

STUDI

DIUINA ELOQUIA CUM LEGENTE CRESCUNT: DOES GREGORY THE GREAT MEAN A SUBJECTIVE OR AN OBJECTIVE GROWTH?*

di Pol Vandeveld

As a Father of the 6th century Church, Gregory the Great became famous for the allegorical interpretations in his numerous and lengthy writings on the Bible. The audacity of some of his interpretations caused his method of reading to be both the object of praise and the source of controversy. Such praise and controversy began in the Middle Ages and still persists today¹. I will examine two related elements among the many that have troubled commentators. The first problem deals with the extent of the growth Gregory has in mind when he says that the divine text grows with the reader. Does he mean only the subjective growth of the reader enriched by the text or does he also mean an objective growth of the text, that the text can change through the

* I am indebted to Fr. Roland Teske, Fr. Pierre Bogaert, and Lance Richey who commented on a previous draft of this paper. I also benefitted from the editorial help of Alice VanBenthuyzen and Gregory Traylor.

1. Gregory was seen, Thomas O'Loughlin writes, «as the most illustrious exegete after Augustine throughout the seventh and eighth centuries» (Thomas O'Loughlin, *Teachers and Code-Breakers: The Latin Genesis Tradition, 430-800*. Instrumenta Patristica, 35 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1998], 183). His *Morals on the Book of Job*, for example, were abundantly copied until the 13th century (See Robert Wasselynck, "Les *Moralia in Job* dans les ouvrages de morale du haut moyen âge latin", in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 31 (1964), 5-31) and translated into vernacular languages. A translation into old German appeared as soon as the 10th century. A translation into Spanish was available in the 11th century and a partial translation into old French in the 12th century. Gregory has been called «the magnificent doctor» (*doctor magnificus*, by Hincmar, who died in 879) as well as «the wisest pope» (*sapientissimus papa*, by Bernon of Reichenau, who died in 1048). Alcuin calls him «the most lucid interpreter of the holy Scripture» (*sacrae Scripturae lucidissimus expositor*, quoted in Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'écriture*, book 1, vol. 2 [Paris: Aubier, 1959], 538-9). Later commentators, however, have not been as enthusiastic; some, like Rosenmüller in the 19th century, deemed him «an uneducated man» (*vir indoctus*), even «a most superstitious man» (*homo superstitiosissimus*), responsible for the «barbarism of the Latin Church». De Lubac devotes a section to the «barbarism of Saint Gregory» and lists some of his critics (*Exégèse médiévale*, book 2, vol. 1, 53-77).

reading? The second problem concerns the order of the three different senses Gregory sees in the biblical text. The allegorical understanding is usually the second sense, on the basis of the literal sense, and yields the moral. But sometimes the allegorical sense is the third, while the moral sense is the second. Furthermore, although the literal sense is usually the first, foundational sense, sometimes Gregory considers the allegorical sense as foundational.

By focusing on the *Homilies on Ezekiel*² and using at times the *Morals on the Book of Job*³, I argue that the statement *diuina eloquia cum legente crescunt* means not only a subjective growth of the reader, but also an objective growth of the text. Such mutual growth takes the form of a cooperation between text and reader. It is from within such cooperation that the senses of the biblical text must be found and understood. The literal meaning is thus foundational, as the basis for the other senses. Seen from the perspective of the cooperation, however, the literal meaning is rather what the allegorical understanding takes as its foundation, since readers must know in advance of what the literal meaning is the foundation. In this perspective the allegorical understanding comes first.

I will begin with the second problem concerning the different senses of the Bible. In the second part, I will show how the cooperation between text and reader legitimates Gregory's apparent incoherencies and audacities.

1. Gregory's use of the different senses of the Bible

I do not claim to offer an exposition of Gregory's hermeneutics or the historical import of Gregory's readings of the Bible, which constitute a remarkable stage in the development of biblical interpretation in general⁴. My interest lies exclusively in the status of the different senses in Gregory's methodology of reading, not in the results of Gregory's exegesis or the content of the different senses.

2. Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechihelam prophetam. Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*, vol. 142 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971). Unless otherwise noted, I use the English translation by Theodosia Gray (*The Homilies of Saint Gregory the Great on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, ed. Juliana Cownie, trans. T. Gray (Etna: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1990)). References are given in the text and correspond to the Book, Homily, Paragraph and Line(s) in CCL.

3. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob. Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*, vol 143, 143A, 143B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979). Unless otherwise noted, I use the English translation: *Morals on the Book of Job* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1844-50). References are given in the text in CCL.

4. See Pier Cesare Bori, *L'interpretazione infinita. L'ermeneutica cristiana antica e le sue trasformazioni*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1987. See also: Robert Wasselynck, "L'influence de l'exégèse de S. Grégoire le Grand sur les commentaires bibliques médiévaux (VII-XIIIe S.)", in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 32 (1965), 157-204.

Primarily under the influence of Origen⁵ and Augustine⁶, Gregory distinguishes three senses⁷ in the biblical text: first, the historical or literal sense, second, the allegorical or typical sense, and third, the moral or contemplative sense. «In one and the same sentence of the Scripture one finds his nourishment in history alone, another in the typical sense, another seeks through the type a contemplative understanding (*HEz* I.7.10: 181-3. Translation modified)⁸. Or, «For first, we lay the historical foundations; next, by pursuing the typical sense, we erect a fabric of the mind to be a stronghold of faith; and moreover as the last step, by the grace of moral instruction, we, as it were, cloth the edifice with an overcast of colouring» (*Mor.*, CCL 142, *Ad Leandrum*, 3:110-114)⁹. On the basis of the literal sense, the allegorical sense

5. On the link between Gregory and Origen, see de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, book 1, vol.1, 221ff.

6. Augustine offers the more sophisticated and clear categories of the four levels of meaning in the Bible: «In all sacred books one should note the things of eternity which are communicated, the facts of history which are recounted, future events which are foretold, moral precepts which are enjoined or counseled» (*In libris autem omnibus sanctis intueri oportet, quae ibi aeterna intimentur, quae facta narrentur, quae futura praenuntiantur, quae agenda praecipiantur vel admoentur*. Saint Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*. 1.1.3 CSEL 28.1 Vindobonae: Tempsky, 1894). «The facts of history which are recounted» (*narratione rerum factarum*) correspond to the literal sense, to the extent that it is what the letters say: what is said at the level of the letters narrates the events that took place. The «moral precepts which are enjoined or counseled» (*quae agenda praecipiantur vel admoentur*) will be known as the moral or tropological sense. The Bible teaches us how to act and how to live. In Gregory's formulation, who on this point follows Augustine, it is said: «(a)s you find increase in divine speech you will yourself have progressed within it» (*tantum in sacro eloquio propectum invenis, quantum apud illud ipse profeceris*, CCL 142, I, VII, 8:156-7). The «future events which are foretold» (*quae futura praenuntiantur*) will be known as the allegorical sense to the extent that this level of sense prefigures what is going to happen. «The things of eternity which are communicated» will be known as the anagogical sense to the extent that the narrated events are the figure of eternal realities accessible through contemplation. Augustine's distinction will be summarized in the following hexameter by Augustine of Dacia, known by all medieval interpretation schools: *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia* («The letter teaches us what happened, allegory what to believe. The moral sense tells us what to do, the anagogical sense what to strive for»; quoted, among others, by Nicholas of Lyra in *De commendatione sacrae Scripturae in generali*, *Patrologia Latina* vol. 113, col. 28D).

7. Henri de Lubac seems too eager to see the four senses in Gregory and less attentive to the text when Gregory deviates from the four senses. It is an overstatement to claim, as he does, that Gregory is «one of the main initiators and greatest masters of the medieval doctrine of the fourfold sense» (*Exégèse médiévale*, Book 2, Vol. 1, 189). This is not enough, however, for branding the four volumes of de Lubac's *Exégèse médiévale* as a «theological agenda» that is «based on the apologetic need of Catholics» and which is «of very limited worth to the historian», as Thomas O'Loughlin does (O'Loughlin, *Teachers and Code-Breakers*, 159-60).

8. *In una enim eademque Scripturae sententia alius sola historia pascitur, alius typicam, alius vero intelligentiam per typum contemplativam quaerit.*

9. *Nam primum quidem fundamenta historiae ponimus; deinde per significationem typicam in arcem fidei fabricam mentis erigimus; ad extremum quoque per moralitatis gratiam, quasi superducto aedificum colore vestimus.*

gives the moral sense. An *allegoriae intelligentiam* is mentioned as leading to contemplation.

Sometimes, however, the *ordo exegeticus* is different. For example, the triplicity of senses mentioned above from Homily 7, *historia – typica intelligentia – contemplativa intelligentia*, is reformulated 25 lines below as *historia – moralitas – contemplatio*: «Maybe another seeks through history a moral lesson and, through an understanding of allegory, an object of contemplation» (*HEz* I.7.10: 206-8. Translation modified)¹⁰. This schema seems to take over the metaphor Origen uses, where the letter corresponds to the body, the moral sense to the soul, and the allegorical sense to the spirit. The schema follows the linear order of reading the text: first, what the words say (literal), then what they tell us (moral), and then the ultimate aim (allegorical)¹¹.

Although Gregory sometimes qualifies as allegorical what is properly the typical sense, according to which events are the figure or the «type» of Christ and his Church here on earth, the allegorical sense can also be the anagogical sense, according to which what is narrated refers to the eternal realities accessible to contemplation. In other passages the «allegorical» sense also includes the moral sense that, when not included in the allegorical sense, can in turn be part of the literal meaning. Even more disturbing, the first sense, which is the foundation of the others, is not always the historical or literal sense, but sometimes the allegorical sense, as most clearly stated in *In I Regum*: «Because as far as the salvation of the believers is concerned faith comes before the works, we put forward the typological interpretation as a solid foundation; the whole construction of the work in its moral and historical interpretation will be based upon it or will follow it»¹².

Faced with this problem of the order of the senses, commentators either consider the passages containing the unusual order «some exceptions»¹³ or «caused by mere distraction»¹⁴. Some marvel at Gregory's ingenuity and creativity¹⁵, while others are skeptical about his audacity¹⁶.

10. *Alius fortasse per historiam, moralitatem, atque per allegoriae intelligentiam contemplationem requirit*. As mentioned above, Gregory does not always distinguish the typical and the allegorical senses.

11. These two orders can actually be found in Origen as well. De Lubac argues that in Origen these two orders are radically different, the order «literal, moral, allegorical» being more pagan, and the order «literal, allegorical, moral» being Christian (De Lubac, I, vol. 1, 203). Bori somewhat disagrees and argues that the two orders can coexist, as in Gregory, due to the circularity of meaning. We will come back to this circularity (Bori, 56-7).

12. *Sed et, quia in salute fidelium fides operibus prior est, typicam significationem uel solidum fundamentum praemittimus, cui totius suscepti operis fabrica in morali uel historica expositione supponatur uel subsequatur* (*In lib. I Reg.*, prologus 8 (CCL 144, 54).

13. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale* book 1, vol. 1, 187

14. Adalbert de Vogüé, *Sur le premier livre des rois*. Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1989) 351, 66.

15. For example, Bernard de Vrégille, «Écriture sainte et vue spirituelle». In *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 4, 169-176.

16. R.A. Markus, for example, in his compelling presentation of Gregory's

Regarding the problem of what the first foundational sense is, which is most often the literal or historical sense, but is at times the allegorical sense, some commentators point to the fact that these unusual passages are most clearly formulated in *In I Regum*¹⁷ and either explain them away as caused by distraction, as mentioned above, or as possible evidence that *In I Regum* is not an authentic work by Gregory¹⁸.

Gregory's particular interpretive goal, together with the use he makes of the different senses of the Bible, can, I submit, explain both his apparent inconsistencies and the divergent opinions about him. Gregory was essentially guided by an interest in predication: how to live and teach others how to live a good Christian life¹⁹. The utility of the Bible for guiding life consists in the message of charity²⁰. «God speaks to us through the whole of scripture solely

understanding of allegorical interpretation, argues that Gregory, compared to Augustine, «is doing [...] neither “exegesis” nor even “interpretation”, exegesis concerning the truth of the matter in question, while interpretation is an «exposition of a truth related in some other way to the text in question» (R. A. Markus, *Signs and Meanings: World and Text in Ancient Christianity*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996, 20). The reason for this, according to Markus, is that «Gregory's allegorical exegesis proceeds from the signified to the signifier» (Markus, *Signs and Meanings*, 60). This explains in part what Markus characterizes as «exegetical free-wheeling» (Markus, *Signs and Meanings*, 50).

17. Stephan Kessler, *Gregor der Große als Exeget. Eine theologische Interpretation der Ezechielhomilien* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia Verlag, 1995), 201-2.

18. Commentators generally agree that Gregory did not write *In I Regum* himself. The consensus for a long time was that his secretary, Claudius, drafted the commentary. There has been a long debate and controversy on whether Gregory revised and made Claudius' work his own. Adalbert de Vogüé, who edited two volumes of this work and translated them into French, was confident, in his introduction to the first volume, that «the *Commentary of Kings* is [...] a fully Gregorian work, while bearing the mark of a collaboration» (Adalbert de Vogüé, *Introduction*, in Gregory the Great, *Commentaire sur le premier livre des Rois*, vol. 1, Sources Chrétiennes, 60). He radically changed his views later on and became confident that the author is not Gregory, but a 12th century monk of the abbey of Cava in Campania, named Peter Divinacello (Adalbert de Vogüé, “L'auteur du commentaire des rois attribué à Saint Grégoire: un moine de Cava?” *Revue Bénédictine* 106, n. 3-4 (1996): 319-331). Although already questioning Gregory's authorship at a time when de Vogüé was still championing it, Francis Clark moderates de Vogüé's reversal of opinion and maintains that, all things considered, the work has a core of Gregorian provenance: «there is in *In I Regum* a substantial core of genuinely Gregorian material, used by the medieval author as the framework on which to construct his own fabrication» (Francis Clark, “Authorship of the Commentary *In I Regum*: Implications of A. de Vogüé's Discovery”. In *Revue Bénédictine* 108, n. 1-2 (1998), 66).

19. See Grazia Rapisarda Lo Menzo, “L'Écriture sainte comme guide de la vie quotidienne dans la correspondance de Grégoire le Grand”. In *Grégoire le Grand. Colloques Internationaux du CNRS, Chantilly 1982*. Paris: CNRS, 1986, 215-225. For Gregory, the Bible is sacred reading, known later as *sacra pagina*, as opposed to *sacra doctrina*. In this sense Gregory is not an exegete, in the sense of a specialist of the biblical text with a sophisticated method for approaching the written document in its materiality and historical significance.

20. There are many accounts of Gregory's use of charity. Among them, see R.A. Markus, *Signs and Meanings. World and Text in Ancient Christianity*, where the author

in order to attract us to the love of Him and our neighbor» (*HEz* I.10.14: 219-21. Translation modified)²¹ or «there are two precepts of charity, to love God and to love one's neighbor. It is through both precepts that the words of the Holy Scripture vivify us» (*HEz* I.7.16: 340-342. Translation modified)²².

In his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, given as sermons in 593²³, and his *Morals on the Book of Job*, given between 579 and 585 and revised as late as 595, Gregory presents himself as an interpreter or even a privileged reader who was highly regarded in his time²⁴. Of interest to Gregory is the correlation between history and mystery. He recognizes the existence of two levels of writing in the Scripture. The historical writer transmits the facts (*per scribentis vocem, Mor., Praefatio, I, 2:24*) and through such a historical writer we have the words of history (*verba historiae, HEz* I.12.15: 222) that provide the human meaning. The author (*auctor*) is the Holy Spirit who inspired (*inspirator*) and dictated (*dictavit*) what was to be written (*scribenda Mor., Praefatio, I, 2:22-4*). Special attention is thus required to take into account the two layers of meaning and intentions (human and divine), what Gregory calls discernment (*discretio, HEz* II.7.1: 1)²⁵. This discernment allows for the adjudication of what belongs to letter and spirit: «For, behold, we read Holy Writ: if we were to understand all things literally we would have lost the virtue of discernment; if we reduce all things to spiritual allegory, we are likewise bound by the stupidity of lack of discernment» (*HEz* I.3.4: 64-7)²⁶.

shows the similarities and differences between Augustine and Gregory (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996, 17ff and 58ff).

21. *Deus per totam nobis sacram Scripturam loquitur, ut nos ad suum et proximi amorem trahat.*

22. *duo sunt praecepta caritatis, dilectio videlicet Dei, et dilectio proximi, per quae utraque nos sacrae Scripturae dicta vivificant.*

23. For a full description of Gregory's *Homilies on Ezekiel*, see Stephan Kessler, *Gregor der Große als Exeget. Eine theologische Interpretation der Ezechielhomilien*.

24. As Beryl Smalley reminds us, «the *Moralia in Job* originated in the monastic *collatio*, the daily conference where the abbot preached and the monks were allowed to ask questions suggested to them by their reading» (Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (New York: Philosophical library, 1952), 32).

The *Homilies on Ezekiel* were also intended to fulfill a specific goal for a particular audience: as homilies they were preached by the pope to an audience in Rome. (See Markus, *Signs and Meanings*, 52ff). See also Michel Banniard, «Iuxta uniuscuiusque qualitatem. L'écriture médiatrice chez Grégoire le Grand», in *Grégoire le Grand. Colloques Internationaux du CNRS*, 477ff.

25. On Gregory's use of *discretio* in general, see among many others: André Cabassut, «Discretion» in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité. Ascétique et mystique. Doctrine et histoire*. Paris: Beauchesne, 1960, vol. 3, 1311-1330; Claude Dagens, *Saint Grégoire. Culture et expérience chrétiennes*. Paris: études augustiniennes, 1977, esp. 117-124; Eloi Dekkers, «Discretio chez saint Benoît et saint Grégoire». *Collectanea Cisterciensia*, 46 (1984), 79-88; and Dom Robert Gillet, «Introduction», in Grégoire le Grand, *Morales sur Job*. Trans. A. de Gaudemaris (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1975), 17ff. These commentators, however, do not focus on the role of *discretio* in the activity of reading the Bible.

26. *Ecce enim sacram Scripturam legimus: Si omnia ad litteram sentiamus, virtutem*

Although, as mentioned above, he distinguishes three senses in the Bible, when it comes to his practice of interpretation, Gregory usually contents himself with a duality, be it a duality between carnal and spiritual sense, between literal and allegorical sense²⁷, between historical and typical sense, or between external and internal understanding. Commenting on Ezekiel and his vision of a scroll, Gregory writes: «For the Book of Holy Writ is written within by allegory, and without by history. Within through spiritual understanding, but without through the plain sense of the letter» (*HEz* I.9.30: 590-2)²⁸. Similarly, paraphrasing the passage that speaks of «stretching out heaven as a curtain» (Psalms 103: 2-3), Gregory asks rhetorically: «What is meant by the name of heaven if not Holy Writ? [...] This is stretched out as a curtain because shaped by the tongue of the flesh through His scribes it is unfolded before our eyes by explanation through the words of learned men» (*HEz* I.9.30: 601-6)²⁹.

Since Gregory refers to three senses, but most of the time makes use of two, these senses seem to mean different things and take a different status. I will focus on the apparently unstable states of the literal and allegorical senses, leaving aside the moral sense, and show that there is both consistency in Gregory's method and justification for it³⁰.

Regarding the allegorical sense, its status changes whether it is part of a duality or a triplicity. In the duality, it is a sense opposed to the literal, whereas when part of the triplicity, allegory is also sometimes what mediates the literal meaning and the moral meaning³¹. As mediation, then, the allegorical

discretionis amisimus; si omnia ad spiritalem allegoriam ducimus, similiter indiscretionis stultitia ligamur.

His conviction is that what is narrated in the Bible evokes a superior reality that intelligence can grasp by virtue of the light of the Holy Spirit. «And it happens that you perceive the words of the Holy Writ to be heavenly if, kindled through the grace of contemplation, you are suspended on heavenly things» (*HEz* I.7.8: 160-2). *Fitque ut Scripturae sacrae verba esse caelestia sentias, si accensus per contemplationis gratiam temetipsum ad caelestia suspendas.* At this level, the narrative—Augustine's *narratio rerum factarum* (see note on Augustine above)—has become mystery.

27. *Scripture in littera dividitur et allegoria* (*HEz* II.3.18: 427).

28. *Liber enim sacri eloquii intus scriptus est per allegoriam, foris per historiam. Intus per spiritalem intellectum, foris autem per sensum litterae simplicem.*

29. *Quid enim caeli nomine nisi sacra Scriptura signatur?... Quod sicut pellis extenditur, quia, per scriptores suos carnis lingua formatum, ante oculos nostros per verba doctorum exponendo displicatur.*

30. In what follows I thus disagree with Markus when he states about Gregory that «little is to be gained by attempting to disentangle the oddly haphazard vocabulary» (Markus, *Gregory and his World*, 46).

31. I cannot examine here the role of allegory in the interpretation of the Bible or the differences between the allegorical sense and the typical sense. Regarding the role of allegory in the interpretation of the Bible, see Gilbert Dahan, *L'exégèse chrétienne de la Bible en Occident médiéval* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1999). Regarding the difference between allegorical and typical senses, see de Lubac, "Typologie et 'allégorisme,'" in E. Ferguson, *Studies in Early Christianity* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1993). I thus

understanding is both a sense and a method of reading, as he suggests in his letter to Leander, a letter that de Lubac, alluding to Descartes, considers Gregory's «discourse of allegorical method»³². Gregory writes that his monk brothers demanded that he «not only unravel the words of the history in allegorical senses (*verba historiae per allegoriarum sensus*)»; they also asked, he continues, that «I would go on to give the allegorical senses the turn of a moral exercise» (*allegoriarum sensus protinus in exercitium moralitatis. Mor., Ad Leandrum, 1:48-9*).

Regarding the literal sense, the fact that allegory is both a sense and a method of reading causes a split: the literal meaning is a foundation (e.g., for the allegorical sense) but has to be read in a certain spirit through allegory, so that literal is what allegory posits as literal. Literal is both the foundation for the allegorical sense and the result of the allegorical method of reading.

Let us review the different senses of the literal meaning. The «literal meaning» is what is conveyed by the *littera*, which in turn can mean two things. Within the *verbum* (or *sermo*) – word or expression – as opposed to *res* – thing – a distinction is made between the *littera* – letter – that pertains to the linguistic aspect, and the *sensus*, which is the meaning. Very often, however, *littera* means not just the letter, but also the intention conveyed by the letter. Gregory speaks of an intention of the letter or a literal intention (*intentionem litterae, Mor., V, XXIII, VII, 14:6-7*). Similarly, he speaks of the words of the literal intention (*verbis litterae, Hez II.10.2: 24*). Gregory makes use of three different senses of the term «literal» (*iuxta litteram*), depending on that with which it is contrasted. These uses were also common to many Fathers of the Church. Literal can mean non-figurative, non-Christian, and the basis for the spiritual sense.

1.1. Literal as opposed to figurative

Since there is already a meaning in the «letters», *littera* most often refers not to the material linguistic sign, but to the intention carried by the words of the text. *Littera* refers to things and constitutes the narrative of the biblical text. *Littera* thus means the story told, so that the literal meaning, as the intention carried by the words, is the historical meaning of what is said: a reference to what really happened. The literal sense is thus also called *historia*, and the two terms are interchangeable. Such a literal sense as *historia* is the first meaning of the text (*prima significatio*). It is also the first exposition (*prima expositio*) for the commentator and the first understanding (*primus intellectus*) for the reader³³. Scripture, according to most Church

use allegory in a generic sense as the transformation of the literal sense into a spiritual sense.

32. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, book 2, vol. 2, 134.

33. Commenting on Gregory, Thomas O'Loughlin writes that «history is the direct

Fathers, essentially narrates facts that really took place, not myths or timeless facts. Divine revelation has taken shape historically and is thus a fact belonging to history. Gregory speaks of a «historical truth» (*veritate historiae*, HEz I.12.1: 1) and it is from this historical truth that interpretation must take its departure.

In Gregory's first use, the literal meaning in the sense of a literal intention is sometimes opposed to the figurative meaning. This general and rather vague sense of literal is at the origin of an implicit agreement among the Church Fathers, which Gregory shares: the biblical text should not be interpreted simplistically or naively, because there are some passages of the Bible that are not to be understood according to the letter, but only figuratively. In Ezekiel, Gregory claims, a passage can be found that «does not seem to be tenable according to the letter» (*teneri posse ad litteram non videtur*, HEz I.12.20: 386. Translation modified), or of which we know that it «is devoid of reason according to the history» (*iuxta historiam a ratione vacare cognoscimus*, HEz I.12.21: 410-1), or «in which there is according to literal reason no historical meaning» (*iuxta rationem litterae nihil historicum sonat*, HEz II.1.3: 88-9). In such passages, the literal meaning in the sense of a literal intention does not make sense³⁴.

Besides this first use of the term «literal» – as opposed to figurative – which has been sanctioned by common usage, the «literal meaning» can be the meaning of the Bible taken without the light provided by the New Testament and thus a non-Christian meaning. This is the second use of «literal».

reading of the text setting out the bare physical facts». O'Loughlin, *Teachers and Code-Breakers*, 184. These equivalences between literal and historical remained common: «literal or historical meaning» (*sensus literalis, vel historicus*), wrote Nicholas of Lyra, among many others (Nicholas of Lyra, *De commendatione Sacrae Scripturae in generali*, *Patrologia Latina* 113, col. 28C). In the words of Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Prima expositio est historica, in qua consideratur prima verborum significatio ad res ipsas de quibus agitur* (Hugh of Saint-Victor, *De scripturis et scriptoribus preanotatiunculae*, *Patrologia Latina* vol. 175, col. 11D). As he will advise his reader, «I do not think that you can be perfectly adept in allegory if you do not take your support on history». *Neque ego te perfecte subtilem posse fieri puto in allegoria, nisi prius fundatus fueris in historia* (Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Eruditionis didascalicae libri septem*, *Patrologia Latina* vol. 176, col. 799C). In accordance with its Greek etymology, as Hugh of Saint-Victor reminds us, where the verb *historeo* means conducting a concrete search or study, *historia* first names the narrative of what the author could have seen. (*Historia dicitur a verbo graeco ἱστορέω, historeo, quod est video et narro. Propterea quod apud veteres nulli licebat scribere res gestas, nisi a se visas, ne falsitas admisceretur veritati peccato scriptoris, plus, aut minus, aut aliter dicentis* (Hugh of Saint Victor, *De scripturis et scriptoribus praenotatiunculae*, *Patrologia Latina* vol. 175, col. 12A).

34. This opposition between literal and figurative will remain. Hugh of Saint-Victor uses the same formulations: «There are some passages in the divine text that cannot be read according to the letter» (*Sunt quaedam loca in divina pagina, quae secundum litteram legi non possunt*. In *Eruditionis didascalicae libri septem*, *Patrologia Latina* vol. 176, col. 801B).

1.2. Literal as non-Christian

Clearly, as a text the Bible can be read in many different ways and with many different goals. Christians, however, do not read the Bible just as a document, as nonbelievers can do, but as a revelation. The particular status of the biblical text – human manifestation through the letter and sacred text through the divine intention – consists in the fact that the words (*verba*) in the Bible referring to things (*res*) are not the whole of the Bible, for the things themselves have a meaning that results from God's work as creator and as one who intended some things to mean other things. The meaning of words, which is carried by the letter and is thus a literal meaning, is determined by human convention. As such, the words (*verba*) constitute a «language of the flesh» (*carnis lingua*, *HEz* I.9.30: 605). By contrast, the meaning of the things (*res*), carrying the divine intention, is the spiritual meaning. Accordingly, there is a consensus among Christian biblical interpreters that, besides the literal meaning, there is in the Bible a spiritual sense that we can uncover by paying special attention to the text under the guidance of the Spirit. «But in Holy Writ also those things which can be accepted according to the history are very frequently to be understood spiritually so that faith in the truth of history is retained and spiritual understanding is derived from the mysteries of allegory» (*HEz* II.1.3: 61-5)³⁵. This opposition between literal and spiritual meaning is based on the warning of Saint Paul that «the letter kills, but the spirit gives life» (2 Corinthians 3:6).

There is thus a necessity for the words in the Bible, but words are necessary as means only. They have to be passed through so they cancel out once their task has been fulfilled. Such a fulfillment takes place when the things have been revealed to the reader, that is, when the spiritual sense has been grasped³⁶. The difficulty is to adjudicate what belongs to the letter and what belongs to the spirit.

35. *In Scriptura autem sacra et ea quae accipi secundum historiam possunt plerumque spiritualiter intelligenda sunt, ut et fides habeatur in veritate historiae, et spiritualis intelligentia capiatur de mysteriis allegoriae.*

36. Hugh of Saint-Victor will later summarize the problem in a concise manner: «[I]n the other writings the philosopher only knows the meaning of words (*verba*); but in a sacred page, the meaning of the things is by far superior to the meaning of words. For the former has been established by use, while the latter has been dictated by nature. The former is human speech, the latter is God's word addressed to humans. The meaning of words is a matter of convention among men, while the meaning of things is natural. Such a meaning results from the creator's operation who wanted some things to be meant by others. *Philosophus in aliis scripturis solam vocum novit significationem; sed in sacra pagina excellentior valde est rerum significatio quam vocum: quia hanc usus instituit, illam natura dictavit* [Col 21A] *Haec hominum vox est, illa Dei ad homines. Significatio vocum est ex placito hominum: significatio rerum naturalis est, et ex operatione Creatoris volentis quaedam res per alias significari* (Hugh of St. Victor, *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris praenotatiunculae*, *Patrologia Latina* vol. 175, col. 20D-21A).

Gregory sees this difficulty in terms of a somewhat subtle interaction between the literal or historical meaning, on the one hand, and the spiritual meaning, on the other. Divine authorship both motivates a spiritual interpretation – we try to understand what God tells us – and legitimates the point of departure for this spiritual interpretation. We interpret what is written, that is, the historical meaning: «because the words of prophecies for the most part narrate facts that took place in history, so that mystical realities are also thereby described, it is appropriate to explain spiritually these same facts that we presented» (*HEz* I.12.20: 382-5. Translation modified)³⁷.

That means that the literal meaning is the foundation of the spiritual meaning, as our starting point; but the literal meaning itself needs some form of foundation for being intelligible. The literal meaning is only «fully meaningful» if the things (*res*), which are part of God's plan, are understood. We thus need a familiarity with the story told in the Bible. For if we do not have that «background», not only would we not know how to interpret passages of the Bible, but we would not even know what these passages relate, report, or convey. We would not know what kind of divine realities such a literal meaning could possibly express. We would only have grammatical functions, words written at random. In order to be meaningful, the literal sense must be read against the background of the history of Scripture.

Thus, knowledge of *historia* is required for the letter of the text to function and be deciphered. This knowledge, however, is of a certain sort. *Historia* must be understood in the light of the New Testament. This use of the term «literal» in the sense of «historical from the perspective of the New Testament» is typically Christian. Sharply diverging from the faithful Jews, who are the second son of the Church³⁸, Christians think that God's revelation took a significant turn with the New Testament so that this second revelation provided new guidance for reading the Old Testament. The Spirit revealed in the New Testament retrospectively cast the Old Testament in a new light: as a preparation and prefiguration of the «New Alliance»³⁹ «The New Testament

37. *Sed quia verba prophetiae sic plerumque narrant historica, ut per haec etiam mystica describantur, oportet ut haec eadem dicta quae protulimus spiritualiter disseramus...* In another passage, Gregory takes as a justification for his allegorical interpretations the fact that the preachers of the Old Testament spoke of heavenly mysteries in an obscure language, through the shadows of allegories (*Praedicatores vero Testamenti veteris quia per allegiarum umbras de caelesti mysterio obscura dicta protulerunt HEz* II.3.17: 420-2).

38. *HEz* 1.3.6: 36.

39. For Christians, borrowing de Lubac's terms, «everything [Scripture] narrates really took place in history, but the narrative of what happened does not have its whole aim in itself; all of this must still be accomplished and must be really accomplished in us every day through the mystery of this spiritual intelligence» (de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, book 1, vol. 1, 308). Quoting Origen, de Lubac writes that «understanding the Bible “spiritualiter” or understanding it “evangelico sensu” is one and the same» (de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, book 1, vol. 1, 310). Or, as Gregory puts it, «we who came to faith through the grace of God, did not learn the Gospel through the Law [the old alliance of the

has manifested what the Old Testament indicated» (*quod designavit Testamentum Vetus, hoc Testamentum Novum exhibuit, HEz I.6.15: 277-8*. Translation modified), or in another formulation: «the New Testament is the explanation of the Old Testament» (*expositio Testamenti Veteris, Testamentum Novum (HEz I.6.15: 325*. Translation modified). In his Homilies on Ezekiel, commenting on the fact that Ezekiel saw a wheel inside the wheel, Gregory sees this wheel inside the wheel as an allegory of the place of the New Testament within the Old Testament. The wheel inside the wheel – the New Testament reinterpreting the Old – shows allegorically that reading the Bible requires a conversion: interpreters have to turn their soul to the mystery of Christ. The allegorical interpretation that follows from such a conversion – seeing the Old Testament as allegories of the New – does provide a conversion of both the letter and the soul. It is Jesus and his revelation that give the Old Testament its meaning. This conversion to Christ, permitted by the New Testament, in turn allows the conversion of the reader. By virtue of the allegorical interpretation, the reader discovers a new understanding, the truth of the Word in the letter. «Allegory builds up faith», says Gregory in his homilies on the gospels. *Sed quia nonnumquam allegoria fidem aedificat (HEv 2, 40, 1, PL 76, 1302AB)*. Allegory edifies faith in the sense that allegory says what is to be believed – *quid credas allegoria*, as Augustine of Dacia said – and what is to be believed is essentially the message of charity revealed by the New Testament.

The *littera* is thus pre-determined by its background, to the extent that a correct interpretation cannot dispense with the knowledge of such a background. The *littera* is also over-determined, to the extent that the background not only pre-determines interpretations, but also forbids other possible interpretations and narrows the possible choices to what the background allows. Such an over-determination is best manifested by the canonic example of Jerusalem. The name «Jerusalem» was already analyzed by Jerome in his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, and Nicholas of Lyra (13th-14th century), several centuries after Gregory, re-explains it as follows: «According to its literal meaning it [the word “Jerusalem”] means a given city which was before the capital of the Judea kingdom; it was founded by Melchisedec, then expanded and fortified by Solomon»⁴⁰. The literal meaning of any word is determined by what that word can designate in the corpus of the books of the Bible and in accordance with what those books say. Such designation in the case of Jerusalem would include, as manifested by Nicholas of Lyra’s analysis,

Old testament]; we learn the Law through the Holy Gospel» (*[N]os ad fidem Domino largiente venientes, non per legem Evangelium, sed per sanctum Evangelium legem didicimus. HEz I.6.11: 214-6*. Translation modified).

40. *[Jerusalem] quae secundum sensum litteralem significat quandam civitatem, quae fuit quondam metropolis in regno Judaeae, quae primo fuit fundata a Melchisedech, postea per Salomonem dilata et fortificata* (Nicholas of Lyra, *De commendatione sacrae Scripturae in generali, Patrologia Latina* vol. 113, col. 28D).

the «capital of Judea», «founded by Melchisedec», «expanded and fortified by Solomon». Later, Hugh of Saint Victor will even give the list of the books to read in order to understand the literal meaning: *Genesis, Exodus, Josue, Judges and Kings, Paralipomena*; in the New Testament, one has to read the four *Gospels* and the *Acts of the Apostles*. Hugh ends by saying: «Such are the eleven books which seem to me to concern particularly history, besides those that we properly call “historiographic”»⁴¹.

It is certainly possible to focus exclusively on «the letter in the story» (*in historia litteram*) and to take the words of history literally (*verba... historiae iuxta litteram, Mor., Ad Leandrum, 4:163-4*). Such a decision, however, would amount to ignoring the revelation offered by the New Testament, a revelation that manifested «the spirit through the meanings of the letter» (*per significationem litterae spiritum*) (CCL 142, I, III, 4: 69-70). Thus, by confining oneself to the Old Testament, as do faithful Jews, one embraces the old letter that was once the way God spoke to his people; but that, after the New Testament, turns out to be a meaning not enlightened by the Spirit of the New Alliance. Remaining in the revelation of the Old Testament, the people «ignoring the faith in the Trinity, only possessed the decalogue in the Law» (*solum Decalogum tenebat in lege, fidem Trinitatis nesciens, HEz II.4.9: 299*). Seen from the point of view of the New Testament, such a meaning is, thus, «literal» and, as such, «a letter that kills». In Gregory’s terms, «all that happened, as we know, when the Jewish people understood the words of God only according to the letter which kills, whereas the converted gentility penetrated the divine words through the spirit that vivifies»⁴².

1.3. Literal as the foundation of the spiritual sense

Besides these two senses of «literal» – literal as opposed to figurative and literal as non-Christian – there is also a third, technical use. In Gregory, as

41. *Hi undecim magis ad historiam pertinere mihi videntur, exceptis his quos historiographos proprie appellamus* (Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Eruditionis didascalicae libri septem, Patrologia Latina* vol. 176, col. 801A). In the name of the exegetical principle that the New Testament is, one can retrospectively level a charge of adulteration of the letter against the interpretations of the Old Testament that did not see the foretelling of Christ’s work, as in the following passage where Nicholas of Lyra recommends one to have recourse to Hebrew manuscripts in order to find the truth of the letter in the Old testament: «On this point one has to be very suspicious about the passages of the Old Testament which refer to Christ’s divinity and its consequences. For the Jews have adulterated some of those passages in order to defend their mistake» (*In hoc tamen valde cavendum est, quantum ad locos Scripturae Veteris Testamenti, qui de deitate Christi ac de consequentibus ad hoc loquuntur: quorum aliquos Judaei [Col 30B] corruerunt ad defensionem sui erroris* (Nicholas of Lyra, *De intentione auctoris et modo procedendi, Patrologia Latina* vol. 113, col. 29D-30B).

42. *Quod videlicet gestum est, cum verba Dei, et Judaeorum populus ad solam litteram quae occidit acciperet, et conversa gentilitas per spiritum qui vivificat penetrare* (*Mor., III, XI, XVI, 25:33-36*. Translation modified).

well as in other Church Fathers, the literal meaning is one of the three senses of the biblical text Christian exegetes have to bring to the fore, the other senses usually being the allegorical or typical and the moral or contemplative.

As a component of the three senses, the literal meaning constitutes the basis for the others. When Gregory uses a duality of senses, the spiritual sense is sometimes used generically as covering the other, non-literal senses (moral and allegorical). Because of this, the pair «literal-spiritual» no longer names an opposition, as in the second use of the term where «literal» means «non-Christian», but an interaction: the literal meaning is the foundation for the spiritual meaning and thus belongs to it⁴³. As the *Morals on the Book of Job* states it, which was quoted at the beginning: «For first, we lay the historical foundations» (*Mor., Ad Leandrum*, 3:110-111). The act of laying the literal sense (*Primum quidem fundamenta historiae ponimus*) is in Gregory's text part of a series of metaphors linked to the construction of a building⁴⁴. The literal meaning is thus at the foundation of the edifice. The act of laying (*ponimus*) the literal meaning, however, also suggests that the literal meaning, for being a foundation, is put at the foundation, in which case the literal meaning is also the result of the act of laying a foundation.

This view that the literal meaning is put at the foundation is confirmed by another line of metaphors, also linked to building. In his commentary on the «Song of songs», Gregory writes: «allegory is a kind of machine (*quandam machinam*) which allows the soul, separated from God by a great distance, to be lifted up to him»⁴⁵. Allegory is a machine and the way the machine works is by reading the text in a certain way. In these metaphors – the construction of a building where the literal meaning «is put» at the foundation, and the engineering of a machine for reaching a divine meaning – it appears that the literal meaning (which is at the foundation of the building and thus – one might think – the first layer) itself turns out to be the object of an antecedent

43. There are passages in which the exegetical principle of charity can justify downplaying the literal meaning and engaging in allegorical interpretations, as Gregory candidly acknowledges in *Morals on the Book of Job*: «I shall be found often therein to put rather in the background the order of exposition, and to employ myself at greater length upon the wide field of contemplation and of moral instruction» (*unde et in eo saepe quasi postponere ordinem expositionis invenior, et paulo diutius contemplationis latitudini ac moralitatis insudo. Mor., Ad Leandrum*, 2:90-2).

44. *Nam primum quidem fundamenta historiae ponimus; deinde per significationem typicam in arcem fidei fabricam mentis erigimus; ad extremum quoque per moralitatis gratiam, quasi superducto aedificum colore vestimus.*

45. *Allegoria enim animae longe a deo positae quasi quandam machinam facit, ut per illam levetur ad deum. In canticum canticorum. Corpus Christianorum vol.144, 2:14-15.* Quoted by Grover Zinn, «Exegesis and Spirituality in the Writings of Gregory the Great», in John Cavadini (ed.), *Gregory the Great: A Symposium*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 170. Also quoted in R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 47. Markus translates *machina* by pulley because of the movement of the soul being lifted up toward God (*Signs and meanings*, 50).

act of building: the literal meaning has rather been «engineered» and placed at the foundation. Allegory as a method of reading is a machine of meaning⁴⁶.

Thus, while saying that the building has to be firmly set on the historical meaning, Gregory also says that the firm foundation of the historical and moral senses is provided by the allegorical sense. The literal meaning is thus what supports the building and what has been engineered for fulfilling such a function. This dual place of the literal meaning explains the dual function of the allegorical reading, which can be, then, also the first sense as the method for reading. When Gregory conveys the link between literal and spiritual meaning through the metaphors of «root» and «marrow», the precedence can be granted to the literal meaning, which works as a root in the heart of listeners (*in corda audientium iuxta litteram verbi radicem*) and will produce the «fruits» of the spiritual meaning (*spiritalis fructus*, HEz II.1.1: 36-7). Alternatively, the spiritual meaning is given precedence as a spiritual marrow hidden in the letter (*latens in littera spiritalis medulla*, HEz II.10.2: 26)⁴⁷.

What is striking in this use of literal – literal as the basis for the spiritual meaning – as well as in the second sense – literal as opposed to Christian – is that they are both defined extrinsically. The latter use is defined negatively: literal means «not guided by the spirit». The former use is defined retrospectively: literal means what the spiritual sense takes as its foundation. In both cases, to use a contemporary expression, literal is a category of interpretation in the sense that it is a qualification given to a certain meaning once an interpretation has already taken hold of the text. Gregory «equates» the literal meaning with a non-Christian meaning, in the second use of the term «literal», and he «takes» the literal meaning as the foundation for the spiritual meaning, in the third use of the term «literal»⁴⁸.

46. Although he does not make reference to Gregory, Yves Delègue uses a Gregorian formula in the title of his book *Les machines du sens: Fragments d'une sémiologie médiévale*, which presents texts by Hugh of St-Victor, Thomas Aquinas, and Nicholas of Lyra (Paris: Editions des Cendres, 1987).

47. This precedence of the allegorical meaning is explicitly stated in *In I Regum*: «Because as far as the salvation of the believers is concerned faith comes before the works, we put forward the typological interpretation as a solid foundation; the construction of all the works in moral and historical interpretation is based upon it or follows it» (*Sed et, quia in salute fidelium fides operibus prior est, typicam significationem uelut solidum fundamentum praemittimus, cui totius suscepti operis fabrica in morali uel historica expositione supponatur uel subsequatur, In lib. I Reg., prologus 8, CCL 144, 54*). This statement in *In I Regum* is more explicit than what we find in the *Homilies on Ezechiel* or the *Morals on Job*. Although I do not want to make any claim regarding the authenticity or absence thereof of *In I Regum*, this statement remains compatible with the works of certain origin and cannot by itself offer an argument against the authenticity of the work.

48. One of the solutions will be to distinguish, as the humanist Jacques Lefèvre does, two literal meanings: «For I believe that there is a twofold literal meaning: one, improperly so called, is the meaning of the blind and the short sighted who understand divine realities in a wholly carnal manner and submit them to change; the other meaning, the true one, is the meaning for those who are enlightened by the Spirit» (Jacques Lefèvre, quoted in de Lubac, vol. 2, part 2, 413).

These equivalences («equated with non Christian», in the first case, and «equated with the historical meaning», in the second case, where the literal meaning is the foundation of the spiritual) are clearly interpretive decisions and, I submit, part of a hermeneutic judgment Gregory sometimes characterizes as *discretio*. Let us recall Gregory's adage: «if we were to understand all things literally we would have lost the virtue of discernment; if we reduce all things to spiritual allegory, we are likewise bound by the stupidity of lack of discernment» (*HEz* I.3.4: 64-7)⁴⁹.

Such an hermeneutic decision to allocate what pertains to the literal or the spiritual levels is not directly legitimated in the text of the Bible: neither the literal nor the spiritual meaning is simply extracted from the text, as my review of the three senses of «literal» indicates. In addition, the virtue of *discretio* itself is not in the text, even if it was shaped by reading the Bible. At this point, it could be argued that the qualification of «literal» is nothing else than a retrospective qualification made from what is seen as the spiritual meaning. The spiritual meaning would then arise from the encounter of the biblical text and the background of those (Christians in Gregory's case) who read it «in that particular spirit». It would be an «extra meaning», as Thomas O'Loughlin calls it, which accompanies what the text says. Since «the justification for the existence of this “extra” lay not in the nature of the text as text», it is tempting to conclude with O'Loughlin that, for Gregory, the justification of the spiritual meaning lies «in the basic religious assumptions held by those engaged in reading the text» and that the need for «“additional meanings” arose out of the actual encounter of reading the text with their assumptions about what the text they were reading should mean»⁵⁰.

O'Loughlin seems to believe that if the spiritual meaning is not in the text, then it can only be a product of the assumptions of the readers. It is my contention that, for Gregory, this is a false dichotomy. The discernment (*discretio*) Gregory praises is precisely what allows us to find a middle way between a spiritual meaning given in its self-identity in the text (what he denies) and a spiritual meaning that is a mere projection of the readers' assumptions (what he rejects). Gregory solves the apparent contradiction between a foundational and an engineered literal meaning by introducing the role of the reader and his background.

2. The justification: cooperation between text and reader

As we saw, Gregory's hermeneutic position is difficult to assess given that he, at times, is quite traditional in his method of reading the Bible, and at other times makes startling statements; for example, regarding the literal meaning as both a foundation and a product, or regarding the place of allegorical

49. See note 25 above on *discretio*.

50. Thomas O'Loughlin, *Teachers and Code-Breakers*, 1998, 157.

understanding as both a sense founded upon the literal meaning and a method of reading. Gregory summarizes these controversial ideas in his famous statement that *divina eloquia cum legente crescunt*. While there is a consensus on the fact that this statement means a subjective growth of the reader, to the extent that readers can see more or less in the text given what they can understand, there is strong disagreement on what an objective growth, if anything, could mean, the objective growth being the growth of the text itself. Most commentators understand the objective growth of the biblical text as its capacity to respond to readers at whatever level readers approach the text, with naïveté or sophistication. Such an objective growth, however, is only metaphorical and amounts to the subjective growth of readers, only with an emphasis on the supple character of the text.

As we have already seen, however, Gregory is more audacious. Those who recognize that he means more by growth of the text than a metaphor fall into two camps: those who dismiss that view and those who embrace it. Among those who dismiss the objective growth in a non-metaphorical sense, we find Markus who holds that «Gregory's sense of the inexhaustible riches of the scriptures encouraged him to roam at ease among its meanings. *The* meaning of a text was as much the creation of its reader as it was determined by the text»⁵¹, so that «his own homilistic practice illustrates the unlimited freedom from textual restraint to which he felt entitled of his exegesis»⁵². As a consequence Markus subscribes to Meyvaert's view that Gregory's works represent «a grand exercise in the use of the imagination»⁵³. Others wholeheartedly embrace the idea of the growth of the text in a non-metaphorical sense: Bori shows that such an objective growth was already present and thus prepared in previous commentators, even if these commentators were not as explicit as Gregory: «Gregory the Great does not appear as responsible for a rupture [with the tradition], but as the clear end point of a coherent and substantially unified evolution»⁵⁴.

The problem with Markus' assessment is that Gregory is fairly explicit about what he means and, as I have shown so far, consistent. The principle of charity in interpretation – not in the sense of the Christian charity – that says that we should grant to an author at least as much as we can find should lead us to be more charitable to Gregory than Markus is. The difficulty with Bori's position is twofold. First, he essentially offers an argument for the stronger objective growth based on its compatibility with previous authors who were not as explicit. Weaker versions do not explain the arising of a stronger version. Secondly, and more troubling, Bori puts together statements by Gregory from different works, which reinforce each other, but without considering the context from which these passages are taken and without, for example, considering the fact that one of these works, *In I Regum*, is at best of

51. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, 44.

52. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, 45.

53. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, 45.

54. Bori, *L'interpretazione infinita*, 71.

Gregorian inspiration. He relies heavily on the statement from *In I Regum* that we quoted and which says, «contemplation is not only the power through which the scripture itself is examined once it has been composed. Contemplation is also the power through which the scripture, had it not been composed, would be composed»

We do not have to make such a radical choice between an objective growth produced by the imagination, as Markus believes, and the real organic growth of the text so that the reader has precedence over the text of the Bible and can cause not only the meaning of the text to grow but also the materiality of the text, as Bori has the inclination to believe. For the activism of the reader is somehow tempered by the motivation of such an activism: it is in order to be faithful to the spirit of what is said. As Zinn points out, «The “construct” results from a process which interprets the sacred text for the edification of Gregory’s audience, listeners and readers»⁵⁵. Gregory justifies his «hermeneutic engineering» by showing the necessary cooperation that takes place between text and reader⁵⁶.

In his *Homilies on Ezekiel*, Gregory explains the interaction between biblical text and readers by borrowing Ezekiel’s vision of the Chariot of Yahweh⁵⁷. The chariot is made of four creatures that Gregory, after the Church Fathers, understands as the four evangelists. The four wheels are understood as an allegory for Scripture, a metaphor Bori believes⁵⁸ specific to Gregory. Gregory writes:

But what does a wheel signify, if not Holy Writ, which rolls from every direction to the mind of hearers, and is retained by no snag of error from the way of its preaching? It rolls from every direction because it proceeds straight and humble amid diversity and prosperity alike. For the circle of its precepts is now above, now below, those which are spoken spiritually to the more perfect, and accord with the letter for the

55. Zinn, “Exegesis and Spirituality in the Writings of Gregory the Great”, in John Cavadini, *Gregory the Great*, 172.

56. The primary goal of reading the Bible has, as for early Christian interpreters, always been more than an attempt to understand what is said. It is also supposed to be a contribution to God’s glory. For one to witness God’s presence, one has first to be touched by God’s word. In such a framework, reading the Bible is thus one of the most efficient ways to access the divine intention and thereby to become a witness. Reading is thus essentially an exercise or training in order to let oneself be transformed by the reading so that one’s own ways of thinking regarding the Church, Christ, or the afterlife can be reevaluated and deepened. In this sense, there has always been a pragmatic aspect in the reading of the Bible as a moral exercise where one’s own ethical framework or *habitus*, in the sense of a set way of life, is questioned. As mentioned above, Gregory is clearly motivated by such a moral concern. He essentially writes for an audience composed of his monk brothers or future preachers. In the text upon which he comments, it is for their sake that he brings to the fore a meaning which, lying beyond the letter, will help them or will enlighten them in their task of preaching.

57. Bori (*L’interpretazione infinita*) has offered an excellent reading of Gregory’s allegorical reading, to which I in large part subscribe.

58. Bori, *L’interpretazione infinita*, 32.

feeble, and those which little children understand literally, learned men lift above through spiritual intelligence (*HEz* I.6.2: 17-25)⁵⁹.

The movement of the biblical word is infallible and unstoppable as it moves forward toward its proclamation. However, the might of the word depends on its adaptability to those addressed by it. The wheels rise or go down to the ground depending on the receptivity of the listeners or readers. The movement of the word is thus circular – forward and upward like a wheel – and not transitive – from one point to another on a straight line. It leads to contemplation those who are able to understand the sense at this level and, because it moves forward and upward, comes back to the humble, so that the spiritual sense gained by the learned can be shared. This sharing is precisely the purpose of preachers, as it was the evangelists' goal.

Reading the Bible is thus not only an intellectual act of appropriating the sense. It is also a commitment to proclamation: preachers who have gained a superior understanding must come back in order to enlighten others: «the living creatures move forward for the utility of neighbors» (*vadunt ergo animalia ad utilitatem proximi*, *HEz* I.7.15: 328-9. Translation modified), in the sense that readers, who become better through their reading, become walking men: «there are some people who progress to a point where they know how to dispense appropriately the earthly goods they receive, how to apply themselves to the works of mercy, and assist those who are oppressed. These people are walking, given that they apply themselves to the utility of neighbor» (*HEz* I.7.15: 309-311. Translation modified)⁶⁰.

Ezekiel writes: «And when the living creatures went the wheels also went together by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth the wheels also were lifted up with them» (1:19). Here is Gregory's comment:

because divine words grow with the reader, for the deeper each understands them the deeper they penetrate into him [...] because if the minds of the readers have not attained the heights, divine words, as if in the depths, lie there not understood (*HEz* I.7.8: 145-9)⁶¹.

59. *Quid autem rota, nisi sacram Scripturam signat, quae ex omni parte ad auditorum mentes voluitur et nullo erroris angulo a praedicationis suae via retinetur? Ex omni autem parte voluitur, quia inter adversa et prospera et recte et humiliter incedit. Circulus quippe praeceptorum illius modo sursum, modo deorsum est, quae perfectioribus spiritualiter dicuntur, infirmis iuxta litteram congruunt, et ipsa quae parvuli iuxta litteram intellegunt, docti viri per spiritalem intelligentiam in altum ducunt.*

60. *Sunt autem quidam qui usque ad hoc proficiunt, ut terrena quae accipiunt bene dispensare noverint, misericordiae operibus intendant, oppressis subveniant [...] Hi videlicet vadunt, in eo quod se ad proximi utilitatem tendunt.* On Gregory's views on the role of the preacher and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, see Markus, *Signs and Meanings*, 54. See also R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World*, 23ff., as well as Dagens, *Saint Grégoire*, 312.

61. *quia divina eloquia cum legente crescunt, nam tanto illa quisque altius intellegit, quanto in eis altius intendit [...] quia nisi legentium mentes ad alta profecerint, divina dicta, velut in imis, non intellecta iacent.*

The wheel is the Scripture and the living creatures, both the evangelists and all readers who are made perfect by the Gospels⁶², are the authors of the Scripture. In Ezekiel's vision as understood by Gregory, there is a harmony between the movement of the living creatures and the movement of the Scripture, but there is no dependence. The text grows not only through its authors, but also through the readers. The text grows with the one who reads it. Glossing the fact that the wheels «followed» the living creature, Gregory writes:

It is well said of these same wheels: «and followed it». For the reader's spirit, if he there seeks moral or historical understanding, the moral sense of the history follows him. If he seeks figurative knowledge, allusive speech is soon recognized. If contemplative, the wheels forthwith almost take wing and are suspended in the air because heavenly understanding of Holy Writ is laid bare in words...The wheels follow the spirit because the words of Holy Writ, as has often been said already, grow through the intellect according to the perception of the reader (*HEz* I.7.9: 171-180. Translation modified)⁶³.

One could entertain both a weaker and stronger reading of Gregory's claim. In the weaker reading, which is the most common among commentators, the growth of the text can be understood as a metaphor for the subjective growth of the reader when reading the Bible. The soul is enriched as it listens to the word of God, so that the text has reached its goal. In this sense of being successful, the text grows as its meaning has been unfolded or exerted its effect on readers. As such a subjective growth, the text adapts to the readers: simple people will rejoice in the story and advanced readers will reach a deeper understanding. They take from the text what their intelligence and interests allow them to take. That the text of the Bible follows the spirit of the readers only means in this reading such an adaptation of the Scripture to the level of the readers. As Markus summarizes Gregory's statement, «the scriptures contain what the reader finds in them»⁶⁴.

While Gregory certainly has this understanding in mind, he also has a much more radical, non-metaphorical view. In this «stronger» version, the text grows in the process of reading insofar as the text expands and unfolds, gains its existence as biblical text when readers make use of it. Bori speaks of a

62. *Nec immerito per evangelistas quatuor perfectorum omnium numerus exprimitur, quia omnes qui in Ecclesia modo perfecti sunt perfectionis suae rectitudinem per eorum Evangelium didicerunt* (*HEz* I.2.18: 348-351). See also: *Quia vero per quatuor animalia etiam perfectos omnes significari diximus* (*HEz* I.6.11: 203-4).

63. *Bene autem de eisdem rotis dicitur: Sequentes eum. Legentis enim spiritus, si quid in eis scire morale aut historicum quaerit, sensus hunc moralis historiae sequitur. Si quid typicum, mox figurata locutio agnoscitur. Si quid contemplativum, statim rotae quasi pennas accipiunt et in aere suspenduntur, quia in verbis sacri eloquii intellegentia caelestis aperitur... Rotae enim spiritum sequuntur, quia verba sacri eloquii, ut saepe iam dictum est, iuxta sensum legentium per intellectum crescunt.*

64. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World*, 43.

«simultaneous growth» of the reader and the text⁶⁵. Gregory's insistence that the spirit of the readers leads the movement of the Scripture indicates that there is a form of cooperation between text and readers that takes place. This is in my view the originality of Gregory.

Cooperation means more than an active participation in the text or the acceptance of bringing the text to life⁶⁶. It means a mutual enrichment. The text, for Gregory, is «life or fire» (*HEz* II.10.1: 14-8). The cooperation of the reader consists in letting the life or fire spring from the text by opening one's mind to the possibility that the text can transform the reader. «Thus indeed the words are of the sacred Scripture. They are held cold in the story told by the letter. But if someone were to strike those words, with the intelligence focused and with the inspiration of God, fire would spring forth from their mysterious meanings, so that now the heart is inflamed spiritually while before it remained cold when hearing those words according to the letter» (*HEz* II.10.1: 14-8. Translation modified)⁶⁷.

Such a strong version, in which cooperation is truly mutual, gives readers power over the text. Although readers clearly do not write the biblical text, they can share in the authorship when they contribute to the unfolding and expansion of the text. We subscribe to Bori's assessment that the growth in question «is not only a spiritual progress measured according to Scripture. We also have here, at least according to Gregory, an objective growth and a forward movement of the sacred text that goes with the progress of the one who reads it: it is a "virtus sacri eloquii"»⁶⁸. Commenting on Ezekiel's vision, Gregory insists that the movement of the wheels does not obey the movement of the living creatures, but is in synchrony with them. The same spirit animates the living creatures and the wheels. Allegorically it means that the power of the spirit is both in the Scriptures and the reader. This common presence is precisely what produces the act of reading. Within the text, there is thus an objective might or power dependent upon the act of reading for increasing.

65. Bori, *L'interpretazione infinita*, 59ff.

66. Umberto Eco has used the expression «cooperation» in the weaker sense where the text sometimes asks for the involvement of readers, that they make guesses or complete part of the plot (*Lector in Fabula*. Milan: Bompiani, 1979).

67. *Sic etenim, sic verba sunt sacri eloquii, quae quidem per narrationem litterae frigida tenentur, sed si quis haec, aspirante Domino, intento intellectu pulsaverit, de mysticis eius sensibus ignem producit, ut in eis verbis post animus spiritaliter ardeat, quae prius per litteram ipse quoque frigidus audiebat*. Besides a fire that can kindle us, the text is also a way for us to measure our commitment as Christians. Commenting on Ezekiel's mention of a reed, Gregory understands the reed as the Scripture: «this reed is said to be a measuring reed, for we measure through the Scripture every action of our life in order to see either how much we have progressed or how far we fall short of perfection» (*HEz* II.2.7: 166-9. Translation modified). Because it is a measuring device, the Scripture tells us the extent of our commitment, and thereby challenges us, so that «the life of the listeners is measured through the hand of the writers» (*per manus scribentium vita mensuratur auditorum*, *HEz* II.2.7: 173. Translation modified).

68. Bori, *L'interpretazione infinita*, 59.

The reader is moved by this power, recognizes the power of the text, and creatively contributes to this power. One could say that the act of reading is the initial impetus for the wheels' movement, which leads the word to its proclamation through predication: the goal of reading is predication, but the movement has to be sustained. This sustained movement is only possible through a mutual contribution of both the text and the reader. Being addressed and moved by the text, the reader in turn carries the text further. Being read, the text grows or is increased: «when a reading of the holy scripture is sought, it is found at the measure of what becomes of the person by whom it is sought» (*quaesita sacra lectio talis invenitur, qualis et fit ipse, a quo quaeritur*) (HEz I.7.16: 332-3. Translation modified). The reading links the text to what the reader becomes by virtue of reading it. Still, since Gregory obviously does not want the Bible to be a product for personal and convenient consumption, what governs such cooperation between text and reader so that text and reader are mutually dependent on each other?

When readers ponder the biblical text, if their reading is nurtured by charity, they have the guarantee that continuity exists between the text to be interpreted and the re-inscription of such a text in their living context. In other words, the principle of charity allows for a recontextualization of the Scripture: a reading of the letter (*littera*) as a narrative (*narratio*) that tells us historical facts (*historia*), narrating facts and events whose meaning is to be configured in the light of the message of charity. For the letter refers not only to past words, but also to future words, beyond the limits of the sacred history included in the biblical canon. For every biblical word also addresses the present of those who read it and who find there a pre-figuration of their own existence. To that extent, the biblical context includes all the possible books, all the questions the reader asks the Bible. Charity as a hermeneutic principle amounts to recognizing in readers a shared authorship of the biblical text. Reading is now much more than an interpretation: the text of the Bible itself grows. Because it is the same spirit which informs text and reader, the different recontextualizations expand the text, in the sense that they make the text larger, broader, and richer: the divine words «literally» grow with the reader (*divina eloquia cum legente crescunt*, HEz I.7.8: 145)⁶⁹. For the same reason, a recontextualization of the text does not amount to disfiguring it: the text has just grown larger.

The cooperation between text and readers under the form of a shared authorship that makes the text grow has, as a consequence, the fact that interpretation is a «machine of meaning», engineering and producing what the text says. Flowing naturally from the productivity of interpretation, Gregory seems to give his assent wholeheartedly to the possibility of a multiplicity or infinity of valid interpretations.

69. See also: *quia igitur dicta sacri eloquii cum legentium spiritu excrescunt* (HEz I.7.10: 244-5).

In the interpretation of sacred scripture one need reject nothing that is not opposed to sound faith. For, as from one piece of gold, some fashion necklaces, others rings, and others bracelets, so from the one knowledge of sacred scripture various exegetes through innumerable interpretations compose various ornaments which all however contribute to the splendor of the heavenly spouse⁷⁰.

He also accepts that a misunderstanding can be claimed to be «right», if it contributes to an increase of charity:

But if seeking the virtue in the divine words he has understood them differently from him by whom they were proffered, albeit he seeks the edification of charity beneath another's meaning, the words which he reports are the Lord's, because God speaks to

70. in intellectu sacrae scripturae respui non debet, quicquid sanae fidei non resistit. Sicut enim ex uno auro alii murenas, alii anulos, alii dextralia ad ornamentum faciunt, ita ex una scripturae sacrae scientia expositores quique per innumeros intellectus quasi varia ornamenta componunt, quae tamen omnia ad decorem caelestis sponsae proficiunt (S. Gregorii Magni Registrum Epistularum, CCL 140, III, 62:41-6).

The view that the interpretation of the Holy Scripture is infinite was accepted during the Middle Ages. However, this infinity has been redefined. There are many reasons for such a shift in hermeneutics that cannot be examined here. One of them is that the Bible becomes an object of academic interest in the different schools. Scholars look at the text, and more and more believe that, as Kenneth Hagen puts it, «what the Holy Spirit intended to say is there in Scripture, and all the levels of meaning are in the letter of the text, not in some other levels of meaning» (Kenneth Hagen, "The History of the Scripture in the church", in Kenneth Hagen, Daniel Harrington, Grant Osborne, and Joseph Burgess, *The Bible in the Churches. How Different Christians Interpret the Scriptures* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 9.) Such a change in the interest of scholars caused a change in how the method of reading the Bible has to be utilized. From *sacra pagina* (the sacred page) there is a shift in theology to *sacra doctrina* (sacred doctrine). It is emphasized more and more that readers can only have a specific place within the circle of reading, in accordance with their capacity and their role. The Catholic Church, for example, has progressively seen itself as the only one able to cover the whole circle of interpretation because, more and more, the wheel has been seen as the Church's reading. «Consequently, so that you can safely judge the letter, do not rely on your own intelligence», Hugh of Saint Victor advises his reader. «This access [to the letter] should be asked from the doctors and the wise. Relying on the authority of the sacred Fathers and on the testimonies of the Scriptures, they can both provide you with such an access and open it to you as far as it is necessary» (*Ut ergo secure possis iudicare litteram, non de tuo sensu praesumere [...] a doctoribus et sapientibus haec introductio quaerenda est quae et auctoritatibus sanctorum Patrum, et testimoniis Scripturarum, eam tibi, prout opus est, et facere, et aperire possint* (Hugh of Saint Victor, *Eruditionis didascalicae libri septem, Patrologia Latina* vol. 176, col. 804D-805A). In a famous formula, Vincent of Lerins writes: «that your treatment not your subject, your manner not your matter may be new» (*cum dicas nove, non dicas nova, The Commonitorium of Vincentius of Lerins* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 22, 5, 88).

Some recent trends in theology, illustrated by Urs von Balthasar among others, have resisted these late moves and tried to reconnect with some of the insights of the early Fathers of the Church. Similarly, the revival of hermeneutics with Heidegger and especially Gadamer, structuralism, and contemporary literary theory, has reopened the debate both about the status of the literal meaning and about the contribution of readers to the text.

us through the whole of scripture solely in order to attract us to the love of Him and our neighbor⁷¹.

Because there is an intrinsic instability in the meaning of the text due to the interaction of the literal and the spiritual levels and because readers come to the text with their background, the background of Christians can take precedence over the meaning sought. Since the text follows the reader, as the image of the wheel following the living creatures indicates, what matters is what readers do with the text⁷².

Gregory not only explains his method of interpretation, but also justifies it and makes a case for it both at the specific level of a Christian reading and at the general level of the necessity of a background. Regarding his specific way of interpreting the Bible from a Christian background under the auspices of charity, Gregory shows that such a reading has the advantage of accounting for the novelty of the New Testament. For, if the Bible is read only in following the old Law, the New Testament is not fully integrated as a New Alliance. Reading the Bible while recognizing the novelty of the New Testament means acknowledging that the New Testament retrospectively leads us to see that what was before an integral whole (the Old Testament) was in fact a first stage – a literal meaning – that can now be read (and has to be) as the carrier of another meaning. Although such a view amounts to recognizing that the *littera* is a retrospective qualification (from the point of view of the New Testament), it is precisely what the New Testament – understood as a revelation of a New Alliance – demands. In other words, the hermeneutic decision to see the *littera* as in need of assistance derives from the very content of the New Testament. It is thus the New Testament that justifies putting the allegorical sense as a foundation, since allegorical understanding is not only one among different

71. *Nam si in verbis Dominicis virtutem requirens, ipse aliter quam is per quem prolata sunt senserit, etiamsi sub intellectu alio aedificationem caritatis requirat, Domini sunt verba quae narrat, quia ad hoc solum Deus per totam nobis sacram Scripturam loquitur, ut nos ad suum et proximi amorem trahat* (HEz I.10.14: 216-21). This is in echo to Augustine for whom making a mistake that contributes to the edification of charity is like leaving the road by mistake during a trip and cutting across fields to reach the point where the road led (Saint Augustine, *Doctrina Christiana*, 1, 35-36, 39-41).

72. As already mentioned, we find such a view on the cooperation between text and reader expressed even more clearly in *In I Regum*: «For contemplation is not only the power through which the scripture itself is examined once it has been composed. Contemplation is also the power through which the scripture, had it not been composed, would be composed». *Contemplatio enim virtus est, non solum per quam ipsa scriptura condita recognoscitur, sed per quam nondum condita conderetur* (*In lib. I Reg.*, CCL 144, 3, 171:3475-7). This passage suggests that the very materiality of the text, the fact that it has been written, is itself dependent on the background of those who read and that such a background is actually what made the text come into being. Such a passage of *In I Regum* confirms the other passage quoted above where Gregory puts the allegorical understanding as the «solid foundation» for the other senses. Although stronger and more explicit than what we have found in the *Homilies on Ezechiel* or the *Morals on the Book of Job*, the passage from *In I Regum* remains, however, in conformity with the latter.

senses, but also the very method to read the bible «in the right (Christian) way». Hence, the literal meaning is both a foundational sense at the beginning of the process of reading, and a result, since the very process of reading is itself a hermeneutic stance. The literal meaning is an over-determination, but not a strict predetermination. It is an over-determination to the extent that readers come to the text with their whole effective history, their personalities, needs, and consequently their beliefs and expectations. In the case of Christians, they implicitly make the hermeneutic decision to read the Bible in the light of the New Testament. It is not, however, a strict predetermination as if a set of religious assumptions could preempt the results of reading; as if readers, before reading, already assumed what the text says. Although the background will determine the direction the reading is going to take, Gregory seems to say, the text at one point becomes strong enough to find its way between over-determination and predetermination. What prevents the background from becoming so intrusive as to erase the power of the text is the dynamic cooperation for which the text asks.

Since the cooperation between text and reader is under the auspices of charity, readers are accountable for their reading of the Bible. The literal meaning remains the level where interpreters have to justify their interpretation. Because it is too weak and unstable to serve as the motivation of an interpretation and needs a background to be meaningful as literal, the literal meaning cannot be first in the order of discovery. Nevertheless, the literal meaning remains first in the order of justification, since it anchors any claim made by interpreters that they interpret this text rather than that other text and why they interpret it the way they do. Any interpretation is ordered to charity and the well being of the Christian community. As Markus notes, Gregory «was engaged in a truly communal exercise with his equals. Understanding the Bible was an enterprise carried out for the sake of the community, and within the community, drawing on its resources and its traditions of scriptural discourse»⁷³. The existence of a literal meaning makes it possible for interpreters to make claims regarding the validity of their interpretation – valid in the sense of ordered to charity – and these claims in turn regulate the conversation that takes place in a community. In case of conflicts among competing Christian interpretations, the decision favors the one that contributes to the increase of charity and thus to the edification of the Christian community.

But Gregory does not simply confine the correct reading of the Bible to an actual Christian community. His framework also allows for a debate with non-Christians and the literal meaning remains the space where the redeeming of claims can happen. The regulative role for charity allows a decision to be made when there is a conflict between two hermeneutic principles – for example Christian and Jewish. In this case, the decision amounts, first, to recognizing that the Jewish reading belongs to another tradition, not the

73. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World*, 42.

Christian tradition – an agreement to disagree of a sort; and second, as we can infer, a possible discussion about how the regulative idea of charity is manifested in the Bible and what God's will is. Gregory implicitly and retrospectively forces the Jewish reading of the Bible to recognize that such a reading is also a hermeneutic decision that is not self-evident and that it needs to make a case for ignoring the New Testament as a New Alliance⁷⁴.

The growth of the reader and the text, which is so troubling to many interpreters, is in fact the growth of the community. Gregory does not say that individual readers have power over the text in isolation from their community. To the contrary, readers read with the standards of their community and from within their community. There is thus no radical arbitrariness in the sense that any reader can see anything in the text. As for the arbitrariness of a community – and Gregory acknowledges at least two communities of interpreters, Christian and Jewish – Gregory defends the Christian reading which is guided by charity, since charity is precisely the message of the text of the bible. It is thus almost by necessity that the text grows when the community of readers grows in their understanding of the text. They alone can make the text speak and be the text it is. It is thus not only unavoidable, but also felicitous that the text «falls in the hands» of readers and risks being subjected to their whims. In the hands of readers, the text has a chance to make a difference. It needs to be struck in order to thrust its own fire upon readers. The text grows indeed, because it has been furthered, propagated, and even disseminated by readers. But also, the fire of the text has spread, so that the reader's personal growth is eventually explained by the growth of the fire. In the end, the mutual growth of text and reader is a shared authorship by readers. The text is theirs because, transformed as they are by the text, they not only made it theirs, but, by fulfilling the very intention of the text, they made the text become itself.

74. «The Gentiles bear in mind those precepts which the Jewish people could not keep so long as they hearkened only to the letter thereof» (HEz I.6.3: 52-4) *illa gentilis populus praecepta tenet in mente, quae Judaicus populus habere non potuit, dum solam in eis litteram attendit.*