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ADAM ALONE IN PARADISE.
A JEWISH-CHRISTIAN EXEGESIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
FOR THE HISTORY OF ASCETICISM

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In this communication I wish to illustrate a case of interdependence between exegesis, ecclesiology and the theology of asceticism in the first four centuries CE. The focus of my analysis will be on a Christian adoption of a Jewish explanation of God's command to Adam to work and to guard Paradise in Gen 2:15. Its purpose is to show that some approaches to this Jewish legacy may to a certain extent have depended upon the dynamics of the development of the ascetical movement.

The two main pieces of evidence that I am going to present are taken from 'The Word of the Saint Barsabas, archbishop of Jerusalem, about our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Churches [and about the chief priests]' as well as from a letter to the monks probably written by the fourth century Egyptian bishop, St. Serapion of Thmuis.

The only manuscript to which we owe 'The Word of Saint Barsabas' is the old Georgian manuscript *Athos Ivion* 11 dating from the tenth century.¹ The text was published with a French translation and introductory notes in 1982 in *Patrologia Orientalis* by the Belgian Jesuit, Michel van Esbroeck. However, this publication seems to have produced only little reaction in the scholarly world apart from the registration of this writing in the *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* (No 1685) and some other patristic handbooks (see, however, Manns 1984, 165–180; Bumazhnov 2008(b); Bumazhnov 2008(a), 260–264).²

Besides, the editor's claims concerning the date of the probably Greek original of the text (second century) and its place of provenance (Palestine, possibly Jerusalem, see van Esbroeck 1982, 55–60), as well as its archaic theology together with the considerable length of the document (over 40 *Patrologia Orientalis* pages), invite a renewed consideration of this neglected piece of early Christian literature.

¹ The words 'and about the chief priests' are a later addition to the title, cf. van Esbroeck 1982, 29–31.

² In the present article I partly use materials discussed from the other points of view in my publications mentioned above.

As this is not the place to attempt a comprehensive presentation of the work of Barsabas, I will simply say a few words about its content, presumed dating and its localization.

Content

The genre of early Christian testimonies, according to Kamptner, includes 'Bibelkommentare, die entweder eine Folge von Zitaten mit jeweils daran anschließenden Interpretation oder lediglich interpretierende Paraphrasen der entsprechenden atl. Texte bringen' (Kamptner 2002, 674). Although the exact relationship of the 'Word of Saint Barsabas' to this genre is a matter for further investigation, the *Word* can be described to some extent as a collection of Old Testament testimonies about Christ and the Church. With this hermeneutical principle in mind, the author recounts several biblical stories, starting with the first chapter of Genesis and closing his discourse with the Exodus and Moses. In particular, he deals with the stories of Adam in Paradise, Noah and the flood, the foretelling of the birth of her son to Sarah, Isaac's blessing of Jacob with Esau's reaction, Jacob's blessing of his sons, the stories of Joseph, and Moses and the Exodus. Thus, the continuous typological exegesis of the Old Testament or, in his own words, 'the elucidation of the whole Scripture' (ყოველი წერილი (...) გამოხსნდება; *Word* 1.9–10, 64)³ in relation to Christ and the Church can be seen as the author's primary concern.

Dating

In addition to van Esbroeck's considerations concerning the dating (van Esbroeck 1982, 59–60), it can be observed that the terminological distinction between the Gospels and the 'Writings' (meaning the Old Testament), as made in chapter 42, fits the second century situation with the canon of the Holy Scripture and is less likely the more we move

³ 'They (i.e. the prophets) elucidate the whole Scripture,' the English translation here and in the following excerpts is mine, unless the translator is named. On the term 'Scripture(s)' (წერილი / წერილები) as a name for the Old Testament in contrast to the Gospel(s) (სახარება / სახარებანი), see below.

away from this period (cf. Lampe 1961, s.v. γραφή). Barsabas' usage of the terms 'Scripture(s)' and 'Gospel(s)' corresponds approximately to that of St. Irenaeus of Lyon as described by von Campenhausen: 'Einige Male nimmt er diese Bücher (i.e. the Gospels) auch mit dem Alten Testament zusammen und bezeichnet sie dann ohne Unterschied mit den altgeheiligten Namen als "Herrenschriften", "die Schriften" oder "die Schrift". Doch geschieht dies nicht regelmäßig, sondern nur gelegentlich und fast wie im Versehen. Im allgemeinen hängen diese Begriffe (...) immer noch an den Büchern des Alten Testaments. Man erkennt daraus beides: einerseits die tatsächliche Bedeutung, die die neutestamentlichen Schriften für Irenäus bereits besitzen, und andererseits die Neuheit und fehlende Sicherheit ihres Geltungsanspruchs und ihrer Autorität' (von Campenhausen 1968, 220).

The fact that most of the traditions which Barsabas shares with other Christian authors can be found in St. Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235 CE) and other second century Christian writers (see Van Esbroeck 1982, 37–42) makes a dating in the late second–early third century an acceptable starting point to continue our efforts in seeking a balanced approach to the problems of the work of Barsabas.

Localization

The localization of the *Word* is much more a matter for discussion. Van Esbroeck's claim for Palestine and Jerusalem do not seem impossible though not absolutely conclusive (van Esbroeck 1982, 55–56). Even if Barsabas, as van Esbroeck suggests, uses in chapter 43 traditions connected with the Cave of Treasures and Adam's grave at Golgotha (which is questionable in itself), it does not necessarily imply that the *Word* of Barsabas was written in Palestine. Some details, on the contrary, leave open the possibility of a localization alternative to the Palestinian one. So commenting on Joseph's coloured robe from Genesis 37, Barsabas says in chapter 39 that it prefigured the incarnation of Christ who in His human body, put on like a garment all nations believing in His name. He gives as examples of these nations: 'Jews and Gentiles, Assyrians and Persians' (*Word* 39.18–19, 102). Although the acquaintance with both latter nations is not impossible in Palestine, their mention might sound more natural closer to the borders of the Persian empire, for example in Syria or Mesopotamia. As in the case with the dating, we shall consider the question as a matter for further research.

*Jewish Exegesis of Gen 2:15 in Chapter 4
of the Word of Barsabas*

In chapter 4 of his work, Barsabas quotes Gen 2:15 and provides an explanation of this biblical verse. The passage we are interested in reads as follows:

„დაადგინა ადამი სამოთხესა საქმედ და ცვაღ.“ ვის თვს სცვიდა? ვინ იყენეს მპარავ? ადამ მარტომ იყო ცოლითურთ. ანუ რასა იქმოდა სამოთხესა შინა? რამეთუ სრულიად სიტყუთა ღმრთისადათა აღშენებულ იყენეს ნერგნი იგი, არამედ საიდუმლოდ წერილ არს, რამეთუ დაადგინა იგი სამოთხესა შინა, ესე არს ეკლესიად, რადთა იქმოდის სიმართლესა და დაიმარხნეს მცნებანი.
(*Word* 4:11–18, 66)

‘He (i.e. God) put Adam in Paradise to work <it> and to guard <it>’ (Gen 2:15). What did he guard against? Who were the thieves? Adam was alone with <his> wife. Or, what did he work at in Paradise? For these plants were edified (made to grow?) by the word of God alone. But, what is written is a mystery. For He put him in Paradise, that is, the Church, for working <at> righteousness and for keeping the commandments.

This passage is of interest in several respects. First, the understanding of working and keeping Paradise as referring to ‘righteousness and commandments’ is more Jewish than it might seem at the first look. A widespread Christian exegesis of Adam’s task has in view the charge not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Gen 2:16–17. We find it, for example, in the second century in St. Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* II.24, in the second part of the fourth century in St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Comm.Gen.* II.7 as well as in Severian of Gabala, *In mundi creationem* V.5, and also in the sixth century in Procopius of Gaza, *Ad Gen.* 2:15.

A Jewish antecedent to this tradition is the so called Slavonic book of Enoch 31:1, a Jewish apocryphal writing of the first century CE (Böttrich 1995, 813):

And I (i.e. God) created a garden in Eden, in the east, so that he (i.e. Adam) might keep the agreement and preserve the commandment. (trans. Andersen 1982, 152)⁴

The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Gen 2:15 has a parallel to this exegesis with a characteristic shift from the particular commandment in Gen 2:15 to the law and *its commandments* in the whole:

⁴ Kronholm 1978, 76, n. 96 gives a list of parallel rabbinical evidences.

The Lord God took Adam (...) and made him dwell in the garden of Eden to labour in the law and to keep its commandments. (trans. Maher 1992, 23)

As we can see, Barsabas does not follow the Slavonic Enoch and the well established Christian tradition, but agrees with the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan with its typical stress on the Torah. Barsabas’ questions ‘What did he guard against? Who were the thieves? <...> Or, what did he work at in Paradise?’ have a parallel in the *Quaest.Gen.* I.14 by Philo of Alexandria:

Why does (God) place the man in Paradise for two things, to work and guard it, when Paradise was not in need of work, for it was complete in all things as having been planted by God, and was not in need of a guardian, for who was there to be harmed? (trans. Marcus 1961, 9; from the ancient Armenian)

A similar set of questions is also to be found in the Syriac commentary on Genesis by St. Ephrem, *Comm.Gen.* II.7.

A second characteristic which makes Barsabas’ exegesis of Gen 2:15 unique in early Christian literature—provided that the *Word* is really early—is the author’s stress on Adam being alone in Paradise (Eve does not play any role in the *Word*). This feature is not an accidental by-product of the author’s argumentation on the meaning of the keeping and guarding of Paradise, but on the contrary appears to be a consequence of his decision to confront Adam with righteousness and commandments instead of giving another possible explanation of the trees of the divine garden. This is perfectly clear from the following exhortation in chapter 10.16–21:

უკუეთუ სამოთხე იგი ეკლესიად არს ღმრთისად, შენ ხარ ადამი, პირველი იგი ჳორციელი. შეიმოსე შენ დიდებად, იქმენ ფრთხილ და ნუ გარდასუალ მცნებათა, არამედ იქმოდე სიმართლესა, და ყაე მშუღობად, რადთა შეხვდე სამოთხესა მას შინა, რომელ არს ეკლესიად ღმრთისად, და მოვიდეთ სასუფეველსა მას ცათასა.
(*Word* 10.16–21, 70)

If Paradise is the Church of God, you are Adam, the first carnal <man>.⁵ Put on the glory, be vigilant, do not offend the commandments, but work <at> righteousness and make peace so that you will come into Paradise which is the Church of God and we shall reach the kingdom of heaven.

⁵ Van Esbroeck 1982, 71 n. 46 suggests that the Greek original text rendered at this place πρωτόπλαστος.

Thus, explaining Paradise as the Church and making Adam a model and type for every Christian, Barsabas confronts Adam, and respectively, each member of the Church, only with the commandments of the Lord and the working of righteousness and fails to set them in any relationship to other human beings. This is the consequence of his explanation of the plants in Paradise.

The difference between Barsabas and the main stream of the early Christian exegesis of Paradise is easy to demonstrate. What they have in common is the connection with the Church. On the other hand, the mainstream characteristic which *differs* from Barsabas is the interpretation of the trees of the garden of Eden in their multiplicity as an allusion to the Church as the society of the holy ones. A conclusive example can be advanced from the third century *Commentary on the book of Daniel* 1.18 by St. Hippolytus of Rome:

“Ὅτι δὲ ὁ παράδεισος ἐν Ἐδέμ ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ φυτευθεὶς εἰς τύπον καὶ εἰκόνα ἐγένετο τῆς ἐκκλησίας, σαφέστατά ἐστιν ἐπιγνῶναι τοὺς φιλομαθεῖς <...> Ἐδ<ε>μ οὖν <εἰ>ρηται τόπος τρυφῆς, <ου>τέστ<ι> <ν> παράδεισος· „κατὰ ἀνατολὰς“ ἐφυτεύετο, ξύλοις ὄφραίοις καὶ καρποῖς παντοδαποῖς κεκοσμημένους, ὥστε ἔστι νοῆσαι τὸ σύστημα τῶν δικαίων τόπων εἶναι ἅγιον, ἐν ᾧ ἡ ἐκκλησία ἐφυτεύετο. οὔτε γὰρ ψιλὸς τόπος δύναται καλεῖσθαι ἐκκλησία, <οὔτε> οἶκος διὰ λίθου καὶ πηλοῦ ἠκοδομημένος· οὔτε αὐτὸς καθ’ ἑαυτὸν ἄνθρωπος δύναται καλεῖσθαι ἐκκλησία· οἶκος γὰρ καταλύεται καὶ ἄνθρωπος τελευτᾷ. τί οὖν ἐστιν ἐκκλησία; σύστημα ἁγίων ἐν ἀληθείᾳ πολιτευομένων, ἢ οὖν ὁμόνοια καὶ ἡ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῶν ἁγίων ὁδὸς τοῦτο γίνεται ἐκκλησία (...)
(*Comm.Dan.* 1.18, 40.19–21, 42.6–15)⁶

Those who love learning can clearly realize that the Paradise in Eden planted by God became a type and an image of the Church (...). So Eden means ‘a place of delight,’ that is Paradise. It was planted ‘in the east’ and adorned with frugiferous trees and fruits of every kind, so that one can understand that the congregation of the righteous ones is <that> holy place where the Church was planted. For neither bare land nor a house built of stones and clay can be called ‘the Church,’ not even a man by himself can be called Church: since a house is exposed to destruction and a man is subject to death. What, then, is Church? It is the community of the saints living according to the truth. Therefore, it is the unanimity and the common way of the saints in the unity which makes up the Church.

⁶ On the Church as society in St. Hippolytus’ ecclesiology, see Hamel 1951, 42–46.

This imagery of the community as a group of plants cultivated by God has biblical roots (cf. e.g. Isa 60:21) and was explored in the Essene literature from Qumran, where it takes clear paradisiacal traits: the members of the Qumran community are described as trees of life watered with the waters of holiness (cf. 1QH VIII.4–13). Another pre-Christian evidence is the Psalms of Solomon 14:2 ὁ παράδεισος τοῦ κυρίου, τὰ ξύλα τῆς ζωῆς, ὅσοι αὐτοῦ ‘The Paradise of the Lord are the trees of life, His holy ones.’

The Christian usage of this imagery belongs to the very centre of the mystery of baptism; the person being baptized is spoken to as a tree which will be planted by God in His Garden, i.e., the Church.⁷ One of the earliest witnesses of this idea is found in the eleventh Ode of Solomon with its unmistakable baptismal context (see Daniélou 1960, 682–683), as in Ode 11.16.18–19:

And He took me to His Paradise,
Wherein is the wealth of the Lord’s pleasure (...)
And I said, Blessed, O Lord, are they
Who are planted in Thy land,
And who have a place in Thy Paradise;
And who grow in the growth of Thy trees,
And have passed from darkness to light.
(trans. Charlesworth 1973, 52–53)

Another important early Christian model of the Church was the primitive community as described in Acts 2 of which the Epistle of Barnabas provides an illustrative evidence:

μὴ καθ’ ἑαυτοὺς ἐνδύοντες μονάζετε ὡς ἤδη δεδικαιωμένοι, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συνερχόμενοι συζητεῖτε περὶ τοῦ κοινῆ συμφέροντος
(*Ep.Barn.* 4.10, 146.19–21)

Do not shut yourselves up and court solitude as though your justification were already assured. On the contrary, attend the common meetings and join in discussing what contributes to the common good. (trans. Kleist 1961, 41–42)

The author of the Epistle opposes deliberate solitude (μονάζειν) and the gathering of the Church community (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ συνερχόμενοι) together with its management of the common good (συζητεῖτε περὶ τοῦ

⁷ Cf. Daniélou 1950, 16; Daniélou 1963, 42ff; Miquel 1984, 193; *Ep.Barn.* 11.10–11; Origen, *Commentarius in Canticum canticorum* 3.8–9.

κοινή συμφέροντος). These two last activities are explicitly recommended whereas the first one is no less explicitly rejected (μὴ...μονάζετε). Being alone is thus contrasted with the ideal of a Christian community coming together ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό, an expression which in this case unmistakably points to chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles as the author's ecclesiological pattern (see Bumazhnov 2008, 252–254). The concept of the original Church community, with its emphasis on fellowship, would seem to make it more difficult to accept the idea and terminology of a religiously motivated solitude, as far as it stresses the value of a secluded way of life.

Similarly, the ecclesiological imagery of the garden of reborn people planted by God, as we find it in the Odes of Solomon, St. Hippolytus of Rome and other early Christian writings, strongly emphasizes the communal character of the Church and contradicts the idea of being alone even within this community. As I argued elsewhere (Bumazhnov 2008, 263–264), the lack of such imagery in the *Word* of Barsabas with its image of a lonely Adam in Paradise as a model for everyone in the Church allows for the possibility of the *Word's* role in transmitting the idea of religiously motivated solitude.

As far as it concerns the exegesis of Gen 2:15, in chapter 4 of the *Word*, we have evidence corroborating to a certain extent this thesis. The text I am referring to is taken from the *Epistle to the Monks*, ascribed to St. Serapion of Thmuis. Though recently questioned by Klaus Fitschen, the authorship of St. Serapion seems still to be a more convincing alternative to other suggestions (Fitschen 1992, 79–84). If it is a work by him, the *Epistle* could have been written shortly after the death of St. Antony the Great in 356 CE. In chapter 8 the author says:

οὕτω τοίνυν καρποφοροῦντες λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ παρρησιαστικότερον δύνασθε λέγειν Θεῷ· Καταβήτω ἀδελφιδός μου εἰς κήπον αὐτοῦ, καὶ φαγέτω καρπὸν ἀκροδρύων αὐτοῦ· ἕκαστος γὰρ ὑμῶν, ὃ ἀξιοπόθητοι Θεῷ μονάζοντες, κήπος ἐστε Χριστοῦ παντοδαπῶν δένδρων εἶδη περιέχων, ταῖς τοῦ νόμου φυλακαῖς καὶ ἐντολαῖς γεωργοῦμενος
(*Epistle* 8, PG 40, 933C–D)

Therefore, bearing fruit in <your> word and work, you can say to God more frankly: 'Let my beloved come down into his garden, and eat the fruit of his choice berries.'⁸ For every one of you, O monks desired by God, is a garden of Christ, full of trees of every kind, cultivated by keeping the law and commandments.

⁸ LXX Cant 5:1, English translation according to Brenton.

The image of a spiritually advanced Christian being himself the Paradise of God is not unknown in times earlier than fourth century and provides in itself *no parallel* to the lone Adam in Paradise, see *Epistle to Diognetus* 12.1:

οἷς ἐντυχόντες καὶ ἀκούσαντες μετὰ σπουδῆς εἴσεσθε, ὅσα παρέχει ὁ Θεὸς τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν ὀρθῶς οἱ γινόμενοι παράδεισος τρυφῆς· πάνκαρπον ζύλον εὐθαλοῦν ἀνατείλατε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ποικίλοις καρποῖς κεκοσμημένοι.
(*Ep. Diogn.* 12.1, 338.17–20)

If you who became a Paradise of delight read this and listen attentively, you will find out what God bestows on those who love Him as they should. Cultivate in yourselves a fruitful tree in fullest bloom <and> adorn yourselves with a variety of fruit. (trans. Kleist 1961, 146 [with some modifications])

The connection to the *Word* of Barsabas chapter 4 is, however, established by the last words of the passage saying that each μονάζων, being the garden of God, does cultivate himself by keeping the law and—as we probably have to understand the *Epistle*—the commandments:

ἕκαστος γὰρ ὑμῶν, ὃ ἀξιοπόθητοι Θεῷ μονάζοντες, κήπος ἐστε Χριστοῦ παντοδαπῶν δένδρων εἶδη περιέχων, ταῖς τοῦ νόμου φυλακαῖς καὶ ἐντολαῖς γεωργοῦμενος
(*Epistle* 8, PG 40, 933D)

For every one of you, O monks desired by God, is a garden of Christ, full of trees of every kind, cultivated by keeping the law and commandments.

Thus, the missing connection to fellow human beings, found by implication in the targumic exegesis of Gen 2:15, comes by Serapion to its full development: every monk is, as such, both a 'Paradise' as well as an 'Adam,' who is concerned only with the commandments and the law. The Church, that is Paradise as a community, does not play any role here.

My conclusion would be the simple observation that the developing ascetical movement in the fourth century put new wine into the old wine-skins of the Jewish targumic exegesis of Gen 2:15 which had been known in the Church at least since the second part of the second century. Needing new forms in order to express the new self-knowledge of the monks, bishop Serapion goes back to traditions which in their original—Jewish or Christian—contexts were far from intending any individualistic interpretation and develops them so that they can fit into the situation of the monks. The first step in this direction was made by Barsabas of Jerusalem with his concept of Adam being alone in Paradise.

Whether or not his writing was really known to Serapion or any other early monastic writer is a question which is yet to be resolved.

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