, *Comm. Gen.* 21:16–17 (p. 283b); the argument is traceable to Jerome by way of the *Gloss*.

[226] Denis, *Comm. Gen.* 21:17 (p. 283b).

[227] One further coda may be recorded. Denis commented extensively not only on the literal but also on the mystical sense, usually in separate chapters. As expected, Galatians 4 drives much of Denis's allegorical interpretation. Thus, Genesis 16 (pp. 241a–42b) is an allegory of the contest between the New Testament and the Old, between the primitive church and the synagogue. The synagogue is unbelieving and proud, like Hagar. The spring where Hagar rested represents the Scriptures of the Old Testament, or (better) its literal sense; by tarrying there, the Jews merit only the letter that kills, not the spirit that gives life. In Genesis 21 (pp. 284b–85a), Ishmael's derision of Isaac foreshadows the derision of Christ by the Jews. The bread and water that Abraham gave Hagar represent the carnal sacraments of the Jews, as well as (again) "the literal and insipid exposition of the scriptures," which God bequeathed "to the unfaithful synagogue." This attachment to the letter is why they wander in the desert, but the well that God revealed to Hagar in Gen. 21.19 anticipates the eventual conversion and salvation of the Jews through baptism (Isidore's allegory). With respect to Hagar, the contrast between Denis's literal and mystical exegesis is strong but neither surprising nor original. In the latter, Hagar is reduced to a cipher in which only her most typical fault (pride) remains. Absorbed by the allegory, she belongs no longer to Sarah but to an old polemical agenda framed by Origen and sharpened by many others. Far from compromising the consolation he offered to the literal Hagar, however, Denis's polemical allegory illustrates his ability to separate symbol from history. Luther will argue even more explicitly (below) that what Hagar symbolizes is irrelevant to what she is.

Cardinal Cajetan: Hagar the Pious

One of the earliest commentaries on Genesis of the Reformation era was the work of one of Martin Luther's opponents — Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, general of the Dominican Order from 1508 to 1518. In the last decade of his life he commented on the Psalms (1527), then on every book of the New Testament except the Apocalypse. In 1529 he turned his attention to the Old Testament. His death in 1534 found him in the early chapters of Isaiah. Cajetan's is a peculiar commentary for his day: he rarely cites any of the Fathers or medievals, he virtually ignores everything but the literal sense, and he is obsessed with capturing the nuance of the original language in his own translation, even if a literal rendition leaves the meaning obscure. For all of these features, Cajetan was often excoriated and even censured by his most immediate Roman Catholic contemporaries, though Luther is reported to have praised Cajetan's exegesis, and his work may have received a warm reception also in Geneva.[228]

Cajetan's treatment of Hagar is evenhanded, if somewhat spare, as may be illustrated by the comments on Genesis 16. In his own way, he affirms the traditional portrait of Hagar as a runaway slave brought to sincere repentance. To be sure, Hagar is only a slave, and in the history of salvation the good things that happen to her and her son are performed by God particularly for the sake of Sarah and Abraham.[229] Cajetan seems to underscore the contrast whereby "the first cause of being" condescends to exercise special care "even for a mere woman."[230] But these points do not lead Cajetan to impugn the character of either Hagar or Ishmael — far from it. Hagar's repentance is staged against the backdrop of an epiphany that Cajetan likens to the setting of the Magnificat, insofar as both Hagar and the Blessed Virgin, "having been greeted by the angel, pondered the nature of that greeting."[231] Hagar's joyful and repentant response, moreover, is utterly unfeigned, as Cajetan's perfectly Thomistic explanation makes clear:

> Hagar, having heeded the angel joyfully and now properly prepared for her pregnancy, contemplated who indeed was promising such things to her, surmising, at

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[228] For Cajetan's method, see A. F. von Gunten, "La contribution des 'Hébreux' a l'oeuvre exégétique de Cajétan," in *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVI^e siècle*, ed. Olivier Fatio (Geneva: Droz, 1978), pp. 46–83; and Thomas Aquinas Collins, "Cardinal Cajetan's Fundamental Biblical Principles," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 17 (1953): 363–78. On the opposition to Cajetan's exegesis, see idem, "The Cajetan Controversy," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 128 (1953): 90–100. Luther's passing remark was that "Cajetan, in his later days, has become Lutheran"; see WATR 2:596.14, as cited by Jared Wicks, *Cajetan Responds: A Reader in Reformation Controversy* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1978), p. 36. For the Genevan point of view, see Ganoczy, *La Bibliothèque de l'Académie de Calvin*, pp. 95–97, 184–86

[229] These comments occur, respectively, in Cajetan's *Comm. Gen.* 16:8 and 21:15 in his *Commentarii illustres . . . in Quinque Mosaicos libros* (Paris, 1539), pp. 80, 99.

[230] Cajetan, *Comm Gen.* 16:7 (p. 80): "curam etiam mulierculæ exercere."

[231] Cajetan, *Comm. Gen.* 16:10 (p. 80).

> last, a divine messenger. And while the angel was silent, God was steadily at work from within, disposing Hagar's mind and will at every point as she herself was contemplating, so that she might merit the angel's third speech.[232]

Even if part of Hagar's affliction was justly inflicted by Sarah, Cajetan observes, she cried out for divine mercy. God heard her cry, for her afflictions deserved his attention. Consequently, Hagar's act of naming God (in Gen. 16:13) acknowledges the benefits she received and constitutes an act of thanksgiving, as does her subsequent act of naming the well in honor of "the living God who saw me."[233]

Given Cajetan's fairly sympathetic account of Hagar, it is worth noting that he fails to observe that the epiphany in Genesis 16 is unusual not only as the first annunciation, but also as the first epiphany to a woman. On the other hand, he does take notice of a similar "first" at Gen. 16:11. His remarks are deceptive, insofar as they cloak his awareness of earlier writers:

> Do not fail to notice that to no one prior to Ishmael did God give a name. For indeed, he is the first among humans to receive a name from God. But from this novel and not insignificant blessing [*gratia*], nothing is known as to whether Ishmael was good or evil: for no one should boast for having received God's freely given blessing, nor should anyone be praised, nor should anyone presume such a person is good.[234]

It might seem odd for Cajetan to underscore Ishmael's uniqueness and blessing then turn so suddenly to the question of Ishmael's moral character. In fact, Cajetan here demonstrates that he is not at all ignorant of earlier exegesis but is consciously rejecting it. For at the very same locus, Denis and Lyra — who also note the novelty of Ishmael's naming — report much deliberation over how Ishmael could have merited such a blessing in view of his supposedly evil character, not the least of which was his "persecution" (à la Galatians 4) of Isaac.[235] But what Cajetan leaves out is the extensive and pejorative account of Ishmael drawn from Christian and especially rabbinic sources. Cajetan also defends Ishmael at two other points where his reputation traditionally suffered: Gen. 21:9 and 21:20. The former text is where Lyra drew from the rabbis so many startling connotations that might underlie Ishmael's "play" with his half-brother. For Cajetan, for Ishmael to "play" with Isaac was for him simply to mock Isaac and to encourage other boys to make fun of him. And even though St. Paul would characterize such play as "persecution," Cajetan (speaking for Abraham) finds in Ishmael no fault deserving of so harsh a punishment as exile.[236] At Gen. 21:20, Cajetan again alludes to earlier exegesis in defending Ishmael. The text simply states that "God was with the lad." Cajetan takes this statement as sufficient refutation of the "nonsensical" view (*nugas*) that Ishmael grew up to become a brigand or highwayman — a view found, once more, in rabbinic commentaries and reported by Christian writers as well.[237]

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[232] Cajetan, *Comm. Gen.* 16:11 (p. 81).

[233] Cajetan, *Comm. Gen.* 16:11, 13 (p. 81).

[234] Cajetan, *Comm. Gen.* 16:11 (p. 81). The last sentence reads, in part, ". . . vt ex diuina gratia gratis data nullus glorietur, nullus laudetur, nullus speretur bonus."

[235] See Denis, *Comm. Gen.* 16:11 (p. 238), where he also uses the language of *gratia gratis data*. On Cajetan's use of sources, particularly medieval Hebrew commentaries, see von Gunten, "La contribution des 'Hébreux,'" pp. 64–71.

[236] Cajetan, *Comm. Gen.* 21:11 (p. 98): "[Sarah's] command was quite evil in the eyes of Abraham on account of his son. It seemed unfair and cruel (*iniquum atque crudele*) to eject his son and firstborn with no compelling guilt on his son's part."

Cajetan's defense of Ishmael is pertinent precisely because he extends the same treatment to Hagar. Against those who think that Hagar literally "threw" her son under a tree (in Gen. 21:15), Cajetan finds it "nefarious to think that so pious a mother would add affliction to her already afflicted, only-begotten son."[238] And against those earlier exegetes (Rashi, though he is not named) who excoriated Hagar for returning to Egypt and idolatry and for procuring an Egyptian wife for her son, Cajetan simply explains as a matter of course that "we are all naturally inclined to prefer our own people."[239] Cajetan's defensive moves here are probably impelled partly by his commitment to the literal sense. But it is equally true that he sees the "literal" blessing of God in the lives of Hagar and her son, and he will allow neither speculation nor traditional prejudices against Ishmael and Hagar to obscure these other literal and historical aspects.

There is one final exegetical point where Cajetan reads the text to favor Hagar and Ishmael. In his comments on Genesis 21, Cajetan seems scarcely troubled by many traditional problems, such as the impropriety of Abraham being bossed about by his wife, or how Sarah could have known God's will better than Abraham himself did. What seriously worries him, however, is whether the patriarch inhumanely underprovisioned Hagar and Ishmael before sending them off. Of course, Gen. 21:14 is not without ambiguity. When Abraham put bread and water on Hagar's shoulders, "along with the child," does the text mean he put Ishmael on her shoulders, too? After all, Cajetan observes, the boy is usually reckoned to be about seventeen years of age! Or did he put the supplies also on the young man? Either way, one still might stumble over the further question

> of how it was fitting that Abraham, who was so wealthy, provided for his wife and son so sparingly [*exigue*] — or rather, so miserably [*misere*]! — that he should give his wife only as much bread and water as she could carry on her shoulders. The solution is that by "bread and water" is to be understood all kinds of provisions [*omnia victualia*], and that Abraham provided copiously and quite prudently so that he even would have provided a jar to keep the water fresh [*prouiderit de vase seruatiuo aquae*] along the way. This indeed was fitting for a well-to-do father unwillingly forced to send his son away. Also, neither the provisions nor his son was given to Hagar to be carried; rather, to carry the supplies and his son and Hagar herself, he provided asses or other pack animals, as well as attendants. . . . Truly, it is impious [*nefas est*] to believe that he would have sent his wife and his young son out on foot and without provisions.[240]

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[237] Cajetan, *Comm. Gen.* 21:20 (p. 100): "Hinc apparet nugas esse quod ismahel exercuerit latrocinia. Si enim Deus quatenus iudex erat cum puero, longe erat a latrociniis."

[238] Cajetan, *Comm. Gen.* 21:15 (p. 99): "Nefarium siquidem est cogitare quod tam pia mater adderet afflictionem afflicto filio proprio vnigenito."

[239] Cajetan, *Comm. Gen.* 21:21 (p. 100): "Naturali amore vnusquisque afficitur nationi suæ."

[240] Cajetan, *Comm. Gen* 21:14 (p. 99); various motifs here call to mind comments traceable to the rabbis or, perhaps, to Rupert of Deutz. On the following page, at verse 20, Cajetan discovers that Abraham also had the foresight to send along a tent!

Cajetan defends his elaborate reconstruction, insisting that all these details are not made up but are demanded by the literal reading.[241] Nonetheless, the entire matter really boils down to a single premise and conclusion: to exile someone without proper supplies amounts to cruelty, if not murder; and since Abraham was a decent man, such brutality on his part is inconceivable. Even granting that Cajetan's primary concern here was to exonerate Abraham, for us it is Cajetan's humanity that emerges more clearly than Abraham's. Cajetan, too, was a decent man, and he could not conceive that Hagar and her son should be treated so heartlessly. And so, he took recourse to what may well be an exegete's ultimate act of identification with a narrative: he amends the text.

Huldreich Zwingli: Mixing Stereotypes with Admiration

If we turn now to examine some of the commentaries from the Reformed tradition — that is, from that branch of Protestantism often called "Calvinist," which actually arose not in Geneva but from diverse and earlier streams in Zurich, Basel, and Strasbourg — we find that Hagar does not always fare quite so well. Indeed, starting with Huldreich Zwingli, the early Reformer of Zurich, we find a whole series of commentators in which gender stereotypes about "womanish behavior" seem more pronounced, if also rather rote. Yet Reformed commentaries also harbor their share of surprises and sympathy.

Zwingli lectured through Genesis in 1527. Student notes of those lectures were soon published under an unusually honest title: *Farrago annotationum*, "a mishmash of annotations." One of Zwingli's recurring themes in his commentary, particularly in the patriarchal narratives, is how the "flesh" tempts and hinders everyone, even those who are the holiest. This theme is brought to bear on Hagar in Genesis 16: "The slavewoman displays a character not only womanish but servile, whereby we see the peculiar character of the flesh. If, when we are promoted to some office or dignity, we immediately puff ourselves up [*statim cristas erigimus*], we are ungrateful to those by whose grace or reward these things came to us."[242] But it does not help Hagar's case here when Zwingli alludes at length to the Anabaptists of his own day as being similarly "carnal" and "ungrateful." Hagar's contempt for Sarah is also developed at some length as expressing "the character of those who disdain and vilify others, wrinkle their foreheads, turn their faces away and avoid many, turn up their noses, and hiss with their mouths."[243] To be sure, Sarah also acts carnally by responding to Hagar with jealousy and hatred, leading Zwingli to remark rather proverbially, *muliebris est impatientia* — "impatience is the mark of woman."[244]

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[241] Cajetan, *Comm Gen* 21:14 (p. 99): "The literal sense here is not false (*fictus*) but to be inferred (*insinuatus*): First, from the decency of Abraham Next, from the sex and condition of Hagar: she was, after all, his wife. Then, from the age of his own son. And lastly, from the bread, that is, from the provisions to be carried Indeed, all these things together indicate that pack animals were needed to carry them and, consequently, their servants and all the other necessities Surely Abraham did not treat Ishmael worse than the other sons whom he later begot from his concubine, on whom he lavished rewards." For Cajetan on Keturah, see *Comm. Gen* 25:1 (p. 110).

[242] Huldreich Zwingli, *Farrago annotationum in Genesim* (hereafter cited as *Ann. Gen.*) on Gen. 16:3 (ZSW 13:93–94), reading in part "Refert serva ingenium non solum muliebre, set et servile, ubi proprie carnis ingenium videmus"

[243] Zwingli, *Ann. Gen.* 16:5 (ZSW 13:95).

It comes as a bit of an about-face, then, when Zwingli launches into the moral of Hagar's affliction and flight in Genesis 16. She models, for Zwingli, not only that we ought to bear humbly the chastisement of our superiors as our just desert, but also that "the Lord respects our affliction and inflicts nothing on us beyond the will of our best and most compassionate father. The Lord will vindicate; he exercises care for us no less than for Hagar; and [he does] so, that we might perform the obedience which we owe."[245] Hagar is thus simultaneously a type of "carnal Israel" (consciously alluding to Galatians 4) and an instance of how God rescues the pious who hope in him.[246] The same ambiguous mixture recurs in Genesis 21, where Zwingli again finds Hagar's character "servile and womanish" — indeed, if Ishmael reviled or abused Isaac, Hagar is to be blamed for raising him this way — even though Hagar is clearly also (from v. 17) one of "God's own" whom God "hears and protects."[247] And Sarah's plan to banish Hagar and Ishmael again illustrates her "carnal feelings," which Abraham, apparently having better insight into God's plan, resolves to use "for a more excellent result."[248]

The frequency with which Zwingli sprinkles gender stereotypes over his exegesis may actually do more to undermine their significance than to establish it. Such conventions and clichés serve merely as asides, filling in what would otherwise be silences in his lecture, and they often recede into the background. Still, it is no surprise that the patriarch is virtually untainted by such flaws. Abraham's resistance to Sarah's plan thus stems from his clear perception of its harshness. Indeed, "to the father's mind it seemed inhumane, cruel, and severe,"[249] and one suspects Zwingli, father of four, is reading these verses through Abraham's eyes. The tale of the banishment embodies "violent emotions," he observes, "both of good and of evil."[250] He later returns to ponder this impression: "Herein arise powerful feelings, to send away with his mother such a beloved son, and to abandon [them] to who knows what fortune or mishap. The prudent reader will consider these things, so there is no need to dwell on this at length."[251] But Zwingli does dwell on it further and turns to read the end of the story now through Hagar's eyes: and if he seems cold when he describes Hagar as having "exposed" or "abandoned" her child, he is not without sympathy. Hagar was "filled with despair," he writes, having judged her son "about to die from the heat," and so she withdrew lest she see the child die — "which, as you may know, maternal affection cannot bear."[252] And, finally, despite the awkwardness of the Hebrew wording of Gen. 21:16–17, Zwingli preserves the idea that it was Hagar's voice, raised on behalf of her son, that God heard. All in all, Zwingli's portrait offers an odd but moving mixture of facile stereotyping and a genuine sense of empathy — for Hagar no less than for all the story's characters.

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[244] Zwingli, *Ann. Gen.* 16:6 (ZSW 13:95). Sarah's "fleshly" character is noted twice more on this and the preceding page.

[245] Zwingli, *Ann. Gen.* 16:6–9 (ZSW 13:95–96).

[246] Zwingli, *Ann. Gen.* 16:11–13 (ZSW 13:96–97). Between verses 12 and 13, Zwingli lapses unannounced into a brief excursus inspired by Galatians 4, though he expounds the Pauline "allegory" at length when he gets to Gen. 21:21 (ZSW 13:136–38). He also uses this allegory to explain Ishmael's Egyptian wife. "Ishmael took an Egyptian wife because [!] he prefigures the law and the flesh (*Mulierem Aegyptiam ducit Ismaël, eo quod legis et carnis figuram gerit*)." As noted earlier, the providential-typological explanation is common in Ambrose, whose influence on Zwingli is suggestive but disputed; see Edwin Künzli, "Quellenproblem und mystischer Schriftsinn in Zwinglis Genesis- und Exoduskommentar," *Zwingliana* 9 (1950–51): 185–207, 253–307, and n. 85 in this chapter.

[247] Zwingli, *Ann. Gen.* 21:9–10, 17 (ZSW 13:133, 135–36). This is as much as Zwingli says about Ishmael's "play" in Gen. 21:9, that it signifies derision and reviling or possibly injury (*derideret, vilipenderet aut crebris iniuriis adficeret*). No sources are mentioned.

[248] Zwingli, *Ann. Gen.* 21:12 (ZSW 13.134): "Sensus ergo est: quod Sarah facit, ex adfectu carnis facit; ego vero bene utar hoc consilio ad rem excellentiorem."

[249] Zwingli, *Ann. Gen.* 21:11 (ZSW 13:134): "Gravis haec res visa est Abrahae, inhumanum, crudele et durum videbatur paterno animo . . . ut proprium filium ac dilectum eiiceret; primogenitus enim erat atque ob hoc charissimus."

[250] Zwingli, *Ann. Gen.* 21:9–10 (ZSW 13:133).

Conrad Pellican: Faith under the Providence of God

Zwingli's comments about the "womanish" character of Hagar and Sarah are echoed particularly among others who taught in Zurich, including Conrad Pellican and Peter Martyr Vermigli.[253] Pellican, a well-known Christian Hebraist, was invited to Zurich by Zwingli himself in 1526; he taught there for the rest of his life, publishing a commentary on the entire Old Testament in 1532–35.[254] The opening pages of Pellican's account of Hagar in Genesis 16 seem determined to underscore, as Zwingli did, the slave woman's low character. Accordingly, Hagar's ingratitude proves, "once again, the infirmity of her sex." Hagar does not bear her lot in life "except servilely." If the pregnant Hagar's smugness moved Sarah to a display of womanly weakness, Hagar reacted "with no less womanish impatience." Indeed, in a comment redolent of Augustine, Pellican lauds only Abraham for transcending "the fragility and affections of both women." Whereas Sarah is portrayed as a complainer, Abraham models for all husbands that they should "spare the weaker vessel," placating their wives with lenience — "unless," of course, "they are intractable."[255]

Nonetheless, if Pellican is using the language of condescension to set Hagar up, he is setting her up not for a fall but for rescue. For when the angel overtakes the

[251] Zwingli, *Ann. Gen.* 21:14 (ZSW 13:135): "Magni sunt hic adfectus, talem ac tam dilectum filium amandare cum matre et nescio cui fortunae et casui exponere."

[252] Zwingli, *Ann. Gen.* 21:15–16 (ZSW 13:135): "Desperabunda enim mater putabat puerum aestu moriturum; abscessit ergo relicto puero sub arbusto, ne cogeretur mortem eius aspicere. . . . Cogitabat enim . . . intra se: ecce, puer morietur, quod ut videas, maternus adfectus non feret."

[253] Vermigli actually ended his career in Zurich. His lectures on Genesis, published posthumously in Zurich in 1569 (see n. 270), were originally delivered in Strasbourg sometime around 1543.

[254] Conrad Pellican, *Commentaria Bibliorum*, 5 vols. (Zurich: Christoph Froschauer, 1532–35). His later commentary on the New Testament is a much more derivative work.

[255] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 16:4, 6 (1:20^{r}), reading in part: "Sexus iterum proditur infirmitas, ancillæ ingratitudo. . . . Non fert fortunæ suæ sortem, nisi seruiliter. . . . Afflixit ergo illam Sara, uindicauit se fœmineo more. . . . Agar autem fœminea vicissim impatientia subesse non vult." Of Abraham he says, "Ad fragilitatem aspicit sexus, patitur se admoneri, non æque dura refert, non excusat, non irascitur, mansuete respondet: maritis in exemplum. . . . Sic non debent mariti attendere uervis iratarum, sexui danda uenia, paci potius consulant: imbecilli uasculo parcant, placare studeant lenitate, nisi sint intractabiles."

pregnant handmaid in the desert, the intractable, fragile, womanish servant is suddenly nowhere to be found. In her place there is only a model penitent. And so when the angel asks her where she has come from, "Hagar herself, a holy and faithful woman, simply confesses what is true: she does not complain against her mistress [but] indicts herself as a fugitive. She does not respond to everything, undoubtedly frightened at having run into a man in the wilderness; she uses words sparingly. But her confession of error merits forgiveness, consolation, and grace."[256] Hagar is one of "God's own." She receives a magnificent promise — a promise made not to Abraham, Pellican observes, but to Hagar. She receives an angelic comforter and returns from the desert a changed woman. And her response to God's blessing and care for her was one of thanksgiving and prayer, both of which moved her to invoke God and to name the well in commemoration of God's grace.[257]

Pellican's picture of Hagar as a faithful penitent in Genesis 16 forecasts his treatment of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21. The great and traditional controversy over Ishmael's "playing" scarcely surfaces — a surprising omission from the commentary of a skilled Hebraist. Pellican simply notes that the term is explained "in various ways," as indicating either that Ishmael made light of the celebration for Isaac's weaning, or that Ishmael gestured something shameful in front of Isaac, or else that Sarah's "womanly feeling" toward Ishmael was overcome by a hatred born of "maternal affection" for her own son.[258] In any case, while Abraham was indeed displeased with this display of insolence and ambition, few words of reproof stick to Ishmael beyond the light rebuke (attributed to God in Pellican's paraphrase) that he is "more fragile in faith and destined for lesser gifts."[259] And yet, however fragile Ishmael's faith, Pellican sees it at work in the midst of this trial: "The boy himself, now sixteen years old, had learned from his father to believe and hope in the Lord. Indeed, the faith of Abraham suffused that entire holy family."[260] In a comment redolent of Chrysostom, Pellican finally subordinates Ishmael's "crime" to God's larger plan: "Of Ishmael it is related only that he played or laughed, and therefore he was driven from the inheritance not on account of his laughter, but rather by the good pleasure of God, who is merciful to whom he wills, and lavishes or denies good things to whom he wills. Nonetheless, he does not deny grace to Ishmael."[261]

Similar accommodations are made for Hagar, who displays her faith by accepting her exile as the will of God "without murmuring or quarreling." Therefore, asserts Pellican, "she was unable to be abandoned by the Lord, to whom she had committed everything."[262] When Ishmael seems on the point of death, Hagar commits him, too, to the Lord: "She prayed to the Lord with her heart, with her faith, and with her tears; she cried out in loudest prayer."[263] And her prayers are answered. The eyes of the Lord continue to watch over Hagar and her son, now that they have been removed from Abraham's family. "Not that Hagar and Ishmael were not saved," Pellican is constrained to add. "But she was not a perfect figure of the faithful, although truly it may be believed that she was a member of the faithful, and they were a type of the gentiles who would come to believe."[264] This awkward apology for Hagar actually amounts to rather high praise, dimmed only by the obligatory nod to St. Paul: she is a saint, one of God's own, and if the narrative of her life does not cast a shadow as long as Sarah's, it nonetheless edifies in its own way by dropping wonderful hints of God's grace and care for gentile Christians, who are Abraham's offspring only by way of adoption. In other words, despite the conventional view that Protestants always championed St. Paul, Pellican joins the ranks of his many predecessors who upstaged the depiction of Hagar in Galatians 4 with a more generous allegory, the one coined not by the Apostle but much later, in the mysterious treatise uncovered by Raban Maur.[265]

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[256] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 16:8 (1:20^{r}).

[257] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 16:8–14 (1:20).

[258] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 21:9 (1:26^{v}): "Varia exponitur ratio lusus, uel quod Ismaël irriserit conuiuium patris, significando sibi tanquam primogenito hæreditate deberi, quod Sara ferre non ualebat: uel quod turpe aliquid Ismaël designasset coram Isaac: uel quod materno affectu tam odiebat ancillæ filium, quam suum fœmineo sensu amaret impacientius." Pellican does not explain how the third interpretation derives from the meaning of *lusus*.

[259] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 21.13 (1:27^{r}): "Licet nolim Ismaelem primogenitorum honore frui, quia tamen filius tuus est, licet fide fragilior, & ad minora dona destinatus . . . benedicam tamen ei. . . ."

[260] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (1:27^{r}).

[261] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 21:20 (1:27^{r}).

[262] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (1:27^{r}).

It remains only to note that the question of Abraham's alleged inhumanity is not overlooked by Pellican. What Abraham does in exiling his firstborn is indeed severe, a deed contrary to his own merciful nature. But Abraham is acting in faith: what God commands, he believes, cannot turn out for evil. Indeed, well aware that Hagar had been rescued "years earlier" from a similar endangerment, he trusts the word of God — against his own natural sense and experience — that Hagar and Ishmael will somehow be snatched from the jaws of death. So, far from putting the Lord to the test by his sparing provision for Hagar, it was rather Abraham himself who was tested.[266] At this point, Pellican's concern over Abraham's treatment of Hagar receives corroboration from an unexpected corner. Having commended in turn the faith of Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael, he pauses to add that he will not mention "the follies of Rabbi Salomon."[267] Which follies? Evidently he is offended that Rashi read Hagar's "wandering" here as backsliding into idolatry. Pellican retorts that "it is not to be wondered at, if the woman wandered. What is more wondrous is that she did not receive even the comfort of a servant [*famuli solatium*] from so rich a father." Pellican seems to be framing a double rebuke, directed not only at Rashi's slander of Hagar's piety but also at a similar charge leveled at Ishmael, on the grounds of which Rashi had justified Abraham's slender provisioning.[268] Perhaps he thinks Rashi is straining at a gnat, to fault Hagar on spurious grounds and yet fail to address the scandal in Abraham's actions. In any case, Pellican himself does see a scandal here. And, to his credit, he neither rationalizes Abraham's severity nor looks for a scapegoat. Instead, he finds a place for it within the larger scandal of faith itself. "All things were permitted by divine dispensation," he concludes. "They were done at the command of him to whom they entrusted their lives and possessions, always and everywhere."[269]

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[263] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 21:16 (1:27^r): "Corde, fide, lacrymis orabat Dominum: fortissima prece inclamauit."

[264] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 21:17 (1:27^r): "Non quod Agar, & Ismael saluati non fuerint: sed non figura erant perfecte fidelium, licet uere fideleis fuisse credi possit: typusque fuerunt gentium crediturarum."

[265] See p. 50 in this chapter at nn. 148–149.

[266] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 21:11, 14 (1:26^v, 27^r), reading in part: "Docemur ergo omnia postponere uoluntati Dei, uerbo Dei contra sensum, & experientiam fortiter adhærere, omnem fidutiam in eum proijcere. Quanto autem Abraam ancillæ in exilium destinandæ pauciora dedit, tanto fidei ardorem maiorem expressit." Pellican might well have found a concise precedent for reading Hagar's exile as a test of Abraham's faith in Theodoret; see p. 42 in this chapter.

[267] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (1:27^r): "Stultitias Rabi Salomonis, tam hic quam alias prætereo: mirum quod de eis non confunduntur Iudæi."

[268] For Rashi's view, see p. 58 at n. 175 in this chapter.

Peter Martyr Vermigli: Unresolved Discomforts

As an Augustinian canon in his forties, Peter Martyr Vermigli fled Italy for Zurich after the writings of Zwingli, Bucer, and Melanchthon moved him to embrace Protestant beliefs. Though his career as a Reformer both began and ended in Zurich, the posthumous Genesis commentary dates from lectures given in Strasbourg during the early or mid-1540s. Vermigli's comments on Genesis 16 and 21 incorporate even more rabbinic material than Pellican did. Likewise, Vermigli openly quarrels with Rashi, but it is a dispute with a puzzling agenda. He cites rabbinic arguments at least fifteen times in these two passages. Rashi is mentioned four times, always with denigration; Ibn Ezra and David Kimhi, together mentioned four times, are always quoted favorably. Of the other references, four are generic ("the Hebrews say," etc.) and three are rabbinic observations that Vermigli presents as his own. Six of these seven "anonymous" references are cited approvingly, which leaves the reader mystified, given that Vermigli could have drawn all of the seven, including the six references he liked, also from Rashi. Yet Rashi remains a "trifler" and, "as a rule, unbelievable."[270]

One should note that Vermigli also outdoes Pellican in references to "womanly weakness" (attributed four times to Sarah) and to the "servile character" of Hagar and Ishmael (three references). But as was the case with Pellican and others, these cavils drop by the wayside as the plot develops. Despite references to her flawed character and mental weakness, when put to the test Hagar proves to possess "a mind not hostile to piety."[271] She prays to God; she confesses her sin and repents; she neither accuses nor curses Sarah; and she offers up her thanksgiving by invoking God under a new and fitting name.[272] Vermigli's comments on Genesis 21 proceed similarly. After an opening remark on Sarah's weakness and jealousy, we learn that Sarah actually acted as a prophet. And though Ishmael was initially castigated for servility and impudence, his despair caused his faith to flourish, and both he and his mother called on God, who heard them.[273]

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Vermigli's commentary, however, is his treatment of Abraham's displeasure with Sarah's plan, along with Abraham's summary dismissal of his wife and son. Here Vermigli truly seems to labor to explain how this saintly man could be at first so reluctant to obey what proved to be God's will, then so hasty and harsh when he finally came around. Was it wrong for Abraham to resist Sarah's plan? No, Vermigli insists, his reluctance is commendable, for it shows his commitment to care for those whom God entrusted to him, specifically, Hagar and Ishmael. Until he was instructed otherwise, then, he conducted himself as "a humanitarian persisting in the laws of God." And if he was slow to recognize Sarah's authority here, it was only because "he knew that God had decreed otherwise from the beginning, namely, that the woman should obey the man."[274] But didn't Abraham neglect his duty later on, when he sent Hagar and Ishmael off with nothing more than bread and water? Vermigli is well aware that Abraham could have supplied them richly with gold, silver, camels, and companions,[275] and clearly the question makes him uncomfortable, for he offers no fewer than three solutions. First, he considers the argument of "the Hebrews" that Abraham was acting prophetically, in anticipation (and judgment?) of the later mistreatment of Israel at the hands of the Ishmaelites. Astonishingly, far from contesting this interpretation, Vermigli actually allowed it to stand, provided it be recast as an allegory of how we, too, ought to exile or "mortify" our own carnal impulses! A second and admittedly more historical interpretation is that of Ibn Ezra, who invoked an argument from silence. That is to say, "it is not necessary that Moses should have narrated everything," and Abraham may well have given them other things, such as silver and gold. Particular mention is made of bread and water only because these things would be so scarce in the desert.[276] Vermigli liked this explanation as well, but he added still a third: Hagar and Ishmael were, in fact, treated "just a little bit inhumanely, as it were" (*aliquantulum, vt apparet, inhumaniter*)—but they deserved it. Their bad conduct needed to be chastised, so their hard eviction "tended not to their endangerment but to their correction."[277] Does Vermigli protest here too much? His three apologies for Abraham's conduct are striking, but they cannot all stand together. And that makes all the more evident his unresolved discomfort with Hagar's shabby dismissal.

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[269] Pellican, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (1:27^r).

[270] Vermigli, *In Primvm Librvm Mosis, Qui Vvlgo Genesis Dicitur Commentarii* (Zurich: Froschauer, 1569), on Gen. 21:7, 11 (fol. 82^v, 83^r): "nugator," "fere semper vanus."

[271] Vermigli's *Comm. Gen.* 16:4 (fol. 65^v) stated, "Hoc est impotentis & parum ingenui animi, non posse ferre fœlicitatem repentinam." But a page later (fol. 66^v) he wrote, "nihilominus a pietate animum non habuit alienum."

[272] Vermigli, *Comm. Gen.* 16:7, 8, 9, 13 (fol. 66^v). At verse 13, Vermigli offers this explanation of Hagar's invocation of God: "Quare non immerito Agar volens gratias agere Deo, illumq; sub aliquo nomine & titulo inuocare, ex eo quod tunc circa illam egerat ipsum appellat: experta enim cum tunc esset consolationem, ex illo Dei aspectu, iure illum appellat se videntem ac respicientem."

[273] Vermigli, *Comm. Gen.* 21:9, 11, 17 (fol. 83^r, 84^r).

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[274] Vermigli, *Comm. Gen.* 21:11 (fol. 83^{r}): "Hæc Abrahami molestia non illum reddit minus iustum, imo ex ea est non leuiter commendandus: vnicuique sunt vehementer tuendi omnes illi, quos ei Deus quauis ratione coniunxit. At filij & vxoris necessitudine nulla maior inter homines extat, quare si nondum de voluntate Dei edoctus, illa ægre fert quæ ad Ismaelis & Agaræ perniciem spectare intelligit, non est accusandus, imo hoc nomine, vt humanus & in Dei legibus persistens haberi debet. Neque statim paret mulieri, cum secus sciat ab initio Deum statuisse, vt scilicet viro mulier obediat"

[275] Vermigli, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (fol. 84^{r})· "Sed nonne Abrahamus videtur inofficiose & duriter egisse aduersus filium & uxorem? Qui cum haberet Camelos & tantam auri, argenti, ac omnium rerum copiam, aquam duntaxat & panes illis tradiderit: oportuit donatos & bene comitatos a se dimittere."

[276] Vermigli, *Comm. Gen* 21:14 (fol. 84^{r}): "Verum quod ad historiam attinet, vt inquit Abenezra, fieri potuit vt Abrahamus alia dederit, puta aurum, argentum, &c neq; omnia necesse est vt Moses narrauerit. Aquæ & panis mentio facta est, eo quod sciuerit Abrahamus illos per deserta loca erraturos, vbi huiusmodi rerum cibi inquam & potus est summa penuria."

[277] Vermigli, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (fol. 84^{r}): "Adhæc cum illorum vterque male se gessisset in sua familia, erant aliquo pacto castigandi, vt scilicet aliquid ferre cogerentur, ideo non immerito in abitu sunt aliquantulum, vt apparet, inhumaniter tractati, quod non ad illorum perniciem sed correptionem vergit."

Wolfgang Musculus: Grieving for the Forsaken Hagar

Like Vermigli, Wolfgang Musculus left a Catholic vocation — fifteen years as a Benedictine monk — in order to take up a Protestant calling. Musculus preached in Augsburg for seventeen years, until expelled in 1548 for refusing to accept the terms of the Augsburg Interim. He relocated to teach in Bern, where he wrote the majority of his many exegetical works. Musculus's 1554 commentary on Genesis is a massive work, numbering some 861 pages.[278] His treatment of our passages fills nearly thirty-five folio-sized pages, offering the reader multiple strings of readings, explanations, questions, and observations. It is a rather repetitious, if not undisciplined, arrangement that leaves Musculus open to the charge of inconsistency in handling his material. At least, this is the impression left by his treatment of Hagar, insofar as the tendency to exaggerate first her flaws, then — equally — her piety, reaches a peak with Musculus. Accordingly, his comments on Gen. 16:1–12 offer Hagar no quarter: she is "equally servile and womanish," malicious, rebellious, and contemptuous.[279] Moreover, "if Hagar had been a pious woman with any human feeling [*humaniter affecta*], she would have offered condolences to her mistress on account of her sterility."[280] Unlike Pellican, Musculus seems to think that Hagar's flight toward Egypt did, in fact, imply her apostasy from "the piety of the house of Abraham in which she undoubtedly had been instructed for so many years" into "the superstitions of Egypt."[281] Thus, if God rescued Hagar from the dangers into which she rushed, it was solely for Abraham's sake, for "neither Hagar nor the seed she had conceived were anything in themselves."[282]

To be sure, Sarah is no shining light either. She is seized by carnal affections, even as her idea to use Hagar as a surrogate was based on faulty reasoning and presumption. Similarly, she misdirects her anger at Abraham when she should have simply accommodated Hagar's petty behavior as part of the usual course of pregnancy. But instead of forgiving Hagar, Sarah afflicts her, seeking to vindicate her own honor at the expense of Hagar's fetus. Thus, however inadvertently, Musculus clearly registers Hagar's mistreatment and Sarah's inhumanity. There is quite a contrast, he admits, between Sarah here and the encomium found in First Peter. If such a lapse can befall a woman as saintly as Sarah, what are we to expect of other women?[283]

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[278] It was probably well on its way to being four or five hundred pages longer. But less than halfway through Genesis, in the midst of chapter 25, the reader is informed that the commentary will henceforth be less prolix, "lest the mass of the work become more costly for the buyer and more tedious for the reader." One can only guess that behind this note stood a panicked publisher; see Wolfgang Musculus, *In Mosis Genesim . . . Commentarii* (Basel: Johann Herwagen, 1554), p. 612. By comparison, Calvin's commentary on Genesis ran only 334 pages in a slightly smaller format. Did Musculus wish to rival Luther, whose work on Genesis surpassed 1,800 pages in four volumes?

[279] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 16:3 (p. 383): "Illud uero seruile ostendebat ingenium pariter & muliebre." See also pp. 386–87.

[280] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 16:4 (p. 387).

[281] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 16:7 (p. 391). I have emended Musculus's "nec . . . nec" in this sentence to "nec . . . sed," since the following line compares Hagar to those who have been led "from superstition as if from Egypt," but who nonetheless "return to the mud-wallow like a dog to its vomit." Note, however, that in the later context of Gen. 21:21 (p. 521), Musculus commends Hagar's piety in not taking Ishmael back to Egypt.

[282] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 16:7 (p. 391): "Nec Hagar, nec semen quod conceperat, per se respiciebantur."

Abraham, on the other hand, is virtually exonerated. Granted that he incautiously acquiesced to a woman's counsel, still, he acted in ignorance and otherwise modeled chastity, patience, and temperance. Truly, Musculus's apology for Abraham at times strains belief. In explaining why Abraham seems to have countenanced Sarah's merciless treatment of Hagar, he essentially says that had Abraham further urged Sarah to be just and fair to her servant, she would have been pushed over the brink into uncontrolled rage. Likewise, Abraham did not pursue Hagar into the desert to bring the pregnant concubine home, not because he was inhumane or "made of stone" (*lapideus*), but because he feared to exacerbate his conflict with Sarah. So God sent an angel to fulfill "what Abraham ought to have done himself,"[284] and that is about as much of a rebuke as the patriarch receives.

Given the way Musculus has polarized the characters in this narrative, his sudden reappraisal of Hagar in Genesis 16 is surprising—or would be, had not so many other commentators made similar reversals. In any case, the story of Hagar's rescue is, for Musculus, also a tale of redemption. Hagar is compared to the lost sheep of Jesus' story in Matt. 18:12. She who was so impious is now "an example of a convicted conscience," "an example of sincere confession" and true repentance. Musculus sees a great "zeal for piety" in Hagar's naming of the well, but he is also struck by the implications of her theophany and the name she bestowed on God, by which he judges her to have experienced what it means to be a child of God (*affectus filiorum*).[285] He even breaks new ground, after a fashion, in his consideration of Hagar's name for God. Dismissing the usual explanations of Hagar's vision of the *posteriora Dei*, Musculus opts for "historical simplicity." That is to say, the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar not with face averted but spoke with her directly, in a conventional way. Why, then, did Hagar speak of beholding God's "back"? "I would believe," Musculus suggests, "that out of womanly shame and modesty, Hagar was lying face-down on the earth." Thus, when the angel finally left her, "she lifted her eyes and saw the back of the one departing."[286] This "simple explanation" may not be as persuasive to modern readers as Musculus maintains, but it makes one other thing clear: in addition to displaying piety, Hagar now also models the modesty appropriate to her sex.

In Musculus's account of Hagar's banishment in Genesis 21, only two issues require attention: the question of Abraham's asperity, and Hagar's response. Abraham's alleged inhumanity toward Ishmael and Hagar is depicted unflinchingly and in detail. In particular, he observes that not only could Abraham have added much by way of supplies and assistance but he also seems to have inflicted greater hardship than either Sarah or God demanded. Abraham's conduct even violates what would later be codified in Deut. 15:13–14, that no servant should be set free without provisions or stipend.[287] Musculus is not without a response — indeed, "in the face of scripture's silence," he offers two or three. First of all, the divine oracle that Abraham received during the night (21:12) probably shocked and alarmed him, so that, disturbed and confused, he acted without circumspection or premeditation.[288] However, if that conjecture fails to please, Musculus offers what he thinks is a more likely explanation, to the effect that the peremptory dismissal was Abraham's way of showing how promptly and sincerely he wished to obey the divine oracle. "Wherefore it appears that he wished to give them nothing of his goods, lest by displaying any paternal benevolence, he should seem to eject them reluctantly [*grauatim*]."[289] Musculus finds this a better conjecture than Rashi's idea that Abraham actually despised Ishmael as a degenerate. And it may be that Musculus's explanation is strengthened by his collateral insistence that Abraham was directed (specially?) by the spirit of God. He also does not disregard what this act cost Abraham, whose obedience defied his own deepest feelings toward his son and wife. The world may judge Abraham to have been inhumane and cruel, Musculus writes, but Abraham has really done no more than model the kind of obedience and self-denial that is required of every Christian — an obedience that is equally prone to be misjudged by those who do not understand what love owes to the Lord.[290]

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[283] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 16:2, 5 (passim: pp 385, 387, 389).

[284] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 16:2 (passim: pp. 386–89, 391).

[285] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 16:7–14 (passim. pp. 391–93, 397, 396).

[286] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 16:7–14 (pp. 395–96).

As was the case in Genesis 16, Musculus's account of Hagar in Genesis 21 begins with a token of blame only to turn quickly to praise. Hagar's response to her exile is deemed especially admirable. She does not murmur or complain but bears her fate, despite the many objections she had reason to voice:

> She could have turned back and said, "Am I therefore being ejected without cause [*praeter meritum*]? And am I being evicted empty-handed, destitute of food and supplies? Are you driving Ishmael your firstborn into exile? What evil did he do? Are you giving him to me to raise? But he's yours more than mine! Why are you placing all care for him on my shoulders? How will I bring up the son who belongs to you when I have been driven out and dismissed with empty hands? Where will I take him? If you must eject me, at least save your son!"[291]

But Hagar throws none of these things back at Abraham, though she surely expressed her great grief in tears. Thus, despite her vices — "no one is born without vices!" — Hagar is as beautiful an example of obedience as Abraham himself. And in the lines that follow, Musculus does his best to dramatize and enumerate the "accumulation of misery and calamities" that batters Hagar and her son. As did others, he praises Hagar for her self-control, for despite her extreme anguish, she cursed no one but simply wept. Actually, Musculus says he would not have found it impious if she had mixed some accusations or complaints with her tears, somewhat after the manner of

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[287] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (pp. 515–16).

[288] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (p. 516): "Si respexeris animum Abrahæ, apparet hunc usqueadeo fuisse oraculo diuino nocte illa perculsum & consternatum, ut expergefactus subitam ancillæ ac filii eius eiectionem ad hunc modum instituerit. Scimus quid accidat turbatis & consternatis, ubi ad gerendum aliquid subito sine ulla circumspectione ac præmeditatione feruntur."

[289] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (p. 516).

[290] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (p. 517).

[291] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (p. 517).

Job or Jeremiah. Indeed, even Christ cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[292] One must pause here a moment, to pay proper respect to this last comparison. Musculus has not quite made Hagar a type of Christ, but it is no light estimation of her sufferings and sense of abandonment that they are drawn together in the same paragraph with those of the Savior. Musculus's picture of Hagar and his defense of Abraham may well be carelessly assembled at points, but he is surely to be singled out—if for no other reason—for this remarkable comparison between Hagar and Christ, drawn long before the supposedly modern sensibilities of the late twentieth century.[293]

John Calvin: Hagar the Reprobate

Within days of Musculus's dedicatory letter for his commentary on Genesis in July of 1554, John Calvin had written one of his own. Calvin, too, has much to say on these texts, but compared to all that has gone before, most of what he says is rather austere and rigorous. Calvin is far less inclined to allow the momentum of the exegetical tradition, whereby Hagar's behavior was often given the benefit of the doubt, to continue unchecked. Instead, the signs of Hagar's piety or repentance traditionally found in the text are all treated by Calvin with great suspicion.

It is important to note that, for Calvin, none of the actors in this drama comes away untarnished. Sarah is blamed for having instigated Abraham's polygamy,[294] and her womanish jealousy and intemperance twice make matters at home even worse.[295] Abraham displays more equanimity, but even he is upbraided by Calvin for the fickleness of his affection for Hagar.[296] Calvin's treatment of Ishmael, however, is especially instructive. Early on in the saga, when God bestows a name on Ishmael, Calvin tips his hand: Ishmael's name and blessing are at most a mark of God's temporal benefits, granted as a mark of "paternal benevolence" toward the house of Abraham.[297] And although Calvin makes little or nothing of the fact that Ishmael's name was divinely imposed, he is concerned to state at the outset that Ishmael was reprobate (*reprobum*).[298] Calvin's judgment thus conditions how he reads the later statement (Gen. 21:20) that "God was with the lad." Where Cajetan had taken this verse as a sign of God's blessing, Calvin distinguishes several modes of God's presence: "He is present with his elect, whom he governs by the special grace of his Spirit; he is also sometimes present as respects external life, not only with his elect, but also with outsiders [*extraneis*], in granting them some exceptional benediction."[299] The enigmatic episode where Ishmael "plays" with his younger brother offers a final illustration of Calvin's dismal expectations. The exegetical restraint for which Calvin is justly admired leads him to pass over in silence the more far-fetched interpretations of "play" found in Lyra and the rabbis. Thus there is no suggestion of idolatry or lasciviousness, and Calvin explicitly denies that Ishmael assaulted his brother physically. Ishmael's offense was purely verbal, consisting merely of malignant derision, contempt, impious mockery, canine and profane laughter, and petulance.[300] But this was no trivial or "playful" matter,[301] Calvin warns, because what Ishmael insulted in the person of his brother was no less than God, God's grace and God's word, as well as the faith of his father.[302] The implication is clear: Ishmael was a blasphemer.

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[292] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14–16 (p. 518).

[293] The identical comparison is drawn by Trible in *Texts of Terror* (p. 92), albeit not between Christ and Hagar, but between Christ and Jephthah's daughter.

[294] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 16:4 (CO 23:225, CTS 1:427): "Praecipua quidem culpa penes Sarai residebat . . ."

[295] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 16:1, 16:6, 21:10 (CO 23:223, 227, 301; CTS 1:423, 430, 543).

[296] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 16:6 (CO 23:226, CTS 1:428–29): "sibi placet in stulta audacia."

[297] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 16:11 (CO 23:229, CTS 1:433).

[298] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 16:11 (CO 23:229, CTS 1:433).

[299] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 21:20 (CO 23:305, CTS 1.551). For Cajetan, see n. 237.

Like son, like mother? Hagar certainly receives scant praise from Calvin. She is not merely ungrateful but also positively unbridled; not merely "servile" but also of "indomitable ferocity."[303] Having imputed these traits, Calvin appraises Hagar's flight and return not as the momentary lapse of one of God's saints,[304] but as the protracted and not entirely successful mollification of a thoroughly defiant woman. At the conclusion of her first flight, Calvin narrates that "Hagar, who had always been wild and rebellious, and who had, at length, entirely shaken off the yoke," was finally broken by affliction.[305] But even here Calvin was quite willing to entertain that the first signs of Hagar's repentance were insincere:

> Moses . . . implies that Hagar, after she was admonished by the angel, changed her mind and, being thus subdued, betook herself to prayer; *unless, perhaps, it is the confession of the tongue rather than a change of mind which is here denoted.* I rather incline, however, to the opinion that Hagar, who had before been of a wild and intractable temper, begins now at last to acknowledge the providence of God.[306]

Given the general reluctance with which Calvin records his personal speculations, his skepticism toward Hagar must run deep. In all probability, too, he knows very well how the later history of Hagar will turn out, in Genesis 21, with Hagar's relapse into unbelief and backsliding.[307]

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[300] All these terms are found in Calvin's *Comm. Gen.* 21:9 (CO 23:300–1, CTS 1:542–43): "maligno subsannatio . . . contempsit . . . impius illusor . . . canino suo risu et profano . . . petulantiam."

[301] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 21:8 (CO 23:299, CTS 1:541): "Videtur quidem hoc primo adspectu esse frivolum. . . . Et certe si personas reputamus, statuemus non fuisse rem lusoriam."

[302] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 21:9 (CO 23:300–1, CTS 1:543).

[303] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 16:6 (CO 23:227, CTS 1:430): "Servilis igitur ingenii mulier, et indomitae ferociae. . . ."

[304] It is not easy to tell whether or how Calvin considers Hagar to belong to God. In Gen. 16:7, the angel's "discovery" of Hagar displays God's undeserved clemency toward "his own" (*suis*); but in Gen. 16:11, Hagar is part of a group of "unbelievers" (*incredulos*: see also n. 309 in this chapter) that is contrasted to "the Lord's own" (*suorum*). Cf. CO 23:227, 229 (CTS 1:430, 434).

[305] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 16:14 (CO 23:232, CTS 1:438): "Agar quae semper ferox et rebellis fuerat. . ."

[306] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 16:13 (CO 23:230, CTS 1:435), emphasis mine.

[307] Calvin thus remarks at Gen. 21:17 (CO 23:304–5, CTS 1:549), "The angel reproves the ingratitude of Hagar; because, when reduced to the greatest straits, she does not reflect on God's former kindness toward her in similar danger." Modern commentators, one may recall, often see Hagar's two desert excursions as a doublet.

If Hagar scarcely displays any true repentance, it is equally true that Calvin finds little if any true piety. Her flight from Sarah in Genesis 16 is culpable for many reasons, Calvin states, but not least because it represents a flight from the true church of that day into apostasy.[308] Similarly, when Gen. 16:11 reports that "the Lord heard [Hagar's] affliction," many commentators assume she had been crying out to God. Calvin points out, however, that "we do not read that Hagar, in her difficulties, had recourse to prayer." More likely, she was stupefied by her despair, and it was sheerly the unmerited grace of God that he delivered her despite her "sloth and stupor."[309] Nothing improves the second time around here, either. When the water runs out in Gen. 21:15, Hagar is once again paralyzed by her grief.[310] Indeed, pondering why "God heard the voice of the lad," when it was Hagar who cried out, Calvin gives little credence to the unattributed view that Hagar was thereby accounted unworthy of having her prayers answered. Neither mother nor child was worthy, Calvin avers, and it is but "an uncertain conjecture" that either was brought to any repentance by this experience. To the contrary, Calvin opines that neither of them prayed in faith or resorted to divine help at all.[311]

As a final consideration, one may put the person of Hagar out of mind and inquire simply about the justice of the banishment. Calvin is aware, to be sure, that Sarah's plan was brutal. For Abraham, sending his son away was no different than having his bowels torn out.[312] And Calvin is not insensitive to the charge of inhumanity: "But with how slender a provision [*tenui . . . viatico*] does he endow his wife and son! He places a flagon of water and bread upon her shoulder. Why does he not load an ass, at least, with a moderate supply of food? Why does he not add one of his servants, of which his house contained plenty, as a companion?"[313] Abraham's answer might have been that he didn't want Hagar and Ishmael to get too far away. But God's answer, Calvin tells us, is that this extreme punishment is simply the reward of pride and ingratitude: "God willed that the banishment of Ishmael should be so harsh and sorrowful [*tam dura et tristis*], so that his example might strike terror into the proud, who . . . trample under foot the very grace to which they are indebted for all things. Therefore he led them both to a miserable end."[314] Calvin does not blanch before the harshness and severity of this punishment. In his view, Hagar and Ishmael deserved what they got. Nevertheless, while one might fairly label Calvin's exegesis as also harsh, one cannot so easily characterize it as traditional: for here, as elsewhere, Calvin stands alone.[315]

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[308] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 16:9 (CO 23:228, CTS 1:432): "It might also be that [the angel] censured her departure from that house which was then the earthly sanctuary of God. For she was not ignorant that God was there worshipped in a peculiar manner."

[309] Calvin's words at *Comm. Gen.* 16:11 (CO 23:229, CTS 1:433–34) are generalized: "socordes et stupidos." Later on, at 16:13 (CO 23:231, CTS 1:437), he further indicts her "torpor" and "shameful blindness."

[310] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 21:17 (CO 23:305, CTS 1:550).

[311] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 21:17 (CO 23:304, CTS 1:549).

[312] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (CO 23:303, CTS 1:547): "Filium ergo ablegat, non secus ac si sua ipsius viscera avelleret."

[313] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (CO 23:304, CTS 1:548); the passage smacks of Cajetan (n. 240, in this chapter). Of course, both may be inspired by a rabbinic source, but the reference to "asses" is peculiar, found only in Raban Maur and (after Calvin) in Sforno and Vermigli.

[314] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (CO 23:304, CTS 1:548).

Why was Calvin so hard-hearted toward Hagar and Ishmael? Why did he discount not only the divine blessings and care recorded in Genesis but also the corroborating and sympathetic testimony of so many commentators over the centuries, including most of his Reformed colleagues? Several reasons may be suggested. First, there is evidence that Calvin's reading in the exegetical tradition was far from comprehensive, so that much of this testimony may have remained unknown to him.[316] Second, Calvin's preference for "sparing and sober" exegesis arose not only as a rhetorical strategy but also as a sometimes visceral reaction against the excesses and errors of other commentators. In his 1555 letter to a Lutheran critic, Calvin worried lest such errors lead readers to hallucinate; significantly, it was the late Martin Luther whom Calvin edgily rebuked there, and we will shortly see why.[317] However, the most determinative factor in his treatment of Hagar and Ishmael may well have been their lifelong association, for Calvin, with the arrogance and tyranny of Protestantism's elder "half-brother," Roman Catholicism. In other words, Hagar and Ishmael never quite appear as themselves in Calvin; they are always emblematic of the self-justifying "papists" who were tormenting Calvin's evangelical brothers and sisters in France and elsewhere. And although there is no evidence that Calvin drew anything from Augustine's anti-Donatist treatises here, the exegetical logic is the same: Hagar and Ishmael are villains precisely because they are alive and well, and still persecuting the true children of Abraham today.[318]

If Calvin's near-solitary stance provokes curiosity among his readers, one's bewilderment grows at the rather different treatment Calvin afforded Hagar in a sermon only six years later.[319] Saying nothing at all about Hagar's eternal destiny, Calvin plays up her mistreatment by Sarah and underscores how much worse off slaves were then than servants are in his time. Before he is finished, Calvin will also direct barbs at husbands who lightly cast aside their wives—implicitly rebuking

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[315] This is my conclusion from studying how Calvin portrays the patriarchs in general; see my essay, "Patriarchs, Polygamy, and Private Resistance: John Calvin and Others on Breaking God's Rules," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994): 3–27.

[316] The modest number of titles on Calvin's working bookshelf is deduced by Anthony N. S. Lane in "The Sources of the Citations in Calvin's Genesis Commentary," chapter 9 of *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), pp. 205–59.

[317] "Hoc quidem testari licet, nihil mihi fuisse propositum nisi ut publicae lectorum utilitati consulerem, quibus saepe in hallucinationem proclivis est lapsus, nisi admoniti caveant" (CO 15:454). The letter is Calvin's reply to Francis Burkhard (27 Feb. 1555). For a partial translation and comment, see T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (second ed.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), pp. 198–200.

[318] See p. 36. These arguments are developed at greater length in my essay, "Calvin's Exegetical Legacy: His Reception and Transmission of Text and Tradition," in *The Legacy of John Calvin: Calvin Studies Society Papers* 1999, ed. David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2000), pp. 31–56.

[319] Jean Calvin, *La servante chassée: Sermon inédit sur l'histoire d'Agar (23 mars 1560)*, ed. Max Engammare (Geneva: Éditions Zoé, 1995). This sermon has since sppeared in the *Supplementa Calviniana* collection of Calvin's sermons on Genesis, also edited by Engammare.

Abraham, too![320] Most amazing, however, is how Calvin uses Hagar as his point of departure for a brief digression about the limits of tyranny. Coming hard on the heels of predictable exhortations about the rights of masters and the obligations of domestics, this surprising excursus is all the more provocative against the events of the day. Only a week earlier, a Huguenot attempt to seize power (the so-called Conspiracy of Amboise) had unfolded into a failure still unknown to Calvin as he spoke. To be sure, Calvin had disapproved of the attempted coup — a plan that might have halted the long series of French wars of religion — but its success would have turned Calvin's "parenthesis" here into a rather prescient and politic apology for resisting tyranny.[321] More to the point, Calvin's sermon adds an important codicil to his commentary: clearly, Hagar's coloration depended not only on Calvin's exegesis but also on whatever else he may have had in the back of his mind.

Wrestling with the Deity: Luther and Hagar

Calvin's colleagues, of course, were not the only Protestants to comment on Genesis. Indeed, it is not clear that Calvin was acquainted with Zwingli's lectures, but he surely knew and used the massive commentary compiled from the lectures Martin Luther gave from 1535 until shortly before his death in 1546. But if Calvin found fault with everyone in this narrative, Luther seems to find faith and faithfulness, along with nobility tempered by suffering, wherever he turns. There are surprises for Luther's readers, too. We will begin with a brief look at Luther's comments on Genesis 16, then turn to his even more remarkable suggestions about the meaning of Genesis 21.

Many of Luther's comments on Hagar's conception and on her subsequent contempt for Sarah are not at all new. He echoes the traditional observations about the weakness of women (both Sarah and Hagar), Hagar's servile nature, and Hagar's haughtiness and pride: she was, Luther concludes, "as proud as a louse on a scabby head."[322] Somewhat more original in its substance is Luther's proposal that Hagar fled in order to force Abraham to declare his affection for her and his expected firstborn — a sort of countercoup to avenge herself against Sarah.[323] But the plot is ultimately directed by God, who brings Hagar to repentance. What she had to learn was that her "affliction" (that is, her subordination to Sarah) was not a sign of God's wrath or neglect, however much it felt like that, but rather something pleasing to God. And once Hagar learns to trust God, everything changes. Here in particular is where

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[320] Calvin, *La servante chassée*, pp. 23–28, 31–32.

[321] Calvin's excursus against tyranny in matters of belief is found on pp. 28–30 of *La servante chassée*, pp. 28–30; see also Engammare's remarks on pp 45–47. For the Conspiracy of Amboise, see N. M. Sutherland's article in *OER* 1:24–25 and sources cited there.

[322] Luther, *In Primum Librum Mose Ennarationes* on Gen. 16:4–5 (WA 42:582, 585–86; LW 3:47, 52–53); hereafter cited as *Comm. Gen.*

[323] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 16:6 (WA 42:590, LW 3:59). Luther's account is further remarkable in his suggestion that Abraham and Sarah, having repented of their respective contributions to Hagar's flight, "undoubtedly prayed for Hagar after she had fallen into such a serious sin. . . . Those who were saintly and without guilt bear the consciousness of sin." See *Comm. Gen.* 16:7–9 (WA 42:591–92, LW 3:61).

Luther's sympathy for Hagar emerges most clearly, from the way he treats her as an example for us: "Most of us are like Hagar," Luther writes, not only in displaying pride toward our perceived inferiors but also insofar as we, too, have been led to faith and repentance. The confession of faith whereby Hagar "names" God is therefore also "the hymn of the whole church," "a hymn for the instruction of every one of us," and an act of "true worship" on the part of "saintly Hagar."[324]

Having registered Luther's encomium for Hagar, we may make two further observations on Genesis 16. First, there is an intriguing relationship between the remarks of Luther and Calvin here. Summarizing the effect of Hagar's angelic visitation, Luther wrote this sentence: "After this revelation, Hagar, who had been rebellious and impatient of the yoke, has become an entirely different person."[325] Luther's affirmation of Hagar's repentance here is neither unprecedented nor particularly surprising. What makes this sentence of special interest is partly that it is a rare instance in which one may detect Calvin's verbal dependence on Luther.[326] Yet what is truly surprising here is neither Luther's traditional position nor even Calvin's tacit use of Luther (we know this from other texts in Genesis), but rather the utter contrast between Luther's sympathetic portrait of Hagar and Calvin's far more begrudging account. Calvin clearly likes the cadence and imagery of Luther's text. But, unlike Luther, he really does not like Hagar. Luther sees Hagar's transformation as real and compelling, so his statement here could fittingly be taken as a hallmark of his overall portrait of Hagar. Calvin's statement, on the other hand, is at best the high-water mark of his otherwise wary approach to a suspected hypocrite. Indeed, as we will have even more reason to believe in a moment, Calvin's austere approach to Hagar and Ishmael may well constitute his reaction against what he may have perceived as Luther's lapse from literal exegesis into wishful thinking.

A second observation also underscores Luther's fundamental sympathy for Hagar. Luther could not have foreseen how Calvin would use his words, but he assuredly saw how St. Paul might be used to denigrate Hagar after the fact. Luther's response was unyielding:

> I certainly conclude that Hagar should be counted among the saintly women; for the fact that Paul compares her to Sarah and calls her a maid who has no place in the home is in no wise a hindrance. For in Scripture even the saints frequently symbolize the ungodly. . . . I believe that Ishmael, too, was saved together with many of his descendants; nor does it do him any harm that his mother symbolizes the synagogue. For the entire church symbolizes eternal damnation, since it is cruelly afflicted and slain by its enemies. Yet it is not abandoned. . . . Thus Hagar, justified

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[324] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 16:13–14 (WA 42:599–601, LW 3:71–74).

[325] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 16:15–16 (WA 42:601, LW 3:74); see the next note for the Latin text of Luther's statement.

[326] Note the following similarities (underlined):

Vides rebellem Hagar et impatientem iugi post revelationem hanc prorsus aliam factam. Luther, WA 42:601.	Agar quae semper ferox et rebellis fuerat, tunc vero prorsus excusserat iugum, nunc alia prorsus apparet, postquam malis fracta fuit cordis eius durities. Calvin, as cited on p. 84 at n. 305.

> and sanctified by the Word of God, symbolizes the ungodly without detriment to herself.[327]

Luther hereby initiates a radical rehabilitation of Hagar and Ishmael for which few precedents can be found — in Isidore, Rabanus, and Pellican, perhaps — and it is all the more marvelous that he rescues them from no less a canonical threat than the Apostle himself.[328] Never mind what Paul says, argues Luther: in her own person, Hagar belongs to God.

Luther's account of Hagar's exile in Genesis 21 also begins with some familiar moves. Hagar sinned through pride. Hagar incited Ishmael to covet the primogeniture. Ishmael's mockery was no trivial matter. Abraham bore a misplaced loyalty to Ishmael. Ishmael deserved to be driven out. These are all traditional observations, though for Luther they are merely prolegomena to the point he began to make in chapter 16, namely, that what seems like tragedy and divine abandonment is in fact God's way of teaching his people to trust only him. This is Luther's well-known doctrine of the *Deus absconditus* — the God whose presence is far nearer than we expect, albeit revealed only under a humble if not contrary guise. Accordingly, one may expect Hagar and Ishmael to learn valuable lessons about faith and trust and humility through their exile, and so they do.

However, what one would not expect — at least, not in light of exegetical tradition — is that Luther's sympathy for Hagar could possibly run as deep as it does. His comments take this unexpected turn when he comes to describe the actual eviction of Hagar at verse 14. There Luther's commentary introduces a degree of pathos and poignancy that is simply astonishing, and he rings the changes on this theme for nearly twenty pages of the Weimar edition:

> This is surely a sad story if you consider it carefully, although Moses relates it very briefly. After Abraham is sure about God's will, he hastens to obey. . . . He simply sends away his very dear wife, who was the first to make him a father, along with his first-born son, and gives them nothing but *Ein sack mit brott, und ein krug mit wasser*. . . . But does it not seem to be cruelty for a mother who is burdened with a child to be sent away so wretchedly, and to an unfamiliar place at that, yes, into a vast and arid desert?[329]

Luther does not shrink from describing just how barbarous Abraham appears here: "If someone wanted to rant against Abraham at this point, he could make him the murderer of his son and wife. . . . Who would believe this if Moses had not recorded it?"[330] But Abraham is actually no less anguished than Hagar here, and within a few pages Luther has everyone in the narrative weeping, and the readers of the text as well.

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[327] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 16:13–14 (WA 42:598–99, LW 3:70). Luther provides several other examples here, as follows: "'Thus Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea symbolize the ungodly synagog[ue], although they themselves are saintly and pious . . . Thus Simeon calls Christ a sign on the basis of Isaiah 8, which calls him 'a stone of offense.'"

[328] Luther's ability to bracket Galatians 4 is signaled also at *Comm. Gen.* 16:6 (WA 42:589–90, LW 3:58), where he notes that the verb "to humble/afflict" (Hagar) is applied to Christ in Zech. 9:9 and to Moses in Num. 12:3.

[329] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (WA 43:161, cf. LW 4:36). Luther's lapse from Latin into German ("a sack of bread and a jug of water") is surely meant to emphasize the paucity of supplies.

[330] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:15–16 (WA 43:164, LW 4:40–41).

> It is surely a piteous description, which I can hardly read with dry eyes, that the mother and her son bear their expulsion with such patience and go away into exile. Therefore Father Abraham either stood there with tears in his eyes and followed them with his blessings and prayers as they went away, or he hid himself somewhere in a nook, where he wept in solitude over his own misfortune and that of the exiles.[331]

"Trial follows upon trial, and tears force out other tears." Nonetheless, Abraham and Sarah are acting not according to their natural feelings but in obedience to the divine command in verses 12–13. And so Abraham and Sarah urged Hagar and Ishmael "to bear this expulsion patiently; for, as they said, it was God's will expressed by a definite word that Ishmael should leave home and . . . wait for God's blessing in another place."[332]

All this sadness, then, is not without purpose. Hagar and Ishmael are guilty not only of pride but also of presumption—the presumption that being born first automatically gives Ishmael sole rights to what God promised Abraham. The purpose of Ishmael's exile, Luther writes, "is to let him know that the kingdom of God is not owed to him by reason of a natural right but comes out of pure grace. . . . Ishmael and his mother must learn this lesson, since both wanted to proceed against Isaac on the strength of a right."[333] Fortunately, Luther thinks, Hagar and Ishmael did learn this lesson. And, having done so, they are changed and rewarded. Indeed, as his commentary proceeds, it seems as if Luther cannot tie up enough loose ends by way of recompense to Hagar, her husband, and her son. With respect to that son, Luther argues that "the expulsion does not mean that Ishmael should be utterly excluded from the kingdom of God."[334] Indeed, so well did the contrite Ishmael learn to forsake self-reliance that Luther calls him "a true son of the promise."[335] More astonishing still, he

> undoubtedly developed into a well-informed and learned preacher who, after he had been taught by his own example, preached that God is the God of those who have been humbled. . . . After Ishmael had become a husband, he [brought] . . . his wife and her relatives and parents to the knowledge of God. Among the uncircumcised heathen he established a church like Abraham's church. . . . God caused him to become great . . . in the Word and spiritual gifts; for, says Moses, God was with him.[336]

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[331] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:15–16 (WA 43:168, LW 4:46). In his comments on Gen. 21:14, Luther variously (but expressly) names every member of the household as weeping; see WA 43:161–64 (LW 4:37–40), passim.

[332] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (WA 43:162, LW 4:38).

[333] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:15–16 (WA 43:166, LW 4:42).

[334] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:15–16 (WA 43.165, LW 4:42). Abraham's household constituted the entire church in his day and was thus, for Luther, coterminous with the kingdom of God. See Ulrich Asendorf, *Lectura in Biblia: Luthers Genesisvorlesung (1535–1545)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), p. 261: "die Kirche nirgends als in Abrahams Haus und bei denen ist, die sich mit ihm verbunden haben "

[335] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:17 (WA 43:176, LW 4:56).

[336] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:20–21 (WA 43:186, LW 4:69). Luther also addresses the faith of Ishmael's descendants, as well as the conversion of the Canaanites, in *Comm. Gen.* 21:15–16 (WA 43:166–67, LW 4:43–44). For Sozomen on the decline of Ishmael's heirs, see n. 128.

Finally, that Ishmael settled nearby, in Paran (21:21), further indicates to Luther "that Ishmael was reconciled with his father Abraham and his church, although his descendants, as usually happens, gradually deteriorated."[337]

Once again, like mother, like son—for here is how Luther describes the transformation of Hagar: "Because the Word of God is never proclaimed in vain, Hagar, too, is first awakened from death, as it were, by the angel's voice. Then she is enlightened with . . . the Holy Spirit, and from a slave woman she also becomes a mother of the church, who later on instructed her descendants and warned them by her own example not to act proudly."[338] But Luther still is not finished. After her chastisement, Luther thinks Hagar returned to live not merely near Abraham, but, after Sarah's death, with him—"for the opinion of the Jews that Keturah is Hagar pleases me."[339] Embracing this bit of rabbinic speculation here means not only that Luther thinks Hagar bore Abraham another six sons (cf. Gen. 25:1–2) but also that he wants so much to read a happy ending that he is willing to credit precisely those exegetes on whom he had previously lavished so much contempt.[340]

All the same, no degree of happiness ceded to Hagar by way of denouement can possibly arrest the attention of the modern reader nearly so much as Luther's account of one other dimension of the trial endured (albeit in somewhat different ways) by both Abraham and Hagar. If it is true that the ending of this story is happier than one would expect, it is equally true for Luther that the tribulations leading to that ending were also more devastating, and the stakes far higher. Luther's depiction of the exile steps beyond the accounts of his predecessors to suggest a particularly modern anxiety. That Hagar should have to forsake her pride and presumption is understandable. But that she should be driven away from Abraham also suggests for Luther a terror, a trial, and a temptation far more horrible. To leave Abraham was, for Hagar, to leave the church of her day, indeed, to leave the kingdom of God. What else could this mean but that God was abandoning her unto reprobation? In short, why should Hagar not believe that God hates her?[341] Having raised this problem, Luther faces it head-on. Truly, it was God's intention to kill Hagar, spiritually, that he might raise her up.[342] But here Luther sees Satan at work, too, who typically stirs up lies and "very sad thoughts" in the afflicted, and Hagar wanders aimlessly in the desert, having fallen into a deep stupor.[343] Consequently, to comfort and correct Hagar requires a divine remedy, namely, an angelic visitation. "And here," writes Luther, "we are also warned about the purpose: it is not because God hates Ishmael and Hagar that he allows them to be cast out so pitifully. That phony explanation is the fabrication of the devil! God's plan is that they should be humbled and learn to trust in God's grace alone, not in merits or some carnal prestige."[344] God does not hate Hagar, Luther proclaims. But all those who have had their faith tested will understand perfectly why she might have thought so.[345]

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[337] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:20–21 (WA 43:186, LW 4:71).

[338] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:17 (WA 43:177, LW 4:58).

[339] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:15–16 (WA 43:166, LW 4:43).

[340] Luther makes many anti-Jewish asides in this context, but for those pertaining especially to exegesis, see WA 42:594, 596–97, 599–600; 43:144 (LW 3:64, 67–69, 70–73; 4:12–13). For the view of *Genesis Rabbah* that Keturah was, in fact, Hagar, see n. 171.

[341] A similar question is raised by Trible (*Texts of Terror*, pp. 25–28) and taken up by many recent critics; see the synopsis on pp. 21–22 in this chapter.

[342] Or, in the words of LW 4:59, "He wanted to crush you" (*Mortificare vos voluit*, WA 43:177.32).

[343] Luther, *Comm Gen.* 21:15–16 (WA 43:169, LW 4:47–48).

As noted, Luther's treatment of Hagar is lengthy. Nonetheless, for all its length, it is far less a piece of technical or literal exegesis than it is a psychologizing of the story.[346] Luther even seems a bit self-conscious about his prolixity, for however often he mentions how sad or tragic or horrible this story is, he feels compelled to concede that "the words are few."[347] Finally, Luther exclaims, perhaps defensively, "I am not inventing these things, but the very situation and Moses' earlier narrative clearly suggest these circumstances."[348] The reader cannot but suspect that Luther's exegesis is led here more by a warm and tender heart than by a calm and cool detachment. Luther's willingness to psychologize and speculate in this story may also be one more reason why Calvin's patience wore thin, not only with Luther but toward Hagar as well.[349]

A Lutheran after Luther: Johann Brenz

Despite the imposing stature of Luther's massive *Lectures in Genesis*, and despite even the reverence with which his successors regarded him as a prophet and apostle in their midst, it has been shown that later Lutheran commentators on Genesis did not necessarily feel obliged to adopt Luther's exegetical insights or approaches as their own.[350] A brief look at Johann Brenz (1499–1570) bears this out. The Reformer of Württemberg, Brenz was among Luther's earliest followers; his own lectures on Genesis were delivered sometime after 1553 and published posthumously.[351] The architecture of Brenz's approach is familiar: an initial vilification of Hagar is followed by commendation for her repentance.[352] But Brenz's account of Hagar's flight in Genesis 16 really shows a small degree of interest in Hagar, except as a threat to the well-being of Abraham and Sarah. Indeed, virtually all the "sadness" in this chapter belongs to Abraham and Sarah, who fear greatly "lest Hagar kill herself or the fetus" and who also worry that they might be held responsible by God for the death of the unborn child. Thus, the angel recalls Hagar primarily for the consolation of her master and mistress, and only secondarily to show God's care for the lowly.[353] After Luther's amazing display of compassion for Hagar, Brenz seems quite cool by comparison, nor does he make much of Hagar's vision of God. His account of Hagar's banishment in Genesis 21 is remarkable chiefly for its failure to raise the specter of Abraham's inhumanity.[354] At the moment of exile, the trial is wholly Abraham's, and while Luther's theme of the mortification through which faith must pass does recur in Brenz, here again Abraham is the sole protagonist. Only when the scene shifts to the desert does Brenz ponder Hagar's plight, and echoes of Luther are surely to be heard here: "Why would God plan their annihilation? For nothing less than that he was planning their liberation and salvation. Indeed, he cast them into dire necessity and want, that they might learn humility and be raised to hope in and invoke only the mercy of God."[355] One cannot accuse Brenz of trifling with Hagar's plight, for he clearly states that she and her son were led by God into "about as serious a calamity as can happen in those parts."[356] But, unlike Luther, he by no means be-labors the point. Instead, he hastens through the text to find in Hagar and Ishmael a rather formulaic example of the second use of the law, whereby the law drives us to despair so that we might seek our righteousness in Christ instead. Accordingly, Brenz appears to find it easy to see—too easy, perhaps—that Hagar and Ishmael got not only what they deserved, but also just what they needed.[357] Viewed as a satellite of Luther's *magnum opus*, Brenz's work can be credited for reflecting faithfully, if palely, some quintessential Lutheran themes. Read in isolation, however, Brenz's commentary seems just a bit facile.

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[344] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:17 (WA 43:178.2–7): "Atque hic etiam de finali causa admonemur, non quia Deus Ismaelem et Hagar oderit, ideo sic miserabiliter eos sinit eiici. Hanc falsam causam Leviathan adfingit, Dei consilium est, ut humilientur, et discant confidere in sola Dei gratia: non in meritiis aut dignitate aliqua carnali."

[345] God imposes a similar course of renunciation and mortification on Abraham. Luther explicitly likens the effect of Hagar's banishment (i.e., its effect on Abraham) to the impact of the offering of Isaac in Genesis 22; see *Comm. Gen.* 21:15–16 (WA 43:168, LW 4:45). But it is clear that both Hagar and Ishmael also endure a crisis of faith no less dramatic than what Kierkegaard would later attribute to Abraham in *Fear and Trembling.*

[346] This is not to say that Luther ignores the traditional grammatical and historical problems. Many of them are, in fact, treated with brevity; but others are pressed into service on behalf of his broader reading of the text. The statements in Gen. 21:20–21 (discussed earlier) that "God was with" Ishmael, that he dwelt in Paran, and even that he obeyed his mother in choosing a wife, are all evidence of Ishmael's ultimate godliness. The problematic shift from "Hagar lifted up her voice" (21:16) to "God heard the lad" (21:17) is nicely resolved by Luther in Hagar's favor by reading the latter phrase as part of the angel's proclamation to Hagar. Thus her greatest cause for anxiety—Ishmael's impending death—is alleviated; see WA 43:181 (LW 4:63–64).

[347] See WA 43:161.25, 162.17, 162.31–32, 164.24–25, and 167.41–42. His aside at *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (WA 43:162.31–32, LW 4:38) is especially moving: "If Moses had wanted to record everything as it happened, he would have needed a large volume for this one account. For who could describe the tears and sighs of the mother as well as of the son?"

[348] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14 (WA 43:163.1–3, LW 4:38): "Haec non adfingo ego, sed ipsae circumstantiae, et Mosi superior narratio has circumstantias clare adferunt, quam enim pius et etiam in hostes clemens et misericors fuerit Abraham, Sodomitarum historia docet" One wonders whether there is a trace of Cajetan here.

[349] In effect, Luther's commentary may have but worsened a preexisting condition, for Calvin's association of Hagar and Ishmael with the persecution of Protestants is rooted in his 1548 commentary on Galations. Luther's exegesis of Hagar did not appear in print until 1550.

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[350] See Robert Kolb, "Sixteenth-Century Lutheran Commentary on Genesis and the Genesis Commentary of Martin Luther," in *Théorie et pratique de l'exégèse*, ed. Irena Backus and Francis Higman (Geneva: Droz, 1990), pp. 243–58. Kolb compared Luther's work to commentaries by half a dozen of his followers, including David Chytraeus (1557), Cyriacus Spangenberg (1563), Nikolaus Selnecker (1569), Simon Musaeus (1576), Martin Faber (1577), and Georg Fabricius (1584).

[351] Brenz's commentary on Genesis is found in the first collected edition of his works; see *Opervm . . Ioannis Brentii . . . Tomus Primus* (Tübingen: George Gruppenbach, 1586).

[352] Cf. Brenz, *Comm. Gen.* 16:1 (p. 153) and 16:7, 9–12 (pp. 155–56). The first passage here is of additional interest for drawing attention to Prov. 30:21–23 ("the earth . . . cannot sustain . . a handmaid when she is lord of her mistress") as illustrative of this incident in Genesis. The significance of this proverb is also noted by Trible (*Texts of Terror*, p. 31 n. 17) and Darr (*Far More Precious than Jewels*, p. 137).

[353] Brenz could have been inspired here (*Comm. Gen.* 16:6–7, p. 155) by Luther's remarks about Hagar's desire to extort a show of affection from Abraham (p. 87 at n. 323, in this chapter).

[354] Brenz, *Comm Gen.* 21:9–10 (pp. 186–87). The closest Brenz comes to addressing the ethical issue is when he alludes to Abraham having had to "invert the natural order" by which a wife (Sarah) should be subject to her husband and by which a husband ought to protect his wife and sons (Hagar and Ishmael).

[355] Brenz, *Comm. Gen.* 21:17–21 (p. 189): "Num idcirco fit, quod Deus cogitet interitum eorum? Nihil minus, sed cogitat liberationem & salutem eorum. Conijcit enim eos in extremam indigentiam & necessitatem, vt discant humilitatem, & excitentur ad spem, & inuocationem solius misericordiæ Dei." Cf. p. 92 at n. 344 in this chapter.

[356] Brenz, *Comm. Gen.* 21:17–21 (p. 189): "in tantam afflictionem & calamitatem, qua vix potuit eis grauior in his terris contingere."

Conclusion

Although our survey stops here, just a few years past the midpoint of the sixteenth century, Hagar's career in the exegetical tradition naturally continued. However, having examined a healthy slice of the most influential Christian and Jewish interpreters (and not a few of the lesser lights) from late antiquity through the Reformation and the dawn of the so-called modern period, we are in a good position to make a few summary observations concerning the reception of Hagar among precritical commentators.

To begin with, Hagar's treatment by precritical commentators illumines the history of exegesis in an intriguing way, particularly the part of that history that tracks the development of allegorical exegesis, from its meteoric rise to its more gradual decline. The profile of Hagar, Abraham's wife and exile, evolves through a long succession of expositors, east and west, Greek and Latin, and the resulting series of images—some, admittedly, too fleeting or adventitious a glimpse even to merit the label, "image"—illumines the often unexpected and unannounced interaction between figurative and literal exegesis. Of all the stories in Scripture, Hagar's alone received an allegorical interpretation that was canonically approved, licensed, so to speak, by St. Paul. Never mind that Philo had coined another attractive allegory, independent of the New Testament, and never mind that Paul's *allegoria* was actually a typology, as Chrysostom would later observe. What one would expect to matter most to Christians after Paul was that the only text of Genesis available to them was the one that had already been authoritatively glossed and interpreted in a way that did not flatter Hagar or her son. Paul's allegory, moreover, would not seem to bode well for the personal destiny of Hagar and Ishmael, nor for that of their descendants. Consequently, for Christian writers to attend at all to the historical dimension of the story in Genesis would seem ever after to require resisting or ignoring two impulses, both arguably Pauline: one, to read that story solely in terms of its typological significance, as a parable of law and gospel, of old covenant and new; the other, to see Hagar and Ishmael as scapegoats, foils, or villains.

Much of the earliest commentary on Hagar was, in fact, wholly allegorical and almost as often disapproving of her and her son. But allegory—whether Pauline or Philonic—never fully succeeded in obscuring the story in its original, literal, "historical" aspect. Even as Philo's account interwove the "real" Hagar with her supposedly purified and allegorical twin, so also did most Christian expositors, beginning with Origen, blur the line between Hagar the type and Hagar the person. St. Paul thus turns out to be one of the very few ever to construct a pure allegory, that is, a figurative interpretation that never wandered back to the history from which it was drawn. Perhaps if Paul had been preaching continuously through Genesis, his homilies would have taken a different tack, but he seems to have enjoyed no such luxury. Instead, the only account of Hagar bequeathed by an apostle was the one in Gal. 4:24–31, a mere 130 words, but an allegory significantly more stark than Philo's: for to play a slave bearing children for slavery is surely more dismal a part than to be cast as the "preliminary studies" that serve an essential if penultimate role. It would therefore seem but a small speculation to suggest that the widespread intermingling between the Philonic and Pauline allegories of Hagar and Sarah[358]—seen at least as early as Origen—actually helped deny the Apostle the last word against Hagar and her character, experience, or destiny.

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[357] Brenz, *Comm. Gen.* 21:14, 17–21 (pp. 188, 189). Except for a brief gloss on verse 21, Brenz says nothing about the later history of Hagar and Ishmael, nor about the results of their spiritual transformation.

In any event, there is a continuous evolution of the image of Hagar among Christian commentators, even if it is a development that often seems to move in slow motion. Indeed, to view this footage only a yard at a time could easily suggest no development at all. Medieval exegesis, especially before Lyra, could be caricatured as a steady series of allegorical plagiarisms, even as sections of Reformed exegesis could be excerpted so as to resemble a self-imitating collection of misogynist clichés. And while a longer viewing would refute these and other complaints, it remains the case that an awareness of Hagar's complexity and interest only gradually gained enough mass to form an obvious precipitate.

Some of the important ingredients are easy to overlook. The appeal to Hagar's theophany as evidence of a trinitarian presence in the Old Testament, for instance, could readily seem like a case of tendentious proof-texting and therefore of no value. But however one may assess the theological argument of a Novatian or a Hilary, and even if one would not credit them with being particularly interested in Hagar, there is still reason to think that their urgent heralding of how God—indeed, God the Son—graciously appeared to Hagar inadvertently served to impress readers also with the implications of so great a visitation (on two occasions, no less) for the character of this supposedly despicable slave woman. In other words, the theological exploitation of Hagar in a trinitarian context may well have contributed to later estimations of her significance in contexts more directly exegetical.

Such a lesson from the trinitarian controversies would seem to have been lost on Ambrose and Augustine, whose accounts of Hagar are among the most one-dimensional. However, insights of the sort set forth by Novatian or Hilary about "who Hagar really saw" may well have added momentum to the reworkings of the Pauline allegory that were hinted at by Origen. For him, instead of prefiguring "the carnal Jews" or unbelievers or heretics, Hagar found a new role in signaling not the road to hell but rather the way of salvation for repentant (that is, converted) Jews or, alternatively, for the entire gentile church — and one should note that Origen and other commentators who advanced this interpretation would have numbered themselves among those gentiles. But when the spores of Origen's allegory drifted to the west and took root among Isidore, Bede, and Raban Maur, new features appeared for which Origen can take no credit. Hagar's pilgrimage now led her not only through repentance but also to visions far higher — to a pious and mystical encounter with her Creator that, for all practical purposes, fell short only of the *cognitio facialis* of the beatific vision. And, as a pilgrimage, it is all the more wondrous for beginning inside an allegory but wandering in short course back toward the historical narrative and the literal Hagar.

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[358] Some corroboration for such a hypothesis may be drawn from Augustine, who was a skilled allegorist, but exclusively Pauline when it came to Hagar and also—not coincidentally, one may argue—remarkably unsympathetic to her. Ambrose offers similar testimony: though he conjoins Pauline and Philonic readings of Hagar, the Pauline interpretation comes first and appears thus to jade Ambrose's reading of Philo, so that Hagar bears little resemblance to the necessary "preliminary studies" but is written off as mere worldly wisdom.

Isidore, Bede, and Rabanus may well have begun by echoing what Origen had said about Hagar as a counterpart to the Samaritan woman, but they ended with some stunning embroidery: what began as a theophany in the desert ended with Hagar portrayed not only as the model penitent, but the model contemplative as well. Far from being an example of behavior to avoid, as she was for Paul, Hagar is now commended for the imitation of all. One may well wonder, then, if scraps from Novatian or Hilary have not been rewoven into this new pattern.[359] Not only was the result a marvelous bit of handiwork, it was also one that — at least in abridged form — would have received widespread notice. Framed among the other excerpts in the *Ordinary Gloss*, this new picture of Hagar as a Christian exemplar would have been readily available to virtually every scholar and churchman for centuries to come.[360]

In the later Middle Ages, portraits of Hagar are mixed, despite the tendency among earlier medievals to intermingle the figurative concubine with her literal counterpart. In all fairness one might say that there is a degree of competition between allegorical and literal interest in the story of Hagar — a contest in which both sides are driven by different aspects of the long-standing rivalry between Christians and Jews. Accordingly, some medieval commentators perpetuated more or less Pauline readings of Hagar in order to underscore the continuing inferiority of the synagogue to the church. Rupert of Deutz is typical, recognizing (for example) the genuineness of Hagar's theophany but reinterpreting it as utterly inferior to the spiritual knowledge of God that is the plenary possession of all Christians. Rupert and others leave no doubt but that the Pauline Hagar is alive and well in their own day, so they continue to exhort her to return to her ecclesial mistress and submit.

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[359] None of the early medieval writers mention Novatian or Hilary, but the mere recognition of Hagar's desert experience as including a theophany would seem fairly "portable" as exegetical arguments go; and Döring's explicit recognition of Hilary in this context adds further plausibility here (see p. 66 at n. 211, in this chapter).

[360] The openness of these medieval interpreters to a relatively affirmative reading of Hagar and Ishmael as figuring (inter alia) the inclusion of those outside Israel offers an apt qualifier to John Goldingay's recent question, posed in acknowledgment of the insights of Elsa Tamez (at n. 30, in this chapter), as to why otherwise insightful "Jewish and Christian exegetes have both missed" this prominent inclusive emphasis in the text of Genesis; see Goldingay, "The Place of Ishmael," in *The World of Genesis*, pp. 148–49.

At the same time, other medieval commentators were clearly fascinated by what the rabbis had to say about these episodes in Genesis. To be sure, everyone knew from what Jerome had written long ago that the Hebrews saw much more than met Christian eyes in the account of Ishmael's "playing." But Lyra's far more extensive reporting clearly betrayed not only his own but also a more general Christian fascination with rabbinic traditions about Hagar and all the other characters and episodes, too. The significance of the later medieval interest in Jewish exegesis probably lies far less in the sensational appeal of these newfound exegetical curiosities than in the way the teachings of "the Hebrews" exposed existing fault lines in Christian literal exegesis. That is to say, rabbinic speculation captivated Christian readers precisely because these midrashic details were clearly crafted to resolve ambiguities and unclarities that had long unsettled both Christians and Jews. Whether the issue was Abraham's polygamy, or Hagar's ingratitude, or Sarah's odd annoyance at two boys playing together, or Abraham's reluctance to evict Ishmael, followed by his sudden vehemence—all of these were elements in the story that could use some clarification. Of course, many of the "solutions" offered by the rabbis were dismissed almost out of hand, and one might say that if the rabbis helped to resolve actually very few exegetical problems for Christian readers, they served admirably to focus attention on the complexity of the text of Genesis and on all that Christian readers did not really know and could not fully explain.[361]

By the sixteenth century, Lyra's rabbinic discoveries were scarcely new any more. So when the commentators of the day redirected much of the energy once allocated to figurative exegesis into the "letter" of the biblical narrative, rabbinic views were far from central—though they could often be heard in the wings or backstage. And if the Reformers often dismissed the rabbis, they certainly did read them, whether in Lyra, or through informants, or in the great rabbinic Bibles that appeared in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, or in the Latin digests offered by Sebastian Münster in the 1530s. But it was far less the answers provided by the rabbis that interested the commentators of the sixteenth century than their questions, particularly as the rabbinic questions were symptomatic of dissonances commonly provoked by the text. Rabbis and Reformers often shared an interest in analyzing Scripture in terms of its characters' ethical achievements or failings, even if they would often disagree in specific moral judgments.

The Reformers' pervasive concern for morality and for matters of praise and blame was more than mere moralism, however, insofar as their expressions of moral judgment were normally driven by the theological considerations they saw ingrained in the historical narrative. In other words, while they might begin by marking the "womanly weakness" of Hagar or Sarah and even continue to season their exegesis with such platitudes, their driving interest in Genesis 16 and 21 was not simplistic.

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[361] As Denis the Carthusian makes clear, a single commentator might harbor both attitudes toward Hagar (i.e., admiration and denigration), as well as a dual approach to his Jewish contemporaries (i.e., a willingness to learn from them coupled with a proselytizing agenda). Thus, Denis lends a critical but respectful ear to Lyra's report of rabbinic arguments, then draws an exceedingly sympathetic picture of Hagar. Afterward, however, he turns to the allegorical understanding of the story and reproduces the same polemical details on which Rupert had majored, thereby vilifying both Hagar and the synagogue of his own day.

They were concerned to learn the ways of God; they probably thought they knew enough already about the ways of men and women! In the Hagar narratives, this quest was pursued under the shadow of the great promise made to Abraham and Sarah and its fulfillment. Hagar was therefore judged less by her conformity to the obvious conventions of gender than to the peculiar requirements of living in such a strange and blessed household—a peculiarity that eventually extended to her, too, insofar as she received her own annunciation, promise, and fulfillment. Thereafter, readers and commentators alike were saddled with the responsibility of reconciling two promises, two heirs, two mothers: all divinely appointed, even if one side took precedence.[362] To be sure, these male commentators would not have seen much conflict between their own gender expectations and what God was up to in Abraham's house. Still, when Hagar obeyed Sarah, her submission was not just business as usual (though it was that, too); it also constituted, for many commentators of the Reformation, her training in the ways of faith and in the ways of a promise-keeping God. It was, in other words, her training for exile—for testing, and eventual redemption.

If sixteenth-century commentators are, therefore, mostly uninterested in allegory (Vermigli excepted), they also have less enthusiasm for intruding St. Paul into the book of Genesis. Indeed, some of them, most explicitly Pellican and Luther, fashioned interpretations that deliberately set Paul's allegory aside as a truth of a different category. In other words, what Paul said Hagar symbolizes or prefigures has no bearing on what she really is or was. In theory, of course, the letter of any text of Scripture always had a certain priority over its figurative meanings, but the Apostle was not your average allegorist. Nonetheless, it is truly remarkable how often Reformation commentaries vilified Hagar, then turned around to praise her repentance, faith, endurance, and piety. With the exception of Calvin, they all found it an easy matter to begin by denigrating Hagar then end with Hagar as one of "God's own." She modeled a familiar pattern, of course: sin and grace, faith and repentance—a pattern that lay at the heart of the Reformation, though certainly equally prized by Cajetan and other Catholics as well. The point to be noted, however, is that none of these readers wanted to reduce Hagar to a mere palimpsest inscribed with the words of St. Paul. And however much these later commentators resisted or bracketed the Pauline allegory, the allegorical inventions of Isidore, Bede, and Rabanus were by no means wasted on the Reformers. Far from it: Hagar's allegorical penance was reread as historical; her eminence as a contemplative theologian was recast in terms of her faith and humility. In short, the "literal" interpreters of the sixteenth century nicely reversed the field on Rupert (see p. 62), recycling the spiritual meaning by placing it now in service of the letter.

Although a detailed response to the feminist concerns for Hagar will not be offered until the findings of the next two chapters have been entered into the record, it may be said for the moment that while precritical commentators are often quite capable of substantiating feminist suspicions, they are also able to disarm us with their concerns for issues of injustice and human suffering. Some commentators may indeed treat Hagar as a cipher and as a "throw-away character," but this is not at all the rule. It is also true that the silences of the text are often read to favor Abraham unduly, though, given the gender stereotypes possessed by all these commentators, that is really no surprise. On the contrary, it is remarkable how often not only Sarah's but also Abraham's behavior toward Hagar was questioned. Sometimes such questions are raised directly, as with Musculus's memorable judgment that "neither Sarah nor Abraham understood God's will very well here." At other times, Sarah's or Abraham's treatment of Hagar was challenged more obliquely, for example, by the tendency of a commentator such as Vermigli or Musculus to spread the burden of the charge among several lines of excuse, none of which was fully cogent by itself.

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[362] Accordingly, however much one may admire Calvin for the "lucid brevity" of his literal exegesis, he remains open to criticism for not really having unpacked the significance of Hagar's annunciation or God's lavish promise to Abraham and Hagar on behalf of Ishmael.

In any case, it is abundantly clear that many precritical commentators found Hagar's story of tremendous interest — so much so that they did not hesitate to offer signs of emotional engagement with her misfortunes and redemption. Such identification on the part of these commentators cannot always be dismissed suspiciously, as if it were really but a disguised interest in Abraham or Ishmael as the subjects of a divine promise for which Hagar happened to figure as the inevitable but expendable female progenitor. Some commentators may imply as much, but certainly not all. There seems little reason to express such high degrees of empathy, or to draw parallels with the sufferings of Job or Christ, or even to manipulate the biblical text in search of a better ending (whether that meant adding provisions and servants, or a final reconciliation and reunion of Abraham and Hagar), if the "real" subject of interest were the patriarch or one of his sons. Virtually all of the precritical commentators who were moved to write at any length seem so moved in part because of the troubling nature of the story with its many unanswered questions, but also and often simply out of sadness and sympathy for Hagar. No one will mistake these precritical commentators for modern writers with modern sensitivities, but neither should they be regarded as aliens. Accordingly, when (say) Renita Weems asserts that "at some time in all our lives, whether we are black or white, we are all Hagar's daughters,"[363] she may be addressing only the experiences and fortunes of women, but the impulse that drives her to care about Hagar is surely not so at odds with what Luther saw in this mistreated slave woman that drove him, too, to exclaim, "We are all like Hagar."

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[363] Weems, "A Mistress, A Maid, and No Mercy," p. 17.

2

Jephthah's Daughter and Sacrifice

Her father . . . did with her according to the vow he had made.
Judges 11:39

Here is a story as sad as it is notorious. It lies halfway through the Book of Judges, itself a mostly bleak landscape in which a few peaks are defined by valleys long, deep, and dark. The closing refrain of the book is that "in those days there was no king in Israel, the people did what was right in their own eyes." Anarchy seems to have tainted virtually everyone, even those whom God periodically raised up for deliverance. Gideon and Samson were two such rulers, brought to ruin by various follies recounted in Judges 8 and 16. And Jephthah was another. The son of a prostitute, he was rejected by his half-brothers but found a vindication of sorts when the Gideonites, his kin, besought him to lead them against the Ammonites. Prior to that great battle, "the spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah." Unfortunately, at that time he also made his infamous vow, to sacrifice as an offering whatever should be the first to meet him on his return. He was met, of course, by his only child, his daughter, and though he tore his clothing in regret at this turn of events, the daughter herself urged him to fulfill his vow, asking only for two months' time "to wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I." When she returned, her father fulfilled his awful vow.

Although the text of the book of Judges offers no direct word of disapproval, the juxtaposition of Jephthah's narrative with so many other dismal stories could scarcely be taken as an endorsement. Yet any attempt to evaluate the story is complicated, for Christian interpreters, by Jephthah's appearance also in the so-called "roll of heroes" in Hebrews 11, an entire chapter that recounts the cumulative witness of faithful pilgrims of the Old Testament, from Abel through "the prophets." Near the end of that list, in verse 32, the writer exclaims, "What more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah . . ." —four unlikely heroes from Judges who seem "hardly . . . paragons of faith."[1]

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[1] Gale A. Yee, "Introduction: Why Judges?" in *Judges and Method*, p. 2. Rarely, some commentators will cite the generic tribute to "the judges" in Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 46:11 as a parallel to the commendation of Jephthah in Hebrews, even though Sirach praises none of the judges by name.

These two disparate testimonies about Jephthah—one apparently gloomy, from the Old Testament; the other rather rosy, from the New—not only marked out a crux of interpretation but also provided a great deal of latitude for imaginative reconstruction and identification with the story. Even as nature abhors a vacuum, so also have the silences and gaps of Judges 11 rarely been left alone. Not only have biblical commentators typically been obsessed with explaining how the tragedy of Jephthah's daughter could possibly have occurred in light of clear and canonical prohibitions against child sacrifice, they have often been provoked also by the parallels between the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter and certain classical legends, such as the stories of Iphigenia and Idomeneus.[2] But the tale's impact has extended well beyond the ranks of Scripture scholars, and even where writers are unaware of her classical counterparts, Jephthah's daughter has rarely failed to evoke a response. Fifty years ago, Wilbur Sypherd attempted an inventory of literary and artistic treatments of Jephthah's daughter since the Middle Ages. He chronicled over three hundred plays and poems, more than a hundred and seventy musical compositions, and nearly a hundred paintings, engravings, manuscript illustrations, sculptures, tapestries, or mosaics in which motifs from the story are depicted.[3] These numbers would probably be matched with ease by more conventional exegetical studies. Clearly, whatever silences or gaps seem to mar the biblical narrative, many have lent a hand—at least in the relatively recent period surveyed by Sypherd—to fill those gaps and break the silence. And in the half-century since Sypherd took his inventory, few have been so dedicated to Jephthah's daughter as feminist critics.

Jephthah's Daughter in Recent Feminist Studies

It is not surprising that the tragedy of Jephthah's daughter should also have attracted so much comment from recent feminist biblical studies. What makes these studies different from others, as noted earlier, is their use of a hermeneutic of suspicion, whereby one attempts to discern and critique the often unstated agenda or ideology of an author or text.[4] Esther Fuchs describes one way to apply such a procedure to Judges 11: "Literary strategies work here in the interests of patriarchal ideology, the ideology of male supremacy. This understanding calls for a resistant reading of the biblical text, a reading attuned to the political implications of omissions, elisions and ambiguity. A reading, above all, that resists the tendency in biblical narrative to focus on the father at the daughter's expense."[5] The problem with focusing on the father, as argued by Ann Tapp, is that "atrocious events can be glossed over as unfortunate but necessary for the good of the 'hero.' . . . The reader is lured into identifying with an [actor] whose actions might otherwise be condemned as unethical."[6] A crucial goal of feminist criticism, then, is to expose this hidden agenda for what it is. One of many such trenchant analyses is that of Cheryl Exum: "The androcentric message of the story of Jephthah's daughter is, I suggest, submit to paternal authority. You may have to sacrifice your autonomy; you may lose your life, and even your name, but your sacrifice will be remembered, indeed celebrated, for generations to come."[7] In other words, Judges 11 exalts the "dutiful daughter" as a paradigm and ideal, urging all daughters to be similarly selfless and noble in placing themselves at their father's disposal, regardless of personal cost.[8]

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[2] See n. 38.

[3] Sypherd, *Jephthah and His Daughter.* For some of the more recent treatments, see Sol Liptzin, "Jephthah and His Daughter," in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature,* ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 392–94.

[4] See pp 7 and 14 in my introduction. One of the most provocative feminist readings of Judges is that of Adrien Janis Bledstein, who asks (in her essay's title), "Is Judges a Woman's Satire of Men Who Play God?" She proceeds to illustrate how the women in the book expose the pretentiousness of many of the judges and other men, suggesting that the work may have been written by a woman, possibly the prophet Huldah; see pp. 34–54 in *A Feminist Companion to Judges,* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

[5] Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5/1 (1989): 45, 40–41.

Feminist readings of this story thus pursue a twofold program: on the one hand, the men in the text along with the text's androcentricity are critiqued; on the other hand, the story is read anew from the perspective of its female characters and hearers. It is worth our while to take stock of some of the specific criticisms and questions on both counts here.

With respect to Jephthah, feminist critics have pointed out how he is one of a series of judges in Israel who seem to wield anything but justice — power, yes; justice, no. Jephthah is often celebrated for his faithfulness to his vow, even as his daughter is celebrated for her obedience, but Renita Weems finds this telling of the story highly deceptive. "Honor, integrity, and obedience" are indeed noble ideas, she writes, but these ideas are often "corrupted in the hands of extremists" — among whom she would count Jephthah, who was blinded by his ambition.[9] Moreover, Jephthah is but one of many men in Judges who treat women, especially daughters, as property to be controlled.[10] Yet Jephthah seems specially riven by flaws, for not only is he so insecure that he attempts to bargain with God by means of a vow, despite being anointed with the spirit (11:29),[11] but he also indulges in "blaming the victim" when he accuses his daughter of causing him trouble (in 11:35).[12] At the same time, feminists have pointed out that Jephthah may well not have been without love for his daughter; indeed, his daughter was his only child and her death would also mark the end of his lineage.[13] The question has further been raised as to how Jephthah may have been affected by his own abusive upbringing as the outcast son of a prostitute.[14]

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[6] Ann Michelle Tapp, "An Ideology of Expendability: Virgin Daughter Sacrifice in Genesis 19.1–11, Judges 11.30–39 and 19.22–26," in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, ed Mieke Bal (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), p. 170.

[7] J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 66, 68–69. Exum is but one of many critics who indict the patriarchy implicit in the daughter's namelessness. Athalya Brenner describes it as "a pejorative authorial comment"; see her introduction to *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, pp. 10–14. Some feminists, such as Beth Gerstein and Mieke Bal, attempt to redress the indignity by bestowing a name on her. See Beth Gerstein, "A Ritual Processed," in *Anti-Covenant*, pp 175–76, 182; and Mieke Bal, "Between Altar and Wandering Rock· Toward a Feminist Philology," in *Anti-Covenant*, p. 212: "Not to name her is to violate her with the text, endorsing its ideology." Elizabeth Cady Stanton voiced the same complaint over a century ago: "This Jewish maiden is known in history only as Jephthah's daughter — she belongs to the no-name series. The father owns her absolutely, having even her life at his disposal" (in *The Woman's Bible*, 2:25).

[8] "The Case of the Dutiful Daughter" is the title of a subchapter in Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 18. Essentially the same point was made of Jephthah's daughter in *The Woman's Bible* by both Elizabeth Cady Stanton (2:24–25) and Louisa Southworth (2:26).

[9] Renita J. Weems, "A Crying Shame: Jephthah's Daughter and the Mourning Women," in *Just a Sister Away*, pp 53–55, 61. See also Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*, p. 130: "Jephthah can no longer be thought of as a hero."

[10] Tapp, "Ideology of Expendability," pp. 169, 171; Bal, "Between Altar and Wandering Rock," pp. 223–24.

[11] So Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 96; Bal, "Between Altar and Wandering Rock," p. 213; and idem, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 6 But cf. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 49, who reads Jephthah's vow as impelled by the spirit of God.

As part of the text's possible androcentricity, of course, one must also consider—as in the case of Hagar—the question of divine complicity. The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter is not only much like the trial of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, writes Fewell, but also like Saul's hasty vow that would have cost his son's life but for the intervention of the people of Israel: "A reader who recalls God's last-minute deliverance of Isaac in Genesis 22 might legitimately ask, Where is God in this story? Or one who remembers Saul's willingness to keep his vow and execute Jonathan (1 Samuel 14) might question, Where are the people who, as in Saul's case, might stay a violent father's hand?"[15] Some have answered the first question negatively: "Throughout it all God says nothing," writes Trible, and Exum adds that the absence of any divine judgment on Jephthah's sacrifice has to be read as implicating the deity.[16] Fewell herself admits that the death of Jephthah's daughter may indicate that sons are more valued by God and society; but it is equally possible that "the death of the daughter, the silence of God, and the absence of the people are but signs of something rotten with the state of Israel."[17]

With respect to Jephthah's daughter, feminist criticism has attempted to uncover the "remnants" of discourse that might tell us more about her. The results command attention. For example, modern commentators have usually assumed that when the daughter goes out to mourn her virginity, she primarily laments that she will never bear children. But is this really so? A number of studies have scrutinized the vocabulary of the text and challenged this male-centered explanation, asking what it was that was really mourned—or, perhaps, celebrated.[18] It is possible she was mourning that she would never experience sexual pleasure. Perhaps she lamented her virginity, without which she would be unfit for sacrifice and would, therefore, survive her father's vow![19] It is also possible that the text reflects less a custom of commemorating Jephthah's daughter than a traditional adolescent rite of passage, such as those associated with other stories of virgin daughter sacrifice.[20]

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[12] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* p 102, Exum, *Fragmented Women,* p. 19; and Richard G. Bowman, "Narrative Criticism of Judges: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence," in *Judges and Method,* p. 37.

[13] These observations are made, respectively, by Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," p 43; and by Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative,* p. 51.

[14] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise,* p. 126; cf. Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes,* p. 130.

[15] Danna Nolan Fewell, "Judges," in *The Women's Bible Commentary,* p. 71; revised with David M. Gunn in *Gender, Power, and Promise:,* p 128.

[16] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* p. 102. Exum, *Fragmented Women,* pp. 19–20; cf. idem, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative,* pp. 59–60, where she also ponders what appears to be God's tacit acceptance of Jephthah's vow. See also Levenson, *Beloved Son,* p. 14.

[17] Fewell, "Judges," p. 71, cf. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise,* p. 128. Again, the contrast between Abraham and Jephthah was earlier drawn—and protested—by Louisa Southworth, who observed that "means were found to revoke this explicit command [i e., God's command to Abraham] with regard to a *son,*" but even though Jephthah's vow had no divine warrant, "the prevailing sentiment of the age felt it unnecessary to evade its fulfillment—the victim was only a *girl*" (*The Woman's Bible,* 2:26–27, emphasis mine).

[18] This is the point of Bal's subtitle in "Between Altar and Wandering Rock: Toward a Feminist Philology." See esp. pp. 214–19, and cf. idem, *Death and Dissymmetry,* pp. 46–52.

Feminist critics have also probed the character of the daughter. Most see her as stumbling into her father's vow unwittingly, but Fewell wonders whether she may not have acted in deliberate defiance of her father.[21] In any case, most of these writers wish to affirm the daughter's independence.[22] Yet if the daughter receives more sympathy than her father, the balance by no means is thrown wholly to one side. Many also wonder why she offered no protest. "If only the young woman had screamed, kicked, fought, cursed, even fled," writes Weems, "anything . . . but surrender."[23] Invoking the parallel of Saul's vow, Alice Laffey reflects on the meaning of the people's intervention on Jonathan's behalf:

> What distinguishes the two stories are the responses of the children's constituencies and the stories' outcomes. The female companions of the daughter of Jephthah are typical products of patriarchy; the "sons of Israel" are also, but differently! One response leads to life; the other to death. . . . There is no penalty placed on the people for obfuscating Saul's vow and securing Jonathan's life. May we conclude similarly that no penalty would have ensued had the girl's companions had the courage to challenge Jephthah?[24]

Some commentators have found great significance in how she chose to spend her final days of life, namely, in the company of other women and not with men.[25] And many have also seen the annual lament for Jephthah's daughter on the part of "the daughters of Israel" as a remembrance worth reviving, indeed, as a precedent for their own commemorations of Jephthah's daughter and as a means to rescue her from namelessness and oblivion. Hers is a story that demands retelling. She is "an unmistakable symbol for all the courageous daughters of faithless fathers," writes Trible. "In her death we are all diminished; by our memory she is forever hallowed."[26] Fuchs seconds Trible: "The courageous and noble daughter must be mourned for, remembered and respected by women today, much as ancient Israelite women are reported to have done."[27] For all these reasons, Jephthah's daughter surely is worthy of our attention today. As Tapp observes, "The only other biblical character who is sacrificed by a patriarch for the good of his people is Jesus — . . . an interesting contrast to the burnt offering of Jephthah's nameless virgin daughter."[28]

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[19] Both of these are suggested by Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, pp. 67–68.

[20] The parallels between Jephthah's daughter and various rites of passage associated with Iphigenia and Kore (Persephone) are strikingly drawn by Peggy L. Day, "From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. idem (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), pp. 58–74. See also Bal, in n. 17, Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative* (pp. 66–67); idem, *Fragmented Women* (p. 39); David Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow* (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1986), pp. 42–43; and n. 38, in this chapter.

[21] Fewell, "Judges," p 71; cf. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 127. At issue is whether Jephthah made his vow in public or not. The more typical view (that she was an unwitting victim) is expressed by Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," pp. 38–39.

[22] For example, in asking for a time to grieve, "she attempts to define herself, to lay some claim to her own voice"; Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 68. Trible sees her as displaying no self-pity but as extending to her father the compassion that he denied her: "Hers is not a quiet acquiescence" (*Texts of Terror*, p. 102).

[23] Weems, "A Crying Shame," p. 57. Elizabeth Cady Stanton also wished that the daughter had displayed "a dignified whole-souled rebellion" and placed a dozen sentences on her lips in rebuke of her father: "You may sacrifice your own life as you please, but you have no right over mine." See *The Woman's Bible*, 2:25–26.

[24] Laffey, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 99.

[25] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 104. Weems, "A Crying Shame," p. 67. Such companionship enabled the daughter and her friends to transform "patriarchal restraint into complementarity"; see *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 69, where Exum applies the definition of "woman's culture" that was articulated generically by Gerda Lerner in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 242.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to attempt an evaluation of the feminist treatment of Jephthah's daughter just surveyed in such compressed terms, the questions such studies raise can by no means be brushed aside. Indeed, these same questions constitute the bulk of the baggage we wish to take with us as we survey in this chapter a different body of literature and interview a somewhat different group of writers, namely, the theologians and especially the biblical commentators from the first century through the Reformation.[29] How have they responded to this tragic tale? It is often assumed that the commentary tradition inevitably rode roughshod over Jephthah's daughter, if she was noticed at all. Trible, for example, asserts that "throughout centuries patriarchal hermeneutics has forgotten the daughter of Jephthah but remembered her father, indeed exalted him."[30] Seconding Trible's observation, Bal asserts that "centuries of exegesis have joined efforts to cover up what was no more felt as relevant."[31] And Cheryl Brown writes that "perhaps the tragedy greater than her untimely death is its meaninglessness, attested to by the embarrassed, or simply unconcerned, silence of commentators throughout the centuries."[32] That, of course, is our question. Were commentators embarrassed, unconcerned, or silent? Did they conspire to excuse Jephthah? Did they view the daughter's death as meaningless? It would be anachronistic to impose our questions on the church fathers, and it would be beyond belief to claim for them a feminist agenda, much less a feminist hermeneutic. But it remains, for all that, no anachronism to expect the Fathers, medievals, and Reformers to be moved by the story of Jephthah's daughter. We turn therefore to our precritical commentators, to see just what sort of attention they paid.

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[26] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 108. Trible goes on to recast the lament for Saul and Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1 as a lament for Jephthah's daughter.

[27] Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," p 36.

[28] Tapp, "Ideology of Expendability," p. 172.

[29] There is no survey that provides the sort of detail required for our purpose. Although Renaissance and Reformation commentators sometimes catalogued the views of their predecessors, modern commentaries mostly ignore precritical exegesis. David Marcus has recently analyzed (in *Jephthah and His Vow*) the long-standing debate over whether Jephthah's daughter was sacrificed or not, in the course of which he recaps the rabbinic discussion and much of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century argumentation; earlier Christian commentaries are mostly bypassed. One of the most ambitious accounts is that of Laur. Reinke, "Über das Gelübde Jephthas," *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Alten Testamentes* 1/1 (1851): 421–526; like Marcus, Reinke advocates a "survivalist" reading of the daughter's fate, in the course of which he provides detailed (if not always well-organized) summaries and excerpts from many church fathers and not a few medievals, interacting at length especially with writers from the seventeenth century through his own day. A. Van Hoonacker argues with much of the later nineteenth-century scholarship and Reinke in particular; see "Le Voeu de Jephté," *Le Muséon* 11 (1892): 448–69 and 12 (1893): 59–80 A concise survey of positions held to the time of Peter Abelard is provided by Wolfram von den Steinen in "Die Planctus Abaelards – Jephthas Tochter," *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 4 (1967) 132–36. A. Penna abstracts many patristic sources, albeit too briefly and sometimes unreliably; see "The Vow of Jephthah in the Interpretation of St. Jerome," *Studia Patristica* 4 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961), pp 162–70. Joe H. Kirchberger's exceedingly compact sampling of earlier traditions and literary developments accompanies the artwork in *Great Women of the Bible in Art and Literature*, pp. 128–33. Feminist and early Jewish sources are more loosely assembled by Jonathan Kirsch, *The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible* (New York: Ballentine, 1997), pp. 204–31. Unfortunately, even the best of these surveys tend more to tabulate arguments and positions rather than attend to what may be disclosed about Jephthah's daughter by other details.

[30] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 107. Her indictment is actually directed at canonical and extracanonical treatments (the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha), but few would claim that "patriarchal hermeneutics" was abandoned by postcanonical writers.

Josephus and Pseudo-Philo: Daughter, Martyr, Patriot

The story of Jephthah and his daughter occasioned significant response already by the first century. Two such writings are Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* and the so-called *Biblical Antiquities*, falsely attributed to Philo. These two Jewish sources offer a fitting prelude to our ensuing study of Christian commentators.[33] Although Josephus and his work were well known to Christian writers, the career of Pseudo-Philo is harder to trace, for the work has so much in common with later codifications of midrash that influence and reception are difficult to prove or disprove.

Two features are especially notable in Josephus's concise recounting of the tale. First, Josephus makes it clear that Jephthah's words on seeing his daughter are words not only of lament, but also of blame. Where Jud. 11:35 (NRSV) reads, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me," Josephus narrates instead that Jephthah "chided" his daughter "for her haste in meeting him."[34] The remark is not developed, but it is plain enough that he has a generally low view of Jephthah's behavior here. A second observation bears this out, for Josephus describes the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter as "neither sanctioned by the law nor well-pleasing to God," and he faults Jephthah for considering neither the outcome of the deed nor how it would appear "to them that heard of it."[35] In other words, by condemning Jephthah's sacrifice, Josephus has made explicit what the text of Judges left in silence.

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[31] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 7.

[32] Cheryl Brown, *No Longer Be Silent: First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical Women. Studies in Pseudo-Philo's Biblical Antiquities and Josephus's Jewish Antiquities* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), p. 94.

[33] The *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (hereafter *Bib. Ant.*) was probably composed in Hebrew, but it survives only in the Latin translation of a Greek edition. The text was ascribed to Philo or associated with other genuine works in early editions and manuscripts; photographs of several title pages and incipits appear in Guido Kisch, introduction to *Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1949), pp. 3–106. Some claim to find the work cited by various church fathers, but Louis H. Feldman finds "no undoubted reference" prior to the *Historia Scholastica* of Peter Comestor; see his Prolegomenon to *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, trans. M. R James (New York: Ktav, 1971), p. xii. The critical text may be found in *Pseudo-Philon, Les Antiquités Bibliques*, ed. D. J. Harrington et al. (SC 229–230; Paris Éditions du Cerf, 1976). Note that SC 229 contains an introduction by Harrington along with the critical text and French translation, SC 230 contains a literary introduction by several authors and a commentary by Charles Perrot. There are several English translations; I have primarily used that of D. J. Harrington in *OTP* 2:297–377. Harrington's translation of the Jephthah passages, however, has generated some significant complaints from more recent writers; see n. 53.

[34] Josephus, *Antiquities* 5.7 10 §264 (LCL 5:120–21)

What is easily overlooked by modern readers, however, is the agenda at work in Josephus's omissions and revisions of the story. The presentation of Jephthah and his daughter by Josephus (as well as by Pseudo-Philo) has recently been the subject of a study by Cheryl Brown.[36] It is well known, of course, that part of Josephus's reason for writing the *Jewish Antiquities* was to present his people in a favorable light to a Greco-Roman audience. This accounts for some of the omissions. But Josephus also describes Jephthah's actions so as to call to mind similar stories from ancient mythology and literature. In describing the moment when Jephthah sees his daughter approaching, Brown observes, Josephus thus "replaces the biblical 'he tore his clothes,' which would have had little meaning for his audience, by a phrase from Thucydides: 'stunned at the magnitude of the calamity before him. . . .' "[37] Similarly, Josephus's earlier description of the approaching tragedy called to mind the circumstances of Idomeneus, who also made a rash vow, even as his statement that Jephthah "had dedicated her to God" probably alludes to the story of Iphigenia, who was dedicated to Artemis by her father.[38] Moreover, Josephus emphasizes the role of the daughter's death as the price of freeing her people — another echo of Iphigenia's role that would nicely underscore how the Jewish people shared with their Graco-Roman contemporaries an appreciation for a dutiful, patriotic, and selflessly noble daughter.[39] Finally, Brown observes, when Josephus censures Jephthah's immolation of his daughter as "neither sanctioned by the law nor well-pleasing to God," surely he is responding to the accusation that Jews practiced human sacrifice. Accordingly, he does his best to deny that any approval of Jephthah issues either from Israel's laws or Israel's God.[40]

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[35] Josephus, *Antiquities* 5.7.10 §266 (LCL 5:120–21).

[36] See Cheryl Brown, *No Longer Be Silent*, pp. 93–139.

[37] Brown, *No Longer Be Silent*, p. 120. The quotation is from Thucydides 3.113.3.

[38] Brown, *No Longer Be Silent*, pp. 119–20. Shipwrecked, Idomeneus vowed to Neptune whatever should first greet him on safe return; he was met by his son, though (Brown notes) other versions have him meet his daughter. Agamemnon, not foreseeing the birth of his daughter Iphigenia, vowed to Artemis the most beautiful thing the year should bring forth in exchange for victory over Troy. These and other parallels to the story of Jephthah's daughter are often discussed by scholars, along with whether (or how) these other stories influenced the telling or retelling of Judges 11. See, e.g., Sypherd, *Jephthah and His Daughter*; Margaret Alexiou and Peter Dronke, "The Lament of Jephtha's Daughter: Themes, Traditions, Originality," *Studi Medievali*, third series, 12/2 (1971): 825–51; and Debora Kuller Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible· Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), esp. ch. 4, "Iphigenia in Israel," pp. 128–66. Louis Cappel, writing in the seventeenth century, accused the Greeks of modeling the story of Iphigenia after Jephthah's daughter, and he implies that Iphigenia's name derives from *Jephtigenia*, "that is, daughter of Jephthah"; see §27 of Cappel's *De Voto Jephthæ* (reprinted in *Critici sacri* at 2:2086; see n. 291, in this chapter). Sypherd elaborated on the story's mythological correlates in a separate essay, "Jephthah and His Daughter: An Introduction to a Study of Historical, Legendary, Mythological, and Cult Relations," *Delaware Notes* (12th series; [Newark]: University of Delaware, 1939), pp. 1–18.

[39] Brown, *No Longer Be Silent*, pp. 120–22; cf. Amaru, "Portraits of Biblical Women in Josephus' Antiquities," p. 169.

[40] Brown, *No Longer Be Silent*, p. 124.

If Josephus's account of Jephthah is a politic condensation of Judges 11, Pseudo-Philo's is a significant expansion and rewriting of the biblical text, though his intention is not always evident. However, there can be no mistake but that this first-century author was disgusted with the rashness (or, better, the vagueness) of Jephthah's vow, for he reports that God grew angry with Jephthah:

> Behold, Jephthah has vowed that he will offer to me whatever meets him first on the way; and now if a dog should meet Jephthah first, will the dog be offered to me? And now let the vow of Jephthah be accomplished against his own firstborn, that is, against the fruit of his own body, and his request against his only-begotten. But I will surely free my people in this time, not because of him but because of the prayer that Israel prayed.[41]

Here there is no doubt that Jephthah's vow was illegitimate, if not blasphemous. In contrast to Judges 11, Pseudo-Philo portrays God as far from silent. Cynthia Baker has pointed out that God is concerned more with the divine dignity than the daughter's life, but the scandal is far worse according to Brown: Jephthah's vow is superseded by God's own vow, which is all the harsher for its specificity.[42] Thus, Pseudo-Philo has reproached Jephthah and, in contrast to Judges 11, God has gotten involved—but by no means to rescue Jephthah's daughter.

Pseudo-Philo's other changes in the narrative are equally puzzling. For example, when Jephthah sees his daughter coming to greet him, his grief is far from dramatic: he does not tear his clothing but merely grows faint,[43] and instead of crying "Woe!" or "Alas!" he makes a thoroughly enigmatic statement to his daughter (whom Pseudo-Philo names Seila): "Rightly was your name called Seila, that you might be offered in sacrifice. And now who will put my heart in the balance and my soul on the scale? And I will stand by and see which will win out, whether it is the rejoicing that has occurred or the sadness that befalls me."[44] Baker takes Jephthah's first sentence as part of Pseudo-Philo's attempt to "dull" the questions of culpability and victimization—and, ultimately, the sense of tragedy—that emerge from Judges 11. Both Jephthah and his daughter are the subjects of a "divinely ordained fate."[45] Accordingly, it was Seila's destiny to be sacrificed, and Jephthah's appropriate response is to wait and see. Part of Pseudo-Philo's strategy, Baker argues, is to "eliminate intimacy" between the characters, but a side effect thereof is the enhancement of Seila's autonomy.[46] "I am not sad because I am to die," she says, "nor does it pain me to give back my soul, but because my father was caught up in the snare of his vow; and if I did not offer myself willingly for sacrifice, I fear that my death would not be acceptable or I would lose my life in vain."[47] Seila's concern that her sacrifice be voluntary is surely to be interpreted in the light of Isaac's near-sacrifice in Genesis 22, an episode that Pseudo-Philo has already glossed twice, in 18.5 and 32.2–4, and that Seila herself called to her father's attention at the outset of this speech: "Remember . . . when the father placed the son as a holocaust, . . . and the one being offered was ready and the one who was offering was rejoicing."[48] Seila also mirrors Isaac's sense of destiny, for of Isaac, too, is it said that he was born to be sacrificed (32.3).[49] But how far is the parallel with Isaac to be drawn? The question is of moment precisely because of what Pseudo-Philo has already said about Isaac, namely, that by his voluntary sacrifice he will inherit "life without limit and time without measure." Moreover, his "blessedness will be above that of all men [*homines*]," and future generations will thereby be instructed "that the Lord has made the soul of a man [*hominis*] worthy to be a sacrifice." And, finally, Isaac's blood seems to have atoning value, even though it was not actually shed.[50] Pseudo-Philo seems to place some or all of these considerations in the mind of Seila.

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[41] Pseudo-Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 39.11 (SC 229:278, *OTP* 2.353). The first sentence here is closely paralleled in midrashim on Gen. 24:8 and Lev. 27:2, which may well draw independently on a common rabbinic tradition; see *Gen. Rab.* 60:3, *Lev. Rab.* 37:4 (Soncino 2.527, 4:470).

[42] See Cynthia Baker, "Pseudo-Philo and the Transformation of Jephthah's Daughter," in *Anti-Covenant,* p. 197; and Brown, *No Longer Be Silent,* p. 97.

[43] See *Bib. Ant.* 40.1 (SC 229:278.6), which reads "Et videns eam, Ieptan resolutus est." Brown's view that Jephthah "fell apart" or "melted" seems a forced reading of *resolvere,* especially in view of his ensuing speech

[44] Pseudo-Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 40.1 (SC 229:278–79, OTP 2:353). Harrington notes that "Seila" means "the one 'asked for' or 'requested'" (a view that has prevailed for the last century); see *OTP* 2:353, note a. The imposition of this name by Pseudo-Philo inevitably recalls the modern feminist concern; see n. 7. Sypherd lists forty-five different names that have been given to Jephthah's daughter from the Middle Ages to his own times; see *Jephthah and His Daughter,* p 10 n. 1.

[45] Baker, "Pseudo-Philo and the Transformation of Jephthah's Daughter," pp. 198–99.

In any case, the overall treatment of Jephthah's daughter here not only develops her character but develops her as a woman of character, making explicit much that is barely detectable, if at all, in Judges 11. Seila's independence emerges also in the next part of the episode, where she leaves her father to mourn with her companions in the mountains. First, however, she went and "told it to the wise men of the people, and no one could respond to her word" (40.4). Another puzzle! What did she say, and why couldn't the sages respond? Harrington notes a rabbinic tradition to the effect that the prohibition against human sacrifice had been forgotten.[51] In fact, a midrash on Exodus 12:1 asserts that "mountains" here means "elders," suggesting that Jephthah's daughter went to the elders to prove that she was a virgin and therefore deserved to have the vow annulled.[52] Truly, there may be a hint that Seila was seeking to annul the vow, for why else would the Lord proceed to take credit for silencing the wise men "so that they cannot respond to the daughter of Jephthah," unless it be "in order that my word be fulfilled and my plan that I thought out not be foiled. And I have seen that the virgin is wise in contrast to her father and perceptive in contrast to all the wise men who are here. And now let her life be given at his [her?] request, and her death will be precious before me always, and she will go away and fall into the bosom of her mothers."[53] Nonetheless, it is also Seila who earlier insisted that her father not annul his vow.[54] There is a strange conspiracy at work between God and Jephthah's daughter. Providence has designed her death as a punishment for her father and it cannot be thwarted. But there is also a sense in which her "wisdom" and the voluntary nature of her death have endeared her to God.[55] To the extent that the implicit parallels with Isaac are added to those which are explicit, one might read Seila's death also as an entry into eternal life and blessedness, and even as an atonement of sorts.

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[46] Baker, "Pseudo-Philo and the Transformation of Jephthah's Daughter," p. 199.

[47] Pseudo-Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 40.3 (SC 229:280, *OTP* 2:353).

[48] Pseudo-Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 40.2 (SC 229:280, *OTP* 2:353).

[49] The point is adduced also by Charles Perrot in his commentary on this verse (SC 230:190): "La fille de Jephté est ici présentée comme un nouvel Isaac, dans l'offrande joyeuse et spontanée de sa personne." Brown identifies three distinctive terms applied to Isaac that are also employed of Seila; see *No Longer Be Silent*, pp. 98–99.

[50] See Pseudo-Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 32.3 (SC 229:244f, *OTP* 2:345). On the question of atonement, see 18.5 (SC 229:150, *OTP* 2:325), where it is said of Isaac that "because he did not refuse, his offering was acceptable before me, and on account of his blood I chose them "

[51] Harrington, *OTP* 2:353, notes f and g.

[52] See *Exod. Rab* 15:4 (Soncino 3:163). Although *Exodus Rabbah* was probably not codified (i.e., written down) until the tenth or eleventh century (cf. Evans, *Non-Canonical Writings*, p. 133), it may well draw on the same traditions taken up by Pseudo-Philo (see n. 41). The midrash on the Song of Songs (2.8.2) dates from the early seventh century and contains the same assertion, albeit more concisely. The midrash on Lev. 27:2 (§37:4, Soncino 4:470–71) makes four further observations: first, that Jephthah could have consulted Phinehas the high priest (mentioned in Jud. 20:28), but the culpable pride of both men prevented any such meeting; second, that Jephthah died wretchedly and was buried dismembered, thus explaining why Jud. 12:7 says he was buried in the cities (pl.) of Gilead; third, that he should have bought a

Still, why does Pseudo-Philo wish not only to canonize Jephthah's daughter but also to correlate her death with such a degree of divine determinism? Brown's analysis is exceedingly helpful here. Dating the work after the fall of Jerusalem in the first century, she suggests that Pseudo-Philo wishes to invest Jephthah's daughter as a type for the city of Jerusalem. That city fell once before, of course, to Babylon. Both times the catastrophe generated a profuse amount of commentary from the Old Testament prophets and from intertestamental literature. Brown demonstrates how many of the motifs applied by Pseudo-Philo to Jephthah's daughter are elsewhere applied to "the virgin daughter of Zion" (Lam. 2:1)—that is, to Jerusalem. Chief among these themes are, first, the notion that God is ultimately responsible for the city's death; second, the idea that Jerusalem's destruction is somehow of atoning value (that is, the city was destroyed so that the people might live); and, third, that the nation's leadership or elders are also blameworthy in the overall disaster.[56] In other words, in the wake of Jerusalem's destruction at the hands of Rome, Pseudo-Philo uses Jephthah's daughter to interpret the city's fall in a way that held out both hope and rebuke to the survivors.[57]

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substitute offering; and, fourth, he was in any case not bound to offer an unfit victim such as his daughter. Apparently, these other observations are not noticed by Christian commentators until much later; see pp. 121–22 and 170. Leviticus 27 occasions comment on Jephthah's daughter because verses 1–8 stipulate the monetary equivalents required to redeem human beings dedicated to divine service; verse 5 thus allows a young girl to be released from such a vow for a payment of ten shekels.

[53] Pseudo-Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 40.4 (SC 229:280–81, *OTP* 2:353–54). The brackets indicate a point at which Baker challenges Harrington's unnatural translation of *eius* (which appears three times in the sentence: see SC 229:282.40–42) as "his" in this instance rather than "her," thereby undermining the clearly voluntary nature of Seila's death See Baker, "Pseudo-Philo and the Transformation of Jephthah's Daughter," p. 203.

[54] See Brown, *No Longer Be Silent*, pp. 105–7.

[55] Indeed, as Brown observes (*No Longer Be Silent*, p. 109), Pseudo-Philo applies Psalm 116:15 to Seila: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones [Heb.: *hasidim*]," imputing to her the status of one of God's "holy ones."

[56] For full details and other parallels between Seila and Jerusalem, see Brown, *No Longer Be Silent*, pp. 109–15.

[57] Brown, *No Longer Be Silent*, pp. 126–27.

Pseudo-Philo concludes the chapter with Seila's long and lyrical lament (40.5–7). The chiastically arranged elements of the lament bewail the various tokens of marriage that she will never enjoy by dying so prematurely: the marriage-chamber, garlands, the white robe, sweet-smelling oils, and so on.[58] The text's difficulties have been read in various ways. Brown finds further corroboration of the resemblance between doomed Seila and fallen Jerusalem.[59] Baker, restricting her inquiry to literary analysis, addresses another issue. The first half of the lament mentions Seila's father in the abstract; the second half is addressed plaintively to her mother — a character quite absent from the text of Judges. In the first half, Seila asserts (or prays) that her life was not in vain; in the second half, she tells her mother that her birth was in vain.[60] Baker suggests that the two halves correspond to the differing realms, values, and perspectives of men (fathers) and women (mothers). From the father's perspective, Seila displays the willing obedience a father expects, whether he gives her for marriage or for sacrifice, so her death is not in vain. By contrast, none of the mother's expectations for her daughter will be fulfilled. Thus, "the 'mother' section of the lament provides a response to the distant (and deadly) 'realm of the fathers.'"[61]

Though their analyses are driven by different methods, both Brown and Baker would agree that the overall lament underscores the daughter's tragedy, not her father's. Indeed, that the *Biblical Antiquities* replaces the silence of Jud. 11:38 with such a lengthy monologue surely represents a significant shift in sympathies, narrative and otherwise. Clearly, Seila's father, together with his vow and his grief, have been thoroughly upstaged by his daughter's death, as noble as it is tragic. What remains to be seen, of course, is whether any of Pseudo-Philo's insights or sympathies recur in his successors.

Early Greek Interpretations: A Host of Cameos

Jephthah and his daughter are mentioned by many patristic writers, though their appearances are often incidental to the topic at hand. Nonetheless, there are some surprising assertions made about Jephthah, as well as some provocative applications and lessons drawn from the tale. That Jephthah's vow was troubling to church fathers in the West is evident from the studied and often convoluted considerations of Ambrose, Jerome, and Ambrosiaster, as well as from the domineering analysis that later came from the pen of Augustine. However, before examining these well-known Latin writers on our way to Augustine, it is worth a look at the diverse if brief appearances that Jephthah and his daughter made in a number of Christian writers in the eastern half of the empire. Some were predecessors while others were near contemporaries of the

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[58] Alexiou and Dronke marshall extensive evidence not only from a variety of ancient literature but also from funerary inscriptions to illustrate how the themes of Seila's lament had become virtual commonplaces in cases of premature death by the time of Pseudo-Philo; see "Lament of Jephtha's Daughter," pp. 825–51.

[59] Of particular note is a text in *4 Ezra* comparing the destruction of Jerusalem to a marriage that was unconsummated due to the bridegroom's untimely death. See Brown, *No Longer Be Silent*, pp. 104–5

[60] The lines read, respectively, "Ecce quomodo accusor, sed non in vano recipiatur anima mea," and "O Mater, in vano peperisti unigenitam tuam." See *Bib. Ant.* 40.5, 6 (SC 229:282.47–48, 284.57).

[61] Baker, "Pseudo-Philo and the Transformation of Jephthah's Daughter," p. 202.

Latins just named. These Greek sources include the *Apostolic Constitutions*, Origen, Methodius, Ephraem the Syrian, Gregory of Nazianzus, Isidore of Pelusium, Epiphanius of Salamis, and John Chrysostom.

Despite the brevity of the references to Jephthah's daughter in these writers, together they successfully introduce us to most of the ingredients that will be refined and permuted in later exegesis, both literal and figurative. Of course, one soon discovers that literal exegesis of Judges 11 is almost wholly preoccupied with casuistry, that is, with ethical deliberations over the morality of Jephthah's deed. Figurative exegesis, on the other hand, varies so much in its scope and objective that we must take a moment to clarify our terminology.

Jephthah's daughter could inspire several different "lessons," sometimes all in the same interpreter. Some saw in her sacrifice a moral about how we, too, should obey God even against our own desires. This moral or "tropological" reading could be made more figurative still, however, when the interpreter reinforced the moral by depicting Jephthah's daughter as emblematic of the flesh, so that Jephthah thus models Christian obedience and self-control by sacrificing his fleshly desires. The moral or tropology thus takes half a step toward allegory. But "allegory" is itself a notoriously malleable term, and we will try to reserve it for instances where Jephthah's daughter is read more specifically as prefiguring the (bloodless) sacrifice of perpetual chastity that is offered by Christian ascetics and virgins. Barely a step beyond this "allegorical-ascetic" reading is another sort, in which either Jephthah or Jephthah's daughter may be depicted as a type of Christ: the former offering up his flesh or humanity (again, in the person of his daughter), or the latter offering up herself, as did Christ on the cross. We will reserve the term "typological" for this line of exegesis, not because any of our terms or distinctions were so closely observed in our authors, if at all, but solely to signal when a commentator has seen something Christological in the narrative. As we will see, these figurative layers are often interwoven within a single sentence or paragraph.

Patristic Cameos I: Excoriating a Hero's Misdeed

The *Apostolic Constitutions* is a collection of ecclesiastical laws, probably of Syrian provenance; although it dates from the fourth century, it builds on documents dating from the second century.[62] In it, Jephthah and his daughter are barely mentioned, but this terseness serves to highlight what may well have been a formulaic response to such a tangle of ethics and exegesis. The last third of book 7 deals with liturgical matters; the thirty-seventh chapter is a collect that entreats God to hear the prayers of the people and recalls how God accepted the "sacrifices" of a long list of biblical saints and heroes, including "the prayers . . . of Jephtha in the war before his rash vow." Jephthah is immediately preceded here by Gideon and Samson, both of whom were likewise heard despite their sin.[63] The same pattern is followed for all

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[62] See Pierre Nautin, "Apostolic Constitutions," *EEC* 1:62; cf. *ODCC*^{3} 90.

[63] *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.37 (PG 1:1036, ANF 7:474–75). Specifically, God is said to have heard the prayers "of Gideon at the rock, and the fleeces, before his sin; of Samson in his thirst before the transgression; of Jephtha . . . before his rash vow" (πρὸ τῆς ἀκρίτου ἐπαγγελίας)

three judges, whereby God's special anointing is divorced from their subsequent sins. The underlying exegesis is not figurative but a simple and literal effort to reconcile these "heroes" of Hebrews 11 with the heinous behavior recorded in Judges. Indeed, despite stating that God accepted Jephthah's sacrifice, the *Apostolic Constitutions* implies that it was Jephthah's sacrifice of prayer, not his daughter, that God welcomed. Given the liturgical and therefore public context, one may infer that a significant segment of the church had found a way to qualify the heroic status of Jephthah and, at the same time, to condemn his vow and its fulfillment.

Patristic Cameos II: Origen on Jephthah's Daughter as Martyr and Mystery

Although nine of Origen's homilies on Judges survive, these treat only the first seven chapters of the book. However, Jephthah does surface briefly (if enigmatically) in another work, in his comments on the Fourth Gospel. At John 1:29, where the Baptist proclaims that Jesus is "the lamb of God," Origen labors to explain for his readers the significance of the symbol and of sacrifices in general. In the course of his exposition, he eventually draws a comparison between the deaths of martyrs and the sacrifices that underlie the image of Jesus as the lamb of God. In other words, Origen argues, martyrdom is like a sacrifice offered to God in that it delivers some sort of benefit, indeed, it contributes somehow to the defeat of evil, though—significantly—he confesses himself unable to be more specific. It is in this context that Jephthah should be considered, for (says Origen) it was by this vow and his daughter's willing death that he triumphed over the Ammonites.

Origen's discussion here is a masterpiece of subtlety, but the subtlety might easily be missed. Indeed, his excursus here gets off to a shaky start, for he admits that by requiring such sacrifices God appears to be extremely cruel (πολλῆς ὠμότητος). Origen's response to this objection is to remind his readers that some divine secrets (ἀποῤῥητοτέρων) remain beyond human understanding,[64] and while one might protest that his recourse to mystery is too quick or too facile, his theodicy may actually be the stronger for what he has refused to say—namely, he refuses to claim that martyrdom brings in its wake any *visible* triumph or *visible* defeat of evil. To be sure, Origen is also silent about whether Jephthah's vow was licit or not, but there is reason to believe he regarded the vow as illicit even if God somehow honored its fulfilment.[65] And Origen is not silent in arguing that the martyr's crown is visible only to faith: presumably, the true significance of these cruel deaths remains, for now, one of those secrets known only to God.

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[64] Origen, *Comm. John* 6.36 (PG 14.293, Brooke 1.173.21–26; ANF 10:377–78).

[65] This is a point at which one would dearly love to hear Origen's full homily on Judges 11, of which only half a dozen lines remain. In that fragment, Origen insists that Jephthah's anointing does not implicate the Spirit as the source of his thoughtless vow; see PG 12:949–50. Origen's views are therefore not at odds with either Josephus or Pseudo-Philo, both of whom styled Jephthah's daughter as a martyr without approving her father's vow. Probably little or no influence was exerted on Origen by Clement of Alexandria, who mentions Jephthah twice, but only as part of a chronology and in a near-quotation of Heb. 11:32; see *Stromateis* 1 21, 2.4.

Coming from the author of the famous *Exhortation to Martyrdom,* one whose own father was martyred and who, at a later date, would not shrink from the same path, Origen's understatement here is no small marvel. He may be an advocate of martyrdom, but his is no theology of glory. Nothing here rivals Ignatius's fond dreams of being eaten by lions.[66] And so it is in the midst of this sober excursus that Jephthah's daughter makes her unexpected appearance. Of her, Origen's judgment is plain: she was a martyr, literally so, as were many others in canonical history, and through her death one can only believe — not see — that evil was restrained and many were blessed.

Patristic Cameos III: Asceticism as Analogue to Sacrifice

Origen's excursus on Jephthah's daughter seems remarkable for its exegetical restraint in yet one more way, for the daughter appears mostly as a literal martyr — a surprising turn, perhaps, for an exegete so well known as an allegorist. To be sure, Christian martyrs bore also a symbolic correspondence to the death of Christ, but the symbolism was grounded first in their own reality, in that both Christ and the martyrs engaged in a real struggle against evil. Nonetheless, since it is likely that Origen preached through all of Judges, it is equally likely that Origen also offered a more directly figurative reading that may lie behind the exegesis of so many of his successors. In any case, with the advent of Christian monasticism in the early fourth century came a burst of ascetic exegesis that supported consecrated virginity by innovative appeals to all possible scriptural role models — including Jephthah's daughter.

Examples abound, especially among Greek writers. One of the earliest comes from Methodius of Olympus (d. 311), whose best-known work, the *Symposium,* was written in imitation (and correction) of Plato's dialogue of the same name. The work consists of discourses by ten virgins extolling virginity as the ideal form of Christian discipleship; in the eleventh and concluding discourse, the virgin Thecla sings a hymn to Christ the bridegroom and to the church as bride. Several of the verses recount virginal men and women whose lives anticipated what Christian virgins now live for and long for: a (mystical) union with Christ. These exemplars include Abel, Joseph, Jephthah's daughter, Judith, Susanna, John the Baptist, and the Virgin Mary. Only Abel and Jephthah's daughter, however, are said also to prefigure Christ: "The newly-killed one, his girl, Jephtha led as sacrifice to God, her who knew no man, like a lamb led to the altar. And she, nobly fulfilling the image of your flesh [σου τὸν τύπον τῆς σαρκὸς], blessed one, called out bravely: 'I keep myself untouched for you, tending my gleaming lamps — bridegroom, I come to you!'"[67] Here, there is no word of condemnation for Jephthah's deed, only praise for his daughter's determination.

Praise for Christian virginity likewise drives the interpretation of Jephthah's daughter in a hymn written by Ephraem of Syria, probably in the 360s. As Kathleen

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[66] Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Romans* 4.1–5:2 (LCC 1:104–5). "Let me be fodder for wild beasts — that is how I can get to God. I am God's wheat and I am being ground by the teeth of wild beasts to make a pure loaf for Christ. . . . What a thrill I shall have . . ! I hope they will make short work of me. I shall coax them on to eat me up at once."

[67] Translation from Alexiou and Dronke, "Lament of Jephtha's Daughter," p. 852; see Methodius, *Symposium* 11.2.13 (PG 18:212, cf. ANF 6 352).

McVey observes, to portray the daughter as intending to preserve her virginity misses the point of Judges.[68] Nonetheless, that is how Ephraem recasts the story, but he also adds—much as did Methodius—a Christological interpretation of the daughter's sacrifice.[69]

Gregory of Nazianzus offers further evidence that even as Jephthah's daughter was becoming somewhat of a stock image for Christian virginity, so also was the father's vow and fulfillment read as exemplary of the self-renunciation and commitment required generally of Christian ascetics. In an epitaph composed in honor of Nonna, his pious mother, Gregory recalls how both Abraham and Jephthah offered their children to God, sacrifices that he describes as "equally great" (ἀμφότεροι μεγάλην), then links them to his mother's offering: "a chaste and holy life, a soul of prayer, a beloved victim." Although these three phrases could also describe his mother, in context they almost certainly allude to how Gregory was himself dedicated to God by his mother even before he was born. He thus identifies his own life and, in particular, the piety he and his mother shared, with both Isaac and Jephthah's daughter.[70] On the other hand, elsewhere it would seem that he was not necessarily impressed with Jephthah himself. In an oration in praise of the Maccabean martyrs, he recounts how bravely the aged Eleazar faced torture, then turns to discount, in a passing comparison, Jephthah's vow as actually rather self-serving, impelled more by despair and soldierly passion than piety.[71]

More admiration for Jephthah's daughter as a pattern for female asceticism can be found from around the end of the fourth century in Isidore of Pelusium. Writing to Sandalaria (evidently a woman ascetic), he sets forth also Susanna, Judith, and Thecla as proof that a woman's nature is no bar to overcoming temptation. And in the case of Jephthah's daughter, not only did she choose death "manfully," she also left this life nobly—literally, "in legendary fashion"—with her virginity (intact).[72] As we will see in a moment, the popular image of Jephthah's daughter as a model for

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[68] Ephraem the Syrian, *Hymn 2.10–11 on Virginity* (McVey, pp. 268–69). Alexiou and Dronke call attention to another of Ephraem's hymns in which Jephthah's steadfastness and his daughter's encouragement is portrayed ("Lament of Jephtha's Daughter," p. 852 n. 47).

[69] Ephraem's typological reading of Jephthah's daughter is evidently developed at greater length in his commentary. As Reinke summarizes, not only did Jephthah act in conscious imitation of Abraham, hoping God would provide a ram in place of his daughter, her death was also styled [providentially, one must assume] as a type of the death of Christ. Jephthah's tearing of his garments (11:35) thus prefigured the "uncovering" of the synagogue; the two months' lament anticipated the eventual mourning of the unbelieving Jews, as well as the hesitation of the high priests to execute Jesus, *and* that the Law and the Prophets (=the *two* months) had to precede the death of Christ. See Reinke, "Ueber das Gelübde Jephte's," pp. 444–45; Reinke lists no edition, but Penna ("Vow of Jephthah," p. 167 n. 2) cites the same work as *In librum Judicum XI*, in *Opera omnia syriace* (Rome, 1737), 1:321f. One may note that Jephthah (as an antitype of Jesus' executioners) is implicitly rebuked here, while his daughter is valorized.

[70] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epitaphium* 94 (PG 38·58), reading in part: Μῆτερ ἐμὴ, σὺ δ'ἔδωκας ἁγνὸν βίον, ὑστάτιον δὲ | Ψυχὴν εὐχωλῆς, Νόννα, φίλον σφάγιον. On his mother's prenatal consecration of her son, see Quasten 3:236.

[71] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 15.11 (PG 35:929–32). The story of Eleazar's martyrdom is told in 2 Macc. 6·18–31 and 4 Macc. 5:1–7:23.

[72] Since Isidore is writing to ecclesiastical virgins in order to encourage them in their asceticism, my addition of "intact" here is meant only to underscore what I think his words imply. It is not difficult to see the parallel with Ephraem's emphasis on the preservation of virginity. See Isidore of Pelusium, *Epistle* 1.87 (PG 78:244): ἡ δὲ καὶ θάνατον ἀνδρείως ἑλομένη, καὶ τῇ παρθενίᾳ συναπελθοῦσα ἀοιδίμως.

Christian virgins was welcomed in the Latin West by Ambrose, who, ironically, worked also to becloud the daughter's image behind the fog of his own ethical worries.

Patristic Cameos IV: Jephthah's Daughter as Goddess

Perhaps the most curious of these short references to Jephthah's daughter are the notations made in passing by Epiphanius of Salamis in his encyclopedia of heresies, the *Panarion*, probably completed by 377. Twice he mentions local cults devoted to Jephthah's daughter:

> In Sebasteia, which was once called Samaria, they have declared Jephthah's daughter a goddess, and still hold a festival in her honor every year.[73]
>
> In Shechem, that is, the present-day Neapolis, the inhabitants offer sacrifices in the name of Core, because of Jephthah's daughter, if you please, who was once offered to God as a sacrifice. And for those who have been taken in by it, this has become the misfortune of idolatry and the worship of vain things.[74]

The first reference comes in Epiphanius's tractate against the worship of Melchizedek as a power greater than Christ; his intention is to illustrate how worship has often been directed to mortals on spurious grounds. The second reference occurs in the tractate against the Antidicomarians, who denied the perpetual virginity of Mary, though it is actually directed against an excessively high view of Mary as taking the place of God (23.3). Although the *Panarion*'s use of sources has been described as "rather confused and uncritical,"[75] Epiphanius's account remains of interest for several reasons. Whether or not there was such a cult (or cults) in the fourth century that in some way espoused a connection with Jephthah's daughter, Epiphanius evidently found grounds for thinking there was. Moreover, the *Panarion* adds further testimony to the connection many saw between Jephthah's daughter and her mythological parallels. It is especially curious, however, that Epiphanius's reportage here is apparently ignored by later Christian writers — a silence made only more intriguing in light of some recent speculations over whether the annual commemoration reported in Judges 11 might, in fact, indicate some sort of cultic activity focusing on Jephthah's daughter.[76] Although Epiphanius's remarks do not allow a reconstruction of his own attitude toward Jephthah's daughter, they demonstrate not only that her story had not been forgotten but also that it had retained the power to fascinate and inspire.

Patristic Cameos V: Chrysostom — A Providential, Cautionary Tale

If most of the Greek Christian writers we have examined were heirs of Origen, standing firmly in the tradition of Alexandrian allegorical exegesis, it is fitting to end this section with a lone representative of the Antiochene school of exegesis, with its concern for a more literal account of Scripture's historical narrative. During Lent 387, John Chrysostom preached a series of twenty-one homilies, delivered while the city of Antioch waited fearfully to hear how the emperor Theodosius would punish its citizens for a riot in which his statues were desecrated. Chrysostom emerged from the crisis with his reputation secured as both rhetor and pastor, having combined throughout these sermons a sharp moral reprimand with the assurance of divine providence.[77] Against this backdrop, addressing the problems created by rash oaths, Chrysostom's fourteenth homily discussed several biblical stories, including Herod's promise to the daughter of Herodias, Saul's oath that ensnared Jonathan, and Jephthah's vow. For Chrysostom, there is at work in such rash utterances "a malignant demon," but it is equally true that "God did not forbid" the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter. Moreover, he is acutely aware of how the tale provokes scandal: "I know, indeed, that many unbelievers impugn us of cruelty and inhumanity on account of this sacrifice."[78] Chrysostom's concession here must not be slighted: for whatever else it may represent, his ensuing explanation is surely also an attempt to soften the dissonance among his own hearers over the apparent cruelty of Jephthah and, perhaps, God. As Chrysostom sees it, God allowed this sacrifice to go forward as a cautionary tale, lest anyone in the future vow to take a life in the expectation that God would intervene as occurred in the case of Isaac. Viewed in this light, the daughter's sacrifice illustrates God's "care and benevolence" (κηδεμονίας καὶ φιλανθρωπίας) for the human race. Startling as that may seem, Chrysostom confirms his case with an argument from silence, "for after this sacrifice, no one vowed such a vow unto God."[79]

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[73] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 55.1.10 (PG 41:973); translation from Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1985, 1994), 2:78.

[74] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 78.23.6 (PG 42:736); translation from Williams, 2:619. The passage may thereby testify to the affinity of Jephthah's daughter with Artemis, as is briefly argued by Sypherd, "Jephthah and His Daughter," p. 14.

[75] So Quasten 3:388.

[76] Kirsch, *Harlot by the Side of the Road*, pp 215–17, 228–31, and sources cited there.

Of more enduring significance, perhaps, is Chrysostom's appreciation for the annual mourning mentioned at the story's end. The purpose of this commemoration is described in terms both poignant and concise: the calamity is to be remembered "lest her misfortune be consigned to oblivion."[80] Two lessons were to be conveyed by such lamentation, Chrysostom observes: first, to make everyone wiser for the future, lest anyone imitate Jephthah; and, second, to teach that such sacrifices are contrary to God's intention. Although in another context Chrysostom will allow that Jephthah did display an exemplary faith, neither there nor here does he commend the vow or its execution.[81]

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[77] See J. N. D. Kelly, *Golden Mouth: The Story of John Chrysostom—Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), pp. 72–82.

[78] Chrysostom, *Homiliae de statuis ad populum Antiochenum* 14.3 (PG 49:147, NPNF 9:434).

[79] Chrysostom, *Hom. de statuis* 14.3 (PG 49:147, NPNF 9:434).

[80] Chrysostom, *Hom. de statuis* 14.3 (PG 49:147, cf. NPNF 9:434): μὴ λήθῃ παραδοθῆναι τὸ πάθος.

[81] Chrysostom, *Homily 27.2 on Hebrews* 11:32 (PG 63:186, NPNF 14:488). There is also attributed to Chrysostom a homily *De Jephte*, which I have not seen. It is mentioned dismissively by Peter Martyr Vermigli in 1561 and quoted approvingly by Cornelius à Lapide before 1637, but the earliest and longest excerpt appears in the twelfth century, in Rupert of Deutz (discussed on p. 141) In this homily, Jephthah prefigures Christ while his daughter typifies the virginal church, offered up as a martyr during time of persecution—an allegory far more redolent of Origen or Augustine than Chrysostom. For Vermigli, see p. 162; for Lapide, see his *Commentaria in Scripturam Sacram* (Paris: Ludwig Vives, 1877), 3:186b. No such homily appears anywhere among the works of Chrysostom in PG 47–64, nor in the early Chevallon edition of 1536. Strangely, neither did Jose Antonio de Aldama list the homily in his *Repertorium Pseudochrysostomicum* (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1965).

Augustine's Latin Predecessors: Ambrose, Jerome, Ambrosiaster

By the time Augustine wrote his treatise on Jephthah in the second decade of the fifth century, he could have availed himself of many exegetical precedents. While Augustine's fluency in Greek was both limited and late, it is not impossible that some of the exegetical traditions just surveyed could have been filtered through Latin translations, whether oral or written, as was the case with Rufinus's translations of Origen, only some of which survive. But there were Latin precedents for Augustine, too, dating at least to the early years of the fourth century, such as the *Carmina adversus Marcionitas*. Sometimes ascribed to Tertullian but probably written in Gaul before 325, this lyrical work illustrates how an ostensibly figurative interpretation of Jephthah could be effectively derailed by moral considerations.[82] Nonetheless, there can be little doubt but that the *Carmina* was far less important to the Latin exegesis of Augustine's day than were Ambrose, Jerome, and perhaps Ambrosiaster.

Ambrose of Milan: A Shifting Tale of Praise and Blame

The longer treatments of Jephthah in the fourth and fifth centuries are governed by no particular formula. Instead, a variety of analyses emerges, as may be illustrated beginning with Ambrose. Jephthah is mentioned primarily in four works of diverse genres: two deal with virginity; one, with the conduct of the clergy; another, with the sins of King David and his repentance. The last-named work seems the most natural parallel to Jephthah's story. To be sure, Jephthah intrudes into the treatise rather unexpectedly, alongside Samson, as part of an outburst marking David's adultery as typical of Old Testament saints, not exceptional. "Find me anyone without a lapse into sin!" Ambrose dares, then proceeds to tell of the delinquencies of Samson, Jephthah, Aaron, and Miriam. Here there is no word for Jephthah but of condemnation. "First of all," Ambrose asks, "what need was there to swear so lightly, and to vow so confidently something whose outcome he could not know? Second, what was the point of fulfilling such a sad oath to the Lord God, so as to pay off his vow with a bloody funeral?"[83] Thus did Jephthah consider the piety of his daughter "worthy to be rewarded with death." Ambrose's disgust with Jephthah is unmistakable, as is his perception of the underlying irony and pathos.

But Ambrose's other treatises add differing considerations. In the first book of *The Duties of Clergy*, Ambrose declares that although it is essential for the clergy to discharge obligations faithfully, "it is sometimes contrary to duty to fulfil a promise, or to keep an oath." One example is Herod, whose foolish promise to the daughter of Herodias cost the Baptist his head. Another example is Jephthah, who would have done better "to make no promise at all, than to fulfil it in the death of his daughter."[84] As the ensuing summary of book one explains (§257), it is not enough to understand virtue and duty; one must also understand which duties and virtues take priority over others, and here, he implies, is where Jephthah failed.[85]

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[82] Specifically, the third book refutes Marcion's repudiation of the Old Testament by expounding its various prefigurations of Christ. However, where one would expect an explanation of Jephthah as a type of Christ, there is instead a harsh rebuke: Jephthah's promise is branded as "senseless" (*amens*) and the deed itself as "wickedness" and a "crime," indeed, as violating "the sacred laws of parenthood [*solvit pia jura parentis*]." Pseudo-Tertullian, *Carmina adversus Marcionitas* 3.4 (PL 2:1073, ANF 4:153); on date and provenance, see Quasten 2:319.

[83] Ambrose, *Apologia prophetæ David* 4.16 (PL 14:899), reading in full: "Da mihi aliquem sine prolaptione delicti. . . . Jephthe victor ab hoste remeavit: sed vexilla referens triumphalia, suo victus est sacramento, ut pietatem occurrentis filiæ parricidio remunerandam putaret. Primum omnium quid opus fuit tam facile jurare, et incerta vovere pro certis, quorum nesciret eventum? Deinde ad quid sacramenta tristia Domino Deo reddit; ut cruentis solvat sua vota funeribus?"

However, when Ambrose returns to the same two examples in book three, the playing field has changed. Herod is still unequivocally condemned for his madness. But some new variables are now factored into Jephthah's deed.

> Never shall I be led to believe that the leader Jephtha made his vow otherwise than without thought [*incaute*]. . . . For he repented of his vow after his daughter came to meet him. He then tore his clothes. . . . And though with pious fear and reverence he filled up the bitterness of a harsh payment, yet he ordered . . . an annual period of grief and mourning. . . . A harsh promise, but more bitter the payment, which even he who carried it out held it necessary to grieve. . . . I cannot blame the man for holding it necessary to fulfill his vow, but what a wretched necessity [*miserabilis necessitas*], that it could be paid only by the death of his child [*parricidio*]![86]

All at once the story has received a host of qualifications. Jephthah's vow is still condemned, but it is now his carelessness, not his sin, that is underscored. Moreover, marks of repentance are now discerned, along with Jephthah's "pious fear and reverence" (*pio metu ac formidine*). Still more surprising is Ambrose's invention that the annual commemoration of the daughter's death (cf. Jud. 11:40) was instituted by her father! And, finally, one can only wonder at Ambrose's strange and fatalistic comment on the "necessity" that drove the sacrifice, especially given his earlier (and later) insistence that bad vows should not be kept.[87] It would appear that the camera has captured Ambrose's moral casuistry in this treatise at the moment of its metamorphosis into something else, into (say) a tale of redemption through tragedy. And so he concludes his chapter, first, by asserting the superiority of Jephthah's daughter to Cicero's tale of two brave Pythagoreans, and then by extolling the utterly voluntary nature of her sacrifice, "so that what was originally a fluke of [her father's] impiety became instead a pious sacrifice."[88] Like so many others, Ambrose must find a way to make sense out of Jephthah's senseless deed.

The story receives yet another twist in one of Ambrose's early treatises on virginity. He begins by observing that although Jud. 11:39 records that Jephthah fulfilled his vow, there is no explicit mention of the daughter's sacrifice. Ambrose alleges that this is Scripture's way of censuring the deed, "to shrink from mentioning it."[89] But, again, qualifications remain: "What then? Do we approve this? Not by any means! But even if I do not approve of his sacrifice, I will not overlook his fear and dread lest he renege on his promise."[90] However misinformed on this issue, Jephthah nonetheless had a salutary view of God and of obligations in general. In other words, he meant well.[91] Ambrose compares Jephthah's motive here to that of Abraham in Genesis 22, where he displayed his willingness to sacrifice Isaac and was therefore commended by God. But Ambrose's use of Genesis 22 is both troubling and troublesome. He tries to draw two general lessons from the text; one, that promises are not to be broken lightly; two, that God does not approve of human sacrifice, as the provision of a ram in 22:13 indicates. Jephthah, Ambrose suggests, must have seen himself as following Abraham's example, and over the next two paragraphs Ambrose gradually paints himself into a corner by validating Jephthah's reasoning instead of repudiating it. In the absence of any word to the contrary, human sacrifice would be at best an ambiguous plan, one that would need divine approval. But in Abraham's case, the plan was dictated by a divine oracle; thus, subsequent cases could reasonably find a precedent by looking to Abraham. Indeed, Abraham's oracle taught this very point: that "the welfare of children was of less account than religious obligations."[92] On the other hand, Ambrose protests from his corner, "children ought to be offered to God by their parents" — that is the whole point of this treatise on virginity! — "but they shouldn't be butchered."[93] And so, having himself laid a foundation for Jephthah's defense by invoking the precedent of Abraham, Ambrose can only wonder why, when the daughter was so concerned lest her father make himself a liar — why wasn't the father similarly concerned for his daughter's life?[94]

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[84] Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum* 1.50.254 (PL 16:108; cf. NPNF^2 10:43 [subsections are misnumbered]).

[85] Ambrose's analysis is thus echoed by Weems's criticism that Jephthah's alleged virtue was really a gross distortion of virtue; see p. 102.

[86] Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum* 3.12.78 (PL 16:177, cf. NPNF^2 10:80).

[87] See Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum* 3.12.77–79 (PL 16:177, NPNF^2 10:80).

[88] *De officiis ministrorum* 3.12.81 (PL 16:178, cf. NPNF^2 10:80), reading in full: "Rediit ad patrem, quasi ad votum rediret, et voluntate propria cunctantem impulit, fecitque arbitratu spontaneo, ut quod erat impietatis fortuitum, fieret pietatis sacrificium." The two Pythagoreans (§80) appear in Cicero, *De officiis* 3.10 §45. In *Epistle* 37.33 (to Simplicianus), Ambrose similarly cites Jephthah's daughter as exemplifying how freedom is attained through virtue, expressed in her as contempt for death (PL 16:1135, FC 26:298).

Ambrose escapes this widening dilemma only by an imagined prompting from his audience — or, more likely, from his conscience. If Jephthah merely followed Abraham's example, why ("someone will ask") did God allow the sacrifice here when he had prohibited it of Abraham? Ambrose's answer shifts the focus of his discussion from the ethics of human sacrifice to the moral character of the individuals in question. Specifically, he suddenly finds both Jephthah and his daughter wanting in comparison with Abraham and his son. Abraham did not grieve, he did not wallow in paternal affection, he simply hastened to obey. Similarly, "Isaac did not hesitate, when 'he followed his father with unequal steps'; he did not weep, when he was bound; he did not seek a delay when he was offered."[95] In short, Isaac's prompt devotion merited a ram being sacrificed in his stead, and so he saved his life. Jephthah, however, did grieve; his daughter wept; and both doubted God's compassion. Moreover, the daughter sought a two-month delay. And so, Ambrose implies, this is why the father lost his daughter and the daughter lost her life. Having wrestled so inconclusively over grander considerations, Ambrose seems desperate to extricate himself from this morass and to salvage his exhortation to virginity, even if he tarnishes the reputation of Jephthah's virgin daughter in the process. Here he concludes: "Mercy is large where faith is prompt."[96] Jephthah and his daughter hesitated. Jephthah and his daughter got what they deserved. Frankly, it is not really unfair for the modern reader, or any reader, to regard this conclusion as a disappointment, if not an exegetical sleight of hand — especially when the bishop of Milan later comes to testify against himself. Preaching in 392 at the wake for Valentinian, the young emperor of the West, Ambrose cited the two months allowed to Jephthah's daughter not as a breach of faith or vow but as an eminently fitting period for mourning, and one that Valentinian's two surviving sisters would do well to emulate.[97]

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[89] Ambrose, *De virginitate* 2.5 (PL 16:281), written about 378.

[90] Ambrose, *De virginitate* 2.6 (PL 16:281), reading: "Quid igitur? Hoc probamus? Minime gentium. Sed tamen etsi parricidium non probo, adverto prævaricandæ metum et formidinem sponsionis."

[91] An equivalent point will be registered also by Ambrosiaster; see n. 112.

[92] Ambrose, *De virginitate* 2.7 (PL 16:281): "docuit filiorum salutem religionis obsequio posthabendam."

[93] Ambrose, *De virginitate* 2.7 (PL 16:281). "offerri a parentibus Deo debere filios, non debere jugulari."

[94] Ambrose, *De virginitate* 2.7 (PL 16:281): "Certe cum hic filia tam sollicita fuerit de patris voto, cur pater non dubitaverit de filiæ parricidio: et cum illa paternum caverit mendacium, iste filiæ non caverit interitum?"

[95] Ambrose, *De virginitate* 2.8–9 (PL 16:281–82); the phrase in single quotation marks appears to allude to Vergil

Ambrose's diverse statements on Judges 11 cannot be explained by any chronological development in his thinking, for remarks such as those in the previous paragraph occur both early and late. Instead, his comments are best understood as driven less by the text than by his desired applications. In the treatise just considered, his agenda was to recruit virgins for the religious life (appealing also to their parents), and to this end he went on to stress how much smaller a sacrifice it is to vow virginity than to vow as Jephthah did.[98] Similarly, in his later treatise on virginity, he appeals directly to young people that "the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite ought to teach you" that one's parents' vows are worthy of honor.[99] Even if Ambrose's exhortations strike the modern reader as shameless propagandizing, one must not allow these statements to eclipse Ambrose's other perceptions: of Jephthah's culpability, of the pathos of the situation, and of the daughter's piety — the last of which is the one feature commended by all four texts examined here. Given the frequency and diversity of Ambrose's references to Jephthah's daughter, one may well wonder if any other ecclesiastical writer ever found her to be so haunting a biblical figure. To reprise the theme of the "dutiful daughter" may prove wearisome to modern critics who evaluate such an encomium with a hermeneutic of suspicion, but it remains that Ambrose saw her as a noble soul in her own right, and he did what he could to draw something worthwhile from an otherwise disastrous mistake.

Caught in the Crossfire between Jerome and Jovinian

Unlike Ambrose, Jerome (writing toward the end of Ambrose's life) was clearly familiar with the midrashic tradition that would later appear in *Genesis Rabbah* but that was also taken up by Pseudo-Philo. In the spirited treatise written against Jovinian around 393, Jerome begins by rebutting Jovinian's interpretation of Jephthah, then proceeds to echo the rabbis:

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[96] Ambrose, *De virginitate* 2.9 (PL 16:282): "Et ideo misericordia largior, ubi fides promptior." Ambrose's sentiment here is explicitly shared only by Procopius, despite Penna's claim that "all" interpreters fault the daughter for "slothfulness" ("Vow of Jephthah," p 165).

[97] Ambrose, *De obitu Valentiniani* 49–50 (PL 16:1434–35, FC 22 286–87).

[98] See Ambrose, *De virginitate* 3.10 (PL 16:282).

[99] Ambrose, *Exhortatio virginitatis* 8.51 (PL 16:367).

> Whereas he [sc. Jovinian] prefers the fidelity [*fidem*] of the father Jephthah to the tears of the virgin daughter, [his argument actually] supports us. For we are not commending virgins of the world so much as those who are virgins for Christ's sake, and most Hebrews blame the father for the rash vow he made. . . . Supposing (they say) a dog or an ass had met him, what would he have done? Their meaning is that God so ordered events that he who had improvidently made a vow should learn his error by the death of his daughter.[100]

Jovinian's lost treatise, of course, was intent on raising the stature of marriage, and he seems to have collected a long series of biblical proof-texts to argue that marriage is no hindrance to serving and pleasing God well. In the case at hand, he apparently denigrates Jephthah's daughter for her show of emotion and attachment: thus, the virgin offers a poorer showing than her (obviously) married father.[101] Jerome's goal, on the other hand, is to disqualify both Jephthah and his daughter from testifying on the subject of Christian virginity. Accordingly, where Jovinian wants to find fidelity, Jerome sides with the rabbis in finding the father not faithful but merely thoughtless.[102] Jerome discards the daughter, too, disdainfully classing her among "the virgins of the world"—probably meaning that her virginity simply reflected her circumstances or stage in life rather than any consecrated vocation, though there may be some additional significance to the phrase (to be addressed shortly). For the moment, one should simply note that Jephthah receives no commendation from Jerome, who appears to endorse the view, voiced earlier by Pseudo-Philo, that God arranged to take the daughter's life in order to punish Jephthah's foolishness.

It is possible to shed further light on Jerome's peremptory dismissal of Jephthah's daughter, but—from our vantage point—the other shoe does not drop until a quarter century later. In the commentary on Jeremiah, written at the very end of his life, Jerome again mentions Jephthah. His remarks were occasioned by a text wherein the people of Judah are indicted by the Lord for burning their sons and daughters in the fire, which, God says, "I did not command nor did it come into my mind" (Jer. 7:30–31, NRSV).[103] Jerome then adds a puzzling aside: "But if Jephthah offered his virgin daughter to God, the sacrifice was not pleasing but only the intention of the one offering it."[104] In fact, his statement is highly elliptical. The place of these perverse sacrifices in Jer. 7:31 is named Topheth, but only on consulting 2 Kings 23:10 does one learn that the sacrifices at Topheth were offered to Molech, a Moabite or Ammonite deity. Thus, it would appear that Jerome's first impulse was to interpret Jephthah's vow as offered not to Yahweh but to Molech, a "worldly" context, so to speak, that would also explain why Jerome was so unimpressed with the daughter's virginity.[105] That Jephthah might have offered his vow to the "Christian" God comes to Jerome only as an afterthought. On this reading, Jephthah's motive is commended but his sacrifice is not—a view already observed in Ambrose.

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[100] *Contra Jovinianum* 1.23 (PL 23:242, NPNF^2 6:363): "Porro quod præfert Jephte patris fidem, lacrymis virginis filiæ, pro nobis facit. Et nos enim non tam virgines sæculi, quam eas quæ propter Christum sunt virgines, prædicamus: et a plerisque Hebræorum reprehenditur pater voti temerarii. . . . Si canis (inquiunt), si asinus occurrisset, quid faceret? Ex quo volunt Dei dispensatione esse factum ut qui improspecte voverat, errorem votorum in filiæ morte sentiret" It is of some interest to document the progressive introduction of additional unclean animals into the editorial rebuttal of Jephthah's vow. While Pseudo-Philo was content to worry that Jephthah might be met by a dog, Jerome has added an ass to the welcoming party (as did Ambrosiaster, below). By the fifth or sixth century, *Gen. Rab.* 60:3 and *Lev. Rab.* 37:4 (Soncino 2:527, 4:469–71) had recorded that the rabbis envisioned a threesome, including a camel. The first Christian source I have found to mention the camel is Procopius of Gaza, who also adds a horse. Although one would not think much imagination were required to embroider upon such a list, traditional exegetes seemed rather reluctant to do so.

[101] Note that *Contra Jovinianum* 1.5 (PL 23:216, NPNF^2 6:349) reads somewhat differently than 1.23: in the earlier text, Jovinian is said to prefer the father's faith or fidelity simply "to *her*, who would have met death mournfully" (*ei, quae caesa sit lugens*). The rebuke insinuated here presumably underlies Penna's claim that Jovinian had criticized the daughter's plea for two months to mourn ("Vow of Jephthah," p. 164, and n. 96, in this chapter). While Jovinian would probably have praised Jephthah qua father (i.e., as married) on any pretext, it is speculative to claim that he faulted the daughter not only for failure of nerve but also *for procrastination*.

[102] Jephthah's vow is also indicted as rash (*temeritate*) in Jerome's *Comm. Micah* 6:6–7 (CCSL 76.498.193–95, PL 25:1210), where he argues the folly of offering anything as a sacrifice to God except our own lives, dedicated to the confession of his name.

These two treatments, however brief, suggest that Jerome is generally contemptuous of Jephthah, though he can also imagine a loophole by which Jephthah's good intentions might be recognized. Jephthah's daughter, however, is scarcely acknowledged. But Jerome can also advocate on Jephthah's behalf. Writing to Julian, a nobleman of his acquaintance, to console him over the recent deaths of his wife and two daughters, Jerome commends how quickly "the fear of Christ dried the tears of paternal affection," but observes that Julian's losses still fall short of those endured by various biblical exemplars: "[Yours] was a great triumph of faith, true. But how much greater was that won by Abraham who was content to slay his only son, of whom he had been told that he was to inherit the world, yet did not cease to hope that after death Isaac would live again. Jephthah too offered up his virgin daughter, and for this is placed by the apostle in the roll of the saints."[106] Here, too, a cross-reference is needed to clarify Jerome's remarks. Abraham's hope for Isaac's resurrection is a particular motif of Heb. 11:17–19, a chapter in which Jephthah also figures. Jerome's juxtaposition of Jephthah and Abraham probably implies that Jephthah, much like Abraham, offered his daughter in hope of her resurrection—even though Hebrews 11 knows nothing of such an implication.[107] To put things mildly, Jerome has given

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[103] Jerome renders the text as "quae non praecepi nec cogitaui in corde meo," then paraphrases it as "quae non praeceperit eis nec ulla legis iusserit sanctione"; see *Comm. Jer.* 2.45 3 (CCSL 74:83.12–13, 84.7–8; PL 24:735).

[104] Jerome, *Comm. Jer.* 2.45.4 (CCSL 74:84.8–10, PL 24:735): "Quodsi Iepthae optulit filiam suam uirginem deo, non sacrificium placet, sed animus offerentis."

[105] Significantly, it would also implicitly exonerate Yahweh from any involvement in human sacrifice. Such an implication would not necessarily conflict with the midrash Jerome cited against Jovinian and that he alludes to in this text as well, though without attribution; see *Comm. Jer.* 2.45.4 (CCSL 74:84.10–12, PL 24:735).

[106] Jerome, *Epistle* 118.5 (PL 22:964, NPNF^2 6:223).

[107] An allusion to Jephthah's imitation of Abraham is not really needed to explain the brief reference in the treatise against John of Jerusalem, where the goodness of bodies is at issue. Against John's Origenistic tendencies, Jerome argues that Jephthah was "reckoned by the Apostle among the saints" (again, presumably in Hebrews 11), even though he was the son of a harlot; cf. *Contra Iohannem Hierosolymitanum* 22 (PL 23:373, NPNF^2 6:435). Jerome makes the identical point in *Epistle* 60.8 to Heliodorus in 396 (PL 22:594), and the case of Jephthah will later be abstracted into canon law by Gratian's *Decretum*, D.56 c 5 (PL 187 309).

Jephthah the benefit of great doubt, not to say of utter silence! And if Jerome's other references served to discredit Jephthah, this reference made up for some of the loss. Evidently, consistency was not Jerome's strong suit, any more than it was Ambrose's.

Ambrosiaster: The Martyrdom of a Criminal's Innocent Daughter

The writings of an anonymous near-contemporary of Ambrose, identified since the Renaissance simply as Ambrosiaster, are often noted for a degree of conservatism and ethical rigor. His remarks on Jephthah are no exception. In the forty-third of a series of questions on the Old Testament, he ponders why Abraham was prohibited from sacrificing his only child while Jephthah was allowed to go ahead. He responds by contrasting the two men: Jephthah was not legitimately born, he was a leader of thieves, and there is no testimony to his righteousness — all traits in sharpest contrast to Abraham. Jephthah was, in short, "a criminal and improvident man" who made a promise to God out of "foolish devotion."[108] But Ambrosiaster presses this line of questioning even harder, and perhaps with a trace of sarcasm: "Was he forced to make a vow? Or did he not understand how a vow ought to be made? Indeed, what if a dog or an ass had run to him . . . or his wife?" The reference to the "dog or ass" recalls Pseudo-Philo and could have anticipated Jerome, but the likeness to Pseudo-Philo is deepened by Ambrosiaster's explanation: Jephthah's punishment is a talion formula, insofar as his error will, by the decree of the divine Judge, be turned against him. The Ambrosiaster seems oblivious to the obvious imbalance, that the penalty was directly borne by the daughter and not by Jephthah himself.[109]

Perhaps what follows was meant as compensation, then, for he insists that dying "innocent of her father's evil" worked to the daughter's advantage (*lucrum*), insofar as she thereby "escaped the pains of hell" (*pœna caruit inferi*) which, "had she lived a while longer," she may have been unable to avoid. This casual remark may well conceal a wonderful encomium, one suggesting that Ambrosiaster ranked Jephthah's daughter among the Christian martyrs, who (it was commonly held) reached beatitude immediately upon death.[110] Origen's allusive depiction of Jephthah's daughter as a literal martyr (as opposed to the looser analogies drawn between her death and the ascetic life) would thus seem to have found a foothold with Ambrosiaster here in the Latin West.[111] In any case, he refuses to consider that Jephthah's vow or personal worth was responsible for his victory.[112] Moreover, he may be correcting Pseudo-Philo by denying that God heard the prayers of Israel, for Ambrosiaster sees no such prayer here.[113] Instead, God gave Jephthah the victory simply to honor the divine name, or possibly on account of the merits of Abraham. Ambrosiaster is thus one more early voice expressing an angry bewilderment at Jephthah's stupidity together with a marked esteem for the daughter.

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[108] Ambrosiaster [Pseudo-Augustine], *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* 43 (PL 35:2239): "Nam Jephthe homo facinorosus et improvidus, stulta devotione munus Deo promisit dicens . . ." *Stulta* and cognates occur four times in this short passage.

[109] Ambrosiaster, *Quaest.* 43 (PL 35:2239). Indeed, Ambrosiaster seems so obsessed to see the father punished that he can say that God "winked at" or "concealed" (*dissimulavit*) the sacrifice of the daughter.

[110] Ambrosiaster, *Quaest.* 43 (PL 35:2240). The passage is not without ambiguity: "Filia autem ejus lucrum fecit: quia enim innocens in malis patris mortua est, pœna caruit inferi; quod diu forte vivendo adipisci nequisset." *Inferi* here would denote whatever Ambrosiaster understood by the intermediate state. My reading has benefitted from the suggestions of Cecil M. Robeck and David G. Hunter. See also Willy Rordorf, "Martyr – Martyrdom I. Christian Martyrdom," *EEC* 1:531; and Adalbert Hamman, "Purgatory," *EEC* 2:725.

[111] Not that Ambrosiaster necessarily offered the first such foothold. There is a poorly attested account of the martyrdom of a priest named Epictetus and a monk named Astio (purportedly in 290, under Diocletian)

St. Augustine and Jephthah's Daughter

Elements of almost all of these other fourth-century writers coalesce in Augustine's remarks on Jephthah and his daughter, which are found principally in two places: as part of a consideration of the morality of suicide and martyrdom in the first book of *The City of God* (begun in 413), and then in his *Questions on the Heptateuch* (finished in 419). Although it defers to *The City of God* on the propriety of voluntary self-sacrifice, Augustine's "question" on Jephthah is by far the more exhaustive treatment. Were it not buried near the end of a collection of more than 650 questions parceled out into seven books, it could easily stand as an independent essay: at eleven and a half columns in the Migne edition, it is four times the size of any other question save one and it is, arguably, the work's longest question on a single topic.[114] Augustine worries over a number of things contained in or implied by Judges 11, and surely some of the reason for the length of his deliberations lies in his inability to come to closure on so many of his points.

Augustine's discussion divides roughly in half: first to be addressed is the obvious ethical problem (along with some underlying hermeneutical issues), after which he proceeds to allegorize the story in all its details.[115] His analysis is a convoluted bit

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that likens Christian martyrdom to the offering up of Isaac, Jephthah's daughter, and Stephen, as well as to that of the "good shepherd" in John 10; see *Vita Sanctorum Epicteti Presbyteri et Astionis Monachi* 1.19 (PL 73 406). One may document more reliably how Jephthah's daughter was lauded ca. 400 by Sulpicius Severus ("endowed with no womanish constancy, she did not shrink from dying"), but his admiration does not cast her as a martyr per se; see *Chronica* 1.26 (PL 20:112).

[112] Note, however, that Jephthah is described as "faithful" in that at least he realized his own error; see Ambrosiaster, *Quaest.* 43 (PL 35:2239). A similar qualification arises in the midst of Ambrosiaster's refutation of "baptism for the dead" in his commentary on 1 Cor. 15:30–31 There, he interjects that even though Jephthah was found to be faithful, it was neither his "foolish" vow nor its fulfillment that was approved, but rather "the perseverance of his faith"; the larger argument appears to be that being baptized for the dead is similarly wrong, however well-intentioned. Both qualifications are probably occasioned by Jephthah's presence among the other heroes of Hebrews 11. See *Ambrosiastri Qvi Dicitvr Commentarivs in Epistvlas Pavlinas* (CSEL 81/2:175.14–18)· "nam et Iepthe, quamvis in re, quae accepto ferri non possit, fidelis inventus est, offerens filiam suam secundum votum suum, quod stulte voverat, non ergo factum probatur, sed perseverantia fidei in exemplum profertur."

[113] Pseudo-Philo's assertion about the prayers of Israel is quoted at n. 41.

[114] Augustine's discussion constitutes question #49 on Judges: *Quæstiones in Heptateuchum* 7.49 (PL 34:791–824; CCSL 33:335–77). Only a handful of questions are even three columns long. The only rivals to his treatment of Jephthah in 7.49 are 4.33, which is just under five columns, and the last question on Exodus (2.177, sixteen columns), which is actually a long string of comments on the various features of the tabernacle.

[115] The transition occurs at the end of paragraph 15. See PL 34:816 or CCSL 33:366.1175; paragraphs are numbered only in CCSL, but Migne's divisions are identical.

of writing, though when one considers how little Judges 11 tells us about Jephthah's intention, much less about God's plan, one must commend Augustine for managing any clarity at all. I will attempt to recap his arguments and concerns by addressing, in turn, what he says about Jephthah, about God, and about the daughter who often seems lost in the shuffle.

As we have seen from the way the *Biblical Antiquities* of Pseudo-Philo presents the story of Jephthah, some readers found Jephthah's vow not so much scandalous as simply careless: the scandal lies rather in his obsession with fulfilling his vow at the cost of his daughter's life. While Augustine, too, is aware of this interpretation (probably from Jerome), his curiosity is directed first to another traditional question. What, precisely, did Jephthah intend to vow? Whatever he had in mind, Augustine observes with a trace of wit, it surely was not a sheep, "for it is not the custom now, nor was it then, for sheep to run out to greet a returning master." Instead, this is the sort of behavior one expects from a dog—but that would have been a sacrifice at once illicit, contemptible, and unclean.[116] None of this is new. But Augustine also adds his own, more sinister analysis: the Latin text of Jephthah's vow in verse 31 reads not *quodcumque*, but *quicumque*—not "whatever comes forth to greet me," but "whoever." Augustine's conclusion is chilling: Jephthah never intended anything but a human sacrifice all along. Who? Surely, if not his "only beloved" daughter, Jephthah must have planned to sacrifice his wife.[117]

At the outset, then, it would appear that Jephthah intended to do something utterly unlawful. However, as Augustine could have learned from Ambrose or Jerome, Jephthah's deed seems to have a precedent in Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac on Mt. Moriah. Armed with this parallel, Augustine entertains three possible explanations for Jephthah's behavior: either he is excused because he had a special command from God, as Abraham had; or he is excused because his action bears a certain prophetic significance; or he is not excused, having acted out of ignorance. An apparent flaw in the first of these explanations is that Scripture does not mention any such special permission or dispensation. Of course, Augustine counters, it may be that Jephthah was simply trying to imitate Abraham in believing that God could be pleased by such a sacrifice, or in believing that God would either resurrect the victim or else stay Jephthah's own hand. But having raised such an objection, Augustine does not quite face its difficulties. Clearly, he does not want to spawn a host of patriarchal copycats. And so his solution is that works undertaken voluntarily are laudable only if first of all licit.[118] Human sacrifice is ruled out on both counts. To be sure, Augustine's advice here would have been of little help to Abraham! Nonetheless, he charges ahead, asserting that the cases of Abraham and Jephthah differ at a crucial point, namely, that "scripture seems to pass no judgment on [Jephthah's] vow and deed," whereas Abraham's obedience was praised. What should we do where Scripture is silent? Augustine is ready with an answer: "The divine scriptures proffer no opinion on either side concerning this deed of Jephthah, so that our mind might be exercised in judgment. Therefore we may now say that such a vow displeased God and brought vengeance upon her, so that the only daughter ran to meet her father first of all."[119] Augustine would seem to have dismissed out of hand any claim that Jephthah had a special dispensation for his vow. But Augustine then frays his own rope by introducing two scriptural complications drawn, first, from Jud. 11:29, where "the spirit of the Lord" is said to have come upon Jephthah; and from Heb. 11:32, where Jephthah is listed among the great heroes of faith. Perhaps Scripture is not so silent after all.

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[116] Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.6 (PL 34:812, CCSL 33:360.946–53).

[117] Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.6 (PL 34:812, CCSL 33:361.954–62). To the objection that a feminine object should have been denoted by *quaecumque*, he responds that Scripture often uses the masculine for either sex.

[118] Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept* 7.49.5 (PL 34:811–12, CCSL 33:360.925–41).

To be sure, Jephthah is not the only hero in Hebrews 11 whose résumé has a few stains.[120] Gideon is also mentioned there, as well as in Jud. 6:34, where — again, like Jephthah — the spirit of the Lord comes to rest upon him, too. Gideon's twofold similarity to Jephthah makes him a useful instrument for Augustine's reconsideration of whether a special dispensation is to be inferred from the spirit's anointing or from the commendation in Hebrews 11. Gideon's own flaws make the comparison especially apt, for, shortly after he was endued with the spirit, he twice tested God by (literally) putting out a fleece; and, later on, he fashioned a golden ephod that "became a snare to Gideon and to his family," indeed, to all of Israel.[121] Should these dubious deeds, like Jephthah's vow, be understood as the work of the spirit?

In Gideon's case, Augustine wavers. Although he knows that Scriptures such as Deut. 6:16 forbid putting God to the test, he claims not to know whether Gideon sinned. Augustine's hesitation is fueled in part by his appreciation for the "prophetic" significance of the alternately wet and dry fleece,[122] an issue we will consider in a moment. But eventually Augustine concedes that Gideon's own words — when he prayed to God, "Do not let your anger burn against me" (6:39) — amount to a confession of sin. Moreover, Scripture openly condemns the fashioning of the golden ephod, a point Augustine finds corroborated by the absence of any report that Gideon prospered after this blunder.[123] The general lesson here is that God uses not only the faithful and pious, but also those who are somewhat deficient and delinquent. Indeed, he uses the evil and the ignorant, such as King Saul ("a reprobate in every way") and the treacherous high priest Caiaphas.[124] Nonetheless, Augustine still leaves a loophole for Jephthah, for Scripture reports that his careless vow was followed by a great victory.[125]

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[119] Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.7 (PL 34:812, CCSL 33:361.971–75). His statement recalls the midrash summarized by Jerome (n. 84), though here God's displeasure is expressed indirectly (that is, by the vow), not by decree

[120] As observed also by Yee, "Why Judges?" p. 2.

[121] See Judges 6:36–40 and 8:24–27.

[122] Specifically, the wet fleece on dry ground signified how God's heavenly grace was initially restricted to Israel. Then, the dry fleece on the wet ground signified the dispersion of grace throughout the world by means of the church, as well as Israel's estrangement from grace. See Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.9 (PL 34:813–14, CCSL 33:362–63).

[123] See Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.10 (PL 34:814, CCSL 33:363).

[124] See Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.11 (PL 34:814, CCSL 33:363.1065–66): "omni modo reprobatum."

[125] On the question of the end (i.e., a successful outcome) justifying the means, see Thompson, "Patriarchs, Polygamy, and Private Resistance," p. 23.

Gideon continues to serve Augustine as he shifts his attention to another possible excuse, namely, that the strange actions of Gideon and Jephthah were justified by their prophetic significance. Such gestures may have been deliberate, impelled, as it were, by a motive superseding the usual norms of morality. Augustine even raises the possibility that the tests Gideon applied to God, along with his prayer that God would not be angry, were not sincere. Instead, they were staged by Gideon as a prophecy or sign of how God would later bypass Israel in favor of the church. As anyone can see, Augustine loves to find such "prophetic" readings in the Bible. But he also perceives the danger — as well as the inconsistency — in exalting these signs at the expense of other passages in Scripture that so clearly forbid testing God, false worship, and human sacrifice. And so he resolves his dilemma by a dialectical approach. Whatever Gideon intended, whether knowingly or ignorantly, it remains that what he did was sin. But even his sin occurred under the greater providence of God, so that the prophetic or allegorical significance of his deeds was no accident.[126]

The same dialectical approach is then applied to Jephthah, at last, so as to allow the prophetic significance of his vow without excusing its sinfulness. However, Augustine's exposition is startling enough to bear repeating. At the outset of his treatise, Augustine was at pains to remind the cruder interpreters of Scripture that God opposed not just human sacrifices but all animal sacrifices. The sacrifices enjoined in the Old Testament were tolerated only because "they were signifiers and shadows, so to speak, of things to come."[127] Suppose, then, Augustine ventures, "someone" were to say Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter was part of God's plan to get the attention of his people. In other words, suppose that God saw how people failed to perceive Christ and the church as foreshadowed in the sacrifice of sheep and therefore took care not only to prohibit human sacrifices but also to arrange Jephthah's violation of this very law. "[The resulting] bewilderment would itself provoke a great question, and the great question would encourage the zeal of pious minds to examine the great mystery, so that he who piously examines the profundity of the prophecy might lift the Lord Christ from the depth of the scriptures, just as a fish on a hook."[128] That the Almighty should so contrive to regain our attention, and at the cost of the daughter's life, is not a lesson for the squeamish. But Augustine is anything but squeamish: "We do not oppose this argument and analysis."

Nonetheless, there is still an important distinction to be maintained between "the intention of the one who makes a vow" and "God's providence in using any such intention to a good end." And this distinction leads Augustine back to the dilemma originally raised by the silence of Scripture here. In short, if Jephthah had a special command, then his vow was commendable;[129] but if Jephthah based his vow on human error, his sin was justly punished by the death of his daughter. Does Augustine ever resolve the dilemma? Perhaps. Almost at the last moment, he calls attention to Jephthah's own words of regret at seeing his daughter coming to meet him, and this observation seems to tip the scale so as to indict Jephthah's ignorance and error. Even so, Augustine spends another full paragraph belaboring and prolonging the ambiguity.[130]

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[126] Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.12–13 (PL 34:815, CCSL 33:364–65).

[127] Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.1 (PL 34:810, CCSL 33:358).

[128] Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.14 (PL 34:815–16, CCSL 33:365.1126–40), reading in part: ". . . ut ipsa admiratio magnam gigneret quaestionem et magna quaestio ad perscrutandum magnum mysterium studium piae mentis erigeret, pie uero scrutans mens hominis altitudinem prophetiae uelut hamo piscem dominum Christum de profundo scripturarum leuaret? *Huic nos rationi et considerationi non obsistimus.*"

[129] This is the point at which Augustine defers to his earlier discussion in *Civ. Dei* 1.21, where Jephthah is considered alongside Abraham and Samson, all of whom seem to have been specially moved by a secret

Jephthah emerges from Augustine's study as a man who was probably well intended, pious, and faithful, but also sadly misinformed to think that God would be pleased by human sacrifice, whether of his wife or anyone else. God, on the other hand, rises above human failings, even as he seems somehow to direct them, ultimately bringing good out of evil. From Judges 11, Augustine concludes, two good things emerge. First, Jephthah is appropriately and definitively punished for his rashness, and any dangerous precedent that might be drawn from Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac is henceforth dismantled and disgraced.[131] Second, these events bequeath to the people of God a riveting adumbration of the sacrifice that Jesus was one day to make, for Jephthah is a type of none other than Christ himself. Augustine's typological exposition culls too many details from Judges 11 to reproduce here; indeed, he tries to comment on every verse, apologizing only for skipping over Jephthah's long speech to the king of the Ammonites in verses 14–27. The essential Christological features, however, include how Jephthah's lineage was questioned by his brethren, leading to his expulsion; how Jephthah then surrounded himself with sinners; how the Gileadites, having rejected him, returned to him to seek deliverance; and so on.[132] Numerological and eschatological speculations abound. But the sole question worth detaining us here pertains to Jephthah's daughter and, maybe, his wife.

Augustine's literal exposition offers but one comment on Jephthah's daughter, to the effect that the soul of this "good and virgin daughter" would be well received by God and that it was also of God that she did not resist her father's vow but complied with the divine decree.[133] But other helpful details are added near the end of the treatise, where Augustine again takes up Jephthah's vow, ostensibly from a typological perspective, but with inevitable references to the historical sense as well. Apparently, Augustine feels he has already dealt sufficiently with the moral scandal of human sacrifice, so here he confines his remarks to how Jephthah's wife and daughter fit the typological narrative. Although Jephthah's intention to sacrifice his wife

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divine command and therefore are not to be branded as homicidal. The larger context here addresses whether or when suicide is to be preferred to involuntary defilement; Augustine advances pagan Romans and Christian martyrs as contrasting examples (*Civ. Dei* 1.16–28, CCSL 47:17–30).

[130] Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.14–15 (PL 34:816, CCSL 33:365–66). And even if Jephthah acted in error, Augustine adds, it is still to his credit that he feared God and that he faithfully rendered what he vowed.

[131] Augustine may well be distancing himself, tacitly, from Ambrose's clumsier handling of whether Jephthah or anyone else might find a legitimate precedent in Abraham and Isaac. See the discussion at n. 77.

[132] Augustine, *Quaest in Hept.* 7.49.16–28 (PL 34:816–21, CCSL 33 366–73).

[133] Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.15 (PL 34:816, CCSL 33:366.1168–71): "Credebat enim etiam bonae et uirginis animam filiae bene recipi, quod non se ipsa uouerat immolandam, sed uoto et uoluntati non restiterat patris et dei fuerat secuta iudicium."

was frustrated by his daughter's accidental intervention, Augustine delights to discover in the two women a neatly dovetailed typology.[134] When Jephthah vowed to offer a sacrifice, he prefigured Christ in 1 Cor. 15:24, when Christ delivers up the kingdom to God the Father. The kingdom, of course, is none other than the church, and Augustine carefully describes the sacrificial imagery whereby the church is offered to God as a *holocaustoma*. Both Jephthah's wife and his daughter here symbolize the church, he concludes, because the church is at times called the spouse or wife of Christ, but elsewhere, his chaste and virgin daughter.[135]

There is a limited amount of comfort to be drawn for modern readers from this spiritualization of Jephthah's daughter and her death. Augustine scarcely agonizes over Jephthah's anguish, much less that of his daughter. Nonetheless, that he has spilled so much ink over this story above all others in his *Questions on the Heptateuch* is surely some indication of how much the story troubles him. Augustine thereby also illustrates how little difference it made to him that Jephthah sacrificed a daughter rather than a son—in contrast to some recent theories.[136] Indeed, Augustine finds the story of Jephthah's daughter more problematic than that of Abraham and Isaac, and it is precisely the striking parallel between the two stories that deepens Augustine's perplexity, propels him toward some unlikely solutions, and forces him to grapple in his own way with the question of "Where is God in this story?"[137] That he has cast Jephthah and his daughter in the roles of Christ and the church may be to evade some deeply troubling issues, but it is also an acknowledgment that some sort of salvage operation, some act of triage, is desperately called for. And there is at least one sure note of recognition at the end of Augustine's penultimate paragraph that Jephthah's vow was, historically speaking, not merely illicit but also tragic: "For why should mourning and lamentation have been decreed if the vow was a thing of delight?"[138]

From Augustine and Chrysostom to Nicholas of Lyra

Augustine's lengthy essay would prove immensely influential for more than a thousand years. The bulk of the *Glossa Ordinaria* will be drawn from Augustine's forty-ninth question on Judges. Raban Maur and Hugh of St. Victor will each reprint Augustine's treatise virtually unchanged but under their own names. Later on, even the young Luther, after struggling on his own for a while, will hand off the question at last to a verbatim extract from the bishop of Hippo. Still, Augustine had no lock on the story, and it is important to take note of the many Latin commentators who labored in the nine centuries that led from Augustine to the *Ordinary Gloss* and on to the *Postils* of Lyra, as well as those in the East who wrote in the wake of Origen or Chrysostom. Of course, those who traverse the landscape from Augustine to Lyra should be prepared for slow going. Medieval exegesis can easily weary the modern reader with its reliance on a common stock of patristic excerpts, its thickets of glosses in which all trees look about the same. Dependence on the Fathers was much the rule in a day when authority and consensus counted for more than creativity, and departures from tradition could be slight and unannounced — indeed, often no more than a new arrangement of material or a difference in paraphrase. But even a paraphrase can signal a writer's engagement with the text at hand, his personal affirmation of tradition, or even a change of view. In East as in West, medieval interpreters can be at once derivative and unpredictable.

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[134] Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.26 (PL 34:820, CCSL 33:372.1371): "Ex utroque igitur prophetia coaptata est."

[135] Augustine's proof-texts are Eph. 5:31–32 (wife), Matt 9:15–22 (daughter), and 2 Cor. 11:2 (chaste virgin), see *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.26 (PL 34:820–21, CCSL 33:372). His depiction of the church as Jephthah's virgin daughter will find its counterpart in the later Middle Ages, when many will conclude that he did not really sacrifice her but devoted her instead to lifelong virginity. See my discussion at p. 151.

[136] Cf. Tapp, who suggests ("Ideology of Expendability," pp 171–72) that Jephthah's daughter would have received "a more noteworthy place in the history of Israel" had she been, instead, a son.

[137] Compare this question (raised by Fewell, n. 14, in this chapter) with Augustine's suggestion that Jephthah may have been counting on God to intervene and override the sacrifice, just as in the case of Abraham; see p. 126.

[138] Augustine's question ("Nam quare luctus et lamentatio decerneretur, si uotum illud laetitiae fuit?") concludes an aside directed "ad historiae . . . proprietatem." See *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.27 (PL 34:821, CCSL 33:373.1414–19).

After Origen and Chrysostom: Jephthah's Daughter in the East

In the writers of the fifth and sixth century, John Chrysostom's explanation of the narrative's ethical turmoil commonly survives in whole or in part. Echoes of Chrysostom are clearest in Theodoret of Cyrus, writing sometime after 453. God did not restrain Jephthah in order to teach his successors greater discretion in making promises to God. The vow was "exceedingly senseless" (ἀνόητος ἄγαν), writes Theodoret, and the daughter displayed far more character than her father.[139] Chrysostom's sermon on the statues may also lie behind the reference to Jephthah in the *Questions and Answers to the Orthodox*, which revives Chrysostom's belief that the devil shares some blame for this catastrophe. Accordingly, the devil's scheme to fashion a snare of the vague vow (τὸ ἀόριστον τῆς εὐχῆς) came to naught when Jephthah proved to value his vow's fulfillment more than his daughter's life — an act of piety (εὐσέβειαν) in the writer's eyes.[140] Similar notes are struck in the mid-fifth century by Pseudo-Nilus, who admires Jephthah for keeping his promise and for thereby placing piety before nature (φύσεως προτιμήσας εὐσέβειαν), even though it filled him with unbearable anguish to sacrifice his beloved and only daughter.[141]

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[139] Theodoret, *Quaest. 20 in Jud.* (PG 80:508): Ἀμείνων δὲ ἀυτοῦ ἡ θυγάτηρ πολλῷ. Theodoret thus praises the daughter (contra Penna, n. 96 in this chapter).

[140] The *Quæstiones et Responsiones ad Orthodoxos* was once attributed to Justin Martyr but probably dates around 400 and is of Syrian provenance (Quasten 1:206). *Quaest.* 99 (PG 6:1344) also ends with a possible echo of Chrysostom, namely, that God allowed the miscarried vow to proceed as an everlasting warning against similarly indefinite vows

[141] Pseudo-Nilus of Ancyra, *Peristeria* 11.4 (PG 79:908); cf. Quasten 3:503. One might also report here the account of "Elisaus of Amathunik," which comes to me only by way of Reinke's review ("Ueber das Gelübde Jephte's," pp 446–52) of an essay by Welte that appeared in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 22 (Tübingen, 1842): 608–20. Evidently Elisäus, an Armenian church father of perhaps the sixth century, embellished the pathos of the account, describing how Jephthah decapitated his daughter with a sword, how anguished the father was to lose his beloved daughter, and how stricken Jephthah's compatriots were, too, lifting up their voices as one, "as if heaven and earth were lamenting the death of their only daugh-

There are also other views, however, including some sharply contrasting attitudes about Jephthah and his daughter. In particular, the remarks of Procopius of Gaza are almost unprecedented in their hostility to the pair. Writing around 520, Procopius begins with an uncredited line from Gregory of Nazianzus's fifteenth oration, then proceeds to incorporate motifs he could have found in Chrysostom, Theodoret, or even Pseudo-Philo. Yet all of his borrowings are bent backward: where these other authors found ways to praise at least the daughter, Procopius excoriates both parent and child. Accordingly, the vow is instigated by Satan (Σατανᾶ), who tempted Jephthah to think he would thereby be protected. But it was fundamentally an impious vow, Procopius exclaims: he could have been greeted by a dog, a horse, an ass, or a camel. Despite the superficial resemblance of Jephthah and his daughter to Abraham and Isaac, they compare quite unfavorably with the patriarch and his son, for not only did Abraham never dream of such a sacrifice on his own, but when commanded to such an act, he did not hesitate.[142] Jephthah fails on the first count, having offered a vow insulting to God; his daughter fails on the second, in her reluctance to suffer.

Procopius is unusual, then, not only for faulting the daughter at all but for his willingness to single her out for special contempt. One can only read his words as laced with sarcasm when he adds that "the daughter proves to be worthy of her father, for she did not acquiesce to the vow. Bewailing her virginity more bitterly than any dirge, she preferred not the pious offering of her mortal life, but rather that the sacrifice to God would be ever delayed. This is why God does not stop the slaughter: for she was not like Isaac, nor was her father like Abraham."[143] The moral is clear: vows are not to be made lightly but, once made, they are to be fulfilled with alacrity. And if the lesson seems harsh, Procopius thinks it was also successful, for he goes on to assert (with Chrysostom, probably) that no pious person ever repeated Jephthah's mistake. In any case, Procopius insists not only that Jephthah's vow played no part in his victory but also that his anointing with the spirit bore no relation to his vow.

There is, however, a postscript. Just when Procopius appears on the verge of leaving Jephthah and his daughter in all their haplessness, he suddenly turns back to report that "some say" the daughter willingly submitted to her father's decree rather than falsify his vow, so that not only was she "blameless" in the matter but she also fulfilled "a type of the holy and saving sacrifice" — assuredly, the increasingly familiar type of the death of Christ. Yet Procopius is curiously detached; his account reports the typology rather than argues for it, and he prefers to end by reiterating that

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ter, an unbearable sacrifice on an illegal altar." Elisäus goes on to insist that Jephthah is on the list of saints in Hebrews 11 not because of his deed but in spite of it. See Sever J. Voicu, "Elisaeus, Doctor (Elise vardapet)," *EEC* 1:268.

[142] Procopius of Gaza, *Commentarii in Judices* 11:30 (PG 87:1069) The comparison further admits that Jephthah did, indeed, love his daughter as Abraham had loved his son, but Jephthah's piety was like a lifeless corpse (τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας νεκρόν). Procopius's rebuke of the daughter's hesitation is redolent also of Ambrose, leading one to wonder less about Ambrose's influence than the possibility of a common earlier source.

[143] Procopius, *Comm. Jud.* 11·30 (PG 87:1069/1072)· Καὶ ἡ θυγάτηρ ἀξία γίνεται τοῦ πατρός. Οὐ γὰρ ἔστερξε τὴν εὐχὴν, οὐ τὴν εὐσεβῆ προσφορὰν τῆς θνητῆς ζωῆς προετίμησε, πικρότερον παντὸς θρήνου τὴν παρθενίαν πενθήσασα, μᾶλλον δὲ τὴν Θεῷ θυσίαν προσάγεσθαι μέλλουσαν.

such a human sacrifice was never repeated, never approved by any law, and never desired by God.

Procopius is alleged both to have used Theodoret and to have held him in some contempt,[144] so that one might wonder if his unusual hostility toward Jephthah's daughter manifests a reaction of some sort, though it is hard to see what would be gained: many had already vilified Jephthah in order to isolate and declaim his deed without feeling compelled to denigrate the daughter as well. Procopius's animosity is odd, moreover, because despite his arguably Alexandrian or Origenist sympathies, he still ends in full concert with his Antiochene predecessors (or rivals), namely, by stressing that Jephthah's deed was atrocious and that Abraham furnishes no precedent, then or now.

Jephthah's Daughter in the West: From Augustine to the Gloss

The story of Jephthah and his daughter was rarely read in the West without due homage paid to Augustine, whose contribution was simply too bulking to ignore. Yet it is clear that Augustine did not satisfy all of his readers. Many later interpreters were fond of supplementing Augustine's typology with a variation proposed by Isidore of Seville, and the story found other independent solutions and applications even among Augustine's closest followers.

Some Non-Augustinian Readings. An early case in point derives from Quodvultdeus, Augustine's young friend and later the bishop of Carthage. Writing around 450, he repudiates Jephthah's rash presumption and audacity, then asks why God did not intervene as he did in the case of Abraham and Isaac. Quodvultdeus proposes that, in the first place, Jephthah (unlike Abraham) undertook this vow voluntarily; he was not tested by God but rather, in a sense, Jephthah put God to the test. In the second place, Jephthah's careless promise could have led him to immolate a potentially unlawful victim. These are all conventional answers that Quodvultdeus could have garnered from his mentor,[145] and it is only in expounding the figurative meaning of Judges 11 that Quodvultdeus offers Latin readers something new. Specifically, not only does he follow Augustine and others in seeing Jephthah as a figure of Christ, who offered up his virginal flesh for our redemption, but — beyond this — he portrays the daughter, too, as a figure of Christ in her own right. Accordingly, the daughter's withdrawal to the mountains to mourn with her friends is compared to Christ's ascent with his friends to the Mount of Olives, where he prayed and sweat drops of blood before his passion.[146] Thus, although Methodius (and maybe Ephraem) had previously identified Jephthah's daughter with the flesh of Christ, Quodvultdeus is apparently the first Latin commentator to make such an identification in explicit terms, potentially supplanting the Augustinian linking of the daughter to the virgin church. Moreover, by extending the type so as to identify Jephthah's daughter with Christ—and not just with his flesh—Quodvultdeus demonstrates how difficult it was for a properly orthodox theologian to separate the two natures of Christ, whether the formulation be credal or typological.[147]

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[144] See Irmscher, "Procopius of Gaza," *EEC* 2:713, also *ODCC*^{3} 1334.

[145] Quodvultdeus, *Liber de promissionibus et prædictionibus Dei* 2.20 36 (CCSL 60.105–6, PL 51·789). Note, however, that in his *De tempore barbarico I* 4.4 (CCSL 60.428), Jephthah is praised, along with the sacrifice of his daughter, for the zeal with which he overcame enemies who themselves "sacrificed to gods and demons."

[146] Quodvultdeus, *De prom. et prædict.* 2 20.37–38 (CCSL 60:106–8, PL 51:789–90).

By contrast, Peter Chrysologus, another successor of Augustine and a contemporary of Quodvultdeus, seems to read neither of these sources very carefully. In a sermon, he used the example of Abraham and Isaac to urge his hearers to trust that the commands of their heavenly Father are indeed directed to their own good, then proceeded in unqualified fashion to commend Jephthah's daughter, "who with complete joy paid off her father's obligation by her own death."[148] The result is an odd collapsing of the two stories, as if there were no moral or scriptural complications to be found in Judges 11.

In the sixth century, a commentary on Paul from the school of Cassiodore is actually closer to Chrysostom than Augustine in locating the "cautionary" aspect of the tale in the annual commemoration for Jephthah's daughter, whereby a warning was regularly imparted—presumably to the maidens' parents—lest anyone ever again foolishly (*stulte*) think God is pleased by human blood.[149] In Britain, also in the sixth century, the story was given a quick moral by the monk and historian Gildas, who thought Jephthah compared favorably to the self-indulgent clergy of his own day. Accordingly, Jephthah's sacrifice imitated a Pauline selflessness, in that he suppressed his own pleasure and carnal desires—of which the daughter and her celebration were symbolic.[150] Yet another relatively non-Augustinian reading is presented in the mid-ninth century by Paschasius Radbertus, the abbot of Corbie, who draws upon the story in a way reminiscent of Ambrose in order to enlist ecclesiastical virgins. Remarkably, his comments arise in the course of expounding Psalm 45, in which verses 10–15 describe the princess who is led to the king.[151] Radbert uses the occasion to craft an extravagant exhortation to girls to comply with their parents' vows to commit them to the cloister. To this end, he pulls out all the stops, invoking the obedience of Isaac at Mt. Moriah as an example worthy of imitation.

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[147] One might well argue that Shuger makes too much of the distinction between Jephthah's daughter as a type of Christ versus merely a type of Christ's flesh. Noting how Isidore portrays her as only the latter (see next paragraph), Shuger concludes that "the daughter simply disappears into the flesh of her father; she possesses no independent existence, and therefore her sacrifice poses no moral dilemma." But Quodvultdeus illustrates how easily an allegorist might slide between these two images; he also corrects the misimpression that Jephthah's daughter was not seen as a type of Christ prior to George Buchanan in the sixteenth century and Louis Cappel in the seventeenth. See Shuger, *Renaissance Bible*, pp. 144 and 148 n. 105.

[148] Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon* 55 (PL 52:353), reading in full: "Hinc Jephte filia patris munus, patris vota, sua morte tota gratulatione persolvit."

[149] See [Pseudo-] Primasius of Hadrumetum, *Commentaria in Epistolas S. Pauli* (PL 68:771): "Jepthe fidem habuit, pugnando contra filios Ammon et in filiam suam offerendo, licet in hoc stulte egisset, quod omnipotentem Deum sanguinem humanum fundens putavit placare. . . . Sed potest quaeri qua de causa mos inoleverit ut omni anno virgines Hebraeorum plorent filiam Jepthe: quae ista cognoscitur esse ratio, ut dum cernunt deplorari illam a filiabus suis, nemo ad tantam stultitiam tantumque piaculum audeat prosilire, ut Deo sanguinem fundat humanus." On the attribution of this work, see ODCC^3 1327.

[150] To be sure, in such a mixture of the allegorical and literal, one is left wondering—if the daughter is really only a symbol for Jephthah's own carnal desires—what or who was then actually sacrificed. Of course, the elliptical reference to Jephthah is but one in a series of counterexemplars offered See Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae* 3.4 (PL 69:371): "Quis ut adversariorum plebi Dei immunem prosternere gentium millia, unicam filiam quae propria voluptas intelligitur, imitans et in hoc Apostolum dicentem: Non quaerens quod mihi utile est, sed quod multis, ut salvi fiant (I Cor. X, 33), obviantem victoribus cum tympanis et choris, id est carnalibus desideriis, in sacrificium votivae placationis, ut Jephte, mactavit?"

> But perhaps you will say, "[Isaac was able to do this] because he was a man." Turn your mind, then, to the daughter of Jephthah, who, lest she frustrate her father's vow, offered herself in death because her father "opened his mouth." Not only did she not flee, she exhorted her father to perform what he promised to God. So too should you, beloved girls, fulfill in yourselves the happy vows of your parents. "Fulfill what you have vowed to God" [Eccl. 5:4]. Persevere in the temple with Samuel, who lived as the Lord's Nazarite to the end of his days.[152]

The ease with which Radbert can invoke human sacrifice in order to recruit nuns reminds us not only of several earlier speeches and poems that juxtapose Jephthah's daughter with Christian virgins, but also of the traditional rhetoric that had long characterized Christian asceticism as a "bloodless" martyrdom.

Isidore and His Imitators. If Radbert seems untouched by Augustine's exegesis, the same was not true of his seventh-century predecessor Isidore of Seville, who effectively repackaged Augustine in a compact and influential way. Isidore's comments are almost exclusively typological. Reiterating the parallel Augustine had noted between Jephthah's rejection by his brethren and Christ's rejection by the Jews, he moves beyond Augustine to represent Jephthah's daughter as the flesh of Christ, offered in fulfillment of an oath (*sacramentum*) that "the Father swore and the Son [*Unigenitum*] vowed."[153] Elsewhere, Isidore added the literal and epigrammatic gloss that Jephthah was "successful in his battles, faithful in his promises, overcoming tender feeling through mental endurance."[154] Though modern readers may blanch at such untroubled admiration for a man who killed his daughter, Isidore clearly is not disposed to question the necessity of Jephthah's sacrifice, any more than he would rethink the necessity or the contours of the death of Christ: as scriptural accounts, both exempla are simply given.

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[151] Radbert is expounding verse 14, but verse 10 is also in sight: "[10] Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house, [11] and the king will desire your beauty . . . [13] The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes; [14] in many-colored robes she is led to the king; behind her the virgins, her companions, follow" (NRSV).

[152] Radbertus, *Expositio in psalmum XLIV*, §3 (PL 120:1052, CCCM 94, line 672).

[153] Isidore introduces God the Father under the cover of Psalm 132:2, and though he stops short of reidentifying Jephthah with the divine Father, the ambiguity remains ripe for the sort of development already found in Quodvultdeus. See Isidore, *Quaest.* 7.1–3 on Judges 11 (PL 83:388–89). Pseudo-Bede repeats this passage, changing only half a dozen words, in his *Quæstiones in Librum Judicum* §7 (PL 93 428). The same allegory is concisely repeated in Isidore's *Allegoriæ Quædam Sacræ Scripturæ* 79 (PL 83:111).

[154] Isidore of Seville, *De ortu et obitu patrum* 30 (PL 83:139): "Jephte Galaadites, felix praeliis, fidelis in promissis, affectum pietatis exsuperans tolerantia mentis." To this brief sentence, Isidore adds three more to fill in the details of Judges 11. An equally approving and pithy gloss is offered by Sedulius Scotus, a contemporary of Radbert and Rabanus, who explains (apropos of Hebrews 11) how Jephthah exercised faith *offerente filiam suam contraque moab pugnante*, that is, "by offering his daughter and by fighting against Moab." In other words, he is there because he offered his daughter—not in spite of it, as if the act were a lapse of faith; see his *Collectanea in Omnes B. Pauli Epistolas* on Hebrews 11 (PL 103:268, CCCM 67:268.52).

Isidore proved to be a resource for centuries to come, perhaps owing to the way his depiction of Jephthah's daughter as the flesh of Christ had simplified Augustine's more complicated interpretation, while still preserving the compelling typology Augustine had drawn between Jephthah and Jesus. At any rate, it is clear that Isidore's interpretation eclipsed that of Quodvultdeus: Jephthah's daughter was ever after almost always a type of Christ's humanity rather than simply of Christ himself. Echoes of Isidore are unmistakable in Ambrose Autpert's eighth-century discussion of Jephthah as one of many types of Christ, as his appeal to Psalm 132 further proves, and perhaps also in Ado of Vienne.[155] An editorial archetype of sorts is established about this time by Raban Maur, whose ostensibly weighty commentary on Judges is really nothing but questions 48 and 49 from Augustine, spliced onto an opening paragraph that reproduces the text of Isidore's allegory.[156] As we will see, Rabanus selected the very same passages that would form the account of Jephthah's daughter in the *Ordinary Gloss* three centuries later.

Raban Maur. There is more to the views and exegesis of Rabanus, however, than his plagiarism of Augustine and Isidore. If for nothing else, one should at least credit him for the sheer diversity of his borrowings: in addition to copying Augustine and Isidore in his own commentary on Judges, he also availed himself of virtually every major Latin source on Jephthah's daughter, incorporating mostly uncredited excerpts from Jerome's commentary on Jeremiah, Augustine's reflections on Jephthah in *The City of God,* Ambrose's description of Jephthah's "miserable necessity," and even Ambrosiaster's account of how Jephthah is an example not for his vow but for his perseverence. And it is but one of Rabanus's idiosyncracies that these four Fathers are parceled out among four separate works, unmingled and without conflation.[157] Yet Rabanus can also write originally. Ambrosiaster's commentary on Paul stopped short of Hebrews, so Rabanus evidently came up with his own material, writing colloquially of Jephthah's shortcomings. "Some fault Paul here for putting Barak, Samson, and Jephthah among these others. What do you say? Having listed [Rahab the] harlot here, should he not list *them?* And don't tell me that their way of life was different at that time. If they hadn't believed [they wouldn't be listed here], even if they weren't all that strong in their faith."[158] His greatest original outburst, however, is occasioned by an attack he perceived on the *Rule of St. Benedict*, and specifically on the practice of offering children to a monastery at a young age.[159] Rabanus is quick in his defense and writes at some length on behalf of the acceptability of consigning children to religious service. To this end, he constructs an a fortiori case that draws on Judges 11 as precedent of sorts. In brief, if God approved of Jephthah's literal sacrifice of his child, how much more should we approve of offering children as living and spiritual sacrifices—a clear allusion to Rom. 12:1. What gives one pause, however, is his facile assumption not only that Jephthah was divinely endorsed but also that such sacrifices were generally unproblematic:

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[155] Ambrose Autpert, *Expositio in Apocalypsin* 5 prologue (CCCM 27, lines 634–49). Cf. Ado of Vienne (ca. 875), *Chronicon* (PL 123:42): "In Jephte filia virgine, carnis Christi immolatio virginis et in resurrectione totius corruptionis absorptio."

[156] Raban Maur, *Commentaria in librum Judicum* 2.15 (PL 108:1177–90); Isidore's text is also reproduced in Rabanus's *De universo* 3 (PL 111:57).

[157] In Rabanus's *Expositio super Jer.* 4.7 on 7:30–31 (PL 111:865), Jerome's *Comm. Jer.* 2.45.4 is cited to argue that Jephthah's intention and not his sacrifice pleased God. Augustine's *Civ. Dei* 1.21 appears in Rabanus's *Comm 2 Macc.* 14:37–46 (PL 109:1255) as a comment on the self-martyrdom of Razis. Ambrose's *De officiis* 3.12 (on bad vows) appears in Rabanus's *Poenitentium liber ad Otgarium* 21 (PL 112:1415), cited there by way of Canon 2 from the eighth Council of Toledo. Ambrosiaster's *Comm. 1 Cor.* 15:30 appears in Rabanus's commentary on the same text, §11.15 (PL 112:148).

> What, my friends, do they say to this? Their whole discourse is intent on mocking our order! Yet who is so foolish and perverse as to say that it was a sacrilege for Jephthah to offer his daughter for the sake of the vow that he vowed to God? When, after all, scripture says that he did this after the spirit of God came upon him, and especially when the Apostle Paul numbers him in the catalog of saints in his epistle to the Hebrews. Indeed, if it was licit for the fathers in their day to offer a son or daughter by the sword, why isn't it licit for the men of our own age merely to consecrate their offspring to God spiritually, and to hold up a sacrifice living, holy, and pleasing to God as a reasonable act of the worship of Christ?[160]

In all likelihood, Rabanus has been carried away in this early treatise by polemical excess. None of his many later references to Jephthah's sacrifice are nearly as brazen, nor nearly as original, suggesting that perhaps he found a certain chastening as he absorbed more traditional interpretations. All in all, Rabanus's is an impressive repertoire of exegesis, replicating almost the full spectrum of views. And if it is therefore impossible to locate the center of his exegesis, much less assay his personal interest in the narrative, it is at least assured that Jephthah's daughter was often on his mind.

The Glosses. As was the case with Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21, the sources of Raban Maur's commentary on Judges 11 proved to coincide with what the compiler of the *Glossa Ordinaria* also selected—two questions from Augustine and a paragraph from Isidore, reorganized according to the order of the verses of Judges 11 and condensed or paraphrased in many places. The *Interlinear Gloss* is even more one-dimensional, constituting nothing more than a necklace of odd-sized pearls culled from Augustine.[161] Nonetheless, it would be wrong to conclude from Augustine's dominance of the *Glosses* that he was given the last word on Jephthah's daughter. As we have seen, at least a few writers of the early Middle Ages still read Ambrose, Jerome, and the pseudo-Augustinian views of Ambrosiaster. Likewise, Judges 11 continued to serve as a warrant for parents desirous of placing their daughters in a convent, thereby ensuring that the allegorical-ascetic reading remained alive, with some thanks owed probably to Ambrose. And the popularity of Isidore's typology — wherein Jephthah's daughter represents the flesh of Christ rather than the church, as Augustine had proposed — further suggests that Augustine's medieval successors did not regard his figurative exegesis as beyond improvement.

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[158] Rabanus, *Expositio in Heb.* 29.11 on 11 32 (PL 112:804, emphasis mine): "In hoc loco culpant Paulum quidam, quoniam Barach et Samson et Jephthen inter istos constituit. Quid dicis? meretricem ponit, istos non ponat? Nec mihi nunc dicas aliam vitam eorum, sed si non crediderunt, etsi non claruerunt in fide." The last sentence is a bit obscure, but not fatally so.

[159] The practice is addressed by §59 of the *Rule of St. Benedict* (see, e.g., LCC 12:328).

[160] Rabanus, *De oblatione puerorum* (PL 107:426–27) "Ad haec quid respondent isti amici mei, quorum sermo totus versus est in suggillationem ordinis nostri? Quis ergo tam stultus et tam perversus est, ut hunc Jephte sacrilegum esse dicat, pro eo quod filiam propter votum quod Deo vovit, obtulerit? cum Scriptura dicat hoc eum fecisse facto super eum spiritu Dei; maxime cum Paulus apostolus in Epistola quam ad Hebraeos scripsit eum in catalogo sanctorum enumeret Si enim patribus illius temporis licuit per ferrum filium aut filiam Deo offerre, cur non modo licet istius aevi hominibus sobolem suam Deo spiritualiter consecrare, et exhibere hostiam vivam, sanctam, Deo placentem, rationabiliter in obsequium Christi? Si autem Abrahae oblatio placuit Deo, et Jephte factum meritum sanctitatis illi acquisivit, cur non multo magis spiritualis oblatio per evangelicam doctrinam instituta Deo placere credenda est?"

Jephthah's Daughter in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Commentaries

The same might be said of Augustine's casuistry. A survey of twelfth- and thirteenth-century writings (that is, besides the *Glosses*) demonstrates that the story's unresolved moral issues continued to elicit original commentary, and with increasing attention to exegetical nuance. Only rarely is attention focused directly on the daughter. Preaching in defense of Christian virginity, Baldwin, archbishop of Canterbury in the late twelfth century, reopened the question of the daughter's two-month delay. Observing at the outset that there are various interpretations, Baldwin admitted that if she were merely lamenting her failure to leave behind an heir, her "virginity" is scarcely of religious significance. But Baldwin's eyesight is keen enough to notice what must have been brushed aside by the earlier accusations of Ambrose and Procopius, namely, that the daughter's request to postpone the sacrifice follows hard on the heels of her insistence that Jephthah keep his promise. In recognition of such integrity, Baldwin overturns the objection just raised and concludes instead that "she seems to have intended something noble [*altum quid*] — and whatever it may have been, God, the inspector of hearts, knew."[162]

Commentators of this period give even more notice to Jephthah's actions, especially in light of the apparent conflict between Judges 11 and Hebrews 11. The tension is subtly acknowledged in a passing comment by Guibert of Nogent early in the twelfth century. Extolling how faith and perseverance contribute to true penitence and change of life, Guibert claims that this is the sort of faith that the Apostle's review commends in "almost all the patriarchs . . . so that even Rahab and Jephthah are numbered there, whose claims to have such praiseworthy faith are more obscure than the rest."[163] It is a backhanded compliment: Jephthah and Rahab must have had great faith, since they are listed in Hebrews, but Guibert admits that their "faith" is at best "obscure." In midcentury, Peter Lombard solves the problem perhaps too easily, asserting that the Apostle lauds the faith by which Jephthah won his battle, not his sacrifice.[164] By contrast, Peter Comestor, the Lombard's disciple, erects a fence around Jephthah's vow by suggesting that he may well have been a good man prior to his rash promise — after all, the spirit of the Lord did come upon him, implying that he was worthy of such a blessing — and he may well have been a good man after the vow, as his presence in Hebrews 11 suggests.[165] Alan of Lille, defending the saints of the Old Testament from Catharist heretics later in the twelfth century, similarly concludes that Jephthah "freed himself from his sin through repentance."[166] And Philip of Harvengt may not know just exactly what Jephthah did to please God — he knows nothing to suggest that God welcomed the daughter's death — but he is quite sure that, somehow, Jephthah did please God: "it is impious for anyone to doubt this" in light of Hebrews 11.[167] All these writers highlight the prominent role given to Hebrews 11 in even the briefest considerations of Jephthah, and one may conclude that the scandal of unreconciled canonical texts was at least as problematic as Jephthah's vow. The same course will be followed a century later by Hugh of St. Cher, who calls attention also to Jephthah's exemplary conduct in seeking peace with the Ammonites in verse 12. Hugh by no means exonerates Jephthah, but he places great store by the testimony of Hebrews 11 and the repentance he assumes it must impute to Jephthah. "From these things," says Hugh — presumably alluding to his careful balancing of Jephthah's evil motivations and deeds against his other good intentions and repentance — "the solution to everything is clear."[168]

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[161] Specifically, the *Interlinear Gloss* on Judges 11 consists of twenty-three separate comments, ranging in length from one word to three sentences. Of these, all but a two-word gloss on 11:7 are from Augustine's forty-ninth question on Judges; cf. fol. 45^v–47^v in the 1545 Lyons edition of Lyra, *Biblia Sacra*. Both *Glosses* on Judges, as well as those on Genesis, are now attributed to Gilbert the Universal and date from the 1120s; see ODCC^3 682 and Smalley, *Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, p. 60.

[162] Baldwin (d. 1190), *Sermon* 13.36 (CCCM 99, line 322; cf. PL 204:475): "Verumtamen altum quid — quicquid illud sit, quod nouit inspector cordis, Deus — cogitasse uidetur, que patri suo dixerit: 'Pater mi, si aperuisti os tuum ad Dominum . . .'"

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[163] Guibert of Nogent (ca. 1053/65–ca. 1125), *De sanctis et eorum pigneribus* 1.2.3 (PL 156:619, CCCM 127, line 295): "Haec est ergo illa fides, quam in omnibus pene precedentibus patriarchis tanta replicatione commendat apostolus, ut etiam Raab et iepte connumeret, qui fidei tantopere predicatae obscuriores admodum caeteris causas habent."

[164] Peter Lombard, *Comm. Heb.* 11 (PL 192:497): "nec laudatur Jephte quod filiam occidit, sed quod per fidem Deo juvante hostes superavit." To this sentence, which is almost certainly borrowed from Lanfranc of Canterbury (PL 150:401), Lombard then splices one of the usual excerpts from Augustine (*City of God* 1.21).

[165] Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica* §12 on Judges 11 (PL 198:1284). The Comestor also bequeaths to his successors a very loose paraphrase of Jerome (he says Josephus, but the misattribution is usually amended tacitly or ignored), namely, "Arguit Josephus Jephte, quia obtulit holocaustum non legitimum, nec Deo charum. Quid si canem obvium habuisset, immolasset eum Domino? Fuit ergo in vovendo stultus, in solvendo impius." The last sentence is especially common in other writers. An even more convoluted consideration of Jephthah's deed, ending at about the same place, is offered by Peter of Poitiers (who completed Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*) in his *Sententiarum Libri Quinque* 1.10.30 (PL 211: 831–32).

[166] Alan of Lille, *De fide catholica contra hæreticos libri quatuor* 1.38 (PL 210:344): "Jephte quoque quoniam eum Apostolus commendat, similiter per pœnitentiam se a peccato liberavit."

[167] Philip of Harvengt, *De Institutione Clericorum* 5.38 (PL 203:926): "Quod autem idem Jephte Deo placuerit, non est fas quempiam dubitare, cum eum in sanctorum Catalogo inveniatur apostolus nominare." Philip's deliberations are all the more remarkable, given his explicit search here for exceptions, special commands, and hidden counsels (*exceptiones . . . jussio specialis . . . occulto quodam consilio*) in the cases of Abraham, Samson, and others.

[168] Hugh of St. Cher, *Comm. Jud.* 11:12, 29–31 (*Opera* 1.205^{v}–6^{v}). Jephthah's just conduct in war had similarly been argued a century earlier by Hervé de Bourgdieu; see next paragraph.

There is another popular line of argument in the twelfth century, however, that endeavors not so much to salvage Jephthah's reputation from the vow as if from a momentary lapse, but rather to excuse the vow itself on the grounds of a special divine dispensation. This argument, too, is fueled largely by the testimonies of Heb. 11:32 and Jud. 11:29, but here there is no balancing at all. Instead, the scales tip wholly in Jephthah's favor: for what is normally wrong, Augustine wrote, is praiseworthy if divinely commanded. Accordingly, Hugh of St. Victor argues that "a hidden divine prompting" is the only possible explanation that would acquit Jephthah of perversely imitating the worship of Molech.[169] Similarly, Hervé de Bourgdieu appeals to Jephthah's success in war as proof of some sort of special approval: "The Lord knows secret causes on account of which such a sacrifice could have been pleasing to him."[170] Andrew of St. Victor follows his colleague Hugh:

> Anything someone vows reasonably (indeed, unreasonable and foolish ones are to be broken) ought to be paid. Jephthah, when he paid his unreasonable and foolish vow and impiously took care to fulfill what he foolishly promised (unless maybe he had a personal command of the Holy Spirit and was relying on its authority), did not hesitate to fulfill even such a vow.[171]

The two views of Jephthah could scarcely stand in greater contrast: Andrew finds Jephthah unreasonable, foolish, and impious, but all of this vituperation is provisional, pending the question of secret divine inspiration — a question that leads even Peter Comestor to challenge his own account of Jephthah's fall and repentance by juxtaposing the view of "some" (*quidem*) that Jephthah was guided by a private word from the Holy Spirit.[172] Naturally, it would be no surprise to find the argument from special permission combined with appeals to Jephthah's presumed good intention as a further ameliorating factor — though, notably, it was never argued that the sacrifice of his daughter was good per se.[173] No one, however, brought the appeal to divine dispensation together with so many other avenues of excuse as compactly as did

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[169] Hugh of St. Victor, *Adnotatiunculæ Elucidatoriæ in Librum Judicum* (PL 175:92): "Ritum gentilium secutus humanum sanguinem vovit, sicut postea legimus regem Moab filium suum immolasse super muros. Hoc ergo contra legem, nisi forte occulto instinctu divino excusetur, ut recte ab Apostolo inter sanctos numeratus sit." As noted above, Hugh's *De filia Jephthe* (PL 177:323–34) is identical to Augustine's *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49 except for minor changes in wording, paragraphing, and punctuation. The *Quaestiones et decisiones in epistolas D. Pauli* (attributed to Hugh by PL 175, but questioned by Penna, "Vow of Jephthah," p. 168 n. 1), in qq. 112 and 114, also declaim Jephthah's deed with vehemence but leave open the possibility of an all-excusing secret dispensation (*occulto monitu . . . instinctu divino*); see PL 175:631.

[170] Hervé de Bourgdieu (d. 1150), *Commentaria in Epistolas Divi Pauli* on Heb. 11.32 (PL 181:1659): "Novit enim Dominus secretas causas, propter quas tale sacrificium ei placere potuit."

[171] Andrew of St. Victor, *Expositio historica in Ecclesiasten* 5:3 (CCCM 53B, lines 884–85).

[172] Comestor, *Comm. Jud.* 11 (ch. 12, PL 198:1284): "quidem tamen excusantes eum, familiari consilio Spiritus sancti dicunt eum hoc fecisse."

[173] Indeed, it would probably be easy to demonstrate that the most common descriptor used in connection with Jephthah is "foolish" or "stupid" (*stultus*). Question 112 of Hugh's *Quaestiones . . . in epistolas D. Pauli* (PL 175:631; cf. n. 169, in this chapter) is typical: "He acted foolishly by what he vowed, but more foolishly by fulfilling it." Yet the very next question reiterates the vow's essentially uncontested tragic effect. "Why did the Hebrew virgins make a lament every year in remembrance of the death of that girl? Answer: For the sake of an example, lest anyone should ever again vow or do something so foolish from which such sorrow might follow."

Thomas Aquinas, a century later. Citing Jerome's harsh condemnation of Jephthah (via Peter Comestor), Thomas softens it considerably yet without revoking it:

> The Scripture says that *the Spirit of the Lord came upon him,* because his faith and devotion which moved him to make the vow were from the Holy Spirit. For this reason, because of the victory he won and because he probably repented of his sinful deed (which, however, prefigured something good), he is placed in the catalogue of the saints.[174]

In other words, Aquinas sustains Jerome's condemnation of Jephthah, then adds virtually every possible qualification, including appeals to Jephthah's integrity, divine dispensation, validation by results, his later repentance, and his typological significance.

Figurative treatments of the passage in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries often added new details to old allegories. For instance, Godfrey, abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Admont, repeated the traditional interpretation of Jephthah's daughter as a type of the humanity of Christ, but in a manner that will jar the sensibilities of modern readers. Christ's divinity—or, in the larger context, God the Father—tends and oversees the humanity of Christ, Godfrey writes, "just as a father protects his daughter."[175] The simile is a tender one, until it is recalled that Jephthah was his daughter's executioner, after all. But the simile also exposes a rift between the Middle Ages and our own day, insofar as Godfrey (like Isidore and others) can easily slide from a consideration of domestic relations, whether human or divine, to the question of sacrificial death—again, human or divine—with virtually no seams showing.

Other images emerge from the comments of Rupert of Deutz, who presents separate tropological and typological readings, both dubiously attributed to John Chrysostom. Morally, he writes, "each of us ought to be a Jephthah," so that once we have triumphed over our enemies, the delights of the flesh, we may return victorious to God, tearing the vestments of our evil thoughts and offering up for mortification our "only soul" (alluding to Jephthah's only daughter).[176] Typologically, Jephthah also prefigures Christ, who offered up the church "as an only victim" through the immolation of the martyrs during the time of persecution. Once again it is evident how fluidly the image of Jephthah shifts from the portrait of Christ to that of God the Father: "The only [son] offers the only [daughter]; the bridegroom offers the bride; the father offers the daughter."[177]

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[174] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* II-II, q. 88, a. 2, "Should a vow always be made concerning a greater good?" *ad* 2 (London: Blackfriars, 1964), 39:162–63. The remarks here develop what Thomas had said earlier in his commentary on Heb. 11:32; see his *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura* §630 (Rome: Marietti, 1953), 2:474.

[175] Godfrey of Admont (d. 1165), *Dominical Homily* 3 (PL 174:33–34): "Per *filiam Jephte* humanitas Christi designatur, quam ille suæ divinitatis procuratione, uti pater filiam tuetur. Dicit ergo filia patri, loquitur humanitas Christi Deo Patri . . ." Godfrey goes on to explain the two months as symbolizing a whole list of other pairings, e.g., the Old Testament and the New, the salvation of Jews and Gentiles, the redemption of body and soul, the love of God and neighbor, the active and the contemplative life, and the patriarchs and the prophets.

[176] Rupert of Deutz, *De trin.* 21.12 on Judges 11 (PL 167:1040–41).

[177] Rupert of Deutz, *De trin.* 21.12 on Judges 11 (PL 167:1041). The Latin is more succinct: "Offert unicus, unicam: sponsus, sponsam: pater, filiam." The typology is not original, of course, but is traceable to Augustine.

In the mid-thirteenth century, Hugh of St. Cher elaborates various morals, all focusing on the mortification of the flesh. Jephthah is thus an allegory of the "contemplative" who sacrifices his flesh that he may live in Christ. Similarly, the daughters of Israel represent "all faithful souls" who lament their sins of the flesh "and annually renew penance for four days." The days themselves symbolize contrition, confession, satisfaction, and (finally) supererogation, suggesting that the faithful souls Hugh had in mind were those in pursuit of a religious vocation. Hugh's "mystical" or typological exegesis is more intriguing: though there is nothing new in seeing Jephthah's daughter as a type of Christ's flesh, Hugh further depicts the annual lament of the daughters of Israel as a type of Lent, when the church annually mourns "the passion of its Bishop."[178] Hugh's analogy between the lament that leads to Good Friday and the lament for Jephthah's daughter evidently set an agreeable precedent. Not only does it reappear two centuries later in Denis the Carthusian, it also may have contributed to a panel in Ulrich of Lilienfeld's fourteenth-century *Concordantia Caritatis* (facing page), in which the daughters of Israel are prototypical of the "daughters of Jerusalem" in Luke 23:27–28, who wept for Jesus on his way to the cross.[179]

There are also some arresting statements in these writers that emerge, essentially, as obiter dicta. I have already noted how Hugh of St. Cher assembles many of his considerations from Augustine, then proceeds to offer his own rather casuistic analysis, as well as the typological and allegorical readings just described. But his most striking comment may well be a pithy gloss on Jud. 11:25, where Jephthah asserts, "I cannot do otherwise" than fulfill the vow. In effect, Hugh calls Jephthah a liar: "He spoke wickedly, because he could have [done otherwise] and, moreover, he should have."[180] Surprisingly, our other Hugh — the Victorine, that is, who a century earlier rested his case by appealing to Jephthah's "hidden divine prompting" — apparently had second thoughts, too, observing succinctly that Jephthah left "a cruel example of piety."[181]

Even stronger, though, is an exclamation from Rupert of Deutz. Considering various aspects of the vow, Rupert found Jephthah reprehensible for his thoughtlessness but praiseworthy for seeking victory from God. Then Rupert added a qualification so unexpected, his nineteenth-century editors felt compelled to intervene: "Moreover, even God is inexcusable [*sic*] in this deed, who did not prohibit but that

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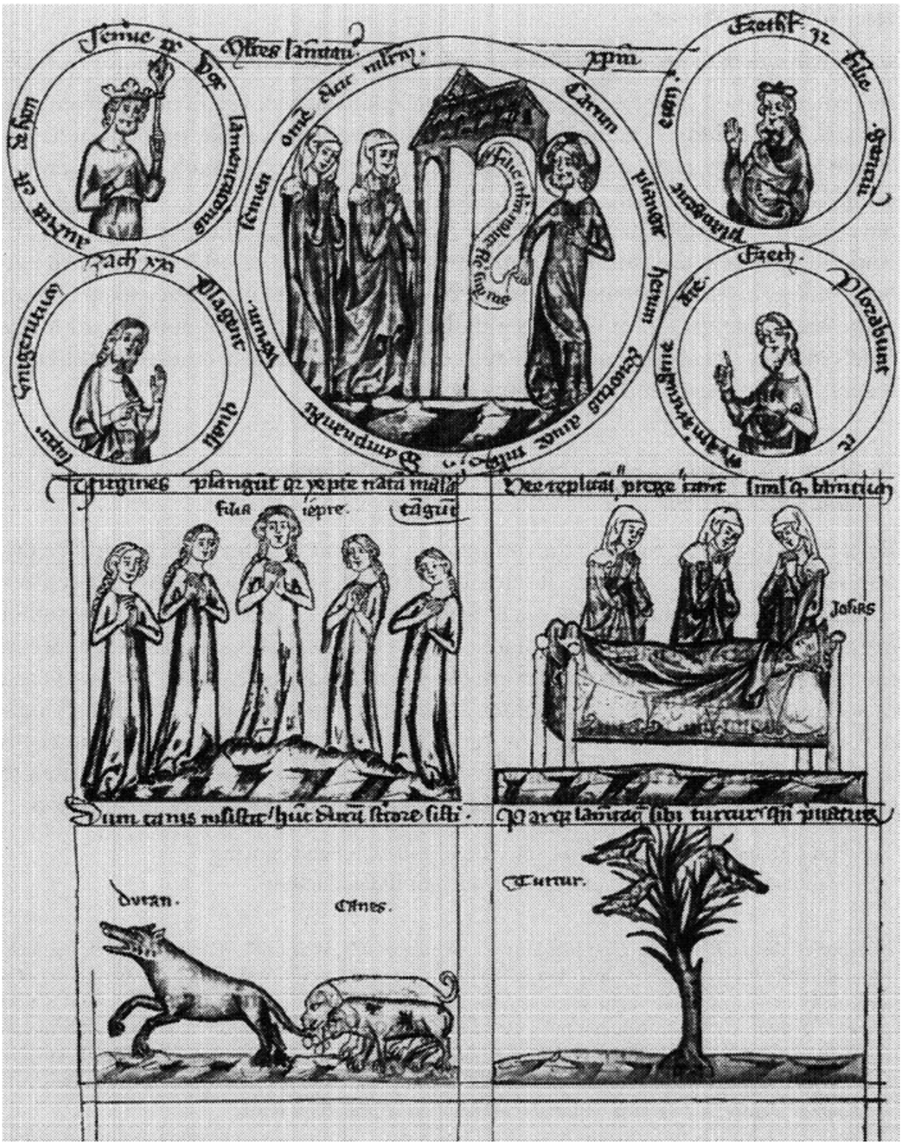
[178] Hugh of St Cher, *Comm. Jud.* 11 (*Opera* 1:206^{v}): "Filia Iepthe caro Episcopi est, quæ immolata est Deo patri. *Filiæ Israel:* id est, sancti singulis annis luctum Ecclesiæ pro Episcopi passione recolunt, diffusæ per quatuor partes orbis." The traditional allegory of Jephthah's daughter as the flesh of Christ recurs also in Martin of Leon, *Sermon* 30 (PL 208:1144–45).

[179] Ulrich of Lilienfeld, *Concordantia Caritatis*, Lilienfeld Stiftsbibliothek ms. 151, fol. 90^{v}. Jephthah's daughter appears likewise in other "concordance" literature of the fourteenth century, especially in the productions of various Austrian monasteries; see Gustav Heider, *Beiträge zur christlichen Typologie aus Bilderhandschriften des Mittelalters* (Vienna: Kaiserlich-Königlichen Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1861), p. 120.

[180] Hugh of St. Cher, *Comm. Jud.* 11:35 (1:206^{v}): "*Aliud facere non potero.* Male dixit, quia posset, & deberet etiam."

[181] Hugh of St. Victor, *De Vanitate Mundi* 4 (PL 176:730): "crudele posteris pietatis relinquens exemplum."



Jephthah's daughter as a type of Christ. In the "concordance" literature of the later Middle Ages, the lament of the daughters of Israel for Jephthah's daughter (left side, upper square) was cited as an adumbration of the lament of women for Christ on his way to the cross (Luke 23:27–28). Also depicted on this panel (fol. 90^v from Abbot Ulrich of Lilienfeld's fourteenth-century manuscript, *Concordantia Caritatis*) are other Old Testament lamentations loosely associated with women, including Jeremiah 9:19, Zechariah 12:10, Ezekiel 32:16, Ezekiel 27:31, and 2 Chronicles 35:24–25. Reprinted by permission of Stiftsbibliothek Lilienfeld and with assistance from Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt (Graz).

he should sacrifice his daughter to him."[182] In fact, those editors need not have worried so, for Rupert goes on to offer the usual explanation for God's nonintervention, namely, that Jephthah's temerity needed punishment and we may profit from his example by avoiding rash vows. Still, Rupert can at least imagine such an intervention as he paraphrases what the angel said to Abraham in Gen. 22:12, words Jephthah never heard: "Do not extend your hand over the *girl,* neither do anything to her."[183] Rupert then offers the pair of figurative readings from "Chrysostom" described earlier. And yet his final sentence seems to concede that, these many exegetical options notwithstanding, Judges 11 remains a darksome tale, one in which it is hard to see God's majesty directing or acting in events. Rupert is obviously relieved to usher his readers on to a less disturbing narrative.[184]

Laments for Jephthah's Daughter: Theodore Prodromus and Peter Abelard

Before moving on to examine the momentous rabbinic argument that would be disseminated by Nicholas of Lyra, it remains to consider a final pair of twelfth-century contributions, both of them less exegetical than poetic: one from the East, the other from the West. Writing after the middle of the century, Theodore Prodromus recast much of the Old Testament in the form of several hundred quatrains. The two verses that depict Jephthah and his daughter are couched in opposition and disturbingly devoid of transcendence. "Happy are you, Jephthah," the first begins, then proceeds to describe the single-mindedness with which he fulfilled what he had promised to God at the cost of his only daughter's life.[185] The second is virtually an antiphon:

> You unhappy maiden! And yet you dance, and with hands waving
> You beat the drum, and you rejoice over your ill-fated father

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[182] Rupert of Deutz, *De trin* 21.12 on Judges 11 (PL 167:1040, CCCM 22:1168): "Porro et Deus in hoc facto inexcusabilis (*sic*) est qui non prohibuit quin ille filiam suam sibi sacrificaret" (Migne's editorial *sic*). Rupert's outburst against God might seem at odds with his later statement (in *De trin.* 40, §7, CCCM 24:2058, PL 167:1771) that Jephthah is to be excused "by the necessity of his vow," but he probably means not that the vow was a necessary act but that, once uttered, the vow was binding on Jephthah. In other words, Jephthah deserves to be numbered in the "catalog of saints" for keeping his vow, not for his prudence.

[183] Rupert of Deutz, *De trin.* 21.12 on Judges 11 (PL 167:1040), emphasis mine.

[184] Rupert of Deutz, *De trin.* 21.12 on Judges 11 (PL 167:1041): "Verum nos ea prætercurrentes, in quibus jubentis desuper vel agentis Domini majestas non effulget, ad illa properemus, in quibus auctore ipso gestis, manifestior mysteriorum pulchritudo perlucet." Rupert's anger is still not exhausted by these citations· in his *Comm. Eccl.* 5·4 (PL 168 1243), Jephthah's deed is branded as "thoroughly despicable" (*vilior*) and "evil," while his *Comm. Micah* 6:6 (PL 168:505) likens it to "the cruellest pagan crime" (*scelus sit crudelissimae gentilitatis*). The latter reference alludes to the king of Moab, who sacrificed his firstborn to turn a battle against Israel in 2 Kings 3:26–27—a standard cross-reference here since Jerome (n. 102), though traces of [Pseudo-] Primasius (n. 149) are also insinuated into the exegetical lore here by way of Haimo of Auxerre's *Expositio in Heb.* 11:32, which copies [Pseudo-] Primasius, and Haimo's *Ennaratio in Mic.* 6·6, which elaborates with elements from Jerome (PL 117:162, 913–14).

[185] Theodore Prodromus, *Tetrasticha in Vetus Testamentum: De Jephte* (PG 133:1141). The full text of the first quatrain is as follows: Μακάριος σὺ τῆς σφαγῆς Ἰεφθάε· | Τὴν παῖδα γάρ σου τὴν μόνην, τὴν παρθένον, | Μηδὲν μελήσας τῷ Θεῷ σφάζων θύεις, | Τὰς εἰς ἐκεῖνον ἐκτελῶν ὑποσχέσεις. ("Happy are you, Jephthah, for the sacrifice: For you slay your girl, your only one, the maiden, Taking thought for nothing, sacrificing her to God, Keeping your promises to him ")

Because the trophy-bearer returns from war:
Truly, he is not willing, but he will cut your throat all the same.[186]

Coming unheralded in the midst of Theodore's concatenated epic, these two epitaphs should not be overinterpreted. But it is hard not to see a measure of considered sarcasm in the first quatrain, and a bitter irony in the second. There is no excusing, no secret inspiration, no moral at the end of either; there are only good and understandable aspirations blindsided by staggering losses. If Theodore does not claim to understand the tragedy of Jephthah and his daughter, he certainly succeeds in recreating its starkness and pathos.

Something similar occurs on a larger scale in the writings of Theodore's near-contemporary, Peter Abelard. As glaciers sometimes deposit massive boulders far from their origins, then melt away, leaving later observers to wonder, so might one regard Abelard's *Lament of the Virgins of Israel over the Daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite*.[187] As an inventive and sympathetic retelling of the story, Abelard's lament or *planctus* is not without precedent, but it stands out as pensive and brooding among the more workmanlike commentaries reviewed so far. Yet Abelard's unusual composition only reflects its peculiar circumstances of origin. Written in the 1130s as one of six biblically inspired laments, it is often read as reflecting the personal calamities that followed upon his disastrous affair with Heloise.

At the same time, however, Abelard's *planctus* is also "a deep dramatic probing" of Jephthah's daughter.[188] This four-part poem is the longest of Abelard's laments. It begins and ends with a chorus of the "virgins of Israel," which (as Peter Dronke has observed) renders the whole lament "an imaginative reconstruction" of the commemoration described at the end of Judges 11.[189] The second part describes the encounter between Jephthah and his daughter, while the third depicts the daughter's musings during her final hours, likening her death to the marriage she will never know.[190] Jephthah's daughter is here depicted as both noble and tragic, and as more complex than what commentary literature usually offers. She is "more to be admired than pitied,"[191] and she upstages her father far and away: whereas in Jud. 11:35 she assents to the terms of the vow, perhaps even reassuring her father, in Abelard she chides her father for his hesitation and urges him to "be a man now in spirit as in sex, not to oppose my glory or your own."[192] Indeed, she compares herself to Isaac, drawing encouragement from her own willingness: "If God did not accept the death of a boy, how much greater the glory if he accepts me, a girl!"[193] The daughter's courage is all the more compelling for its realism; at one point she exclaims how a ritual appropriate for a bride is unbearable by one destined for death, yet she regains self-control and offers herself to her father's sword.[194] The father, however, is utterly condemned by the closing chorus: "O demented mind of a judge, insane persistence of a general! Father, but the enemy of your race, whom you impair through the death of your only one!"[195] Even God is implicated: "If he did not want a victim," urges the daughter to her father, "he would not have let you win."[196] Yet the final stanza returns to emphasize the importance of commemorating Jephthah's daughter: "Tell it, maidens of Israel, remembering that peerless one, the renowned girl of our people — you are greatly ennobled through her."[197] In these last stanzas, the chorus of virgins does two things in quick succession: they censure Jephthah's deed and they offer, as a protest and as an alternative, their own commemoration. In short, "by cherishing and admiring their heroine, they win something of her nobility of mind."[198]

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[186] Theodore, *De Jephte* (PG 133:1141): Παρθενικὴ μελέη σὺ μὲν ὀρχῇ, χερσὶ δὲ σῇσι | Τύμπαν' ὑποκτυπέεις, περὶ πατρὶ δὲ κάμμορε χαίρεις, | Οὕνεκ' ἀπὸ πτολέμοιο τροπαιοφόρος μετανοστεῖ· | Αὐταρ ὅγ' οὐ μὲν ἑκών, ἔμπης δέ σε δειροτομήσει.

[187] Peter Abelard, *Planctus virginum Israelis super filia Jephtæ Galaditæ*. Latin references are taken from the edition of the text reproduced in Wolfram von den Steinen, "Die Planctus Abaelards," pp. 142–44. The somewhat faulty 1838 edition appears in PL 178 1819–20.

[188] Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages: New Departures in Poetry*, 1000–1150 (second ed.; Westfield College, London: University of London Committee for Medieval Studies, 1986), p. 117.

[189] So Alexiou and Dronke, "Lament of Jephtha's Daughter," p. 854; the same point was registered a few years earlier by von den Steinen, "Die Planctus Abaelards," p. 137.

[190] My analysis here is indebted to several studies by Peter Dronke, including his essay with Margaret Alexiou, "Lament of Jephtha's Daughter"; his chapter, "Peter Abelard: *Planctus* and Satire," in *Poetic Individuality*, pp. 114–49, and his early essay, "Medieval Poetry – I: Abélard," *The Listener* (November 25, 1965), pp 841–42, 845. See also the study by von den Steinen, "Die Planctus Abaelards."

[191] "O stupendam plus quam flendam virginem! O quam rarum illi virum similem!" Note how she is favorably compared here to men.

There are many observations one might make here. Alexiou and Dronke, for example, have argued for Abelard's debt to Pseudo-Philo,[199] and it is also Dronke who has eloquently articulated the correlation between the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter and Heloise's sacrifice for Abelard.[200] Yet there are other factors in this equation, too, for Abelard's *planctus* is closely matched by a paragraph in his longest letter to Heloise. There, Jephthah's daughter is but one in a line of female biblical exemplars, stationed between the mother of the seven Maccabean martyrs and the mother of Christ, and we are reminded that Abelard was by no means the first to see the parallels between the death of Jephthah's virgin daughter and the martyrs and ascetics who came after.[201] Abelard's letter is at once a truly original composition—he must have startled some of his readers by proffering that Jephthah's daughter would have stood firm where Peter denied Christ—and also a traditional piece of ascetic propaganda. Long before Abelard, Ambrose and many others had found in Jephthah's daughter a winsome poster-child for the cloistered life, though some of Abelard's contemporaries could also take her to task for falling short of true Christian ascesis.[202] In short, while Abelard's letter largely reiterates the motifs of his *planctus*, it seems to reinscribe Jephthah's daughter far more in terms drawn from the history of interpretation than from his own autobiography.[203]

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[192] "Ut sexu sic animo vir esto nunc, obsecro. Nec mee nec tue obstes glorie . . ." Translation here is that of Dronke, "*Planctus* and Satire," p. 115.

[193] "*Puerum qui respuit, si puellam suscipit, Quod decus sit sexus mei, percipe.*" *Translation here is from* Alexiou and Dronke, "Lament of Jephtha's Daughter," p. 856. Abelard's general understanding of women is very much a mixture of both traditional and progressive views. See Mary McLaughlin, "Abelard and the Dignity of Women," in *Pierre Abélard, Pierre le Vénérable* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1975), pp. 287–334.

[194] Dronke, "*Planctus* and Satire," p. 115; Alexiou and Dronke, "Lament of Jephtha's Daughter," p. 857.

[195] "O mentem amentem iudicis! O zelum insanum principis! O patrem, sed hostem generis, unice quod nece diluit!" Translation is from Dronke, "*Planctus* and Satire," p. 120.

[196] Translation is from Dronke, "Medieval Poetry," p. 842a.

[197] "Hebree dicite virgines insignis virginis memores: inclite puelle Israel hanc valde virgine nobiles." Translation is from Dronke, "*Planctus* and Satire," p. 234.

[198] Alexiou and Dronke, "Lament of Jephtha's Daughter," p. 858

[199] Alexiou and Dronke, "Lament of Jephtha's Daughter," pp. 853–57.

[200] "In the way that Jephtha's daughter goes through with the ordeal of her ceremonial death, in her relentless courage, it is impossible not to think of Abelard's description of Heloise taking the veil, explicitly as a sacrifice for Abelard's sake, and a sacrifice that to her was scarcely distinguishable from dying for him, voluntarily"; Dronke, "*Planctus* and Satire," p. 144. Cf. von den Steinen, "Die Planctus Abaelards," p. 139.

That observation, however, does not necessarily detract from what Dronke has written concerning the overall effect of Abelard's lament:

> As Abelard has presented Jephtha and his daughter, we cannot, strictly, identify with either of them: we can admire her heroism, but deplore the waste and the murder; we can see the torment that his sense of duty causes him, and at the same time with the chorus see that the root of his torment is insane. The one thing we can no longer do after experiencing Abelard's *planctus* is to accept the biblical narrative of the event without questioning its implications.[204]

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[201] Abelard, *Epistle* 7 (PL 178:245): "Quis in laudem virginum vineam illam Jephte filiam assumi non censeat? Quae, ne voti licet improvidi reus pater haberetur, et divinae gratiae beneficium promissa fraudaretur hostia, victorem patrem in jugulum proprium animavit Quid haec, quaeso, in agone martyrum factura esset, si forte ab infidelibus negando Deum apostatare cogeretur? Nunquid interrogata de Christo cum illo jam apostolorum principe diceret: 'Non novi illum?' Dimissa per duos menses a patre libera, his completis redit ad patrem occidenda. Sponte morti se ingerit, et eam magis provocat quam veretur. Stultum patris plectitur votum, et paternum redimit mandatum amatrix maxima veritatis. Quantum hunc in se lapsum abhorreret, quem in patre non sustinet? Quantus hic est virginis fervor tam in carnalem quam in coelestem patrem? Quae simul morte sua et hunc a mendacio liberare, et illi promissum decrevit conservare. Unde merito tanta haec puellaris animi fortitudo praerogativa quadam id meruit obtinere, ut per annos singulos filiae Israel in unum convenientes quasi quibusdam solemnibus hymnis festivas virginis agant exsequias, et de passione virginis compunctae piis planctibus compatiantur."

[202] Thus, Adam the Scot found the grief over her childlessness misplaced, comparing her unfavorably to Christian virgins and the Virgin Mary (*Sermon* 16.3, PL 198:187). Others of this period who disparaged her lament over her virginity include Philip of Harvengt (*De Institutione Clericorum* 6.22, PL 203:980) and Peter of Blois (*Sermon* 63, PL 207:747). By the late thirteenth century, Jephthah's daughter was one of many whose relative inferiority set off the eminence of the Virgin Mary in the popular picture book, *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*: "The doghter of Jepte bewept to be a virgine dede: Marie fande first the avowe of gloriouse maydenhede"; *The Mirour of Mans Saluacioun: A Middle English Translation of Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, ed. Avril Henry (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1986), p. 59.747–48. Cf. Bert Cardon, *Manuscripts of the Speculum Humanae Salvationis in the Southern Netherlands (c. 1410 – c. 1470)* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), p. 363, item 5c. The *Speculum* thus points to the growing displacement of Christ by Mary in late medieval typology (Cardon, p. 27).

[203] Abelard's ability to use Jephthah's daughter as a token for theological argument is further illustrated by his response to the last of the series of questions posed by Heloise and her community. There, Jephthah's daughter makes but a token appearance to illustrate how childlessness was seen as a curse in the Old Testament. See *Heloissae Problemata cum Petri Abaelardi Solutionibus* 42 (PL 178:724). Still another of Abelard's hymns lauds Jephthah's daughter as heroic and virtuous in what amounts to her martyrdom; see Hymns 125.4 and 126.1–2 in *The Hymns of Abelard in English Verse*, trans. Sister Jane Patricia (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1986), p. 132 These three verses on Jephthah's daughter are part of a longer series in praise of various biblical women.

[204] Dronke, "*Planctus* and Satire," p 144.

To be sure, one might counter that quite a few other precritical writers also questioned the implications of the biblical narrative, particularly in light of its troubling silences, even if they followed the more pedestrian byways of the commentary genre. Nonetheless, Abelard's appeal to modern sensibilities is readily understandable,[205] and some have even claimed his advocacy for a twelfth-century form of feminism.[206] While there is an argument to be made for Abelard's "progressive" views about women—as well as another on behalf of his traditionalism—his lament for the daughter of Jephthah is not a treatise in defense of women, nor is it foremost a paean on behalf of Heloise. While conceding that there are "true, and disconcerting, counterpoints" between Abelard's laments and the *Historia Calamitatum,* Dronke[207] has argued that the shaping force behind all the *planctus* is situated less in Abelard's intention to construct a personal allegory than in his personal sense of identification with a series of biblical tragedies: an identification in which his present perception of grief and irony is both invested in the biblical characters and, at the same time, unpacked from the text. Neither the long letter to Heloise nor the last of his "solutions"[208] dilutes the pathos of the lament for Jephthah's daughter; they merely suggest that, as a skilled exegete and theologian, Abelard could employ biblical texts to suit the full range of his purposes. In this, he is not exceptional. Moreover, if Abelard's affair with Heloise furnishes a string of especially provocative correlates for probing his reading of the Bible, there is probably less distance between Abelard's lament for Jephthah's daughter and (say) Luther's saga of Hagar than one might suppose: both men were moved by the story; they saw themselves in it; they employed their own identification with a character as a means to tell her story. And while Abelard and Luther stand out for their respective intensity, it would be gratuitous to prize their prolixity as if it proved they were the only precritical commentators deeply moved by these texts.

In a final touch of irony, however, Abelard can lay little claim to having influenced the course of subsequent exegesis. While a few of Abelard's hymns circulated to other cloisters, his six laments do not seem to have been among them and did not appear in print until 1838.[209] Just like those boulders dropped by glaciers in the middle of nowhere, Abelard's compelling portrait of Jephthah's daughter remained isolated and essentially unknown.

Looking back toward Augustine, one finds that the landscape has indeed been a mixture of sameness and surprise. Most of the Fathers' observations are reiterated, often in verbatim blocks or by selective paraphrase, and all the traditional topics recur: worries about the precedent set by Jephthah's senseless vow, praise for his fidelity to an oath, perplexity over how to square his actions with his heroic status in Hebrews 11; praise for the daughter, worries over her delay and mourning, affirmation of her as a role model for cloistered Christian virginity, reflection — whether pensive or pro forma — over the "mystery" of Christ's sacrifice that is mirrored by the story in whole or part.

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[205] On this and the following point see also von den Steinen, "Die Planctus Abaelards," pp. 137, 139.

[206] Some of these claims and sources are discussed in McLaughlin, "Abelard and the Dignity of Women," esp. pp. 291–94. Dronke has analyzed the apparent misogynism of the *planctus* of Israel over Samson, "the strangest of the six," and concluded that Abelard is parodying the conventions of medieval misogynism, possibly against some views expressed by Heloise; see Dronke, "*Planctus* and Satire," pp. 136–40.

[207] Dronke, "*Planctus* and Satire," pp. 116–17.

[208] See n. 203.

[209] See Giuseppe Vecchi, ed , *Pietro Abelardo: I "Planctus"* (Modena: Societa Tipografica Modenese, 1951), pp. 34–35; and Thomas Binkley, program notes to Peter Abelard, *Planctus David, Jephta, O quanta qualia,* Studio der Frühen Musik, Electrola 1C 063-30 123.

It is also clear that medieval interpreters could read the Bible just as it has always been read, namely, with great care or without it. Some read Judges 11 with an eye to finding a handy proof-text in support of some cause or application or argument only marginally bound up with the story of Jephthah's daughter, while others moved to engage the narrative much more as an end in itself. Admittedly, drawing such distinctions is an exercise in educated guesswork, but not all our interpreters are impossible to open. When Peter Chrysologus uses the story to impress upon his congregation how God's commands work for their good, or when Godfrey of Admont presents the tale to illustrate God's fatherly protection, one must labor to see the care in such readings in which more problems are raised than solved. On the other hand, there is something more satisfying — and presumably it was satisfying to those who wrote as well as to those who now read them — when Pseudo-Nilus or Theodore Prodromus can pause to recognize the anguish involved for all the characters, or when Baldwin can argue so humbly for giving the daughter's intention the benefit of doubt, or when Rupert imagines what an angel might have said to stop Jephthah's deed.

The typological readings we have encountered demand special comment here. As we have seen, Christological readings of Jephthah and his daughter, like all other readings, could be invoked for a variety of purposes, whether to amplify the allegorical-ascetic reading, or as an Augustinian and "prophetic" solution to the literal exegetical problem, or just as an interesting dimension of the text — as Isidore's compact gloss seems. But figurative interpretations may or may not correspond to a commentator's estimation of the protagonists in the literal narrative. Augustine finds in Jephthah a type of Christ yet despises Jephthah's deed all the same. By the same token, typologies may illumine what an interpreter sees in the letter. When Quodvultdeus draws an analogy between the daughter's period of mourning and Jesus sweating blood in Gethsemane, it seems safe to say that Quodvultdeus has some inkling of what the daughter must have felt and feared. In this context, Hugh of St. Cher might seem all too productive of typologies for one to suppose that his own comparison between the lament for Jephthah's daughter and our own Lenten mourning for Christ is anything but perfunctory — and yet few are also as totally blunt in condemning Jephthah. Hugh certainly has his own pastoral agenda for his audience, but it would be too much to claim he has not read the text with care.

In any case, among these medieval commentators there is simply no support to be found for Jephthah's deed, no precedent to be defended. Instead, there is a strong consensus that any praise for the man can stand only on the supposition that, sooner or later, he repented. And if the essential exegetical arguments recur over and over again, it may simply hint at the commentators' hope that if this troubling text could be churned but once more, perhaps this time the missing solution might emerge.

From Lyra to the Reformation: The Impact of the "Hebrew Truth"

In the later Middle Ages, the course of the discussion would in all likelihood have gone on much as before, had it not been for a new argument introduced by David Kimhi in the early thirteenth century. Prior to Kimhi, rabbinic literature had mostly vilified Jephthah along lines followed also by Pseudo-Philo. As noted earlier, both *Genesis Rabbah* and *Leviticus Rabbah* had blamed Jephthah for making an unfitting vow, to which God granted an appropriately unfitting answer, but these midrashim also asserted various considerations by which the vow could and should have been annulled—comments that indicate, according to Leila Bronner, the rabbis' compassion for Jephthah's daughter and their horror at the outcome.[210] It is curious, though, that while Christian commentators clearly had learned somehow of the rabbinic rebuke of Jephthah for his vow's obvious flaws ("What if a camel or ass or dog had come forth first?"), arguments for the vow's annulment seem unknown and unused by even the most sympathetic Christian writers, to whom such arguments would surely have appealed.[211]

If the earlier midrashic and talmudic arguments went wanting for attention, however, the writings of David Kimhi did not. Kimhi's key argument—which he attributed to his father, Joseph Kimhi—entailed a reinterpretation of the Hebrew letter *waw* ("and") in the wording of Jephthah's vow.[212] Instead of reading it conjunctively as "and," Kimhi construed it disjunctively, as "or." The corrected text would read as follows: "Whatever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me . . . shall be the Lord's *or* I will offer it up for a burnt offering." Kimhi explains: "*He shall be the Lord's* if not suitable for a sacrifice or *I will offer it up for a burnt offering* if it is suitable for a sacrifice."[213] In other words, Kimhi has discovered a grammatical basis for arguing that Jephthah's daughter was not, in fact, sacrificed but instead "devoted" to the Lord. As we will see, this argument came to generate a great deal of controversy from Lyra through the Reformation and beyond, for Kimhi's discovery looked for all the world like the missing solution that would finally bring a happier ending.

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[210] Leila Leah Bronner, *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), p. 132. See also nn. 52 and 100, in this chapter.

[211] The same may be said for a ninth-century midrash from *Tanhuma Behuqqotai* 5 (cited by Bronner, *From Eve to Esther*, pp. 132–33) that depicts the daughter as arguing with her father against the vow and perhaps even lobbying the Sanhedrin. Despite the recent studies of Jewish sources used by Peter Comestor, he seems ignorant of these midrashim; see Esra Shereshevsky, "Hebrew Traditions in Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica* I: Genesis," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 59 (1968–69): 268–89, esp. 289; Samuel Tobias Lachs (writing contra Shereshevsky), "The Source of Hebrew Traditions in the Historia Scholastica," *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 385–86; and Rainer Berndt, "Pierre le Mangeur et André de Saint-Victor: Contribution à l'étude de leurs sources," *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 61 (1994): 88–114.

[212] Although David Kimhi's commentary on Judges was first published (i.e., printed) in 1485, Lyra had publicized the same conclusion a century and a half earlier, crediting only "the Hebrews" and without mentioning the argument's details. See Frank Ephraim Talmage, *David Kimhi: The Man and the Commentaries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 189; and Lyra, *Comm. Jud.* 11:39 (2:47^{v}). As far as I know, the first detailed Latin report of Kimhi's exegesis is that of Sebastian Münster in his *Hebraica Biblia* of 1534. Both Lyra and Munster are discussed below.

[213] Kimhi, *Comm. Jud.* 11:31, as translated by Talmage, *David Kimhi*, p. 7. Original text may be found in *The Commentary of Rabbi David Kimhi on the Book of Judges*, ed. Michael Celniker (Toronto: Rabbi Dr. M. Celniker Book Committee, 1983), p. 261; see also Celniker's account of the interpretation on pp. v–vi.

Nicholas of Lyra and the Survival of Jephthah's Daughter

Strangely enough, however, when Lyra wrote his *Postils* in the 1320s, he did not cite either Kimhi or his argument. Instead, he referred more generically to the arguments of "the Hebrews," suggesting perhaps that in the century since Kimhi's death, medieval rabbinic exegesis had broadly taken account of this new grammatical insight. But Lyra's inexplicable omission meant that the world of Christian exegesis would discover Kimhi's interpretation in two stages: first, in Lyra's own work, as a striking bit of midrashic speculation; then again, two long centuries later, when a series of publications in Hebrew and finally in Latin would display the provocative grammatical underpinnings of the gloss and attribute it to the venerable Rabbi Kimhi.

Even in what he does include from rabbinic sources, Lyra is not necessarily bound by the rabbis' own conclusions. Thus, in his version of the possible intervention exercised by the sages of Israel or by Phinehas the high priest, he recounts that such intervention did *not* fail—despite the contrary testimony of various midrashim (see n. 52, in this chapter). Jephthah's daughter was not killed. Instead, she became a nun in all but name. Lyra puts it like this:

> This is a question of what really happened [*de facto*], and nothing can be known about it except as scripture says so expressly, or insofar as something can be drawn out of scripture. Accordingly, an unprejudiced and undogmatic comparison of texts allows one to say that Jephthah's daughter was not sacrificed to the Lord through bodily death, but more through a civil or spiritual death, in the same way that the religious [*religiosi*] are called "dead to the world," insofar as they are excluded from worldly activities and totally freed for divine obedience. Thus Jephthah's daughter was sacrificed to the Lord through the observation of virginity, to spend her life in prayer and fasting and pious works.[214]

Once Lyra has hold of this bone, he will not let it go, and all the traditional ameliorations of Jephthah's deed are gradually transformed into props for the daughter's religious consecration. The puzzling anointing with the spirit is no longer puzzling, because it turns out that God did superintend Jephthah's vow after all: for it was by the spirit, Lyra explains, that Jephthah tacitly intended the vow to bind only insofar as it could be fulfilled licitly.[215] And how else would such a prudent man as Jephthah spend the two-month delay, except by consulting the sages and legal scholars, who would inevitably have informed him that human sacrifice is contrary to the teaching and intention of the law? Moreover, that the girl was not killed also removes the apparent scandal of Jephthah's presence in the "catalogue of saints" in Hebrews 11. And so, the "memorial" for Jephthah's daughter in Jud. 11:40 proves rather to be a commemoration of her intention — not her fate. Having tied up so many loose ends, it remains only for Lyra to demonstrate (against his unnamed objectors) that a vow of virginity was legitimate and acceptable to God at the time of the Old Testament.[216]

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[214] Lyra, *Comm. Jud* 11:39 (2:47^{v}). I have had to render the second sentence rather freely: "Igitur sine preiudicio & assertione per modum collationis potest dici . . ."

[215] Lyra, *Comm. Jud.* 11:39 (2:47^{v}).

Although Lyra's neat report of the daughter's survival was accompanied by an equally up-to-date account of the story's typological and moral meanings,[217] there could be no doubt which of his readings was deemed most newsworthy to later interpreters. Nonetheless, not everyone liked what they found in Lyra.

The Spiritual Reading's Swan Song: Denis the Carthusian

A century later, Lyra's enthusiasm for the rabbis was confronted rather directly by Denis the Carthusian. Denis divides his comments into three sections: a verse-by-verse exposition is followed by an excursus on the vow, and a "mystical exposition" concludes. The confrontation with Lyra occurs in the middle section. Denis devotes two paragraphs to summarizing Augustine's arguments here, and a third to Lyra's position. Then he proceeds to challenge what Lyra says about "the Hebrews" on the grounds that not all Hebrews agree that Jephthah's daughter was not sacrificed.[218] Moreover, Catholic opinion also holds that she was killed.[219] Finally, if Augustine is correct that Jephthah intended a human sacrifice, then there is nothing to be said by way of amelioration; only if one imputes to Jephthah the "hidden guidance of the Holy Spirit" can the deed be praised. Despite the cleverness of Lyra's alternative, then, Denis takes him to task over his failure to stick to the letter. Like all of his predecessors, however, Denis has to admit that one can neither disprove nor disallow that a divine dispensation might be hiding behind the silence of the text.

Although Denis has offered yet another tour of familiar scenery, there are actually some rather unexpected views visible in the first and concluding sections of his commentary. To begin with, he displays a sympathy for Jephthah's daughter that is both subtle and sustained. Unlike his predecessors, Denis's reconstruction of Jephthah's tragic homecoming places the daughter in the company of her friends (*sodalium suarum choreis*), the same companions who later, in words placed in the daughter's mouth, "will weep with me out of compassion, whose compassion will be some sort of solace for my tears."[220] Denis also seems sensitive to the incongruity of Jephthah's blaming his daughter for coming to meet him, and he defends her of the charge of "deceiving" her father.[221] She did not deceive him, formally at least, says Denis, "because she did nothing to deceive him" but acted with pious intent. He was only deceived materially, because against his wishes "his victory was changed into lamentation, and the daughter whom he hoped to exalt magnificently through marriage, he is forced or led to sacrifice."[222] Denis does not hesitate to compare the daughter's "goodness and obedience" to that of Isaac, and this is also why she was to be commemorated annually: "because she suffered so innocently, as well as willingly and obediently."[223]

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[216] Lyra, *Comm. Jud.* 11:39–40 (2:48^{r}).

[217] Lyra's "mystical" reading (2:46^{v}, 47^{v}) synthesizes Augustine, Rupert, and many others to present Jephthah's daughter as a type of the church, which contains many who are similarly sacrificed through vows of virginity. *Moraliter*, Lyra follows Hugh of St. Cher: Jephthah represents the sort of learned clergyman who, called away from seclusion to minister to the world, sometimes has to offer up his daughter, that is, the vainglory that runs to meet his success.

[218] Denis the Carthusian, *Comm. Jud.* 11 (3:174b–76a); only Josephus is cited by name.

[219] Denis the Carthusian, *Comm. Jud* 11 (3:174b–76a), citing Augustine, Jerome, and Aquinas.

[220] Denis the Carthusian, *Comm. Jud.* 11:34, 37 (3:174a). The passage is also notable for acknowledging that for her to die childless was not just her father's loss and her opprobrium, but also her personal loss — a point that Denis underscores by putting it in her own words: "defleam . . eo quod semen in Israel non relinquo."

Denis invests his mystical exposition with equal detail. After rehearsing Augustine's typology of Jephthah as Christ, he turns around to offer no fewer than three typological options for Jephthah's daughter. First, she apparently prefigures the church, particularly in the persons of Mary Magdalene or Peter, who were the first to run to meet the risen Lord and who were then "so mightily inflamed with his love that they inwardly died to the world" and were thus offered to God. Second (and more aptly, says Denis), she prefigures the flesh or humanity of Christ. But she also signifies, third, "the incarnate Wisdom of the Father," given over to death for us all — and Denis proceeds to illustrate the typology with five references in Scripture to the sufferings of the Messiah. It is a striking series of proof-texts. He begins with Romans 8 ("God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all"), then moves back to Isaiah 53 as it might be spoken by God the Father ("I have stricken him for the transgression of my people"), then on to two psalms placed by Denis on the lips of Christ ("You overwhelm me with all your waves," and "For they persecute those whom you have struck down"), ending back in the Acts of the Apostles ("In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer").[224] This impressive string of allusions to Christ as the suffering servant is then itself capped off by Denis's refinement of the typology that Hugh of St. Cher had drawn between Lent and the annual lament for Jephthah's daughter. For Denis, the commemoration described in Jud. 11:40 is more precisely a prefiguration of Holy Week, when Christians annually gather "to hear with deepest compassion and tears the history of the Lord's passion."[225]

Our own consideration of Denis's focused typology must be framed between two further observations. First, one should bear in mind that when Denis drew his allusions between Jephthah's daughter and these messianic texts, his readers would have supplied, mentally, not only the full "verse" for which his proof-texts served as tokens but also the larger canonical context. Psalm 88:7 begins, for example, "Your wrath lies heavy upon me . . . ," just as Isa. 53:8 adds, "For he was cut off from the land of the living . . ." These fuller contexts would have added to the poignancy of the typology and thus also to the implicit valuation of the daughter's death. Second, it is simply uncanny to find in the writings of a fifteenth-century Carthusian monk such exact precedents for the epitaphs Phyllis Trible drew from Isaiah 53 as fitting commemorations for Hagar and Tamar.[226] For his mystical insight, Denis was known among the Carthusians as the "ecstatic doctor." Although the exegesis of the Reformation era would soon discount such ecstasies and mystical interpretations, Denis offers a fitting climax to our own survey of medieval interpretations of Judges 11. Not only did he recapitulate traditional literal readings of the story in an original and compassionate manner, his meditation upon the traditional typology led him also to enhance considerably the figurative significance of Jephthah's daughter, her suffering, and her sacrifice.

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[221] Jud. 11:32 (Vg.) reads, in part, "Heu filia mi decepisti me et ipsa decepta es."

[222] Denis the Carthusian, *Comm. Jud* 11:35 (3:174a).

[223] Denis the Carthusian, *Comm. Jud.* 11:36, 40 (3:174), reading more fully, "eo quod passa sit istud tam innocenter ac sponte et obedienter, occasione communis victoriæ filiis Israel desuper condonatæ."

[224] The exact references, following modern numbering, are Rom. 8:32a, Isa. 53:8b, Ps. 88:7b, Ps. 69:26a, and Acts 3:18; my translations here follow Denis but build also on the NRSV. Denis does not identify these quotations (though his editors do) but simply quotes or paraphrases the Vulgate.

[225] Denis the Carthusian, *Comm. Jud.* 11 (3:178a). In a final paragraph, Denis expounds the chapter's tropological (moral) significance, railing against oath-breakers, especially those religious who disregard their vows.

Jephthah's Daughter in the Era of the Reformation

If inventories of surviving manuscripts are any sort of guide, medieval commentators and preachers were four to seven times less likely to find their way to the book of Judges than to the book of Genesis.[227] The trend is not changed by the Reformation. For this reason, uncovering alternative sources of exegetical opinion continues to be worth the effort. Commentaries on Judges survive from Luther, Cajetan, Pellican, Brenz, and Vermigli, as well as from some of the century's later Lutherans and a few others. Fortunately, there are additional sixteenth-century exegetes to canvass, too, who did not leave commentaries on Judges but made known their observations about Jephthah or his daughter in other sorts of exegetical or theological contexts. Sebastian Münster's annotated Hebrew Bible, the *Hebraica Biblia,* furnishes one example, but so does Calvin, who considered Jephthah in his various discussions of vows. It will also be instructive to look briefly at the suggestive literary treatment of Jephthah's daughter constructed by George Buchanan in the mid-sixteenth century, after which the chapter will conclude with a glance toward the seventeenth.

Luther and Cajetan: Rational Explanations for Jephthah's Misdeed

One of the grand curiosities of the reception of Jephthah's daughter in the sixteenth century involves the slowness with which the details of the argument for the daughter's survival finally leaked out. David Kimhi's commentary on Judges was published in Hebrew as early as 1485, and the details of his father's argument were fully set forth in the Rabbinic Bible (*Mikra'ot G'dolot*) published by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in

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[226] See Trible, *Texts of Terror,* pp. 8, 36.

[227] This statistic is based on a hand-count of entries pertaining to Genesis and Judges in Friedrich Stegmüller, *Repertorium Biblicum Medii Aevii,* 7 vols. (Madrid: Instituto Francisco Suárez, 1950–77), and the first seven volumes of Johannes Baptist Schneyer, *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters, für die Zeit von 1150–1350,* 11 vols. (Münster, Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1969–90). Stegmüller lists about 550 works or fragments addressing some part of Genesis, and 120 for Judges. Schneyer lists 1,817 references to Genesis and 250 for Judges. This brute comparison of numbers could be refined in many ways, but the proportions would probably remain about the same.

1517–18 and revised in 1524.[228] But it is exceedingly difficult to detect evidence that Christian commentators took any notice until 1535 or so, when Sebastian Münster's *Hebraica Biblia* provided a Latin summary. Of course, neither Luther nor Cajetan, two of the century's earliest commentators on Judges, could have known Münster's work, but neither did they benefit from these Hebrew books, even when they might have had access to them. Luther's ignorance is understandable, since his knowledge of the rabbis stemmed almost wholly from Lyra. Cajetan, on the other hand, whose commentary drew on his own interviews with Hebrew informants, might have known better, or so one would think.

Martin Luther. Luther's remarks on Jephthah and his daughter are not extensive. Indeed, although he is to be numbered among those Reformers who commented on the book of Judges, Luther's 1516–17 lectures were known to exceedingly few of his contemporaries, and the manuscript did not surface until just over a century ago. His remarks pursue a pastoral agenda, though his exegesis is far from innovative. A significant portion of his remarks simply paraphrases Augustine on the differences between Abraham and Jephthah.[229] But Luther is not wholly uncritical in his use of Augustine, whose claim — that *quicumque* in verse 31 necessarily implies a human sacrifice — he refutes simply by noting that Hebrew has no neuter, so *quicumque* has to stand in for *quodcumque* or *quicquid.*[230] Luther also appears familiar with Lyra (but not with Kimhi), for he dismisses the idea that Jephthah's daughter was given over to a "civil death" (that is, by her seclusion) as contrary to the text as written.[231] "Even though she had not sinned," Luther says, Jephthah himself sinned mortally. Luther's responses to Augustine and Lyra are bracketed, however, by the overall lesson he wishes to draw: "God sometimes allows his saints to stumble," but the purpose is actually to console us who likewise are sinners and to cultivate our reliance on God when we see how God raises them up after their fall — "as in the case of David and Peter."[232] Jephthah is oddly absent from Luther's little list.

There are other passing remarks on Jephthah to be found throughout Luther's voluminous writings, but the most significant addition to the view espoused in his early lectures is recorded in the table talk. Jephthah is mentioned in four separate accounts, all of which seem to stem from the same episode in the autumn of 1532. Several of the details are of interest, such as Luther's indictment of the vow as not merely foolish (*stultum*) but also superstitious — a fault common especially among soldiers fearful of a battle's outcome.[233] (Luther, it should be recalled, was no stranger to vows provoked by great fear, having entered on his monastic vocation at age twenty-one as a result of a thunderstorm-induced vow to St. Anne.)[234] In three of the accounts, Luther condemns the vow as a violation of charity or equity, suggesting that Jephthah should have known better, perhaps even without any appeal to Scripture or revelation.[235] And in one account, Luther places Jephthah's foolish vow and the immolation of his daughter *before* he was overcome by the Holy Spirit.[236] But the poignancy of Jephthah's rashness — and of his daughter's death — emerges most forcefully in these words: "If any pious person had been here, he could have dissuaded Jephthah from this foolishness by saying to him, 'You shouldn't kill your daughter as you vowed, because the law is fair, and you never intended [to sacrifice her].' Jonathan was freed from Saul's vow in just this way, for on occasion God allows his saints to play the fool."[237] If anything was to blame for this needless sacrifice, it seems to have been Jephthah's superstition or his rigidity and foolish consistency. Seeking to avoid sin, he ended instead by heaping one sin upon another,[238] and yet a moment's reflection on the divine principles of love and fairness should have taught him better.[239] Furthermore, Luther concludes, if Jonathan was released from his father's vow unharmed, Jephthah's daughter deserved no less.

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[228] Kimhi's argument for the daughter's survival is found in the second volume of both editions, at sig. IV-[1]^{v} and sig. 35-[VI]^{v}, respectively. Although Celniker claims (*Commentary*, p. xxix) that Kimhi influenced Pagnini's 1528 Hebrew-based Latin Old Testament, no trace of that influence emerges in his translation of Jud.11:30–31: where the Vulgate has *eum holocaustum offeram Domino*, Pagnini renders *erit domino, & offeram illud i[n] holocaustum.* See *Biblia . . . vtriusq[ue] instrumenti nouam tranlatione[m]* ([Lyons. Antonius du Ry], 1528), sig. M-ii, fol. 90^{r}.

[229] Luther, *Praelectio in Librum Iudicium* (WA 4:575.18–25); cf. Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.1, 4.

[230] Luther, *Praelectio in Librum Iudicium* (WA 4:574.34); cf. Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 7.49.6. In neither this nor the former case is Augustine named by Luther.

[231] Lyra is probably behind a marginal gloss in Luther's German Bible as well; see WADB 9/1:131.

[232] Luther, *Praelectio in Librum Iudicium* (WA 4:575.25–28; cf. 575.2): "Sic Deus sanctiores cadere permisit et permittit, ut nobis peccatoribus foret consolatio et fidutia in Deum videntibus nobis talium virorum post lapsum resurrectionem, ut David, Petrus."

Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan. The comments of Cajetan are briefer than Luther's. On the traditional question of whether Jephthah did well or ill in fulfilling his vow, he simply throws up his hands, for there is nothing in the text to prove or disprove that his vow proceeded from the Holy Spirit.[240] On the more recent question of whether Jephthah killed his daughter or merely "devoted" her to the Lord, Cajetan holds that the vow entailed both actions, and so the daughter was, in fact, sacrificed. He goes on to suggest that Jephthah's unfortunate deed was the product of a general misunderstanding of the law of Moses (in Leviticus 27).[241] Like Lyra, Cajetan thinks Jephthah would have used the two-month delay to obtain a second opinion; unlike Lyra (but like the midrashim), Cajetan thinks the high priest was as befuddled as Jephthah on the question, and so Jephthah fulfilled his vow.[242]

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[233] The fullest account in the *Tischreden* is §2753b (WATR 2:632–34), which reports Luther's anecdote of "a certain Tartar" forced to sacrifice his own daughter under circumstances similar to Jephthah's. Christians, however, should wage war not by magic but by faith and prayer (cf. §374, WATR 1:163.30, LW 54:58–59).

[234] The parallel with Jephthah's vow is not trivial, even if Luther seems unaware of it. "Luther himself repeatedly averred that he believed himself to have been summoned by a call from heaven to which he could not be disobedient. Whether or not he could have been absolved from his vow, he conceived himself to be bound by it. Against his own inclination, under divine constraint, he took the cowl." So wrote Roland Bainton in *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), p. 34. Martin Brecht makes the same point in *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483–1521* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), pp. 48–49.

[235] Luther, *Tischreden* §354 (WATR 1:148.27): "quia contra charitatem"; cf. §2753a, 2753b (WATR 2:632.18, 633.14): "legem ferre epiikiam," "quia lex habet *epieikeian*" or possibly "quia habes *epieikeian*." For another instance of Luther's appeal to equity or natural right, see Thompson, "Immoralities of the Patriarchs," p. 44.

[236] Luther, *Tischreden* §2753a (WATR 2:632.16): ". . . qui suam filiam occidit post victoriam, ante quam Spiritus Sanctus in eum irruerat." §2753b (WATR 2:633.10–11) follows Judges 11 by mentioning the spirit before the vow.

[237] Luther, *Tischreden* §2753b (WATR 2:633.12–15): "Si hic pius aliquis affuisset, cum amovere potuisset ab hac stultia dicendo Iepte: Tu non debes filiam occidere secundum tuum votum, quia lex habet *epieikeian; du hasts nicht also gemeint* Ita Ionathan est liberatus a voto Saulis *Also lest Gott seine heiligen narren.*"

[238] Luther, *Tischreden* §354 (WATR 1:148.28): "addit peccatum peccato."

[239] About the same point is made by Luther in an exposition of Psalm 22:25 (WA 59:173.14): a vow such as Jephthah's opposes the word of God and, as such, is invalid and not to be observed.

There is, however, a postscript to add. Cajetan's commentary on Judges was completed in 1531, so he could not have known Münster's summary of Joseph Kimhi's grammatical argument for the daughter's survival. Neither does it seem that Cajetan's Hebrew assistant informed him of the argument, unless (perhaps) he deemed it unworthy of comment. Nonetheless, the annotator of Cajetan's commentary on the Pentateuch, Antonio Fonseca, found Kimhi's argument sufficiently interesting that—in his editing of Cajetan's work for its posthumous publication in 1539—he inserted verbatim excerpts from Münster in the margin of Cajetan's commentary on Lev. 27:29.[243]

Christian Hebraists of the 1530s: Introducing the Survivalist Argument

The summary of Kimhi's argument that appeared in Sebastian Münster's 1534–35 *Hebraica Biblia* is itself not extensive, but it provides the grammatical foundation for the survival of Jephthah's daughter that is so conspicuously missing from Lyra. Thus, Münster distills the argument about the disjunctive *waw*, along with the corroborating observation that the daughter was said to bewail not her life but her virginity. Far from being killed, she was devoted to lifelong chastity, indeed, to lifelong isolation except for the four days of mourning each year when the daughters of Israel came to offer consolation and conversation.[244] Up to this point, Münster gives the impression that he has embraced Kimhi's views here as his own; but then he reports that many among the Hebrews condemn Jephthah for failing to redeem his daughter from his vow, as per Leviticus 27. In addition, he adduces the midrashic account of how Jephthah was kept from consulting with the high priest Phinehas by their mutual pride. "Meanwhile, the daughter died, . . . and both were punished by the Lord": Jephthah was paralyzed, while Phinehas was deprived of the Holy Spirit.[245] Evidently, Münster intends to let the reader choose between these interpretations, for his own views are never voiced.

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[240] Cajetan, *Comm. Jud.* 11:30, 39 (in *Opera Omnia* [1659] 2:56–57): "nihil certi habeo."

[241] Cajetan's *Comm. Lev.* 27:29 (*Opera* 1:339) fills in the details: Jephthah had a superficial understanding of that law whereby a human being may be devoted to destruction. What he failed to understand is that a vow is binding only if first of all licit, and the only human beings liable to such a vow of destruction are enemies of the people of God and witches (*maleficus*), blasphemers, and other people of that sort.

[242] Cajetan, *Comm. Jud.* 11:39 (*Opera* 2:57).

[243] These marginal annotations appear in the first edition of Cajetan's pentateuch commentary (1539), as well as in the five-volume *Opera Omnia* of 1639.

[244] Sebastian Münster, *Hebraica Biblia latina planeque noua Sebast. Mvnsteri tralatione* (Basel: Michael Isengrin and Henricus Petri, 1534–35), fol. 238^{v}: "Rabi Ioseph Kimhi dicit copulam, &, hic disiunctiue pro או accipiendam: ut sit sensus: quod primo occurrerit, domino mancipabitur ueluti sanctum, si immolatitium non sit: uel si immolatitium sit, offeram illud in holocaustum. Non igitur interfecit pater filiam suam: alioquin ipsa non dixisset, plangam super uirginitate mea, sed plangam super anima mea: sed secundum Hebræos reclusit eam, & a consortio hominum separauit, nec nisi quatuor diebus per annum aditum concessit."

Other Christian Hebraists writing at about the same time were more outspoken in favor of a "survivalist" interpretation. For example, Conrad Pellican's 1533 commentary on Judges adopted a position along the lines of Lyra, arguing that Jephthah's daughter lived in perpetual celibacy as a servant of the temple in some unspecified capacity.[246] Naturally, Pellican could not have known Kimhi's argument from Münster, but—given his reputation as a Hebraist—it is astonishing that he adduces no evidence beyond that of Lyra.[247] By way of contrast, it is clear that Johann Brenz, whose Judges commentary first appeared in 1535, also did not know Münster's work; but he does know the arguments of David Kimhi, having only recently been alerted to them (he tells us) by his learned friend Bernard Zigler, a professor of Hebrew.[248] Both Pellican and Brenz—one a Zwinglian, the other a Lutheran—enthusiastically embrace the view that the daughter was not killed, but Brenz's aside suggests that the details of Kimhi's interpretation were still largely unknown even by the mid-1530s.

The joint testimony of Pellican and Brenz is rather illuminating. First of all, there is an obvious improvement in the image of Jephthah himself. If what he risked in his hasty vow was never his daughter's life but only her marriageability and his own lineage, he is more to be pitied than vilified. Accordingly, Pellican suggests that Jephthah's vow was never meant to render the Lord favorable to him in battle; instead, it was intended all along merely as a gesture of thanksgiving.[249] Brenz makes a similar point: Jephthah made his vow not to accrue merit for the satisfaction of his sins—a remark obviously directed against Roman Catholicism—but to display his gratitude for God's mercy: "Certainly his vow was imprudent, but it was not impious."[250] Second, by dramatically softening Jephthah's misdeed, Pellican and Brenz seem freed to discard many traditional arguments and excuses. His anointing with the spirit seems far less incongruous if Jephthah's promise risked not his daughter's life but only her freedom to marry. The latter sort of oath could well be numbered among legitimate Old Testament vows — unlike the traditional reading, in which Jephthah's promise blatantly violated the law of God.[251] Indeed, Brenz writes, "such a vow would be clearly impious, and the fulfillment of the vow would be as impious as it was cruel."[252]

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[245] Münster, *Hebraica Biblia* on Judges 11, fol. 238^v. His summary then concludes, "Jonathan the Chaldean interpreter [i.e., *Targum Jonathan*] is also of this opinion." On Jephthah's death, cf. n. 52.

[246] Pellican's comments appeared in the second volume of his series on the entire Old Testament (*Commentaria Bibliorum*, 2:44^v).

[247] Pellican authored a rather crude Hebrew grammar in 1503 or 1504 that was quickly eclipsed by Reuchlin's grammar in 1506; see Basil Hall, "Biblical Scholarship: Editions and Commentaries," *CHB* 3:45. Pellican's neglect of Kimhi's argument challenges Jerome Friedman's assertion that "Bomberg's . . . famous Rabbinic Bible [was] found on virtually every Hebraist's desk"; see *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-Century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983), p. 36.

[248] Johann Brenz, *In Librum Iudicum et Ruth Commentarius* (Haganau: Peter Braubach, 1535); reprinted in *Opervm . . . D. Ioannis Brentii . . . Tomus Secundus* (Tübingen: George Gruppenbach, 1576), p. 151.

[249] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 11:32 (fol. 44^v). Jephthah still deserves some degree of rebuke, however: "Not everything done by even the holy fathers are to be praised: indeed, many are read to have been done against the law of God and nature, and these . . . are by no means to be praised or drawn forth as examples."

[250] Brenz, *Comm. Jud.* 11:29 (2:152).

At the same time, the daughter's survival brought certain complications for these two Protestant interpreters. By conceding a degree of legitimacy to Jephthah's no longer lethal vow, Pellican and Brenz risked backing into an endorsement of clerical or monastic vows of celibacy. Both sidestepped the pitfall simply by denying that Jephthah's daughter established any precedent, but the contested question of parental authority still remained. Traditionally, Protestants attempted to avoid two seemingly contradictory Catholic teachings of the day, whereby parents might force their children into celibacy or into an arranged marriage, while at the same time priests often encouraged secret marriages between physically infatuated adolescents as a way of avoiding births out of wedlock. Luther first charted this Protestant via media in his 1524 treatise, "That Parents Should Neither Compel Nor Hinder the Marriage of Their Children and That Children Should Not Become Engaged Without Their Parents' Consent."[253] Pellican, however, accents mostly the issue of parental authority. For him, Jephthah's daughter is something of a role model, and he praises her "noble character," her role in the deliverance of Israel, and especially her filial obedience.[254] Brenz's regard is just as high, but he grants Jephthah's daughter a more active role. Like all children, he observes, she was obliged to "honor her parents." Nevertheless, for her to marry or to remain celibate was never fully in her father's hands, for her own consent was both necessary and determinative.[255] In other words, where Brenz might easily have praised Jephthah's daughter for her exemplary submission to parental authority, he chose instead to herald her freedom and autonomy.

Later Reformed Casuistry: No Excuse for Jephthah's Sacrifice

Neither Brenz nor Pellican seems to have exerted any decisive influence on his colleagues, who uniformly continued to advocate the traditional view that Jephthah's daughter was killed by her father. Sixteenth-century Reformed exegetes who held this view include Bucer, Calvin, and Vermigli.

Martin Bucer. Although Bucer's undated commentary on Judges survives, having been published posthumously in 1554, his remarks on Judges 11–12 are, unfortunately, missing. In the next chapter, when we consider the horrendous fate of the

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[251] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 11:34 (fol. 44ᵛ).

[252] Brenz, *Comm. Jud.* 11:29 (2:151): "certe perspicuum est, quod & votum fuerit impium, & impletio voti fuerit tam impia, quam crudelis."

[253] Luther, *Daß Eltern die Kinder zur Ehe nicht zwingen noch hindern, und die Kinder ohne der Eltern Willen sich nicht verloben sollen* (WA 15:163–69; LW 45:379–93).

[254] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 11:36, 40 (fol. 44ᵛ).

[255] Brenz, *Comm. Jud.* 11:29 (2:152).

Levite's concubine in Judges 19, we will see how the stupidity and malfeasance of the characters in that tale elicit from Bucer a sustained and burning anger, and it is tempting to speculate that he would have been equally angry in his remarks here.[256] His views do survive, however, in his commentary on Matthew. In Matthew 14, where John the Baptist is put to death in fulfillment of Herod's careless promise to grant the daughter of Herodias whatever she wished, Bucer drew a terse comparison with Jephthah: any vow or oath that is opposed to God's commands simply cannot be observed or fulfilled — exactly the position he later took in his 1543–46 exchange with the Catholic controversialist Bartholomew Latomus.[257]

John Calvin. Jephthah's vow was mentioned by Calvin in at least five of his works, of which four are extant. The earliest reference comes from his 1549 commentary on Hebrews, where he offers a traditional mix, approving the father's valor but censuring his vow: "Jephthah rushed headlong into making a foolish vow and was overobstinate in performing it, and thereby marred a fine victory by the cruel death of his daughter."[258] A decade later, Calvin returned to Jephthah in the course of a general consideration of religious vows in the *Institutes.* There, too, his judgment is moderated: while he declaims the insanity of vowing celibacy as equivalent to the sin of tempting God, he by no means disallows all vows. Thus, it is Jephthah's foolishness, born of thoughtlessness and impetuosity, that Calvin condemns — that is, the content of his vow, not the vow per se.[259] Not long afterward, in 1561, Calvin preached through the book of Judges, but the transcripts of these sermons were lost early in the nineteenth century. Yet there are two other nearly contemporaneous references that may well harbor traces of Calvin's lost sermons. Writing in rebuttal of the Dutch spiritualist Theodore Coornhert in 1562, Calvin dismissively says of Jephthah that "zeal without discretion is nothing."[260] That same year, preaching on 1 Sam. 1:11–18, Calvin allowed that Jephthah's humble birth, like that of Samuel, did not hinder him from doing great and memorable things, nor from worshiping God faithfully. Yet, a few paragraphs later, considering the difference between Hannah's vow and that of Jephthah, Calvin is clearly much exercised in wrath: "Truly, this was a 'going forth' worthy of his vow! Behold the murderer of his own daughter, a detestable crime and one clearly diabolical, yet speciously covered by the name of religion."[261]

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[256] Martin Bucer, *In librum Iudicum Ennarationes* (Geneva: Robert Estienne, 1554).

[257] Bucer, *In sacra qvatvor Euãgelia, enarrationes* on Matt. 14:6 (Geneva: Robert Estienne, 1553, preface dated 1536), fol. 126^{r}. For the controversy with Latomus, see Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), pp. 343–48; and Peter Sharratt and Peter G. Walsh, introduction to *George Buchanan: Tragedies* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1983), pp. 14–15.

[258] John Calvin, *Comm. Heb* 11:32 (CO 55:166, CNTC 12:182), continuing as follows: "In every saint there is always to be found something reprehensible. Nevertheless although faith may be imperfect and incomplete it does not cease to be approved by God."

[259] Calvin, *Institutes* 4.13.3 (OS 5.240.20–21, LCC 21:1257): "Sic Iephthe stultitiae suae poenas dedit, quum praecipiti fervore inconsideratum votum concepit." This comment was not added until 1559

[260] Calvin, *Response à un certain Holandois,* CO 9:625.

[261] Calvin, *Hom. 3 on 1 Sam.* 1:11-18 (CO 29:265, 267): "Filia prior occurrit: dignus sane voto exitus. En enim propriae filiae parricidam, scelus detestandum ac plane diabolicum, et quidem specioso religionis nomine tectum." Calvin concludes: "Wherefore we are to be warned above all lest we imitate him, and let us be advised that all vows are to be tested according to the rule of the will of God."

Calvin thus ends with nothing good to say about Jephthah, but his accumulated comments are strangely old-fashioned even for his own day. Not only does he believe the daughter was slaughtered in sacrifice, he betrays not the slightest inkling that he is aware of any other explanation, whether it be Kimhi's argument or Lyra's diluted reportage thereof.[262] It is also striking that Calvin brands Jephthah's act as diabolical—an old descriptor that is not particularly common in this context, but one that he might have obtained from his familiarity with Chrysostom.[263]

Peter Martyr Vermigli. While one may lament losing the fuller comments of Bucer and Calvin, Vermigli's 1554–56 Strasbourg lectures provide an extensive compensation.[264] His treatment of Jephthah's daughter—possibly the century's most comprehensive survey of interpretation—takes the form of a verse-by-verse commentary on Jud. 11:29–40, followed by a slightly longer "commonplace" on the vow of Jephthah.

As an advocate of the "sacrificialist" reading of Judges 11, Vermigli is well aware of the exegetical problems attending the view that Jephthah put his daughter to death. He addresses them systematically. Regarding Jephthah's endowment with the spirit of the Lord, he notes that there are three ways in which the spirit may be said to be "in" or "with" someone, so that while Jephthah may have been blessed with the spirit for the purpose of delivering Israel, no claim is ever advanced that he had been sanctified or regenerated by the spirit.[265] Then, Kimhi's reading of the vow is explicitly dismissed on the grounds that the Old Testament knows nothing of a perpetual vow of chastity. Next to be considered is the question of how Jephthah could have been ignorant of Leviticus 27, with its instructions about "redeeming" someone from a vow. Possible answers here include that Jephthah, as a man of war, may not have been knowledgeable about the law; he may have been perversely influenced by the Baal-worship of the Ammonites; or else the vow may actually have been a curse or "ban," whereby a person (or thing) might be either dedicated to perpetual divine service or, perhaps, destroyed. However, as Vermigli comments later on, the daughter's consent would be required to ratify a vow of perpetual divine service, and an oath of total destruction could properly be sworn only against declared enemies of

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[262] Ironically, while the allusion to Jephthah's vow in *Institutes* 4.13.3 leads directly to a condemnation of vows of celibacy, Calvin seems unaware that some of his "survivalist" predecessors would insist that the real content of Jephthah's vow entailed precisely that—celibacy, not sacrifice. Calvin's apparent ignorance here would conform to Lane's recent suggestion that not only was most or all of Calvin's knowledge of Jewish sources obtained secondhand, so also was his knowledge of Lyra, which may have come only by way of Luther Lane has also argued, however, that Calvin was familiar with Munster's *Hebraica Biblia*, as well as with the notes ascribed to François Vatable in Stephanus's 1545 Latin Bible; see "Citations in Calvin's Genesis Commentary," pp. 226–29, 248–51. Either Münster or the Vatable notes could have introduced Calvin to the "survivalist" interpretation of Judges 11.

[263] Like most precritical commentators, Calvin has a developed demonology (addressed in *Institutes* 1.14.13–19), yet he is not lavish with the adjective *diabolicus*. It occurs but a dozen times in the 1559 *Institutes*, where it is usually reserved for the most serious doctrinal errors or character flaws. See Ford Lewis Battles, *A Concordance to Institutio Christianae Religionis (1559): John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College and Seminary, 1980), microfiche, p. 1360, 7C10.

[264] Peter Martyr Vermigli, *In Librvm Ivdicvm . . . Commentarii* (Zürich: Froschauer, 1561); translated in 1564 as *Most fruitfull & learned Commentaries . . .* (London John Day, n.d.).

[265] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 11:29 (fol. 137, ET fol. 190^{v}).

God. The point toward which Vermigli is arguing, and which he will pursue doggedly in the commonplace, is that no matter how Jephthah's deed is explained, it can never be excused — unless one presuppose a special command of God.

The commonplace returns to some of these arguments with even greater care, and Vermigli takes on successively the positions and arguments of Kimhi, Levi ben Gerson, Lyra and his sympathizers, "Chrysostom," Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine. Vermigli's various rebuttals need not be reprised; one need only observe that despite his respect for the likes of Ambrose and Augustine, he endeavors to refute every single amelioration of Jephthah's deed or character. For example, Ambrose had argued that Jephthah was to be credited at least for his godly fear, or for his fidelity, or for his perseverance; but Vermigli rules out each of these virtues as vicious if put to serve an ungodly end.[266] Augustine's ameliorations are similarly tackled and, for the most part, sacked, though there remains some ambiguity in Vermigli's treatment of the "typological" excuse, in that he never really approves or condemns Augustine here.[267] A few lines later, however, considering Augustine's claim that Jephthah may have been moved by the spirit of God, Vermigli complains, "but that cannot be inferred from the words of the history. . . . Augustine wishes to explain how Jephthah might be defended, which I also would gladly do, if I had any part of the history to help me."[268] Yet Vermigli's conclusion backs down just an inch or two:

> If it be asked whether he sinned in doing this, one may answer in two ways. First, given that he was human, he could have sinned, even as many of the ancients fell. Secondly, it might be said that he did this by the impulse of the Holy Spirit, not as though God would have others imitate this act, but so that people might thereby understand that Christ would one day die for their salvation. Everyone is free to choose either of these answers. I, however, think it likely that he fell.[269]

Obviously, Vermigli hates to exonerate Jephthah by an argument from silence, and the burden of his comments has been to refute those who do. Ultimately, though, the argument from silence for a special dispensation can be neither refuted nor established, but only assumed. Were one to make that assumption, mind you, sooner or later Vermigli would give an approving nod to the Christological significance of the daughter's death. Still, Vermigli muses, "I think he fell."

Filed among Vermigli's comments are also words of praise for Jephthah's daughter and some reflections on her death. Three points are of special interest. First, Vermigli lauds her along the usual lines for her outstanding display of "piety and obedience." But he also stresses, as not all do, that she was free to veto the vow that her father so wrongly swore.[270] That she complied with the vow suggests, for Vermigli, that "she had a regard only for the glory of God." Second, in commending the annual lament for Jephthah's daughter, Vermigli explains that there were two reasons for such a rite. On the one hand, the daughters of Israel "did not want such a great matter to pass into oblivion." On the other hand, they may well have hoped this annual ritual would warn their own parents against such ill-considered vows.[271] Both of these comments bear a certain resonance for modern readers, as does a third observation. Verse 39 states laconically that "her father . . . did with her according to the vow he had made," and those interpreters who argue that the daughter was not sacrificed usually take refuge in the indirect wording, which does not explicitly say that he killed her. Recent feminist critics have read the vagueness here as the narrator's attempt to soften the father's crime by describing it euphemistically. Formally, at least, Vermigli might seem to agree: "It is often the case in narratives," he writes, "that the really horrible things are not always expressed."[272] Vermigli, of course, would be unlikely to indict the narrator for his patriarchal prejudices, but he freely sustains the father's indictment for such an unspeakable deed.

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[266] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 11, "De voto Iephtæ" (fol. 140^r, ET fol. 194^v). Again, this recalls the observation of Renita Weems; see nn. 9 and 70.

[267] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 11, "De voto Iephtæ" (fol. 140^v, ET fol. 195^v).

[268] Vermigli, *Comm Jud.* 11, "De voto Iephtæ" (fol. 141^r, ET fol. 195^v).

[269] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 11, "De voto Iephtæ" (fol. 141^r, ET fol. 196^r).

[270] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 11:36 (fol. 138^v, ET fol. 192^v): "Potuit non obedire, cum pater ita perperam uouisset."

Martin Borrhaus: An Independent and Ambiguous Witness

Not long after Vermigli's lectures, a commentary on Joshua through Kings appeared from the pen of Martin Borrhaus, also known as Martin Cellarius. Borrhaus spent the last two decades of his life as professor of Old Testament in Basel, a fitting successor there to Luther's former colleague and opponent, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. The theological views of Borrhaus were always eclectic and often radical. George Williams describes him variously as a "Scotist convert to Zwickau chiliasm and scholarly proto-Unitarian" and as one "who had long stood on the shifting boundaries between Spiritualism and Anabaptism."[273] Nonetheless, it is hard to see how his radical sympathies affected his exegesis in this instance. As the subtitle of his commentary made plain, Borrhaus's interest as a commentator lay in reading the Old Testament histories for their mystical sense, as foreshadowing the coming of the Messiah.

In light of that declared intention, it is no surprise to see Borrhaus begin his remarks on Judges 11 with Augustine's depiction of Jephthah as a type of Christ. But his figurative exegesis is derailed for a long moment by the problem of Jephthah's vow. Borrhaus is by no means the first to know or present the details of Kimhi's argument (albeit without crediting any source), but he may be the first to make a virtue of indecision, for while he presents both sides, the survivalist and the sacrificialist, he chooses neither. Indeed, not only does he seem determined to bring the two competing interpretations to stalemate, he also expounds the figurative sense of the story by offering a tandem interpretation in which both endings find an apt typological counterpart for Jephthah's daughter in the New Testament. Thus, if the daughter survived, her consecrated virginity looks forward to 2 Cor. 11:2, where Paul recalls how he wanted to join the Corinthians "to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." But if, instead, she was sacrificed, then she represents the "living and holy sacrifice" of Rom. 12:1, which consumes the "old man" through the fire of the Holy Spirit and perfects the new one.[274] To be sure, Borrhaus is not unaware of how Protestants differ from Catholics on subjects such as celibacy and vows, but his discussion of Jephthah's daughter always straddles the fence. Most notably, whether the vow pertained to sacrifice or religious chastity, it was always the daughter's lawful prerogative to object, Borrhaus insists, despite the likelihood that both father and daughter were ignorant of her rights.

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[271] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 11:40 (fol. 138^{v}, ET fol. 192^{v}): "nolebant enim rem tantam obliuioni tradi. Idque fortassis agebant, ut parentes monerent, ne posthac tali uoto se obstringerent." The same point is later repeated as a summary of Augustine's views (fol. 141^{r}, ET fol. 195^{v}), but it also recalls Chrysostom (at n. 97).

[272] Vermigli, *Comm Jud.* 11, "De voto Iephtæ" (fol. 141^{v}, ET fol. 196^{v}): "Et sæpe fit, ut in narrationibus atrociora non semper exprimantur." Here it is Ambrose who is echoed; see p. 120 at n. 89.

[273] George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (third ed.; Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992), pp. 613, 960. Cf. Abraham Friesen, "Borrhaus, Martin," *OER* 1:202–3, who characterizes Borrhaus as Reformed, evidently on the basis of his high doctrine of predestination.

Later Lutherans: Valorizing Jephthah's Daughter

The second half of the sixteenth century saw the appearance of a handful of Lutheran commentaries on Judges, but they are all remarkably compact. They are also uniformly focused on the literal sense of Scripture and its moral application. Victor Strigelius issued an irregular collection of glosses to accompany his translation of the Hebrew text of Judges in 1567.[275] In the same year, Cyriacus Spangenberg produced elaborate "tables" (sort of a cross between sentence diagrams and flow charts) of the Old Testament that also harbored occasional glosses.[276] Near the end of the century, in 1593, Moritz Heling paraphrased several biblical books, adding to each chapter a list of pertinent loci that are really but single-sentence theses.[277]

All three writers agree in predictable ways: the vow was rash; it should not have been observed; the daughter models perfect filial obedience. Despite his brevity, however, Strigelius pauses to defend Jephthah's daughter and her two months' mourning: "Without a doubt the most holy girl was not seeking pleasure, but rather used the interval to weep over the sins of her youth, and to prepare herself for her blessed departure from this life by meditating on the divine word and by offering pious prayers." With equal confidence, he announces that Jephthah simply acted unlawfully and without any special command—and so, with a stroke, Strigelius strips all ambiguity from the passage: the daughter is wholly good, while the father is wholly bad.[278] Spangenberg also reserves good words for Jephthah's daughter, who

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[274] Martin Borrhaus (1499–1564), *In Sacram Iosuæ, Iudicum, Ruthae, Samuelis & Regum Historiam, mystica Messiae seruatoris mundi adumbratione refertam* ... *Commentarius* (Basel: Ioannes Oporinus, [1557]), cols. 220–22.

[275] Victor Strigelius, *Liber Ivdicvm ad Ebraicam Veritatem Recognitvs, & argumentis atque scholijs illustratus* (Leipzig: [Ernst Vögelin, 1567]), pp. 107–8.

[276] Cyriacus Spangenberg (1528–1604), *In Sacros Bibliorvm Veteris Testamenti Libros, præcipuè Historicos, nempe Iosvam, Ivdicvm, Rvth, Samvelis duos, Regum duos, Chronicorum duos, Esram, Nehemiam, Esther, Iobum: Tabvlarvm M. Cyriaci Spangenbergii Opera* . . . *Pars Secunda* (Basel: Ioannes Oporinus, 1567 [colophon dated March 1569]), p. 85.

[277] Moritz Heling, *Periocha, id est, Argvmenta Singvlorum Capitvm, Et Locorvm communium breves consignationes, in libros Josvæ, Judicum, & Ruth* (Nürnberg: Typis Gerlachianis, 1593), pp. 146–47.

[278] Strigelius, *Liber Ivdicvm* 11:37, pp. 108–9: "Haud dubie sanctissima puella non quæsiuit voluptates, sed hoc interuallo deplorauit peccata iuuentutis suæ, & se ad beatam migrationem ex hac vita præparauit meditatione verbi diuini & pia precatione. . . Iephthah fecit quod & lege vetabatur, & nullo speciali iubebatur imperio."

(he says) returned after two months sheerly out of pious zeal, implying that someone of weaker character might have procrastinated or fled. Like Vermigli, Spangenberg finds a twofold rationale for the annual commemoration for Jephthah's daughter: to mourn her death, but also to forewarn other parents against such an imprudent and ignorant vow.

Exegetical Correlates in Sixteenth-Century Religious Dramas

As amply documented by Sypherd, the sixteenth century witnessed a spate of literary output — plays and poems, both Latin and vernacular — that retold and recast the story of Jephthah, his vow, and his daughter.[279] Given Sypherd's remarkable ambition to chronicle all of the nontheological works that consider the story, it is telling that his list begins, for all practical purposes, with the sixteenth century. Only a handful of items dates earlier.[280] The sixteenth century, however, boasts of over two dozen literary treatments (including several ballads) of Jephthah's daughter. Of these, several were dramatic re-creations composed by acquaintances or adherents of the theologians and exegetes of the day. Thus, in the early 1540s, George Buchanan, an eventual acquaintance of Calvin's successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza, wrote one such play. Bishop John Christopherson dedicated a play, written in Greek, to Henry VIII in 1544. Joseph de Acosta wrote *Jephte filiam trucidante*, one of at least five sixteenth-century Jesuit plays, in 1555. The same year, Hans Sachs, celebrated Lutheran poet and playwright of Nürnberg, wrote a vernacular play, *Der Jephte mit seiner tochter.* Bruno Seidel studied at Wittenberg and was deeply impressed by Philip Melanchthon; he went on to teach medicine at Erfurt and write *Jephta* in 1568. And two other Lutherans of the century, both preachers and theologians, also composed plays about Jephthah's daughter: Johannes Pomarius of Magdeburg, in 1574; and Georg Dedeken of Lübeck and later Hamburg, in 1594.[281]

These dramatic interpretations range, in Sypherd's estimate, from the "simple" and moralistic play of Hans Sachs, which stands fully in the tradition of medieval mystery plays, through the mixture of low humor and moralism found in some of the Jesuit and Lutheran plays, to the "deep human emotion and lofty philosophical reflection" that characterizes Christopherson's writing for the stage. As tragedies, these plays give full rein to the grief distributed all round; some highlight the role of the devil in the proceedings; and a few also depict the girl's mother — so absent from Scripture — as a significant character, sometimes opposing Jephthah or debating with him, and sometimes as having the last word, whether of lament or submission to the evident will of God. Our attention, however, will be limited to the earliest of these works, one that influenced several of these others by being variously imitated, adapted, plagiarized, or just translated into French, Italian, German, Hungarian, and Polish even before the end of the century.

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[279] Sypherd, *Jephthah and His Daughter*, pp. 13–43, 131–44.

[280] Sypherd's chronological list specifies eight items, but these include separate entries for Pseudo-Philo and Abelard, as well as a collective entry for works of biblical paraphrase; see *Jephthah and His Daughter*, pp. 129–31. A cursory discussion of these earlier works (apart from Pseudo-Philo and Abelard) appears on p. 10 of Sypherd's book.

[281] Most of the information in this and the following paragraph depends on Sypherd (*Jephthah and His Daughter*, pp. 13–43, 47–58, 131–44), who warns that there was another Lutheran preacher named Johannes Pomarius in Magdeburg at this time. For an English translation of Christopherson's play, see John Christopherson, *Jephthah*, trans. Francis Howard Fobes (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1928)

Although he later openly aligned himself with Reformed Protestantism, George Buchanan was probably at most a Protestant sympathizer when he wrote *Jephthes sive votum tragoedia.* His interests lay with Erasmian humanism, and his acquaintances here included the elder Scaliger, Muret, Ronsard, and others — including Beza. Buchanan's play is interesting for a number of motifs and issues it highlights. Sypherd calls attention to the central place given over to the underlying theological issues and judges Buchanan's work to be too disputative and distracting to make for effective drama. Shuger, on the other hand, underscores the play's emphasis on the unquestionable love of the father for his daughter: after depicting the moral and mental agonies of Jephthah in a pair of debates between Jephthah and a priest and between Jephthah and his wife (named Storge), Buchanan depicts Jephthah as deciding to offer himself as a victim in his daughter's stead. Yet it is at this point in the play that the daughter actually overrides her father's decision, upstaging him for the play's duration and effectively moving out from under her father's authority to take on a public role of her own.[282] Clearly, Buchanan is not out to change the outcome of the biblical story, but to explore and humanize it. However, his exploration and interest grows out of potentially conflicting commitments: as "the first Renaissance biblical drama modeled on Greek tragedy" (namely, Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis*), his play probably testifies more to Renaissance humanism's fascination with the classics than it does to Buchanan's exegetical curiosity.[283]

Buchanan's biblical play can serve our own explorations in two ways. First, *Jephthes sive votum* can help establish the boundary — or, perhaps, the no-man's-land — between literature and commentary literature. That Buchanan is engaged by the sheer pathos of the story of Jephthah's daughter is undeniable, yet however much one may read his play as a comment on Judges 11, he still offers more an extrapolation of previous commentary than original invention. The point may be illustrated from a consideration of the play's purpose. As a school play, *Jephthes* was originally written for the instruction of French schoolboys — "who in all likelihood," Shuger observes, "would not be very interested in daughters per se." What would be of interest to them, though, is the way his portrait of Jephthah's daughter might mirror for them the uncertainties of growing up in a context where families were often riven by the religious conflicts of the Reformation in France. Her destiny — sacrifice at her father's hands — might very well become theirs: "Sacrifice, in other words, is the female equivalent of war. . . . The play projects the boys' anxieties about having to die for their country or their faith and, by ennobling the sacrificial daughter, consoles these fears — holding out the promise, as it were, of displacing their own fathers by risking death for the Father/fatherland."[284] Jephthah's daughter is thus an exemplar for Buchanan's pupils — indeed, she is clearly intended to stand as a type of Christ. But Buchanan is not the first to style Jephthah's daughter as a type of Christ (Shuger notwithstanding),[285] any more than he is the first to make of her an exemplar. One might argue a similar case on behalf of many of the commentators surveyed so far: Jephthah's daughter was certainly an exemplar for Ambrose's religious recruits, for Abelard and Heloise, and for all the parents and children who might be imagined among the beneficiaries of sixteenth-century commentaries. By the same token, one might argue that the pervasive moralisms of other sixteenth-century Jephthah plays — whether Lutheran or Jesuit — are also and essentially the recycled moralisms of earlier commentators. By common consent, fictive or theatrical reconstructions of biblical stories not only have greater freedom to fill in the silences of the text with feeling and pathos, they have that as their raison d'être. The playwright or poet thus enjoys a luxury that most commentators deny themselves, and one may well wonder if such an unspoken ethos helps to explain not only the neglect of Abelard's *planctus* but also the contempt with which Calvin seems to have regarded some of Luther's more expansive outbursts (as seen in the preceding chapter). Indeed, Luther's effusions may seem aberrant by comparison with other commentators, but the question of genre must be considered with care. Poets are charged to inscribe depth of feeling. Commentators may well share such feeling, but the exegetical genre or ethos may inhibit its expression. Moreover, given that biblical commentaries are often constructed of so many bits of exegetical lore, passed along from writer to writer as if from hand to hand, perhaps we need the aberrant outburst — say, that of Rupert of Deutz — to signal how much may be going on under the surface. In other words, commentary literature may seem prosaic, but sometimes that may be, literally, a superficial judgment.[286]

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[282] For the discussion of this play I am indebted not only to Sypherd, but also to Shuger, *Renaissance Bible,* pp. 145–55; and to Sharratt and Walsh's introduction to *George Buchanan: Tragedies,* pp. 13–20.

[283] Shuger has expertly dissected some of the competing pagan undercurrents of the play in *Renaissance Bible,* pp. 156–66.

[284] Shuger, *Renaissance Bible,* pp. 151, 155.

Buchanan's portrait of Jephthah's daughter can also serve our own explorations in a second (and secondary) way, as a window through which we might glimpse how the various sixteenth-century interpretations of Judges 11 reflect ongoing religious and exegetical conflicts. In particular, Shuger has drawn a comparison between Buchanan's *Jephthes* and Beza's 1550 play about the binding of Isaac, *Abraham sacrifiant*, convinced as she is that Beza offers, in effect, "a deliberate rewriting of

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[285] Shuger, *Renaissance Bible*, pp. 155–56; cf. n. 147 and p. 153, in this chapter. It could be argued, however, that Buchanan is the first to cast Jephthah's wife as a type of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ (see Shuger, p. 151). Utterly absent from the biblical account, Jephthah's wife is almost always absent also from the commentaries — with Augustine as the sole exception. The sixteenth-century playwrights typically add a multitude of characters, often including a mother for Jephthah's daughter and often coining names for both. Even in Buchanan's case, however, the wife is not the reconstruction of a biblical character but a clever allegory. As the priest represents the dictates of right reason, so does the wife represent the claims of human affection (στοργή). What is particularly compelling in Buchanan's depiction of Jephthah's wife is her transformation, at the end of the play, from an allegory of *storge* into a type of the Virgin Mary, in whom the sorrows of maternal affection are divinely transformed.

[286] That the contrast between how a commentator and a playwright approach the biblical text can be drawn from sixteenth-century examples may not, in fact, be accidental. In a related discussion, Shuger argues that while Buchanan's play did not of itself precipitate the emergence of "subjectivity" in Renaissance literature (as opposed to the literature of devotion, where such expressions were traditional), it certainly signals that some such shift was underway, whereby "the language of introspection, desire, and inner struggle migrates from devotional praxis, from the monasteries and the confessional, to literature" (*Renaissance Bible*, p. 165).

Buchanan's tragedy, a Calvinist response, as it were, to the neoclassical daughter."[287] Her comparison of Buchanan and Beza, however, is actually a link somewhere in the middle of a grander chain of argument that attempts to probe Renaissance apprehensions of sacrifice. Thus, earlier in her analysis, she pondered why it was that exegetes after Lyra, "particularly Protestant ones," were inclined to argue for the daughter's survival:

> The overt motive for this shift is to get rid of the embarrassing fact that the Epistle to the Hebrews mentions Jephthah among the Old Testament heroes of faith—a tribute seemingly incompatible with infanticide—but one also suspects deeper discomforts with blood sacrifice motivating this attempt to restrict paternal power to the sexuality of the daughter. The important early seventeenth-century biblical scholar Louis Cappel offers the sole Protestant critique of this sanitized reading. But Cappel himself was almost certainly influenced by Buchanan's play.[288]

One of the most interesting corollaries that emerges from Shuger's speculation suggests that Protestant survivalist readings of Jephthah's daughter may be symptomatic of a more general hostility to the ostentatious ceremonialism of medieval Catholicism, particularly with respect to the eucharistic sacrifice.[289]

Without a doubt, Shuger keenly analyzes the Renaissance perceptions of sacrifice, but her judgment here seems oddly counterintuitive. While Protestant hostility to ceremony is a well-established fact, it is far from clear that the line dividing sacrificial from nonsacrificial interpreters coincides so neatly with the gulf that divided sixteenth-century Protestants from their Roman counterparts. One would expect Protestant exegesis in particular to *resist* styling this exemplary daughter as a "protonun"[290]—an expectation corroborated by the careful qualifications added by both Brenz and Pellican in arguing for a nonsacrificialist interpretation. But the line Shuger seeks to draw between Protestants and Catholics of the day is further erased by a more thorough polling of commentators. Assuredly, Cappel does not offer "the sole Protestant critique," for many sixteenth-century Protestants subscribed to the sacrificial reading, including Luther, Calvin, Bucer, and Vermigli, as well as the later Lutherans examined here: Spangenberg, Strigelius, and Heling. A still more trenchant challenge to such an easy stratification comes from the playwrights themselves, for all of the sixteenth-century plays—not just Buchanan's, but the Lutheran and Jesuit plays alike — presuppose the daughter's tragic death. Indeed, what may be an option for exegesis is surely determined with finality by the demands of stagecraft: after all, how much food for tragedy is to be found merely in a daughter's consecrated survival?

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[287] Shuger, *Renaissance Bible*, p. 160. It is crucial to note her language here, for despite his later profession of the Reformed faith, *Jephthes* is not written from that perspective but out of Buchanan's humanist commitments and interests. For Beza, see Théodore de Bèze, *Abraham Sacrifiant*, ed. Keith Cameron, Kathleen M Hall, and Francis Higman (Geneva: Droz, 1967), esp. pp. 15–17, where the editors suggest that the play expressed Beza's newfound Protestant convictions, and that both his conversion and his play were shaped by the challenging account of Abraham's faith and obedience that he found in Calvin's *Petit traicté, monstrant que c'est que doit faire un homme fidele congnoissant la verité de l'evangile, quand il est entre les papistes* (CO 6:570).

[288] Shuger, *Renaissance Bible*, p. 137.

[289] Shuger, *Renaissance Bible*, pp. 162–63.

[290] Sharratt and Walsh, *Buchanan: Tragedies*, p. 17, briefly note two sixteenth-century Roman Catholic writers (Godfrey Tilmann and Claude d'Espence) who happily reiterate this traditional line, and a third (Charles de Bovelles) who cites Jephthah's daughter to illustrate more generally the rights that parents have over their children.

That the Lutheran Brenz and the Zwinglian Pellican can argue for the daughter's consecration — despite the obvious polemical risks for a Protestant in countenancing a vow of celibacy — probably says more about their willingness to trust Kimhi's analysis of Hebrew grammar than it does of their adherence to any supposed party line. The source of Vermigli's opposition to the "survivalist" interpretation, on the other hand, seems to lie in his commitment to the letter of the text, a commitment that is only underscored by his refusal to disallow Augustine's argument from silence, despite his strong impulse to do so. One suspects that virtually all of these exegetes, including those of the sixteenth century but also their predecessors, walk a line strung tightly between their perception of the literal or historical shape of Judges 11, replete with its pregnant silences, and their underlying desire to extract some sort of moral sense from this dismal story — a desire to find if not a happy ending, at least a cautionary tale.

Looking toward the Seventeenth Century

Such is the path and pattern that would be followed well beyond the end of the sixteenth century. Long after the Reformation, this mixture of cryptic textual facts and unresolved moral dissonance continued to provoke deliberation over the morality of Jephthah's vow and to fuel debate over whether his daughter was really killed. The specific positions taken by critics over the next half-century or so may be culled and tabulated from the exegetical compendia of John Pearson or Matthew Poole,[291] or gathered directly from a plethora of commentaries and sermons. Either way, the divisions do not fall along any "denominational" lines. On one side, the moderate Calvinist Johannes Drusius, the Puritan William Perkins, and the fugitive Arminian and Catholic sympathizer Hugo Grotius all believed Jephthah's daughter was not sacrificed. On the other side, the moderate Calvinist Louis Cappel, the Puritan Richard Rogers, the Jesuit Cornelius à Lapide, and the nonconformist Presbyterian Matthew Poole all believed she was.

The scope of this study does not allow a detailed sojourn into the seventeenth century, but it is worth a quick foray across the border to compare two virtual kinsmen of the earliest decades — William Perkins and Richard Rogers, both Englishmen, both students of Christ's College (Cambridge), and both conforming Puritans, yet on opposite sides with respect to the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter. Perkins preached a long series of sermons on Hebrews 11 that were edited after his death and published in 1607. A few years later, in 1615, Richard Rogers published over a hundred sermons on the book of Judges, the title page of which bears an uncanny link to Perkins's own subject matter in the form of a boxed quotation from Heb. 12:1: "Wherefore seeing we are compassed with so great a cloud of witnesses . . ." — uncanny, in that *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses* was the original title given to Perkins's work, and the two Puritans' harmony of intention is thereby flagged. With respect to Jephthah's daughter, Perkins accedes to all the details of Kimhi's argument; indeed, he exemplifies Shuger's analysis (p. 168), in that the presence of Jephthah in Hebrews 11 is the foundation for his belief that the daughter was not killed, and the grammar of Judges 11 is but a corroboration.[292] Rogers, too, is well acquainted with Kimhi's argument — we know this not only because he describes it in detail, but also because we know he pored over the commentary of Vermigli as preparation for preaching, sometimes incorporating verbatim extracts. In fact, Rogers said at the outset of his published sermons that he had drawn on only two sources: his own study and the works of "Master Peter Martyr."[293] Still, there is reason to wonder here if he is not tacitly opposing Perkins's recent publication as standing among the "some" who exonerate Jephthah by appeal to Hebrews 11.[294] In any case, Rogers is persuaded neither by that appeal nor by Kimhi's *waw*-disjunctive. Neither is he above sarcasm: after all, if a dog had greeted Jephthah first, he could neither have made it a burnt offering nor dedicated it as a virgin to temple service![295] What weighs more for Rogers is, instead, the sheer unlawfulness of Jephthah's vow in light of the biblical prohibition against human sacrifice and the provision of the Mosaic law (in Lev. 27:1–8) for such a vow to be redeemed monetarily.[296]

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[291] John Pearson (in *Critici Sacri*, 9 vols. [London: C Bee (et al.), 1660], 2:2066–88) furnishes excerpts on Judges 11 from Drusius, Cappel, Lapide, and Grotius, along with several earlier writers, including Isidore Clarius, Vatable, Munster, and Sebastian Castellio. Matthew Poole's *Synopsis criticorum* (5 vols. [third ed ; London. C. Bee, 1669–76], 1:1143–55) also offers extracts from Cappel and Lapide, but appears to give the last word to Vermigli.

In much of Rogers's argumentation, echoes of Vermigli may be heard. But there are many points where his work is his own, and one of these presents a subtle but noteworthy invention. Extolling the daughter's courage and obedience, Rogers wrote:

> Only this we may wonder at, that the daughter of *Iphtah* — a man ignorant (no doubt) and unacquainted with many things concerning the will of God, and therefore none of the fittest to season his children with religion (especially considering his banishment and manner of living) — that she (I say) should yet attain to this excellent courage, and show so rare a pattern of obedience, as that few men's example in the Scripture may compare with her in the one, [and that] assuredly, the greatest part of the children of the most careful and religious parents (for all their knowledge) come far short of her in the other. But where grace is, there nature and sex is not to be respected: that which the Author to the Hebrews says, that "by faith many waxed strong," is truly verified in this worthy damsel, among the rest.[297]

Many recent critics have decried the unfairness by which the innocent daughter is forgotten even in name while her father is laundered and eulogized on the roll of heroes in Hebrews 11. Rogers, however, has not forgotten her. Even if one might fault this Puritan preacher for perpetuating the androcentric image of the "dutiful daughter," one must surely reserve some admiration for the instinct by which his last sentence has smuggled Jephthah's daughter into precisely that list from which she had so long seemed excluded. For him, she too is a hero of faith.[298]

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[292] William Perkins, *A Commentary on Hebrews 11 (1609 Edition)*, ed. John H. Augustine (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991), pp. 174–75.

[293] Richard Rogers, *A Commentary upon the Whole Book of Judges* (London: Felix Kyngston, 1615, facsimile reprint; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), sig. [B4].

[294] Rogers, *Comm. Jud* (Sermon 67), p. 570.

[295] Rogers, *Comm. Jud.* (Sermon 67), p. 569.

[296] Rogers, *Comm. Jud* (Sermons 67–68), pp. 570–71, 576, 579.

[297] Rogers, *Comm. Jud.* (Sermon 68), p 584; spelling and punctuation modernized.

Accordingly, in place of Shuger's proposed correlation between Protestantism and the nonsacrificial exegesis of Judges 11, perhaps it would be better (if somewhat less profound) to draw a correlation between the sacrificial interpretation and a writer's degree of admiration or empathy for Jephthah's daughter.[299] Of course, as argued earlier with respect to sixteenth-century dramatists, this is not so clever an insight: probably in every century, compassion for this young woman is evoked and expressed only in proportion to one's perception of what she lost.

Conclusion

The history of the interpretation of Jephthah's vow and Jephthah's daughter from late antiquity through the Reformation is distinguished principally by four or five crucial exegetical turns, along with a few curiosities. By way of conclusion, I will briefly consider how these developments are related.

The most obvious milestones include, first of all, the identification of Jephthah's daughter as a martyr in some sense, at least insofar as her death is understood to effect something of value for the tribes of Israel. Although the biblical account in Judges makes no such indication, this is the earliest interpretation encountered in any of the extrabiblical writers, including Josephus and Pseudo-Philo, two first-century sources. It may also be the earliest Christian interpretation (not counting the laconic reference in Hebrews 11), appearing in Origen's third-century commentary on the Gospel of John. The references in Josephus and Pseudo-Philo are particularly striking for combining an unambiguous censure of Jephthah's vow with an equally clear conviction that the daughter's death "counted" for something—even though the vow was formally rash and materially illicit. Both of these Jewish writers see the daughter's voluntary death as "patriotic," but Pseudo-Philo goes further: by alluding to parallels between the offering of Jephthah's daughter and that of Isaac, he implies that in some way her death has atoning value. Despite the seeming incoherence of Jephthah's vow, then, both writers approach the story with a commitment to its overall coherence: the scandal of the father's vow is not denied, but the daughter's character and death are invested with sufficient virtue to counterbalance the father's vice.

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[298] Rogers goes on to direct quite a number of admiring comments toward Jephthah's daughter, whose selfless response he ranks among similarly praiseworthy speeches uttered by the Apostle Paul, Nehemiah, Mephibosheth, and David. He also imagines that she used the two-month delay in exemplary fashion by spending the time in fasting and meditation as a preparation for her death; and he praises her "modesty, grace, and wisdom" as well as her "faithfulness, constancy, and obedience." Rogers therefore found the annual lament over the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter a fitting custom, agreeing that "it should not be forgotten." See his *Comm. Jud.* (Sermon 68), pp. 582–83, 586–88.

[299] Similarly, Lapide (d. 1637), a Jesuit and a sacrificialist, also praises Jephthah's daughter extensively, even composing a speech for her at Jud. 11:36 of what she might have said by way of resistance, but didn't. See Cornelius à Lapide, *Commentaria in Scripturam Sacram*, 3:187a: "Indeed, she could have replied to her father, 'I did not vow myself to be offered up to God; nor are you, O father, lord over my life so that you can devote me [to God] and sacrifice me against my will. I do not want to die so young and childless! I want the flower of my youth to unfold fully; I want your offspring and my own to take root! Wherefore I cancel and dissolve your vow'—and thus she could have freed herself from death and her father from his vow and sorrow. But she refused [to free herself], so that she might bear witness to her faith [*religionem*] towards God, her obedience towards her father, and her charity towards her countrymen [*Rempublicam*]. So she offered herself to God as a victim—indeed, a burnt offering—on behalf of her father and fatherland."

Similar considerations may also be present in the mind of Origen, though the context of his remarks leads him to address only the daughter's death and not the father's vow. In any case, and regardless of whether he was influenced by Josephus or rabbinic tradition (as found in Pseudo-Philo or recorded later in the *Midrash Rabbah*), Origen's instinctive linking of Jephthah's daughter to the Christian martyrs of his own day demonstrates not only his affinity for this aspect of the early Jewish reading of the text but also the natural tendency to see Jephthah's daughter as an exemplar. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the father's vilification with the daughter's valorization may well render this early line of interpretation as the plausible middle term for subsequent developments that might otherwise seem more distantly related, namely, the allegorical-ascetic reading, the typological-Christological reading, and the literal-casuistic reading.

Of these three, the allegorical-ascetic reading is the shortest step to take. Origen saw Jephthah's daughter as a model of selfless devotion to God and likened her to a select few among his contemporaries in order to commend both her and them (the Christian martyrs) for imitation. Pseudo-Philo's motive may have been much the same. In the fourth century, however, persecution of Christians declined along with opportunities for martyrdom, while admiration for Christian asceticism — also called bloodless martyrdom — increased by way of compensation. It should be no surprise, then, that so many of the fourth-century texts mention Jephthah's daughter almost unreflectively as a forerunner of consecrated ecclesial virginity — an identification that was only strengthened, of course, by her repeated depiction as a virgin in Jud. 11:37–40. To characterize such references as unreflective, however, is not to disparage them but merely to register how Jephthah's daughter was already established for Christian readers and hearers as a stock character in her role as an archetype of selfless and chaste devotion. The very brevity of these references suggests as much. No one has to argue that she is fit to play such a part, as both Greek and Latin writers attest, whether Methodius, Ephraem, Isidore of Pelusium, or Gregory of Nazianzus; or Ambrose, Jerome, or a host of later Latin writers. It probably also needs saying that when precritical commentators draw such parallels between Jephthah's daughter and Christian martyrs or virgins, they might be accused of capitalizing on her tragedy for their own purposes, but it is more germane to observe that they are extolling her autonomy by correlating it with the highest categories known to them. For these fourth-century writers and their successors, the death of the daughter is not the ultimate evil, nor is sacrifice or martyrdom a meaningless destiny, even if it is often perplexing.[300] Obviously, they have never met Jephthah's daughter, but they instinctively extend to her a dignity earned only by the spiritual elite of their own day.

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[300] Even at the Reformation, when the bloom had long since fallen from the rose of Christian asceticism particularly in its monastic expression, sacrifice and martyrdom are still part of the Protestant mental currency. On this particular point I cannot commend highly enough Shuger's perceptive and moving analysis of the shift from Renaissance attitudes to those of secular modernity; see *Renaissance Bible*, pp. 192–96.

If the allegorical-ascetic reading — the second exegetical milestone — is a short step from the first, the typological-Christological reading is but another step beyond that. Given that Christian ascetics sought to offer themselves to lifelong self-denial and *imitatio Christi*, she who was so apt a precursor for Christian virgins was equally so for the one whose earthly life those virgins sought to emulate above all. Indeed, Origen's own identification of Jephthah's daughter with Christian martyrs was part of an analogy meant to elucidate the death of Christ — an issue raised in John 1:29 when the Baptist greeted Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." A third milestone, then, marks the typological development of Jephthah's daughter as prefiguring the death of Christ. While it is possible to brood over why she was often styled as a figure of Christ's *flesh* (as opposed to symbolizing both natures), the "one-nature" typology of the daughter probably should be taken not as a truncation of the daughter's personhood but simply as a way to accommodate the character of Jephthah in the overall story. This is the conclusion one would draw from a Greek writer such as Methodius: when he speaks of Jephthah's daughter as a type of the flesh of Christ, "flesh" is more properly taken here as a metonym for Christ in his mortality. Methodius does not oppose the *flesh* of Christ to anything, and Jephthah himself is styled in no special role at all. Similarly, for Ephraem, the daughter's Christological image is obtained by way of her resemblance to Isaac, while Jephthah is at best a type only of Abraham.

The decisive factor in developing Jephthah's daughter as a type *only* of the human nature of Christ did not emerge until later on, in the fifth century, when Augustine coined his cleverly detailed account of how Jephthah prefigured Christ in matters such as his lowly birth, his status as an outcast, and his role as a deliverer — all elements drawn from earlier in Judges 11. When such a cunning typology was presented to later exegetes on a platter, as it were, they found it hard to resist. But however much Augustine's successors admired his typology of Jephthah, the same welcome was not extended to what he did with Jephthah's daughter, whom he depicted as a type of the church, destined to be offered up by Christ to God the Father. Indeed, it would seem that history found Augustine wanting here, for his successors invariably either supplemented or abandoned his typology of the daughter, most often to reinvest her, alongside her father, as also a type of Christ. Although credit ought to have gone to Quodvultdeus for the depiction of father and daughter as symbolizing Christ and his flesh, it was instead Isidore of Seville who was lauded ever after for distributing the Christological role between two players. The popular part of Augustine's exegesis was thereby joined with an equally popular image that was simply too compelling for even Augustine to rewrite, namely, the image of Jephthah's daughter as prefiguring not the church but Christ in the flesh. It is significant, one suspects, that later elaborations or variations in the typological exposition of this story almost always enhance the daughter in her Christological role.[301]

A fourth milestone marks the development of various casuistic analyses, whereby Jephthah is excused (or not) and whereby a place is found for the story and its silences in the divine economy. Both the Christian and the rabbinic traditions reached this milestone by the fifth century, as evidenced by Augustine's lengthy treatment and by the arguments of *Midrash Rabbah*. To be sure, Pseudo-Philo and the midrashim are oriented more toward explaining how circumstances and character flaws conspired to carry out this tragedy. While they grant that the Almighty may have allowed the vow's execution in order to punish Jephthah, they are confident that the vow displeased God greatly. God's displeasure is likewise assumed by the earliest Christian writing, perhaps beginning with the sources of the *Apostolic Constitutions*. But additional questions and considerations begin to snowball among the later Fathers, of whom Ambrose is a good representative. How many different ways he posed the question of how such a tragedy could come to pass! Clearly, the bishop of Milan was bemused by the tale, if not befuddled, and he returned to it over and over again. Nonetheless, it took Augustine, his former pupil, to pull together the strands from Ambrose, Jerome, and others, and to offer a synthesis that not only addressed the ethical and exegetical issues but also dovetailed with previous allegorical and typological readings.

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[301] Because of its inclusion in the *Ordinary Gloss*, Augustine's typology of Jephthah's daughter as the church would have been almost universally known, but it rarely receives independent comment. Lyra, for example, reports it in order to commend virginity; Denis offers one of the few developments, apparently epitomizing the church in Peter or Mary Magdalene.

Thus, while Augustine's appeal to divine dispensation was not really a new argument, it was new here, for he appears to be the first to consider whether Jephthah's vow was actually elicited by a secret word from God. His suggestion raised the stakes considerably, especially for ethicists. Disquieting as it may be to imagine God conspiring to punish Jephthah in such a harsh and seemingly unfair manner, by killing his daughter, there is some measure of comfort in imagining Jephthah to be utterly unwitting in the whole process, so that however inscrutable providence may be, at least Jephthah is unambiguously stupid and — in equal measure — both pitiful and culpable. How much more alarming, then, if Jephthah's act were to be seen as not only considered and rational, but also pious! Jephthah would offer a precedent far more threatening than Abraham and Isaac, insofar as he would thereby carry out a sacrifice that God forbade in Abraham's case, and with no clear testimony that God ever so ordered. Nonetheless, it was Abraham's precedent that lent the small but sufficient scrap of plausibility to Augustine's argument from silence, for if God could test Abraham and so approve his faith, why should one not imitate him? Perhaps the difficulty of the question, along with the specter of copycat crimes, was what led Augustine to jettison his own suggestion in favor of a more traditionally foolish Jephthah. Unfortunately, arguments from silence may begin with what is inaudible, but they lead quickly to what is irrefutable, so that Augustine's discarded suggestion effectively dealt the exegetical tradition a wildcard, one that could never be trumped.

Worries over just such an undocumented special dispensation haunted later exegesis, and hampered the ethical and casuistic analyses of later medieval and Reformation writers. One can easily trace this post-Augustinian anxiety from the Victorines through Vermigli, for the most credible and reasoned indictments of Jephthah always add to the word "guilty" this deflating codicil: "unless he had permission." Modern readers, especially readers of the front page, will distrust anyone who invokes divine permission for acts otherwise criminal, but it would be fairer to understand precritical commentators here as adopting, rather against their best wishes, a somewhat different hermeneutic of suspicion. If modern and postmodern minds are not particularly appreciative of divine transcendence, much less divine intervention, precritical commentators saw things rather differently. They knew that the God whom they loved and worshiped could also be a threat, and if many of them were quick to posit an orderly universe, it was no less fragile an order for all their confidence. Like Luther, most precritical commentators knew in their own way how hidden were the ways of God, and how absolute his power. And so, because the silences of Scripture could never be presumed as either safe or predictable, precritical commentators always reserved a space for suspicion — not a suspicion about the integrity or ideology of the text, but rather a predilection to doubt that God can be contained by our own perceptions of order or custom, even where Scripture seems otherwise clear.[302] To be sure, what passes here for suspicion or self-doubt or even humility never becomes paranoia, as the many detailed and purposeful discussions of Jephthah's immorality and recklessness confirm, and the common assumptions about right and wrong do not suddenly lose their force the moment a commentator asks if Jephthah may have had some secret guidance. Interpreters continued to stress how mistaken Jephthah was, and perhaps his daughter as well. The father simply overstepped his bounds, and either of them might have vetoed the vow without incurring divine displeasure. Still, especially in the light of Abraham's trial of faith on Mt. Moriah, no commentator will dogmatically exclude the possibility of a repeat performance, nor presume to sit lightly in judgment on the ways of God. *Princeps legibus solutus est* was a maxim of the day, and it fit God above all: "The lawgiver is above the law."

If the appeal to secret divine permission on Jephthah's behalf seems to have introduced a large measure of chaos into the text, not to say an overdose of anxiety, perhaps the antidote was marketed by Lyra. Thus, a fifth exegetical marker may be identified in the Christian discovery of later rabbinic arguments for the daughter's survival, including the especially provocative grammatical assertions of Joseph and David Kimhi. The appeal of such an argument is plain. If the daughter of Jephthah were not killed but only devoted to temple service or something like that, then no matter who did wrong—whether Jephthah or Phinehas or the daughter or even God—at least the outcome would not have been fatal and the exegetical confusion would therefore be far less critical to resolve. As a milestone, however, there is much to puzzle over. It is beyond doubt that Lyra was familiar with an argument whose contours are clearly those of Kimhi, but did Lyra know the grammatical details? If so, it is exceedingly curious that he failed to report them; if not, one wonders how he himself came to recommend the argument at all.

In any case, for two centuries Lyra was the primary if not exclusive agent through whom Kimhi's conclusion was disseminated. And yet his incomplete reporting may have done just as much to innoculate some later writers against the argument. Among sixteenth-century commentators, in particular, there is no universal acclaim for the survivalist or nonsacrificial argument, nor does it even generate consistent attention: Luther brushes it aside in a marginal gloss, while Calvin seems wholly ignorant of the matter. However, herein may lie a clue. We know that Luther was reading Lyra by 1516–17 (even if Calvin never did), and it is clear that Luther was quite unmoved by Lyra's argument for the daughter's "civil death" as a nun. We also know that Brenz could claim in 1535 to have learned of the argument (that is, in its detailed form) only recently. The contrast between Luther's early indifference and Brenz's later enthusiasm could indicate that where the argument was known only from Lyra, it was easily dismissed as groundless speculation; but where Kimhi's *waw*-disjunctive was explained in detail, the overall argument took on new life and gained new converts. At the same time, it remains that no amount of potential psychic relief was enough to render the grammatical or exegetical argument plausible to everyone. For many, the newly discovered *waw*-disjunctive was simply too slender a thread on which to suspend so many other judgments against Jephthah and thus it amounted, in their eyes, to so much sophistry on behalf of Jephthah and his daughter.

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[302] For more on the traditional discussion over whether the Decalogue (e.g.) would be binding in any possible universe, as well as over the medieval distinction between the ordinary and absolute powers of God, see Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth, 1991); and Thompson, "Immoralities of the Patriarchs," pp 9–46.

If there is a sixth milestone to be recognized, one might well locate it not among precritical commentators but in the recent feminist analyses that have applied to the story and its author a more modern hermeneutic of suspicion, for otherwise the course of exegesis — particularly post-Enlightenment, critical exegesis — has not advanced significantly.[303] Indeed, however much historical-critical exegetes may have added lexical or philological insights, they actually do less to resolve the story's theological difficulties than merely to rule them out of bounds — except when someone such as David Marcus comes along and tries to revive the nonsacrificialist interpretation on modern terms. One could even argue that recent feminist interpretation, knowingly or not, has revived interest in at least some of the factors that were uppermost also in the minds of precritical commentators: including questions about the morality of the vow, a recognition of the troubling discrepancy between the daughter's fate and that of Isaac or Jonathan, exasperation over the failure of any contemporary to remedy Jephthah's ignorance, an awareness of the suggestive parallels between Jephthah's daughter and Jesus, and an appreciation for the importance of keeping alive the memory of her unjust death as a means of protecting the daughters of later times.

There are, of course, other ways in which feminist concerns intersect with those of precritical commentators, as well as additional points at which they sharply disagree. This is a dialogue that is truly cross-cultural, and one that will be resumed more deliberately after the following chapter. For the moment, however, I will make do with a final observation regarding the genre and implicit tone of the literature just surveyed.

One of the curiosities uncovered here has been the diversity of genre in which views of Jephthah's daughter are embedded. To be sure, one could say that interpretations or opinions bearing on Jephthah and his daughter occur in only two kinds of context, namely, either in texts whose genre obliges the writer to say something about Judges 11—commentaries come to mind, of course, but so also would Theodore Prodromus's poetic retelling of the Old Testament—or else in texts that invoke the episode more or less inadvertently, seemingly by happenstance or merely in passing. In particular, it is striking to note how many comments on Jephthah's daughter are not, in fact, from commentaries as usually defined.[304] Granted that the book of Judges has never been the most popular subject for the art of biblical commentary—itself a fact for which one might blame those who design lectionaries[305]—it remains that a significant proportion of the literature surveyed here consists of treatises on other topics, whether letters of counsel, discussions of polity, or apologetics and polemics. In other words, even though most of these writers did write commentaries on some part of the Bible, their recorded thoughts on Jephthah's daughter survived often in alternative contexts—that is to say, when something besides Judges 11 was foremost on their minds. The point to be taken is simply that her story was sufficiently known and valued that, in these other contexts, she could easily come to mind and be insinuated into the argument at hand. Thus, while no one can say when the annual commemoration for Jephthah's daughter fell into disuse and oblivion, the biblically literate generations from the first century through the Reformation era seem to have been far more observant of her memory than one might have assumed: both the figurative and the moral lessons are gauged to provoke and apply precisely such a recollection. Even where commentaries on Judges are few, then, one cannot simply suppose that the story of Jephthah's daughter was forgotten or neglected.

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[303] Marcus quotes William F. Albright's remark in 1970 that "no new light has been shed by recent discovery on the meaning of the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, whether she was condemned to perpetual virginity or was to be a human sacrifice. The arguments on both sides are perhaps equally weak" (*Jephthah and His Vow*, p. 57 n. 51). Marcus's own work is dedicated to reviving the former argument, which in this century has been more often rejected.

At the same time, to credit precritical commentators with a greater-than-expected interest in Jephthah's daughter is by no means to impute great depth of perceptivity or sensitivity to every chance remark. Her story lends itself to exploitation as well as to exploration, and she has often enough been reduced to a menial role, forced to serve as a proof-text in support of a foreign agenda. Nonetheless, when Sypherd sweepingly asserts that "the innumerable theological discussions which appeared in the early and late Middle Ages, and also in the later centuries of the present era . . . rarely, as one might expect, . . . rise above the level of cold abstract exposition,"[306] there is ample room for dissent. Given that Sypherd's was a study of Jephthah's daughter in literature and art, the basis for his generalization is not hard to discern. Yet the "humanistic" appeal of the fictive reconstructions with which he was concerned should not be read so as to impute to them either modernity or superiority, nor should it be used to dismiss works of a more deliberately theological character. There is no doubt but that the allegories, typologies, and ethical analyses that we have followed through so many commentaries and treatises and sermons, patristic through Reformation, can be read with contempt for their glibness or for their rationalizing tendencies, if that is what one is determined to find. On the other hand, the very same allegories, typologies, and ethical analyses may also be read sympathetically (and without changing a word) as means whereby minds both theological and pious attempted to identify with Jephthah's daughter, reading their own lives and concerns and ecclesial contexts into her story in order to recall the witness of her truncated life — in mourning, warning, and grace.

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[304] Naturally, the "commentary" genre evolved continuously; one should not expect any universal or static form. See, inter alia, "Postils and Postillators," in Smalley, *Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, pp. 264–81; and Kenneth Hagen, "What Did the Term *Commentarius* Mean to Sixteenth-Century Theologians?" in *Théorie et pratique de l'exégèse biblique*, pp. 13–38.

[305] The role of lectionaries in shaping textual awareness must not be discounted G. G. Willis reports that "by the Middle Ages the Old Testament lesson had disappeared everywhere, except at Milan." Curiously, there is evidence that Ambrose's lectionary did include the story of Jephthah's daughter, but Willis questions whether it was a regular lesson or merely appeared on a single occasion; see *St. Augustine's Lectionary* (London: SPCK, 1962), pp. 5, 13, 15. Sypherd confirms the neglect of Jephthah's daughter by medieval lectionaries (*Jephthah and His Daughter*, p 11 n. 11) But the problem is perfectly contemporary, too. The committee that prepared *The Revised Common Lectionary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992) considered including Judges 11 but eventually rejected it as too controversial. For other expressions of this concern, see Jean Campbell, "Lectionary Omissions," *The Witness* 76/5 (May 1993): 22; Marjorie Proctor-Smith, "Images of Women in the Lectionary," in *Women—Invisible in Theology and Church*, ed. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Collins (Concilium 182; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), pp. 51–62; and Walter Sundberg, "Jephthah's Daughter: An Invitation to Non-lectionary Preaching," *Word and World* 13 (1993): 85–90.

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[306] Sypherd, *Jephthah and His Daughter*, p. 11 n. 4.

3

Four Expendable Women

Do whatever you want to them. . . . Do to them as you please.
Judges 19:24, Genesis 19:8

If a narrative of suffering requires at least a tinge of nobility or virtue in its characters for the narrative to effect some sense of redemption or catharsis, then the story of the Levite's wife in Judges 19 is severely wanting. There is no catharsis or redemption here, only a mind-numbing senselessness in the wake of bestial savagery. The tale is one of the lesser-known Bible stories, and its hideous details make it an unlikely candidate for popular sermonizing.

The story begins in midstream. An unnamed Levite had a wife, a "concubine" or *pîlegeš* we are told, who left him — either out of anger or in the course of some sort of unfaithfulness, depending on whether one follows the Septuagint or the Masoretic text — and returned to her father. After four months, the Levite set out after her, "to speak to her heart" and bring her back (19:3). There follows an odd interlude in which the woman's father repeatedly detains the Levite in the name of hospitality, but eventually the Levite and his wife undertake the return journey from Bethlehem to Ephraim. Fearing abusive treatment at the hands of the Jebusites, the Levite opts to spend the night in Gibeah, a city of Benjamin. He is taken in by an old man, a fellow Ephraimite living in Gibeah, but their repast is interrupted by the men of the city, who clamor for the Levite that they may have intercourse with him. The old man tries to dissuade them, then offers to them instead his virgin daughter and the Levite's wife. "But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine, and put her out to them. They wantonly raped her, and abused her all through the night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go" (19:25 NRSV). The Levite found her in the morning at the door of the house, where she had fallen "with her hands on the threshold." When she did not respond, he put her on a donkey and went home. There, he carved her into twelve pieces, sending her parts with envoys throughout all Israel.

Although the chapter ends there, the ensuing chapters that conclude the book of Judges press on toward an utterly dismal denouement. In Judges 20, the Levite's account of the assault on his wife provokes Israel to seek revenge against the unrepentant Benjaminites. In a fearsome series of battles, forty thousand Israelites and twenty-five thousand Benjaminites were reported slain—all but six hundred of the tribe of Benjamin. Judges 21 recounts the subsequent plight of those six hundred. Their tribe will perish if they cannot find wives, but the rest of Israel had vowed not to allow their daughters to marry Benjaminites. Lest the tribe be extinguished, Israel turned against the city of Jabesh-gilead for failing to muster against Benjamin, sparing only four hundred virgins. The additional two hundred wives were then kidnapped from the men of Shiloh so that, technically, the Shilohites could claim not to have violated their vow. Truly, "in those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (21:25).

From the outrage perpetrated against the Levite's wife a spiral of violence thus arises, a long course of bloodshed and rapacity that extends to the entire nation and destroys well over sixty-five thousand lives. These three chapters are filled with brutality, and it is surely not accidental that many commentators omit or gloss over such barbarism. But these chapters are also filled with ambiguities, many of which prove to be of tremendous significance for feminist readings of the tale. The first part of this chapter will consider these more recent readings before moving on to survey the contributions of precritical commentators. As we will see, the story and fate of the Levite's wife is actually bound up not only with the virgin daughter of the Levite's host in Gibeah—she who was similarly offered to the Gibeahites—but also with two other daughters, both better known. Judges 19 finds a near-perfect parallel, if not a precedent, in Genesis 19, where Lot offered his two virgin daughters to a frenzied crowd of Sodomites, from whom the daughters were saved only when angels intervened on behalf of Lot and his family. Interpreters ancient and modern have consistently used both tales to shed light on each other. Consequently, the survey that follows will keep an eye not only on the Levite's wife, but on all of these women, all of whom were considered expendable by the men who were nominally their guardians.

Recent Feminist Interpretation of Judges 19–21

Feminist criticism of Judges 19–21 may be considered under headings corresponding to the tale's five or six major plot developments. To begin with, the opening scenario is itself full of lexical puzzles and narrative ambiguities. The first problem concerns the status of the Levite's *pîlegeš* (פילגש), usually translated as "concubine" but challenged by some interpreters. Closely related, perhaps, is the question of what the Hebrew and Syriac versions meant to denote by describing her as having "played the harlot" against him (וַתִּזנה, from *zanah*)—a question complicated by the text of the Septuagint, which asserts instead that she "became angry" with him (ὠργίσθη).[1] Although commentators typically defer to the Hebrew here, feminist critics have had good reason to challenge this reading. Fewell and Gunn explain:

> The Hebrew text states that the young woman "whored against him," though what that means is not as obvious as it might first appear. Would a woman who has actu-

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[1] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 66. While the Old Latin follows the Septuagint here, the Vulgate is altogether silent.

> ally committed adultery return to her father's house, given the social shame that this would bring upon him? By the same token, would the Levite, in such a case, be likely to go to the father to woo her ("speak to her heart") and bring her back? And why is there no mention of legal consequences (cf. Genesis 38)?[2]

Without a doubt, questions such as these complicate the reading of the Hebrew text and may well support the alternative reading of the Septuagint. Fewell and Gunn suggest that calling the woman a whore could simply be a way to characterize (and defame) her independent behavior; Yee makes a similar point. Indeed, her subsequent mistreatment at her husband's hands might well suggest that she was fleeing his abusive behavior.[3] Yee further understands *pîlegeš* to designate a secondary wife, one taken solely for sexual pleasure or for the sake of offspring if the primary wife is barren; the absence of that primary wife from the narrative may represent the narrator's attempt to shame the Levite and discredit his character.[4]

A more radical reinterpretation, however, has been proposed by Mieke Bal, who argues that *pîlegeš* is better read here in a primitive sense, whereby it denotes not a concubine but the wife in a "nomadic" marriage—a marriage in which the wife continues to live in her father's house. The narrative of the Levite and his wife, then, like the entire course of Judges 19–21, depicts a painful transition in Israel from this earlier "patrilocal" kinship structure to one in which the wife resides with the husband (a "virilocal" model).[5] In Bal's reading, the woman's "unfaithfulness" was actually constituted by her initial desertion not of her husband but of her father, and all of the later plot turns serve largely to reinscribe on her body the conflict between her father's marriage code and that of her husband. Bal's tour de force is widely admired but not so widely adopted; to say the least, it crowds an awful lot of unrecorded activity between the first two clauses of Jud. 19:2. An alternative scenario is offered by Cheryl Exum. Although admittedly influenced by Bal, Exum is persuaded far less by Bal's reading of *pîlegeš* than by Yair Zakovitch's reading of *zanah* as tantamount to the woman having declared her divorce. In either case, returning to her father's house constitutes, for Exum, "a gesture of sexual autonomy."[6] A still different scenario is advanced by Koala Jones-Warsaw, a womanist critic who speculates that the reference to harlotry might represent the Levite's accusation that his wife was not a virgin at marriage; the woman's father would figure as a defender of her innocence.[7] Obviously, no consensus has emerged here, but feminist interpreters are united in their reluctance to take the accusation of infidelity at face value.

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[2] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 133.

[3] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 133; Gale A. Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17–21 and the Dismembered Body," in *Judges and Method*, p. 162. The story is commonly ameliorated by citing the Levite's resolve to "speak to her heart" as proof of his love for his wife, however much this thread is dropped in the subsequent narrative (so Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 67). Bal vigorously dissents on the grounds that "to speak to the heart" is correctly understood as speaking to the mind, that is, as seeking to persuade more by reason than by affection; see *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 90. But Bal does not address Trible's other lexical examples here.

[4] Yee, "Ideological Criticism," p. 162: "In contrast to Israel's patrilineal ideology, where men typically marry and have sons to carry on the family name, the Levite apparently eschews a primary wife and uses his secondary wife for sexual gratification."

[5] This is the primary thesis of her entire book, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*, a thesis applied also to Jephthah's daughter On Judges 19–21, see pp 6, 80–93.

[6] Exum, "Raped by the Pen," in *Fragmented Women*, pp. 178–79; cf. 177 n 13. Exum draws this interpretation of *zanah* from Yair Zakovitch, "The Woman's Rights in the Biblical Law of Divorce," *The Jewish Law Annual* 4 (1981): 39, cited by Exum at p. 178 n 20.

The story's second episode involves the Levite's errand to the house of his wife's father, a strange scene of enforced hospitality. Whatever the Levite intended by "speaking to her heart," it seems thoroughly upstaged by the days of feasting with his father-in-law. Trible has characterized this episode as "an exercise in male bonding," observing that "neither food nor drink nor companionship attends the female, but the males enjoy it all."[8] But feminist and womanist responses to Trible's remark helpfully demonstrate how this community of interpreters also corrects itself. Accordingly, Bal explains that the episode is concerned far less about hospitality than it is with the competition between the two men (and, for Bal, the two marriage systems), between whom the Levite's wife is caught. As a guest, the Levite is actually in a position of relative powerlessness.[9] Developing this insight, Jones-Warsaw adds that since the young woman had been living in her father's home for four months, there is no reason to suppose that she was entitled to the sort of hospitality reserved for guests.[10]

It is the catastrophe that occurs on the way home, however, that understandably provokes the most comment. As is universally noted, the scene closely mirrors the events of Genesis 19, when Lot offered his two virgin daughters to protect his two visitors from probable homosexual rape. Here, however, there is no angelic intervention, and the Levite finally resolves the conflict by forcing his wife out the door and into the hands of the townsmen, who gang rape her until morning. But between the crowd's initial demand and their later seizure of the Levite's wife lie several unanswered questions. For one thing, it is peculiar that the old man—the host in this episode—offered these "good-for-nothings" not only his daughter but also his guest's wife, who surely should also have been protected by his hospitality. Second, it is curious that the same Gibeahites who wanted to "know" the Levite and who initially refused the offer of two women somehow ended up being so satisfied with just the one that the Levite was able to get a good night's sleep.[11] And, as with Lot, there is the troubling question of what moved the Levite to this cruel act.

Bal's response to this turn of events extrapolates her analysis of earlier parts of the story. The Levite, having challenged patrilocal marriage is, ironically, forced to take refuge in a father's house. The Gibeahites' hostility to him as an outsider thus more specifically represents hostility to the system of virilocal marriage that he has sought to introduce. The Levite is therefore to be punished, but this is more effectively done by depriving him of his wife—thus reaffirming the system that he had challenged. The old man's daughter is not taken, then, precisely because she displays perfect submission to patrilocy and has no need to be punished.[12] Exum, again, does not adopt the social analysis that forms Bal's interpretative grid, but she agrees that story is meant to punish the Levite's wife for her earlier display of autonomy, so the old man's daughter is excused for reasons similar to those cited by Bal. In addition, she suggests, the wife is preferred also because "homosexual rape is too threatening to narrate."[13]

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[7] Koala Jones-Warsaw, "Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic. A Reading of Judges 19–21," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, p. 174.

[8] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 68. The remark about male bonding is seconded by Fewell, "Judges," p. 75

[9] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, pp. 90–91.

[10] Jones-Warsaw, "Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic," pp. 175 n. 2, 180–81.

[11] So concludes Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, p. 174.

Most of these commentators agree that the initial threat of homosexual rape proves that the issue was not sex or lust, but rather a lust for violence or a desire to humiliate or dominate the outsider.[14] However, the motivation of the men inside the house is variously explained. Fewell and Gunn suspect the Levite harbored some resentment against his wife for the whole troublesome errand and, in particular, for her father's delaying tactics; abandoning her to the mob is a way of blaming her.[15] Jones-Warsaw offers an analogous explanation:

> It would be presumptuous to assume that it was easy for the old man to offer either of the women under his care. But, since the crime of homosexual rape was a more serious offense than heterosexual rape within *their* social context, he was acting to lessen the degree of victimization. The Levite, eager to save himself, thrusts his wife, his concubine out to the men.[16]

As we will discover, it is fairly traditional to see homosexual rape as more heinous than heterosexual rape, though the point is also contested in various ways. But Jones-Warsaw underscores the lesson most often drawn from this episode, namely, that "hospitality" protects only men.[17]

The gang rape has a long and disturbing sequel, beginning with the Levite stumbling upon his wife's body at the threshold the next morning, and proceeding on to her dismemberment and the civil war that follows. Although the Septuagint assures us she was dead, the Hebrew text is provocatively silent, leaving the reader to wonder whether the woman was still alive when the Levite bundled her onto his donkey. Thus, in the absence of any declaration of when she died, the Hebrew leaves open the grisly possibility that the Levite was also his wife's butcher. Either way, nothing deterred him from industriously carving her into a dozen pieces. Although the Levite later framed his act in terms of a quest for justice, many feminists have challenged his explanation. Indeed, Bal sees his act not as a protest against her rape but as a participation in it. "Dismembering her dead body is not only a desacralization but also an erasure of all her remaining humanity. It is as if the man is trying, in overdoing the violence already done to her, retrospectively to affirm *his* mastery, as against the mastery of the rapists, over her. Even at this poignant moment . . . the men compete."[18] Once again, Exum continues Bal's point: the dismemberment further punishes the woman's display of autonomy. "'If the female body offends you, cut it up,' might be the motto," though Exum goes on to add more soberly that what she is attempting to describe is not the narrator's "conscious misogynistic design" but rather "a subtext motivated by male fear of female sexuality and by the resultant need of patriarchy to control women."[19]

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[12] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, pp. 92–93, 158–59

[13] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp 182–84.

[14] So Bal and Exum. See also Tapp, "Ideology of Expendability," p. 162; and Yee, "Ideological Criticism," p. 164.

[15] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, pp 133–34.

[16] Jones-Warsaw, "Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic," p. 177 (emphasis hers).

[17] So Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 122, and Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 182–83. Or, as Trible trenchantly glosses Jud 19.24, "If done to a man, [rape] is a vile thing; if done to women, it is 'the good' in the eyes of men"; see *Texts of Terror*, p. 74.

The Levite's subsequent explanation of his astonishing deed is similarly faulted. Far from acquitting him, his speech serves more to exhibit his spinelessness. Particularly bothersome is what seems to be his revisionism: for only now do we hear from him that the Gibeahites intended to kill him, and only now do we hear that his wife died of the assault. Moreover, there is no mention of homosexual rape nor of the Levite's own complicity in delivering his wife to her tormentors. Here again, critics are divided over the significance of these changes. The Levite certainly seems shrewd in evading the question of his own culpability, and Bal complains that most commentators — like the tribes of Israel gathered here — are taken in by him.[20] However, while Trible senses that the Levite's "crime of silence" is being protected by the narrator, Exum finds the Levite's self-serving speech rather a sign of the narrator's disdain.[21] Niditch, on the other hand, thinks the changes in the account stem from the narrator's discomfort with homosexual rape, while Yee places the discomfort within the Levite himself.[22] These interpreters find more agreement in reflecting on the final sequence of events that follows, namely the civil war, the sack of Jabesh-gilead, and the abduction of the young women of Shiloh. In a word, it is deemed bitterly ironic that the supposed quest for justice for the Levite's wife entailed not only so much loss of life but also the reenactment on a massive scale of the Gibeahites' original crime, visited now upon the abducted women of Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh.[23]

A few summary remarks are in order here, particularly with respect to the overall effect of this tale. Trible, whose essay continues to drive much of the discussion, seeks not only for readers to remember the Levite's wife — and, repenting, to say "never again" — but also to post an indictment of the narrator of Judges and his canonical successors. "Truly, to speak for this woman is to interpret against the narrator, plot, other characters, and the biblical tradition because they have shown her neither compassion nor attention."[24] Lerner's verdict is similar: "Nowhere in the text is there a word of censure toward [the Levite] for his action or toward the host, who offers up his virgin daughter to save his guest's life and honor. On the contrary, the text assumes that no explanation for such behavior is necessary."[25] And Tapp lumps the tale together with the stories of Jephthah's daughter and the daughters of Lot as sharing a single ideology, namely, "virgin daughters are expendable."[26]

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[18] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 126 (emphasis hers).

[19] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 181. Yee thinks the Levite is deliberately contrasted to Saul, who (in 1 Samuel 11) dismembered and distributed a yoke of oxen as a means of mustering Israel against the Ammonites on behalf of Jabesh-gilead. "The Levite, however, whose profession should guarantee that the ritual is legitimate, becomes the agent of a grotesque antisacrifice that desecrates rather than consecrates" ("Ideological Criticism," p. 165).

[20] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 135, Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, pp. 160, 216

[21] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 82; Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 186.

[22] Susan Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19–20. Family, Community, and Social Disintegration," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 371; Yee, "Ideological Criticism," p. 166.

[23] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 83; Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 127; cf. Jones-Warsaw, "Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic," p 181.

[24] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 86.

Other feminist interpreters, however, temper these judgments. Fewell compares the narrator to the women in Jud. 11:40 who commemorated Jephthah's daughter; she asserts, moreover, that "writing the wrongs" is implicitly a means of self-critique.[27] Yani Yoo, in a study of the parallels between the Levite's wife and the sexual slavery imposed on women in Korea during its occupation by Japan, finds in the story's "absurdities and ironies" a signal of the narrative's intention to condemn violence against women.[28] Feminist exegetes often criticize the namelessness of female characters as a ploy to render them also powerless and dehumanized, but Brenner argues that the namelessness of all the figures here censures especially the men.[29] Recognitions that the Levite and others are implicitly criticized by the narrative are also voiced by Niditch and Lasine,[30] but the last word may be fittingly shared by Exum and Jones-Warsaw, both of whom offer perceptive qualifications. Exum agrees that the narrator intends to censure both the Levite and the Gibeahites; the problem is that the censure is carried out in a way that does more to exploit and demean women than to defend them—and much less to listen to and believe them.[31] Jones-Warsaw, on the other hand, feels that a womanist reading is able to move beyond Trible's "dichotomistic" approach: the problem in Judges 19–21 is not just that women are victimized, and to restrict the problem to issues of gender effectively silences other characters, also victims, such as the men of Jabesh-gilead.[32] In other words, there are other kinds of suffering here besides sexism and other kinds of evil besides patriarchy.[33]

In reporting the views of ancient, medieval, and Reformation commentators on the story just recounted, my approach will differ slightly from that of the previous two chapters. As noted earlier, commentaries on Judges are not nearly so numerous as those on Genesis, and even within Judges commentaries, Jephthah's daughter captured a far greater share of attention than did the Levite's wife. Consequently, commentators' opinions on the Levite and his wife will be supplemented wherever possible by their treatments of Lot's offer of his daughters to the Sodomites in Genesis 19, a tale often read as the twin of Judges 19. (Indeed, some precritical commentators economized at the latter passage by deferring entirely to their "earlier comments" in Genesis.) The advantage of consulting this near-parallel in Genesis is that it allows us to poll a number of premodern interpreters who commented on Genesis but whose views on Judges do not survive or are not otherwise known. The two stories are not perfect parallels, of course, and some recent commentators have called attention to significant differences between them.[34] Nonetheless, most feminist critics read the stories in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 as first cousins, if not twins.[35] It will therefore be of interest to see not only what precritical commentators said about Lot's deed, but also whether Lot—as the nephew of Abraham and one called "righteous" by the New Testament[36]—was given any benefit of doubt that the Levite was denied.

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[25] Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, p 174

[26] Tapp, "Ideology of Expendability," p 171

[27] Fewell, "Judges," p. 77.

[28] Yani Yoo, "*Han*-Laden Women· Korean 'Comfort Women' and Women in Judges 19–21," *Semeia* 78 (1997): 37–46.

[29] Brenner, introduction to *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, pp 12–13

[30] See Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme," pp 369–71; cf. Stuart Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19: Lot's Hospitality in an Inverted World," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29 (1984): 37–59.

[31] Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 197–98, 200–201.

[32] Jones-Warsaw, "Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic," pp. 180–81.

[33] Given the concern that surfaced so prominently in connection with Jephthah's vow, it is surprising that few feminist commentators ponder God's role in or behind Judges 19–21. Fewell and Gunn are unusual in suggesting that when the tribes consult Yahweh in preparing for war against Benjamin, the response is one of "allowing them to do as they please," possibly as a divine display of "ironic indifference"; see *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 135.

The Levite's Wife and Lot's Daughters in Early Jewish Exegesis

The story of the Levite's wife and its bloody sequel did not infallibly attract attention or comment. Philo, for instance, is silent on this text. But a few early Jewish sources do take cognizance of the tale, including Pseudo-Philo and Josephus, both of whom are more forthcoming than the later midrashim.

Pseudo-Philo. Were one to subpoena Pseudo-Philo, however, he would prove to be a hostile witness: even though he abridges the account severely, he concisely exonerates the Levite and excoriates his wife. The Levite is no longer guilty of expelling his wife; she was, instead, dragged from the house by the mob. Moreover, Pseudo-Philo blames her for her own demise, "because she had transgressed against her man once when she committed sin with the Amalekites, and on account of this the LORD God delivered her into the hands of sinners."[37] Although this explanation might seem simply an elaboration of the infidelity alleged by the Hebrew text, for Pseudo-Philo it is her religious purity that is far more at issue than her sexual infidelity. Harrington notes Pseudo-Philo's abiding worries over Jewish intermarriage with Gentiles, and the ensuing chapters underscore in yet another way his preoccupation with religious purity.[38] Dwelling at length on Israel's initial two defeats in the Benjaminite war (in Judges 20), Pseudo-Philo finds it scandalous, if not blasphemous, that the tribes of Israel reacted so promptly to avenge the concubine's murder yet responded to Micah's idolatry (in Judges 17–18) with sheer indifference.[39] It is beyond argument that the woman is vilified by Pseudo-Philo, but the resulting misogynism here seems inadvertent—though still real.

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[34] For example, although Niditch observes how Judges 19 is commonly read by modern commentators as dependent on the story of Lot, she herself argues the other way around; see "The 'Sodomite' Theme," pp. 375–78. Lasine argues that Judges 19 is an utter inversion of Genesis 19; see "Guest and Host," pp. 38–41.

[35] In particular, the indictment of Lot parallels what is said of the Levite. Lerner writes, "Lot's right to dispose of his daughters, even so as to offer them to be raped, is taken for granted" (*Creation of Patriarchy*, p. 173). Fewell and Gunn (*Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 58) dismiss traditional ameliorations of Lot's offer as "desperate": instead, "the simpler reading is that this is patriarchy caricaturing itself." Just as important a parallel, however, are the reproaches leveled at those recent biblical commentators who have defended Lot here. Lerner criticizes E. A. Speiser on this basis, and Jeansonne (*Women of Genesis*, pp. 35–36) finds similar faults in the commentaries of Bruce Vawter and John Skinner.

[36] So 2 Peter 2.7–9: "If [God] rescued Lot, a righteous man greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by their lawless deeds that he saw and heard), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment" (NRSV).

[37] Pseudo-Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 45.3 (SC 229:306, *OTP* 2:359–60). As Harrington notes here, Pseudo-Philo may be drawing on the reference to the woman's adultery in Jud. 19:2.

Josephus. If Pseudo-Philo represents a hostile witness, Josephus's sustained and tendentious revision offers almost the opposite. We saw earlier how he retold the story of Jephthah's daughter so as to portray Judaism favorably in Roman and Hellenistic eyes. In similar fashion, there is no mention here of the woman's status as a concubine, nor of her adultery.[40] Instead, the story turns on the Levite's unrequited love for a beautiful woman who, weary of quarreling, returned to her parents (plural: γονεῖς). Still smitten, the Levite pursued her and was reconciled to her. The subsequent assault at Gibeah, as Josephus tells it, was a strictly heterosexual affair: the young men of Gibeah desired not the Levite but his beautiful wife. They spurned the old man's warning, threatening him with death, whereupon he offered his own daughter in the place of his guests. But the Gibeahites seized the Levite's wife, and the endless night of rape followed. Josephus concludes:

> They . . . let her go towards the break of day. She, outworn with her woes, repaired to the house of her host, where, out of grief at what she had endured and not daring for shame to face her husband—since he above all, she deemed, would be inconsolable at her fate—she succumbed and gave up the ghost. But her husband, supposing his wife to be buried in deep sleep and suspecting nothing serious, tried to arouse her, with intent to console her by recalling how she had not voluntarily surrendered herself to her abusers, but that they had come to the lodging-house and carried her off.[41]

Josephus concludes with a concise account of how the husband's misimpression was corrected and how he proceeded to send her severed parts to the tribes of Israel in search of redress.

Obviously, the story has been thoroughly sanitized. There is, first of all, no reference to the homosexual[42] character of the Gibeahites' assault—an intriguing bit of redaction. However, given Josephus's willingness to tell of the homosexual lust of the Sodomites in Genesis 19, it may well be that he is willing to attribute this vice to non-Israelites but would prefer not to admit it of his own countrymen, here represented by the tribe of Benjamin.[43] Of equal interest is the way he has touched up the portrait of the Levite and his wife so as to render them virtually devoid of vice. She is beautiful, he is in love with her, and an initially rocky marriage is portrayed as on the mend when tragedy strikes. Far from pushing his wife out the door, the Levite is violently stripped of her. She, displaying an appropriate sense of shame and deference to her husband, dies the virtuous death of grief. Josephus's Levite is a marked contrast to the brute in Jud. 19:28 who tersely orders his wife to "get up." Instead, Josephus imputes to him the intention to awaken and console her.

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[38] Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo," *OTP* 2:359, note d

[39] Pseudo-Philo, *Bib. Ant.* 45.6–47.8 (SC 229.308–17, *OTP* 2:360–62).

[40] Josephus's silence on these matters may be attributed to his reliance on the Septuagint or other Greek versions rather than on the Hebrew—his usual pattern, as discussed by H W. Attridge, "Josephus and His Works," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, ed. Michael E. Stone (Assen. Van Gorcum, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 211–16

[41] Josephus, *Antiquities* 5.2.8 §§147–48 (LCL 5.68–69). Although Josephus may seem to blame the victim here, Whiston's translation of τοῖς γεγενημένοις as "she concluded that he would never forgive her *for what she had done*" (as opposed to the Loeb's "at her fate") is simply without textual warrant; see *The Works of Josephus*, trans William Whiston (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987), p. 136.

[42] While "homosexual" is the usual descriptor for the same-sex assaults in Sodom and Gibeah, one should be mindful that the term is of recent coinage and no part of the premodern vocabulary. For example, "there is nothing resembling the categories 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' in Thomas [Aquinas].

Josephus goes on to smooth over the conduct of Israel against Benjamin and to underscore Israel's indignation over such an outrage; other ameliorations could also be noted.[44] For our purposes, however, two general observations will suffice. First, Josephus's editorial changes can probably be taken as indications of his embarrassment over the original outlines of the story. Whatever character flaws might be registered against the Levite, his wife, her father, or the old man according to the text of Judges 19–21, they all disappear and are replaced with the appropriate virtue.[45] Second, and possibly more important, Josephus should be credited for the effects of what he did not say. While several among later Christian commentators will draw considerable guidance from the way Josephus retells and interprets Judges 19–21, none of them will learn from him something that he himself surely knew, namely, that the Hebrew text of Jud. 19:2 attributed the departure of the Levite's wife not to her anger but to her infidelity. Christian readers, so reliant on their Greek and Latin Bibles, will not learn of this inflammatory detail until it is reported by Lyra, thirteen centuries later.

The Midrashim. The attention given to this episode by Josephus and by Pseudo-Philo offers a remarkable contrast to later rabbinic exegesis, particularly the midrashic treatments. In the entire *Midrash Rabbah*, for instance, there are up to ten references to the events of Judges 19–21, but all of them are extremely oblique.

Thomas cannot responsibly be made even to speak in debates where homosexuality and heterosexuality serve as categories for personal identity. When Thomas talks about the Sodomitic vice, he is talking about a vice." See Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 155.

[43] For Josephus on Lot's offer of his daughters to the Sodomites, see *Antiquities* 1.11.3 §§200–1 (LCL 4:98).

[44] In later lines, Josephus adds that the fury of the Benjaminite war was due both to what happened to the Levite's wife and also to the military losses sustained by Israel. The parents of the kidnapped daughters of Shiloh were to be told that "they have but themselves to blame for neglecting to protect their daughters." Ultimately, it is the "wisdom" of the Israelites that is heralded as having brought the unhappy episode to a satisfactory conclusion; see *Antiquities* 5.2.9–12 §§150–174 (LCL 5 68–81). By contrast, Lot's offer of his daughters is reported both tersely and without embellishment, neither accusing nor excusing him (*Antiquities* 1.11.2 §201, LCL 4:98–99).

[45] A similar conclusion is drawn by Amaru, "Portraits of Biblical Women in Josephus' Antiquities," pp. 158–59. Not only does the Levite become a more sympathetic character, but his wife is transformed as well into a "beautiful, chaste, Sarah-like" woman.

Of those that pertain to this inquiry, most reflect on the meeting of the tribes to take vengeance on Benjamin or on Benjamin's near-extinction. Only in one case is there a possible allusion to the abuse suffered by the Levite's wife.[46] Given the opprobrium usually heaped on women accused of harlotry, Jud. 19:2 seems a missed opportunity.[47] The near-silence of the rabbis is rendered still more enigmatic by their silence with respect to Lot's offer of his daughters. Indeed, having surveyed the midrashic and talmudic sources, Leila Bronner concludes that "nowhere in classical rabbinic literature is there a discussion of [Lot's] daughters' feelings, . . . and nowhere is there a condemnation of Lot."[48] Not until the *Midrash Tanhuma* (ninth century) is Lot's behavior explicitly repudiated.[49] Kugel translates:

> Normally a man will sacrifice himself for his daughters or his wife: either he kills or is killed [on their behalf]. But Lot was ready to turn over his daughters to them for iniquity! Said God to him: Well then, you can keep them for yourself, and eventually little schoolchildren will laugh about you when they read, "And Lot's two daughters became pregnant from their father" [Gen. 19:36].[50]

This later midrash is perfectly blunt in its commonsense condemnation of Lot, and rabbis will subsequently build upon it. But the later declamations do not alter the many preceding centuries during which Lot's callousness was apparently ignored. Was this rabbinic silence merely part of the general "forgetting" of these daughters that feminists have recently excoriated? One might so argue, but Bronner offers three other suggestions. Perhaps the rabbis' silence reflects "deep revulsion on their part." Or, given that the rabbis would have agreed that homosexuality was the greater evil, perhaps they "saw no point in castigating Lot" in a no-win situation. Or perhaps "Lot's degeneracy" is to be taken as implicit in various other accounts of the depravity of Sodom—a depravity that may have tainted both Lot and his daughters. Still, the rabbis would be extremely unlikely to place obligations of hospitality before matters of sexual morality.[51] In other words, Bronner implies, their silence here may well embody more grief and outrage than apathy or androcentrism.

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[46] See *Midrash Rabbah* §3.2 on Esther 1:9 (Soncino 9:45), which, commenting on Queen Vashti's feast for the women, alludes to Jud. 19:25 possibly by way of denigrating either Vashti or King Ahasuerus. The other texts noted above include *Midrash Rabbah* on Genesis §§73.5, 82.4, 97; on Esther §7.11; on Ecclesiastes §5 16; and on Lamentations, Proem 33. Louis Ginzberg adduces two texts — Gittin 6b (in the Babylonian Talmud) and the Targum on Judges 19.2 — in which the Levite's harshness is blamed for precipitating this chain of disaster, an argument akin to Josephus's account See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:212 n. 134.

[47] On rabbinic attitudes toward harlotry, see Bronner, *From Eve to Esther*, pp. 142–47, also cf. pp. 118–21 on the vilification of Dinah.

[48] Bronner, *From Eve to Esther*, p. 115. *Jubilees* 16:5–6 (*OTP* 2:88) offers a curious contrast here, recording God's judgment on Sodom without mentioning Lot's offer of his daughters, yet heavily condemning Lot and his daughters in the following verses (16:7–9) for their incest, then prophesying that Lot's seed will be extirpated "just like the judgment of Sodom." While this Lot is far from the just man of 2 Peter 2:7, there is actually a long tradition of doubting Lot's integrity in early Jewish and Christian literature. See two sections in James L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1997), "Lot the Righteous" and "Lot the Wicked," pp. 182–85; idem, *Traditions of the Bible. A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 328–31, 345; cf. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5:240 n. 171. None of these early texts addresses Lot's exposure of his daughters; see next note.

[49] Specifically, *Tanhuma Vayera* 12, which, according to Bronner, "is the midrashic source on which all later medieval commentators base their discussion, including Ramban, Rabbenu Bachia, and Abarbanel, who consequently indict Lot for his indecent behavior" (*From Eve to Esther*, pp. 115–16). This is also the only rebuke of Lot's pandering cited by Ginzberg (*Legends* 1:255, 5:241 n. 176). For the Ramban, see p. 201

[50] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was*, p. 185; bracketed text is his

Patristic Commentary on Judges 19 and Genesis 19

If there is a sympathetic way to read the silence of the rabbis, perhaps one may hope for as much from the church fathers, among whom it is difficult to find any sustained comment on Judges 19. Naturally, one would not expect comments from those Fathers who did not preach or write on Judges, a situation that explains the "silence" of a major exegete such as Chrysostom; and only a few of Origen's homilies on Judges survive. But one might expect some comment from those who did address the book of Judges, whether in continuous exegesis or in the popular question-and-answer format. Indeed, there are several of the latter treatises extant, but these too are disappointing. Although Ambrosiaster's questions on the Old Testament addressed Jephthah's vow, they do not take up this other matter. Theodoret's *Questions on the Octateuch* do attend to the final chapters of Judges, but he concerns himself primarily with why the gathered tribes of Israel—despite their ostensible zeal and piety—were twice defeated by Benjamin. In the course of indicting the tribes for their hypocrisy, Theodoret also indicts the Gibeahites for their own lawlessness and lust; beyond this, he says next to nothing about the Levite's wife.[52] Augustine's influential questions on the Old Testament end prematurely, fizzling out with Samson at Judges 15. No explanation is offered for this apparent truncation, nor do Augustine's later admirers comment on his abrupt ending. Indeed, it may well be that Augustine's silence was as loud as a death knell for his later imitators, for it is otherwise a remarkable coincidence that the commentaries of Quodvultdeus, Isidore, and Pseudo-Bede are similarly abbreviated. Perhaps these epigones of Augustine simply refused to rush in where their master feared to tread.

Consequently, after surveying the few odd and fragmentary treatments of Judges 19–21 bequeathed by the church fathers, we will turn to the parallel tale in Genesis 19, where Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine, and others offered observations and arguments that help us to surmise what they probably thought about the episode in Gibeah.

The Levite's Wife among the Church Fathers: Small and Tentative Lessons

Jerome. Although his series of questions on the Old Testament addressed only the book of Genesis, Jerome does contribute a passing comment on Hosea 9:9 and 10:9, where Israel's present sin is likened to "the days of Gibeah." He glosses the first text simply, as referring to “what was once done in Gibeah, when the wife of the Levite returning from Bethlehem was slain by unlawful copulation.”[53] The second text, however, receives a longer paraphrase:

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[51] Bronner, *From Eve to Esther*, p. 115.

[52] Theodoret, *Quaest. 27 in Jud.* (PL 80:515–18). Theodoret's response includes a diminutive reference to the Levite's wife as "the little woman" (τὸ γύναιον), but it seems unwise to make much of this. His following question offers a brief and perfunctory explanation of why the surviving Benjaminites were told to seize wives from the virgins of Shiloh.

> All Israel has sinned against me from the day when Benjamin foully and cruelly killed the Levite’s wife in the city of Gibeah. Not because he [i.e., Israel] punished the injury and avenged the crime with blood, but because he leaped up at the chance to fight over a husband’s sorrow yet declined to avenge sacrilege against his God; for when the ephod and teraphim were worshiped as idols in Micah’s house, he looked the other way.[54]

Jerome has touched on one of the other unsolved mysteries of Judges, namely, the strange and evidently unpunished idolatry of Micah in chapters 17 and 18. Later commentators will suggest that Micah’s idolatry lay behind the two defeats Benjamin dealt to Israel; Theodoret himself may be moving in this direction, too, though he is not explicit; and a clear precedent for this reading could have been drawn from Pseudo-Philo. Jerome’s interest in Hosea’s prophecy inevitably pushes the Levite’s wife into the background, but it is not insignificant that he chooses to describe her as a wife (*uxor*), despite his familiarity with the Hebrew text, nor should one overlook his descriptions of her fate.[55] Clearly, Jerome reprehends the Gibeahites’ crime, much as Theodoret would later on, but in the context of Hosea he felt no compunction to pass judgment on the Levite.

Ambrose and Sulpicius. As slight as these references are, the Levite and his concubine are not utterly ignored in other patristic writings. In particular, Ambrose narrates the story at great length in a letter to Syagrius, bishop of Verona (ca. 380), and a shorter synopsis is set forth in the *Chronicles* of Sulpicius Severus (ca. 400). Both accounts take a suspiciously Josephus-like approach to taming the story.[56] As was the case with Jephthah’s daughter, Ambrose’s concern is to advocate on behalf of Christian virgins. His letter is actually a follow-up to an earlier missive to Syagrius in which he explained his intervention in the controversy over Indicia, a Christian virgin accused of unchastity by her brother-in-law. Ambrose’s investigation ended by vindicating Indicia and excommunicating her accusers, but what lingers in the reader’s ear is Ambrose’s outrage that Syagrius would demand Indicia prove her integrity by a midwife’s physical examination: “I prefer virginity to be made manifest by the mark of one’s character rather than by the body’s enclosure.”[57] Curiously, while the first letter is rich in historical detail, the second letter seems to be nothing but a retelling of Judges 19–21, bracketed by brotherly exhortations against subjecting holy virgins to "bodily insult" (*corporalem contumeliam*).[58] The story thus stands as a long illustration for a terse exhortation: truly, an extravagant anecdote pressed into the service of a simple point. Taking up Josephus's depiction of the Levite's passion, his wife's overwhelming beauty, and their unfortunate quarreling, Ambrose may well lean more on the text of the *Antiquities* than on the book of Judges. Not that Ambrose is merely a copyist: if he appears at times merely to paraphrase Josephus or Judges, elsewhere he invents dialogue and details and inserts moral asides.[59] Still, the overall tone is set wholly by Josephus. There is, for instance, no mention of the Gibeahites' homosexual aim, for it is the woman's beauty that frenzies the mob. Neither is she expelled by the Levite; rather, she is seized after the townsmen reject the old man's offer of his own daughter — an offer that Ambrose rationalizes much as Josephus did, as a lesser crime than endangering one's guests.[60] And, as in the *Antiquities*, the woman's sense of humiliation and defilement is what leads to her collapse at the old man's threshold.

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[53] Jerome, *Comm. Hosea* 9:9 (CCSL 74 97.195): “. . quando uxorem leuitae reuertentis de Bethleem illicito necauere concubitu.”

[54] Jerome, *Comm. Hosea* 10:9 (CCSL 74:113.284–90): “Ex eo die quo uxorem Leuitae turpiter atque crudeliter interfecit Beniamin in urbe Gabaa, peccauit mihi omnis Israel; non quia ultus est iniuriam et scelus sanguine uindicauit, sed quia dolore maritali prosiliuit ad pugnam et sacrilegium in Deum suum noluit uindicare; eo quod in domo Michae ephod et theraphim quae pro idolis adorabantur, neglexerit.”

[55] Of course, it is yet another riddle why Jerome, in translating the Hebrew text of Jud. 19:2, made no mention of the infidelity of the Levite’s concubine.

[56] As Ambrose’s editors are quick to point out: a note to *Epistle* 6.3 (at PL 16:899) directs the reader to Josephus’s *Antiquities* 5 2.

[57] Ambrose, *Epistle* 5.14 to Syagrius (PL 16·896, FC 26 159). “Malo morum signaculo, quam corporis claustro virginitatem exprimi.”

Josephus's intention was to cast the history of his people in a favorable light. Ambrose's purpose, however, was to show the great esteem in which chastity was held in the olden days — even though he comes to express that Israel may have been immoderate in its retribution.[61] But with respect to the Levite's expulsion of his wife, the crucial yet unaccountable factor in Ambrose's exposition is his preference for Josephus. Why did the bishop of Milan derive his blueprint from Josephus rather than from the text of Judges? Something similar is at work in Sulpicius Severus, whose *Chronicles* also make no mention of the woman's alleged infidelity, and while he does not conceal the homosexual intent of the townsmen, he does rewrite the ousting of the Levite's wife somewhat euphemistically, as a passive event and one that essentially bypasses the Levite: "Having come to accept the body of his concubine as a substitute plaything, they spared the foreigner."[62] He then leads to an ending redolent of Josephus's emphasis on the woman's self-conscious humiliation: "After mistreating her all night, they brought her back the next day. But she, while her husband looked on, breathed out her last — whether from the injury of rape or out of shame cannot be specified."[63]

From the examples of Ambrose and Sulpicius, one may conclude that the Fathers did not conspire to bury the story of the Levite's wife, but it is hard to credit them for being significantly more forthcoming than the earliest rabbis. Indeed, in place of outright silence they have left us with other puzzles, particularly the one that emerges from their preference for Josephus and, one must surmise, for a tale in which the heroes do not look so much like villains.

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[58] Ambrose, *Epistle* 6.19 to Syagrius (PL 16:904, FC 26:171).

[59] For instance, Ambrose thinks the Levite rejected his servant's suggestion to seek lodging in Jerusalem (Jebus) out of a misplaced contempt for his servant's status; see *Epistle* 6.5 to Syagrius (PL 16:900, FC 26:165). This lesson is recovered by some Protestant commentators.

[60] Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 5.2.8 §145 (LCL 5:66) with Ambrose, *Epistle* 6.8 to Syagrius (PL 16:901, FC 26:167): "publicum flagitium privato dedecore tolerabilius habere."

[61] Ambrose, *Epistle* 6.2, 16 to Syagrius (PL 16:899, 904; FC 26:163, 171).

[62] Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 1.29 (PL 20:113): "vicario demum concubinae ejus corpore in ludibrium accepto, advenae pepercerunt."

[63] Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 1.29 (PL 20:113): "Sed illa (stupri injuria, an verecundia, parum definio) viso viro animam efflavit"

Lot and His Daughters among the Church Fathers: Bartering One Sin for Another

Fortunately, the meager patristic interpretation of Judges 19–21 can be supplemented in yet another way, for the inscrutable reluctance of the rabbis to comment on Genesis 19 is by no means matched by the church fathers, who are much more inclined to record their views about Lot's endangerment of his daughters. In that episode, as we will see, revulsion does not induce silence: some, at least, freely identify Lot's offer of his daughters as evil, even if but a lesser evil when compared to the threat of homosexual rape. The parallel between the two cases therefore allows some cautious extrapolations toward the Levite and his wife. A crucial question to bear in mind, however, is whether Christian attitudes toward Lot—arguably a minor Old Testament hero and "a righteous man" according to 2 Peter—can reliably forecast attitudes toward the Levite, who surely would rank well below Lot.

The assault on Lot's household is discussed at some length by Ephraem, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine, among others.[64] Their comments are uniformly disturbing, but instructive.

Ephraem the Syrian. Perhaps the most idiosyncratic remarks are those of Ephraem. His initial account of Lot's offer simply asserts that the Sodomites would not take the daughters but instead threatened Lot; there is nothing to indicate that the offer was out of order, or even unusual. But Ephraem casts the event in an unusual light at the end of the chapter, where he comments on the daughters' surreptitious incest with their father:

> Because the two daughters had yielded to two disgraces their sons became two nations; *because the two daughters had been offered in the place of the two angels, their two offenses were forgiven them.* The young women could no longer be with Lot [as wives], because he was their father, nor could they belong to any others, for the husband of their youth was still alive. These two thus condemned themselves and, because they rashly did what was not right, deprived themselves of what they ought to have had. By this last solemn modesty, however, their previous rashness was greatly pardoned.[65]

As noted above, the *Midrash Tanhuma* would eventually explain Lot's incest with his daughters as his punishment for risking their chastity, and Ephraem may well have been familiar with some such rabbinic view. Here, however, he reverses the equation so as to craft a new evaluation, one uniquely constructed from the daughters' point of view. Accordingly, Ephraem does not stipulate that Lot's act was vicious, but he makes it fairly clear that enduring such exposure was credited to the daughters as virtue, a meritorious deed that atoned, at least in part, for their later incestuous transgression.

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[64] Although Origen provocatively mentions Lot's moral and spiritual inferiority to Abraham, he omits any comment on Genesis 19:8, see *Hom. Gen.* 4.1, 5.1 (PG 12:183–84, 188–89; FC 71:103–4, 112–13). Jerome offers an explanation of how Lot could have two sons-in-law and yet leave Sodom with two virgin daughters, but utterly ignores Lot's offer; see *Quaest. in Gen.* 19:14–15 (CCSL 72:23, PL 23:965–66).

[65] Ephraem, *Comm. Gen.* 16.5, 16.13 on 19.8, 31–38 (FC 91:161, 164; CSCO 152:77–80, 153:64–66), emphasis mine.

Ambrose. The exegetical course charted by the bishop of Milan would be mapped out in greater detail by Augustine and consulted by many if not all of their heirs. As Ambrose reads the tale, Lot simply chose the lesser of two evils. That is to say, given his obligations as a host, "the holy Lot offered the modesty of his daughters. For even if that, too, was a gross impurity, to have intercourse according to nature was in any case less criminal than to do it against nature."[66] This is the famous argument from *compensatory evil,* which many felt was anticipated — and rejected — by St. Paul's response to his slanderers in Rom. 3:8: "They say we say, 'Let us do evil so that good may come.'" In the case at hand, Lot avoided the greater evil of sodomy by allowing the lesser evil of rape as a sort of compensation. This is also the same reasoning we saw Ambrose apply to Judges 19, possibly in imitation of Josephus. Here, however, the argument is more developed and assuredly does not mimic Josephus, who reported Lot's effort to protect his guests but was rather close-mouthed about the rationale.[67]

Chrysostom. In his homily on Genesis 19, preached about the same time as Ambrose's treatise on Abraham, John Chrysostom also invoked the obligations of hospitality, using about the same casuistry:

> "By no means, brothers," he says, "don't be so depraved." Don't entertain such ideas, he is saying . . . don't even imagine such illicit relations. But if you're bent on satisfying the frenzy of your passion, I will supply the means of rendering your exploit less serious. "I have two daughters, who have had no relations with men." They are still without experience of marital intercourse, in fact they are virgins, in their prime, with the bloom of youth upon them; I will hand them over to you to be used as you wish. Take them, he says, and on them spend your lust and discharge your evil desires. . . . What marvelous virtue in the good man! He surpassed all the standards of hospitality! I mean, how could anyone do justice to the good man's friendliness in not bringing himself to spare even his daughters so as to demonstrate his regard for the strangers and save them from the lawlessness of the Sodomites?[68]

Chrysostom's rationale is the same as Ambrose's — namely, to violate the daughters would be "less serious" than to rape Lot's male guests — but Chrysostom's attributions portray Lot less as his guests' guardian than as his daughters' pander. On the other hand, one of Chrysostom's modern editors has wondered if he is not speaking ironically here,[69] and it may well be that his homiletical goal is not really to defend Lot but to use his example to prod Christians in Antioch to make greater sacrifices for one another. Still, Chrysostom's cheery endorsement of Lot may have been all-too-readily absorbed by his successors, as when Procopius of Gaza saw little in Lot besides his "perfect hospitality."[70]

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[66] Ambrose, *De Abraham* 1.6.52 (PL 14:462): "Offerebat sanctus Lot filiarum pudorem. Nam etsi illa quoque flagitiosa impuritas erat; tamen minus erat secundum naturam coire, quam adversum naturam delinquere. Præferebat domus suæ verecundiæ hospitalem gratiam, etiam apud barbaras gentes inviolabilem." For the date of this work, see Mara's remarks in Quasten 4:156.

[67] Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.11.3 §201 (LCL 4:98).

[68] Chrysostom, *Hom.* 43.4 *on Gen.* 19:7–8 (PG 54:400, FC 82:444–45).

Augustine. The situation seems hardly improved, from a modern standpoint, by the bishop of Hippo. Lot's offer arises in four of Augustine's treatises, but the most significant considerations occur in his two treatises on lying. Augustine described the first of these, *De mendacio* (written in 395), as "vague, complicated, and entirely irksome," and he intended it to be replaced by *Contra mendacium*, written a quarter of a century later.[71] *De mendacio* is indeed complicated, and in a moment we will see how its confusion bears on Augustine's argument about Lot. However, one must first record that both of Augustine's treatises essentially agree with Ambrose's presupposition that the body of a man is more valuable than that of a woman, that "it is less evil for women to suffer violation [*stuprum*] than men."[72] Once one allows the legitimacy of this argument from compensatory evil, Lot's actions may be seen as both reasonable and justified, and even as contributing to his righteousness.

Further Considerations Regarding Patristic Ethics and Exegesis

At first glance, the combined testimony of Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine might well confirm feminism's worst fears about the Christian tradition: that the church fathers happily stand in solidarity with this sordid tale, making explicit and ratifying an androcentrism that the text of Genesis 19 merely implies. And if modern readers find such apologies for Lot embarrassing or disappointing or androcentric, the insult would only be compounded were one to fabricate a similar apology for these church fathers. If their commentaries strike the reader as overly self-serving, the charge — if truly deserved — would be something for their successors to repent of, not to tuck away. But before any such judgment can be considered, there are other dimensions of the Fathers' positions to measure and other evidence to weigh.

For instance, if Chrysostom seems more credulous than warranted in imputing virtuous intentions to Lot, it is helpful to discover that Chrysostom gives this great benefit quite freely to all the Old Testament heroes.[73] And if Augustine's devaluation of women seems irretrievably offensive, important qualifications are still to be drawn from his treatises on lying. As he himself admitted, *De mendacio* is confusing (and hardly perfected by its successor), but it is worth the trouble to unravel. In general, Augustine there rejects the argument that would permit a lie to avoid a greater evil. It is a worse sin to tell a lie than to suffer virtually any evil, he asserts, for whereas the lie would be one's own, the evil one suffers remains the sin of another. Along these lines Augustine proceeds to describe eight kinds of lies and quickly disallows all but the last — and here is where such confusion enters that one could easily misread him were one to skip his concluding paragraphs. Having strenuously asserted that evil does *not* defile its victim, he then appears to offer an exception. Sometimes the sins of others do, it seems, defile their victims. "If he have filth poured all over him, or poured into his mouth, or crammed into him, or if he be carnally used like a woman; then almost all men regard him with a feeling of horror, and they call him defiled and unclean."[74] Clearly, Augustine does not sleep without occasional nightmares! And so he allows in this paragraph that one may lie to avoid such a fate, indeed, "these we are bound to avoid even by sinning ourselves."[75]

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[69] See Robert Hill's editorial remark, FC 82:445 n. 19.

[70] Procopius, writing a century and a half after Chrysostom, seems to feel no need to apologize on Lot's behalf but extols Lot's "perfect hospitality" in exposing his daughters: "Haud dissimile est huic facto illud, quod in Judicum libro ab filiis Benjamin perpetratum legimus, cum corrupissent uxorem Levitae. Caeterum Lot, adeo perfectae hospitalitatis erat, impiis illis, ne hospites damnum caperent, pater filias suas constuprandas objicit" (*Comm. Gen.* 19:8, PG 87:371–72). As the first sentence here forecasts, his later remarks on Judges (PG 87:1077–80) worry more over the unexpected defeats suffered by Israel and not at all over the Levite's dubious actions. (Recall that not all of Procopius's comments survive in Greek.)

[71] Augustine's remarks are recorded in *Retractations* 1.26, 2.86 (FC 60:117, 254).

[72] Augustine, *De mendacio* 7.10 (PL 40:496, NPNF 3:463, FC 16:70); and *Contra mendacium* 9.20 (PL 40:530, NPNF 3:489, FC 16:147 [quoted here]). Also see *Quaest. 42–44 in Gen* and *Contra Faustum* 22.41, 60.

Augustine spends the entire second half of the treatise analyzing and reevaluating this position, until at last he returns to his starting point: "A lie that violates neither the teaching or practice of piety, nor innocence, nor service to others, ought to be allowed if it preserves bodily chastity."[76] Yet this is not, after all, his last word. Even though lies that most closely resemble this eighth kind of lie are least sinful of all, Augustine finally concludes that perfect faith is to be preferred to bodily purity — and so a Christian ought to bear even bodily defilement rather than tell a lie. The second half of *De mendacio* does not retract Augustine's defense of Lot, then, but it does illustrate how a nearly overwhelming fear of unnatural intercourse instinctively directed his sympathies to Lot more than to the daughters.[77]

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[73] See Thompson, "Immoralities of the Patriarchs," esp. pp. 20–25. It is equally helpful to recall Chrysostom's high doctrine of providence — the main category he invokes to explain Lot's subsequent incest with his daughters — as well as his special reverence for Scripture. See *Hom.* 44.5 *on Gen.* 19:33 (PG 54:411, FC 82:465), where he writes, "Let no one ever presume . . . laden as we are with such countless burdens of sin, to condemn those whom Sacred Scripture discharges of all sin and for whom it rather even supplies such a remarkable defense."

[74] Augustine, *De mendacio* 9.15 (PL 40:499, NPNF 3:465 [quoted here], FC 16:75): "At si fimo perfundatur, aut si tale aliquid ei per os infundatur vel inculcetur, patiaturve muliebria; omnium fere sensus adhorret, et conspurcatum atque immundum vocant."

[75] Augustine, *De mendacio* 9.15 (PL 40:499, NPNF 3:465 [quoted here], FC 16:76): "illa vero quæ ita committuntur in hominem, ut eum faciant immundum, etiam peccatis nostris evitare debeamus; ac per hoc nec peccata dicenda sint, quæ propterea fiunt ut illa immunditia devitetur."

[76] Augustine, *De mendacio* 20.41 (PL 40:515 [translation mine], NPNF 3:475, FC 16:105): "mendacium quod non violat doctrinam pietatis, neque ipsam pietatem, neque innocentiam, neque benevolentiam, pro pudicitia corporis admittendum sit."

[77] That Augustine's fears represent more than his personal nightmares is confirmed by Peter Brown, who also reports that "for the first time in history, in 390, the Roman people witnessed the public burning of male prostitutes, dragged from the homosexual brothels of Rome" pursuant to an edict of Theodosius. Perhaps this public outcry is echoed, at a distance, by Augustine's *De mendacio*, written but five years

Augustine's later treatise against lying, *Contra mendacium*, simply omits most of this discussion of defilement and unnatural intercourse, though it is surely presupposed by his reiterated devaluation of women's bodies.[78] But the later treatise is especially of interest for introducing a second line of defense for Lot. If it took Augustine the entire length of *De mendacio* to discover that he could not, in fact, defend Ambrose's argument from compensatory evil, *Contra mendacium* is the stronger for drawing this conclusion earlier and then moving on. And so even if the argument that Lot chose a lesser evil has some merit, the later treatise distances itself from that view in favor of a different excuse, namely, that Lot's action was simply the product of a troubled mind:

> That just man's mind [may] have been disturbed [*turbari*], so that he was willing to do that which . . . God's Law . . . will cry aloud, must not be done. . . . That just man, by fearing [*timendo*] other men's sins, which cannot defile except such as consent thereto, was so perturbed [*perturbatus*] that he did not attend to his own sin, in that he was willing to subject his daughters to the lusts of impious men.[79]

This is a significant shift. No longer was Lot's offer an act of prudence; now it is at best a mark of confusion, and at worst merely "his own sin," pure and simple. Augustine then proceeds to compose some attributions of his own, addressed to Lot: "Assuredly it would be most rightly said," Augustine avers, to exhort Lot to "do what you can . . . [but] do not commit a great crime of your own while dreading a greater crime of other men." Remarkably, Augustine rejects (in another attribution) any defense of Lot as "acting upon his rights as his daughters' lord," for (he implies) even a master does not have the right to force a slave to endure an undeserved evil.[80] In short, while Augustine's low view of female dignity is preserved in this late treatise, his earlier defense of Lot has crumbled and, in effect, Augustine has surrendered: Lot's offer was criminal. It was sinful. Literally, it was a crazy thing to do.[81]

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later; see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 30, 383, 432. Augustine's understanding of "natural" sexuality is challenged by John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp 148–52

[78] See the quotation from *Contra mendacium* 20 at n 72.

[79] *Contra mendacium* 9.21 (PL 40:531, NPNF 3:489 [quoted here], FC 16:148).

[80] *Contra mendacium* 9.22 (PL 40:532, NPNF 3:490 [quoted here], FC 16:149–50). Augustine's argument in the middle of §9.22 is introduced as an alternative to simply having Lot stand fast in defense of his daughters, but it ends up as no more than a subtle variation on the already-rejected argument from compensatory evil. And though he concludes this alternative argument elliptically ("De qua re non disputabo, quia longum est"), it seems clear enough that—however much he enjoys these casuistic subtleties—Augustine is not inclined to sustain the argument for compensatory evil in any form, however nuanced, and the treatise then turns to other considerations. The same deliberation (and the same tentative resolution) is found in Augustine's *Quaest 42 in Gen.* on 19:8 (CCSL 33:17, PL 34:559).

[81] The treatise against Faustus the Manichaean nicely illumines both sides of Augustine here. On the one hand, he completely ignores the scandal of Lot's endangerment of his daughters, preoccupied as he is with the daughters' incest later in Genesis 19. On the other hand, what he says there of Lot remains applicable to our own inquiry as well: "Lot . . . does [not] belong to those testified to in Scripture as having continued righteous to the end, although in Sodom he lived a pious and virtuous life, and showed a praiseworthy hospitality. . . . On these accounts he is commended in Scripture—not for intemperance or

Before moving on, it remains to ask what light is shed on the Levite's forcible expulsion of his wife by these treatments of Lot and his daughters. To the degree that Ambrose, Chrysostom, or Augustine defended Lot by appealing to compensatory evil—an argument that the later Augustine finally rejected—they might similarly excuse the Levite or the old man in Judges 19 for protecting their male bodies at a woman's expense. But it must be added that the excuses fashioned for Lot were impelled largely by factors that do not apply to the Levite. Augustine, for example, inferred Lot's righteousness in circular fashion, on the grounds that "he was worthy to entertain even angels" (Heb. 13:2),[82] but all of these writers were aware not only that Lot was not condemned by Jesus in Luke 17:29 but also that he was praised as "a righteous man" in 2 Pet. 2:7. This is a stronger and far less ambiguous endorsement than even Jephthah received in Hebrews 11. Lot, therefore, must have some measure of defense, even if nothing more than a claim to temporary insanity. The Levite, however, had no such canonical recommendation. All these factors lend weight to the view that Lot's deed was saved from complete execration only by his standing elsewhere in Scripture. As a corollary, then, one should not hope overmuch for any defense at all of the Levite's cruel exposure of his wife.

The Levite's Wife and Lot's Daughters in Medieval Commentary

The Ordinary Gloss and Early Medieval Exegesis

Comments on Judges 19–21 continue to be scarce after Augustine, as may be easily demonstrated by skipping ahead to the twelfth century to examine the *Glossa Ordinaria*. On Judges 19, one finds nothing more than an excerpt from Augustine's *City of God* 16.34 that glosses the Levite's expulsion of his wife in verse 25 with an explanation of how concubines are sometimes called wives. The *Gloss* on Judges 20 offers an excerpt from Gregory the Great in which he extracts from Benjamin's two victories over Israel a warning against hypocrisy and an exhortation to examine oneself before correcting others.[83] And on Judges 21 there is apparently no gloss at all.[84]

A more determined search of the predecessors and potential sources of the *Gloss* only confirms that these chapters were regularly avoided. Isidore follows the pattern

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incest. But when we find bad and good actions recorded of the same person, we must take warning from the one, and example from the other As, then, the sin of Lot, of whom we are told that he was righteous previous to this sin, instead of bringing a stain on the character of God, or the truth of Scripture, rather calls on us to approve and admire the record in its resemblance to a faithful mirror, which reflects not only the beauties and perfections, but also the faults and deformities, of those who approach it"; see *Contra Faustum* 22.60 (PL 42:437–38; NPNF 4:295)

[82] Augustine, *De mendacio* 7.10 (PL 40:496, NPNF 3:463 [quoted here], FC 16:70)

[83] This was also Theodoret's moral (n. 52). The Migne *Gloss* (at PL 113:532) cites the quotation from Gregory as *Moralia* 24.13, but Migne's edition of Gregory places the passage at *Moralia* 14.29.34 (PL 75 1057).

[84] At least in the Migne edition (PL 113). The 1542 Lyons edition of Lyra (2:55^{v}) appends to Lyra's own moral exposition of Judges 21 a different excerpt from Gregory, in which the provision of wives for the remnant of Benjamin models pastoral compassion for sinners.

of Augustine's questions on Judges, jumping from Samson to Ruth.[85] Pseudo-Bede does likewise. Raban Maur offers nothing more than the same excerpt from Gregory found in the *Gloss*.[86] The pattern of this silence seems governed by some secret inner logic, some pervasive intuition. Thus, Theodore Prodromus, the twelfth-century Byzantine poet, would have had little reason to know or adopt Augustine's exegetical oversights, yet every reason (one would think) to be comprehensive in turning Old Testament stories into verse. Nonetheless, he too makes the identical leap, following his twenty-two tetrastichs on Samson with a pair on Ruth.[87]

Unfortunately, most of these authors are equally silent about Lot's willingness to endanger his daughters. Isidore does not mention the incident.[88] The meager remarks of Pseudo-Bede and Rabanus, as well as those of the "real" Bede, are wholly cribbed from Augustine. Haimo of Auxerre, writing at the end of the ninth century, provides an abstract of the Augustinian pattern. The "usual" solution, he tells us, is to see Lot's betrayal of his daughters as an act of "compensation," using a lesser sin to avoid a greater and unnatural crime. But Haimo thinks it better to attribute Lot's action to mental disturbance, so that either Lot did not know what he was doing or, perhaps, he was unaware that his guests were actually angels.[89] Unlike Augustine, however, Haimo fails to remind his readers that Lot is not to be regarded as an example.

From the Ordinary Gloss to the Postils of Lyra

Twelfth-Century Latin Commentaries. Writings appearing after the *Glossa Ordinaria* continue to display little originality. Rupert of Deutz poignantly asks, "What could be more foul, or more criminal, or more cruel, than what is reported here?"[90] But Rupert has in mind the whole event, with the Levite and his wife appearing as dual victims, at best; one looks in vain for any reproach directed at the Levite. Hugh of St. Victor's chief contribution is to recognize the discrepancy between the narrative in

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[85] Isidore, *Quaest. in Jud.* (PL 83:390).

[86] Pseudo-Bede, *Quaest. Jud.* (PL 93:429–30), Rabanus, *Quaest. Jud.* 21 (PL 108:1199–1200).

[87] Theodore Prodromus, *Tetrasticha* (PG 133:1141–46) His treatment of Lot rails against the wickedness of Sodom (and later warns against the evils of wine), but the sarcasm in his paraphrase of Lot's offer targets the Sodomites, not Lot himself (PG 133:1109–10).

[88] Isidore says of Lot that he is a *homo justus* and *hospitalis*, while the daughters are not even mentioned; see *De ortu et obitu patrum* 9 (PL 83:134). Figuratively, Lot is first a type of Christ among the ungodly, then his drunkenness cast him also in the role of the law, which was yet to come (*Quaest.* 15.4, 15 9 *in Gen.* 19, PL 83:245–46). Isidore's typologies are condensed in his *Allegoriae* 31–33 (PL 83:105); both are adapted from Augustine, who saw Lot as a type of the body of Christ (i.e., the church) in its life among the ungodly but also as a type of "the future law," which stupefies those who misuse it; C. *Faustum* 22 41–45 (PL 42.425–27; NPNF 4:288–89).

[89] Haimo of Auxerre, *Expositio super Gen* 19:8 (PL 131:91).

[90] Rupert of Deutz, *De trin.* 26 on Judges 19 (PL 167 1056): "Quid hoc auditu turpius, scelestius, crudelius?" Rupert's treatment of Lot exactly bypasses the offer of his daughters, though he does observe that Lot's faith and righteousness fell short of the "the perfection of Abraham," much as Augustine had said earlier. Figuratively, Lot is a type of those who did not consent to "the crime of the Jews" (Matt 27 is editorially noted here), but whose faith and righteousness still fell short of that of the Apostles; see *De trin* 6.7–8 on Genesis 19 (PL 167:408–9).

Judges 19 and that in Judges 20, in that the Levite's report of how he himself had been threatened with death came strangely late, and he does not mention that the Gibeahites had wanted to rape him. Hugh's solution suggests that the Levite crafted his later, public account out of shame.[91] Finally, although Peter Comestor provides little more than a new (if slightly extended) paraphrase of the text, he does reintroduce the sanitized account of Josephus into the Christian discussion of the story, thus calling into question the homosexual intent of the Gibeahites. This measure of respect granted to Josephus might lie behind the silence with which the Comestor covers the endangerment of the old man's daughter and the Levite's wife, but the precedent offered by so many centuries of Christian silence here may have proved more irresistible still.[92]

Allegorical Readings. Two early twelfth-century writers, Guibert of Nogent and Bruno d'Asti, offered allegorical readings of Lot and his daughters that probably informed what Hugh of St. Cher would later say about the Levite and his wife. For Bruno, the two daughters represent "our flesh and substance," which the church (Lot) will gladly relinquish in order to obey the law of God and defend the two testaments (the angels) against heretics.[93] For Guibert, the daughters represent greed and vanity, two "feminizing" vices that resist reason and sap its strength; they are fittingly expelled to be abused by demons.[94]

A century later, Hugh of St. Cher devoted considerable space to figurative readings of both Judges 19 and Genesis 19. Allegorically (*moraliter*), the Levite and his wife signify the spirit and the flesh. A good "wife" is one who loves her husband, but a rebellious wife will run away to her father's house, which Hugh interprets as the house of the devil, the "father" of fleshly desires. There, the Levite is offered various temptations by his father-in-law, whose delaying tactics in the story correspond to the devil's desire to procrastinate our penance. The city of Jebus represents the grace of humility; for Jebus to be bypassed at sunset by the Levite — who, leading his wife, now signifies "a cleric who loves the flesh" — is an ominous sign. "Having bypassed penitence and desiring excellence, the sun of righteousness sets, because when . . . dignity is desired, grace decreases or is entirely lost."[95] Here the allegory abruptly ends, but the exposition can be extrapolated at least to the point of the gang rape in verse 25 on the basis of Hugh's remarks at Gen. 19:8. There, the two angels represent one's intellect and higher affections (*affectus*), which ought to be protected from demons (here, the Sodomites) even at the risk of body and soul (here, Lot's two daughters, *caro* and *anima*).[96] In other words, all of Hugh's allegorical daughters are expendable. Moreover, his allegoresis bleeds into even his avowedly literal exposition of Judges 19, where Hugh once again speaks of the devil's procrastinating our penance. As for the old host's offer of his daughter, Hugh relies largely on Peter Comestor: "They say the old man did not sin, because he said this as a ruse or out of a disturbed mind, just as Lot in Genesis 19."[97] Hugh is clearly not much interested in the potential scandals provoked by either Lot or the Levite, except as allegoristic fodder.

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[91] Hugh of St. Victor, *Ann. Jud.* 20:5 (PL 175:96): "Out of shame [*pudice*], he remained silent about what they wished to do to him, recalling something else in its place." Hugh is silent on Lot's exposure of his daughters (*Ann. Gen.* 19, PL 175:52), however, as is his fellow Victorine, Andrew (*Expos. Hept.* on Gen. 19, CCCM 53:67).

[92] Again, one wonders about the influence exercised by the premature ending of Augustine's questions on Judges — a riddle made only more provocative by the Comestor's use of Augustine's *Quaest. 42 in Gen.* for his own comments on Gen. 19:8. There, he seconds the view that Lot acted out of perturbation, but his dismissal of the argument from compensatory evil is not without ambiguity. See *Historia Scholastica* §52 on Genesis 19 and §22 on Judges 19–21 (PL 198:1100, 1291–92). The latter passage also states that the Levite's wife left him because *he* was angry — an interpretation that Denis the Carthusian will develop later on (n. 111).

[93] Bruno d'Asti (d. 1123), *Expositio in Genesim* 19 (PL 164:194–95).

[94] Guibert of Nogent (ca.1053/65–ca.1125), *Moralia in Genesin* §5 on 19:6–8 (PL 156:149).

[95] Hugh of St. Cher, *Comm. Jud.* 19:1–14 (fol. 211^{v}–212^{r}).

Later Medieval Jewish Exegesis. If the Christian commentary on Judges 19–21 was relatively unproductive during this period, at least two insights of note were offered by rabbinic contemporaries. The discrepancy that Hugh of St. Victor had noticed in the Levite's claimed "death threat" in Jud. 20:5 came also to the attention of Rabbi David Kimhi, at or shortly after the end of the twelfth century. Kimhi reports a different way to exonerate the Levite: "According to commentators, 'meant to kill' implied that he had made up his mind to be killed rather than submit himself to this abomination, or [else that] he labeled this ugly practice as killing."[98] In other words, the Levite's own account is not necessarily an exaggeration of the actual events.

Something different develops, however, in the thirteenth-century remarks of Rabbi Nachman, who addresses both stories in his commentary on Genesis. For Nachmanides, by "abandoning his daughters to prostitution" Lot passed from praise to disgrace and demonstrated that he had "an evil heart."[99] But the rabbi quickly turns from his concise condemnation of Lot to a longer digression on why this episode is not, in fact, similar to what happened in Judges 19, despite a superficial resemblance. Specifically, he is concerned to stress that the crimes committed in Gibeah were not as evil as in Sodom. Accordingly, not only did fewer men surround the house in Gibeah than in Sodom, but Lot's demeanor is also deemed worse than that of either the old man or the Levite. The old host, after all, "knew" that they would not want his daughter, and the Levite endangered not a wife but "only" a concubine, indeed, a concubine who had already committed harlotry. The Israelites were therefore wrong to seek the death penalty, since the men of Gibeah did not mean to kill the woman but only to abuse her, and they also erred by failing to consult with the other Benjaminites. Thus does Nachmanides explain how both Israel and Benjamin deserved the punishment each received in the course of the ensuing civil war.[100] Although no one prior to Nachmanides seems to have broken the traditional parallel between Genesis 19 and Judges 19, he may well have set a more lasting precedent simply by his stony denigration of the Levite's unfaithful wife.

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[96] Hugh of St. Cher, *Comm. Gen.* 19:4–8 (fol. 24^{r}).

[97] Hugh of St. Cher, *Comm. Jud.* 19:22 (fol. 212^{v}). "Sed nun quid peccauit senex, hoc dicendo? Dicunt quod non, quia hoc dixit ex surreptione siue perturbatione animi, sicut Loth, Gen. 19.b." Hugh's literal exegesis of Gen. 19:8 merely reproduces Augustine (via the *Gloss*) and a single sentence from the Comestor. His remarks on Judges 19 follow Josephus, also via the Comestor.

[98] Kimhi, *Comm. Jud.* 20:5 (trans. Celniker, p. viii).

[99] Ramban (Nachmanides), *Comm. Gen.* 19:8, p. 251, he goes on to quote *Tanhuma Vayera* 12, which causally links this episode to Lot's later incest with his daughters.

Nicholas of Lyra: Exposing the Adultery of the Levite's Wife

With the appearance of Lyra's *Postils* in the fourteenth century, we find at last more than a stenographic concern with these texts. To be sure, Lyra does reargue Augustine's treatment of Lot, adducing some new proof-texts in the course of his *quaestio* and *objectiones*. Remarkably, though, Lyra's examination of the argument for compensatory evil leads only to a firmer rejection. Lot had no special divine permission or command, Lyra concludes, and while he should have protected his guests, to offer his daughters was an unlawful means to that end. In short, Lot sinned.[101]

Lyra's exposition of Judges 19 is more complicated, largely because he is the first Christian commentator to demonstrate an awareness that the Hebrew text accuses the Levite's wife of adultery. One might therefore expect the woman to receive a harsher treatment from Lyra, and the point is not lost: either her husband evicted her for fornication, or else she herself, having absconded with a lover, feared to return to her husband. But Lyra does not belabor the point, and the woman's sin is soon forgotten.[102] Consequently, Lyra handles the assault in Gibeah by reiterating the lesson of Genesis 19, namely, that the host — and by implication, the Levite as well — should not have resorted to a mortal sin to avoid something worse. Lyra is also concerned to note that the "abuse" suffered by the Levite's wife may well have consisted not only of rape, but also of "unnatural intercourse," a prospect that he had earlier termed "Sodomite intercourse."[103]

Some of Lyra's literal commentary on subsequent events is also worth noting. For instance, he, too, notices the discrepancy between the narrative of Judges 19 and the Levite's later reportage, but he reconciles them by appealing alternately to Josephus's account and the notion, perhaps from David Kimhi, that the Levite saw his death portended in the threat of homosexual rape. Moreover, he supposes that the gathered tribes insisted on further corroboration of the Levite's story, for which purpose the Levite had witnesses: his own servant, his host, and his host's servant.[104] Finally, Lyra is at least somewhat troubled, first, by the viciousness of the war against Benjamin, especially the slaughter of all the women of the tribe: "That seemed miserable enough in itself, . . . but especially so because the Lord had not commanded this."[105] Second, Lyra is equally troubled by the abduction of the daughters of Shiloh, observing that the Israelites' vow to withhold their daughters from the Benjaminites was against charity and therefore not binding. And while it is certainly true that Lyra defends the plan to abduct two hundred young women from Shiloh as not sinful, he adds a most curious afterthought: "And it is probable that those virgins consented to marry before they were known by them."[106] In other words, Lyra wants to believe that even if these women were kidnapped, no marriage was consummated without the woman's consent.

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[100] Ramban (Nachmanides), *Comm. Gen.* 19.8, pp. 252–56. Toward the end of this digression, Nachmanides also quotes the Talmud (Sanhedrin 103b) in tracing Israel's troubles to having shown more indignation over the concubine's death than over the idol fashioned by Micah, much as Pseudo-Philo argued earlier (see p. 187 at n. 39).

[101] Lyra, *Comm. Gen.* 19:8 (1·72^{v})

[102] Lyra, *Comm Jud.* 19:2–3 (2:53^{v}). Lyra also finds nothing unusual in the Levite's pursuing his unfaithful wife.

[103] Lyra, *Comm. Jud.* 19:25 (2:54^{r}): "*Qua cum tota nocte abusi &c.* quia non erat eorum vxor. & ideo talis concubitus erat abusus. vel quia vtebantur ea concubitu innaturali." See Lyra also at Jud. 19:22 (2:54^{r}): "*Educ virum qui ingressus est domum tuam, ut abutamur eo* concubitu Sodomitico: vt communiter dicunt expositores."

[104] Lyra, *Comm. Jud.* 20.5–6 (2:54^{v}). Predictably, Lyra does not think to include the host's daughter.

Lyra's allegorical and moral readings of Judges 19 are only partially predictable. Allegorically, the Levite and his wife signify God and "the synagogue," which, having "fornicated" through idolatry, is sought out by God for reconciliation. The moral reading initially follows Hugh of St. Cher (though Lyra attributes it to Augustine): as a husband should rule his wife, so should reason dominate sensuality, which is prone to be led astray by sensual delights. But then comes a surprise. Shifting his attention to the tribulations and abuse with which the devil attempts to impede repentance, his moralizing turns typological: the tribulation and mistreatment that the apostles and other believers suffered are prefigured, Lyra writes, in the abusive death of the Levite's wife. Furthermore, that her death was "announced" throughout the land of Israel (cf. 19:29) signifies that the martyrdom of the apostles and other saints ought also to be declared through the whole church, as an inspiration to the devotion and constancy of the faithful.[107] Lyra's passing castigation of the woman's literal adultery is thus followed, maybe even overshadowed, by his praise for what her sufferings prefigure. Of course, the link between literal and figurative exegesis is not always evident: the logic may be linear, inverse, or simply capricious. That is to say, a figurative reading may build on the commentator's evaluation of narrative elements; it may attempt to substitute an edifying image for one deemed not so; or it may ignore the narrative altogether by allegorizing words or phrases torn from their context. In this case, Lyra's figurative valorization of the Levite's wife seems to have left behind his concern for her infidelity (which, moreover, has its own figurative reading), for while Lyra is quick to brand her eviction as a sin, he never argues that her rape corresponds to her infidelity as a form of delayed punishment—an argument that would become quite popular later on. Accordingly, while Lyra stops short of calling the Levite's wife a martyr herself, he still seems to regard her sufferings as undeserved, despite her infidelity, and it is not out of place to conclude that he was willing to impute to her literal sufferings a measure of regret, if not respect.

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[105] Lyra, *Comm. Jud.* 21:1 (2:55$^{\text{v}}$), reading in full: "ideo non videbatur via qualiter tribus Beniamin reparari posset per generationem: quia omnes mulieres tribus Beniamin fuerant intefectæ [*sic*], quod satis miserabile videbatur, quod vna tribus tota de populo Israelæ deleretur: maxime cum hoc dominus non præcepisset, sed tamen dixisset: Cras tradam eos in manus vestras . . ."

[106] Lyra, *Comm. Jud.* 21:18a (2:56$^{\text{r}}$): "& probabile est quod illæ virgines consenserunt in matrimonium antequam cognoscerentur ab eis."

[107] Lyra, *Comm. Jud.* 19:1–3 (2:53$^{\text{v}}$, 54$^{\text{v}}$), reading in part: ". . . & postea per imperatores Romanorum, in quibus tribulationibus apostoli & plures alii cum illusionibus magnis fuerunt mortui. & hoc fuit figuratum in interfectione prædictæ mulieris cum magna illusione."

Denis the Carthusian: Defending Jerome and the Levite's Wife

Despite his new information about the apparent infidelity of the Levite's wife, Lyra seems generally more sympathetic to her and to the other women in Judges 19–21 than his predecessors. It is therefore puzzling to find him taken to task a century later by Denis the Carthusian. In fact, Denis's attack is really a defense of Jerome and the Vulgate. Denis is thoroughly unsettled by Lyra's translation of the Hebrew of Jud. 19:2 as "who committed fornication against him," instead of Jerome's "who left him":[108]

> Nonetheless, I believe that Jerome translated it just as it appears in Hebrew, and that perhaps the Hebrew word may be equivocal, and it was more aptly translated in this place by *Reliquit* than . . . as *Fornicata est.* For a little later it follows [in 19:3], "Her husband followed her, wishing to coax her to be reconciled." And men are not accustomed, when their wives commit adultery, to go roving after [*peragere*] them. . . . On the contrary, if she had been an adulteress, the man would have been obliged to hand her over. Therefore I think the *Scholastic History* is more correct, that the woman was angry with her husband on account of some excess of the man. Nor is it likely that she would have dared to return to her own father's house with a lover in tow.[109]

Denis's account is remarkable for several reasons, not the least of which is his rather modern-sounding analysis of the narrative to disclose the Levite's motives. Recent critics have also appealed to the Levite's solicitude for his allegedly adulterous wife to overturn the reading of the Hebrew text in favor of the Greek.[110] Admittedly, it is possible that Denis is more concerned to defend Jerome than to defend the woman, but he has in any case exercised an independent imagination to arrive at his interpretation.[111] He carries out this reading through the following verses, possibly with some debt to Josephus, by detailing the quarrels that wearied the woman, the husband's enduring ardor, and his happy reception by his wife, as if in the wake of four months' separation "the injuries done to her" had been forgotten.[112]

Denis's elevated view of the Levite and his wife only heightens his disgust over the shocking events in Gibeah. The Gibeahites are "most shameless, fearless, and untamed with respect to observing the divine and natural law."[113] Like Lyra, he fears that the Levite's wife was used not only illicitly but also unnaturally.[114] When she falls before the old man's door as day breaks, Denis movingly explains her collapse as provoked by "affliction, fatigue, shame, and sorrow."[115] And when the Israelites exclaimed that "Never was such a thing done in Israel," Denis again underscores that the deed was "abominable, unnatural, and cruel."[116] He clearly sympathizes with the Gibeahites' victim. But has Denis, like Josephus, also glossed over the Levite's shabby conduct? Actually, no. At the conclusion of his verse-by-verse exposition, Denis asks whether the old man is to be excused for exposing his daughter (and the Levite, his wife). His consideration of the argument for compensatory evil is traditional, and his firm rejection is largely anticipated by Lyra; but Denis may well be firmer still, and more explicit, too. If one should not commit a venial sin to preserve someone else from a mortal sin, he writes, then "how much less should one expose someone else to adultery or rape!"[117] On first glance, then, the old man's offer is horribly sinful, and only if he spoke these words insincerely, as part of a ploy, can any degree of excuse be found for him or for the Levite.

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[108] Denis, *Comm. Jud.* 19:2 (3:209), reading, respectively, *Quæ fornicata est super eum* and *Quæ reliquit eum.*

[109] Denis, *Comm. Jud.* 19:2 (3:209): "Quod viri, uxoribus suis adulteris, non solent peragere, quamvis interdum ad magnam aliorum instantiam recipiant eas ad veniam: imo si fuisset adultera, vir obligatus fuisset eam traducere. Verius ergo reor quod in Scholastica fertur historia, utpote quod mulier fuit viro suo irata propter aliquem viri excessum. Nec verisimile est, quod cum adultero ausa fuisset redire in domum proprii patris."

[110] See, for example, the NRSV translation of the verse: "But his concubine became angry with him, and she went away." The Hebrew reading is relegated to a footnote.

[111] An examination of the *Scholastic History* bears this out, for Denis's suggestion that the Levite somehow acted "excessively" is a significant development of Peter Comestor's laconic phrasing: "quæ *irato viro suo* rediit in domum patris sui in Bethlehem" (PL 198:1291).

[112] Denis, *Comm. Jud.* 19:2–3 (3:209): "*Quæ suscepit eum,* id est, mulier illa, viso suo marito, eum benigne recepit, tanquam oblita injuriæ sibi factæ, quia jam quatuor mensibus absens fuit marito."

For the balance of the book of Judges, Denis is probably indebted to Lyra, though no credit is given. He echoes Lyra's remarks on the Levite's fear of death-by-rape and on the role of witnesses in confirming the Levite's story, as well as Lyra's defense of the abduction of the women of Shiloh — though, for Denis, it is the parents of the women who consented to their marriages.[118] One stroke of originality is raised when Denis pauses to marvel that the Israelites slew the women and children of Jabesh-gilead, "when the children, at least, were innocent. And many women were probably displeased with that crime of the Gibeahites" as well.[119] Denis struggles for answers here, none of which will please modern ears. Accordingly, he argues that for such a detestable crime it was appropriate to punish the men in the person of their wives and children, though he seems to question his own logic when he observes that the point would be lost on the men, most of whom had already been killed. So, apparently as a collateral consideration, he observes that such a death would be "a greater crown for the infants, and a purgation for the women who repented or who were not in mortal guilt." In other words, these women and children almost certainly did not go to hell, despite having experienced in their deaths "the rigor of the divine justice." Obviously, Denis does not like the storyline any better than modern observers do, but he does his best to fashion an acceptable apology for it.[120]

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[113] Denis, *Comm. Jud.* 19:22 (3:210): "Erant itaque sine jugo, id est observatione legis divinæ ac naturalis, intimorati, indomiti, inverecundissimi."

[114] Denis, *Comm. Jud.* 19:25 (3:211): "illicite aut etiam innaturaliter ea utebantur." Denis is at pains here and at several other points to explain that the Levite's wife is called a concubine "in the simple sense," and not "in the common mode of discourse" wherein concubine is pejorative, suggesting a partner taken out of lust.

[115] Denis, *Comm. Jud.* 19:27 (3:211): "præ afflictione, fatigatione, verecundia, et mœrore."

[116] Denis, *Comm. Jud.* 19:30 (3:211): "id est tam abominabilis, innaturalis, crudelis."

[117] Denis, *Comm. Jud.* 19 (3:211): "multo minus debet quis aliquam personam adulterio vel stupro exponere."

[118] Denis, *Comm Jud.* 20:5, 20:8, 21.21 (3:212, 213, 217).

[119] Denis, *Comm. Jud.* 21:10 (3:216–17).

Sixteenth-Century Interpretations of the Levite's Wife and Lot's Daughters

While most early medieval exegesis displays little originality and even little interest in this shocking pair of tales, later commentators such as Lyra and Denis seem increasingly energized by the specific moral dilemmas faced by the characters in Judges and Genesis. The fascinating disagreement between Lyra and Denis is thus a harbinger of things to come. Sixteenth-century commentators cannot avoid the thorny ethical questions raised with fresh urgency by Lyra and Denis, but with their greater knowledge of Hebrew, they will tend to deny the Levite's wife the benefit of the doubt Denis lavished on her. In tracing the discussion through the sixteenth century, we will first of all consider the detailed commentaries on Judges 19–21 offered by Cajetan, Brenz, Bucer, Pellican, and Vermigli, then conclude by examining commentaries on Genesis 19, adding to our list Luther, Zwingli, Musculus, and Calvin.

Cajetan and the Levite: Trading Compensatory Evil for Compensatory Suffering

Though not published until 1539, Cajetan's remarks date from the summer of 1531. As usual, he follows his own muse. Scarcely troubled by the fornication of the Levite's concubine, he ponders at length why the Gibeahites were satisfied to rape the concubine when they had earlier refused the old man's offer of both his daughter and the concubine. He suggests that the men first sought to abuse (that is, rape) the Levite, ignoring the old man's offer; then they turned to kill the Levite instead; but at the last, they had to be content with his concubine. Cajetan is quite pleased to have reconciled "both writings" (*scriptis vtrobique*), by which he probably means the events of 19:22–25 with the Levite's report in 20:5, but he still has to admit at day's end that he really does not know why the Gibeahites turned from intended rape to intended murder.[121]

At this point, Cajetan turns to "the old question" of how it was lawful for the Levite to repay one crime with another, and he truly raises the casuistry of the text to a new level. Granted that "it is never licit to repay a crime with a crime," that is not necessarily what the Levite did. Cajetan counters:

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[120] Denis, *Comm. Jud.* 21:10 (3:216–17). Contrary to his usual practice, Denis offers no allegorical or typological interpretation to cover any of Judges 19–21, but only a very brief series of moral lessons (e.g., not to defend evildoers); see 3:218. He also has no figurative interpretation with which to address Gen. 19:8, though at Gen. 19:30–38 Lot's daughters are allegorized either as the higher and lower reason, which "conceive" when illuminated by the Father; or as appetite and sense, which are liable to inebriate a gluttonous "father" and lead to the conception of depraved "offspring" such as passion and concupiscence; see 1:276–77.

[121] Cajetan, *Comm Jud.* 19:25 (2:67): "deinde vel difficultate, vel ira, vel nescio qua occasione mutati, ad occidendum Leuitam se verterunt."

> It is no sin to trade the suffering that one would bear as a result of someone else's crime for the suffering that another would bear from someone else's lesser crime. In the case at hand, the Levite exchanged undergoing his own death for the punishment of his wife. Thus he did not consent to his wife's adultery but to her punishment, whereby she would be sexually assaulted by so many tormentors. And just as the wife suffered unwillingly (and therefore she is excused), so also the Levite unwillingly endured his wife's punishment in order to save his own life, never imagining that his wife would die from it.[122]

This is a difficult argument, not only in its logic but also in its implications. Cajetan thinks he has found a way around the discredited argument for compensatory evil by substituting an argument from compensatory suffering. Maybe he thought he was working out the details that Augustine had declined to complete (n. 80). But the troubling implication for many readers will center on his account of the wife's "punishment" (*supplicium*). That is to say, is Cajetan simply speaking figuratively of the wife's suffering (or, perhaps, alluding to her tormentors' intent), or does he feel she deserved some sort of punishment for her earlier infidelity? Cajetan does not say, though we will soon see how some of his contemporaries take up this latter possibility and develop it at length. What is decisive for Cajetan's consideration of the Levite's complicity in the rape of his wife, however, is that his subtle argument fails to persuade even himself, so he soon returns to a question whose terms have barely changed: "Is it licit for a man to trade his own suffering for the suffering of an unwilling wife?" Cajetan still strains to answer in the affirmative, asserting that "he is excused somewhat, because a wife is the property of the husband," but he is only postponing the inevitable. The Levite is "not wholly" excused, he admits, "because a wife is not subject to her husband in such a matter as this."[123] In other words, whatever rights the Levite may have had over his wife as chattel, he had no right to force her into another man's grasp.

Cajetan's commentary on the following chapters of Judges continues to kindle the discussion of the Israelites' vengeance against Benjamin and the abduction of the virgins of Shiloh. His concern in the latter instance is to argue that what may have seemed like abduction (*raptus*) formally was only so "materially," for there was no intention to injure these young women or their parents.[124] His response to the slaughter of the Benjaminites is less formulaic: "It seems a great cruelty," he writes, "to vent such fury on women and children . . . sparing neither age nor sex. I do not know by

[122] Cajetan, *Comm. Jud.* 19:25 (2:67): "Sed tunc occurrit antiqua quæstio, quomodo licuit Leuitæ flagitium flagitio repensare ipse enim facto dedit vxorem suam illis. Solutio est, quod flagitium flagitio repensare nunquam licet: sed repensare passionem inferendam sibi ex vno alieno flagitio altera passione inferenda ex minore alieno quoque flagitio, nullum peccatum est. In proposito autem Leuita pati mortem propriam repensauit supplicio vxoris: ita, quod non consensit in adulterium vxoris, sed in supplicium, quo affligenda erat a tot vexatoribus secundum actus venereos & quemadmodum vxor inuita passa est, (& ideo excusatur:) ita Leuita inuitus vxoris supplicium pertulit, vt vitam propriam seruaret, non credens vxorem inde morituram "

[123] Cajetan, *Comm. Jud.* 19 25 (2·67): "Sed restat quæstio, an licuerit viro passionem propriam repensare passione vxoris inuitæ? Solutio est, quod excusatur a tanto (eo quod vxor est aliquid viri) sed non a toto: quia non subditur vxor viro quoad hoc."

[124] Cajetan, *Comm. Jud.* 21.21 (2 70–71).

what right they did this, when in the law of Moses it is clearly prohibited to kill children for the sins of the parents."[125]

Protestant Readings of the Levite's Wife: Pellican, Brenz, Bucer, and Vermigli

The 1530s saw a few other commentaries on Judges appear, including one from Conrad Pellican in 1533 and another from Johann Brenz in 1535,[126] but these two bear such a clear family resemblance to the later commentaries of Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli that we will do well to survey them together.[127] All four replay many of the traditional problems, but they are also united by their adoption of a moralistic agenda largely unprecedented in its concern for narrative detail. Some of those concerns and details are traditional and many are frankly mundane: all four pause to weigh the servant's advice to the Levite in 19:11 and to offer rather hackneyed observations on how servants sometimes are wiser than masters. Similarly, they all feel obliged to stress how the term "concubine" in Jud. 19:1 does not impute illegitimacy to the Levite's marriage. Lyra had already advanced this last argument, of course, as had Münster (whom Bucer may well be paraphrasing), and these Protestants are mostly not bothered by the Levite's taking a wife of presumably lesser dignity—except for Bucer, who is bothered by almost everything in this story.[128] Many of these moral concerns and asides function as virtual commonplaces, a pattern that Vermigli's commentary makes explicit. But many of these moralisms are equally driven by the fragmentation of Christendom in the sixteenth century: these are tracts for the times, and Vermigli again speaks for his colleagues when he concludes, "In all these things we may see an image of our own times."[129]

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[125] Cajetan, *Comm. Jud.* 20:48 (2:69): "Magna apparet crudelitas sæuire in mulieres ac infantes ex Tribu Beniamin, nulli ætati, nullique sexui parcendo: nescio quo iure hoc fecerint, cum in lege Mosis clare inhibeatur occidere filios pro peccatis parentum."

[126] One should also register the appearance of Sebastian Münster's rabbinic digests in 1534–35 (see p. 157, n. 244), but in the case of Judges 19–21, Münster's remarks are mostly concerned with lexical difficulties. However, he does note the disagreement between the "Chaldean interpreter" (i.e., *Targum Jonathan*, which states at 19:2 that the Levite's wife grew angry [*contempsit eum*]) and "the rest of the rabbis" (who follow the Masoretic text in attributing to her some act of fornication); he reports at 20:21 that "the Hebrews" believe that Phinehas lived for up to 300 years (and thus was the same Phinehas who exhibited such ferocity against an Israelite man consorting with a Midianite woman in Numbers 25); and he records how "the Hebrews" attribute Israel's two disastrous attacks on Benjamin to their failure to punish the idolatry committed by Micah earlier, in Judges 17–18. Münster's digests of the rabbinic traditions that pertain to Judges 19–21 are conveniently reproduced in *Critici Sacri* 2:2133–34, 2140–41, 2150.

[127] Bucer's work on Judges was published in a single volume, sandwiched between his long work on the Psalms and another commentary, on Zephaniah, in 1554: *Psalmorum libri quinque . . . enarrati. Eivsdem commentarii in librum Iudicum, & in Sophoniam prophetam* ([Geneva:] Robert Estienne, 1554). It is not known how much earlier his remarks on Judges may have been composed. As noted above (pp. 159–60), some pages of the manuscript, including all of Judges 11–12 and 21, were evidently lost. Vermigli's 1561 commentary represents lectures given in Strasbourg from 1554 to 1556; see p. 161, n. 264.

[128] In particular, he considers it both damnable (*damnosum*) and a vice for the Levite (as a teacher of the people of God) to marry so unworthily as to sully the reputation of his priestly office; *Comm. Jud.* 19:1 (p. 518).

[129] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 21:25 (fol. 208^{r}; ET 288^{v}).

Reformation-related unrest, then, accounts for many of the "new" topics and concerns in these Protestant commentaries, including an impressive series of cautions and jeremiads on the need for vigilance among magistrates (a locus exceeding twenty-three pages in Vermigli), the social and personal consequences of leaving sin unpunished, the importance of parental consent in marriage, the dangers of dancing, and so on. In all of these particular topics, the Reformers' hostility toward Roman Catholicism is scarcely veiled and sometimes explicit and bitter. There may have been no magistrate in Israel in those days, when priests were evidently preoccupied with personal gain, but these Reformers have pledged their allegiance on the side of order and against the laxity that has so long prevailed in church, state, and home. They are obviously angry with many of their contemporaries, and the clouds of their wrath will come to burst upon many of the unsuspecting characters in Judges 19–21.

In the case of the Levite and his wife, moral outrage quickly surfaces. All four commentators were noted Hebraists,[130] so it is no surprise that they ignore the "softer" reading of the Septuagint in favor of the Hebrew account of the woman's adultery. This textual discovery (admittedly known since Lyra) provokes a new question, namely, why wasn't this adulteress stoned?[131] Modern readers will find the sentiment severe, especially in view of the woman's hideous demise, but for these Reformers the woman's crime is no less deserving of punishment than the earlier idolatry of Micah and the litany of assorted atrocities with which the book ends. Here, however, the consensus unravels. Vermigli seems harsh when he begins by noting that, as the wife of a priest, she actually should have been burned to death, and though she may have thought she escaped punishment (since there was, after all, no magistrate), "she could not escape the hand of God."[132] But Brenz fully anticipates Vermigli here and goes even further to interpret the woman's flight as a sign of her lack of humility.[133] Still more severe is Bucer, who not only finds the marriage damnable at the outset but goes on to condemn the Levite for seeking reconciliation and to call the woman's father a pimp for sheltering her.[134] Pellican and Brenz, by contrast, had praised the apparent reconciliation of the Levite and his wife.[135] Bucer's intemperate outburst may well have been the specific occasion for Vermigli's lengthy defense of reconciliation with an adulterous spouse, and for the balance of his commentary Vermigli's initial harshness is muted. He clearly entertains the likelihood that the woman repented and that, despite her just and providential punishment, she escaped an eternal penalty.[136]

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[130] Bucer is described as "ein vorzüglicher Hebraist" by Martin Greschat (*Martin Bucer: Ein Reformator und seine Zeit* [München: C. H. Beck, 1990], p. 94). Bucer and Pellican's contributions are explored by Friedman, *Most Ancient Testimony*, passim.

[131] The question is raised by Brenz, Bucer, and Vermigli, but not by Pellican. For a consideration of the seriousness with which the Reformers regarded adultery, irrespective of gender, see the chapter entitled "Death for Adultery," in Robert M. Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 116–42.

[132] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 19:2 (fol. 178^v, ET 248^v–249^r). Indeed, in all of these writers the ambiguity with which Cajetan spoke of the wife's "punishment" is decisively resolved into a *lex talionis*. No one is more vindictive here than Bucer: "The adulterous woman, as she sinned by her own lust, so she paid the penalty with the lust of another, [a penalty] both more savage and more shameful than according to the law. Therefore you see that God compensates for the lateness of a well-deserved punishment with severity, and he converts into punishments those very things by which pleasure was sought for against God" (*Comm Jud.* 19:29, p. 520).

[133] Brenz, *Comm. Jud* 19:1–2 (p. 177).

[134] *Comm. Jud.* 19:1–3 (pp. 518–19) At verse 27, Bucer states that the Levite's concubine died "so foully and inhumanely" precisely as a punishment for the Levite's own "pimping" (*poenas lenocinii sui*), "because he reconciled himself with an adulteress" (p. 520).

The earnestness with which these Reformers want to see adultery punished is one measure of the distance between the sixteenth century and the present day, at least in the West. But it would be wrong to identify this stark and theocratic moralism as also a mark of misogynism, for these commentators quickly shift their targets when they consider the events immediately leading up to the woman's rape and death. Accordingly, Pellican's outrage slowly waxes hot as he first of all declaims the Gibeahites' stated desire to rape the Levite ("such an impiety and abomination in Israel would be unbelievable if the sacred letters did not so testify"), then bemoans their ignorance of earlier biblical history and their contemptible failure to learn from the story of Lot in Sodom.[137] As for the Levite's endangerment of his wife, Pellican seems to excuse the Levite by an appeal to compensatory evil: "It is a miserable necessity," he writes, "that someone should be forced to allow such a crime in order to avoid one crueller still."[138] Yet his grief at the woman's murder is great, and he would extend no more clemency toward the Gibeahites than the Israelites were later to show.[139] And if Pellican seems to be overly generous in excusing the Levite, his patience is by no means unlimited. Accordingly, even though he had earlier dismissed as a rabbinic "fable" the claim that the Phinehas of Jud. 20:28 is the impetuous and exceedingly long-lived man honored in Numbers 25 (n. 126), Pellican still thinks that the Levite ought to have learned something from the earlier Phinehas's example:

> Bearing with as much patience as he could muster the unhappy fate of her fornication repeated now a second time, he attempts to raise his concubine, who has collapsed in the doorway. But seeing that she was dead and understanding the cause, why wouldn't he be utterly moved to violence? How could he do anything but plan to render such an outrage its just deserts with uncompromising zeal, as if he were another Phinehas?[140]

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[135] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 19:2 (fol. 52^{r}); Brenz, *Comm. Jud.* 19:3 (p. 177).

[136] Despite Vermigli's later admission that "nothing is written" of whether the Levite's wife repented or not, there seems little doubt but that Vermigli would like to view her in a favorable light—a conclusion that emerges from his rather tender account of the couple's reunion and from the final sentence of his commonplace on reconciliation (if not from the sheer existence of this commonplace): "Our Levite should not be censured for having taken his adulterous wife back into favor, provided that she repented of her adultery." Cf. *Comm. Jud.* 19:3–4 with 19:25 (fol. 178^{v}–179^{v}, 182^{v}; ET 249^{r}–250^{r}, 254^{v}).

[137] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 19:22, 24 (fol. 53^{r}).

[138] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 19 27 (fol. 53^{r}): "Misera necessitas qua tantum flagitium quispiam admittere cogitur, ut evadat crudelius."

[139] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 19:27 (fol. 53^{r}): "Quid isti homines inter se criminum obmittebant, qui tanta malitia grassati sunt in peregrinos? Vere liberalia, proba, & iusta illarum gentium sunt ingenia, quæ tanta crimina igne & horribilibus iudicijs extirpantes, pondus flagitij secundum illius horrorem intelligunt & testantur."

[140] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 19:28 (fol. 53^{r}): "Infelicem neceßitatem repetitæ fornicationis iam secundo, æquo ut potuit animo ferens, suscitare tentat in limine procumbentem concubinam: sed mortuam uidens &

His comment on the verse ends abruptly here, leaving the reader to infer that if the Levite was overly reserved in his response, Pellican would not have been.

Pellican is not the only one of his colleagues attracted to the "lesser evil" excuse on behalf of the Levite's act of self-preservation. Brenz advances an argument remarkably similar to Cajetan's notion of compensatory suffering (though he could not have known what Cajetan had written until four years later). Thus, while formally repudiating compensatory evil and condemning the prostitution of one's daughter even if done so that good may result, Brenz still holds, as Augustine did, that heterosexual rape is a lesser evil than homosexual rape. His point, then, as Cajetan's, is simply that the old man (and, presumably, the Levite) did not commit this evil but rather tolerated it, passively.[141] Bucer, however, for all his moral outrage, is less sure about this argument. Like Brenz, he sees the host rather than the Levite as the defendant here, a stance that underscores the old man's obligations (*secundum officium*) to his guests. Bucer cites the deceptions practiced by Abraham and Isaac at the expense of their wives as possible precedents here, but admits that these earlier cases are just as debatable as the one at hand. He concludes in ambiguity:

> These things could be disputed pro and con, and because various considerations and circumstances can be brought to bear, nothing in this case is to be defined as certain. Indeed, no one knows how the future will turn out, so let us beware of such dangers. . . . By prostituting his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine, the old man tried to ransom his guest from rape, which could have been done either in fulfillment of his duty or in violation thereof: in fulfillment of duty, as the sacrifice of lesser things in order to preserve the greater thing in the kingdom of God; in violation of duty, because it could be that he did this out of fear of unbelievers. . . . But just as these cases cannot be foreknown, so also one's duty [*ratio officii*] in these cases should not be defined [in advance].[142]

In short, Bucer is sure of only one thing, namely, that the old man tried, at least, to avoid this catastrophe. A more precise judgment is beyond Bucer's grasp.

In light of the qualified acceptance of compensatory evil conceded by Pellican, Brenz, and Bucer, it is tempting to read Vermigli's remarks as a rebuttal of his colleagues, none of whom he names. In any case, there is little ambiguity in Vermigli, who sides with Augustine against Ambrose and Chrysostom. Conflating the case at hand with Lot's exposure of his daughters to the Sodomites, Vermigli brooks no compromise and no compensation of one sin for another: "If it should seem that a more grievous sin would follow, were we to refuse to sin, that care is to be committed unto God and we should commit no sin under that pretense. . . . Truly, whatever is sin must be rejected on the spot, come what may."[143] In other words, the old man (or

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causam intelligens, quid ni uehementißime permoueretur? quomodo non intolerabili zelo uelut alter Phinees cogitaret de tanto flagitio pro meritis puniendo?" His other remarks on Phinehas occur at 19:22 and 20:26–28 (fol. 53^{r}, 54^{v}).

[141] Brenz, *Comm. Jud.* 19:23 (p. 179).

[142] Bucer, *Comm. Jud.* 19:23 (p. 520).

[143] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 19:21–30 (fol. 182^{r}, ET 253^{r}): "Quod si grauius quippiam uideatur, si detrectemus peccare, sequuturum, ea cura deo committenda est: uos uero illo prætextu nullum peccatum debemus admittere. . . Et sane quicquid peccatum est, ilico respuatur oportet, sequaturque quid uelit."

the Levite, for that matter) should have trusted God rather than trying to bargain with sins. Clearly, Vermigli stands in condemnation of the old man's deeds here:

> However much this old man was obliged to protect [*fidem* . . . *debebat*] his guest, he was no less obliged to protect and defend his daughter and the Levite's wife as well. Neither was it lawful for him to show more loyalty [*fidem*] to his guest than the word of God would allow. Thus he had no right to prostitute his daughter or his guest's wife. For a father does not have his daughter so in his power that he may expose her to the lusts of others. Nor is the daughter herself obliged to obey in anything that is sin [*in crimine*], even if her father should will and command it.[144]

Vermigli thus indicts all the men in this episode, in various ways. Moreover, he restores a measure of empowerment to the old man's daughter and, by implication, to the Levite's wife, both of whom could and should have resisted this impious and unlawful ploy.

The remaining commentary on Judges 19–21 from these four Protestants offers a potpourri of moral judgments, enough for everyone. While no one pauses long over the Levite's butchering of his wife nor questions the accuracy of his report in Jud. 20:5, many other actions receive considerable censure. Pellican, for example, marvels at "the amazing atrocity of the Israelites" against Benjamin: "If they had been the wildest of wild animals, they could not have acted more ferociously."[145] But the near-extermination of Benjamin is followed by yet "another cruelty," namely, the slaughter of the men and women of Jabesh-gilead for the sake of seizing some four hundred unmarried women. As Pellican recounts it, the rationalization for this slaughter is but a human contrivance, undertaken outside the law and without consulting God.[146] Pellican's summary is a sober one indeed:

> Nothing in this history is to be taken as an example, nothing is brought about through the oracles of the prophets, nothing is done with the Lord either having been consulted or with him commanding, nothing is read of the involvement of the high priest. Everything seems to have been carried out more by a spirit of furor and foolishness than by the spirit of God. Nonetheless, so it was done; and as it was done, so it was recorded.[147]

Pellican's melancholy carries over into his description of the abduction of the virgins of Shiloh, an act executed as ill advisedly and as rashly as before, and equally against the law of God. To be sure, Pellican does not fail to excoriate these same virgins (and their parents) for the unseemliness of the girls' dancing, though the real risk lay in their dancing without parental supervision. Nonetheless, the Israelites' original vow should never have been taken as an excuse for killing, abduction, or pillage.[148] In a marvelous bit of understatement, Pellican ends his commentary on Judges by noting how, after Shiloh, the Israelites all returned to their homes, "the matter having been conducted not at all well."[149]

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[144] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 19:21–30 (fol. 182^{r}, ET 253^{r}).

[145] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 20:46–48 (fol. 55^{r}).

[146] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 21:5–12 (fol. 55^{v}): "Ratione ergo humana suffulti, præter legem, & sine consultatione dei decernunt ex malo bonum elicere." This is a point on which Brenz (p. 185) dissents: the failure of Jabesh-gilead to muster against Benjamin was tantamount to complicity in the Benjaminites' crime.

[147] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 21:5–12 (fol. 55^{v}): "Nihil hac in historia trahendum in exemplum, nihil per prophetarum oracula conficitur, nihil domino uel consulto, uel iubente agitur, nihil de summi sacerdotis opera legitur. Omnia magis furoris & stultitiæ spiritu peracta uidentur, quam diuino: & tamen sic gesta sunt, & ut gesta, sic conscripta"

Vermigli echoes many of Pellican's complaints, though assessing his views here requires some diligence. Accordingly, while it might seem that the Israelites were severe, or cruel, or even unlawful in slaying the children of the Benjaminites for the sins of their parents, Vermigli is initially persuaded by his rabbinic sources that such severity was required because the Israelites had vowed to place Benjamin under a ban, that is, to devote Benjamin to total destruction, reserving no spoil. And it may be, he thinks, that such a vow was taken by a special divine mandate.[150] But the cogency of this rabbinic speculation erodes over the next twenty pages, as Vermigli concludes, first, that the Israelites do not seem to have had divine permission for the total destruction of either Benjamin or Jabesh-gilead; next, that their deeds were extreme ("to kill women, old men, and children was far too cruel");[151] lastly, that the whole series of oaths, revenge, and abduction — both at Jabesh-gilead and in Shiloh — was foolish, brutal, fraudulent and insincere, ill conceived, inconstant, evil, sinful, and in flagrant violation of the law of God.[152] Like Pellican, he deplores the custom in Shiloh whereby young women danced on a holy day, and he is not above seeing some justice in their fate. While this may seem like blaming the victims, Vermigli's observation is more directly impelled by his Protestant concern for parental consent in marriage, and he goes on to note that the parents of the young women were also justly punished for their own carelessness.[153] Nonetheless, he concludes, the girls' abductors surely committed the crime of *raptus*, and they escaped punishment only on an unfair technicality, owing to the complicity of the elders of Israel.[154]

The three chapters that conclude the book of Judges run red with the details of chaos, and it would be too much of a stretch to think that sixteenth-century commentators have singled out any of the women in Judges 19–21—not only the Levite's wife, but also the women of Benjamin and of Jabesh-gilead, and the young women of Shiloh — in order to rescue or vindicate them. None of these interpreters would see himself as a special advocate for women in any way comparable to the feminist interpreters of today.[155] Nonetheless, these interpreters are far from heartless and they are by no means blind: and it is precisely the rampant injustice and iniquity in the story that exercises them so greatly. But it still remains that sixteenth-century biblical commentators, like their predecessors, are attempting to address an agenda that is only partially congruent with that of moderns—an agenda that may be cast in sharper relief by a closing look at the parallel case of Lot and his daughters.

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[148] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 21:13–15, 19–20 (fol. 55ᵛ): "Occidere, rapere, uastare crudeliter non docemur."

[149] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 21:24–25 (fol. 56ʳ); for the conclusion of this sentence, see p. 232 at n. 8.

[150] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 20:37, 48 (fol. 196ᵛ–97ʳ, ET 274ʳ): "Sed uerisimile est, quod etiam interpretes Hebræi tradiderunt, Israelitas, cum ieiunassent & orassent coram domino, uouisse *cherem* hoc est, uotum anathematis, quo nihil fas erat reseruari, quod in bello periculoso, & magno discrimine solebat fieri. Quin & in Deuter. 13 cap. Deus edixit. . . . Quod tamen non ex præscripto legis, sed ex dei quodam singulari consilio factum credendum est."

[151] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 21:1–13 (fol. 201ᵛ, ET 280).

[152] All of these descriptors, and more, may be gleaned from Vermigli's comments on Judges 20 and 21; see especially his précis at fol. 207ᵛ (ET 288ʳ).

[153] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 21:14–25 (fol. 203ᵛ, 206ʳ, 208ʳ; ET 283ʳ, 285ᵛ, 288ʳ).

[154] However tempting it may be to translate *raptus* here as "rape," Vermigli is well aware that abduction does not always entail the sexual violation of its victim. In a five-page commonplace, he recalls (nostalgically?) how the Code of Justinian decreed death as the proper punishment for committing *raptus*, as well as for aiding or abetting it — a punishment later reduced by the canonists. Clearly, he has little sympathy for the abductors in this tale. See Vermigli, "De raptu," in *Comm. Jud.* 21 (fol 203ᵛ–206ʳ, ET 283ʳ–285ᵛ).

The Endangerment of Lot's Daughters in Sixteenth-Century Exegesis

The parallel between Genesis 19 and Judges 19 provides an exceedingly valuable resource for the historian, primarily because it warrants the addition of several important commentators—including Luther, Zwingli, Musculus, and Calvin—to the those whom we have already queried on Judges (all of whom, save Bucer, also wrote on Genesis).

Many of their moves are by now familiar. To begin with, there is much of the same sort of moral casuistry already encountered. Even as the various New Testament approbations of Lot exerted a powerful pull on the church fathers,[156] so also did sixteenth-century commentators feel obliged to weigh the traditional explanations for Lot's callous bargaining with his daughters' virtue. They consider all of the usual excuses: either Lot acted badly, perhaps out of a severe mental disturbance induced by the assault at his door; or else Lot acted shrewdly, knowing the offer of his daughters would be rejected but hoping it would shock the Sodomites out of their frenzy; or else his was simply a gesture of triage, choosing the lesser evil of rape over sodomy. The first of these—whether described as mental "perturbation," or extreme fear, or anxiety, or desperation—is cited as an ameliorating factor by Luther, Zwingli, Musculus, Calvin, and Vermigli, but for none of them does this factor change the character of the deed as "shameful" (Zwingli) and "an unlawful remedy" (Calvin). The second excuse, that Lot's offer was "hyperbolic" (to use Cajetan's descriptor), is heavily favored only by Cajetan, though it is given a skeptical nod by Musculus and utterly recast by Luther as an act of great but hidden faith. Calvin, however, dismisses this second excuse as a "sham" (*praetextu*), for there can be no doubt but that Lot simply seized upon "the first subterfuge that came to mind" and so erred.[157] Surprisingly, the appeal to compensatory evil—the third excuse—is commended only by Brenz and is specifically condemned by Luther, Musculus, Calvin, and Vermigli.

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[155] There are, of course, other sixteenth-century commentators, as well as a lengthy roll of commentators in subsequent centuries, who had occasion to address this story. For an analysis of John Milton's extensive use of this tale in the seventeenth century, see Louise Simons, "'An Immortality Rather than a Life': Milton and the Concubine of Judges 19–21," in *Old Testament Women in Western Literature*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Jan Wojcik (Conway, Ark.: UCA Press, 1991), pp. 144–73. Pertinent excerpts from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century interpreters may be found in *Critici Sacri* 1:213–19 and 2:2133–54, and in Matthew Poole, *Synopsis Criticorum*, 1·1201–24.

[156] See especially my discussion of Augustine's developing views, pp. 195–97.

[157] Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 19:8 (CO 23:270, CTS 1:500): "Alii diverso praetextu Lot excusant, quod filias suas sciverit minime expeti. Ego autem non dubito quin effugium quod illi primum occurrit quaerere volens, a via deflexerit."

What needs to be underscored in the midst of these rational moral deliberations, however, is the degree to which these writers are scandalized by Lot's conduct. The traditional casuistic considerations are, in effect, a background wash over which commentators regularly apply the bolder strokes constituted by their own emotive and anxious evaluations of Lot. Few, if any, stand in awe of these excuses' sufficiency. Thus, Luther's complicated yet characteristic worrying over Lot—wherein he claims not to wish to excuse Lot's sin yet styles him as a model of miraculous and improbable faith—appears first of all under a rubric of indignation: "His extreme disloyalty toward his daughters, whose respectability the parent should defend at the risk of his own life, is execrable."[158] Though Scripture does not condemn Lot, Pellican observes, "no one could ignore" that his was a great and atrocious crime.[159] And even Brenz is strangely constrained to voice some second thoughts. Having nicely excused Lot by reiterating the argument from compensatory suffering, he offers another scenario in which Lot would also have been without sin if, excited by the Holy Spirit, he had cast stones upon the Sodomites or attacked them with a sword rather than handing over either his daughters or guests! Alas, while God once gave such a gift to Moses, Phinehas, Jonathan, David, and Christ, he did not grant it to Lot. Surely this violent fantasy is really but Brenz wearing his heart on his sleeve, more boldly than Pellican did in a different context.[160]

Like Brenz, Musculus also grants that sodomy is a worse sin than defiling a virgin, but Musculus finds the argument—and Lot's calculated stratagem—out of place here, for "a father does not have such authority over his daughters that he may hire them out to be ravished; nor would they be bound to obey a father who so ordered them."[161] Moreover, Lot's plan was itself risky, for in all likelihood his daughters would have been not just raped but defiled also by unnatural intercourse.[162] Musculus's point about the limits to paternal authority finds an echo in Vermigli's comments on Judges 19 (see n. 144), but in the case of Lot, Vermigli's contempt is even more pointed:

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[158] Luther, *Comm. Gen.* 19:8 (WA 43:59.27–29, LW 3:258), reading in full: "Sicut autem merito praedicatur illa in hospites fides, ita quoque detestabilis est summa in filias impietas, quarum pudor parenti cum vitae suae periculo defendendus est."

[159] Pellican goes on to blame Lot for seeking worldly affluence and thus preferring to live among the worst sort of people, see *Comm. Gen.* 19:8 (fol 24^{r}).

[160] Brenz, *Comm. Gen* 19:8 (pp 169–70). For Pellican, see the quote at n. 140.

[161] Musculus, *Comm. Gen.* 19:6–8 (p. 461): "In filias id potestatis non habet pater, ut elocet eas ad stuprandum. Nec illæ patri tale quid iubenti obedire tenentur."

[162] Musculus's worry here is more sophisticated than the similar concerns voiced by Lyra and Denis (discussed at nn. 103 and 114), insofar as he identifies the source of the Sodomites' behavior as stemming not from lust so much as from a jaded contempt for women; see his *Comm Gen.* 19:6–8 (p. 464): "Et illud consideremus, quod oblatas uirgines respuerunt. Qua in re manifeste uidemus, insaniam illam Sodomiticam non oriri ex penuria muliebris commercij, sed ex illius nausea & fastidio. Nausea uero & fastidium inde concipitur, quod præ nimia licentia, stuprandi, scortandi & adulterandi uilescunt ac sordent non modo uiduæ, & maritatæ, sed & nubiles uirgines. Tale fastigium [*sic:* fastidium?] illis potissimum locis obtinet, ubi sine ullo pudore omnis generis libido in fœminas exercetur impune, sicuti in prostibulis meretricijs fiere solet. Quare omnium stolidissimi sunt, qui putant lupanaria publica ad hoc conducere, ut in reliqua plebe seruari possit castitas & honestas, cum nihil sit pestilentius, & ad alendam omnis generis libidinem & impudicitiam efficacius."

> We see that many parents, guided only by the light of nature, do everything to protect the chastity of their family members, especially of their wives and daughters, and thus expose themselves to all sorts of dangers. How much more should this man of God have done! Indeed, he who does not care for his own and especially for the members of his family has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.[163]

Lot should have trusted God, cries Vermigli. He should have argued with the Sodomites, he should have resisted them as much as he was able, and — verily! — he should have prayed for them.[164]

Calvin's assessment of Lot is preserved in his commentary of 1554 as well as in a sermon of 1560. His commentary offers a brief but poignant interpretation. Dismissing, for the most part, all the ameliorating arguments, he sadly recounts Lot's "unlawful remedy": "Truly, he does not hesitate to pander his own daughters as prostitutes in trying to restrain the townsmen's unflagging fury. Yet it would have been better for him to have undergone a thousand deaths than to have undertaken such a measure!"[165] Calvin's indictment cuts quickly to the bone of the matter: Lot should have died at his own doorstep before ever uttering such words. One can only marvel, then, to see such a sophisticated critic as Gerda Lerner quote snippets on either side of these sentences only to end on such a dismissive note, as if the sum of Calvin's exegesis were to regard Lot's behavior "as merely 'an imperfection'" — a judgment that is both unfair and unhistorical.[166] Calvin is about the business of writing a biblical commentary, not a treatise on the underachievements of Lot, but the Genevan Reformer's anger and disgust is perfectly clear within the confines of his genre. When Calvin later came to preach on this text, Lot's vicious act was much on his mind: his second sentence signals this problem with considerable deliberation, and he labors for half his sermon to retain in the minds of his congregation at least a mixed evaluation of this man whom Scripture elsewhere earmarks as righteous.[167] At the end of the hour, that is Calvin's lesson: no one has ever achieved virtue unstained by vice, and we must pray to God so that we may be not only sustained by God's power but also instructed by God's word.[168] The lesson also points to Lot's flaw: he had zeal, but he was devoid of good counsel and discretion; he had come to wits' end; his act was born of despair. Calvin does not mean to defend or excuse Lot, only to juxtapose Lot's vice with an appropriate recollection of the men gathered outside — "furious beasts . . . despoiled of all humanity . . . who wished to *paillarder* against nature."[169] Accordingly, Calvin has just as much to say in rebuke of Lot, finding his "thoughtless zeal" thoroughly reprehensible, excoriating him for committing "a vicious act, one detestable in the eyes of God and of everyone."[170] Indeed, Lot "is prepared to expose his two daughters to all shame and make them into fornicators [*paillardes*], not to say the common possession of all. When Lot goes that far, he cannot be excused, for he failed gravely."[171]

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[163] Vermigli, *Comm. Gen.* 19:9 (fol. 76ʳ): "Videmus naturæ lumine multos parentes nil non efficere, vt suorum domesticorum castitate consulant & potissimum vxoris ac filiarum, ita vt se ipsos omnibus periculis exponant: quanto magis hoc virum Dei facere oportuit? Qui enim suorum & maxime domesticorum curam non habet, abnegauit fidem, & infideli est deterior." The last sentence here is a direct but unheralded quotation of 1 Tim. 5:8.

[164] Vermigli, *Comm. Gen.* 19:9 (fol. 76ʳ). "The Hebrews," Vermigli concludes, also think Lot sinned in exposing his daughters to sexual abuse, and they thus observe how incest was a fitting punishment.

[165] Calvin, *Comm. Gen* 19:8 (CO 23:270, CTS 1:499–500): "Filias enim suas ad stuprum prostituere non dubitat, ut compescat indomitum populi furorem. Atqui mille potius mortes obeundae erant quam ineunda talis ratio."

[166] Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, pp. 172–73, citing CTS 1:499–500. Lerner's tendentious use of original sources risks misleading her readers, who may assume Calvin fully deserves such a contemptuous dismissal. Thus, even scholars who ought to know better may end up perpetuating a historical slander, as does Ilona N. Rashkow, who cites Calvin only from Lerner and boldly asserts that Calvin does not "[condemn Lot's] offer of his daughters as rape victims", see *The Phallacy of Genesis: A Feminist-Psychoanalytic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), p. 82.

[167] One could fairly conclude that much of Calvin's accommodation to Lot is driven by the testimony in 2 Peter; see *Serm. 90 on Gen.* 19:6–9, fol. 604ᵛ, 607ʳ.

Conclusion

The story of the rape of the Levite's wife and of its consequences is quite possibly the most disturbing tale in what is arguably the most disturbing book in the Bible. No doubt the final redactors of Judges intended it as such, insofar as such bleakness and anarchy stand ready to serve the book's apologetic for Israel's later monarchy. One of the great peculiarities in the history of the interpretation of this passage, however, is the pervasive silence with which the story was greeted. As we have seen, aside from Josephus's sanitized version and Pseudo-Philo's scapegoating of the Levite's wife, Jewish comments on this story (as well as on Lot's offer of his daughters) are few and late. Likewise, early Christian commentary on Judges 19–21 consists of but a tangent or two from Jerome and Theodoret and, perhaps, the covert influence of Josephus perpetuated by Ambrose and Sulpicius. More significantly still, Augustine's failure to address these final chapters apparently left his many medieval epitomizers and imitators with nothing to say at all, so that — for all practical purposes — it is not until Lyra in the fourteenth century that the horrible ending of Judges is directly addressed by Christian commentators.

Why is this so? None of the other texts studied here is so consistently snubbed by commentators. A related question is raised by Mark Jordan in his recent reexamination of the medieval discussions of sodomy, namely, why did the story of the assault on Lot become eponymous for such same-sex crime while the parallel story in Judges 19 is virtually ignored?

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[168] Calvin, *Serm.* 90 *on Gen.* 19 6–9, fol. 605^{r}

[169] Calvin, *Serm.* 90 *on Gen.* 19:6–9, fol. 604^{v}: "cela luy estoit plus cher que sa propre vie d'entretenir ses filles en chasteté, mais il est comme au bout de son sens, voiant qu'il ne peut apaiser la rage de ces bestes furieuses. Car ceux de Sodome estoient despouillez de toute humanité, quand ilz sont transportez d'une affection si vilaine et si brutale que contre nature ilz veullent paillarder."

[170] Calvin, *Serm.* 90 *on Gen.* 19:6–9, fol. 605^{r}, 606^{r}.

[171] Calvin, *Serm.* 90 *on Gen.* 19:6–9, fol 604^{r}. "Mais cependant il y a eu un vice meslé, voire et grand et digne de reprehension, quand il est prest d'exposer ses deux filles à toute honte, et qu'elles soient paillardes, voire à tout le commun Quand donc Loth vient jusques là, on ne peut pas l'excuser, qu'il n'ait lourdement failly"

> Christian theology did not become preoccupied with a "sin of the Benjaminites" (as the inhabitants of Gibeah were called), nor did European countries adopt penal statutes against "Benjamy." This is the more striking because the incidents at Gibeah are more horrible than the events surrounding Lot's hospitality to the angelic messengers in Sodom. The citizens of Sodom do nothing in the end. They are blinded by the angels, who then instruct Lot to hurry his family out of the city in view of its impending destruction. At Gibeah, there are no angels to rescue the sacrificed woman during the dark night of her torture. She has to suffer and then die of her wounds. Nor does God punish Gibeah with fiery storm. The Israelite armies must do it themselves, after sustaining heavy casualties. Why is it then that the story of Sodom had such a long afterlife?[172]

In the course of his study, Jordan suggests a number of answers to his question, but most persuasive is the one that signals the abhorrence with which Christian theologians viewed same-sex genital relations. Some such execration is present already in Augustine's reluctance to condemn lying as a way for a man to escape suffering this disgrace in particular, but Jordan documents at several points just how self-consciously medieval writers apologized for breaking a silence otherwise so long observed.[173] Augustine's revulsion, echoed by the rhetoric of shame surrounding the medieval discussion, suggests that neither story — Genesis 19 or Judges 19 — was especially popular, and that "unspeakable" crimes were often quite literally treated as such. Thus, even if Lot's badly handled encounter with the Sodomites drew relatively more attention than did the Levite's badly handled encounter with the men of Gibeah, it remains that the conjunction of two odious crimes — rape, and same-sex rape — with a scandalous blurring of heroes and villains would scarcely admit of any easy explanation. In other words, these are not texts for the timid.

The evidences marshaled by Jordan are therefore not at odds with Bronner's speculations on behalf of late ancient and early medieval rabbis, that the rabbis' silence (with respect to Lot) might reflect their "deep revulsion" over the episode, or perhaps embody their recognition of the impossible situation in which such an assault had placed Lot. Bronner's speculations are equally applicable to the story of the Levite and his wife. And it is not out of place to note how even in our own day, most people require no prompting to find this tale shocking and repulsive, yet a large part of what makes the tale so repulsive may well be the absence of any redemptive turn or moral resolution. The tragedy of Jephthah's daughter was at least tempered by her nobility. But who would want to preach on a story that begins so badly and only gets worse?[174] Precritical commentators have no monopoly on silence here. For example, Ruth Bottigheimer has traced the frequent excision of Lot's offer and that of the Levite from children's Bibles over five centuries, but in the case of the Levite, *The Woman's Bible* is equally mute.[175]

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[172] Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, pp 30–31.

[173] Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, pp. 64–65, 92–113, 130.

[174] Thus, in the case of Augustine, perhaps he simply found it more satisfying to end his long series of questions on the Old Testament in the midst of the story of Samson than with Israel's squalid and messy civil war.

[175] Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 86–88, 136–41. *The Woman's Bible* (2:36–37), like so many patristic and medieval commentaries, skips from Samson directly to Ruth.

There is, however, at least one contrast to be drawn between early Jewish and Christian commentary when the problem of Judges 19 is joined to that of Genesis 19, for if the rabbis of late antiquity were mostly silent in both cases, significant Christian voices were raised to assess the behavior of Lot. The debate over Lot's exposure of his daughters was joined by both Ambrose and Chrysostom, then given a definitive treatment by Augustine, who—however much he lingered over casuistic nuances—showed himself willing to exonerate Lot only by a plea of insanity, if at all. Later interpreters echoed this plea on Lot's behalf, though many also credited Lot for sensing that heterosexual rape would not have been as bad (read, "unnatural") as homosexual rape. Lot's standing, however, was bolstered in two crucial ways that the Levite would lack: first, there are both explicit and more oblique commendations of Lot to be found elsewhere in the canonical Scriptures; and, second, however shrewd or base or foolish or fearful Lot may have been, ultimately he was let off the hook by a divine deliverance. Indeed, Lot's rescue may have contributed to the commentators' silence at Judges 19. In Lot's case, nothing succeeds like success. But in the presence of the concubine's broken body, all of Lot's supposedly clever schemes and inventive excuses would sound hollow and silly and wrong.

The interpretative history of the Levite's wife is thus constructed, like the parallel story of Lot's daughters, almost wholly between two cornerstones. One such stone is constituted by the question of whether the Levite (or his host in Gibeah, or, by extension, Lot) might properly appeal to the argument from compensatory evil. In other words, were any of these men right to preserve their own chastity, or that of their male guests, by endangering any of these four women? A negative answer to this question is not without cost, particularly in the case of Lot, insofar as one must then deal with the other biblical texts that praise him. Here is one more place where Augustine established a hugely influential pattern, albeit perhaps an inadvertent one, in that commentators appear more often to reject the appeal to compensatory evil, but they regularly do so with just as much wistfulness, just as much looking back, as Augustine displayed in *De mendacio*. If Augustine's successors mirror his ambivalence, it is probably because they are wrestling with the same imaginary dread: What would *you* do in Lot's place? Thus, it is not unknown for a commentator to invoke the argument, only to kill it with a thousand qualifications. And though Matthew Poole claimed in the seventeenth century that "papalists" commonly excuse the Levite and the old man, there is scarcely such a sharp division between Protestants and Catholics, as even Poole's sources show.[176] Mostly, writers see the weakness of the argument and derive from it only a token of extenuation, not exoneration. The more outspoken writers, however, dismiss it out of hand, just as Vermigli urged: "Whatever is sin must be rejected on the spot, come what may."[177]

A second cornerstone of the discussion is established by the notion that the Levite's wife suffered so gruesomely precisely because of her previous infidelity.

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[176] Poole cites the Catholic writers Menochius, Tirinus, Lapide, and Tostatus as excusing the Levite and his host, mostly by appeal to compensatory evil or other extenuations; but he also cites the Catholics Estius and Bonfrere as mostly not excusing them. See *Synopsis Criticorum* on Jud. 19:24 (1:1206–7); and pp. 214–15, in this chapter.

[177] Vermigli, *Comm. Jud.* 19:21–30 (fol. 182^r, ET 253^r).

Pseudo-Philo is the first to develop this theme, but it returns with a vengeance once the wording of the Hebrew Bible is recovered in the later Middle Ages. Beginning with Lyra, Christian commentators begin to address the catastrophe of the Levite's wife and the ensuing civil war. Ironically, this renewal of attention coincides with the first flowering of a Christian Hebraism, and the result is not only to attend to the Levite's wife but also to uncover from the Hebrew text a shocking secret: the woman later raped to death had herself committed a sin both mortal and sexual. One might well expect this revelation to be seized upon as the key to the story, turning it into a morality play in which an unpunished sin is providentially and fittingly avenged. Although resisted by Denis the Carthusian in the fifteenth century, this moral-providential explanation becomes a nearly universal standard of exchange in the sixteenth. It is often seen, in a word, as the way out. To be sure, this insight does not pertain to the old man's virgin daughter, nor to Lot's virgin daughters—though the rabbinic suggestion that correlated Lot's rash offer in Sodom with the daughters' later incest surely was following the same instinct.

If the line between blaming the victim and offering a deserved rebuke is often very fine, there is reason to believe that many precritical commentators were innocent of the former, despite their strong commitment to the latter. Here is where the parallel case of Lot's daughters is of particular utility, in that it helps exculpate these commentators of special pleading at the expense of the women—in both passages. Owing to his approbation elsewhere in Scripture, Lot could have expected at least a bit more consideration than the Levite. He probably gets it, too, not that the extra consideration does him much good. Calvin's sermon is a fine case in point, for it draws heavily on 2 Peter to counter a wholesale condemnation of Lot, and yet Lot's disloyalty to his daughters is gravely denounced all the same. In all likelihood, then, Calvin's lost sermons on Judges would condemn the Levite, too, just as so many of his Protestant colleagues illustrated in fact! If Lot receives an occasional courtesy not extended to the Levite, it is begrudgingly bestowed. And although many commentators will agree with Ambrose that sodomy is a worse crime than heterosexual rape, most remain vehement in condemning Lot and the Levite for not risking their own lives to save their daughters and wife. Indeed, the more reflective writers—Lyra, Denis, and Musculus, who contended that sodomy and not vaginal rape was likely to be inflicted on whomever was thrust out the door—demonstrate that it was sodomy per se that they found abhorrent, not the gender of its victim. Even where the Levite's wife is most eagerly prosecuted and convicted for adultery, no one else in the story is thereby exonerated or acclaimed, whether the Levite himself or his old host, and certainly not the mob who perpetrated the rape. Bucer's general anger is especially instructive though by no means unique, since Brenz also comes quickly to mind. In a setting so filled with ne'er-do-wells, not all are equally vicious, but there is a plenitude deserving of rebuke and blame. And only one of these is the Levite's also-wronged wife.

Commenting on Lot, Gerda Lerner has asserted that "if we analyze this Biblical story, we notice that Lot's right to dispose of his daughters, even so as to offer them to be raped, is taken for granted." Proceeding to Judges 19, she observes with regret that "nowhere in the text is there a word of censure toward [the Levite] for his action or toward the host, who offers up his virgin daughter to save his guest's life and honor."[178] Lerner's descriptions here need not be contested, but they leave part of the story untold, namely, that precritical commentators were themselves much concerned lest such arguments from silence be taken as the divine and final word. Accordingly, while there are certainly flaws and compromises to be found in their exegesis,[179] there is also much to show that if the Bible takes for granted Lot's right to dispose of his daughters, precritical commentators assuredly did not. And if the Bible nowhere utters a word of censure toward the Levite, they were quick to correct the oversight and to censure him again and again. Indeed, there is a sober lesson to be learned even from the commentators' willingness to consider defending Lot and the Levite behind a plea of temporary insanity. For what else is such a plea, except an admission of total ethical collapse in fact if not in law: a move meant not to exonerate or glorify these men but, instead, to ratify their failure.

At their best, precritical commentators want to remind their readers of much that is worth remembering, not just in Judges 19 but also in the dismal pair of chapters that follow: that even an adulteress deserves the protection of her host; that avoiding a greater evil does not excuse another sin; that no circumstances of war justify the cruel treatment of one's enemies, or wanton slaughter, or the murder of innocent people; that a foolish oath does not suspend the obligation to conduct oneself humanely and within the bounds of law and morality; that no woman so belongs to a man that he may treat her as a bargaining chip or save his own life at her expense. In short, neither virgin daughters nor wives—be they faithful or not—are by any means expendable, and fathers and husbands and hosts should offer their own lives in death or defense rather than treat them as such.

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[178] Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, pp. 173, 174.

[179] Thus, one could easily document, from these commentaries as well as from a host of other writings, that the patristic, medieval, and Reformation-era theologians are prone to stereotyping about women. Sometimes the "lessons" unearthed by precritical commentators are stunning in their banality: when Gregory reads the abduction of two hundred girls as an act of "pastoral compassion" for the wifeless Benjaminites, one suspects the forest has been lost among the trees! More troubling in the present context is the relative lack of concern over the Levite's act of butchering his wife's body and sending the parts to the twelve tribes Hugo Grotius, in the seventeenth century, is apparently one of the first to register any overt squeamishness at this act when he acknowledges that "the atrocity of the deed compelled him to an atrocious remedy"; see *Critici Sacri* 2:2140.

Conclusion

Reading Scripture in the Presence of the Past

It is a strange thing, picking up friendships with the neglected dead . . .
Norman Maclean, *Young Men and Fire*

The written past is a thing that can be used or abused, remembered or ignored. And while there are many reasons why people read history, no one reads without the added guidance of one's own taste and interests. Moreover, any reader who is subjectively engaged by a biblical narrative will almost certainly develop some hope for the story's outcome, particularly if the tale seems devoid of obvious closure or resolution. Such has been the case with the stories surveyed here. Most readers who lingered over the stories of Hagar and her sisters saw in these women of the past also some symbol, some lesson or warning for themselves. Sometimes the impulse to fix the past seems as irresistible as it is impossible. Nonetheless, to care about the past from the perspective of the present, or to read the past with any interest or engagement at all, is to some extent also to read selectively, insofar as every question an interested reader poses of the past is likely to eclipse some other question whose turn never comes. It is all too easy for one who has begun by listening to the past to end by dictating to it.

The interests that have impelled my own research and the questions posed here have no special immunity from these risks of self-interest. To draw up a list of modern-day feminist questions and then turn around to seek answers from an ostensibly precritical past (one might just as well say "prefeminist" past) is admittedly to run the risk of creating the past in one's own image. Still, such a risk does not invalidate the questions or the search: for if modern readers have found parts of the Bible unsettling, or worse, surely one may be forgiven for wondering if it has always been so. Whatever earlier commentators had to say about certain women of the Old Testament, it would seem worth the risk to inquire, even if it should turn out that they actually had nothing to say.

In describing the exegetical history of the texts of terror, however, it would assuredly be an abuse of the past to excerpt and edit for modern readers only the best—

or, as some have actually done, only the worst—of what precritical commentators wrote. If the preceding survey of the "afterlives" of Hagar and other Old Testament women has any claim to have avoided the shoals of its own self-interest, then, that claim would look for corroboration above all in the mixed findings of the search. Precritical commentators are, quite simply, not always predictable in their interaction with biblical narratives, regardless of whether one's expectations are based on a commentator's antiquity or his gender. Some fulfill our stereotypes. Others break out of them. The history of precritical biblical interpretation does not disclose a univocal or monolithic entity, much less one that could possibly pretend to meet all the objections or worries registered by modern feminist critics—not that feminist critics themselves, divided among revisionists, rejectionists, radicals, and others, are free from internal disagreements. On the other hand, that same history of interpretation, in all its variety, has unquestionably furnished some food for thought, and at least a few surprises. Whatever responses precritical interpretations of Scripture may elicit from modern readers—whether curiosity or amusement, impatience or disgust, edification or encouragement—it is to be hoped that one finding is clear: *pre*critical commentators were not necessarily *un*critical in their handling of biblical texts, nor in their consideration of narratives filled with actions and actors that are morally suspect, to say the least.

In support of such a finding, it would be fair to say that the purpose of this study has already been fulfilled far more by the preceding three chapters of unreduced detail than by anything that will follow. Those chapters set out to pay attention not only to some marginalized women of the Old Testament but also to some largely forgotten theologians, only a few of whom find it easy to remain in print today. Precritical commentators demonstrate their active engagement with these stories precisely in their diversity and disagreements, and it would be a mistake to homogenize their views or to submerge them all under the unelected but usual headship of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. The details are important, not just for curiosity's sake or out of an antiquarian obsession, but as proof that few of these churchmen were mere scriveners.

In drawing this study to a close, it is crucial not to lose sight of either the historiographical risks described above or the irreducible diversity among precritical commentators. In the pages that remain I will attempt not to harmonize the history of interpretation with modern feminist criticism—that would indeed be to whitewash many of those exegetical details—but rather to draw these two sets of readers, these two perspectives, a few steps closer together for the sake of conversation. Feminist critics and precritical commentators alike come to the text of the Bible with presuppositions, agendas, and desires for edification of one sort or another. For all their differences, there are also some striking coincidences of interest and expression, and it is worth budgeting a final effort to clarify where the boundaries lie. Thus, I conclude with a twofold retrospective, first, by allowing the concerns of feminist readers to query precritical commentators and their exegesis, then reversing the roles to allow these earlier interpreters a similar inquiry. The concern here is not to vindicate one party against the other. Nor would it be wise, given the restriction of my survey to these three or four exegetical case studies, to extrapolate the following discussion into generalizations about the whole Bible or the whole history of interpretation.[1] In moderating this mutual interview, however, I will try to follow up on the methodological categories—the "exegetical moves"—described in the introduction, and also to address at least some of the implications of discerning and assigning motives to our conversation partners.

Feminist Concerns and Precritical Exegesis

One cannot impute an agenda to feminist biblical critics that is uniform in its details, but it is fair to say that they are all concerned to challenge male-biased biblical texts and interpretations and to give special emphasis to how such texts and interpretations may have difficult or disastrous implications for women—both the women in the text and the women who could be considered as part of its audience throughout the history of the text's reading and reception. It has already been observed how writers and reviewers commonly and off-handedly assert that the stories of women in the Bible have traditionally been ignored and neglected by interpreters, and however overdrawn the claim may be, the complaint is by no means petty. Few exegetical moves would suggest an interpreter's complicity in the marginalization of the women of the Bible more than sheer neglect: to see them in their virtue or vice as simply not worth the ink to mention; or, worse, not to see them at all. Perhaps the most important feminist concern to address, then, is the somewhat preliminary question of whether commentators prior to our own day stand guilty as charged.

Women in Precritical Exegesis:
The Question of Neglect

Did precritical commentators neglect these stories or the women in them? Whatever other conclusions one might draw from our limited interrogation, surely enough has been uncovered to warrant a reduction of the charge, if not its outright dismissal. Really, the accusation of neglect is an armchair generalization, one that ought to have been greeted with mistrust, even apart from the body of evidence introduced here. After all, womanists have known of Hagar's importance to African-American piety and spirituality for the better part of two centuries. Mary De Jong has deftly verified how Old Testament women were common exemplars in the popular literature of the nineteenth century.[2] Despite his deliberate neglect of theological writings, Wilbur Sypherd has amply documented a perennial fascination with Jephthah's daughter in literature and art since the Renaissance. And anyone who peruses Elizabeth Cady Stanton's once-notorious *Woman's Bible* will wonder why her readings of these texts — which anticipated many contemporary complaints and specific textual insights by more than a century — are so rarely footnoted by feminist Old Testament critics today.[3] In any case, it is equally problematic to claim that these stories were neglected, forgotten, or covered up by still earlier biblical commentators. One finds far more than bare mention of these stories among precritical interpreters, who do not seem at all reluctant to engage and often even to apply these disturbing tales for their hearers' and readers' benefit. Naturally, there is no guarantee that what earlier expositors found suitable by way of engagement or application will please later readers — or even these early interpreters' own contemporaries. Nevertheless, Hagar, Jephthah's daughter, and their Old Testament sisters are clearly valued as part of the biblical currency exchanged by precritical commentators with their own readers.

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[1] Happily, other studies have begun to draw attention to biblical women in the history of interpretation. In addition to the plethora of works dealing with Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalen, see Craig S. Farmer, "Changing Images of the Samaritan Woman in Early Reformed Commentaries on John," *Church History* 65 (1996): 365–75; idem, "Wolfgang Musculus's Commentary on John: Tradition and Innovation in the Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, pp. 216–40; John L. Farthing, "Holy Harlotry: Jerome Zanchi and the Exegetical History of Gomer (Hosea 1–3)," ibid., pp. 292–312; Joy A. Schroeder, "The Rape of Dinah: Luther's Interpretation of a Biblical Narrative," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 775–91; David C. Steinmetz, "Luther and Tamar," *Consensus* 19 (1993): 129–42; idem, "Calvin and Tamar," in *Calvin in Context*, pp. 79–94.

[2] Mary De Jong, "God's Women Victorian American Readings of Old Testament Heroines," in *Old Testament Women in Western Literature*, pp. 238–60.

To be sure, to argue that these women's stories were neither neglected nor covered up is not to deny that there are some intriguing gaps and patterns in the coverage of each of these stories. Thus, while Josephus depicted Abraham as recoiling at the brutality of Sarah's exile of Hagar, his brief suggestion is apparently ignored by almost all of the church fathers. Although Ambrose does admit, albeit reluctantly, that Hagar was punished unreasonably, Augustine seems particularly one-sided in his loyalty to Abraham and Sarah — an outgrowth, no doubt, of his propensity to see this conflict as a microcosm of his own bitter encounters with Donatists and pagans. Explicit concern over the severity of Hagar's punishment thus built rather slowly, beginning in the East with Chrysostom (who may have remembered Josephus's passing reference) and in the West with minor acknowledgments on the part of Ambrose and, much later, with Rupert of Deutz. Detailed discussion of the case against Abraham and Sarah does not appear until after Lyra, and although it is tempting to conclude that interest was finally precipitated by Lyra's extended reportage of rabbinic argumentation, the topic of Abraham's cruelty does not really attain full bloom until the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, there was from the earliest time an interest in other aspects of the person and experiences of Hagar for both their literal and symbolic significance. This interpretative trajectory, pioneered by Philo and Origen, is developed by Isidore and his medieval successors in ways that conflate aspects of the personal and symbolic in Hagar, mingling history and allegory — much as Philo and Origen also did.

Still, no obvious explanation exists for the slow pace at which interest in Hagar's unjust treatment developed. One might have expected more, particularly given the scattering of at least passing comments in acknowledgment of the problem. By contrast, the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter seems always to have drawn significant attention, as attested by several ante-Nicene poetical and liturgical references and, possibly, by her presence in Ambrose's lectionary. Ambrose's recurring interest is surpassed by Augustine, however, whose exhaustive analysis set a new standard for worrying over a story, thereby ensuring that all subsequent treatments were at least equally informed.

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[3] This is not to imply that the principal contributions of Stanton are wholly ignored Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, for example, is particularly aware of her importance. see *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 7–14; *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), pp. 52–58; and *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 135. But feminist Old Testament interpreters often reiterate insights traceable to *The Woman's Bible* with no acknowledgment of their important precursor.

Interest in the tale of the Levite and his wife, by contrast, provoked great but belated interest. And although it thus bears a certain resemblance to the pattern seen in the case of Hagar, here the late manifestation of interest might appear more explicable. After all, not only was there a paucity of early commentary on this story, the silence of the earliest writers was compounded by Augustine's unexplained failure to finish his lengthy *Questions on the Heptateuch*, which stopped short of grappling with Judges 19–21. It is tempting to impute to Augustine an unstated revulsion toward the tale, even as a similar aversion might account for the widespread silence of the earliest medieval commentators as well. This suggestion, offered on behalf of the early rabbis by Leila Bronner, is by no means without merit, but it stumbles a bit in the case of Christian commentators. Whereas the rabbis' early reticence to discuss the Levite's wife extends also to Lot's endangerment of his daughters, Christian writers (early and late) are much more forthcoming in Lot's case. So it is a bit of a stretch to attribute the church fathers' relative silence at Judges 19 to revulsion. In the West, at least, it is much more likely that the truncation of Augustine's *Questions* was determinative for his would-be imitators; as suggested earlier, medievals may have been reluctant to rush in where Augustine feared to tread. Still, the grisly tale of the Levite's wife does emerge into the daylight, eventually—a development to which Josephus's and Ambrose's sanitized and moralizing accounts are but the smallest precursors. Indeed, the story of the Levite's wife was virtually placed on hold until Christian exegesis began to emerge out of the long shadows (and, in this case, out of the imposing silences) of Augustine and Jerome—an awakening sparked particularly by the new but slowly developing Christian Hebraism, for which Lyra was such a catalyst. After Lyra, the story comes into its own, catching up in a way with the closely related tale of Lot's endangerment of his daughters. The sad story of Judges 19 does suffer from a degree of neglect, therefore, but it is a neglect that ends in the later Middle Ages, even as many of the story's components had received an appreciable degree of deliberation and even censure in the earlier and more abundant comments on Lot's similar misdeed.

Women in Precritical Exegesis: Literal-Historical Readings and Issues

For the most part, then, these women and their stories do not want for the attention of precritical commentators, even if that attention sometimes came later rather than sooner. But there is more to notice than the mere fact of these interpreters' interest in perplexing passages. In the details of their arguments, responses, and interpretative strategies these early commentators reveal—in ways both explicit and latent—how they grappled with a range of issues that parallel some of the concerns of feminist critics. These issues and concerns may be accessed by means of four distinguishable questions, including whether precritical readers of the Bible were uncritically committed to harmonizing the text; whether their exegesis was capable of transcending gender stereotypes, male bias, and a tendency to blame the victim; whether certain lines of argument served largely to excuse male characters at any cost; and whether a preoccupation with abstractions or technicalities upstaged or overrode their awareness of the deeply troubling aspects of these stories or their ability to portray these women sympathetically. Obviously, not only do these four lines of inquiry often overlap, they are also clearly couched in terms more directly representative of feminist concerns than those of precritical commentators. Nonetheless, the genuineness of these interpreters' interest in the women of these stories emerges in a variety of ways and degrees as they seek to address both the literal and the figurative meanings of biblical narratives.

The Question of Uncritical Harmonizing. The "letter" of the Old Testament text evoked diverse responses in the cases examined here. To begin with, one finds that the New Testament usually exerted a far weaker pull on the Christian reading of these Old Testament stories than one might have expected, and traditional commentators do not come across as uncritically committed to harmonizing canonical accounts of biblical characters. In the case of Hagar, this conclusion actually emerges more from medieval (and later) endorsements than from the patristic treatments of the text. As already noted, both Ambrose and Augustine harbor no high opinion of Hagar, but the diffidence of these two pillars of the Western church only sharpens their contrast with the medieval writers who usually depend heavily on Augustine. It thus falls to Isidore, Bede, and Raban Maur to dissent from Augustine's more predictable views. They looked behind St. Paul and Galatians 4 in order to discover how the book of Genesis fills in Hagar's story with some remarkable details — her vision of God, her divine visitations and rescues — and they then ventured far beyond Genesis to find in her a model of repentance, receptivity, and even spirituality. Their precedent is widely followed (Calvin's isolated dissent notwithstanding), even as Luther allowed that whatever Hagar might symbolize for St. Paul, that does not prejudice what she is — in herself and to God.

Similar moves abound in the case of Abraham and Sarah, who for our purposes are foils for Hagar and her story. They are, in fact, given much benefit of the doubt — far more so for Abraham than Sarah, to be sure. But despite the privileged status imputed to them on the basis of testimony drawn from other Scriptures, neither escapes criticism for banishing Hagar. Of course, there were countertestimonies in the Bible, too. However many texts in praise of Abraham one might invoke — including much of Genesis 12–25, as well as Romans 4 and Hebrews 11 — anyone who came to comment on the discord between Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21 would already have had to contend with Abraham's deception of Pharaoh in chapter 12 and his polygamy in the opening verses of chapter 16. In other words, the father of faith presented commentators with plenty of warts, and his polygamous relationship with Hagar was far from the first of them. It would seem unlikely, then, that Abraham is pre-positioned to receive much praise in this episode, and one would expect the proof-texts to be wielded more to vilify Hagar than to varnish Abraham. As it turns out, the testimonies from elsewhere in the Bible are not employed to rescue Abraham's reputation and he receives a fair share of criticism. Yet if Abraham's reputation is not unblemished, it still remains ultimately unsinkable. Cajetan concisely illustrates the point: by staring straight into the face of the inhumanity done to Hagar, then emending the story line on the basis of Abraham's presumed decency, he tacitly confesses the scandal he would have preferred to avoid. Cajetan cites no single proof-text as warrant, but one suspects they all lurk in the background, again, giving Abraham tremendous benefit of the doubt yet, for all that, not really excusing him.

Scriptural references to Sarah, on the other hand, dispose her to both praise and blame. Thus, her laughter at the angel's announcement in Genesis 18 reinforced the stereotype of women's levity, but the praise for her in 1 Peter 3, as a model for Christian wives, might be expected to override the former text. Instead, praise and blame mingle in the portraits of Sarah even in the confines of her relationship with Hagar. It is no surprise that proverbial comments about "womanish" behavior are directed equally at the two women, but it is a surprise that Sarah is hardly ever exonerated in her treatment of Hagar on the basis of either Galatians 4 or 1 Peter 3. In fact, very few writers claim to base any "historical" analysis of Genesis 16 or 21 on the typology of Galatians; Augustine is the notable exception, to be discussed later. Nor is 1 Peter 3 ceded much of a role in exonerating Sarah. For example, when Musculus calls his readers' attention to 1 Peter, it is not to excuse Sarah, but to issue a caveat: if such a lapse into vindictiveness can befall so holy a woman as Sarah, Christian women (he implies) must be doubly cautious.

Two other characters studied here — Jephthah and Lot — also received New Testament endorsements, but with fairly limited effect on the interpretation of their misdeeds in the Old Testament. Accordingly, while Jephthah's appearance on the roll of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 may momentarily delay the indictment of his outrageous vow, only rarely is his standing on that list invoked as implying the divine approval of his deed. More often, Hebrews 11 serves to fill in what Judges 11 must have omitted: either Jephthah later fell from the great faith lauded here, or else the encomium in Hebrews presumes that after his lapse he regained a measure of faith and righteousness by some unspecified show of repentance. If Judges 11 and Hebrews 11 may be said in this way to have been harmonized, it must be added that the harmony is achieved not by denying Jephthah's misdeed but rather by divorcing the tribute in Hebrews 11 from Jephthah's atrocious sacrifice. Furthermore, even as Jephthah is not exonerated by being praised in the New Testament, so also is his daughter not necessarily dismissed simply because she is not mentioned there — a point underscored best by Richard Rogers, who from the pulpit expanded his reading of Hebrews 11 to find Jephthah's daughter among the anonymous heroes in verse 34, who "by faith . . . waxed strong."

Like Jephthah, Lot might have been presumed impeccable on the basis of New Testament witnesses, either because he is called "righteous" in 2 Peter 2, or on the basis of his passing mention by Jesus, or even (as Augustine argues, alluding to Heb. 13:2) on account of his having been "worthy" to entertain angels. While these other texts are occasionally mentioned and add to the consternation of some commentators, they never succeed in underwriting any serious exoneration of Lot and may well be introduced only for the sake of form. Commentators are simply too scandalized by Lot's actions toward his daughters to allow these other testimonies or inferences much weight, and so they are mostly discounted or quietly ignored.

The Question of Stereotyping, Blaming the Victim, and Male Bias. As noted at the outset of this study, an exegetical tool often favored by precritical commentators entailed the application of ethical analysis to biblical texts. Herein one may observe further similarities and differences between precritical and modern concerns. One may also discover how at least some precritical exegetes found here an easy means for perpetuating conventional gender images: for them, ethical analysis entailed mostly a quick resort to moralism and a cursory search for exempla patterned on stereotypes. The arguments between Sarah and Hagar thus might illustrate any of several "womanly weaknesses." Hagar's insubordination might typify the low breeding of servants. On the other hand (and more positively), Jephthah's daughter could exemplify filial devotion and obedience, or the nobility of consecrated virginity, or both. Although some precritical commentators seem content to post such maxims and move on—as we saw in some (but only some) of Ambrose's and Chrysostom's comments—even the most facile moralizing may embody a tacit recognition of more disturbing dimensions of these stories. There is not always sufficient evidence to verify this proposition, but sometimes there is—as in the cases of Ambrose and Chrysostom, again, whose moral clichés are often overshadowed by far more discriminating reflections on the horror of Jephthah's deed or the injustice borne by Hagar. And while it is true that even the most sophisticated commentators on these texts invoked traditional gender stereotypes, it is probably of greater significance for us that the story for them rarely stopped there.

Usually, gender stereotyping is relegated to remarks made in passing. More time and deliberation by far are spent on what we have called "moral casuistry," in which stories are studied as cases of moral judgment, worthy either of imitation or censure. These analyses are often subtle and discerning not only in how they weigh the evidence and authority of Scripture but also in their recognition of human weakness. The impulse behind such casuistic exegesis is fundamentally reader-oriented, insofar as these commentators are concerned to shape the beliefs, life, and actions of their readers and hearers. Particularly in light of the Bible's apparent failure to condemn some of these biblical actors, precritical commentators feel constrained to clarify for their readers what is right and what is wrong. In doing so, they are not necessarily at odds with recent critics, who also make it an interpretative priority to expose and decry the inhumanity depicted by many of these narratives and, in particular, to unmask what they see as a tendency in many biblical texts to blame the (female) victim.

Such a loaded descriptor must be applied cautiously. As observed earlier, precritical commentators do appear to blame the victim at times, but—as with their use of gender stereotypes—there is more to their exegesis than that. Hagar is a case in point. Commentators found her a particularly easy target for criticism, a fact attributable to her display of pride and contempt in Gen. 16:4, and several writers are keen to point out here that she got what she deserved. But precritical commentators often go on to fish for a far happier ending than many feminist critics envision, and they search for a further degree of moral closure as well. Accordingly, Hagar's eventual repentance in both Genesis 16 and 21 becomes an exceedingly common topos: so if Hagar got what she deserved, she also got just what she needed, namely, a timely and effective correction, but by no means a death sentence. Similarly, the austere characterizations of Hagar found in Augustine's typology or Calvin's casuistry are really not the norm. It is much to the credit of traditional commentators that they are just as quick to notice the remarkable features of Hagar's résumé (precisely the features noted by Trible) and to incorporate them into a complex portrait, one that gradually styles her much more as a heroine than a villain — "St. Hagar," to use Luther's phrase.

In the case of Jephthah's daughter, it is difficult to find anyone who literally blames the victim.[4] When the father exclaims that his daughter has brought him trouble (Jud. 11:35), many commentators take pains to refute the literal charge or explain it as hyperbolic. Only Ambrose's variant explanation — that her two-month delay was an act of bad faith — and the similar critique of Procopius seriously fault Jephthah's daughter. On the contrary, most blame her father and offer him little excuse, apart from suggesting that he was either superstitious or stupid. Some, to be sure, also blame the leaders of the day, and a few others even blame God. And just as some recent critics have bemoaned the daughter's misplaced obedience, wishing she had resisted or run away, so also do some of the precritical commentators evince a comparable view, insisting that no father has such power of life and death over a daughter or son. In other words, the oft-discussed limits to political obedience clearly have their domestic correlates, too. Among those commentators who embraced the nonsacrificial interpretation of Jephthah's vow, there is, understandably, a perceptible sense of relief: how much less tragic would it be to consign one's daughter to a life of religious service rather than to a bloodletting! But among those who hold to the sacrificial interpretation, casuistic considerations may actually testify to their benign intentions on an issue of great interest to modern feminists. Several recent critics, including Trible, Laffey, and Fewell, have lamented that while Jonathan escaped his father's rash vow, and while Isaac was delivered from his father's attempted sacrifice, Jephthah's daughter found no such escape or deliverance. These writers suggest, not implausibly, that the sex of the daughter was a contributing or determinative factor, either because she was seen as more expendable than a son or because she was less equipped by her culture for self-assertion and self-preservation. It is therefore all the more striking that many precritical commentators instinctively draw the same parallels between Jephthah's daughter, on the one hand, and Isaac and Jonathan on the other. These early critics — Augustine, Chrysostom, Luther, and others — by no means attribute the differing fates of Jonathan and Jephthah's daughter to the lesser value or status of a daughter. Isaac, Jonathan, and Jephthah's daughter are seen as parallel cases and role equivalents by these interpreters, and they are baffled to observe how one of the three does not survive, despite her equal worthiness. It may be a mark of naivete that these traditional commentators do not recognize the greater vulnerability of daughters — in this context, at least — but their confessions of perplexity seem to indicate that neither the gender of the daughter nor their own male biases played a determinative role in their interpretation or casuistry.

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[4] Indeed, few find any fault with Jephthah's daughter at all — though Wilbur Sypherd reports one medieval preacher who was unhappy with the two months she spent wandering in the mountains, for fear that careless maidens of his own day would do likewise, singing and dancing, and thus risk rape. Sypherd's reference (in *Jephthah and His Daughter*, p. 11 n. 7) is to Ms. Harl. 2398 fol. 39b, as cited by G. W. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Mediaeval England* (Cambridge, 1933), p. 119. The scandal of young women dancing is more commonly registered with reference to the abducted daughters of Shiloh in Judges 21.

The most difficult "case" studied here is surely that of the Levite's wife, particularly as the story was received by late medieval and Reformation commentators. Many of the earliest readers drew only on Greek or Latin versions and were thereby spared the complication of the woman's apparent adultery — an inflammatory detail found only in the Hebrew text. Thus, where Pseudo-Philo's brief account blamed the woman's death on her own unfaithfulness, other early writers — Josephus and Ambrose — offered no acknowledgment of this complicating factor. Curiously, these two evidently felt constrained to sanitize the story still further, excising any hint of homosexual interest in Gibeah and generally toning down the violence. With the advent of Lyra's rabbinic digests and the concurrent growth of Christian Hebraism, however, the newly discovered details of the "Hebrew truth" rendered all other texts obsolete. From then on, commentators were strongly inclined to draw some degree of correlation between the woman's horrible death and her earlier sexual infidelity, characterizing her unhappy fate much as Pseudo-Philo had done: as a *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye. But does the penchant for moralism here necessarily constitute blaming the victim or evidence of misogynism?

Difficult cases demand careful judgments, and so we must extend our own comments in like measure. The failings of traditional interpreters here are easier to presume than prove, as illustrated by the passing remark of Louise Simons, who praises Milton's literary treatment of the concubine because "he empties it of suggestion that the mob's abominable action may in part be excusable because it works as God's instrument." But who, one may inquire, ever excused the Gibeahites here, even in part?[5] As discussed earlier, the theological and exegetical conflicts of the Reformation were often interlaced with issues of morality. Indeed, one would expect the Reformers to mine the text for moralistic ore, if only to buttress their claim to be more truly concerned than their Catholic counterparts for righteousness, social as well as personal, and thus to prove they are the true successors of the apostles. Protestant commentaries took great delight in calling attention to Roman Catholic moral failings, but no one in the sixteenth century wanted to be seen as morally lax.[6] Consequently, the adultery of the Levite's wife, once publicized by Scripture, could not be treated with silence.[7] But if some commentators squinted to see a measure of *justice* in an adulteress dying by rape (when the Mosaic law, after all, would have had her stoned or burned), no one ever took the earlier adultery as a *justification* for her being raped by the Gibeahites. Far from excusing the mob even in part, precritical commentators would at most echo the parting words of Pellican, that "God uses human foolishness as much as human malice for his own glory and for the salvation of the faithful."[8] Yet human fools remain answerable for their respective idiocies, just as malicious men and women are no less evil for having been used unwittingly by providence to punish other fools and sinners.

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[5] Simons appears to attribute this view jointly to Richard Rogers and Joseph Hall; see "An Immortality Rather Than a Life," p. 145. But the passage she quotes from Rogers's 1615 sermons is heavily and undisguisedly dependent on the 1564 English translation of Vermigli's commentary on Judges, and Rogers actually appropriates most of Vermigli's position, including his condemnation of the old man and the Levite. See Rogers, *Comm Judges*, pp. 902–6.

[6] As noted in the previous chapter, some feminist critics have argued on lexical and hermeneutical grounds that the Levite's wife may not have been an adulteress at all — a highly suggestive argument that deserves serious consideration, for if there was no adultery, centuries of traditional interpretation would be beside the point. But given the speculative nature of the argument and the specificity of the charge in the Masoretic text, the woman's adultery is not only a legitimate question but one that no commentator could responsibly pass over in silence. One may fairly claim that precritical commentators are more evenhanded in distributing blame all around than are those recent critics who discount from the outset any alleged infidelity on the part of the Levite's wife.

Precritical commentators are also far from making the Levite's wife the scapegoat of a catastrophe that calls forth a host of judgments. That is to say, an indictment of the Levite's wife for infidelity does not in the least preclude concurrent condemnations for the Levite himself, for the old man, and for the "sons of Belial" who gathered outside the door in Gibeah, as well as for the misplaced loyalty of the other Benjaminites, for the brutality of the rest of the tribes, and for the connivance of the elders of Israel against Shiloh — not to mention the indiscreet maidens of Shiloh and their careless parents. Medieval and Reformation commentators do not wish to exonerate an adulteress, nor a husband-cum-pimp, nor a treacherous host, nor a town filled with brutes, and so on. The moral-providential explanation, woven at some expense to the Levite's wife, appeals in part because it gives at least a grain of closure to this ever-expanding catastrophe. The sufferings of the Levite's wife seem to many at least a bit less inscrutable if they are somehow occasioned by deliberate moral failure. Almost anything seems better than total moral chaos.

To the degree that the later commentators betray their awareness of gender in this tale, they attempt more often than not to be — in their own eyes, at least — genderblind. Where the Levite's wife is vilified, it is not because she is a woman but because she was unfaithful. Thus, Pseudo-Philo is angry with the woman, but the real fuel for his fire is Micah's unpunished idolatry in Judges 17. Cajetan may begin his calculations on the presumption that a wife is the property of her husband, but his product is still a zero: *no* husband has the right to force his wife into another's hands. Vermigli is as angered over adultery as anyone, yet he holds out hope to the very end — even against the silence of the text — that the woman repented of her adultery and found an eternal peace. By the same token, few if any of these commentators are about the business of rescuing the men. Indeed, it might easily seem from their accounts that *all* of the characters of Judges 19–21 are hell-bound, but even if that is so, travel arrangements will still be booked on the basis of individual deserts and under the oversight of an agent who is "no respecter of persons," whether male or female. In short, no one blames the Levite's wife for all the disasters that followed.[9] And although medieval and Reformation commentators know all the excuses that might be invoked to ameliorate the Levite's endangerment of his wife, as well as Lot's exposure of his daughters and even the abduction of so many daughters in Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh, many of them clearly affirm that all those men did what they had no right to do, and the women who were treated so shabbily had, in theory at least, the right to dissent, to disobey, and even to resist.[10]

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[7] In the sixteenth century, the issue of adultery received new and concerted attention. The traditional double standard, whereby men found it relatively easier to accuse a wife of adultery than vice versa, came under scrutiny from Protestant Reformers, who often tried to eliminate this double standard in local marriage law and who relaxed the strictures of canon law against divorce, if ever so slightly. See Keith V. Thomas, "The Double Standard," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959): 195–216; and Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva* (cited in n. 131 on p. 209). Peter Martyr Vermigli reacted sharply against those who held female adulterers more culpable than males; see his *Loci communes* 2.11.35 (London, 1583), pp. 323–25. And Craig Farmer's account of Musculus on this point is equally germane: "He does not know, for instance, if the adulteress of John 8 was a victim of a double standard, but he does know that women suffer under a double standard in the sixteenth century, and he sees in the story of the adulteress an appropriate occasion to warn Christians of their equal responsibilities to marital fidelity"; see "Tradition and Innovation in the Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery," p. 239.

[8] Pellican, *Comm. Jud.* 21:24–25 (fol. 56^r).

The Question of Excusing Men at Any Cost. The casuistic treatments of these texts often drew on certain lines of argument that were familiar to precritical commentators but that have raised modern eyebrows often enough to call for further attention, particularly insofar as a wary reader might reasonably wonder if these arguments were contrived to excuse male characters. These include excuses based on mental disturbance, the argument from "lesser evils," and appeals to divine dispensation. (Before concluding, I will revisit also the excuses based on allegory and typology.)

The first of these explanations or ameliorations has made regular appearances: Abraham's hasty expulsion of Hagar was attributed to mental confusion by Musculus. Jephthah's commitment to his rash vow was attributed to ignorance by Cajetan and some of the rabbis, to gross superstition by Luther, and was decried as insane by Abelard. Lot offered his daughters while in an impaired mental state, said Augustine, who was echoed by many successors from Hugh of St. Cher to Zwingli and Calvin. Strangely enough, the old host in Gibeah is neither offered nor denied this excuse, despite the parallel between his panic and that of Lot. What should one make of all this claimed mental confusion? Probably not too much, except to note that modern lawyers are not the first to discover and credit a defense based on the plea of temporary insanity. And if readers of modern newspapers are accustomed to the abuse of such legal tactics, most moderns would also grant that the plea is sometimes legitimate. In analyzing cases from the distant biblical past, precritical commentators are not reluctant to admit that deeply disturbing behavior may well be the product of a deeply disturbed mind — especially when they think they have reason to regard the behavior as an aberration on the part of someone otherwise known to be reasonable, decent, and moderate. That the commentators are willing to consider this explanation should not at all imply that they condone the resultant behavior in the least. In the cases reviewed here, they are explicit and insistent on the point: Lot is no example for us, nor is the Levite, nor Jephthah, nor Abraham.

Excuses based on compensatory evil surface mostly in the cases of Lot and the Levite, where the offer of women's bodies in exchange for men's is sometimes suggested as a way of substituting a lesser crime for a greater. However laudable the intention may be when considered in the abstract, the assumption in this case seems scandalous: that women are of less value than men. To be sure, the role of apologist is largely forced upon these commentators by Scripture's stupefying silence in the face of an outrageous ploy that in one case precipitates a miraculous deliverance (for Lot's daughters) but in another, a colossal tragedy (for the Levite's wife). While not all commentators can be acquitted of androcentrism in their tentative defenses of Lot or the Levite, few would subscribe to an assumption so denigrating to women. Indeed, as precritical commentators try to think their way into the common dilemma faced by Lot and the Levite (or the old host), they claim to worry less about the sex of the body than about what will be done to it. In other words, they tend to frame the contrast between lesser and greater evils in terms of natural versus unnatural intercourse — and in the minds of most of these writers, the former happens to pertain exclusively to women while the latter pertains to men. While only a few interpreters (Lyra, Denis, Musculus) are on record as worrying that women, too, might also be violated "unnaturally," their perceptive observation confirms that fear of sodomy was of more weight in the appeal to compensatory evil than any doctrinaire contempt for women. It is tempting for suspicious readers, of course, to impute at least some degree of self-interest to these male commentators' fascination with an argument whose terms — in this context, at least — so typically favor men. Yet there remains a rebuttal to be heard in the simple fact that the appeal to compensatory evil, for all its fascination, is generally discredited and abandoned by commentators over the course of the centuries, just as Augustine came to relinquish it at the end of his own protracted musings.[11]

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[9] Even the exasperated Martin Bucer, were he to designate a scapegoat, would surely pick the Levite himself, not his wife (though this would by no means be meant to flatter her).

[10] A similar conviction governs the foolish oath sworn by Israel against giving their daughters to Benjamin, namely, that it was no more binding than Jephthah's vow.

The appeal to divine dispensation is equally open to feminist suspicion, particularly if gratuitously invoked on behalf of men. Yet this line of argument is often two-edged, if not a counsel of despair. To say that an action is normally wrong or immoral unless God grants special permission may seem like an easy way to use silence to justify practically anything, but precritical commentators are acutely aware that permissive expositions of Scripture would be all-too-happily embraced by would-be libertines in their own communities and congregations. As a rule, precritical commentators do not care to argue from silence when alternatives exist. To identify a misdeed as permitted by God is really only to ratify the silence in a passage, not to explain it. Consequently, even where doubtful actions were attributed to the secret leading of the Spirit, most commentators still sought to discern God's unstated motives and so to establish that while the divine Legislator is above the law, he is not arbitrary or amoral. Thus, for Vermigli, God directed Abraham's show of inhumanity as a wise chastisement of Hagar and Ishmael. Chrysostom and Augustine read Jephthah's illicit vow as a divine warning to later generations. In some cases, apparent immorality is actually an act of monumental faith: Lot risked his daughters shamefully, Luther admits, yet only because he had faith that God would rescue them all. And when Luther recasts Hagar's exile as a divine trial of her faith, he needs no one to tell him how monstrous both Abraham and God look here. Obviously, these exegetes themselves trust in a benevolent providence and do not hesitate to commend such faith to their readers. Hence, when all other lines of explanation seem exhausted, casting the problems and silences of the text upon God is a perfectly legitimate option. Some writers, however, make this move glibly, with their eyes prematurely closed to the difficulties in the text. The better ones, such as Luther, keep their eyes open.

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[11] Discussed in chapter 3, pp. 196–97.

The Question of Empathic Identification. When precritical commentators seem so eager to wrangle endlessly over cases of conscience and ethical abstractions, it is easy to wonder if the women in these tales are actually being lost to sight behind technicalities, adjudications, and cross-examinations, as if their sufferings were but an excuse to lock horns with one's exegetical predecessors in an intellectual pastime. Indeed, do not these commentators often allow Jephthah's vow to upstage his daughter's death? For all the ink Augustine spilled over the passage, his preoccupation is clearly less with the daughter's own impending death than with her father's dilemma and with squaring it with the report of Jephthah having been previously anointed with the Spirit. Of course, Jephthah's dilemma is so absorbing to Augustine precisely because of what and who is at stake, as well as because he finds the daughter's death — like Isaac's near-sacrifice — so redolent of another sacrificial death, the one that lay at the very heart of the gospel itself.

On the question of subjective or imaginative engagement or identification with the female characters in these stories, then, precritical commentators generally earn mixed reviews. Some certainly appear to treat the women of these stories as ciphers or pawns, interviewing them only to get a quick endorsement of some other plan or agenda. In all fairness, however, the "engagement" of a commentator with the characters in a biblical narrative is often a difficult phenomenon to track. One must also allow that the commentary genre is traditionally not very adventurous, even if it may be molded to suit personal taste. There are no fixed rules that demand a psychologizing approach, or any other, and there is really no reason to think that precritical commentators will meet modern expectations at all. Thus, when Ambrose, Jerome, and many others cite Jephthah's daughter as a model of Christian virginity, they do so not as a hostile act but out of some degree of admiration, even though such appearances profile her as no more than a stock character.

Still, many precritical exegetes manifest a consciously considered empathy for the women in these stories, whether expressed directly or otherwise. Personal engagement with a character may emerge in figurative treatments, as we will see shortly, but it is probably clearest in diverse sorts of imaginative reconstruction as well as in spontaneous outbursts. Luther's virtual Hagar-saga has already been cited, and the dramatic portraits of Jephthah's daughter in Pseudo-Philo and Abelard argue similarly. Denis's sympathetic treatment of the Levite's wife stands here as well, as does his comparison between Jephthah's daughter and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Likewise, when Musculus appends to Hagar the dying words of Christ on the cross, who can accuse him of being disengaged or cold-hearted? Reconstructions of male characters can also point to perceptions that go beyond dispassionate abstraction, as when Pellican marvels uncomfortably that the Levite failed to react with immediate vengeance against the Gibeahites, or when Brenz idly wishes that Lot had been empowered by the Holy Spirit to attack the men of Sodom with sword or stones. And when Rupert of Deutz explodes against God over the death of Jephthah's daughter, no subsequent retraction can restore the reader's composure nor underwrite his outburst as somehow "business as usual."

No amount of imaginative identification or empathy, however, can overturn or disguise certain limits observed by precritical commentators — not so much limits to their compassion or interest but self-imposed limitations on how they can respond. When Luther asserted that "most of us are like Hagar," his statement runs in two directions, drawing us into Hagar's world but also her into ours. And so, despite his keen recognition not only of Hagar's mistreatment but also of the degree to which her trials of faith seem like divinely sanctioned abuse, neither Luther nor his peers were willing or able to indict the Almighty on Hagar's behalf any more than they would consider such a move for themselves. However scandalous God's actions might seem, God remained God. Far better that Hagar should suffer — and, given similar circumstances, far better that we should suffer as faithfully as she did — than that she should rally in a rebellion against the *Deus absconditus*. More recent readers, of course, have begun to learn how such words can be preached so as to anesthetize the oppressed, and that is not a lesson to be gainsaid. But Luther and his colleagues were almost certainly preaching first and foremost to themselves, for they asked of these Old Testament women no obedience or submission, however painful, that they themselves did not also pledge.[12]

Women in Precritical Exegesis: Figurative Readings and Issues

There is another set of precritical explanations and portraits that many modern readers greet with skepticism, particularly where these explanations seem to negate the role or significance of the literal or historical dimensions of the biblical text. Philo and Origen are often criticized for their use of allegory in just such a manner, as when Origen dissolves the offense of Abraham's polygamy with Hagar by identifying "Hagar" not at all as a historical person but allegorically (or tropologically) as "virtue." Far from taking multiple *wives*, Abraham actually adorned himself with multiple *virtues*. Whatever they may think of Origen's cleverness, many readers — and not just modern readers — are uncomfortable with what amounts to his erasure of history here. As usual, though, there is more to be said, for as Origen moves on to expound Genesis 21, he reinvests Hagar as a type of the "carnal Jews" or, more specifically, as a type of those Jews who have moved beyond literal and historical readings to discover Christ, the true "well" of living water. However one may wish to assess Origen's interpretation, one must admit that a shade of the historical Hagar has crept back into his presentation of her as an archetype of repentance, so that while he may begin by brushing aside the particulars of the historical narrative — in a way that Isidore, Bede, and Raban Maur do not — he later retrieves some of those historical details as his allegorical treatment unfolds and subtly anticipates the early medieval Latin treatments. Still, his initial recourse to a purely moralistic allegory is patently a flight from the historical offense of Abraham's bigamy with Hagar, and it is understandable if modern readers take umbrage to see the historical Abraham survive while the historical Hagar mostly does not.

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[12] A similar conclusion is drawn by a recent study of Jerome Zanchi's interpretation of Hosea 1–3, namely, that Gomer served as a focal point for Zanchi's own piety and identification, not as an exemplar for his wife's domesticity; see Farthing, "Holy Harlotry," p. 312.

Readings that are more properly typological can also work to loosen or sever their own historical moorings, as Augustine illustrated on several occasions. The Hagar of Genesis, for example, seems scarcely a real person for him: she appears there and behaves as described only because she will eventually be needed by St. Paul to serve as Sarah's foe and foil. Retroactively reduced by Augustine to no more than a rhetorical conceit, she exists only for the sake of her later typological role, so that — and here, arguably, is the chief offense — there is no real reason to harbor any misgivings over her mistreatment in Genesis, because ultimately there is no "her" there. Remarkably, Augustine's sterilizing treatment of Hagar did not leave all that much of a legacy. Even in their figurative readings, most later readers seemed to find the Hagar of Genesis 16–21 much more interesting than Augustine did, and they therefore did much to restore her historical profile even against the inclination of Augustine or Paul. Rupert of Deutz is thus somewhat exceptional (and perhaps even a transitional figure) when, having raised with such unprecedented clarity the scandal of Abraham's miserly conduct, he turns back and shrugs off this troubling history: "the letter," after all, "is in service to the spirit." In other words, biblical histories need not make moral sense — at least as history.

If all moral, allegorical, and typological interpretations were as shallow or as opportunistic as some of those just mentioned, there would be little to say in defense of this long strand of the exegetical tradition. Indeed, when this study was first conceived, I imagined I would have to sift through (if not bypass) endless tomes of figurative exegesis in hope of finding putatively "relevant" comments addressing the letter and history of the Old Testament. My imaginings were wrong. There are, to be sure, plenty of figurative interpretations and applications built on little more than an arbitrary association with words found in the biblical text.[13] Virtually all historians of exegesis will concede this, sooner or later; even an apologist such as Henri de Lubac admitted that some medieval exegetes pursued the allegorical method in its more

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[13] One might include here Hugh of St. Cher's tropological reading of the Levite and his wife as representing the need for the spirit to rule the flesh, or his similar reading of Lot as valuing his mind (the angelic guests) more than his flesh (the daughters). The underlying image of the person as a hierarchy of parts that mirrors man's headship of woman is at least as old as Philo, and Hugh's use of it is almost perfunctory. Yet Hugh's is one of only two allegorical treatments of Judges 19 that I found, the other being that of Lyra, who adopted Hugh's tropology but also read the Levite's wife typologically, as prefiguring the martyrdom that awaited the saints and apostles. Evidently, if interpreters were reluctant to comment on the literal Levite and his wife, they were more hesitant still to allegorize. Figurative comments are quite scarce here, as they are also in the case of Lot's offer of his daughters, where only Isidore, Guibert, Bruno, Rupert, and Hugh ventured minor allegories.

"childish" aspects.[14] However, it would be preposterous to launch sweeping generalizations about the significance of allegory and typology throughout the whole history of exegesis or the whole Bible based only on the modest foundation laid here. The most that one might argue—and I have come to think that it should be so argued—is that the various figurative interpretations we have seen of Hagar and her Old Testament sisters should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. There is a continuum of exegesis to consider: for if it is easy for modern readers to dismiss some of Origen's or Augustine's allegoresis as disfigurements of the biblical text, these same two authors, and many more besides, also offer figurative interpretations that are astonishingly perceptive in their exegesis of both text and life. For this reason, it is also quite out of place to proclaim beforehand that allegory is everywhere and always capricious or irrelevant.

I have noted several times already how the allegorical portrait of Hagar evolves from the arguably hostile sketch in Galatians 4 to the more sympathetic depictions of Hagar as the model penitent, and I have suggested that this development—along with the growing appreciation in the Middle Ages for Hagar as a visionary and as a model of piety and penance—stems from a careful reading of details in the text of Genesis. The typological "reimaginings" of Hagar found in Isidore, Bede, and Raban Maur merit such an extra measure of attention not only because of their originality but also because they seem to indicate a growing resistance to the more pejorative Pauline allegory, and these alternative readings actually appear to do more justice both to the historical narrative and to the historical Hagar. In other words, while it is certainly possible for figurative exegesis to embody a denial of dissonance in the text, as may be the case with Augustine's reading of Hagar, it is also possible for figurative readings to furnish a way of dealing with those dissonances. The development of Hagar in the history of figurative interpretation thus expresses neither the misogynism of precritical commentators nor their supposed contempt for the historical sense of the biblical text. Just the opposite is true: as the features of her history continued to receive scrutiny, Hagar mostly attracted more and more sympathy (again, Calvin notwithstanding). And it says nothing against this argument if, with the exegetical sea change of the Protestant Reformation, a more casuistic approach to Hagar displaced figurative exegesis as a means of addressing (and redressing) both her flaws and her sufferings. In short, whatever one may think of allegory in general or of other particular allegories, these figurative treatments of Hagar seem to commend precritical commentators as close readers of the text who are by no means hostile or indifferent to the person of Hagar.

Figurative interpretations of Jephthah's daughter are at once more diverse and more complicated. To begin with, moralizing approaches may be introduced under the rubric of either literal or allegorical readings. Accordingly, Reformation commentators routinely found in Jephthah's daughter an example of filial obedience and commended her as such — adding a codicil, of course, that a vow such as her father's is never legitimate or binding. Patristic and medieval advocates for consecrated virginity used Jephthah's daughter in a similar way, as a recruiting tool. Neither interpretation is especially profound, nor necessarily exploitative, nor especially nonliteral in character[15] — even if beside the point, in varying degrees, of the original text. Somewhat more convoluted are the comparisons drawn by Origen and Ambrosiaster when they styled Jephthah's daughter as a forerunner of (Christian) martyrdom. Neither of these writers seems to have "used" Jephthah's daughter so much as they used their own better understandings of martyrdom to explain the otherwise obscure meaning of the daughter's death. To be sure, both martyrdom and a life of consecrated virginity were seen not only as the highest acts of discipleship but also as plausible Christological images, setting forth in two different ways or degrees not only the death of the Savior but also his conquest over the desires of the flesh. But even though Origen and Ambrosiaster were notably rigorous in their Christian discipline — witness Origen's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* — neither can be easily accused of trying to capitalize on Jephthah's daughter. Instead, both accounts are markedly somber in tone. If Jephthah's daughter is informally an antitype of Christian martyrdom for Origen, his purpose is not to deny the tragedy of her death but assuredly to offer a humble and appreciative tribute from one who himself knew about martyrdom all too well.

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[14] See de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale*, p. 352 (*Medieval Exegesis*, p 259). The arbitrariness of allegory is a frequent complaint, lodged in particular against de Lubac's account by R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (Richmond: John Knox, 1959), pp. 256–58. See also G. W. H. Lampe, "The Exposition and Exegesis of Scripture: To Gregory the Great," *CHB* 2:159; and Jean Leclerq, "The Exposition and Exegesis of Scripture: From Gregory the Great to Saint Bernard," *CHB* 2:195. Many strands of the current discussion are gathered up by Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 13–14.

Augustine further illustrates how typological and literal-historical concerns can overlap, compete, and cooperate, even within the same commentary. No one devoted more words to Jephthah's misdeed than did Augustine, and however preoccupied he was with the hermeneutical issues that bear on one's evaluation of the father, even these abstract analyses are still tied to the sacrifice of the daughter as a historical calamity. But his lengthy historical-ethical maneuvers are more diluted than supplemented by the way he frames his typological exegesis. That is to say, when Augustine asserts that Jephthah's daughter died in fulfillment of a twofold divine agenda — partly to bequeath a literal warning against rash vows and human sacrifice, and partly to prefigure the relationship of Christ and the church — he sets forth an extremely high view of the providence of God. Nonetheless, it is not a view much relished by modern readers, for whom it smacks of contrivance or special pleading and for whom it seems to implicate even God in the death of Jephthah's daughter. Here is one point where the worlds of many modern readers and many precritical commentators simply collide. (We will see others later.) No apology can be offered for the exegesis here, nor would Augustine want to offer one, for it is perfectly wedded to a worldview in which an utterly prevenient God has the first and the last word over life and death. One may dare to suggest that this is too neat a solution for many moderns, and too threatening at the same time. God cannot play both sides of the fence: God cannot "allow" Jephthah's heinous crime and also predetermine to use it in service of something good. Perhaps we would allow God to salvage good from evil, but surely not to prearrange — or even to seem to prearrange — evil for the sake of good. Nonetheless, if Augustine's twofold solution strikes us as adding to the story's dissonance, he himself would have found it far otherwise and would probably fault modern laments as unsatisfyingly open-ended and devoid of purpose or finality.

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[15] The *Symposium* of Methodius offers an instance of combining the simple use of exemplars with typology. Jephthah's daughter is listed alongside other biblical exemplars of chastity, but she is additionally singled out as bearing an image (τύπον) of the flesh of Christ.

More must be said, however, about the most common figurative interpretation of Jephthah's daughter — the one that occurs in various forms both before and after Augustine and links her to the self-sacrifice of Christ. Debora Shuger has faulted some of these readings, particularly those that liken the daughter to the flesh of Christ, and her father to Christ's dominant divine nature. Such readings seem to evacuate the personhood of the daughter into that of her father, perpetuating a view of daughters as merely the disposable property of men. Shuger's critique is worth pondering, though one may also wonder if the divided-nature typology here was driven more by a simpler necessity, namely, the need to account for (and to cast) two human actors in a role usually reserved for one. That is to say, whereas Christ offered himself willingly as a sacrifice, in Judges 11 both the father and the daughter participated in the sacrifice and shared also, if unequally, in the promising and in its willing fulfillment. Once Augustine had invested so many earlier details of Jephthah's career as harbingers of the life of Christ, it would seem much harder to hand over the entire typology to the daughter rather than incorporating the daughter as a figure of Christ's flesh — especially since, however much he might resemble Christ, Jephthah did not in fact sacrifice himself. Yet an alternative typology did arise shortly after Augustine in the sermons of Quodvultdeus, who moved beyond an alleged interest only in the passivity of the daughter as a type of Christ's fleshly nature in order to draw a further parallel between her and the whole Christ — in both natures. Although this richer typology was not as popular in the Middle Ages, Quodvultdeus's insight still surfaced now and then, most notably in the exposition of Denis the Carthusian, who saw in Jephthah's daughter a prefiguration of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 as well as an adumbration of several other messianic and Christological texts, including one of the crowning verses of the Pauline epistles, Romans 8:32.

All of these Christological readings of Jephthah's daughter may themselves be greeted sympathetically or with suspicion. But in order to grant precritical approaches to these texts a fair hearing, one must at least allow that these traditional exegetes have not defamed Jephthah's daughter by trying to draw her enigmatic death into the orbit of another death: a death at once similar, greater, and — in their eyes — more mysterious and yet somehow comprehensive of the young woman's death. What is to be gained by denigrating these typologies? Faced with a senseless tragedy, precritical commentators must either shrug, ignore, or deny — or else pull the story in the only direction they knew that might have a chance to bring sense out of senselessness. After all, with God, all things are possible. However, some feminist critics are on record as objecting to this move, insofar as it treats the daughter's story as a palimpsest, a parchment whose value will appear only when reinscribed with a later, more edifying narrative. Phyllis Trible regards this move as centered in "Christian chauvinism" and, as such, as a "pitfall" to hearing the story: "To subordinate the suffering of [these] women to the suffering of the cross is spurious. Their passion has its own integrity; no comparisons diminish the terror they knew. . . . To seek the redemption of these stories in the resurrection is perverse. Sad stories do not have happy endings."[16] If these objections are not to be dismissed lightly, neither can they be easily reconciled with the propensities of traditional exegesis. But a careful perusal of the actual statements of precritical commentators ought to suggest that they are not strangers to Trible's concerns—however much they may disagree with her over the proper way to respond. Indeed, for them the comparison between the sufferings of Jephthah's daughter and Jesus Christ does not diminish but rather underscores the enormity of her suffering and her dignity. To look for Jephthah's daughter in the resurrection does not deny the sadness of her story, but neither does it leave that sadness to hang in the air as if God, too, could not care less—as if we alone were the first to notice or care. Instead, many precritical commentators instinctively and tacitly embraced both Jephthah's daughter and Hagar with the time-honored doctrine of recapitulation, derived from Paul and Irenaeus, asserting that somehow—and the assertion is admittedly based on faith, not sight—all the sufferings and wrongs of the world are caught up and reversed in Jesus Christ, who makes all things new.

One is hard-pressed to believe that Trible in particular did not herself know all this. What else should one make of the messianic and Christological epitaphs she bestowed on Hagar, Tamar, the Levite's wife, and Jephthah's daughter? Irony there may well be in these gravestones, as well as a concomitant rebuke directed at the church for having forgotten these women's sufferings, which are yet so like to those of the church's redeemer.[17] But when Trible remembers Jephthah's daughter in terms of Psalm 22—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken her?"[18]—must we really believe there is always or necessarily a great gulf fixed or a broad, ugly ditch between all feminist critics and (say) Wolfgang Musculus, who placed the same words on the lips of Hagar?

Precritical Concerns and Feminist Exegesis

In the discussion so far, I have tried to map the biblical stories examined in previous chapters so as to disclose which areas and concerns might be considered as common ground and which are more clearly disputed between precritical commentators and feminist critics. Although a writer's interpretative method and his or her specific exegetical findings cannot be separated in the field, I have tried to accent how the findings of precritical commentators overlap with and address (however inadvertently) feminist questions and concerns. Again, this is not at all to minimize the distances between feminists and precritical commentators, nor the disagreements within each group — whether such differences are cloaked in terms of history, culture, gender, or ideology. There is probably little love at first sight, whatever pairings one might imagine. But neither is war inevitable.

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[16] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 2.

[17] Trible's book was well received by most of her reviewers, but there was no consensus on her messianic and Christological epitaphs and emphases, which were variously deemed "the most moving aspect" of the book, a detraction from the book, an "imposition" on the text, confusing rather than enlightening, and "bitterly ironic." See (in order) Dianne Bergant, *Horizons* 12 (1985): 371; John C. Holbert, *Perkins Journal* 38/2 (Winter 1985): 44; James G. Williams, *Theology Today* 42 (1985): 100; Ben C. Ollenburger, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986)· 521; and Mark F. Fischer, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 716.

[18] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, p. 92.

In the following section, I will continue the discussion between precritical commentators and feminist critics, but shift the accent slightly. Having focused first on exegetical findings and on the details of the biblical stories, now I will give more of a nod to matters of method and presupposition. Precritical commentators and feminists may in fact respond similarly or dissimilarly to specific biblical characters or events. But what factors contribute to their occasional conjunction, and what determines where they will draw the boundaries and part company? Although many ingredients might be considered in analyzing specific agreements and disagreements, there are two overlapping issues of method that have consistently lurked beneath the surface of controversies that at first glance seem more directly exegetical. One is the issue of what has come to be called reading "strategies" — the notion that texts of one kind or another can be reread either to recover material that the text itself suppresses or to counteract the pernicious effects of either the text or its traditional interpreters.[19] The other issue derives from the related role played in much modern exegesis by the hermeneutic of suspicion, especially as that hermeneutic is often brought to bear against the authority of any canon or rule for how the Bible is to be read or approached. As we will see, although the vocabulary of recent debates is not familiar to precritical commentators, they are not total strangers to the phenomena — in Scripture as well as in the individual interpreter — that drive the modern discussion.

Allegory and Other Reading Strategies

In a passing remark about one of the "new" approaches to the reading of difficult texts in the Old Testament, Gale Yee recently called attention to the similar function of texts and allegories.[20] Her observation was not developed at any length, but her point seems clear. A written text will inevitably embody the ideology that produced it, thereby perpetuating a particular worldview and a corresponding set of values and practices and beliefs. In the same way, an allegorical reading is also encoded with a worldview and ideology and values, all of which are insinuated into its reading of the text or overlaid upon it. And so, whether the allegory is explicitly set forth in the primary text itself (say, as St. Paul allegorizes Sarah and Hagar) or is offered by a later, secondary text, such as the commentary literature studied here, the point remains the same: in both cases, arguably, one ideology is being reinterpreted or replaced by another, one that may or may not be congruent with that of the original text. In other words, to construct an allegory or to read allegorically is certainly also to express one's own ideology and worldview in conscious or unconscious dialogue with — or, perhaps, in opposition to — the text from which one's allegory is ostensibly drawn.

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[19] My dichotomy here is admittedly an oversimplification. There is no agreed-upon list, just as was noted in the introduction with respect to feminist agendas. Critics often redefine and split categories to suit themselves. Schüssler Fiorenza, for instance, describes nine overlapping but distinct reading strategies that feminists have used to reinterpret patriarchal Scripture texts as well as a tenth (her own) that tries to integrate all the others; see *But She Said*, pp. 21–48. Emily Cheney has recently tried to articulate three reading strategies that are particularly practical for feminist preaching, including gender reversal, analogy, and understanding how women function in Scripture texts as exchange objects; see *She Can Read: Feminist Reading Strategies for Biblical Narrative* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1996).

[20] Gale A. Yee, "Ideological Criticism," p. 146 n. 3

Accordingly, when feminist critics today deal with the offense of patriarchal biblical texts by employing new critical strategies for reading and analysis, one might argue that they are not doing anything categorically different than what earlier interpreters did by reading such texts allegorically. That is to say, allegory is and has always been a reading strategy. (Given the imprecision with which "allegory" is often used, it is important to bear in mind here all the figurative elements of the traditional fourfold exegesis, including the tropological or moral, typological or allegorical, and anagogical or eschatological senses.) Like modern reading strategies, allegory may be said to support an agenda or ideology. The question, then, is not whether modern readers care for traditional figurative interpretations of the Bible, but rather whether precritical commentators apply this reading strategy with any self-awareness or deliberation.

It is worthwhile at the outset to recall the explanations offered by the earliest Christian exponents of allegorical reading. Pride of place here is usually ceded to Origen, though his debt to Philo and thus, indirectly, to the Hellenistic tradition of allegoresis goes without saying. Origen acknowledged two factors as responsible for the allegorical impulse. One was his belief that, even as individual Christians are not equal in gifts or intellect, so also, in fulfillment of God's providential and paideutic (or "educational") plan for the world, the divine Logos accommodates both the simple believer and the sophisticate:

> The holy apostles . . . [preached the necessary doctrines of the faith] . . . in the plainest terms to all believers, even to such as appeared to be somewhat dull in the investigation of divine knowledge. The grounds of their statements they left to be investigated by such as should merit the higher gifts of the Spirit and in particular by such as should afterwards receive through the Holy Spirit himself the graces of language, wisdom and knowledge. There were other doctrines, however, about which the apostles simply said that things were so, keeping silence as to the how or why; their intention undoubtedly being to supply the more diligent of those who came after them, such as should prove to be lovers of wisdom, with an exercise on which to display the fruit of their ability.[21]

Allegorical and moral readings thus find some shelter under the rubric of speculative or "gymnastic" exegesis and theology. But Origen advocated allegorical exegesis for another reason, too: as a means of addressing the well-known phenomenon of the "unedifying letter" — texts (including all those that have occupied us here) that are either offensive or obscure if read as literal, historical narratives. We have already seen him argue this point with respect to Abraham's polygamy, but elsewhere he makes the same case more generally, addressing a host of texts whose literal content is judged to be irrational, incredible, or impossible, and therefore clearly fabricated.

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[21] Origen, *On First Principles* 1, preface §3, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973), p. 2. Note also 4.2.4 (pp. 275–76): "One must therefore portray the meaning of the sacred writings in a threefold way upon one's own soul, so that the simple man may be edified by what we may call the flesh of the scripture, this name being given to the obvious interpretation, while the man who has made some progress may be edified by its soul, as it were; and the man who is perfect . . . may be edified by the spiritual law. . . . For just as man consists of body, soul and spirit, so in the same way does the scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given for man's salvation."

> When . . . the passage as a connected whole is literally impossible, whereas the outstanding part of it is not impossible but even true, the reader must endeavour to grasp the entire meaning, connecting . . . the account of what is literally impossible with the parts that are not impossible but are historically true, these being interpreted *allegorically* in common with the parts which, so far as the letter goes, did not happen at all. For . . . divine scripture . . . all has a spiritual meaning, but not all a bodily meaning; for the bodily meaning is often proved to be an impossibility.[22]

A similar rationale for rereading scriptural narratives in figurative terms is offered by Augustine in his hugely influential treatise, *On Christian Doctrine*: "Matters which seem like wickedness to the unenlightened, whether just spoken or actually performed, whether attributed to God or to people whose holiness is commended to us, are entirely figurative. Such mysteries are to be elucidated in terms of the need to nourish love."[23] There is no need to decide which of these two giants exercised greater influence on the history of interpretation; both argue in concert here, though Augustine's testimony continued to garner respect long after Origen's authority was diminished through taint of heresy.[24] The point of recalling their arguments is rather to observe how one of the fundamental motives for the allegorical reading of Scripture is explicitly framed by these two Fathers as, in essence, a reading strategy. That is to say, both Origen and Augustine know and confess — alongside their insistence on Scripture's divine inspiration and authority[25] — that some Bible stories are repugnant to Christian and non-Christian readers alike. Indeed, such stories scandalized the younger Augustine and kept him out of the church until the allegorical interpretations of Ambrose taught him a better way to read the Old Testament.[26]

Both Fathers regarded allegory as generally indispensable for understanding Scripture, but the "indispensability" of the method seems especially tied to the need to read offensive texts strategically. Every text is capable of *lectio divina*, of yielding deeper spiritual meanings or instruction. Offensive or scandalous texts are distinctive, however, in that they may well have no literal meaning (appearances notwithstanding!)—only various spiritual meanings, whether allegorical, tropological or moral, or anagogical. For Origen and Augustine, then, the more offensive a text, the more likely they are to set its literal and historical details wholly aside yet bring them right back, domesticated and reinterpreted as figures, types, or moral exempla. We have seen this illustrated in the cases of Hagar and, in a more qualified way, Jephthah's daughter. It is a clarifying moment, to watch a commentator simply erase the "event"-character of a biblical narrative: something important and peculiar is being signaled. As history, such a move is revisionism at its worst. For the history of interpretation, however, it clearly betrays a reading strategy at work. Are the men in these narratives being protected? Probably so, though the victims are being shielded, too, in a way. Are the crimes of the characters being confessed, however indirectly? Probably so.

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[22] Origen, *On First Principles* 4.3.5 (pp. 296–97, emphasis mine). The need to read Scripture figuratively is the burden of most of 4.2 and 4.3 (pp. 269–312).

[23] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 3.12.18, CCSL 32:88–89. Translation is that of R. P. H. Green, *Augustine: De doctrina christiana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 151; hereafter cited as Green ed.

[24] See de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale* I/1:221–304 (*Medieval Exegesis*, pp. 161–224).

[25] Both incorporate explicit affirmations of the authority of Scripture into the very contexts in which they also articulate the need for figurative exegesis. Thus, Origen numbers himself among those who believe that "the sacred books are not the works of men, but . . . were composed and have come down to us as a result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father of the universe through Jesus Christ" (Origen, *On First Principles* 4.2.2, p. 272). Augustine likewise states that "faith will falter if the authority of holy scripture is shaken" (*De doctrina christiana* 1.37.41; CCSL 32:30; Green ed. p. 51).

[26] Augustine, *Confessions* 5.14, 6.4. Cf. Origen, *On First Principles* 4.2.2 (pp. 271–72).

As a reading strategy, the move to erase the unpleasant parts of biblical history may strike the modern reader as steeped in denial. At one level, at least, that is an accurate description: these two Fathers and many of their peers truly would like to deny that the outrageous deeds recorded in Scripture ever happened. Of course, many modern readers are equally so inclined. Yet the deliberate and considered recourse to allegory expresses not only the general concern of Origen and Augustine for an approach to Scripture that edifies, but also—in the case of the texts of terror, at least—an oblique but sincere repudiation of the deeds depicted in the texts themselves. As a reading strategy, allegory can be framed not merely to harvest a surplus of edification for the more mature but also to help readers at all levels cope with disturbing tales. It is arguable, of course, that the erasure of biblical history short-circuits the process and provides a false resolution. But as urged earlier, modern dissatisfaction with precritical solutions or strategies is of itself no proof that traditional commentators did not, at least, perceive the problems.

In any case, the methodological pronouncements of Origen and Augustine do not succeed in eradicating interest in the historical dimension of these texts. Many later medieval writers—certainly Lyra, but also some of his predecessors—will address both the allegorical and the literal-historical character of the texts studied here, yet without feeling constrained to dissolve the latter. Even as Augustine had combined casuistic analysis with typology in explaining the death of Jephthah's daughter, so do later medievals more consistently juxtapose literal and figurative interpretations with no indication that an offensive history must be discarded before any figurative bandage can be applied. To the contrary, they commonly offer an ethical analysis of the literal circumstances related by the text, then proceed to offer rich allegories of Hagar and Jephthah's daughter that are significantly informed by the letter of the text. As reading strategies, these later medieval (one is tempted to say, more mature) allegories recapitulate the pathos and suffering depicted by the literal-historical narrative, pointing typologically to a resolution under the providence of God. What Schüssler Fiorenza characterized as a "hermeneutics of remembrance" finds at least some correlate here, at least insofar as precritical commentators are also seeking "to keep alive the *memoria passionis* of biblical women."[27] Moreover, one may well wonder what influence some of these medieval allegories may have exercised upon the later "literal" exegesis of Protestants. It is striking, for instance, how Hagar the medieval *allegorical* model of penitence becomes, in the Reformation, Hagar the *literal* penitent.

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[27] Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, pp. 30–31; *Bread Not Stone*, p. 20; and cf. *But She Said*, pp. 62–68.

The Reformation witnesses further evolution away from allegory and reliance on the fourfold sense toward a more exclusive search for the text's literal-historical meaning. It is a gradual process. Not only do some Reformers still honor a chastened allegoresis, it is also true that some figurative readings are simply too cherished to part with. Also, as Vermigli illustrates, sometimes allegory and typology seem to offer the only way out of an exegetical conundrum. And beyond all these qualifications, even those writers who most despised allegory still searched the text for diverse and often pluriform "applications" and "analogies"—reading strategies (by any other name) that met the need for churchly and individual appropriations of the text. Indeed, although the fourfold exegesis is supposed to have been overthrown during the Reformation, in truth the moral or tropological sense simply donned a new uniform, reenlisting in the service of a rhetorically informed literal exegesis as its "application" or "benefit" and taking up, with typology, much of the burden of meaning formerly shouldered by allegory per se.[28] Allegorical arguments and ameliorations do move into eclipse, then, but in the texts we have studied, casuistic analysis—assessing and assigning blame, scrutinizing the silences of the text—offered an alternative to remaining tongue-tied and, of equal importance, allowed commentators the opportunity to guide their own readers through textual and moral thickets. It is not to be overlooked that the "case studies" that medieval and Reformation-era commentators mined from these stories were often seen as highly relevant to their own day—whether the issue at stake involved spousal abuse, abandonment, or polygamy, or (more commonly) the mutual obligations of husbands and wives, of parents and children, and of the state and its citizens. Casuistic and ethical reflection thus provided a reading strategy well suited to the text and the needs of the day and, as such, it modeled a strategy even closer to modern practices and predilections than allegory.

Of course, that precritical commentators had and used reading strategies will be no more than a truism to anyone familiar with the term.[29] What must be given fair weight, however, is that these reading strategies are also attempts to come to terms with at least some of the problems in these texts that are so offensive to feminist readers today. True, the reading strategies of precritical commentators may still be faulted for androcentric values and they may on that account find a cool reception from feminist readers. Yet these two groups of readers are not utterly opposed to one another: they share a common recognition of the offense of the text, even if modern readers are often far more perceptive in seeing just how many slights are embedded in narrative details. Few precritical commentators, for instance, dwelt overmuch on the dismemberment of the Levite's wife, or on the Levite's rather self-serving report to the elders of Israel. Nonetheless, they stand *with* modern exegetes and feminists in perceiving that the victimization of women in these texts constitutes a problem, if not a crisis, for the interpreter; in approaching the text and its host of problems with a variety of methods or reading strategies; and, finally, in attempting to frame the outcome of their own reading more or less in terms of consciously held values that constitute the ideology or world view around which all exegetical conclusions are arrayed and evaluated.

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[28] See Richard A. Muller, "The Hermeneutic of Promise and Fulfillment in Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament Promises of the Kingdom," in *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. David C. Steinmetz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 68–82.

[29] See, for instance, Emily Cheney's remark in *She Can Read*, p. 2: "All readers use strategies to comprehend biblical texts, but they are usually so culturally familiar to readers that they are unaware that they have learned them and are using them."

Canonical Readings and the Hermeneutic of Suspicion

The last-named item — the question of the interpreter's guiding values, the overall plan that the various reading strategies serve — demands further attention before drawing to a close. Toward the end of the first book of *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine candidly described his central presupposition and his highest agenda for the interpretation of Scripture:

> The chief purpose of all that we have been saying in our discussion of things is to make it understood that the fulfilment and end of the law and all the divine scriptures is to love the thing [God] which must be enjoyed and the thing [one's neighbor] which together with us can enjoy that thing. . . . So anyone who thinks that he has understood the divine scriptures or any part of them, but cannot by his understanding build up this double love of God and neighbour, has not yet succeeded in understanding them. Anyone who derives from them an idea which is useful for supporting this love but fails to say what the writer demonstrably meant in the passage has not made a fatal error, and is certainly not a liar.[30]

Origen's doctrine of the benevolent mission of the Logos — as accommodation, *paideusis*, and redemption — might similarly be invoked as undergirding all his reading strategies.[31] The exegesis of both men is governed by a conviction that the Bible is, fundamentally, good news, and divinely so. More specifically, knowing the end toward which all rational creatures, including human beings, are divinely directed, they also know in advance that all Scripture, if read properly, will point us to a loving and merciful God. In the ensuing centuries, this hermeneutic never really falls from favor, though few speak as boldly as Augustine did about bad but charitable exegesis. Heinrich Bullinger — Zwingli's successor in Zurich and the close colleague of many of the commentators we have examined—neatly approximates Origen's and Augustine's point when he describes, in chapter 2 of the Second Helvetic Confession, how the churches of the Reformation sought to handle Scripture:

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[30] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.35.39–1.36.40 (CCSL 32.28–29; Green ed. p. 49). Note, however, that Augustine is not eager to license these bogus but "charitable" readings, as he makes clear in the very next paragraph: "Anyone with an interpretation of the scriptures that differs from that of the writer is misled, but not because the scriptures are lying. If, as I began by saying, he is misled by an idea of the kind that builds up love, which is the end of the commandment, he is misled in the same way as a walker who leaves his path by mistake but reaches the destination to which the path leads by going across a field. But he must be put right and shown how it is more useful not to leave the path, in case the habit of deviating should force him to go astray or even adrift." The implications of this paragraph are discussed at length by Bertrand de Margerie, S.J., *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis, Vol. 3: Saint Augustine* (Petersham, Mass.: Saint Bede's Publications, 1991), pp. 20–35

[31] See Hal Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis: Studien uber Origenes und sein Verhaltnis zum Platonismus* (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 22; Berlin and Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1932).

> We do not allow all possible interpretations. . . . But we hold that interpretation of the Scripture to be orthodox and genuine which is gleaned from the Scriptures themselves (from the nature of the language in which they were written, likewise according to the circumstances in which they were set down, and expounded in the light of like and unlike passages and of many and clearer passages) and which agrees with the rule of faith and love [*regula fidei et charitatis*], and contributes much to the glory of God and human salvation.[32]

A host of references and nuances could be added to fill in the centuries between Augustine and Bullinger, but there is no serious dissent on the key point here: the message of the Scriptures, in their whole and somehow also in each part, is a message of God's mercy and goodness toward all creatures.[33]

Many have described this fundamental stance as a *hermeneutic of charity*, in part because it is an approach to the interpretation of Scripture that consciously (or, perhaps, even unconsciously) seeks to clarify any particular passage in light of a presumption that both the text as it stands and the events narrated in the text are overseen by a sovereign, benevolent, and ultimately trustworthy deity. What is determinative for our study, however, is that this underlying presupposition comes into play even in the texts of terror. For example, few precritical commentators would be inclined to defend the significance of human choice more eagerly than did John Chrysostom, yet in his exposition of the tragedy of Jephthah's daughter, he did not hesitate to invoke the providence of a loving God as having guided these events.[34] Suspicious or skeptical readers may wonder, of course, if Chrysostom's insistence on the tale's being divinely directed to such a horrific outcome does more harm than good to God's reputation and credibility. Chrysostom harbored no such reservation. He clearly thought his exposition was a very good way to address—not evade—the offense that the story's apparent "cruelty and inhumanity" provokes among many "unbelievers."

It is essential also to register, however, some other aspects of this precritical hermeneutic. At the outset of our study, it was observed that the hermeneutic of suspicion is often contrasted not only to a hermeneutic of charity but also to a *hermeneutic of consent*. Schüssler Fiorenza, for example, frames her own use of the hermeneutic of suspicion in conscious opposition to the hermeneutic of consent.[35] "Consent" is a useful term, for it carries a variety of referents and points to several desiderata. Not only will a hermeneutic of consent seek to consent to the text of Scripture, however diversely "consent" may be understood; it will also seek consent with and within the tradition of interpretation; and it will thereby attempt to form and conform to the community of faith that has owned that text and interpretative tradition as well as been shaped by text and tradition. In other words, text, tradition, and community are tightly interwoven in the hermeneutic of consent. They are collated in ways often more easily observed in practice than they are articulated in the terminology and descriptions of precritical commentators. Accordingly, while Bullinger's reference to "the rule of faith and love" may look like a casual concatenation of two theological virtues, his intention is better read as a recognition that the rule of charity Augustine urged upon the reader of Scripture is itself yoked with an even older criterion that measures the interpretation of Scripture by the rule of faith (*regula fidei*), that is, by conformity with the more or less credal body of teachings traditionally credited to the apostles. At the same time, the Reformers and their predecessors typically spoke also of interpreting Scripture in accordance with the "analogy of faith" — an apparently third criterion that (despite its dubious derivation from Rom. 12:6) evaluated the interpretations of difficult passages of Scripture by their agreement or consent with clearer passages and, additionally, with the rule of faith. The analogy of faith is illustrated by Bullinger, though not named as such, when he describes how an "orthodox and genuine" interpretation of Scripture will expound any particular passage in light of the whole Bible.[36]

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[32] Translation is that of Arthur C. Cochrane, in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), p. 226, slightly emended. Original text may be found in H. A. Niemeyer, ed., *Collectio Confessionum in Ecclesiis Reformatis Publicatarum* (Leipzig: Julius Klinkhart, 1840), p. 469.

[33] Richard A. Muller offers a fine discussion of how the notion of a *scopus* or center of Scripture was presupposed by virtually all precritical commentators, Protestant and Catholic alike; see *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 2: Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), pp. 211–21.

[34] Chrysostom, *Hom. de statuis* 14.3, discussed at p. 117. Although Chrysostom has been caricatured as a fairly pure exponent of human freedom, more recent writers have called attention to his underlying affirmation of divine prevenience. Compare (e.g.) Reinhold Seeberg's quick dismissal of Chrysostom in his *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines* (1895–98; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 1:328–29, with the defense A.-M. Malingrey marshals from *De compunctione* (PG 47:393–422) in his entry on Chrysostom in EEC 1:440.

Bullinger's dense statement in the Second Helvetic Confession argues vigorously for the overlap and coinherence of these various concepts and terms in the thought and exegesis of precritical commentators. They all drive toward the coherence and consistency of Scripture as expressing a unified divine revelation and as teaching and illustrating a benevolent divine providence throughout human history. In other words, they believe that the Bible may be trusted to be make sense *internally*, in its own narratives, and *externally*, in addressing its readers — even though there are assuredly texts, times, and places where things look quite otherwise.

Herein may lie the most serious point of contention between precritical commentators and at least some feminists: Is the Bible, or any particular passage of the Bible, finally coherent or not? For many feminist critics, the Bible as Scripture has lost credibility. It suffers, today, from a vote of no confidence and it must now be read under a cloud of suspicion, if at all. These readers therefore feel both justified and obliged to read the Bible with a presupposition not of its coherence but of its probable incoherence. To be more precise, one might say (following Mieke Bal) that the obligation of the reader is to use feminist criticism and other deconstructive tools against the text's patriarchal self-interest in order to establish a countercoherence.[37] Or one might say (as Schüssler Fiorenza writes) that the goal is "to destabilize the center *and* the margins of 'malestream' biblical studies by constructing the *ekklēsia* as a feminist counter-public-sphere from which a feminist biblical rhetoric can speak."[38] Or (with Cheryl Exum) one might read "against the grain," thereby "exposing male control of the production and interpretation of literature . . . [in order] to subvert the hierarchy that has dominated not only readers but also culture itself."[39] For these feminist critics and for many more like them, the writers and redactors of the Bible—and, equally, the Bible's traditional interpreters—are regarded as unlikely, if not unable, to transcend their own patriarchal self-interest. Thus, some corrective must be found, either within the Bible itself or from some other source.

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[35] Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, p. 136–49; cf. *But She Said*, pp. 57–62, 176–80.

[36] These principles are all commonly illustrated, but not so commonly articulated, in the way precritical commentators expound some of the Bible's most difficult texts. See my essay, "Patriarchs, Polygamy, and Private Resistance," pp. 19–27 and esp. pp. 25–26. The theological and political complexity of the search for ecclesial consent has recently been set forth by several of the contributors to *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, 2 vols., ed. Irena Backus (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

Earlier in our study we noted that there is really no single feminist agenda for biblical interpretation. The observation must be repeated here: feminist interpreters are significantly divided between the most radical critics, who would discard the Bible altogether, and feminists with less severe agendas, whose exegesis is interested in various forms of amelioration, reconstruction, reform, or revisionism. Many feminist reading strategies are freely shared among critics whose larger programs or commitments only partially overlap. However, one of the more illuminating divisions within the many discussions of feminist biblical method emerges from Schüssler Fiorenza's particular rejection of a "canonical feminist hermeneutics."[40] Canonical interpreters include those who try to remedy the patriarchy of Scripture by appealing to a "canon within the canon," that is, to an "organizing principle" for interpretation or to a "normative center" in the Bible that will reveal the Bible, or at least part of it, to be genuinely liberating for women if read properly. Schüssler Fiorenza rejects the many forms of this approach for many reasons, not least of which is her judgment that critical scholarship has shown the Bible to be too contradictory to be unified by appeal to any canonical formula. Instead of treating the Bible as a timeless and authoritative archetype, she prefers to see it as a more open-ended prototype whose application remains negotiable and malleable. Accordingly, theological authority for her is to be derived not from the Bible per se but "from the experience of G-d's liberating presence in today's struggles to end patriarchal domination."[41]

The debate over canonical hermeneutics within feminist biblical criticism makes an interesting conversation partner for the larger recent debate over literary canons in general.[42] Here, however, our task is not to arbitrate either dispute but to draw attention to where precritical commentators stand in the conversation — indeed, to insist that they *are* part of this conversation. For the "rules" or canons of charity and of faith mentioned earlier (along with the analogy of faith) are also and explicitly arguments about the canons or rules of interpretation, as well as assertions of the privileged position of the Bible, first, and then of tradition. At the broadest level, the canon that precritical commentators work with is ostensibly the whole Bible, taken as divinely inspired and authoritative. And yet they are equally prone to appeal to a canon within the canon, whether it be the rule of faith (understood as the core of the apostles' teaching) or Augustine's rule of charity, which they would see as not much different. Especially where Scripture seems obscure and offensive, however, and most of all where God seems obscure and offensive and even cruel, precritical commentators labor to find some "rule" that will explain it all. As we have seen, they frequently resort to providence: whatever happened in Scripture, surely God was in charge; and if God is love, somehow there must be a commensurate explanation. The ideal — not always attained, of course — was to make this charitable explanation known to readers in this life.

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[37] Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, pp. 5–7; seconded by Yee, "Why Judges?" p. 3.

[38] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, p. 7 (emphasis hers).

[39] Exum, "Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?" pp. 68–69.

[40] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, pp. 144–50, 155–56.

[41] Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, p. 156; cf. 149. The rejection of canonical interpretation is grounded differently by Cheryl Exum (*Fragmented Women*, pp. 12–13), who asserts that "the very concept of a canon is phallocentric" and finds it of the essence of feminist criticism to recognize and celebrate "contradiction and multiplicity."

Precritical commentators thus labored in ways not unlike those of feminists who today look for a liberating canon within the canon as the key that will unlock problematic and offensive texts. For them, as also for precritical commentators, fairness and justice and equity are corollaries of charity — except that feminists would sharpen the search by prefixing these terms as gender fairness, gender justice, and gender equity. To be sure, the debate within feminist biblical criticism between canonical and non- or extracanonical sources of theological authority is unlikely ever to be resolved, insofar as the controversy seems founded more on presuppositions about the enduring authority of Scripture than on specific evidences. That is to say, however widely and universally the hermeneutic of suspicion may be employed by readers with feminist commitments, there would seem to be a distinction to be drawn between those who use a hermeneutic of suspicion as a tool and those whose commitment to a *hermeneutic* of suspicion masks still deeper commitments to an *ideology* of suspicion toward the Bible and toward its history of interpretation. Admittedly, the distinction is a fine one, and some critics clearly seek to capitalize on both positions at once. But there are also some who have simply declared the Bible — along with its supporting traditions — as too deeply submerged in patriarchy to be salvaged in any way.

In this context, it is quite conceivable that precritical commentators could engage in fruitful discourse with those who advocate using suspicion as a hermeneutic, but not so easily with those for whom it is part of an ideology. Thus, when Schüssler

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[42] Critical literature on this topic is vast, but two well-informed summaries from the standpoint of biblical interpretation are John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), esp. part 2, "Scripture as Authoritative Canon: Interpreting Torah," pp. 89–138; and James E. Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict: Negotiating Texts in True and False Prophecy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). A useful interface between literary and biblical canonical hermeneutics as it pertains to depictions of Old Testament women is provided by Jan Wojcik, "Angel Narrators and Biblical Women: The Fluid Voices of Uncanonical Readings," in *Old Testament Women in Western Literature*, esp. pp. 25–35.

Fiorenza writes that the hermeneutic of suspicion properly "turns its searchlight first on the reader's own reading practices and assumptions," there is an uncanny echo of values affirmed also by precritical commentators, who prized self-examination and discipline as preparation for the interpretative task.[43] Indeed, one might even correlate applying suspicion to oneself with the venerable Calvinist recognition of one's own (total) depravity as an essential consideration in good exegesis. Neither formulation is necessarily at odds with the hermeneutic of charity or consent, nor with an understanding of the Bible as somehow the word of God. In theory, at least, precritical interpreters would welcome such a hermeneutic much as they would welcome the painful yet salutary interrogations of a good confessor.

Precritical commentators are thus fully capable of applying their own kinds of reading strategies to the Bible in order to deal with offensive narratives in ways that bend even the awkward silences of Scripture toward the divine norm of fairness, justice, and the like. What would seem inconceivable to precritical commentators, however, is that they should have to grill the text and force it to divulge its own *writing* strategy. That is to say, the inspired or providential nature of the Bible disinclines precritical commentators from reading the text against itself. They can read the tradition of interpretation "against the grain" — we have seen some of that — and even against St. Paul, but they are not about to treat the text itself as ultimately treacherous or as liable to misdirect them. Obviously, from a feminist perspective this presupposition limits their options. It is assumed that the universe depicted by the Bible makes sense and that justice will add up. Silences are mined for coherence, not incoherence. If we cannot see the coherence, the problem does not lie with the text or its divine author, but with the limits of our finite minds or the limits of revelation, for God does not tell us everything. Nonetheless, even where precritical readers are baffled or disturbed, the text is still to be trusted (they would say), as an expression not of random agency but of the author and finisher of our faith.

Any discourse between precritical commentators and feminist interpreters must therefore take into account the inevitable tensions between the ways precritical commentators seek to respect both the canon of Scripture and the overlapping canons by which Scripture is interpreted, and the ways feminists employ suspicion as a tool capable of various applications and implications — whether seemingly constructive, deconstructive, or destructive. As embodiments of concrete historical positions and perspectives, however, neither precritical commentators nor feminist critics represent internally homogenous entities, nor are their mutual insights fated to incompatibility at every point. On the one hand, precritical commentators — or, to speak more properly, their modern heirs — can learn from feminist critics to read far more acutely and critically without necessarily abandoning canonical commitments. On the other hand, for feminist critics to recognize the earnest struggles of earlier readers to come to terms with the saddest stories of the Bible ought to amplify their solidarity with the readers of the past, even if they cannot grant plenary approval to all of the past's specific readings. In other words, while the predictable tensions of this discourse must be taken into account, it remains an account worth taking precisely because the discourse is worth having.

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[43] See Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, p. 53. As Francis Watson has written, "Radical hermeneutics must learn to practise self-criticism, . . . resisting the temptation to position itself outside and above that which it criticizes"; see *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 7.

To claim to know how Bible readers and theologians of the past would respond to questions and issues of the present is, admittedly, nothing more than an exercise in historical speculation. More to the point, it is a way of appealing to readers of the present to reconsider the past, to summon the readers of the past into the present and so, with their mixture of help and hindrance, to reconsider the values and commitments that govern the thoughts and deeds of readers today. Writing generally of feminist reading strategies, Emily Cheney has advocated an approach to evaluating Scripture that is noteworthy for retaining at least a trace of moderation: "Reading strategies are needed to enable women who feel drawn to the 'humanist' values of male characters to explore how and whether they can affirm these values. It may not be necessary to reject the male character(s) in every case."[44]

The purpose of my own study has not been to offer a critique of modern feminist biblical criticism, though perceptive readers will probably have detected my mixed but genuine appreciation for many feminist insights and priorities. If a word of critique were to be offered, it would be only to lament, again, the stereotyping, neglect, and wholesale dismissal with which precritical commentators have been treated. Of course, this is a failing common also to many of today's self-styled defenders of tradition, who ought to be equally surprised and challenged by the concerns that precritical commentators share with feminist critics. The only reasonable response to such neglect on both sides is to undertake a reconsideration of the past and a thorough reacquaintance with these long-forgotten colleagues who are also among "the neglected dead." There are, in fact, ample reasons to feel drawn to the "humanist" values of many traditional interpreters, if one takes the trouble to listen.

By the same token, however much it will always be a characteristic of the living to want to correct or rebuke their forebears, here it seems hardly necessary to reject them. When the author of the epistle to the Hebrews spoke of the "cloud of witnesses" surrounding us as we run our own race, few readers of the rest of the canon would have supposed that the "saints" listed there were not also sinners — just like all who came after, and just like themselves. To read Scripture in the presence of the interpreters of the past, then, will always be a challenge, insofar as these interpreters belong to their own age and will always prosecute their own agenda rather than ours. Nonetheless, reading Scripture in the presence of the varied readers of the past may also be, at times, a corrective: often a call to rethink and repent, and always a call to remember. We who have the opportunity to benefit from the past should only hope to be found worthy of a similar audience among our own children, and beyond.

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[44] Cheney, *She Can Read*, p. 22.

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Index of Biblical Citations

(exclusive of Genesis 16, 19, 21, and Judges 11, 19–21)

Old Testament
Gen. 14:14–15 67
Gen. 17 13
Gen. 17:1 32, 35
Gen. 17:19–21 39
Gen. 17:25 37
Gen. 17:27 67
Gen. 18:12 228
Gen. 18:15 18
Gen. 20:14 67
Gen. 22 23, 58, 92, 103, 109, 120, 144
Gen. 24:8 108
Gen. 25:1 46, 57, 73, 91
Gen. 25:9 57
Gen. 25:12 17
Gen. 25:17 59
Gen. 26:15–33 48
Gen. 38 181
Gen. 39:17 55
Gen. 49:22–24 24
Exod. 12:1 109
Exod. 32:6 37–38, 55
Exod. 33:18–23 51
Lev. 27:1–8 108–10, 161, 170
Lev. 27:29 157
Num. 12:3 89
Num. 25 208, 210
Deut. 4:29 67
Deut. 6:16 127
Deut. 13 213
Deut. 15:13–14 81
Jud. 6–8 100, 127
Jud. 12:7 109
Jud. 15–16 100, 190
Jud. 17–18 187, 191, 202, 208–9, 232
1 Sam. 1:11–18 160
1 Sam. 11 184
1 Sam. 14 103
2 Sam. 1 105
2 Sam. 2:14 43, 55
1 Kings 13:2 65
2 Kings 3:26–27 144
2 Kings 23:10 123
1 Chron. 5:10–22 17
2 Chron. 35:24–25 143
Esther 1:9 189
Job 22:29 65
Ps. 18:27 65
Ps. 22:1 241
Ps. 22:25 156
Ps. 45:10–15 135
Ps. 69:26 153
Ps. 83:6 17
Ps. 88:7 153
Ps. 116:15 110
Ps. 132 135–36
Prov. 3:34 65
Prov. 30:21–23 93
Eccl. 5:4 135, 140, 144
Isa. 8 89
Isa. 21:13–14 58
Isa. 53 153–54, 235, 240
Jer. 7:21–23 61
Jer. 7:30–31 123, 136
Jer. 9:19 143
Lam. 2:1 110
Ezek. 27:31, 32:16 143
Hosea 1–3 224, 236
Hosea 9:9, 10:9 24, 190–91
Micah 6:6–7 122, 144
Zech. 9:9 89
Zech. 12:10 143
Mal. 4:5–6 47

New Testament
Matt. 5:8 33
Matt. 9:15–22 130
Matt. 14:6 160
Matt. 18:12 81
Matt. 27 199
Luke 17:29 9, 198
Luke 23:27–28 142–43
John 1:29 113, 173
John 4 31, 96
John 8 232
John 10 125
Acts 3:18 153
Rom. 3:8 194
Rom. 4 8, 227
Rom. 8:32 153, 240

Rom. 9–11 48
Rom. 9:2 43
Rom. 11:18–21 50
Rom. 11:25–26 62
Rom. 12:1 137, 164
Rom. 12:6 249
1 Cor. 3:2 39
1 Cor. 10:33 134
1 Cor. 11:2–16 40
1 Cor. 15:24 130
1 Cor. 15:30–31 125, 136
2 Cor. 3:6 30
2 Cor. 11:2 130, 164
Gal. 4:21–31 17, 19, 24, 26, 29–35, 41, 43, 48–49, 53, 61, 63, 69, 71, 74, 77, 88–89, 94–95, 98, 227–28, 237–38, 242
Eph. 5:22–33 40, 130
1 Tim. 5:8 216
Heb. 11:8–19 8, 123, 227
Heb. 11:32 9, 100, 113, 117, 123, 125, 127, 132, 135–41, 144, 149, 152, 160, 168–71, 198, 228
Heb. 11:34 228
Heb. 12:1 170, 253
Heb. 13:2 198, 228
1 Pet. 3:1–6 8, 228
2 Pet. 2:7–9 9, 186, 189, 193, 198, 216, 220, 228

Apocryphal Books
Sirach 46:11 100
2 Macc. 6:18–31 115
2 Macc. 14:37–46 136
4 Macc. 5:1–7:23 115
4 Ezra 111

Index of Biblical Commentators

Abelard, Peter, 105, 144–48, 165, 167, 233, 235
Acosta, Joseph de, 165
Adam the Scot, 147
Ado of Vienne, 136
Alan of Lille, 139
Alcuin, 46, 50, 52, 61
Ambrose Autpert, 136
Ambrose of Milan, 24, 29, 33–36, 38, 46–47, 62, 74, 95, 111, 116, 118–21, 123–24, 126, 129, 132, 135–136, 138, 147, 162–63, 167, 172, 174, 177, 190–95, 197–98, 211, 217, 219–20, 225–27, 229–31, 235, 244
Ambrosiaster, 111, 118, 120, 122, 124–25, 136, 138, 190, 239
Andrew of St. Victor, 53, 57, 62, 68, 140, 174, 200
Apocalypse of Daniel, 63
Apostolic Constitutions, 112–13, 174
Aquinas, Thomas, 66, 70, 141, 152, 187–88, 223
Augustine, 13, 29, 33, 35–39, 46–48, 50, 52, 62–63, 66, 75, 86, 95, 111, 117–18, 125–31, 133–42, 148–49, 152–53, 155, 162–63, 167, 169, 173–74, 190, 193–203, 207, 211, 214, 217–19, 223, 225–28, 230, 233–35, 237–40, 244–45, 247–49, 251

Baldwin, 138, 149
Basil the Great, 29
Bede, 46, 48–52, 61, 65, 96, 98, 199, 227, 237–38
Bede, Pseudo-, 50, 135, 190, 199
Beza, Theodore, 165–68
Borrhaus, Martin, 163–64
Bovelles, Charles de, 168
Brenz, Johann, 92–94, 154, 158–59, 168–69, 176, 206, 208–12, 215, 220, 236
Bruno d'Asti, 59, 61, 200, 237
Bucer, Martin, 78, 159–61, 168, 206, 208–11, 214, 220, 233
Buchanan, George, 134, 154, 160, 165–68
Bullinger, Heinrich, 247–49
Burgos, Paul of, 57, 60, 64–68

Cajetan, Cardinal (Thomas de Vio), 9, 54, 70–73, 83, 85, 92, 98, 154–57, 206–9, 211, 214, 228, 232–33
Calvin, John, 3, 57, 66, 80, 83–88, 92, 98, 154, 159–61, 165, 167–68, 175–76, 206, 214–17, 220, 223, 227, 230, 233, 238
Carmina adversus Marcionitas, 118
Christopherson, John, 165
Chrysologus, Peter, 134, 149
Chrysostom, John, 24, 37, 39–44, 56, 76, 94, 112, 116–17, 130–32, 134, 141, 161, 163, 190, 193–96, 198, 211, 219, 225, 229–230, 234, 248
Chrysostom [Pseudo-], 117, 141, 144, 162, 184
Chytraeus, David, 93
Clement of Alexandria, 27, 29–30, 32, 113

Dedeken, Georg, 165
Denis the Carthusian, 57, 60, 66–69, 71, 97, 142, 152–54, 173, 200, 204–6, 215, 220, 234–35, 240
d'Espence, Claude, 168
Didymus the Blind, 29, 31–33, 37, 44, 47
Döring, Matthias, 60, 64–66

Elisäus of Amathunik, 131–32
Ephraem the Syrian, 45–46, 112, 114–15, 133, 172–73, 193–94
Epiphanius of Salamis, 112, 116
Erasmus, Desiderius, 10
Exodus Rabbah, 56–57, 108–9

Faber, Martin, 93
Fabricius, Georg, 93

Genesis Rabbah, 23, 38, 54–58, 60, 63, 66, 91, 108, 121–22, 150, 189
Gildas, 134
Gloss, Interlinear, 53, 62, 65, 138
Gloss, Ordinary, 46, 52–53, 61–63, 66, 68–69, 96, 130–31, 133, 136–37, 173, 198–99, 201
Godfrey of Admont, 141, 149, 168
Gratian, 123
Gregory of Elvira, 44, 47–48, 51
Gregory the Great, 198–99, 221
Gregory of Nazianzus, 112, 115, 132, 172
Gregory of Nyssa, 29, 33–34, 45
Guibert of Nogent, 62, 138–39, 200, 237

Haimo of Auxerre, 51, 61, 144, 199
Heling, Moritz, 164, 168
Hervé de Bourgdieu, 139–40
Hilary of Poitiers, 44, 48, 65–66, 95–96
Hugh of St. Cher, 11, 60–61, 63, 139, 142, 149, 152–53, 200–201, 203, 233, 237
Hugh of St. Victor, 57, 62, 130, 140, 142, 174, 199–201

Ibn Ezra, Abraham, 59, 78–79
Isidore of Pelusium, 29, 112, 115, 172
Isidore of Seville, 44, 46–48, 50–52, 61, 69, 89, 96, 98, 133–38, 141, 149, 169, 173, 190, 198–99, 225, 227, 237–38

Jerome, 9, 24, 29–30, 37–39, 46, 49–55, 60–63, 66, 68–69, 97, 111, 118, 121–24, 126–27, 136, 138–39, 141, 144, 152, 162, 172, 174, 190–91, 193, 204, 217, 226, 235
Josephus, Flavius, 13, 24, 27–28, 106–8, 113, 139, 152, 171–72, 186–89, 191–94, 200–202, 204–5, 217, 225–26, 231
Jubilees, 27, 189

Kimhi, David (Joseph), 78, 150–51, 154–55, 157–58, 161–63, 169–70, 175–76, 201–2

Lanfranc of Canterbury, 139
Lapide, Cornelius à, 117, 169, 171, 219
Leviticus Rabbah, 122, 150
Lombard, Peter, 139
Luther, Martin, 10, 45, 57, 59, 66, 69–70, 80, 86–94, 98–99, 131, 148, 154–56, 159, 161, 163, 167–68, 175–76, 206, 214–15, 223, 227, 230, 233–36
Lyra, Nicholas of, 54, 57, 60, 63–68, 71, 84, 95, 97, 130–31, 138, 144, 150–52, 155, 157–58, 161–62, 168, 173, 175–76, 188, 198–99, 202–6, 208–9, 215, 217, 220, 225–26, 231, 234, 237, 245

Martin of Leon, 142
Methodius of Olympus, 62, 112, 114–15, 133, 172–73, 239
Midrash, 23, 38, 54–58, 60, 63, 66, 91, 108–9, 121–22, 150, 172, 174, 188–89, 193, 201
Mirour of Mans Saluacioun, 147
Münster, Sebastian, 57, 97, 150, 154–55, 157–58, 161, 169, 208
Musaeus, Simon, 93
Musculus, Wolfgang, 80–83, 99, 206, 214–15, 220, 228, 232–35, 241

Nachmanides (Ramban), 58–60, 189, 201–2
Nilus of Ancyra, Pseudo-, 131, 149
Novatian, 44, 48, 95–96

Origen, 10, 24, 27, 29–31, 33, 37, 39, 45, 47–48, 53, 61, 69, 95–96, 112–14, 116–18, 124, 131, 171–73, 190, 193, 225, 236, 238–39, 243–45, 247–48

Pagnini, Santi, 155
Pearson, John, 169
Pellican, Conrad, 75–78, 80, 89, 98, 154, 158–59, 168–69, 206, 208–13, 215, 232, 236

Perkins, William, 169, 170
Peter of Blois, 147
Peter Comestor, 60–63, 65, 106, 139–41, 150, 200–201, 204
Peter Lombard, 139
Peter of Poitiers, 139
Philip of Harvengt, 139, 147
Philo, 13, 24–27, 29–38, 62, 94–95, 106, 186, 225, 236–37, 243
Pomarius, Johannes, 165
Poole, Matthew, 169, 214, 219
Primasius of Hadrumetum [Pseudo-], 134, 144
Procopius of Gaza, 37, 42–44, 56, 121–22, 132–33, 138, 195, 230
Pseudo-Philo, 27, 106–11, 113, 121–22, 124–26, 132, 146, 150, 165, 171–72, 174, 186–88, 191, 202, 217, 220, 231–32, 235

Quæstiones et Responsiones ad Orthodoxos [Pseudo-Justin], 131
Quodvultdeus, 133–36, 149, 173, 190, 240

Raban Maur, 46, 50–52, 61, 77, 85, 89, 96, 98, 130, 135–37, 199, 227, 237–38
Radbertus, 134–35
Ramban. *See* Nachmanides
Rashbam, 58–59
Rashi, 56–58, 63, 66, 72, 77–78, 82
Reuchlin, Johannes, 57, 158
Rogers, Richard, 169–71, 228, 231
Rupert of Deutz, 11, 60–62, 72, 96–98, 117, 141–42, 144, 149, 152, 167, 199, 225, 236–37

Sachs, Hans, 165
Second Helvetic Confession, 248–49
Sedulius Scotus, 135
Seidel, Bruno, 165
Selnecker, Nikolaus, 93
Sforno, Obadiah ben Jacob, 57, 59–60, 85
Shemuel ben Meir, Rabbi. *See* Rashbam
Solomon ben Isaac, Rabbi. *See* Rashi
Sozomen, 45, 90
Spangenberg, Cyriacus, 93, 164–65, 168
Strigelius, Victor, 164, 168
Sulpicius Severus, 125, 191–92, 217

Tanhuma (midrashim), 58, 150, 189, 193, 201
Targums, 158, 189, 208
Tertullian, Pseudo-, 118
Theodore Prodromus, 144–45, 149, 177, 199
Theodoret of Cyrus, 37, 41–43, 77, 131–33, 190–91, 198, 217
Tilmann, Godfrey, 168

Ulrich of Lilienfeld, 142–43
Urban II, Pope, 63

Vermigli, Peter Martyr, 75, 78–80, 85, 98–99, 117, 154, 159, 161–63, 165, 168–70, 174, 206, 208–16, 219, 231–32, 234, 246
Vita Sanctorum, 125

Zanchi, Jerome, 236
Zigler, Bernard, 158
Zwingli, Huldreich, 73–75, 78, 87, 206, 214, 233, 247

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Index of Modern Authors

Albright, William F., 176
Aldama, Jose Antonio de, 117
Alexiou, Margaret, 107, 111, 114–15, 145–46
Alter, Robert, 14
Amaru, Betsy Halpern, 28, 107, 188
Asendorf, Ulrich, 90
Attridge, H. W., 187

Backus, Irena, 93, 249
Bailey, James L., 28
Bainton, Roland, 156
Baker, Cynthia, 108–11
Bal, Mieke, 4, 6, 102–6, 181–84, 250
Battles, Ford Lewis, 161
Bellis, Alice Ogden 15, 18, 102–3
Bergant, Dianne, 241
Berger, David, 58–59
Berndt, Rainer, 150
Binkley, Thomas, 148
Bledstein, Adrien Janis, 101
Boswell, John, 197
Bottigheimer, Ruth B., 218
Bowman, Richard G., 103
Brecht, Martin, 156
Brenneman, James E., 251
Brenner, Athalya, 15, 18, 21, 101–2, 185
Bronner, Leila Leah, 150, 189–90, 218, 226
Brown, Cheryl Anne, 106–11
Brown, Dennis, 38
Brown, Peter, 196–97
Brown, Raymond, 15
Bruce, F. F., 41, 186

Campbell, Jean, 177
Cardon, Bert, 147
Châtillon, Jean, 48
Cheney, Emily, 242, 246, 253
Childs, Brevard, 238
Clark, Elizabeth A., 48
Clines, David J. A., 7, 19
Collins, Thomas Aquinas, 70
Culver, Jonathan E., 63

Darr, Katheryn Pfisterer, 18, 20–23, 38, 58, 93
Day, Peggy L., 18, 104
De Jong, Mary, 224
Dronke, Peter, 107, 111, 114–15, 145–48

Edwards, Burton Van Name, 51
Eells, Hastings, 160
Evans, Craig A., 54, 109
Exum, J. Cheryl, 5, 18, 21, 102–4, 181, 183–85, 250

Farmer, Craig S., 224, 232
Farthing, John L., 224, 236
Feldman, Louis H., 28, 106
Fewell, Danna Nolan, 18–19, 21, 103–4, 130, 180–86, 230
Fischer, Mark F., 241

Fish, Stanley, 14
Freedman, H., 54
Freytag, Hartmut, 62
Friedman, Jerome, 158, 209
Friesen, Abraham, 163
Froehlich, Karlfried, 10, 30
Frymer-Kensky, Tikva, 4, 23
Fuchs, Esther, 21, 101, 103–5

Ganoczy, Alexandre, 66, 70
Gerstein, Beth, 102
Gibson, Margaret T., 52
Ginzberg, Louis, 38, 189
Goldingay, John, 96, 251
Gordon, Cynthia, 17, 23–24, 60
Gorman, Michael, 47, 50
Graves, Robert, 38
Griboment, Jean, 37
Grudem, Wayne, 5
Gunn, David M., 18–19, 21, 103–4, 180–81, 183–86
Gunten, A. F. von, 70–71

Hackett, Jo Ann, 18–19, 23
Hagen, Kenneth, 177
Hall, Basil, 158
Hamman, Adalbert, 124
Hampson, Daphne, 4
Hanson, R. P. C., 238
Harrington, D. J., 106, 108–10, 186–87
Hayward, C. T. R., 38
Heider, Gustav, 142
Henrichs, Albert, 32
Hill, Robert C., 39, 195
Hoek, Annewies van den, 29–30
Holbert, John C., 241

Irmscher, Johannes, 42, 133

Jeansonne, Sharon Pace, 18–19, 23, 186
Jeffrey, David Lyle, 101
Jones-Warsaw, Koala, 181–85
Jordan, Mark D., 52, 187–88, 217–18

Kamesar, Adam, 38
Kelly, J. N. D., 117
Kingdon, Robert M., 209, 232
Kirsch, Jonathan, 105, 116
Koch, Hal, 247
Kolb, Robert, 93
Krentz, Edgar, 7
Kugel, James L., 189
Künzli, Edwin, 74

Lachs, Samuel Tobias, 150
Laffey, Alice L., 18, 23, 104, 230
Lamirande, Émilien, 33
Lampe, G. W. H., 238
Lane, Anthony N. S., 86, 161
Lasine, Stuart, 185–86
Leclerq, Jean, 238
Lerner, Gerda, 104, 182, 184–86, 216, 220–21
Lerner, Robert E., 63
Levenson, Jon D., 23–24, 103
Lindbeck, George, 15
Liptzin, Sol, 101
Lubac, Henri de, 10–12, 48, 64, 237–38, 244
Luscombe, David, 62

Malingrey, A.-M., 248
Mara, Maria Grazia, 34, 194
Marcus, David, 104–5, 176
Margerie, Bertrand de, 247
McKnight, Edgar V., 7
McLaughlin, Mary, 146, 148
Muller, Richard A., 10, 246, 248

Nautin, Pierre, 32, 112
Niditch, Susan, 18–20, 23, 184–86

Ollenburger, Ben C., 241
Osiek, Carolyn, 4–5

Parker, T. H. L., 86
Patai, Raphael, 38
Penna, A., 105, 115, 121–22, 131, 140
Piper, John, 5
Proctor-Smith, Marjorie, 177

Quasten, Johannes, 29, 33–34, 37, 39, 44, 48, 115–16, 118, 131, 194

Rad, Gerhard von, 23
Rashkow, Ilona N., 216
Reinke, Laur., 105, 115, 131
Revised Common Lectionary, 177
Ricoeur, Paul, 5, 15
Rordorf, Willy, 124

Rosenthal, Erwin I. J., 53
Rulon-Miller, Nina, 18–20
Runia, David T., 29–34, 36, 38

Sakenfeld, Katherine Doob, 4–5
Sandmel, Samuel, 26
Scalise, Charles J., 36
Schneyer, Johannes Baptist, 154
Schreiner, Susan E., 175
Schroeder, Joy A., 224
Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, 177, 225, 242, 245, 249–50, 252
Seeberg, Reinhold, 248
Shereshevsky, Esra, 150
Shuger, Debora Kuller, 107, 134, 166–72, 240
Simonetti, Manlio, 44, 48
Simons, Louise, 214, 231
Skinner, John, 19, 186
Sly, Dorothy, 24–27
Smalley, Beryl, 53, 62–63, 68, 138, 177
Sölle, Dorothée, 22
Southern, R. W., 49
Southworth, Louisa, 102–3
Speiser, E. A., 186
Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, 19–20, 22, 102, 104, 225
Stegmüller, Friedrich, 154
Steinen, Wolfram von den, 105, 145–46, 148
Steinmetz, David C., 8, 26, 224, 246
Stuhlmacher, Peter, 15
Sundberg, Walter, 177
Sutherland, N. M., 87
Sypherd, Wilbur Owen, 13, 101, 107–8, 116, 165–66, 177–78, 225, 230

Talmage, Frank Ephraim, 150
Tamez, Elsa, 19–20, 22–23, 96
Tapp, Ann Michelle, 102, 105, 130, 183, 185
Teubal, Savina J., 20
Thomas, Keith V., 232
Thompson, John L., 10, 13, 35, 86, 127, 156, 175, 196, 249
Tilley, Maureen A., 36
Tolbert, Mary Ann, 4–5
Trible, Phyllis, 3–4, 14–15, 18–19, 22–24, 38, 83, 91, 93, 102–5, 154, 180–85, 230, 240–41
Troost, Arie, 19, 23

Van Engen, John H., 60
Van Hoonacker, A., 105
Vawter, Bruce, 23, 186
Voicu, Sever J., 132

Waters, John W, 19–21
Watson, Francis, 252
Weems, Renita J., 19–20, 22–23, 99, 102, 104, 119, 162
Wicks, Jared, 70
Wiesel, Elie, 19–20, 23, 58
Williams, Arnold, 7
Williams, Delores S., 19–23
Williams, Frank, 116
Williams, George Hunston, 163
Williams, James G., 241
Willis, G. G., 177
Wintermute, O. S., 27
Wojcik, Jan, 214, 251
Woman's Bible, The, 19–20, 22, 102–4, 218, 225

Yee, Gale A., 5, 100, 127, 181, 183–84, 242, 250
Yoo, Yani, 185

Zakovitch, Yair, 181

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Subject Index

- Abraham
  - acted in faith
    - in banishing Hagar, 42–43, 77, 93
    - in offering Isaac, 23, 168
  - as cruel or inhumane, 21, 23, 42–43, 56, 61, 72–74, 77, 79–82, 85–86, 89, 93, 225, 228, 234
  - as fickle, 39, 83
  - polygamy with Hagar, 25–26, 30, 35–36, 42, 46–47, 55, 61, 83, 86, 97, 127, 227, 236, 244, 246
  - as rich or miserly, 9, 19–20, 42–43, 56, 58–61, 66, 72–73, 77–79, 81, 85, 99, 237
  - as virtuous, patient, 42, 73, 81, 228
- Ammonites, 100, 113, 123, 129, 134, 139, 161, 184
- analogy of faith, 249–51

- Barak, 100, 136
- Benjamin, 179–80, 185, 187–91, 195, 198, 201–3, 207–8, 212–13, 218, 221, 232–33
- blaming the victim, 21, 23–24, 60, 102, 152–53, 183, 186–87, 213, 220, 227, 229–31, 233

- canonical interpretation, 247–53
- casuistic exegesis, 9–10, 119, 125–29, 138, 159–63, 173–76, 194, 197, 206–7, 214–17, 229–33
  - as displacing figurative exegesis, 238, 245–46
  - and moral outrage, 209–13
  - moral-providential argument, 220, 232, 248, 251
  - *See also* blaming the victim; compensatory evil; divine dispensation; mental disturbance
- charity. *See* rule of charity
- compensatory evil, 189, 193–98, 200, 202, 205–7, 210–11, 214, 219, 221, 233–34, 240
- concubine. *See* Hagar; Levite's wife

- divine dispensation, 78, 126–29, 139–42, 145, 152, 162, 164, 174–75, 202, 213, 233–34

- feminist exegesis, 18–24, 98–99, 101–6, 180–85, 230–31
  - diverse agenda of, 4, 250
  - and methodology, 4–6, 242, 249–51
  - *See also* hermeneutic(s), of suspicion
- figurative exegesis
  - allegory
    - allegorical-ascetic reading, 112, 138, 149, 172
    - as arbitrary or unhistorical, 61, 203, 237–38, 245
    - as reading strategy, 26–27, 242–47
    - styled as "analogy," 61, 114, 124, 142, 149, 173, 242, 246
    - variability of, 37
  - anagogy, 10, 32, 243, 245

figurative exegesis *(continued)*
  fourfold exegesis, 10, 243
  overlaps with literal readings, 26–27, 31–33, 46, 51, 149, 203, 239–41, 245
  as response to historical narrative, 10, 238–39, 242–47
  tropology, 34, 112, 141, 153, 236–37, 246
  typology
    Christological-typological reading, 173
    providential or prophetic, 35–36, 47, 62, 74, 115, 126–29, 243

Gibeah, Gibeahites, 179–80, 182, 184–85, 187, 190–92, 200–202, 205–6, 210, 218–19, 231–33, 236
Gideon, 100, 112, 127–28
Gideonites, 100
God
  as apathetic, absent, or hidden, 22, 89, 103, 113–14, 175, 236, 241
  as blameworthy, 11, 20, 142, 146, 175, 239
  cares for the afflicted, 23, 40–41, 57, 65, 68, 74, 76–77, 93
  as cruel or harsh, 3, 21, 85, 108, 113, 117, 174, 234–35, 248, 251
  as enemy, 22, 91–92
  favoritism of, 21
  as manipulative of human affairs, 110, 117, 128, 239–40
  and theodicy, 22, 113
  uses evil providentially, 35–36, 47, 62, 74, 110, 115, 117, 128, 174, 196, 239, 243, 245, 248–49, 251–52

Hagar
  feminist criticism of, 18–24, 98–99
  figurative readings of
    as allegory of preliminary studies, 25–27, 29–34, 95
    as allegory of virtue, 30–31, 236
    as allegory of wiliness, 34
    as anti-type of Israel, 23
    compared with Anabaptists, 73
    compared with Job, Jeremiah, and Christ, 82–83, 99
    compared with Mary and the Magnificat, 70
    compared with Samaritan woman, 31, 96
    as symbol of the oppressed, 22–23
    as type of the church, 53, 152, 173
    as type of Donatists, 36, 86
    as type of gentile converts, 50–52, 77, 96
    as type of Jewish converts, 31, 47–48, 52, 69, 96
    as type of Saracens (Muslims), 63
    as type of the synagogue, 33–35, 47–48, 50–51, 53, 61–62, 69, 88, 96–97
  sufferings and mistreatment of
    abandonment, 20, 75–76, 83, 89, 91
    afflictions and anguish, 21, 40, 65, 67, 83, 87, 89, 98–99, 236, 238, 240–41
    exile, 3, 8–9, 17, 21, 23, 27–28, 36, 39–43, 49, 56, 58–61, 66, 71, 73, 76–77, 79, 82, 89–91, 93–94, 98, 225, 234
    forsaken like Christ, 83, 99
    miscarriage, 55, 57–58, 65, 68
    polygamy (*see* Abraham)
    surrogate, 19, 22, 64, 80
  vices and flaws of
    apostasy or idolatry, 38, 58, 63, 72, 77, 80, 85, 91
    contempt for Sarah, 25, 32, 63, 67, 73, 80, 87
    impatient or rebellious, 67, 74–75, 80, 84, 88
    impugned God's justice, 57
    proud or haughty, 34, 39, 42, 53, 67, 69, 73, 85, 87–91
    reprobate, 51, 83–84, 91
    servile, 73–75, 78, 80, 84, 87
    vices, villainy, 82, 86, 94
    weak faith, 57
    See also stereotypes, of women
  virtues and commendations of, 18, 28, 32, 40, 67
    as Christian exemplar, 31, 40–41, 67, 77, 81–82, 88, 91, 96, 245
    as contemplative and visionary, 33, 45–46, 48–53, 70–71, 96, 98, 238
    did not curse or complain, 32, 76, 78, 82–83
    faith and piety, 22, 38, 43, 50–52, 57, 60, 69, 74, 76–78, 80–81, 88–89, 98
    fulfilled the great commandments, 33, 51, 67–68
    maternal affection, 75–76

    - as model penitent, 10, 40, 47–48, 64, 67–68, 70, 76, 78, 81, 83–85, 87–88, 93, 96, 98, 227, 229–30, 236–38, 246
    - as modest, humble, patient, obedient, 28, 40, 65, 67–68, 74, 81–82, 89–91
    - mother of the church, 91
    - names God, 18, 33, 44, 60, 65, 68, 76, 78, 81, 88
    - as one of "God's own," 67, 74, 76–77, 84, 98
    - worthy of divine/angelic visitation, 18, 31–33, 40, 42, 44–45, 48–49, 51–52, 55, 60, 67, 70–71, 81, 95–96, 227 (*see also posteriora Dei*)
- Hagrites, "sons of Hagar," 17, 45, 63. *See also* Ishmael, sons of; Saracens
- hermeneutic(s), 14, 35, 56, 64, 106, 125, 231, 239
  - canonical feminist, 250–52
  - of charity, 15, 156, 240, 248–49, 251–52 (*see also* rule of charity)
  - of consent, 15, 249 (*see also* rule of faith)
  - of faith, 15
  - patriarchal, 105
  - of remembrance, 245
  - of suspicion, 5, 14–15, 98, 101, 121, 174–76, 234, 240, 242, 247–252
    - correlated with total depravity, 252
    - as ideology, 251–52
  - *See also* feminist exegesis, and methodology
- Herod, rash vow of, 117, 119, 160
- homosexual rape
  - as against nature, 194, 196–97, 199, 202, 205, 215, 217, 219, 234 (*see also* compensatory evil)
  - intended to humiliate or injure, 183, 202
  - moved by lust, 188
  - not moved by lust, 183, 215
  - silence regarding, 183–84, 187, 189, 192–93, 200, 231
  - as "sodomy," 188, 194, 202, 214–15, 217–18, 220, 234
- homosexuality, as modern descriptor, 187–88

- ideology of suspicion, 251–52
- Idomeneus, 101, 107
- Iphigenia, 101, 104, 107, 166
- Isaac
  - offering/sacrifice of, 23, 58, 92, 168, 172
  - and primogeniture, 19, 37, 56, 89
  - weaning of, 39, 43, 52, 61, 68, 76
- Ishmael
  - as allegory of flesh or carnal impulses, 30, 79
  - as allegory of sophistry, 26–27
  - as depraved or degenerate, 56, 58, 66, 71, 82
  - as penitent or repentant (*see* Hagar)
  - as persecutor, 30, 41, 43, 49, 57–58, 71, 86
  - "playing" with Isaac, 30, 58, 63, 71, 74, 76, 97
    - as contempt for God, 84
    - as fighting or murder, 43, 55–56, 66, 68
    - as idolatry, 9, 37–38, 52, 54–56, 60–61, 66, 68, 84
    - as sexual immorality, 55–56, 66, 68
  - as reprobate, 83–84, 91
  - sons of, 62–63 (*see also* Hagrites; Saracens)
  - as wild ass, 45, 49, 51, 55, 60

- Jabesh-gilead, women of
  - their sufferings as meritorious, 205–6
  - wrongly slaughtered for crime of men, 205, 212–13
- Jephthah
  - Abraham's offering of Isaac as precedent, 115, 120, 123–24, 126, 129, 132–33, 137, 144, 174
  - Abraham's superiority to, 124, 132–33
  - as allegory of contemplative who mortifies the flesh, 142
  - as cautionary tale, 110, 116–17, 131–32, 134, 140, 144, 169, 239
  - character flaws of
    - blames his daughter, 102, 106, 152–53
    - blinded by ambition, 102
    - cruel or impious, 117, 142, 144, 159–60
    - demented, 146
    - distorted grasp of virtue, 119, 162
    - foolish, 122, 124, 134, 140, 156, 160
    - ignorant, 126, 129, 161, 164–65, 170, 176
    - liar, 142
    - rash, 107–8, 112, 117, 122, 129, 133, 139, 144, 156, 164, 171, 230, 233, 239
    - superstitious, 156, 230, 233

Jephthah *(continued)*
  piety, good intentions, 119, 123, 125, 128, 137, 139–40
  repented of his vow, 119, 125, 139–41, 149
  type of Christ, 112, 117–18, 128–30, 149, 163
    offering up the church as sacrifice, 130, 141, 164, 173
    offering up his flesh or humanity, 112, 133–36
    as rejected deliverer, 129, 135–36, 173
  type of God the Father, 135, 141
  type of synagogue, 115
  See also divine dispensation
Jephthah's daughter
  argument for her survival, 150–52, 154–55, 157–59, 161–64, 168–70, 175–76
    based on *waw*-consecutive, 150, 157, 170, 176
    as "civil death" or religious celibacy, 151, 155, 158, 161, 170, 176
  autonomy affirmed, 102, 104, 108–9, 159, 162, 164, 166, 171–72, 230
    against parental authority, 159, 166, 168
  disparaged for her delay or lament, 230
    bewailing virginity as childlessness, 103, 111, 138, 147, 171
    bewailing virginity as fitness for sacrifice, 103–4
    as inferior to Isaac, 120–21, 132
    as reluctance to suffer, 132
  feminist criticism of, 101–6, 230–31
    as "dutiful daughter," 102, 107, 121, 171
  figurative readings of
    as allegory of fleshly desires, 112, 141–42, 163–64
    as allegory of pride, 152
    annual lament compared to Holy Week, 153
    annual lament compared to Lent, 142, 149
    as type of Christ, 105, 112, 115, 118, 132–34, 143, 149, 167, 173, 239, 241
    as type of Christ's flesh or humanity, 114, 133–36, 138, 141–42, 153, 173, 239–40
    as type of Christian martyrs, 141
    as type of the church, 117, 141, 152, 163–64, 173
    as type of Jerusalem, 110
    as type of Mary Magdalen, 153, 173
    as type of Peter, 153, 173
    as type of the Virgin Mary, 167
  as goddess, 116
  as martyr, 106–11, 113–14, 117, 124–25, 147, 171–73, 239
  as model of virginity or asceticism, 112, 114–16, 119–22, 134–35, 137–38, 146–47, 149, 152, 172–73
    bloodless martyrdom, 112, 135, 172
  sufferings and mistreatment of
    like Christ's anguish in Gethsemane, 133, 149
    compared with sufferings of Messiah, 153, 235, 240
    disparity with fate of Isaac and Jonathan, 103–5, 130, 133, 156, 176, 230–31
  virtues and commendations of
    courage, virtue, 105, 119, 146–47, 170, 172
    equal to Isaac and Jonathan, 105, 109, 115, 146, 153, 172–73, 230–31
    "manliness," 115, 125, 135, 146, 170
    obedience, 102, 111, 121, 135, 151, 153, 159, 162, 164, 170–71, 229–30, 239
    piety, 118, 121, 162
    used two-month delay piously, 133, 171
Jephthah's wife, 124, 129–30, 166–67
  as allegory of *storge* or human affection, 166–67
  as intended victim, 126, 129
  as type of the church (as spouse of Christ), 130
  as type of the Virgin Mary, 167
Jonathan, 105, 215
  escaped his father's vow, 103–4, 117, 156, 176, 230

Keturah, 30, 50, 57, 73, 91
Kore, 104, 116

Latina theology, 20
lectionary, lectionaries, 6, 177, 226
lesser evil. *See* compensatory evil
Levite
  as allegory of carnal cleric, 200
  as allegory of God (seeking the synagogue), 203
  as allegory of spirit or reason (vs. flesh), 200, 203, 237

  as cruel or harsh, 182, 189, 198
  his distorted reporting, 184, 199–202, 205–6, 212
  as eager to save himself, 183
  as prostituting his wife, 211
  sinned mortally, 202, 212, 219
  smitten with love for his wife, 187, 192
  wrong to reconcile with an adulteress, 209
  See also compensatory evil
Levite's wife
  as abused by husband, 181, 200–204
  as allegory of flesh, 200, 203, 237
  as allegory of synagogue, 203
  as angry, 180, 204, 208
  autonomy affirmed, 181, 183–84, 207, 212, 221
  dismemberment, 183–84, 187, 212, 221, 247
  feminist criticism of, 180–85
  rape as punishment, 183–84, 203, 207, 209, 219–20, 231–32
  repented, 210
  shame of, 187–88, 192, 205
  as type of martyrs, 203
  as unfaithful, 180–82, 186–88, 191–92, 201–10, 219–21, 231–32
Lot
  as allegory of spirit (vs. flesh), 200–1
  disloyalty toward his daughters, 215, 220
  evil heart, 201
  hidden faith of, 214–15
  hospitality of, 194–95, 197, 199, 218
  as mentally disturbed, 197–201, 214, 219, 221, 233
  prostituted his daughters, 189, 194, 201, 216–17
  punished by daughters' incest, 189, 193–94
  as righteous, 9, 186, 189, 193, 195, 197–99, 216, 228
  should have resisted Sodomites, 215–16
  as shrewd, 184, 197, 214–15, 219, 234
  as type of Christ or church, 199–200
  as type of the law, 199
  See also compensatory evil
Lot's daughters
  as allegory of appetite and sense, 206
  as allegory of body and soul, 201
  as allegory of flesh and substance, 200, 237
  as allegory of greed and vanity, 200
  as allegory of higher and lower reason, 206
  autonomy of, 197, 215
  their endangerment as meritorious or virtuous, 194
love, as goal of interpretation. *See* rule of charity

marriage, parental consent in, 159, 205, 207, 209, 213
mental disturbance as excuse, 197–201, 214, 219, 221, 233
Micah (priest), 187, 191, 202, 208–9, 232
Molech, 123, 140

old host/old man (of Gibeah)
  acted unlawfully, 212
  as mentally disturbed, 201
  prostituted his daughter, 182, 211–12
  as shrewd, 201, 205, 234
  sinned mortally, 205
  See also compensatory evil

Persephone, 104
Pharaoh, 54, 57, 64, 67, 227
Phinehas, 109, 151, 158, 175, 208, 210–11, 215
posteriora Dei, 49, 51, 59, 61–62, 65, 68, 81
"precritical" (defined), 7
precritical exegesis
  and blaming the victim, 229–33
  and empathic identification, 40–41, 74–75, 87–92, 99, 144–48, 152–54, 171, 176–78, 235–36
  and male bias, 232–35
  and neglect of biblical women, 224–26
  and uncritical harmonizing, 227–29
  See also stereotypes of women

rabbinic exegesis, 23–24, 53–60, 63–66, 108–10, 122, 150–52, 157–59, 174–76, 186–90, 201–3, 218
Rahab, 136, 138–39
reading strategies, 14–15, 242–53
recapitulation, doctrine of, 241
rule of charity, 244, 247–49, 251
  as fairness, justice, equity, 251
  as love of God and neighbor, 247
rule of faith (*regula fidei*), 248–49, 251

Samson, 100, 112, 118, 128, 136–37, 139, 148, 190, 199, 218
Saracens, 45, 49, 63. *See also* Hagrites; Ishmael, sons of
Sarah
  as allegory of virtue 25–26, 30–31, 34
  cast "the evil eye" on Hagar, 55–56, 58
  as a complainer, 75
  as cruel or harsh, 19–20, 27–28, 34, 40, 55, 67, 71, 74, 80
  as type of primitive church, 34–35, 49–50, 53, 59, 69
  as virtuous, holy, patient, 28, 32, 34, 40, 64, 76
Saul, 127, 184
  rash vow of, 103–5, 117, 156 (*see also* Jonathan)
secret leading of the Spirit. *See* divine dispensation
Shilohite women
  abducted illicitly, 184, 212–13, 233
  abduction not intended to injure, 207
  consented to marry, 203
  dangers of dancing, 209, 212–13, 230
  parents to blame for abduction, 188, 212
  parents consented to marriages, 205
silence, arguing from, 11, 59, 66, 79, 82, 99, 101, 117, 123–24, 147–48, 152, 162, 167, 169, 174–75, 221, 232, 234–35, 243, 252
Sodom, as more evil than Gibeah, 201–2
stereotypes
  of Jews or the synagogue
    as carnal, sterile, ignorant, 31, 33–34, 43, 47, 49, 50–51, 53, 61–62, 69, 74, 96–97, 236
  of precritical commentators, 223
    as cruel or misogynist, 4, 6, 12, 95, 187, 210, 231, 238
    as neglectful, 5–6, 8, 10, 24–25, 105–6, 177, 224–26
    as uncritical, 12, 227–29, 238
  of women, 99, 221, 227–29
    blabbing, gossip, 55
    deceptive, untrustworthy, 21
    impatient, inconstant, 74–75, 125
    jealous, 25, 40, 74, 78, 83
    petty, 21, 40, 42, 80
    quarrelsome, 21, 26, 35
    weaker vessel, frail, 39, 75–76
    "whore–madonna," 19
    womanish, 39, 73–76, 80, 83, 125, 228

Tamar, 3, 15, 154, 241
total depravity, doctrine of, 252

vows and oaths
  annulment or redemption of, 109–10, 150, 157, 161, 170
  as "ban" of divine destruction, 157, 161–62, 213
  fidelity to as laudable, 102, 115, 119, 125, 128–29, 132, 135–37, 144, 149, 153, 162–63
  foolish or illicit, 108, 113, 118–19, 122–24, 158–60, 233
    diabolical, 131–32, 160–61, 165
    not approved or binding, 119, 125–26, 136, 140, 142, 150, 156–57, 160, 162, 164, 170–71, 203, 233, 239

womanist exegesis, 18–20, 22, 181–85, 224