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An Urban Bishop in a Changing World: The Exegesis of Caesarius of Aries

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The effort to retrieve and appropriate the theological work of the early Christian centuries, an on-going theological task, has recently received renewed interest. In an earlier essay, I analyzed how this interest played out among a group of Roman Catholic theologians in France, including Jean Daniélou, Louis Bouyer, Jean Leclercq, and Henri de Lubac, in the first part of the twentieth century.[1] These theologians believed that their work, identified as a *ressourcement* (a return to the sources) would bear ecumenical fruit, since the pre-Reformation theologians are the common legacy of all Christians. Their hope seems to have been realized by the publication of the *Ressourcement* series of volumes by William B. Eerdmans, a well-respected publisher in the Protestant tradition. Danielou, de Lubac, and the others focused their attention on the methods by which early exegetes constructed a systematic theology on a careful reading of the biblical text interpreted by what is now called "the allegorical method." And they expressed the hope that modern theologians would take up the task of making careful critical studies of specific early authors, situating them in their historical context and elucidating their thought in terms of that context.

In the following pages, I shall attempt such a study of one early theologian, Caesarius, bishop of Arles in the early sixth century, who left a significant corpus of exegetical sermons. First I will place Caesarius in his specific context, hoping to answer the obvious question, "Why study Caesarius of Arles?" Then I will make a short analysis of the allegorical method as understood by Caesarius and, indeed, by most patristic and medieval exegetes, looking at it in relation to the historical-critical method. An exposition of Caesarius's exegetical work will follow, with careful attention to his exegesis as the foundation for theology. Finally, I will suggest what contemporary theologians, preachers and pastors might learn from this early sixth century bishop.

In the year 500, Arles was an important Roman city, poised at the point where the great Rhone river divides in two and continues its bifurcated way to the Mediterranean, creating the Rhone delta as it goes. From the beginning of the fourth century Arles had grown into an administrative center, an imperial residence and an extremely important exchange point for trade between the Mediterranean region and the interior of Gaul. Caesarius (b. 469/70) came to Arles in his late twenties after an unsuccessful attempt at the monastic life in Lerins and became its bishop in December, 502, serving as its pastoral leader until his death on August 27, 542.

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[1]Marie Anne Mayeski, "Quaestio Disputata: Catholic Theology and the History of Exegesis," *TS* 62 (2001): 140-53.

The world he lived in and the challenges that he faced as bishop have resonances that will be familiar to pastors and church leaders of our own day. It was, first of all, a world of significant riches and radical poverty. Luxury goods abounded and the upper strata of society controlled both the land and the commercial trade that was its life-blood. Secondly, Caesarius's world was marked by noteworthy cultural diversity and was socially stratified along cultural lines. Greeks and Romans controlled the commercial and social life of Arles, but Celts and Ligurians, the original inhabitants, challenged Graeco-Roman hegemony, especially in the large rural surrounding areas whose agriculture supported the city and its population. Religious diversity mirrored the cultural patterns. A rich, if unruly, mix of Roman paganism still overlay the increasing ferment of change as "Christian festivals, churches, and forms of entertainment [had begun] to function as new ways of expressing social relationships, dispensing patronage, and promoting civic unity."[2] In the countryside Celtic-Ligurian paganism still held sway. Thirdly, it was a world in transition. The Roman world, still ostensibly dominant in its architecture—the forum, baths, and arena—was dying, and during Caesarius's lifetime Arles would become a Germanic city. A permanent shift took place in the power relations between the groups of Arlesian citizens that would create the point of demarcation between the world of late antiquity and the Middle Ages. The increasing influence of the Germanic tribes, with their different *mores* and patterns of social organization, challenged not only the dominant Roman culture but also the structures and practices of Christian life. The growing importance of kinship bonds meant that influential laity were increasingly put forward as candidates for priesthood and episcopal office, a clear break with earlier tradition and a challenge to the local bishop's ability to educate and form the local clergy theologically.[3]

Caesarius presided over the church of Arles precisely at that moment when it ceased to be Roman Christian and became Germanic Christian. He would attempt throughout his long episcopacy to retain what he considered the essential tradition even while he accommodated it to a radically new context. There was the continual challenge to deepen the faith of urban Christians and to extend the faith throughout the still largely pagan rural areas.[4] Finally, the city of Arles was at war for long stretches of Caesarius's episcopate. Imperial armies fought with the Visigoths who, in turn, battled Ostrogoths, Burgundians, and Franks for control of this wealthy and strategic city. Caesarius was called upon to work for the ransom of captives, to provide defenses for the sacred places and, especially, for the women's monastery he had founded, and to deal with the usual consequences of war such as famine and disease. At the same time, as cities passed from one kingdom to another, long-standing lines of authority

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[2]William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 57.

[3]See Ian Wood, "The Ecclesiastical Politics of Merovingian Clermont," in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (ed. P. Wormald; Oxford: B. Blackwell Pubs., 1983), 34-57.

[4]C. E. Stancliffe, "From Town to Country: The Christianisation of the Touraine 370-600," in *The Church in Town and Countryside* (ed. Derek Baker; Oxford: B. Blackwell Pubs., 1979), 43-60.

between and among regional bishops were disrupted and, in the power vacuums that periodically occurred, the bishop of Rome sought to extend the range of his own authority. Throughout his episcopacy, Caesarius would struggle to maintain his autonomy as metropolitan bishop and to strengthen church organization and practice in Gaul by convoking regional synods.

To all of these challenges Caesarius responded in ways that reveal his character as a late antique Roman, bringing to bear on them the traditional skills of Roman training and the traditional values of the church that had matured within the Roman cultural matrix. He consistently acted as patron of the city, building churches, ransoming captives, building and endowing a monastery for aristocratic women, dispersing food, clothing and money to those in need. In sum, during his long tenure as pastoral leader of the Christian community of Arles, Caesarius engaged the challenges of economic inequities, cultural diversity, the upheavals of social change, and the realities of war, just as do pastors and theologians today. Furthermore, Caesarius was committed to maintaining the theological and institutional traditions that had endured for the first five Christian centuries even while he adapted them to the new realities. This commitment, too, matches the requirement that fidelity to the gospel imposes on today's Christian leaders. He is, thus, a potentially helpful guide for theologians who seek to retrieve the ancient tradition and appropriate it to new social and ecclesial realities.

What makes Caesarius an even more fitting subject of investigation is the fact that he has left a weighty corpus of exegetical material. Though he played the many public roles imposed on a sixth century Bishop in Gaul—that of patron, administrator, and judge—he was most exercised by the need to promote the Christian education and formation of clergy and people as the primary responsibility of episcopal leadership. He was convinced of the persuasive power of rhetoric when allied to true doctrine; he believed it to be the most effective means of inculcating the faith and insuring its deep appropriation by the people. Therefore he saw with alarm that some of the bishops under his metropolitan authority were preoccupied by administrative concerns and neglected the Sunday sermon, which had been the highpoint of episcopal obligation since the earliest centuries. Furthermore, as the congregations of Christians grew and parishes were developed in rural regions, priests were sometimes ordained without adequate formation.[5] Caesarius himself preached with great regularity and composed sermons that were short and pointed, in a deliberately simple style. They were meant to instruct fellow bishops, clergy, and, obviously, lay Christians in the fundamentals of Christian faith and life. He also carefully composed written sermons meant to serve as models for other bishops and clergy to utilize. He left behind over 300 sermons, each based on the readings assigned by liturgical custom for each Sunday of the church year.

It is fair to say that Caesarius's sermons are not noteworthy for their originality. He consciously modeled himself after the great urban bishops of the previous century, principally Augustine, and borrowed substantially from

[5]Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles*, 77-78; 231.

Augustine and others in composing his own exegesis. But precisely because of this, we find in his sermons valuable insights into the ways in which the methods of the patristic exegetes continued to shape pastoral teaching and the way in which the great Christian affirmations about creation, redemption, and sanctification were proclaimed in new social contexts. Caesarius's sermons stand as eloquent witness to the balance of tradition and adaptation that challenges all theologians in every generation. To read them with sympathy and profit, however, we must reflect briefly upon the allegorical method as it was understood and practiced by Christian exegetes from the earliest centuries.

In using the allegorical method, Augustine (following his predecessors) assumed that the words of Scripture might be understood according to different levels of meaning. He explains this in his treatise "On the Profit of Believing," Chapters 5 and 6, where he also affirms his conviction that allegorical interpretation is the method which Christ and the evangelists themselves used to interpret the Torah.[6] Though patristic theory and practice varied greatly, one can synthesize the most common patristic practice and identify four levels of meaning that were common to Augustine and those who followed him. The historical/literal meaning tells what actually happened, the allegorical meaning indicates the theological interpretation (specifically, how the text reveals Christ and the church), the tropological meaning teaches the truth about the soul's relationship to God (the moral meaning of the text), and the anagogical (or eschatological) meaning illuminates the ultimate end of history and full reality of the end-time.[7]

When early exegetes named an interpretation as "literal," (used somewhat interchangeably with "historical") they did not intend that the text should be read without reference to its literary character. "Historical" or "literal" means that the text narrates the events of an earlier period; in carefully considering all the concrete details of a story taken as historical, ancient biblical scholars took available information from natural history, historical records, and ordinary experience to further clarify the historical meaning of the text. Of course, they did not have the scientific tools to reconstruct the historical situation of the text as we do; their chief critical tools were literary rather than scientific, the disciplines of grammar, logic, and, especially, rhetoric. Patristic exegetes always assumed that the biblical text was a literary artifact, subject to the same rules of interpretation as all literature. They pay significant attention to questions of genre, literary structure, and figurative language, as historical critics do today. Therefore, their interpretation of the "historical/literary" meaning of biblical texts sometimes comes close to our understanding of the historical-critical meaning, though, to repeat, they do not have the scientific tools to reconstruct the world of the original author. Nonetheless, for most patristic exegetes, the historical meaning of the text was merely propaedeutic to the interpretation of its extended meaning, which allowed the exegete to apply the text to the creed his community proclaimed in becoming Christian

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[6]*NPNF* 3: 349-50.

[7]See Karlfried Froehlich, "Early Christian Interpretation," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan; Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 310-15.

(allegorical meaning), to the practice of Christian life expected of them (the tropological), and to the hope for the future fullness of life by which they were motivated to fidelity (the anagogical). Following Augustine, later exegetes (including Caesarius) were unanimous in their conviction that the extended sense was the superior meaning and determining it was the exegete's primary task. Through the use of the allegorical method, Scripture becomes the basis of all theological work and moral exhortation.

We may now turn to a close, careful reading of some of Caesarius's sermons to determine, if possible, how helpful they may be in demonstrating the value of patristic exegesis for contemporary theology. Within the confines of this brief essay, I shall examine two small selections: Sermons 114-116A on the story of the Jews' entry into the promised land under Joshua's leadership and Sermons 167-169 on the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana.[8] Together, these sections represent Caesarius's strategies for dealing both with Old and New Testament passages. They also contain examples of Caesarius's typical and most helpful strategies. Thus in a relatively small sample, which allows for a detailed analysis, we may have a fair appraisal of Caesarius's exegesis. A close, critical reading of the text will, I believe, demonstrate the validity of the following theses in regard to Caesarius's exegetical work. First, that Caesarius takes the historical meaning of the text very seriously indeed, within the limits of his understanding of "historical." Second, that Caesarius builds a restrained allegorical interpretation upon the foundation of the historical meaning of the text, for the most part using significant typologies either present in the text themselves or sanctioned by long-standing liturgical usage. Third, that the theology Caesarius draws from his allegorical interpretations focuses on the great themes of redemption: the nature of Christ, the saving work of Christ, and the changed nature of the redeemed Christian (Christian anthropology). Fourth, that Caesarius presents moral teaching shaped by his anthropology that engages the real world of his audience, its social texture, and its specific challenges.

Caesarius: History and Typology

Let us turn, now, to Caesarius's own work and begin with the three homilies in which Caesarius interprets the text of Josh 2.[9] These clearly demonstrate his great respect for the historical meaning of the text. Caesarius's starting-point is a contemporary question, framed, as he says, by "pagans and especially the most wicked Manicheans" who question God's justice because God has driven the Canaanites out of their own land by force, in order to give it to the Israelites. The question is based, of course, on a literal or historical meaning of the text and Caesarius sets out to answer it in terms of the history presented there. He summarizes the "history" of the early chapters of Genesis to demonstrate that the land of Canaan had originally belonged to the descendents of Noah's good son who were later displaced by the descendents of the son cursed by his father

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[8]I use throughout the translation by Sister Mary Madeleine Mueller, O.S.F. in *The Fathers of the Church* (vol. 47; Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964).

[9]*Homilies* 114-116A; Mueller, *The Fathers of the Church*, 161-77.

Noah who added to their ancestor's sins by many crimes of their own. Far from being the action of an unjust God, then, the story of Joshua records how the Canaanites "are punished by a just judgment when the possessions of their ancient fathers are restored to the Jewish people" (114.2). For Caesarius, as for his predecessors, the historical/literal meaning of the text includes the typologies intrinsic to the text itself, part of the literary work of the biblical author. The author of Joshua had clearly portrayed Joshua as a new Moses and Matthew had portrayed Jesus as the new Moses; upon that double typology Caesarius will build his extended meaning of the text.

As Caesarius moves to extend the historical meaning to a theological one, he cites the precedent of Paul for the use of allegory. Caesarius then makes two typological connections that flow from his understanding of the meaning of the land and the actions of God in regard to the land.

> Before Adam sinned, we were the Promised Land which the Lord extols so many times as flowing with milk and honey, for then there was nothing in us except what the mercy of the Creator had bestowed. However, after we all sinned in Adam, for the Apostle says: "In Adam all die," and again: "From one man all are unto condemnation," through the transgression of the first man, the Canaanites began to take possession of the Promised Land. The Lord's will did not by nature assign the control of our heart to vices but to virtues, and still after Adam's sin haughty vices like the Canaanites drove holy virtues out of their own land, that is, from the understanding of a rational mind, and remained there. (114.3)

As God had intended the promised land for the chosen people from the beginning, the land, to Caesarius, indicates the original condition of the created human person. The land is God's gift from the beginning and stands as metonymy for original justice, which is described as the condition in which virtue holds sway naturally over the human heart. The dominance of vice is a usurpation that results from Adam's sin. Therefore, as God justly restores the land to the chosen through the actions of Joshua, so does God restore the possibility of virtue and the restoration of original justice through the work of Jesus. Just as the author of Joshua portrays him as the new Moses, so, for Caesarius, Jesus is the new Joshua, a typological interpretation made easy by the similarity of names. Just as in the ancient story, Moses, the author of the law, was not allowed to take the Jews into the promised land, so Joshua signifies Christ who does. The crossing of the River Jordan in Josh 2 becomes the type of baptism, one of what Bouyer calls the "great typologies," sanctioned both by New Testament literature and the liturgy.

Caesarius develops each of the four homilies on the story in Josh 2 by building on these fundamental typologies that he finds within the text of Joshua itself and in the gospel texts that reinterpret the Hebrew Scriptures. At regular intervals, he cites the gospel texts that allow him to draw the allegorical conclusions. Joshua is the new Moses and Christ is both the new Joshua and the new Moses.

> The lesson which was read to us just now, dearly beloved, does not so much preach to us the exploits of the son of Nun, as depict the mysteries

> of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He it is who received the rule after the death of Moses. Therefore, Moses died and Joshua governed; the old law ceased, and the true Joshua or Jesus ruled. (116.1)

The transition into the promised land by way of the crossing of the Jordan signifies the transition from sin to grace, from the condition of alienation into the condition of renewed nature, the kingdom of God, through baptism.

> Moreover, brethren, understand that the land of promise was not recovered before the River Jordan was crossed in the rule of Joshua. So it is, brethren, because the spiritual land of promise, that is a pure conscience, is not reached except through the sacrament of Baptism. Joshua compelled the Israelites to cross through this same river which the true Joshua or Jesus later consecrated by His Baptism (114.5).

This is allegory, indeed, but allegory carefully controlled, built upon a foundation of historical interpretation.

Similarly, in his three homilies on John 2, the story of the wedding feast at Cana, Caesarius follows the synoptic typology by which the wine represents the new interpretation given by Jesus to the old "water" of legal interpretations.[10] This is consistent with what contemporary exegetes see as the historical-critical meaning of the text today.[11] Caesarius again sets up two major and related lines of development. In the first, he focuses on the notion of the wedding feast and applies to the story of Cana the notion that the wedding feast as a type of the messianic age, a connection that is clearly in the text. This allows him to explore the mysteries of incarnation and redemption through its nuptial imagery. Caesarius points out that the nuptial feast at which Christ is the bridegroom signifies the joys of human salvation and thus situates the mystery of the incarnation within the nuptial image, calling that mystery the wedding of the divine person to the church, "composed of all the nations." This affirmation is also an echo of the Easter Exsultet, a liturgical hymn that was already in use in Caesarius's day.[12] Using elements from the wedding customs of his own day, Caesarius extends the nuptial metaphor to speak of "the pledge" or "love token" offered by Christ and the "dowry" that Christ bestows. The pledge is, in one homily, "Christ's blood" or, in another, the promises given under the law and the grace offered in the present, while the dowry is the kingdom and eternal life. These are but simple and obvious extensions of the biblically given metaphor.

In the second line of development, Caesarius interprets the transformation of water to wine as an image of the transformation of the redeemed person through baptism. Contemporary exegetes agree that the Fourth Gospel here in chapter 2 announces a replacement of Jewish ritual with Christian mystery;[13]

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[10]*Homilies* 167-69; Mueller, *The Fathers of the Church*, 402-19.

[11]See, e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (AB 29; Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), 104-5.

[12]Some parts of this hymn seem to go back to Ambrose's inspiration; it was known by Jerome and Augustine, although it underwent change even up to the time of Caesarius.

[13]See n. 11 above.

Caesarius simply makes that specific and draws out the implications.[14] He makes an extended comparison between what happens to the water in the jars and what happens to the human person through baptism. The waters retain their liquidity and their volume, yet they receive a new taste and new power. Similarly, the baptized person seems to be the same outwardly, but in "endowed with new dignity" and new power; "his person is not touched, but his nature is changed." In this line of development, Caesarius also elaborates upon the importance of the number of water jars; for him, the six jars indicate the six ages of the world. This is a somewhat more artificial development of the notion of replacement: what is replaced is what has gone before and, so, within this framework, Caesarius gives a kind of summary of salvation history. He places specific emphasis on the creation of Adam, Noah, the sacrifice of Isaac, the kingship of David, the prophecy of Daniel, and the coming of John the Baptist. This is a fairly standard treatment, but Caesarius keeps a kind of thematic thread—references to water and stones—that binds them all together.

In the main, then, Caesarius's use of allegory proceeds according to a clearly discernible method. He begins with a careful exposition of the historical meaning of the text, using his literary skills to identify the typological patterns already inherent in them. He reads the text as individual texts, but he reads them with a hermeneutic that assumes their coherence and, indeed, their continuity. Thus he will use the conclusions and affirmations in one biblical book to inform his interpretation of the text of another, using Pauline theology of the inadequacy of the law, for instance, to ground his understanding of Joshua as a type of Jesus. For Caesarius, as for all the fathers, the scriptural texts taken together tell one story, the story of God's action in the world on behalf of the human community. It is a story that begins with creation, reaches a definitive redemption and revelation in Christ, but continues with the on-going life of the church in liturgy and Christian life. He thus reads the texts in a liturgical context, assuming that the lives and worship of the contemporary community are valid hermeneutic keys for the understanding of the original text. Within this hermeneutic, he then develops the typologies, drawing out the details of the text and amplifying them both by the liturgical applications of the text that are already traditional in his own day and by his understanding of his own world and culture. His sensitivity to the cultural texture of his own world helps him to disclose the human texture of the biblical world. This carefully controlled allegorical method allows him to draw theology from the text in ways that, I believe, are not arbitrary or eisogetical, but serve the formulation of a genuinely biblical theology.

Caesarius: Biblical Theology

We have seen above that Caesarius's systematic theology is built upon the fundamental typologies exposed through the historical-literary meaning of the text

[14]In a small, but telling, detail, Caesarius reveals here that he means no contempt for Jews or for the Law. He affirms that the "mysteries of the Old Testament" were contained in the water jars of the Law, but without holding the hermeneutic key, which is Christ, the Jews were not able to understand. There is no sense of the inferiority of the Jews; their flaw was a hermeneutic one.

and focuses upon the great themes of redemption. In exegeting the story of Joshua's entry into the promised land, for instance, Caesarius has developed the notion that the promised land, which had belonged to God's chosen from the beginning of salvation history, was wrongly invaded by the Canaanites who had to be expropriated. This brings Caesarius to explore the notion of God's original plan for the human person and the human community and, so, to the dynamic of creation, sin, and redemption that are at the heart of Christian theology. In doing this, he brings Pauline theology to bear on the story of Joshua. Since Moses, the man of the law, could not enter the promised land, Joshua/Jesus replaced him. Since the land is, by metonymy, the condition of original justice, so Christ is "the new Adam" who restores what has been lost. The notion of "replacement" controls the details of Caesarius's allegorical theology; his emphasis, however, is on the continuities between the world of Moses and the law and the world of the Christ and grace. The two spies are the two commandments given in the law, but announcing the fullness of the gospel; they announce what is coming but they also anticipate it. There are two sets of twelve memorial stones in the story (Josh 4). Today we understand that they represent two interwoven traditions;[15] for Caesarius, they represent the passage from the covenant of the law to the covenant of the gospel.

> Then Joshua took twelve stones and put them in the Jordan, and from the Jordan he took twelve others and fastened them in the place of the camp. Those twelve which were thrown into the Jordan seem to me to typify the patriarchs, while those which were lifted out of the Jordan prefigured the apostles. Indeed, after the death of Moses, when the patriarchs were buried the Apostles arose as we read in the Psalm: "The place of your fathers your sons shall have; you shall make them princes through all the land." (115.3)

In his mind, the narrative reveals the transition from one set of leaders to another, from the leaders of a small group of the chosen to those destined to lead "the Gentiles." Caesarius here introduces an incipient theology of the church that emphasizes, first, its continuity with Israel and with the whole story of salvation and, second, its expansion to encompass, at least potentially, the whole world.

There is one detail of Caesarius's allegory that seems specifically to suggest his particular audience. In Sermon 116, he exposes the story of the harlot who hides the spies that Joshua has sent. He says of her, that "she prefigured the Church which had been wont to commit fornication with many idols before the advent of Jesus" (116.3). This pagan woman is a kind of church before there is a church; that is, she is potentially a member of the redeemed people and is already acting as redeemed in hiding the spies of Joshua. Indeed, he goes on to say that as soon as she hides the spies, she becomes the object of the king of Jericho's wrath, demonstrating that "as soon as a soul begins to take refuge in Jesus, at once the enemy gets angry." Her simple act while she is yet a pagan

[15]Michael David Coogan, "Joshua," *NJBC* 114.

places her among those who "take refuge in Jesus," that is to say, among those who are redeemed. While this may refer to people in Caesarius's own city who are sympathetic to Christianity but still involved in pagan rituals, it also suggests an insight about ways to redemption for those not explicitly within the Christian community. To the bishop of Arles, whose city would pass from one barbarian king to another during his episcopacy, the universality of salvation was an important ecclesiological note.

In his exegesis of the story of Joshua, Caesarius's Christology is couched in simple biblical affirmations but the context adds important nuances. Christ is both the new Moses and the new Joshua; he is the new Adam who restores the condition of original justice; he is the leader in the struggle with the forces of sin. In the context of the theme of "restoration" these titles all emphasize the way in which Christ continues the work of creation. He is a Moses who does not just give a new law, but restores the integrity of the human person so as to enable each to live the law.

> It was not through Moses, that is, the law of the Old Testament, but through Joshua, the successor of Moses. Thus, indeed, the Apostle says: "The law brought nothing to perfection." Therefore, it was not through the letter of the law, but through the grace of the Gospel that the cruel, wicked people, that is, original and actual sins, could be routed from the Promised Land, that is, the hearts of Christians under the leadership of Jesus. (114.4)

He is the Joshua who leads people not to conquer outward forces but to regain their interior and true reality through a real inner transformation. As the new Adam he brings all people back to that original goodness which is lost through the first sin. Caesarius's thought on the reality of that transformation will be more appropriately considered under his anthropology.

The theology exposed in the exegesis on John 2 also focuses on the central mystery of redemption and of the transformation of the human person that is at its core. Within the context of the wedding themes, Caesarius stresses the joy and unity with Christ that is the experience of salvation and connects it to the joy of reconciliation that is so prominent a theme in Luke, whose narrative Caesarius brings to bear upon this Johannine passage. "Our gain or reinstatement is shown in the nuptial vows and feast, just as in another place the return of the younger son was received with music and dancing" (168.1). The unity of the spouses in marriage is an image of the unity of God and the human community in the incarnation, and the wine that celebrates that union is both a symbol and a foretaste of the joy such union brings. In expounding on the latter, Caesarius piles up psalm verses that sing of the sweet taste of God and of the things of God. Like wine, the experience of God, once tasted, creates a desire for more; it arouses the appetite, but, unlike wine, does not create satiety (167.1). For Caesarius, the experience of God is found and increased by imbibing deeply of the sacred Scriptures, through which "the senses are kindled to fear God and the affections are inebriated" (168.4). In this theological exposition, Christ is the bridegroom, but he is also the creator. Only the one who had created the natural gifts such as water and the human person could transform

both so that the water becomes wine and the human person becomes again a person who is both just and blessed. Just as he affirms that Christ the redeemer is also the creator, Caesarius also affirms an important and intrinsic link between the Christ of the Gospels and the resurrected Christ of Christian faith. For him, the resurrection does not negate the importance of the historical life of Christ but makes of it the source of present salvation. "Let us see," Caesarius says, "what He does at Cana of Galilee, for as a result of it the wonderful miracles of the Lord now come to us" (168.2). According to Caesarius, the liturgical life of the Christian gives him or her access to the transforming power of Christ narrated in the Gospels; he seems to expect, too, that Christ's salvific activity in the Christian community will be congruent with a specific gospel miracle.

In both of these expositions on redemption, the one in the homilies on Joshua and the other in the homilies on John 2, Caesarius's emphasis is on the human person who receives the gift of salvation and is transformed by it. Not surprisingly, then, he devotes a considerable portion of his attention to what is called Christian anthropology, the notion of what it means to be a human person as perceived through divine revelation. He lays down the theoretical foundations of his anthropology within the two major typologies he exposes in each set of sermons. In the four sermons on the story of Joshua, Caesarius affirms that the promised land restored to the chosen people under Joshua's leadership signifies the state of original justice in which human persons had been created from the beginning. "Before Adam sinned, we were the Promised Land which the Lord extols so many times as flowing with milk and honey, for then there was nothing in us except what the mercy of the Creator had bestowed" (115.3). The sin of Adam, according to Caesarius, allowed vices to drive out the virtues that were part of our human nature, but redemption, signified by the re-taking of the promised land, restores us to our original condition.

> The Lord's will did not by nature assign the control of our heart to vices but to virtues, and still after Adam's sin haughty vices like the Canaanites drove holy virtues out of their own land, that is, from the understanding of a rational mind, and remained there. When through God's grace the possession of our soul is again restored to the virtues, we will be seen to recover our own land. (115.3)

Virtue, then, is natural for the human person and part of God's intended structure of human nature from the beginning. Sin and the consequent domination of the human person by vice is an aberration that redemption must correct. For Caesarius, Christ is the new Adam who restores the land. Redemption, for Caesarius, is the restoration of the original goodness of human nature, where "the rational mind" is undimmed and in control and where virtue is the natural condition. This is a thoroughly patristic understanding of human nature consonant with the theme of the human person as the "imago dei" (best elaborated by Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine)[16] and the notion of redemption by Christ as a

[16]Gregory of Nyssa explored the theme in many places; one significant one is in his treatise "On the Making of Man," *NPNF* 5:387-427. Augustine's most notable development and the one most accessible to later authors is in his *Confessions* (trans. Henry Chadwick;

"restoration." There is also, perhaps, a subtle echo of Augustine's image of sin as a wandering in the "land of unlikeness"; Caesarius knew Augustine's work well and used it consistently.

In the homilies on the wedding-feast at Cana, the typology is different but the thought is much the same. There, in Homilies 167-169, Caesarius develops the typology of the transformation of water to wine as signifying the transformation of the human person in baptism. Here the emphasis is on the way in which the person remains outwardly the same and loses nothing of his human qualities or characteristics but is, nonetheless, dramatically changed.

> [T]hrough the water of Baptism, although a man [sic] seems to be the same outwardly, still he becomes different interiorly. He was born with sin, but is reborn without sin; he perished in the first instance, but progresses in the next. He is stripped of what is worse and renewed in what is better; his person is not touched, but his nature is changed. Nothing is seen to have been added, and still what is added is perceived though faith as with the taste and savor of the mind. (167.1)

Caesarius'ss insistence that the baptized "loses nothing of his human qualities" is a re-affirmation of God's original creation and the intrinsic goodness of human nature. Baptismal redemption means "progress" and "renew[al]," not a destruction of human nature nor yet a mere ignoring of the sin in an essentially flawed human nature. Sin alone is done away with. Sin is not natural, but the damage done to human nature, and redemption heals it. Caesarius reminds his audience of this by two references to the work and goodness of creation. He says that only the creator can change the water and human nature in these ways (168.3) and he speaks of the way in which all that "had spoiled the divine image will be consumed" (167.6). Caesarius never lets his audience forget that the work of regeneration is, indeed, God's work, effected through Christ, and not their own achievement. "What Christ effected in the apostles, beloved brethren, He has also deigned to fulfill in us, that we who were lukewarm or cold with unbelief now glow with faith and merit to be in the service of God" (169.10). It is the work of Christ, but it gives rise, in the believer, to "the service of God."

In the great typologies that lie at the heart of these two collections of homilies, Caesarius develops his thought on redemption, sin and the transformation of the human person through the redemptive work of Christ. In the first, he exposes the central notion of redemption, that the human person is alienated from God by sin and must be led back to a state of reconciliation with God through Christ the redeemer. In the second, he explores the great theme of redemption as the transformation of the human person through Christ in Christian baptism. Throughout, he brings his understanding of the Christian creed to bear upon the text. He is grounding his reflections in the biblical text, to be sure, but he is reading that text through the lens of the received tradition of the faith. Just as he uses Pauline and Lucan texts to exegete John and Matthew to exegete the

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Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). On the patristic roots of this doctrine see P. Th. Camelot, "La théologie de l'image de Dieu," *RSPT* 40 (1956): 443-71.

Book of Joshua, so he uses the common understanding of the great Christian truths to unfold what he considers the full meaning of the text. I say "common understanding" because Caesarius does not engage in speculation on controversial themes but synthesizes what the great councils and great theologians had laid down before him. The understanding of sin as alienation from God is implicit in the Gospels and explicit in Paul; it became the anthropological bedrock of the church's preaching in the first several centuries. Similarly, Caesarius's explanation of baptism as the ritual of regeneration, transforming the human person into a believer united to Christ and sharing Christ's relationship with the Father, derives directly from Paul and becomes the foundation of the church's proclamation of the Easter mystery. As he says also, reading the crossing of the Jordan as a type of Christian baptism, in Homily 115,

> Therefore, Joshua who typified the Lord said to the people when he came to the Jordan: 'Prepare your provisions until the third day.' The third day, dearly beloved we recognize as the mystery of the Trinity. What food should we prepare so that we may come to the third day? It seems to me that this food should be understood as faith; for Christians it is by faith that they believe in the Trinity and arrive at the sacrament of Baptism. (115.1)

Having set up the baptismal typology of the crossing of the Jordan, Caesarius reads the text in the light of Christian faith about baptism—a sacrament that confirms faith and brings the believer into the life of grace, the life of the Trinity.

Similarly, in both sets of homilies, Caesarius speaks of Christ through biblical themes—Christ is the new Moses, the new Adam, the bridegroom—but he brings the fullness of the church's Chalcedonian faith in Christ as truly God and truly human to bear on these titles. Thus in discussing the changing of water into wine, Caesarius rhetorically asks, "Who can change these things, except the One who was also able to create them" (168.3)? For him, the Christ of the gospel story is the Christ proclaimed by Chalcedon and preached by the church: fully one with the creator. Caesarius is not original in his use of the accepted creedal formulae; indeed he would have rejected the title of original theologian as spurious, if not oxymoronic. A Christian theologian in his day did not attempt to be original but to expose the riches of biblical interpretation that had been transmitted from previous generations. Furthermore, he was in no way attempting to be a theologian but a pastor, exposing the meaning of the biblical text and of the Christian creed for his specific congregation. He stays close to the text throughout his exposition but uses it as the appropriate frame for expositions of doctrine. He does this with the full conviction that this is what the text really means, that the text was the source of those doctrinal understandings that are now the hermeneutic keys for, in turn, understanding the text. Augustine had argued for this principle in the *De Doctrina Christiana* and it was an integral part of the patristic hermeneutics.[17]

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[17]See especially, Book II, Chaps 8-9, *NPNF* 2. It seems to me not all that different, in principle, from the way in which Martin Luther understood that the Christ within the Bible

Caesarius: Moral Exhortation

In addition to laying out a general and entirely traditional theory of anthropology, Caesarius offers, principally in his ethical exhortations, lots of practical advice through which his anthropology can easily be perceived in greater specificity. Within a variety of contexts, and to several rhetorical purposes, he gives lists of virtues and, more rarely, lists of sins. We first encounter such a list in the story of the invasion of the promised land; Caesarius has told his audience that the invasion signifies the recovery of original justice and so he posits that the battle to take the land is a battle between virtues and vices, a traditional psychomachia. In this battle, chastity overcomes concupiscence, patience defeats fury, and salutary joy removes "a sadness which effects death" (115.3). And Caesarius continues,

> If a man was ruined by the lukewarmness of sloth or carelessness, fortitude will begin to inflame him. If pride crushed him, humility will honor him. The man whom avarice had made obscure will be restored to his former renown by mercy; one who had been struck by the poison of envy will be adorned with kind simplicity. Thus, as each vice is expelled, the contrary virtues will take their position in the passions. (115.3)

For Caesarius, this battle between the virtues and vices is what Paul refers to in his observation that "the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh" (Gal 5:17). There is no dualism between the body and the soul in Caesarius's thought as there was none in Paul; both sin and virtue are located in the will. Nor is it a question of isolated and arbitrary actions. Both sin and virtue are matters of "habitus," an enduring disposition that results from firm choice and results in facility of action. For "the soul," says Caesarius, "advances in whatever habit operates in her" (167.3) and having made a conversion of life, the soul sees more clearly and reaches more steadily for the things of God. But the converse is also true for Caesarius. He suggests that "loving the world and choosing its pleasures our wine [of a transformed self] might be changed again into water," symbol of the unregenerate self (169.10). Baptismal regeneration is an empowering that is like a new birth; but the life that is given must be enacted in a habitus of life that expresses itself in specific actions.

Caesarius gives a similar catalog of verses and vices in the context of his exhortation of John 2. There he again is talking about the ways in which the baptized soul can let slip away the gift of baptismal regeneration. He cites Matt 22:12, about coming to the wedding-banquet without a wedding garment (Matt 22:1), but he speaks of such a one as having "lost" the garment and, in a change of metaphor, of having "broken his water-jar and . . . lost the gift of the sacred font, pouring out the wine of blessed redemption" (167.4). The loss of baptismal innocence is a reprehensible carelessness with the gift of God. Though he is writing as a pastor who must exhort his flock and therefore emphasizes the

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was the norm by which individual biblical texts were to be evaluated. For him, the Christ of the church's faith was the norm of biblical interpretation. Seen John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1988), 40.

practices and virtues that the redeemed Christian must undertake, Caesarius never forgets that all of Christian life is a gift, which enables and enhances human effort but is not a substitute for it.

Caesarius also cites particular sins when he speaks of the Christian's need for purgation. He notes "desiring the wife of another" and "neglecting the advice and admonishments of priests" in the same sentence and with, seemingly, equal emphasis (167.4)! He lists perjury, false testimonies, unjust judgments and wrath as sins "worthy of temporal punishments" and, in contrast, itemizes the qualities of souls whose virtue fulfills their nature's own desire and makes them "happy." These are the people who "use their wealth wisely, content [themselves] with bodily necessities and [are] generous with their possessions, pure in themselves and not cruel toward others" (167.5). If we look carefully at these lists of virtues and vices, we see that they speak of the human person as a social, interrelated being whose responsibilities toward self and others may be subsumed under the categories of justice and charity. He assumes that happiness is a legitimate, god-given human desire and that kindness and joy are therefore moral characteristics. The bishop had a strong regard for the ascetic life, but in his portrait of the moral Christian, living life as a redeemed and sanctified person, there is an important emphasis on full human development within a community of socially responsible adults.

Among the various practices that Caesarius recommends for growth in Christian life, his chief emphasis is on a prayerful and thoughtful attention to the sacred Scripture as the source of life and virtue. Using a metaphor that will become a staple of monastic literature, he bids his congregation to "chew over" the passages of the Scripture that he cites for their edification (114.6). He considers meditation on the sacred Scripture as the chief aid to virtue, along with prayer and night vigils; for him, devotion to prayer and attentive listening to the word of God are both signs of, and aids to, ongoing conversion of life (116A.2, 3). But they are more; they are a stimulus to action. "Meditation on the divine words is like a trumpet arousing your souls to battle, lest perchance you sleep while your adversary is awake." Both reading ("chewing the cud") and attentive listening to a text were, in Caesarius's milieu, active exercises, a matter of practice as much as understanding, or rather, a practice that leads to understanding. This, too, points to his integrated anthropology; Christian life is, to him, a total experience that engages the unified self—intellect, will, affections, and action. His appeal is to the power of the word and of Christian rhetoric to persuade and move the person to respond to the divine gift of regeneration.

In addition to prayerful meditation on Scripture, Caesarius appeals to his audience to practice "good works" as the food that can sustain one on the journey of life (116.2). He is very specific about the works to be practiced, chief among which is almsgiving that purges the self of sin and restores the image of God in the soul (167.6). Almsgiving loomed large in the bishop's own practice. It was part of the program he implemented as a chief patron of the city and his attempts to integrate Christian sites into the geography of the city required the assistance of wealthy city-dwellers. He was also very active in the redemption of captives, suffering persecution when he ransomed those of the enemy barbarians. In an extended moral exhortation on the wedding-feast at Cana, he

presents his thought on almsgiving more completely than elsewhere. He begins with the notion that all of Christian life is a response to the good things God has given and done for God's people. Like Paul, Caesarius understands all of Christian life as a grateful response to God's salvation, gratuitously given. He notes that, in truth, the Christians have nothing of their own to give, but that God's goodness is so great as to accept "the perfect will to act" as already "the completion of the deed" (168.6). In other words, the loving desire to act as God wills is, through God's goodness, the only return the Christian can be expected to make. God does not ask of us what God knows we cannot accomplish. Nonetheless, the redeemed person needs to perform some good thing as an outward expression of this "perfect will to act . . . [and] men [sic] who are not able to give rather abundant alms should at least with a good intention dispense a little something according to their strength" (168.6). Almsgiving done in the proper spirit becomes the testimony of one's complete commitment to the Lord. Likewise, Caesarius believes that the redeemed person will actively perform whatever virtue lies within their power: "love justice, possess charity, cultivate patience, avoid drunkenness . . . and love all . . . in a perfect spirit" (168.6). Note the active and progressive character of the verbs: "cultivate," "avoid," and "love." The redeemed Christian is energetic in the performance of gospel injunctions, but all within the dynamic of a grateful response to God's abundant love and merciful transformation of the self. The Christian moral life is thus a performance and expression of the true self that is God's gift of redemption. It affirms the created (and therefore "natural") goodness of the created self, the social nature of the human person and the progressive character of Christian life, a dynamic that draws the self from transformation to perfection. Like his theology, Caesarius's moral exhortations are built upon an allegorical/typological reading of the biblical text. It is faithful, in spirit and in letter, to the moral message of the New Testament and shows, especially, the influence of the Pauline letters and points the Christian toward his own specific world with its particular moral challenges. At the same time, it is coherent with a systematic theology of redemption embodied not only in the biblical text but in the church's creeds and worship.

Caesarius and Contemporary Practice

Caesarius's accomplishments as exegete and pastor are surely worthy of study in and of themselves. They are a small part of the long and complex history of the reception of the biblical text and that history has, indeed, shaped our interpretation of it, the importance of the historical-critical method notwithstanding. Caesarius's work is a faithful mirror of the larger corpus of biblical interpretations that makes up the patristic tradition, the legacy of those who stand closest in time to the composition of the text and who have long been revered for their insight into it. Beyond that, the question remains: can Caesarius's work suggest any possibilities for the contemporary theologian and pastor? First of all, we can note that Caesarius always gives full weight to the historical meaning of the text, insofar as he understands it. That, surely, remains an enduring model for all who seek to understand the biblical text. As contemporary theologians seek to expose the riches of biblical faith for their own time, they will necessarily

ground their work in its original meaning, as far as that can be illuminated by the historical critics. This may require that, like Caesarius, contemporary theologians enlarge their sense of history. For Caesarius and other premodern theologians, history meant not only what had happened but what continues to happen as the God who is outside of time expresses Godself in time, initiating a history of salvation that unfolds now and into an eschatological future.

Further, Caesarius's use of the allegorical/typological interpretation, generally quite restrained, grows out of his understanding of, and respect for, the literary character of the original texts and the way in which later biblical authors recast earlier themes for new contexts. This might well validate a similar typological interpretation of biblical texts by theologians who seek to understand their meaning for today. Since the advent of the historical-critical method, theologians and biblical scholars have generally ignored the allegorical or typological method of interpretation as uncritical, fanciful and, most of all, unfaithful to the intended meaning of the author. Many theologians, however, have found that to limit the meaning of the text to what may be exposed by the historical-critical method seriously hampers the development of a biblically-based theology, since it restricts the ways in which the text may be applied to the life and theological concerns of contemporary Christians. Elsewhere I have suggested that the historical-critical meaning of the biblical text serves theologians well in their critical function, but seriously limits their ability to open up the riches of the biblical text in constructing contemporary theological explanations of doctrine and suggested that the example of earlier exegetes, using allegorical exegesis broadly understood, might help in the latter function. The *ressourcement* theologians whose work I studied sought to answer the historical critics and re-evaluate allegorical interpretation in light of the historical-critical method. They concluded, first, that patristic theologians generally paid serious attention to the historical meaning of the text insofar as they were able to reconstruct it (as understood above), and gave great weight to the intention of the biblical author. Second, they discovered that early Christian exegetes consistently interpreted the text within the context of the community's worship and allowed text and ritual mutually to interpret each other. This mutual interaction gave rise to the great biblical typologies present in liturgy: Baptism as individual Christian's crossing of the Red Sea; the celebration of the Lord's Supper as an eschatological banquet; Easter as the Christian celebration of an Exodus from sin. Third, they found that the patristic writers who interpreted the text allegorically were not imposing an artificial framework on the text, but following the methods of the biblical authors themselves who reinterpreted earlier texts and events in Israel's history in the light of later historical realities. Such is the process by which Deutero-Isaiah, for example, sees the return from Exile as a new creation and that by which the author of Matthew's Gospel sees Jesus as the new lawgiver like Moses. Finally, they noted that patristic allegorical interpretation did not, typically, deal with the details of the text, but with the great typologies that give rise to the substance of the Christian creeds. These insights suggest that there are standards to guide the contemporary theologian who endeavors to learn from the ancients and yet avoid a too-facile eisogesis in doing theology from the biblical text.

Caesarius's attention to the Bible as a literary artifact also reminds us that the original writers of the biblical books were not only instruments of divine revelation, but story-tellers, poets, sages and rhetoricians as well. They expressed divine revelation in all the genres through which God's audience could be expected to hear it. The imagination was as much the locus of divine revelation as the mind and actions of those who received it. To follow Caesarius's leadership means to develop a deep sensitivity to the literary character of the text, to respect the imaginations of those who wrote it, and to have at least some acquaintance with the literary theory that can help the reader apprehend the full riches of the text. It may also suggest that theologians consider other genres for theological work than the scholarly expositions heretofore privileged, genres that more obviously engage the imagination.

Caesarius is probably at his best when he uses the allegorical method to ground his moral and pastoral exhortations in doctrinal interpretations of Scripture. Here there is much for the contemporary pastor and theologian to imitate. All of Caesarius's moral teaching is rooted, not only in the scriptural text, but also in the great doctrinal truths affirmed by Christian faith. Morality is neither arbitrary nor a program of self-centered perfectionism. To understand the Christian moral life, one must understand the great reality of baptism. To appreciate the behavior required of Christians, one must appreciate the transforming grace conferred by Christ's resurrection. Only when the pastor or theologian has established the firm doctrinal foundation for Christian morality, can both teacher and audience or congregation be convinced that they are on firm ground, not unduly swayed by cultural prejudices nor compromised by self-interest. Having established this sure foundation for his moral exhortations, Caesarius's practical recommendations ring with the thought and the language of the Bible itself. He repeats the New Testament's emphasis on prayer, almsgiving and just actions towards the neighbor. He carefully moves his audience to understand the importance of charitable and merciful behavior, such as the redemption of captives. Throughout, his exhortations are marked by a realistic understanding, first, of the world of his congregation and, secondly, of human nature itself. Regarding the first, he exhorts not about general principles but rather specific situations in their own world. As for human nature, Caesarius shows himself sensitive to the dynamics of behavioral conversion. He calls not for radical transformation but for taking the next reasonable step. The Christian must begin to cultivate good habits; as yet unwilling to give generously, one can at least dispense "a little something" of his abundance. At the same time, Caesarius holds out the ideal clearly, a positive sense of human nature as created in the image of God and transformed by the redemptive grace of Christ. The cohesive theological anthropology so visible and so determinative in Caesarius's sermons is an encouragement for theologians and pastors to reflect more carefully and critically upon their own.

Finally, Caesarius's systematic theology, framed within his reading of the text, vividly reminds us that the theologian or pastor always reads the biblical text from the perspective of his/her own received theology and faith convictions, whatever tools or methods of interpretation may be utilized. The so-called political theologies, feminism and black theology *inter alia,* have

taught us this. Bringing a theological lens to the reading of the text does not vitiate the historical-critical method, which, as its name indicates, is a tool always in service to a hermeneutic. But the critical use of the tool requires the exegete to be conscious of his/her hermeneutic, as Caesarius was aware that he read the text in the light of the church's faith and practice and the pastoral needs of his congregation. In his practice, as in his intentions, Caesarius models an effective and practical commitment to sound biblical and pastoral theology.