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THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH  
IN DEVELOPMENT OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY.  
SELECTED METHODS OF PATRISTIC EXEGESIS. PART ONE.

The contribution of the Fathers of the Church to biblical exegesis is one of their greatest gifts to Christianity. Without doubt their reflections on the Scriptures carry with them not only the scientific approach to theology, but they also have a great impact on Christian Spirituality. The Fathers saw in the Scriptures something more than just the Word, something more than literal understanding of the text. "In the history of interpretation the rise of the historical-critical method opened a new era. With it, new possibilities for understanding the biblical word in its originality opened up. Just as with all human endeavour, though, so also this method contained hidden dangers along with its positive possibilities. The search for the original can lead to putting the word back into the past completely so that it is no longer taken in its actuality. It can result that only the human dimension of the word appears as real, while the genuine author, God, is removed from the reach of a method which was established for understanding human reality"<sup>1</sup>. It does not mean that historical-critical exegesis has decreased the understanding of Scripture. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church underlines, there are many benefits from this method, however our study of Scripture should not be reduced to this form alone<sup>2</sup>.

This article is part one of two essays, in which the author will present selected methods of patristic exegesis. In the first part the author will focus on the general contribution of the Fathers to biblical theology and present some of the methods of patristic exegesis.

1. ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE BY J.H. NEWMAN

The Essay *On the Development of Christian Doctrine* is one of the most profound works by J.H. Newman regarding the Fathers of the Church in theology. It is

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ratzinger, Preface to: Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1993).

<sup>2</sup> See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 109-114.

not without reason that his intellectual conversion was in fact influenced by the works of the Fathers. It is the lecture of ancient texts that led him to the belief that the true Church is the Roman Catholic Church with its apostolic succession and with the Pope as its head. His conversion led him to a deep understanding of the Church and its Doctrine.

According to Newman the importance of patristic thought is not to be treated without any critical approach but should be regarded as an example of experiencing the saving Mystery of God. It is therefore in the Catholic Church where Newman discovers this Mystery that is seen in the continuous growth of Catholic Doctrine down through the centuries. "Till positive reasons grounded on facts are adduced to the contrary, the most natural hypothesis, the most agreeable to our mode of proceeding in parallel cases, and that which takes precedence of all others, is to consider that the society of Christians, which the Apostles left on earth, were of that religion to which the Apostles had converted them; that the external continuity of name, profession, and communion, argues a real continuity of doctrine; that as Christianity began by manifesting itself as of certain shape and bearing to all mankind [...] It is not a violent assumption, then, but rather mere abstinence from the wanton admission of a principle which would necessarily lead to the most vexatious and preposterous scepticism, to take it for granted, before proof to the contrary, that the Christianity of the second, fourth, seventh, twelfth, sixteenth, and intermediate centuries is in the very substance the very religion which Christ and His Apostles taught in the first, whatever may be the modifications for good or for evil which lapse of years, or the vicissitudes of human affairs, have impressed upon it"<sup>3</sup>.

In his essay, Newman uses an argument from antiquity that is applicable to the Church in every age, to present the ongoing continuity in development. Just at the beginning of his essay he underlines the necessity of exploring the achievements of the Fathers of the Church and their input into Christianity. However, he does not accept their works unconditionally as he discovers that there might be some discrepancies. "On the contrary, I shall admit that there are in fact certain apparent variations in its teaching, which have to be explained; thus I shall begin, but then I shall attempt to explain them to the exculpation of that teaching in point of unity, directness, and consistency"<sup>4</sup>.

In the first part of his essay, Newman presents some of the key elements of Christian Doctrine such as the Canon of the New Testament, Original Sin, Infant Baptism, Communion under one kind, the Homousion, the Lord's Incarnation etc. In presenting these examples, Newman calls upon Fathers like Augustine, Athanasius and others to present the doctrine. He states that the heresies of the early Church have greatly influenced the development of Christian Doctrine, and once these heresies were named and excluded from the Church by an official teaching,

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<sup>3</sup> J.H. Newman, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*, Sheed and Ward, London 1960, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

they slowly became less intensive and their influence on Christian Doctrine also diminished. He also points out the fact that sometimes it may seem as if the Fathers are not consistent with the doctrine of the Church, but Newman points out that one should explore the intentions and conclusions in regard to history<sup>5</sup>. Newman noticed that in the early centuries of the Church we can see the traces of the conflicts and the variety of theological elements, “which were in course of combination, but which required adjustment and management before they could be used with precision as one. In a thousand instances of a minor character, the statements of the early Fathers are but tokens of the multiplicity of openings which the mind of the Church was making into the treasure-house of Truth; real openings, but incomplete or irregular”<sup>6</sup>. Newman also notices that the heresies also indicate the anticipation of the mind of the Church. Before giving the final explanation of the doctrine there had to be a real discussion about the controversy, so heresies may be taken as a sort of indication of the current discussions regarding the doctrine<sup>7</sup>.

For Newman, modern Catholicism is nothing less than a “legitimate growth and complement, that is the natural and necessary development, of the doctrine of the early church, and that its divine authority is included in the divinity of Christianity”<sup>8</sup>. Newman in his Essay also points out (indirectly) to the *sensus fidei* with regard to the Fathers: “Thus, the holy Apostles would know without words all the truths concerning the high doctrines of theology, which controversialists after them have piously and charitably reduced to formulae, and developed through argument. Thus, St. Justin or St. Irenaeus might be without any digested ideas of Purgatory or Original Sin, yet have an intense feeling, which they had not defined or located, both of the fault of our first nature and the responsibilities of our nature regenerate”<sup>9</sup>.

In considering the actual input of the Fathers and their orthodoxy, Newman does not only relate to the works of the Fathers but also looks upon a logical sequence in history with regard to the teaching of that particular Father. As he points out in the example of Origen: “The great Origen died after his many labours in peace; his immediate pupils were saints and rulers in the Church; he has the praise of St. Athanasius, St. Basil, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and he provides materials for St. Ambrose and St. Hilary; yet, as time proceeded, a definite heterodoxy was the growing result of his theology, and at length, three hundred years after his death, he was condemned”<sup>10</sup>.

In his work Newman points to four elements: Faith, Theology, Scripture and Dogma. In his description of the first element, he points out the fact that the Fathers had a strong belief and faith, and that they underlined the importance of

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<sup>5</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 90-120.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 262.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 257-266.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 139. See p. 298-300.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 141.

faith in the Christian life. "I do not mean of course that the Fathers were opposed to inquiries into the intellectual basis of Christianity, but that they held that men were not obliged to wait for logical proof before believing; on the contrary, the majority were to believe first on presumptions and then let the intellectual proof come as their reward"<sup>11</sup>.

According to Newman, one of the greatest achievements of the Fathers is their understanding of Scripture. He underlines, as an example, the allegorical and spiritual interpretation of Scripture. "The case had been the same in a still earlier age; - the Jews clung to the literal sense of the Scriptures and hence rejected the Gospel; the Christian Apologists proved its divinity by allegorical means. The formal connection of this mode of interpretation with Christian theology is noticed by Porphyry, who speaks of Origen and others as borrowing it from heathen philosophy, both in explanation of the Old Testament and in defence of their own doctrine. It may be almost laid down as historical fact, that the mystical interpretation and orthodoxy will stand or fall together" and "On the other hand, all who retained the faith of the Church never entirely dispensed with the spiritual sense of the Scriptures"<sup>12</sup>.

In his essay Newman spends a lot of time discussing belief in Purgatory. Using the Fathers, he concludes that the idea of Purgatory was present in early Christianity, albeit indirectly. In this way, Newman actually gives a rather wide interpretation of the writings of the Fathers. He concludes that the text concerning Penance by Clement of Alexandria is a sign of this belief due to the necessity of his explaining of post-baptismal sin. Newman presents the view that the Fathers should be considered as the first formatters of Purgatory. In a historical way it was a form of logical conclusion<sup>13</sup>.

In the works of the Fathers, Newman studies the signs of Monastic Life in the Church. He concludes that the works of the Fathers had a great impact on St. Benedict's Monastic Rule. "Centuries passed, and after many extravagant shapes of the institution, and much wildness and insubordination in its members, a new development took place under St. Benedict. Revising and digesting the provisions of St. Anthony, St. Pachomius, and St. Basil he bound together his monks by a perpetual vow, brought them into the cloister, united separate convents into one Order"<sup>14</sup>.

Newman calls upon the Fathers not only with regard to their theological works, but also with a focus on their practice of life and customs. And so he presents as an example the development of the cult of the Saints in the Church. Newman describes how the Fathers considered Martyrdom in place of Baptism, where the Sacrament had not been administered. Martyrdom was also for Newman a sign of belonging to the Catholic Church. Those who opposed Martyrdom, Newman connected with sects<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 238.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 248.

<sup>13</sup> See ibidem, p. 282.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 284-285.

<sup>15</sup> See ibidem, p. 287-292.

Newman in his Essay gives an answer to the accusation of the Anglican Church that the Catholic Church has abandoned the Fathers and therefore it is no longer the Church of the Apostles. For Newman, on the contrary, the Fathers helped him to understand the dynamic understanding of doctrinal development. In his critique of the Rule of Vincent of Lérins, Newman claims that the Fathers show that the Church was alive in the times of the Fathers and has remained so throughout the centuries as a Catholic Church<sup>16</sup>.

Inspired by the works of J.H. Newman regarding the Fathers, the author of this article would like to present the methods developed by the Fathers that continue to have a huge impact on modern biblical exegesis.

## 2. LITERAL MEANING

In patristic exegesis we can outline elements of literal interpretation. “The literal sense of the Scripture is that which has been expressed directly by the inspired human authors. Since it is the fruit of inspiration, this sense is also intended by God, as principal author. One arrives at this sense by means of a careful analysis of the text, within its literary and historical context”<sup>17</sup>. For the Fathers, the Bible describes actual historical people and events.

The work of Gregory of Nyssa entitled *Life of Moses* is a response to a request of presenting a perfect life. Gregory clearly underlines that full perfection is impossible to achieve for people since they are limited by many factors; however, in our life, we can drive ourselves to perfection as far as we can. To present an example of a perfect life, Gregory presents the figure of Moses. He starts his work by presenting the history of Moses in detail, so as to present the literal interpretation of the Scriptures. Therefore, for Gregory of Nyssa, Moses was an actual historical figure<sup>18</sup>.

Eusebius often prefers the literal reading of the Scriptures and resigns from the systematic use of allegory. Although preferring the direct approach to exegesis, he does not completely abandon the use of allegorical methods. In his work, *Eclogae Propheticae*, he demonstrates a series of Old Testament passages with Christological meaning. As an example, the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies regarding Christ can be understood only in a literal sense<sup>19</sup>.

The literal approach, which often bordered on extreme literalism, referred to what the divinely inspired author intended to convey by what he wrote. It involved a deep analysis of the smallest units of the text (words, phrases, and sentences) and extended to paragraphs, chapters, and whole books. This textual meaning, or contextual meaning, communicated belief in the divine origin, authority, and

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<sup>16</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 300.

<sup>17</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1993), < [http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC\\_Interp-FullText.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm)>, (access: 19.01.2015).

<sup>18</sup> See Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, trans. A.J. Malherbe, E. Ferguson, Paulist Press, New York 1978, no. 1-77.

<sup>19</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 113-114.

trustworthiness of Scripture. This method of understanding is characteristic of the School of Antioch whose representatives would include Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom<sup>20</sup>.

Spiritual exegesis, for Henri de Lubac is a form of the legacy of patristic exegesis which does not present the entire view of Christian understanding of the Bible. Therefore, for him to complete the spiritual understanding we have to start with a literal understanding of Scripture. This method however does not contradict patristic exegesis but merely presents the point of departure for a Christian who wishes to contemplate the Scriptures. As an example we could use the understanding of the Prophets by Diodore, Theodore or Chrysostom who underlined the moral teaching of the prophetic statement with care for the literal sense of the text<sup>21</sup>.

### 3. ALLEGORY

An Allegorical method of interpretation is one through which, beyond the literal sense we can find a second, deeper meaning. This second meaning is usually more important because it presents the real meaning of the Scriptures, the one intended by God. In the times of the Fathers, the allegorical method was developed marvellously by the School of Alexandria. It is often linked with typology<sup>22</sup>.

Origen is without doubt one of the greatest patristic exegetes. He is believed to be the father of Christian allegory. Even if we read his works with just a small insight we can notice the two biggest characteristics of his approach that are quite new and different from that of his predecessors, even in Alexandria. Not only he widened the borders of Christian exegesis pertaining to the subject, but also its form. With regard to the subject, before Origen, the interest of the Fathers was focused only on certain Books of the Old Testament, while he evinced a great interest also in other Books of the Old Testament because he treated the Scriptures as the whole, larger work of divine inspiration<sup>23</sup>.

Origen begins his fourth book by shaping the importance of the divine inspiration of Scripture. He acknowledges that our human senses are fallible and not able to understand fully the things that are invisible. Therefore, the Scripture that is inspired by the Spirit of God can be a sure and unhesitating belief. Scripture is for Origen a form of reference, the source of divine truth. This truth is different to any other because it is divine, given by God. The Greek philosophers also strived for grasping the truth but their understanding of it was not divine. Therefore, Origen sets Christianity above all other systems and religious beliefs because, contrary to

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<sup>20</sup> See M. Simonetti, *Między dosłownością a alegorią*, trans. T. Skibiński, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2000, p. 157-203.

<sup>21</sup> See H. de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, The Crossroads Publishing Company, New York 2000, p. 85-88.

<sup>22</sup> See M. Simonetti, *Między dosłownością a alegorią*, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> See A.V. Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*, vol. 1, J.C. Hinrichs, Leipzig 1893, p. 332-333.

them, Christianity is inspired by the true God. To support his views, Origen gives examples of people who abandoned their old religion for Christianity as they were inspired by this divine truth. The Christians face persecution and torture but their number continues to grow because of the constant presence of Jesus Christ whose words are divine. What's more, Origen points out that Christ predicted the time of persecutions, which can only prove to the unbelieving the divinity of Christ and the salvation he has brought<sup>24</sup>.

Origen refers to prophecies not only in regard to the words of Christ but also to the ancient prophets who foretold the coming of Christ. He also points out that the Christian faith is not only limited to Jews. Origen in his exegesis uses the historical events to prove that in Christ all the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled. He refers to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the absence of offerings because Christ brought the final offering by his cross and resurrection<sup>25</sup>.

Origen also mentions the existence of grace while he refers to the psalms. He writes that even though Christ was teaching for a limited amount of time, the presence of grace assured the fullness of Doctrine and Faith. Moreover, the coming of Christ has "taken away that veil which had been placed over the letter (of the law of Moses), and has unsealed, for everyone who believes upon Him, all the blessings which were concealed by the covering of the word"<sup>26</sup>.

The author of *De Principiis* underlines that the words of Scripture can be misunderstood if there is a lack of will to read the spiritual sense. This can then lead to heresies. Jews understand the Scriptures literally which, according to Origen, is not only wrong, but also unrealistic. The spiritual understanding of Scripture has its roots in the Church and its tradition. Moreover, in the Scriptures there are certain mysteries that cannot be understood literally and cannot be understood at all because of our limitations. "Since, then, it was the intention of the Holy Spirit to enlighten with respect to these and similar subjects, those holy souls who had devoted themselves to the service of the truth..."<sup>27</sup>.

For Origen, as human beings consist of body, soul and spirit, so does Scripture. Therefore, the understanding of certain passages can be granted through the Holy Spirit himself. As an example, the book that was written by Hermas was inspired by the Holy Spirit according to Origen, so that the people to whom it was written could understand the message sent to them by God. Sometimes it is difficult to understand or to see the historical aspect in the Scriptures (in the literal sense), therefore, the allegorical sense can bring a fuller understanding of Scripture. The perfect example is found in the two sons of Abraham. The one born by flesh and the second by promise, symbolise the Two Covenants<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> See Origen, *On First Principles*, vol. 4, in: *Selected Writings*, trans. R.A. Greer, Paulist Press, Mahwah 1979, no. 1-4.

<sup>25</sup> See *ibidem*, no. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 14.

<sup>28</sup> See *ibidem*, no. 15.

To prove his argument, Origen writes about the importance of the allegorical meaning, and presents a number of examples from the Old and New Testaments. His understanding of certain passages corresponds to the origins of semantics or the symbolism of numbers. «Israel» does not necessarily have to mean «Israel» for Origen but rather «the people» who can be described as those who use their mind in understanding things. The number of the crowd following Christ does not necessarily have to correspond to the real number but it can mean something totally different. According to Origen, the real meaning of Scripture is hidden within the frail vessel of the common letter. To understand the true meaning, he refers to Saint Paul the Apostle, who explains the Scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit. However, as much as a person wants to discover the fullness of the Divine Words, he will never be able to comprehend everything that is written because some things are simply meant to remain hidden. "...there are certain things, the meaning of which cannot be unfolded at all by any words of human language, but which are made known more through simple apprehension than by any properties of words. And under this rule must be brought also the understanding of the sacred Scripture, in order that its statements may be judged not according to the worthlessness of the letter, but according to the divinity of the Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration they were caused to be written"<sup>29</sup>.

A good example of allegorical exegesis is Origen's *Commentary on the Book of Song of Songs*. In his exegesis, Origen uses the following method: Firstly, he reads the words and tries to interpret them literally, then he draws his hypothesis that the words mean something totally different. He, then, tries to compare the words that exist in verse to others used in the Scripture. When he finally examines all the meanings, he makes his final interpretation – the spiritual understanding of the Scripture<sup>30</sup>.

The language of the Commentary is almost as though Origen wants to give a lecture on this Book to his students because he tries, with great precision, to present the context of this Old Testament Book before focusing on the actual text. So, in the beginning he categorises the text as the drama in which there are characters that are being introduced and also a specific theme. Origen warns the reader of this particular Book that he has to be a tempered man, since the content of this Book may seem, as though, it focuses on "the things of the flesh" like urges and desires. Therefore, to see the true meaning of this work, the reader has to pass through this feeling to see the true meaning of the relation (love) between the Bride and the Groom which is the Church and the Word. What's more, this Book presents also for Origen a relationship between Christ and his Church. This relationship is presented quite often by the Fathers to present the nature of this relationship<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, no. 27.

<sup>30</sup> See Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R.P. Lawson, Newman Press, Westminster MD 1957, no. 58-90.

<sup>31</sup> See ibidem, no. 21-23, 58-59.



Another example of the use of allegory can be found in Justin the Martyr's description of his conversion. He acknowledges that we can get to know God even though he is not made of material form. He can be known by reason, but to do so, we need the light of the Holy Spirit. Justin says that some things can mean something else, which can be treated as a sign that he also applies exegesis – an allegory (although the term itself is not used)<sup>32</sup>.

Also Gregory of Nyssa uses allegory in his exegesis. As an example, in his book *Life of Moses*, Gregory gives another interesting interpretation to the Burning Bush that is considered to be the symbol of the incarnation of the Truth and presents the mystery of the Virgin whose virginity was not lost by giving birth, as the Bush was not consumed by fire. The theophany also explains that “the transcendent essence and cause of the universe, on which everything depends, alone subsists”<sup>33</sup>.

For Gregory of Nyssa the transformation of the right hand and the changing of the rod into a snake signify the mystery of the Lord's incarnation, “a manifestation of deity to men which affects the death of the tyrant and sets free those under his power”. The transformation of the right hand is the symbol that Christ, while assuming human nature, did not abandon his divine nature. What's more, the change of the rod into a serpent is a symbol of assuming our sinful nature since the Serpent in the Scriptures is considered to be a synonym for sin. The wife who followed Moses is a personification of moral and natural philosophy that can become useful as a companion of life<sup>34</sup>.

The encounter of Moses with Aaron is a symbol of divine help sending us his angels for our benefit. When we turn away from our sins we find in the angel of God a good counsellor and helper. Therefore Moses, strengthened by divine light and given a brother, can finally confront the pharaoh. Also we are strengthened by God when we turn to Him and listen to our angel, given to us by God and can finally confront our sinfulness (Pharaoh as a personification of sin or demon) and turn toward goodness. What's more, we can set an example for other people to follow<sup>35</sup>.

The Plagues that were sent upon the Egyptians are symbols of sinfulness. However if we are growing in virtue we become unharmed like the Hebrews and can draw our strength from God. The killing of the firstborn is a lesson for us that “When through virtue one comes to grips with any evil, he must completely destroy the first beginnings of evil”<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> See Justin the Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, in: *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr*, trans. T.B. Falls, Christian Heritage, New York 1948, no. 1-7.

<sup>33</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, no. 19-26.

<sup>34</sup> See *ibidem*, no. 27-41.

<sup>35</sup> See *ibidem*, no. 42-62.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 63-101.

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 4. TYPOLOGY AND READING SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE

Typological exegesis is a method of interpretation that in the Old Testament, its rituals, institutions and even events, looks for prefiguration or “types” of Christian reality. The Fathers of the Church used typology to demonstrate the unity of God’s plan throughout the History of Salvation. What’s more this approach shows the fact that the Old Covenant was replaced with the New Covenant which is the final and complete fulfilment of God’s promises – the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The typology comes from allegory and sometimes connects with it<sup>37</sup>.

Typology reveals itself in the dual structure of the Scriptures. It is a method in which the New Testament reads the Old Testament. For the Fathers, the one who taught this method to the Church was Christ himself, explaining the Scriptures on the way to Emmaus. The authors of the New Testament follow Christ in that manner by calling upon the Old Testament. Typology is based not only on linking the Promise with its fulfilment but to connect in the manner of analogy as was discovered by the Fathers. What was begun in the Old Testament, sometimes finds partial fulfilment, but is fully fulfilled in the New Testament, bringing both change and renewal. “It may be that the mental operations of the New Testament authors transcend any such duality: simultaneously, they express the New Testament by the Old and spiritualise the Old by the New. As we reflect on an already constituted New Testament, we in our historical exegesis, must comment on the New Testament through the Old, and then on the Old through the New. Our operation is a dual one, as is our movement – we are conscious of a rhythm whose alternating beats become distinguishable only in terms of one another”<sup>38</sup>.

The relation between the Old and New Testament was very important for the Fathers. Origen has a very deep understanding of this relation which, at first, seems like there is a kind of opposition between the two Testaments. “But, even so, there is union. Their relationship is ambiguous. The second derives from the first, but without repudiating it. The second does not destroy the first: while fulfilling it, it gives it life, it renews it. The second transfigures the first. It absorbs it into itself. In a word, it changes the letter of the first into spirit”<sup>39</sup>. This process of transformation was not a long term development but a sudden change. The new key to understanding is Christ, who gave a new meaning and a completely different understanding to the Old Testament<sup>40</sup>. For the Fathers, the content of the Old Te-

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<sup>37</sup> See M. Simon, *Cywilizacja wczesnego chrześcijaństwa*, trans. E. Bąkowska, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1981, p. 465.

<sup>38</sup> H. de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 90.

<sup>40</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 103-111. Bible as the Book of Christ; fulfilled in Christ; Jesus contained in Old and New Testaments; Christus, inluminator antiquitatum; Jesus as Exegete; the role of Christ’s Passion and the Cross in connecting both Testaments; Sacrifice and resurrection (for Ambrose when Christ pushed aside a tombstone, the brought the spiritual understanding to the letter); Christ as abridged Word.

stament was always the same. However, with the coming of Christ and the light of the Holy Spirit its hidden meaning became revealed, as Augustine mentions in his explanation of Psalm 113 – “the hidden and veiled mysteries of the ancient books are in some degree revealed by the ancient books themselves”. Christ the Word is also a source of Unity among the Fathers<sup>41</sup>.

There is also an importance of harmony between the Two Testaments. For Origen, the Two Testaments are like brothers. Rejecting the Old Testament would mean alienation from God’s Testament, as was put by Bede. To describe this relation, one can use the metaphor of two wings. The same metaphor was used later in the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* to describe the relationship between Faith and Reason as two wings which rise up high to contemplate the Truth. Therefore Jerome’s expression that “The whole of Scripture is coherent, united as it is by a single spirit” presents the view of the Fathers’ toward both Testaments. It does not mean that they do not use the Old Testament in their polemics with the Jews who, according to them, no longer have the possibility to see the spirit of the text but just its shell (literal understanding). Again the force that unites both Testaments is Christ, the Son of God<sup>42</sup>.

Justin the Martyr also uses typology. As an example, the figure of Joshua is a prefiguration of Christ. Joshua set the Israelites free by taking them to the Promised Land in the same way that Christ set the people free by taking them to eternal salvation<sup>43</sup>. In the same way Justin presents the antitypical correlation between Mary and Eve. “For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Most High would overshadow her: wherefore also the Holy Child begotten of her is the Son of God; and she replied, ‘Be it done unto me according to your word’<sup>44</sup>.”

Justin Martyr makes a differentiation in typology. “For the Holy Spirit sometimes brought about that something, which was the type (*typos*) of the future, should be done clearly; sometimes he uttered words about what was to take place, as if it was then taking place, or had taken place. And unless those who read perceive this art, they will not be able to follow the words of the prophets (*logous*) as they ought<sup>45</sup>. According to Justin the prophecies of Christ should be interpreted using the literal meaning while *typoi* have two levels of interpretation, because the Christological meaning is above the historical fact without eliminating it<sup>46</sup>.”

For the Fathers, the very important role in reading the Scriptures had the understanding of Christ as the Word. The Word that is born of the Virgin Mary, that

<sup>41</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 91, 95, 187-194.

<sup>42</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 113-130.

<sup>43</sup> See Justin the Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, no. 113.

<sup>44</sup> See no. 100.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 114.

<sup>46</sup> See M. Simonetti, *Między dosłownością, a alegorią*, p. 35-36.

is unifying, completing, illuminating and transcending. This Word – Christ, as Irenaeus speaks at the moment of Incarnation, “he recapitulated in himself the long unfolding of human history, and offered us salvation, condensed in himself”. De Lubac however notices the double recapitulation “that of the Word eternally uttered within the Father and that of the Word addressed to men down through the centuries, the first to allow the second, and the second no less to reveal the first”<sup>47</sup>.

There are also differences between the Two Testaments. What is important is the substance of the New Testament which is the Mystery of Christ. The Two Testaments are not identical in their substance because that would create the danger of the New Testament not being seen as the last source of revelation and it could even be potentially understood by something else like the Old Testament is understood by the New Testament. Therefore, the Mystery of Christ<sup>48</sup>, the Fact of Christ is what the New Testament concentrates on while the Old Testament concentrates on the New<sup>49</sup>.

Jerome underlines the importance of typology. The heavenly Jerusalem is a form of the Church. Eli's death and the slaying of Saul signify the abolition of the Old Law. Jerome also reads Scripture with the Scripture when he writes about the fulfilment of the prophecies. In the Books of Kings, Jerome finds a typology of the wars and fights as a symbol of the struggle of the church with heretics. The shipwreck of Jonah is a figure of the Passion of the Lord. Habakkuk writes about the cross when speaking about a man that is “a strong and unyielding wrestler”. The Book - The Song of Songs presents the type of relations between Christ and his spouse, the Church<sup>50</sup>.

## 5. CONCLUSION

“Recent developments in philosophical hermeneutics and, on the other hand, the observations which we have been able to make concerning interpretation within the biblical tradition and the tradition of the church have shed light upon many aspects of the problem of interpretation that the historical-critical method has tended to ignore”<sup>51</sup>.

Inspired by the work of J.H. Newman, the author has described some of his views on the Contribution of the Fathers to Theology followed by some of the methods of patristic exegesis which are part of a great biblical tradition and have been re-discovered by the great scholars like J.H. Newman, Henri de Lubac, Joseph Ratzinger, and many others. In the second part, the author will present: Canonical Reading, Mystagogical Understanding, Anagogical Understanding, and will give an example of exegesis based on the The Sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1-15).

<sup>47</sup> H. de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, no. 186.

<sup>48</sup> Also in eschatological understanding.

<sup>49</sup> See H. de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, p. 201-205.

<sup>50</sup> See Jerome, *Letter 53: To Paulinus*, in: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 6, trans. W.H. Fremantle, ed. P. Shaff, H. Wace, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo NY 1893.

<sup>51</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Vatican 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1993), < [http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC\\_Interp-FullText.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm)>, (access: 19.01.2015).

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THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH  
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY. SELECTED METHODS  
OF PATRISTIC EXEGESIS. PART ONE.

Summary

Contribution of the Fathers of the Church to exegesis is one of their greatest gifts to Christianity. Without a doubt, their works reflecting on the Scriptures not only include issues relevant to the development of theology but also, have a great impact on Christian Spirituality. This article is the first of two dedicated to patristic exegesis. In this part, the author made a brief introduction on the development of Christian Doctrine with particular attention to J.H. Newman's theory on the contribution of the Fathers to theology.

**Keywords:** patristic exegesis, exegesis, sacrifice, allegory, literal meaning, typology, anagogy, mystagogy, canonical reading, reading Scripture with Scripture, Christian doctrine

WKŁAD OJCÓW KOŚCIOŁA W ROZWÓJ TEOLOGII BIBLIJNEJ.  
WYBRANE METODY EGZEGEZY PATRYSTYCZNEJ. CZĘŚĆ PIERWSZA

Abstrakt

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**Słowa kluczowe:** egzegeza patrystyczna, egzegeza, ofiara, alegoria, dosłowne znaczenie, typologia, anagogia, mistagogia, czytanie kanoniczne, czytanie Pisma z Pismem, doktryna chrześcijańska

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