3. Participation and Scripture

Metaphysics and Hermeneutics: Origen, Hobbes, and Spinoza

Here is the basic point I want to argue in this talk: metaphysics is directly linked to the way in which we read Scripture. As you know at this point, in my understanding, a proper metaphysics is participatory or sacramental in character. That is to say, created realities exist by participating in the eternal being of God. Scripture, likewise, I hope to argue, has a sacramental character. It participates in greater realities. Scriptural exegesis thrives only with a metaphysics that is participatory or sacramental in character. I hope to show that this is so by turning first to Origen (as someone whose participatory view of reality made him read the Scriptures sacramentally) and then to Hobbes and Spinoza, who I think lie at the origin of a modern, non-sacramental way of reading Scripture (that is to say, a historical-critical way or reading the Bible, which assumes that history is a "purely natural" affair, completely separate from otherworldly concerns). From there, we'll turn finally to Edward Pusey, the nineteenth-century Anglican theologian who wanted to restore a sacramental view of the world.

So, let's begin with the brilliant third-century biblical interpreter, Origen (*c*.185–254). Origen pauses in Book III of his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* to explain what he believes allegorical interpretation is all about. Interestingly, he doesn't begin by talking about exegesis at all. Instead, he starts off with a lengthy discussion of metaphysics—Paul's teaching "that the invisible things of God are understood by means of

things that are visible and that the things that are not seen are beheld through their relationship and likeness to things seen" (cf. Rom 1:20; 2 Cor 4:18).[1] Origen clarifies how he views this relationship between the visible and the invisible. "God," he writes,

> thus shows that this visible world teaches us about that which is invisible, and that this earthly scene contains certain patterns (*exemplaria*) of things heavenly. Thus it is to be possible for us to mount up (*ascendere*) from things below to things above, and to perceive and understand from the things we see on earth the things that belong to heaven.[2]

Origen maintains that earthly things contain patterns (*exemplaria*) of heavenly things, and it is their purpose to enable us to go up (*ascendere*). Origen has in mind not just the fact that human beings are created in God's image and as such have a divine character stamped upon them. Other creatures, he insists, also must have something in heaven whose image and likeness they bear.[3] Even the smallest of creatures, a mustard seed, has a likeness to heavenly things; in this case the prototype is nothing less than the Kingdom of Heaven itself (cf. Matt 13:31).[4] Origen observes that though it's true that flora and fauna "do

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[1] Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, in *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. and ed. R. P. Lawson, Ancient Christian Writers, 26 (New York: Newman, 1956), III.12 (p. 218).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., III.12 (p. 219).
[4] Origen observes that the mustard is also a likeness or image of perfect faith (cf. Matt 17:20), so that it is possible to bear the likeness of heavenly things in several respects (ibid.).

serve the bodily needs of men," they also have the "forms and likenesses" (*formas et imagines*) of incorporeal things, so that the soul can be taught by them "how to contemplate those other things that are invisible and heavenly."[5] For Origen, it seems, a mustard seed doesn't just point to the kingdom of heaven as something far away; it contains the very pattern of the kingdom and in some way already makes it present.

The key passage for Origen is Wisdom 7:17–21, which he says "perhaps" refers to just the kind of thing he has in mind.[6] Here King Solomon lists many aspects of the world around him, about which God has given him knowledge, and the king ends the list with "all such things as are hid and manifest (*occulta et manifesta*)."[7] Origen takes that phrase as applying to each of the foregoing items in the list, for the expression shows, so he claims, that everything visible or "manifest" on earth has its invisible or "hidden" complement in heaven: "He who made all things in wisdom so created all the species of visible things upon earth, that He placed in them some teaching and knowledge of things invisible and heavenly, whereby the human mind might mount (*ascenderet*) to spiritual understanding (*spiritalem intelligentiam*) and seek the grounds of things in heaven ...."[8] Created things, for Origen, contain heavenly teaching and knowledge, and the human mind is

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[5] Ibid., III.12 (p. 220). I have changed the translation of *formas* from "shapes" to "forms."
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid. The Greek text speaks of *krupta kai emphanē*. I have left out the italics that Lawson uses to render Origen's biblical quotations.
[8] Ibid.

meant to go up in order to discover what this spiritual or heavenly knowledge is that God has placed in created things.

Origen goes through each of the items in Solomon's list, showing from Scripture how it is a copy of a heavenly exemplar and so contains heavenly knowledge.[9] A few examples will suffice to illustrate what the theologian from Alexandria has in mind. When the Book of Wisdom mentions that Solomon knows "the natures of animals and the rages of beasts" (Wis 7:20), Origen points out that in Scripture human beings are referred to as a "fox" (Luke 13:32), as a "brood of vipers" (Matt 3:7), as "stallions" (Jer 5:8), as "senseless beasts" (Ps 48:13 [49:12]), and as a "deaf adder" (Ps 57:5 [58:4]). Origen's point seems to be that when, with our physical eyes, we see animals acting in certain ways, we can then mentally transfer these characteristics to human beings. Similarly, when Solomon claims he knows "the forces of the winds," Origen turns to Pauls' language of "winds of doctrine" (Eph 4:14) to make clear that on the visible side there are "winds and breezes of the air," while on the invisible side there are "forces of the unclean spirits."[10] Origen concludes from his discussion that God's wisdom teaches us "from

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[9] Ibid., III.12 (pp. 220–21).

[10] Ibid., III.12 (p. 222). The first set of metaphors (where Origen moves from animals to human beings) is different from the second (where he actually moves from sensible to spiritual realities). Origen doesn't elaborate on the difference; I suspect his point is that a metaphor, in its very nature, takes a characteristic observed with the senses and then mentally applies it to a different object. The difference between the two kinds of metaphors is important, however, in connection with patristic exegesis. Here one of the questions is whether historical types in the Old Testament only point forward to future historical antitypes (like visible animals metaphorically representing visible human beings) or whether they also point upward to eternal realities (like sensible wind pointing up to the spiritual reality of "winds of doctrine"). Origen's exegesis sees Old Testament types functioning in both ways, as we will see.

actual things and copies" (*rebus ipsis et exemplis*) "things unseen by means of those that are seen," and that in this way God "carries us over" (*transferat*) from earthly to heavenly things.[11]

It is at this point that Origen finally moves from metaphysics to hermeneutics. Up to this point—and it has occupied by far the longest part of his discussion of allegorizing—all he has dealt with is metaphysics: the question of the relationship between visible and invisible things. (To be sure, it is clearly a *theological* metaphysics that he advocates; one that he believes is both taught and assumed in the Scriptures.) Origen obviously believes that attention paid to metaphysics is time well spent: good metaphysics leads to good hermeneutics. Metaphysics prepares us, Origen thinks, to grasp how we should read the Song of Songs (and, for Origen, much of the rest of Scripture as well):

> But this relationship [between earthly and heavenly things] does not obtain only with creatures; the Divine Scripture itself is written with wisdom of a rather similar sort. Because of certain mystical and hidden (*occulta et mystica*) things the people is visibly led forth from the terrestrial Egypt and journeys through the desert, where there was a biting serpent, and a scorpion, and thirst, and where all the other happenings took place that are recorded. All these events, as we have said, have the aspects and

[11] Ibid., III.12 (p. 223).

> likeness (*formas et imagines*) of certain hidden things (*occultorum*).[12]

What biblical interpretation does, on Origen's explanation of it here, is to move from the visible event to the "mystical and hidden things." The events in the desert did occur—Origen displays no suspicion about the historical narrative—but they did so in order to portray hidden, mystical things. And it is these hidden, mystical things that we are particularly concerned with in our reading of the Scriptures.

I have chosen this passage from Origen because it illustrates that he regards metaphysics and biblical interpretation as closely connected. The way we think about the relationship between God and the created order is immediately tied up with the way we read Scripture. This is something easily lost sight of, yet of crucial significance. I suspect we often treat biblical interpretation as a relatively value-free endeavour, as something we're equipped to do once we've acquired both the proper tools (biblical languages, an understanding of how grammar and syntax work, the ability to navigate concordances and computer programs, and so on) and a solid understanding of the right method (establishing the original text and translating it, determining authorship and original audience, studying historical and cultural context, figuring out the literary genre of the passage, as well as looking for themes and applicability). Such an approach, even if it recognizes the interpreter's dependence upon the Spirit's guidance, treats the process of

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[12] Ibid.

interpretation as patterned on the hard sciences.[13] In other words, the assumption is that the way to read the Bible is by following certain exegetical rules, which in turn are not affected by the way we think of how God and the world relate to each other. Metaphysics, on this assumption, doesn't affect interpretation. In fact, many will see in the way Origen links metaphysics and exegesis the root cause of why his exegesis is wrongheaded: the Bible ought to be read on its own terms, without an alien, philosophically derived metaphysical scheme being imposed on it.

For Origen, metaphysics does affect one's interpretation, and it seems to me that he gives us much food for thought, whereas, in contrast, modern attempts to separate biblical interpretation from metaphysics appear to me misguided. Historically, it is clear that changes in metaphysics and hermeneutics have gone hand in hand. The separation between nature and the supernatural—or, we might say, between visible and invisible things—first philosophically advocated by William of Ockham (*c*.1287–*c*.1347), led to attempts to isolate biblical interpretation from metaphysics. On Ockham's understanding, individual things are not related to other things through their common source of origin. For Ockham, visible things may be like one another (e.g., the similarity that a variety of cats have to each other), but this doesn't mean that they contain patterns (*exemplaria*) of heavenly things sustaining their creaturely individuality, as Origen would have thought of it. Ockham's philosophy decisively abandons the earlier Christian

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[13] Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

Platonist assumption of eternal patterns or "forms" expressing themselves within the objects of the empirical world around us.

Ockham's philosophical position, commonly known as nominalism, was to have profound consequences for biblical interpretation.[14] These became manifest most clearly in the seventeenth century with Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677).[15] Hobbes's book, *Leviathan* (1651), suggests that the underlying cause of the wars of religion was a slavish following of Aristotle over Scripture. Aristotle's claim that "being" and "essence" have real existence lies at the root of the problem, according to Hobbes.[16] He counters Aristotelian philosophy by insisting that universal notions are just words and that we should treat them accordingly. Though we employ such notions—"man," "horse," and "tree"—Hobbes urges his readers to keep in mind that they are merely names "of divers particular things; in respect of all which together, it is called an Universall; there being nothing in the world Universall but Names; for the things named, are every one of them Individuall and Singular."[17] Put differently, Hobbes's metaphysics follows that of

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[14] I give a somewhat more extended discussion in Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 79–81.

[15] For the following account, I am indebted particularly to Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 108–18; and to Scott W. Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture 1300–1700* (New York: Herder & Herder – Crossroad, 2013), 285–393.

[16] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers and Karl Schuhmann, vol. 2 (London: Continuum, 2005), IV.46 (pp. 533–36).

[17] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I.4 (p. 28). Cf. Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 108–09; Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 301–02.

Ockham: both reject the notion that visible things have real relations to invisible things.

The result is that for Hobbes, good and evil are simply words that we assign to the objects of our desire and hatred, respectively.[18] We rely on political authorities—not on universal, Aristotelian truth claims—to determine right and wrong.[19] According to Hobbes, had the Christian tradition simply followed Scripture instead of Aristotle, the church would never have been able to override the proper authority of the king.[20] Hobbes, therefore, suggests that there is but one solution to restoring the proper role of the king vis-à-vis papal power: "a proper reading of Scripture," under the authority of the royal sovereign, who alone has the authority to determine what it is that Scripture demands.[21] It is obvious that this "proper reading" was politically motivated. Hobbes's exegesis, suggest Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, "was, first to last, entirely politicized, offering a nearly endless arsenal of support for the subordination of every aspect of Scripture, from canon

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[18] "But whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, *Evill*; And of his Contempt, *Vile*, and *Inconsiderable*. For these words of Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the Person of the man (where there is no Common-weatlh;) or, (in a Common-wealth,) from the Person that representeth it; for from an Arbitrator or Judge, whom men disagreeing shall by consent set up, and make his sentence the Rule thereof" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I.6 [p. 44]).

[19] According to Hobbes, it is the notion of "separated essences," "built on the Vain Philosophy of Aristotle," that "would fright them from Obeying the Laws of their Countrey, with empty names; as men fright Birds from the Corn with an empty doublet, a hat, and a crooked stick" (ibid., IV.46 [p. 536]).

[20] Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 109–10.

[21] Ibid., 109. See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, III.33 (p. 306).

to interpretation, to the arbitrary authority of the civil sovereign."[22] For Hobbes, then, a proper reading of Scripture is one that is freed from ecclesial constraints and one that abandons the metaphysical notion that earthly things are linked to heavenly things. Having rejected the sacramental link between heaven and earth, Hobbes turned the reading of Scripture into a purely natural exercise of historical scholarship.[23]

Spinoza, much like Hobbes, was concerned with the recent past of religious violence, and he too reconfigured biblical interpretation so as to serve political ends. In his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670), Spinoza outlined a pantheistic view of reality, which had the effect of placing the methods of natural science in control of biblical exegesis. God was not so much shut out from the natural order (as in Hobbes's understanding), as he was simply equated with it. As Hahn and Wiker put it: "[W]hat Hobbes achieved by *excluding* God from his amoral mathematical-mechanical account of nature, Spinoza obtained by *identifying* God with his amoral mathematical account of nature."[24] The effect was similar: biblical scholarship became a purely natural, empirical endeavour that served political aims—in Spinoza's case, the establishment of a tolerant, peaceful, liberal democratic system, in which it is fine for the plebs to be governed by revealed religion, imagination, opinion, and ignorance, while scholarly elites go about

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[22] Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 336.
[23] See Noel Malcolm, "*Leviathan*, the Pentateuch, and the Origins of Modern Biblical Criticism," in *Leviathan After 350 Years*, ed. Tom Sorell and Luc Foisneau (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 241–64.
[24] Hahn and Biker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 381.

finding the truth: establishing the historical origins of Scripture's original sources.[25]

According to Spinoza, therefore, the scholarly task is to establish the true meaning of Scripture. This is to be accomplished by reason—not ecclesial authority.[26] Human reason has the ability to investigate history, and so Scripture should be read historically rather than allegorically.[27] As a result, Spinoza claims that Scripture must be treated like any other ordinary, visible thing: it must be analyzed empirically, and one must not allow higher, invisible realities to determine one's natural understanding of the Bible.[28] Matthew Levering describes the basis of Spinoza's interpretive approach as follows:

> Separated from metaphysical judgment, Scripture can be evaluated on its own terms. The difference with patristic-medieval interpretation thus begins with a different understanding of "nature": for the patristic-medieval tradition, nature is a created participatory reality that signifies its Creator

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[25] Ibid., 375–77, 388–90.
[26] Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 40.
[27] Craig G. Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes: Old Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutical Theory*, Analecta biblica, 139 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1998),10.
[28] Harrisville and Sundberg comment: "Spinoza reduces the rationality of Scripture—that is, its truth—to what agrees with the understanding of the autonomous biblical critic free of dogmatic commitments" (*Bible in Modern Culture*, 39).

> and possesses a teleological order; for Spinoza nature simply yields empirical data within the linear time-space continuum.[29]

Spinoza, in other words, came to reject the kind of connection between visible and invisible things that Origen had posited as real; Spinoza could no longer see the universe as sacramental. Interpretation, therefore, was no longer driven by the search for (participatory) correspondences between things that are manifest and those that are hidden. Spinoza was among the first instead to look behind the biblical text for historical origins, arriving at positions that adumbrated viewpoints commonly associated with the later higher biblical criticism of nineteenth-century German scholarship.

Both Hobbes and Spinoza recognized that there is, in fact, a close link between metaphysics and interpretation, and that if we treat interpretation of Scripture as a historical investigation of empirical (visible) realities by means of one's purely natural, rational abilities, then there are inescapable metaphysical implications. It is only possible to pull off such a drastic restriction of interpretation to visible things by denying their sacramental connection to heavenly, invisible realities—in Hobbes's case by excluding the latter, and in Spinoza's case by radically immanentizing them. Put differently, modern hermeneutics in the tradition of Hobbes and Spinoza is predicated on a radical dichotomizing between visible and invisible things, between heaven and earth—or, we could also say, between nature and the supernatural.[30]

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[29] Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 115.

[30] Spinoza, of course, did not dichotomize visible and invisible things; he identified them in pantheistic fashion. Modern biblical scholarship, it seems to me, has more

The notion that the Bible can—perhaps even ought to—be read without metaphysical assumptions, seems to me seriously mistaken. Today's heirs of Hobbes and Spinoza—for all their clamouring about "objectivity"—are unable to escape metaphysical assumptions when interpreting Scripture. Even when we're not aware of it, we still do metaphysics.

Edward Pusey's Sacramental Typology

The 19th-century Anglican Hebrew scholar Edward Pusey recognized that the nominalism of Hobbes and Spinoza spells the death of sacramental hermeneutic. During the winter of 1836–1837, Pusey delivered his "Lectures on Types and Prophecies in the Old Testament," in which he tried to recover the sacramental hermeneutic of the Great Tradition.[31] Pusey had studied in Germany between 1825 and 1827, and he was troubled by the historicist approach to biblical studies that he witnessed among contemporary German scholars.[32] He became convinced that this same rationalist approach was taking hold among theologians in England as they were influenced by the deist mindset of the previous century.[33] Pusey was troubled, however, not just by the

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commonly followed the trajectory of Hobbes's exclusion of God from nature than Spinoza's identification of the two.

[31] I am much indebted to George Westhaver, principal of Pusey House in Oxford, who introduced me to Pusey's lectures on typology through his excellent dissertation, "The Living Body of the Lord: E. B. Pusey's 'Types and Prophecies of the Old Testament,'" and who also kindly directed me to Pusey's lectures themselves.

[32] Pusey critiqued German rationalism in his book *An Historical Enquiry into the Causes of the Rationalistic Character Lately Predominant in the Theology of Germany* (1828).

[33] Pusey had in mind scholars such as Richard Whately, Thomas Arnold, and Renn Hampden. See Westhaver, "Living Body," 32–33.

critical, rationalist theology that increasingly came to dominate the nineteenth-century theological world, but also by the reaction to it among conservative scholars as they used an equally rationalist, apologetic approach to Old Testament prophecy: they attempted to prove the truth of the Christian faith rationally by providing evidence from Old Testament prophecy in favor of the Christian faith. For Pusey, the two approaches seemed each other's mirror opposites.

The rationalist methodology of conservative apologetics approached prophecy with a view to securing rationally and definitively the truth of the Christian faith: the fact that Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the New Testament was treated as evidence of the truth of the Christian faith.

Pusey was convinced that these rationalist apologetic approaches could not function as a proper bulwark in defense of the Christian faith. George Westhaver, in his dissertation on Pusey's lectures, explains that "Pusey's analysis of German theology and orthodoxism lies behind his criticism of an evidence-based approach to prophecy in the 'Lectures.' The rigid insistence that prophecy must conform to analytic categories and serve as evidence is also a 'dry dialectic system.'"[34] The scholastic orthodoxy of the apologetic approach, Pusey argued, made the mistake of trying to combat historical critics by accepting the very rationalist methodology that the latter employed. This means that the battle had been conceded before it had even started. In particular, Pusey objected to the assumption of common, neutral ground, with prophecy being

[34] Pusey, "Lectures," 36.

treated as something to be analyzed and dissected in order thereby to determine its possibly divine origin:

> In the apologetic use, prophecy is addressed to those who believe not, or, as if men believed not; the truth of the prophecy, which was "assumed" or rather accepted and believed as the very word of God in the former case becomes now the very point at issue. People disclaim or set aside for the time all knowledge of it as being the word of God, all except its previous existence, and would produce belief by the abstract argument that an event, not cognizable by human foresight, could only have been predicted by God, and that consequently the system wherein such predictions were found, came from God.[35]

Pusey maintained that a proper reading of prophecy is sensitive to the sacramental presence of Christ in the prophetic message and as such takes its starting point in the divine character of the prophetic message rather than trying to argue for this on purely rational grounds.

By treating the divine character of Old Testament prophecy as something established rationally and a posteriori rather than accepted a priori by faith, the apologetic school ended up focusing strictly on the linear character of chronologically separate events: the point was to see whether or not prophecies were in fact fulfilled later in history. Pusey noted that this approach moved the focus away from Christ as the

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[35] Ibid., 4.

religious contents of prophecy.[36] The basic problem, as Pusey saw it, was that the apologetic method "limited prophecy to the office of 'foretelling,' abstracted from the subject foretold."[37] It is the absence of a genuine focus on the christological reality of the prophetic witness that concerned Pusey the most. And so he insisted that a rationalist defense of Christianity, centered on prophecy fulfillment, would ironically end up losing the very heart of the Christian faith.

Pusey therefore set out to establish a third way of approaching Old Testament prophecy. Encouraged by discussions with his friend August Tholuck, a Pietist professor of theology at Halle, Pusey developed what he believed to be a more robust treatment of Old Testament prophecy, one that was in line with the church fathers' earlier approach. He countered the apologetic use of prophecy with the comment "Prophecy is given to direct and guide faith, not to create it."[38] As a result, Pusey, instead, focused on the christological contents of Old Testament prophecy. He maintained that the christological archetype was always already present in the Old Testament prophetic type. Westhaver summarizes Pusey's approach as follows: "In addition to the historical or horizontal correspondences between Old Testament types and their New Testament fulfillment, Pusey (like Origen before him) emphasizes a vertical dimension, the way in which types participate in the reality of the eternal Archetype, the Son of God, in whom all types

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[36] Cf. Pusey's comment: "The religious element of prophecy was of necessity withdrawn from their sight, for although it has more persuasiveness, it has less of demonstration. The facts were considered apart from their religious meaning, men argued when they should have worshipped." Ibid., 1.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 4.

are fulfilled."[39] The co-inherence of type and archetype was key to Pusey's view of Old Testament prophecy.

Pusey developed what we may characterize as a sacramental approach to prophetic interpretation. He draws attention to the sacramental relationship between prophecy and fulfillment when he comments: "It has been well said, that God has appointed, as it were, a sort of sacramental union between the type and the archetype, so that as the type were nothing, except in as far as it represents, and is the medium of conveying the archetype to the mind, so neither can the archetype be conveyed except through the type. Though the consecrated element be not the sacrament, yet neither can the soul of the sacrament be obtained without it. God has joined them together, and man may not and can not put them asunder."[40] For Pusey, there was a sacramental link between the shadow of the Old Testament type and the reality of the christological archetype in the New Testament, and on his understanding the two were inseparable. As Westhaver summarizes: "For Pusey the principle of typology is fundamentally a sacramental principle by which spiritual or eternal truth is communicated by typical elements consecrated through Christ's self-emptying in the Incarnation."[41] Perhaps the deepest reason Pusey objected to the apologetic school of Old Testament prophecy is that he regarded its representatives as antisacramental: they ignored or set aside the

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[39] Westhaver, "Living Body," 18.
[40] Pusey, "Lectures," 23. Pusey also speaks of Melchizedek's sacrifice (ibid., 73) and of the Red Sea crossing and the gift of manna (ibid., 26) as sacraments, and he refers to the general "sacramental character of the Old Testament" (ibid., 136 [p. 199 of Pusey's 1851 letter to the bishop of London]).
[41] Westhaver, "Living Body," 182–83.

christological reality as something indifferent and extraneous to the rational and apologetic purposes that they had in mind for Old Testament prophecies. For Pusey, in contrast, a sacramental reading approached Old Testament prophecy with the question of where the prophetic text reveals the real presence of Christ.

Sacramental Reading in Origen: Discerning Heavenly Patterns

Let's return once more to Origen's explanation of biblical interpretation. I have argued that, on his understanding, there's a close connection between earthly and heavenly things, and I have made clear that the same participatory metaphysic is at work in Pusey. But we may ask: is Origen consistent in affirming such an intimate, relational unity of the two? After all, there is little doubt that he treats invisible, spiritual realities as far more significant than visible, material things. Origen's logic is unmistakably anagogical: he believes that we are to "mount up" (*ascendere*) from the created order. The language of ascent (*anagōgē*) is dear to the Alexandrian theologian. We must be carried over (*transferre*) from earth to heaven, from visible things to invisible things. The distinction he draws between visible and invisible things, or between manifest and hidden things (Wis 7:21), underscores the sense of duality that characterizes Origen's thinking. This distinction between visible and invisible things (along with the priority of the latter) is something Origen has in common with the Platonic tradition, and some may suspect him of falling prey to a Platonic *dualism* that runs counter to the holistic biblical understanding of reality.

It seems to me, however, that this would be a misreading of Origen. It is true that his use of the distinction between *manifesta* and *occulta*—or between visible and invisible things—is congenial to his Platonic metaphysical assumptions. But Origen gives numerous indications that he doesn't regard invisible things as separate from visible things. As we have seen, he maintains that "this earthly scene contains certain patterns (*exemplaria*) of things heavenly." It is only because the heavenly *exemplaria* are present in earthly things and events that it is possible for us to "mount up" and experience union with God. Repeatedly, therefore, Origen insists that we can contemplate heavenly things *by means of* their "forms and likenesses" as they appear in visible things. It is *by means of* "actual things and copies" (*rebus ipsis et exemplis*) that we can move on to heaven itself.

Origen's metaphysics in no way dichotomizes visible and invisible things. The reason he believes it is possible to move from the letter to the spirit in biblical interpretation is precisely the fact that (1) there is a letter from which to ascend; and (2) the letter contains certain patterns of the spirit, which we can find only by paying careful attention to the letter. Underlying Origen's exegesis, therefore, is a metaphysics that is profoundly participatory in character. Much like Pusey's later sacramental metaphysic, for Origen, just as visible things participate in invisible things, so the letter participates in the spirit. Anagogy or ascent is possible, he believes, precisely because heavenly, invisible realities are *not* separate from earthly, visible things.

Adrian Pabst, in his book, *Metaphysics*, argues at length that it is the notion of participation (*methexis*) that prevents the kind of dualism

with which Platonism is often charged: "The Socratic and Platonist revolution was to discern the presence of perennial structures in ephemeral phenomena and to theorize this presence in terms of the participation of particular things in universal forms."[42] Metaphysical dualism occurs when visible and invisible things are separated. Plato—and on this point, at least, Origen is in wholehearted agreement—uses the distinction between visible and invisible things not to separate them but to show that they are joined by means of a participatory link that enables one to move from visible to invisible things. The charge of dualism, commonly levelled against patristic metaphysics and exegesis, doesn't stick precisely because of the Platonic notion of participation. It is the modern historical schools of interpretation—Hobbes and his heirs—to which the charge of dualism does apply. After all, it is a modern, nominalist metaphysics that truly separates visible from invisible realities (at times by simply denying the latter, with as a result a lapse from dualism into materialist monism).[43]

Even if what I have argued so far is true, some may still object that a Christian Platonist approach doesn't yield a very exalted role either for visible things (in metaphysics) or for the letter of the text (in Scripture). After all, even if the *visibilia* are indispensable, our aim is always to move beyond them towards heavenly things. How does such a view allow us to revel in the wonders of the created order and savour the intricacies of the historical narrative of Scripture? There is no

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[42] Pabst, *Metaphysics*, 32.

[43] George Steiner, though he focuses on the nineteenth century, refers to this same dichotomy when he speaks of the "broken contract" between word and world (*Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 51–134, esp. 93

denying the anagogical character of Origen's approach: his purpose—in metaphysics and in biblical interpretation—is to ascend. However, just because heavenly things are more glorious than earthly things, that doesn't make the latter lose their splendour; and just because spiritual meaning is of a higher kind than historical meaning, that doesn't leave the latter without significance. Perhaps by valuing visible things less than invisible things, the church fathers actually accurately captured the significance of both. (My basic point here is that it is by denying the presence of *examplaria* within visible things that we trivialize them, since we then reduce them to what makes them empirically observable.[44])

As I mentioned, metaphysics and interpretation are two sides of the same coin; my basic point is that a sacramental metaphysics is at work in patristic biblical interpretation. To understand patristic exegesis, we must recognize that the fathers treated the letter of the Old Testament text (what Origen calls the *manifesta*, and what in sacramental language we may call the *sacramentum*) as containing the treasure of a "hidden" meaning (the *occulta*, as Origen puts it, or the reality or *res*, in sacramental discourse), which one can discover in and through God's salvific self-revelation in Jesus Christ.[45]

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[44] It seems to me no coincidence, for example, that environmental mismanagement has become such a tremendous problem in the modern world: if the natural order is strictly autonomous and has no link to anything transcendent, we treat it as we see it: a collection of purely quantifiable objects, whose goodness and beauty reach no further than themselves. See Hans Boersma, "Reconnecting the Threads: Theology as Sacramental Tapestry, *Crux* 47/3 (2011): 29–37, at 33.

[45] See my interaction on this point with N. T. Wright, in Hans Boersma, "Sacramental Interpretation: On the Need for Theological Grounding of Narratival History," in *Exile in Biblical Studies and Theology: A Dialogue with N. T. Wright*, ed. James M. Scott (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), forthcoming (check).

Origen and Pusey were convinced of a close (participatory) link between this-worldly sacrament (*sacramentum*) and otherworldly reality (*res*). For both, the hidden presence of the reality was finally revealed at the fullness of time, in the Christ event—along with everything that this event entails: Christ's own person and work, the church's origin, the believers' new, Spirit-filled lives in Christ, as well as the eschatological renewal of all things in and through Christ. They saw this entire new covenant reality as the hidden treasure already present in the Old Testament. In other words, the Great Tradition practiced typology, allegory, and so on because it saw the reality of the Christ event as already present (sacramentally) within the history described within the Old Testament narrative. To speak of a sacramental hermeneutic, therefore, is to allude to the recognition of the real presence of the new Christ-reality hidden within the outward sacrament of the biblical text.

Conclusion

The separation of visible from invisible things in the modern period means that we often fail to recognize how the unfolding of history is anchored in God's providential care. Providence assumes that earthly realities participate in heavenly ones. John Webster alludes to this when he comments that it has become difficult for us to affirm that "texts with a 'natural history' may function within the communicative divine economy …."[46] Within the dualism of the modern period, it

[46] John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19.

becomes hard for us to affirm divine providence, and, *a fortiori*, to affirm that divine providence has a bearing on how we read the Scriptures. The cultural ethos of the modern period tempts us to deny that God is intimately at work within the "natural history" that we see described on the surface of the biblical text. As Webster puts it: "Part of what lies behind this denial is the complex legacy of dualism and nominalism in Western Christian theology, through which the sensible and intelligible realms, history and eternity, were thrust away from each other, and creaturely forms (language, action, institutions) denied any capacity to indicate the presence and activity of the transcendent God."[47] According to Webster, it is the dualism of the modern period that undermines a robust sense of divine providence.

The implications for biblical interpretation will be obvious. The loss of faith in providence implies a loss of faith in the sacramental typology of the church fathers. John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno describe this loss by saying that "we have trouble accepting the crossing of the Red Sea as connected in reality to the death of Jesus and Christian baptism. We regard it as present and real only in the imagination of the interpreter."[48] The reason for this, they rightly suggest, is "our profound lack of confidence in the patristic understanding of the divine economy"—in other words, our failure of nerve with regard to divine providence.[49] A sacramental understanding of the relationship between *visibilia* and *invisibilia*, between *manifesta* and *occulta*, results from a robust understanding of God's providential guidance in history, which

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[47] Ibid., 19–20.
[48] O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 88.
[49] Ibid.

sees in Christ (as well as in the types that adumbrate his coming) the true expression of God's providential plan of salvation.