Current Trends in the Study of Midrash

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CHAPTER TWELVE

DE/RE/CONSTRUCTING MIDRASH

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Yvonne Sherwood has written:

In the quest to rehabilitate themselves in regard to themselves and others, colonised peoples have often sought a collective one true self, stereotyped, idealised, and projected back into pre-colonial time. Similarly, the sheer violence of anti-Judaism ... means that my first instinct is to stress and reify the absolute difference of Jewish interpretation, and then, flipping over the pantomime-like Manichean hierarchy, to clap at the Jewish and boo at the Christian. But, as with the relation between colonial and indigenous cultures, the relations between the two cultures are reciprocal, riddling, and complex, and the history of one is literally unthinkable without the other. Taking the hierarchy and simply reversing it, so that the Jewish trumps, teaches, and instructs the Christian, simply repeats the homogenising hierarchies of the critical master-discourse.¹

Or as another recent scholar has put it, ‘If you posit a radical division between Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity, and articulate that division in terms of attitudes to knowledge, embodiment and sexuality, then you have created rather a nice virtual environment within which to explore a whole range of strangely postmodern concerns.’² Both of these quotations seem to me to be fair characterizations (implicitly or explicitly) of the way that my descriptive work on ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity,’ or better, rabbinic and Hellenistic Judaisms (including Christianity) has gone on until now, and I hope, moreover, to have helped in exploring some not-so-strangely postmodern concerns. Taking this now as a useful (that is, a once useful) heuristic, a major goal of my present work is to move beyond that binary. History is never as neat as theory would have it be, and good theory itself is both responsive to history as well as seeking its own self-undermining complications. It would not be unreasonable for

me to say that the theme of most of my scholarly work has been to produce a phenomenology of difference between Judaism and Christianity, but most recently the tune of my work has changed. Lately, I too, have been searching for the ways that the relations between the two cultures are reciprocal, melding, and complex, and the history of one is literally unthinkable without the other.

In her recent book on biblical interpretation and asceticism, Elizabeth A. Clark raises sharp and good questions about my construction of a homology between reading practices and anthropologies in Christianity and Judaism. I have, indeed, argued for a strong form of correspondence between 'dualist' anthropologies (which I had imagined to underlie all practices of celibacy), 'dualist' reading strategies such as allegory, and 'dualist' theologies, such as 'two-nature' Christologies. This depiction needs shading now in the light of Clark's arguments for the inadequacy of such a binarist approach. By remaining within the terms of a binary opposition between asceticism and antiasceticism, or indeed between allegory and midrash, or especially Christian and Jewish, I had been asking, I think, the wrong question, and Clark's work goes a long way towards posing the right question. As the Rabbis say: The question of a Sage is half the answer. There is much more shading than I had imagined between any of the pairs of these binaries, and indeed, in each case one term of the binary (privileged symmetrically but contrariwise in the different 'religions') is dependent on the other for its existence, not only in the obvious semiotic way of I, not-I, but in a deconstructive fashion as well. The question for this paper will be what remains of midrash as a distinct practice of reading after one takes on fully the ways that binary oppositions simply do not hold up (as they never do). After deconstruction, what reconstruction?

I accept Clark's strictures against my much too facile and neat schematizing of a nexus between an allegedly Christian allegorical reading practice and asceticism vs. a parallel nexus between midrashic literalism and rabbinic affirmation of sexuality. That such a nexus can be found within certain (Platonic) Christian circles is, I think, hardly

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to be doubted. The question will be then how to revise descriptions of hermeneutical difference between emerging late antique Christianity and Judaism in such a way that they will capture the nuance to which Clark calls us without entirely losing that which still seems valuable in the distinctions, or as Virginia Burrus has recently put it, 'the challenge lies in isolating what appears both distinctive and relatively constant, so as to make Christianity [or Judaism] itself visible as an object of historical inquiry, while at the same time not losing sight of internal complexity and contradiction and of all that is similar to or shared with other religious traditions of antiquity.' In the case of biblical exegesis, one has first to recognize that much if not most of the practice is shared by the groups that we call Christians and those we call Jews. We have been clearly reminded of this by Clark. It is nevertheless also of interest and importance I think to locate the points of nascent differentiation, especially insofar as these may be seeds that grow into the ultimate separate branches, or perhaps, better put, wedges with which those who sought to sunder what had been together could do their work.

Allegory as Asceticism

One point at which to start is by noting Clark's own finding that 'typology and allegory ... dominate other types of patristic interpretation.' This point suggests still an important distinction between patristic and


7 Some of it because it is simply a common heritage (if not universal mode) of text interpretation; some of it, I believe, owing to contacts between 'Christian' and 'Jewish' readers right through late antiquity. In the former category, one might be tempted to include such strategies as modifying or 'correcting' the interpretation of one passage by citing another (Clark, *Reading*, 125–128). In the second, we might consider such practices as reading the 'war' passages of Scripture as being about struggles in the soul of the religious person/ascetic. See Clark, *Reading*, 138, to whose Christian texts one might compare the famous midrashic statement: 'It is about the war against the Instinct that the Scripture speaks?' See also Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity: Second Printing, with New Preface and Introduction*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991) and Marc Hirshman, *A Reality of Genres: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity*, SUNY Series in Judaism: Hermeneutics, Mystic, and Religion (trans. Batya Stein; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
midrashic reading practices, albeit not, perhaps, between Christian and Jewish reading. The notion of a homology between asceticism and allegorical reading does not require that ascetic content be that which is exposed by allegorical practice but rather that allegorical practice be justified and understood as importantly analogous to ascetic practice itself (as explicitly in at least Origen and Gregory of Nyssa) and even more so that it be grounded in an understanding of language as structured like a self in two levels. In contrast with rabbinic Judaism which knows of none of this, I believe still that this combination in one form or another becomes distinctive if not constant in ancient Christianity. One of the most important of hermeneutical consequences of Logos theology was a proclivity for allegory as a mode of interpretation. The concept of a Logos as both the site of absolute creativity, as well as the revealer of absolute Truth, of Sophia, will promote allegory as a legitimate and choice mode of interpretation. Logos theology, which as we shall see, is predicated on the notion of an Author, a speaker behind the written text, as well as a dual existence for language as signifier and signified conduces to interpretation as a hermeneutic of depth. The ontology of human language itself consists in its privileged pairing of its signifiers with the transcendental signified of the Logos, a ‘magical connection with things by a connection with “ideas,” something authentically referring,’ to borrow the language of language philosopher, Samuel Wheeler III. The move toward allegorical interpretation within Christian writing is thus both epistemologically and ontologically (theologically) grounded. Against the early opponents of Christianity (and Gibbon), and many Reformation thinkers, I would argue that this mode of thinking about interpretation does not involve a blind adherence to authority so much as a hermeneutical consequence of the very notion that the Word has become flesh and dwell among us as God’s exegete, precisely, of course (as I would argue) the theological notion the rejection of which gave birth to rabbinic Judaism at the end of Late Antiquity.

Clark exposes precisely the important distinctions between Christian readers that may help us locate that which is ‘distinctive and relatively constant’ about Christian reading tout court, at least by the third or fourth century.

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10 Clark, 
11 ibid., 
12 ‘Misogynist’ (1938), Mirror of Late Antiquity, p. 6
13 Elizabeth .
third or fourth century, over-against rabbinic reading. Clark performs a taxonomy of reading practice, locating John Chrysostom, Jerome, and Origen along two axes, one of which has to do with methods of interpretation and one with theologies of the relationship between the 'Hebrew past' and the 'Christian present,' or between the 'Old Testament' and the 'New.' These correlate closely with their (somewhat) different marital and ascetic axiologies. John Chrysostom is the author whom Clark finds most rabbinic in his ideology. He is one of the Fathers who wishes to 'unite the times,' that is to deny that there is a yawning gap that divides the mores of the Old Testament from those of the New and of the Christian present; Old Testament characters and teachings are raised up as exemplary for Christian audiences. Thus in his later episcopal (unlike some of his earlier monastic) writings, Chrysostom regularly lauds Old Testament heroes and heroines who married and reproduced. As Clark points out, in consonance with Chrysostom's bringing close of the Old Testament to the New and its sexual mores to those of Christians and thus his very warm attitude toward marriage, Chrysostom is also Rabbi-like in that his 'exaltation of marriage and procreation is firmly grounded in a marital hierarchy that requires the subordination of women.' As Clark brilliantly opines, for Chrysostom, the production of distinction is maintained but displaced, not the distinction of the ascetic over the non-ascetic (which interestingly enough gave room for the female ascetic to be distinguished over the male non-ascetic), but "difference" has been displaced onto a hierarchy within marriage, of husband over wife: 'The hierarchical marking of bodies lies not so much between married and celibate as within the married state, where the "concord" Chrysostom so avidly recommends is exegetically established and maintained precisely on the basis of status differences between husband and wife.'

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10 Clark, Reading, 153.
11 Ibid., 156. See also on the difference of times within Chrysostom, i.e., the difference between his own monastic past and his episcopal present, David Carlton Ford, 'Misogynist or Advocate? St. John Chrysostom and His Views on Women,' Ph.D. diss. (1984), Microfilm. Unfortunately, Ford is at great pains to justify Chrysostom's insistence on strict hierarchy between the sexes within marriage.
13 Clark, Reading, 156, 159.
married reduces difference between the celibate and the married as it had reduced difference between the Old and the New, the Jew and the Christian: ‘Chrysostom’s erasure of difference between the ancient Hebrews and contemporary Christians finds its counterpart in his close alignment of asceticism with marriage: even the married among his hearers can be encouraged to abandon their more sumptuous lifestyles for a daily practice of monklike simplicity.’ Not surprisingly, Chrysostom is one of the Fathers whom Clark marks as most midrashic in his hermeneutical practices as well.

What shall we say about that seemingly very different Christian exegete, the Alexandrian Origen? For Origen, words stand in a relation of correspondence to ideas which are immaterial and imperceptible. Although Origen’s work on the Song has been shown to have close thematic affinities with the interpretations of the midrash, his linguistic strategies are nearly opposite to them. In excess of Philo, for whom the flesh (and fleshly language) are understood as necessary helpers to the spirit (and the allegorical meaning), for Origen the carnal and the spiritual meanings do not parallel each other but are actually opposed to each other, as the body is opposed to the soul. In Ann Astel’s vivid formulation:

Achieving the intensity of an erotic love for God depends, moreover, on the sublimation of every bodily desire—even, in Origen’s own case, at the cost of self-castration. The mark of a perfect soul is precisely this power “to forsake things bodily and visible and to hasten to those that are not of the body and are spiritual.”

Origen’s method of exegesis, then, directly parallels the process of mystical marriage which is the Song’s secret subject. Even as the exegete moves away from the Canticum’s literal, carnal meaning to its sensus interioris, the bridal soul, renouncing what is earthly, reaches out for the invisible and eternal … An almost violent departure from the body itself

11 Ibid., 158.

and from literal, carnal...

For Origen, the very text itself already a text which is understood by... to unfold, to untangle, to unfold, and the sayings of... Since in Origen’s mind, the discover... the contemporary context of Origen’s attempt to understand texts. Origen, a close...

‘overcoming carnal... or the discovery of literal... not surprise at all... the soul/spirit.

We can perhaps understand quite... meanings of the ‘... the kisses of his...
and from literal meaning energizes the soul’s ascent. To pass beyond the literal, carnal sensus is to escape the prisonhouse of the flesh.\footnote{17}

For Origen the very process of allegorical interpretation constitutes in itself already a transcendence of the flesh. Accordingly the Divine Kiss is understood by him to refer to the experience of the soul, ‘when she has begun to discern for herself what was obscure, to unravel what was tangled, to unfold what was involved, to interpret parables and riddles and the sayings of the wise along the lines of her own expert thinking.’\footnote{18}

Since in Origen’s Platonism the world of spirit is the world of the intelligible, for him ‘intellec­tion and loving are one and the same,’\footnote{19} and the discovery of the true and pure spiritual meaning behind or trapped in the carnal words constitutes the Divine kiss. It enacts that ‘overcoming carnal desires [which] ultimately enables the soul to return to its original state and become once more a mens.’\footnote{20} We accordingly see in Origen a close homology between his theology of the body and his theory of allegory as ascetic practice; interpreting allegorically is the hermeneutical equivalent of the ascetic and celibate life. This ought not surprise at all in one for whom the closest analogy for the relation of literal to allegorical was precisely the relation of the body to the soul/spirit.\footnote{21}

We can perhaps see better the point of this by comparing a very unlike approach. In the midrash on Song of Songs, this very kiss is understood quite differently, albeit still as Divine. In Origen, the erotic meanings of the kiss in the first verse of the Song, ‘Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth’ are sublimated into intellection, because of his

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\footnote{19} Astel, *Song of Songs*, 4. See also Gerard E. Gaspart, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Seconds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), I shall have more to say about Mark J. Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, Ashgate Studies in Philosophy & Theology in Late Antiquity (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002) in another place. For the moment, let it be said that on the whole the aspects of Platonism that Edwards denies in Origen are not the aspects to which I am referring here.

\footnote{20} Astel, *Song of Songs*, 4.

\footnote{21} By saying this in this way, I am not conflating the two. In the longer text in which this paper will function, such distinctions will be drawn out. For now, one might consult Elizabeth Dively Lauro, *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture Within Origen’s Exegesis: Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden; Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004).
doctrine that the body is a sign of a fall of the soul from God and must be transcended to be reunited with Him. In the midrash it is that actual body, the actual mouth, which experiences God’s kiss:

He will kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: Said Rabbi Yohanan, An angel would take the Speech from the Holy, Blessed One, each and every word, and court every member of Israel and say to him: Do you accept this Speech? It has such and such many requirements, and such and such many punishments, such and such many matters which are forbidden, and such and such many acts which are mandatory, such and such many easy and difficult actions, and such and such is the reward for fulfilling it. And the Israelite would say to him: Yes! And then he would further say to him: Do you accept the Divinity of the Holy, Blessed One? And he would answer him: Yes and again yes. Immediately, he would kiss him on his mouth, as it is written, “You have been made to see in order to know” [Deut. 4:35]—by means of a messenger.

The erotic connotations, overtones and charges of this description of Divine Revelation [even the prefiguration of Molly Bloom], as it was experienced by each and every Israelite, are as blunt as could be imagined.22 Rabbi Yohanan explicitly connects this kiss with the visual experience of seeing God, also a powerful erotic image.23

In the commentaries of Gregory of Nyssa, the great Cappadocian disciple of Origen, the discourse of asceticism is co-articulated with allegory, as shown by Verna Harrison. Her discussion of Gregory’s interpretation of the Manna when contrasted with the midrashic treatment of this sign will give us an elegant emblem of the differences between these two formations. The literal interpretation of the Manna as physical food had been one of the major bones of contention of the Evangelist against ‘Jewish’ hermeneutic. In analyzing the Father’s reading of this contention, Harrison provides us with an exceedingly clear formulation of one way of looking at the nexus between hermeneutics and the body:

For Gregory’s primary audience in the ascetic community, where fasting and chastity are highly valued as spiritual practices, biblical texts involving food and sexuality, such as the Manna in the Exodus story and the conjugal love in the Song of Songs, are often pastorally inapplicable in their literal form. They are interpreted metaphorically, and transfer the original meaning to the ascetic realm of the soul realm.

Moreover, we find the most profound, potent and untranslatable meaning of these texts in their spiritualization, transfer the material to the ascetic realm of the soul realm. The midrash on the Song of Songs, for example, famously states that the woman is a metaphor for Mary, the soul.

There is then another entire system of allegoric reading of the Bible, a system that focuses on the carnal pleasure and the carnal intention from which the pleasure is derived. Edifying as practiced itself the metaphorical sense of the metaphor as itself a conjunction of two bodies is itself a metaphor of an ascetical anthropology, a metaphor of the body of the soul.

22 Although, to be sure, a very late glossator has added the words, “It didn’t really happen so, but he made them hallucinate it,” Shimon Dunsky, ed., Song of Songs Rabbinic (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1990) 15, n. 4.

their literal sense. Ascetics can read such materials as Scripture only if they are interpreted in another way. So Gregory finds it appropriate to understand them allegorically.

Moreover, within his broadly Platonic world-view, allegory allows him to transfer the concepts and images of nourishment and intimacy from the material to the intelligible world. In his hands, this deliberate transition from text to interpretation becomes an excellent tool for expressing how the ascetic re-directs natural human desire from bodily pleasures toward God. Exegetical method thus comes to mirror ascetic behavior itself and conversely embodies a redirection of thought which can serve as a model for the corresponding redirection of human drives and activities.34

There is then a perfect fit between the hermeneutics and anthropologies of this system, nearly identical to that of Origen. Indeed this anthropological hermeneutical theory goes back at least to Philo and his ascetic Bible-readers of Lake Mareotis, the therapeutae.35 The troping of language from the literal to the figurative, which is called moving from the carnal to the spiritual, exactly parallels the turning of human intention from the desire and pleasure of the body to the desire and pleasure of the soul. Linguistic structure and psychology are thus isomorphic. Even more, I would suggest that this kind of allegorical reading as practiced by this line of Jewish and then Christian Platonists is itself an ascetic practice (and not only a model for one), for the very renunciation of the pleasure of the text, understood as story and about bodies is itself a turning from corporeal pleasure to spiritual contemplation. This articulation between an allegorical hermeneutic and an ascetical anthropology is brought out particularly clearly with respect to the Manna, which is taken as a figure for

the incarnation and perhaps also the Eucharist. Christ is the true food of the soul. However, the fact that the manna is uncultivated is also interpreted as a reference to the Virgin, who conceives her son without a man's seed. Her womb, empty of any human impregnation, is filled from above with divine life. Like the stomach receiving food, it has become an image of the human person as receptacle. By implication, the ascetic, like Mary, is called to turn away from human relationships so as to be united with God, receiving him within himself. Gregory makes this point explicitly in the treatise On Virginity: "What happened corporeally in the case of the immaculate Mary, when the fullness of the divinity

34 Harrison, 'Gregory.'
shone forth in Christ through her virginity, takes place also in every soul through a virginal existence, although the Lord no longer effects a bodily presence."\textsuperscript{26}

We observe here another moment which will be increasingly important in the analysis, that is the move of allegoresis from the historical specificity of events to an unchanging ontology. Manna, literally the record of real corporeal, historical events that happened to a specific people becomes transformed into the sign of an eternally possible fulfillment for everyman’s soul. Accordingly, the analogy drawn between the human body and its corporeal needs, pleasures and desires versus the soul, on the one hand, and fleshly language versus spiritual, allegorical meaning on the other becomes a perfect vehicle for the transcendence of physical, bodily life which is required to transform Judaism from the cult of a tribe to a world-cultural system.\textsuperscript{27}

For the Rabbis of the midrash, on the other hand, the Manna is the literal record of a corporeal food, miraculously given to this people Israel at a particular moment in history. To be sure, it was wonderful food, protean in taste, wondrous in odor and color, miraculous in its exact measure, and distinguished from all other food in that it was perfectly absorbed by the body, so that there was no bodily waste. But it was food—not an allegorical sign of something spiritual. As such, it remains a sign of corporeality. Insistence on the literal, corporeal concreteness of the Manna constitutes for the rabbinic formation a claim that the physical, historical existence of Israel in the world remains the ontologically significant moment. There is, accordingly, a perfect homology between the sign-theory or hermeneutics and anthropology of the monastic Rabbis, as there is for the dualist Jews and Fathers as well. For the Rabbis, in which significance is invested directly in visible, tangible corporeal bodies in the world, the generating human body, the tribe, its genealogy and concrete history, and its particular physical, corporeal practices are supremely valued.

But it is clear too that Nyssa’s (or Origen’s) practice and theory do not come near to characterizing Christian hermeneutic in toto, not by a long shot.\textsuperscript{28} Moreover, Clark makes the startling observation that precisely in the theo- gory and typology, I have discussed much they may have been underutilized in ascetic meaning, but it seems warrantable in a ‘fuzzy’ box of tontianity and even Christianity.

Most surprisingly “midrash-like” is the component of the allegorical and of the monastic, for this is consistently with the corporeal, and much the way we are shown yet that, of course, to affects and ide.

A better way to state terms of what is owed to the midrash but rather the qualities, namely a total absence of monastic reading

\textsuperscript{26} Harrison, ‘Gregory.’
\textsuperscript{27} Werner Wilhelm Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961) 5. Jaeger makes the point that Droysen developed the very concept of Hellenism in order to explain how Christianity became so rapidly a ‘world religion.’
\textsuperscript{28} Clark’s book is thus, *inter alia*, a wonderful exploration of the midrash-like qualities of monastic reading.
ciscely in the thematic interpretative justification of ascetic practice, allegory and typology are less than central: 'Contrary to my own expectation, I have discovered,' she writes, 'that typology and allegory, however much they may dominate other types of patristic interpretation, were underutilized interpretive tools in the church fathers' production of ascetic meaning from Biblical texts.'\textsuperscript{29} A revision of my earlier approach seems warranted, one that will take in as well my own new perspective of a 'fuzzy' boundary\textsuperscript{30} (both socially and descriptively) between Christianity and even rabbinic Judaism.\textsuperscript{31}

Most surprising, most troubling to my earlier binaries, is Jerome's 'midrash-like' practice of interpretation,\textsuperscript{32} since he is a most rabid proponent of the absolute distinction between the celibate and the sexually active and of the permanence of that distinction and, therefore, seemingly most 'unrabbinnic' in his theology of the body. On the one hand, this is consistent with Jerome's insistence on the relevance of corporeality; the corporeality of the text was seemingly significant for him in much the way that the corporeality of the human person was, without that, of course, translating for him into any but the most negative affects and ideas about sexuality and procreation.

A better way of thinking the difference might be to think not in terms of what is absent in the writing of the Fathers and call that midrash but rather to think of what is absent in rabbinic hermeneutics, namely allegory (and even here I do not claim an absolute and total absence but nearly so). Jerome, too, when faced with the obvious

\textsuperscript{29} Clark, \textit{Reading}, 68 for the program, citing also Jacques Binner, 'La Bible dans la vie Monastique,' in Jacques Fontaine and Charles Pietri, eds., \textit{Le Monde latin antique et la Bible}, Bible des Tous le Temps (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985) 392-429. And see especially chapter four, Clark, \textit{Reading}, 101-152, for the practice. It is striking, and not accidental, that nearly all of Clark's examples of 'midrash-like' exegesis on the part of the Church Fathers seem to be from interpretations of the New Testament, but more of that anon.


\textsuperscript{31} This revision will not be precisely following Clark's terms, however. The issue is not for me so much whether ascetic content is constructed through allegorical means. Clark herself has given us the key to understanding why that is not generally the case, particularly in patristic readings of the Christian Scriptures (NT). The issue is rather, in my mind, how the allegorizing that even according to Clark 'dominate[s] other types of patristic interpretation' is theorized and justified in ways that parallel the theory and justification of asceticism.

\textsuperscript{32} Clark, \textit{Reading}, 102.
promarriage, prosex, and pronatalism of much of the 'Old Testament,' resorted to Origenist allegoresis, thus once again matching his ideology to his hermeneutical methodology—my point being, of course, that the Rabbis when faced, as they were, with similar exegetical emergencies (on other fronts, of course) did not allegorize or spiritualize the text but continued to use midrashic methods to turn its meanings in ways more congenial to their own developing religious sensibilities. The most blatan
t example of such Origenism in Jerome is his 'allegorical resolution of the issue [of the Pastoral Epistles] in his Ephesians Commentary,' in which he 'advises that if husbands (coded as souls) nourish their wives (coded as bodies), then wives may be raised up as "men" (i.e., as souls), diversity of sex will cease, and "like the angels" (Matt. 22:30=Mark 12:25), there will be "no male and female"' (Gal. 3:28). Nothing of this sort would have been found in midrash, and this structure of an absence will be repeated in several examples below.

33 Ibid., 167. Of course, it is not to be forgotten that the Ephesians Commentary was written before Jerome turned against Origen, and 'provides a good illustration of [Jerome's] cavalier approach to Origen,' Elizabeth A. Clark, The Origenis Contro


The question and the possibility for the term hedermic and fundamental of the hermeneutical method of interpreting texts, whether Origen, the Hebrew, or the Christian, was the oracles as the Jewish and Philo and the rabbis and the Hebrew texts.

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cist anthropologies and while the anthropologies are consistent as well. More

31 Daniel Boyarin and Najman, "J.
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Theology and Hermeneutics

The question comes down, finally, to the relationship between theology and the possibilities of reading practices. For a logocentric Philo (and the term here is David Winston's, not Derrida's), "The central thrust and fundamental aim of biblical commentary is to trace the return of the human soul to its native homeland by means of the allegorical method of interpretation." For Philo, no less than for Paul or Justin or Origen, the elect are those who 'recognize that the letter is to the oracle as the shadow is to the substance' (Conf. 190). Both Colossians and Hebrews come, of course, immediately to mind, and there is no rabbinic text that speaks at all in this fashion.

Philo is committed, as no rabbinic text ever is, to 'the hidden meaning which appeals to the few who study soul characteristics, rather than bodily forms' (Abr. 147). I would persevere, therefore, in maintaining my hypothesis that the very structure of Christian belief as a continuation of widely held theological notions of both Christian and non-Christian Jews, namely the ongoing notion of the Logos per se, allows a certain set of possibilities for language and thus for interpretation that are by and large shut off via the Rabbis' rejection of logos theology, particularly as that rejection grew ever acute and ever more decisive throughout the period of negotiation of separate religious identities for Christianity and Judaism. The issue was also sharpened, if not by controversy over asceticism, surely by the commitment or its opposite to the maintenance of a literal, historical, and in this sense carnal, 'People of Israel' or its replacement by a spiritual analogue.

The differences in hermeneutics seem not to construct an opposition Jewish/Christian but rather to divide between Jew and Jew, Christian and Christian. On the one hand, there does seem to be a homology between practices of reading and anthropologies, such that the dualist anthropology of Philo and Origen lines up with allegorical reading, while the antidualist or corporal anthropology of the anti-Origenists are consistent with their (somewhat) 'rabbinic' hermeneutical practices as well. Moreover, the full blown difference of midrashic interpretation,
its most radical departures from a logocentric hermeneutics have been shown, if my hypothesis holds water, to be the product of the latest stage in the development of rabbinic hermeneutical theory and practice.\textsuperscript{37} However, on the other hand, it has also been demonstrated very vividly that multiplicity and indeterminacy of interpretation are characteristic of some of the most Platonic, allegorizing of Christian interpreters, namely my allegorical ‘poster-boys,’ Origen of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa.\textsuperscript{38} In addition, then, to deconstructing the binary of Jewish/Christian, we will need finer, subtler tools for describing, what, if anything is distinctive about even the late and full blown development of midrashic hermeneutical theory and practice, over-against contemporary patristic thinking and practice.

There are correlations, it seems, among anthropologies, theologies, and hermeneutics, but they don’t provide a sharp binary opposition between Judaism and Christianity. The model of dialect geography can be useful here.\textsuperscript{39} Modes of interpretation don’t provide an isoglossic line between bounded entities of Christianity and Judaism as much as among dialects of both of these religions in formation. If we do not think, however, in terms of absolute binaries, clusters of characteristics (not exclusively but predominately distinctive) can, nevertheless, be used to characterize the emerging ‘languages’ in formation and in contact. I would reiterate the point made by William Labov: ‘But in regard to geographical dialects, it has long been argued that such gradient models are characteristic of the diffusion of linguistic features across a territory and the challenge has been to establish that boundaries between dialects are anything but arbitrary,’ and yet, ‘Nevertheless, even in dialect geography, most investigators agree that properties do bundle, and that is possible to show boundaries of varying degrees of clarity even when all variable features are superimposed upon a single map.’\textsuperscript{40} In other words, one can imagine a state in which a pre-

deliction toward different religious question. One critical reading (in Logos theology spirit. However, rabbinic reading physical not owe so much asceticizing as 1 right in her strictness has proved similarity between.

A step toward by shading the theology develope “The Christian to mean that all texts.”\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, court there is a can always already referred: And I interpreted to them 24:27, Patric to ‘Origen’s un to logical concept cannot be several thus divine spe bound, of cours of ‘magic langu the textual pro from the Logos theology can be

\textsuperscript{37} Boyarin, Border Lines, 152–201.


\textsuperscript{39} Boyarin, Border Lines, 19–23.


\textsuperscript{11} Clark, Reading
\textsuperscript{41} Boyarin, Border
\textsuperscript{42} Clark, Reading
\textsuperscript{44} Patricia Cox in Origen’s Comm Essays in Imagination
delicitation towards midrash or towards allegory will be differentiating of different religious groups without these being exclusive to the groups in question. One could predict that a predilection, therefore, for allegorical reading (in the broadest sense of the term) will be bundled with a Logos theology and a dualistic conception of the world as matter and spirit. However—and this is a big however—the correlation of rabbinic reading practices with other aspects of rabbinic religiosity does not owe so much to a putative rabbinic asceticism vs. Christian asceticizing as I once might have thought. In this Clark is absolutely right in her strictures. Seeing matters in terms of asceticism as a totality has proved misleading here and does obscure lines of contact and similarity between some Christian writers and the Rabbis.11

A step toward subtlety in this description can perhaps be made by shading the picture with the nuances of the account of historical theology developed elsewhere in my work.12 As Clark herself writes, ‘The Christian accusation that the Jews read “carnally” often appears to mean that they did not give a Christological interpretation to the text.’13 Indeed, this is precisely the point. For Christian reading tout court there is a single ontotheological referent to which the whole text can always already—this formulation seems to me precise here—be referred: And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself [Luke 24:27]. Patricia Cox Miller has also captured this point when she refers to ‘Origen’s understanding of the word “word” not only as a Christological concept but also as a perspective on language.’14 Theology cannot be severed from hermeneutical theory, when it is a Word and thus divine speech that has become incarnate. But the Rabbis were bound, of course, to reject such theologies and with them, any theory of ‘magic language’ as well. Midrash as a form of textuality thus is also the textual product of a theology of language, but one quite different from the Logos theology of Philo and his Christian ‘disciples.’ Rabbinic theology can be understood (on one reading at least) as the product of

11 Clark, Reading, 67.
12 Boyarin, Border Lines, 128–147.
13 Clark, Reading, 68.
14 Patricia Cox Miller, ““Pleasure of the Text, Text of Pleasure”: Eros and Language in Origen’s Commentary on the Song of Songs,” in The Poetry of Thought in Late Antiquity: Essays in Imagination and Religion (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2001) 129.
a systematic and thorough rejection of any form of Logos theology, of any notion that there is any locus for meaning outside of the Scriptural inscription itself.\textsuperscript{15}

Clark’s work strongly further underlines the impossibility of drawing distinctions between a ‘Judaism’ that is somehow pure in its non-Hellenistic cultural forms, while Christianity is that which is ‘open to the thinking of antiquity.’\textsuperscript{16} As we have seen, Logos theology itself is not a distinguishing characteristic of ‘Christianity’ as opposed to ‘Judaism’ and thus neither are the Logocentric modes of textual interpretation. As Logos theology became, however, christologized, I imagine that the Rabbis became more and more distanced from that mode of conceiving God, language, and the world, and thus, as well, from the modes of interpretation to which it leads. In rabbinic religion there is no invisible God manifested in an Incarnation. God Himself is visible (and therefore, corporeal).\textsuperscript{17} Language also is not divided into a carnal and a spiritual being. Accordingly, there can be no allegory.

There do, therefore, remain significant differences to explore between the rabbinic ‘literalist’ reading\textsuperscript{18} and the patristic ‘spiritualizing’ for as Clark points out, (i.e., Pauline) reading is allegorical in so far as Moses to perceived defence of asceticism in Christian writers was more like rabbit. Moreover, even Origenist Father, the most radical of all, and presented with great elements of difference and

One way to understand differences between patristic discourses vs. those of Chrysostom, is: “Through: as self-interpretation of patristic texts, and as if reading of texts. Which don’t that the term \textit{theoria} and late ancient Christia interpretative practices and figurative. How explicitly denoted as \textit{Reading}, also (although well-known). Of course simply mapped as many other ancient, while the rabbinic: specifically, with Chris particularly. I adopt the patristic even on this conservative reading from Paul, note that in the case of both Logos the \textit{The Boundaries of Godhead}, \textit{Harvard} interpretations of Strack and \textit{Religion in Zoharic} (Albany: State Univ
ing, for as Clark herself writes, in Christology the orthodox Christian (i.e., Pauline) reading tradition of the Old Testament is always/already allegorical in some sense. One need look no further than Paul’s veil of Moses to perceive this. This is true even though when it comes to the defence of asceticism as biblical the interpretative strategies of different Christian writers are very different from each other and some are more like rabbinic interpretation than they are like Origenist allegory. Moreover, even the most rabbinic-like interpretative practices of anti-Origenist Fathers are not yet midrash, or at any rate, do not exemplify the most radical traits of midrash, and it remains a challenge presented, and presented well, by Clark’s new work to fine tune our descriptions of difference and similarity.

One way to articulate better what do, after all, seem to be emerging differences between rabbinic and dominant Christian interpretative discourses would be to look more closely at the most ‘midrash-like’ of Christian exegetical practice, so I return to Clark’s discussion of Chrysostom. At one point she writes, specifically regarding Chrysostom: ‘Through such intertextual exegesis, Scripture could be affirmed as self-interpreting, as if the interpreter had played no role in the production of meaning, as if no conceptual cracks existed between the texts, and as if no political consequences attended the choice of intertexts. Which dominant texts controlled the interpretation of others was,

that the term *theoria* is a Platonic term of art.) This assertion, held by virtually all late ancient Christians, and the rabbinic denial of it do have consequences for actual interpretative practice that do not — Clark is right — line up with our senses of literal and figurative. However, ‘excessive’ attention to the ‘literal’ sense, named ‘carnal,’ is explicitly denoted as a characteristic of heightened Jewish reading by the Fathers, Clark, Reading, 73 (although the practice hardly needs documentation, it is so widespread and well-known). Of course, Clark is right that the ‘literal’ mode of reading cannot be simply mapped as the ancient Jewish mode, since Philo, the Dead Sea Scrolls and many other ancient ‘Jewish’ texts exhibit ‘spiritual’ reading theories, Clark, Reading, 75, while the rabbinic anti-spiritualizing reading develops as a consequence of proximity, precisely, with Christianity and only in late antiquity.

I adopt the preferred term of de Lubac as discussed by Clark, Reading, 74, and even on this conservative showing, there is still a significant gap between any Christian reading from Paul to Luther and classical rabbinic reading. It is not inappropriate to note that in the post-classical period of rabbinic Judaism, viz the Middle Ages, we find both Logos theology, in various versions from ‘Arian’ to ‘Nicene’ (Daniel Abrams, ‘The Boundaries of Divine Ontology: The Inclusion and Exclusion of Metatron in the Godhead,’ Harvard Theological Review 87, no. 3 [July 1994] 291–321) and spiritualizing interpretations of Scripture (Elliott R. Wolfson, ‘Beautiful Maiden Without Eyes: Peshat and Sed in Zoharic Hermeneutics,’ in Michael Fishbane, ed., The Midrashic Imagination [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993] 155–209).
in fact, fiercely contested.30 This description, undoubtedly accurate as an account of the reading practice of the great Antiochene bishop, marks, however, the site of a difference—not a point of convergence—between his 'intertextual' reading and the practices of classical midrash.

Clark's own description of Chrysostom (and Jerome for that matter) citing 'intertexts' to construe other readings demonstrates how this practice is quite distinct from a Midrashic style of intertextual exegesis.31 The patristic 'intertextual' reading that Clark describes is couched (precisely as Clark describes it) in terms of a search for the original and true meaning of the text, in support of a particular ideological line. The appeal is exactly to an authorial intention and not to the fracturing and dissemination of meaning that is encompassed by the term 'intertextuality' or the reading practices of midrash which do not translate and interpret the text for us at all.

For rabbinc Judaism, the Song of Songs is the record of an actual, concrete, visible occurrence in the historical life of the People, Israel. When the Rabbis read the Song of Songs, they do not translate its 'carnal' meaning into one or more 'spiritual' senses, they rather establish a concrete, historical moment in which to contextualize it.32 It is a love-song, a love-dialogue to be specific, that was actually (or fictionally, according to some views)32 uttered by a Lover and a Beloved at a moment of great intimacy, at an actual historical moment of erotic communion, when God allowed Himself to be seen by Israel, either the Crossing of the Red Sea or the Revelation at Mt. Sinai. We can see something of this difference by observing the meaning of 'decoding' or 'solving' [ptr] in actual midrash on the Song:

Rabbi Eleazar decoded [patar] the verse in the hour that Israel stood at the Sea. My dove in the cleft of the rock in the hiding place of the steep [Song 2:14], that they were hidden in the hiding place of the Sea—Show me your visage; this is what is written. 'Stand forth and see the salvation of the Lord' [Exodus 14:13]—Let me hear your voice; this is the singing, as it says, 'Then Moses sang' [Exodus 15:21]—For your voice is lovely; this is the Song—and your visage is beautiful; for Israel were pointing with their fingers and saying 'This is my God and I will beautify Him' [Exodus 15:2].

30 Clark, Reading, 16.4.
Rabbi Akiva decoded the verse in the hour that they stood before Mt. Sinai. My dove in the cleft of the rock in the hiding place of the steep (Song 2:14), for they were hidden in the hiding places of Sinai. Show me your visage, as it says, 'And all of the People saw the voices' (Exodus 20:14)—Let me hear your voice, this is the voice from before the Commandments, for it says 'All that you say we will do and we will hear' (Exodus 24:7)—For your voice is pleasant, this is the voice after the commandments, as it says, 'God has heard the voice of your speaking, that which you have said is goodly' [Deuteronomy 5:25].

To be sure, the Lover was a Divine Lover but the beloveds were actual human beings, and the moment of erotic communion was mystical and visionary. The difference between the midrashic and the allegorical lies not in the thematics of the interpretation but in the language theory underlying the hermeneutic. This is the reverse of what is usually claimed. That is, one typically finds it stated that the method of midrash and of allegory, with regard to the Song of Songs is identical, and only the actual allegorical correspondences have changed, but this is not so in my opinion. In the allegory the metaphors of the language are considered the signs of invisible entities, Platonic ideas of mystical love, while in the midrash they are actually spoken love poetry of an erotic encounter. For many allegorists, the allegorical reading becomes a sublimation of physical love, while for the Rabbis, I would suggest, it is the desublimation of Divine Love, an understanding of that love through its metaphorical association with literal, human corporeal sexuality. It is not irrelevant to note that the Rabbis all had the experience of carnal love. The Song is not connected with an invisible meaning but with the text of the Torah, letter with letter, body with body, not body with spirit. This is an entirely different linguistic structure than that of Philo and his followers, even when thematically the readings may turn out to be similar or genetically connected. For the Rabbis, it is the concrete historical experience of the revelation at Sinai which is described by the Song of Songs, while for the allegorists it is the outer manifestation in language of an unchanging inner structure of reality—an abstract ontology, not a concrete history.

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33 Dunskey, Song of Songs Rabbeh, 73.
34 There are ways in which later Christian allegorical readers of the Song seem to be more like the Rabbis in this respect, at any rate, Astel, Song of Songs, 94. It is perhaps no accident that this shift takes place, as Astel notes, when monastic orders are founded who 'recruited their members from among adults, all of whom had lived in
Let us have a closer look at the midrashic controversy just cited. In this instance two different historical locations are adduced by two important early Rabbis as the original site of the singing of the Song of Songs. Each Rabbi does indeed, therefore, choose different 'intertexts' with which to read the verses of the Song. Rabbi Eliezer taking it together with verses having to do with the splitting of the Red Sea, while Rabbi Akiva reads the Song in the context of verses descriptive of the Theophany at Sinai. In sharp contrast to the instances of patristic reading discussed by Clark in which the Fathers, Chrysostom and Jerome respectively invoke verses to constrain the meaning of other verses (essentially a philological methodology) thus leading to an interpretation, or a text that is itself on another ontological level from the biblical texts invoked, the midrash is rather weaving texts into yet another text of the same sort as the Bible itself, narrative on top of narrative, a text, that is, that is not a translation or a gloss or a paraphrase of the biblical text but an expansion of that text. When you have read the midrashic text you have not been told what the text means at all and ‘decoded’ there only means to place it into a particular context, nothing more. Without a logos, there is no ontological place within which a subordinate text can be inscribed no realm of meaning which can be assigned to the biblical text. One further way of thinking about this might be to imagine the Fathers manipulating signifieds, using contexts (my preferred term, rather than intertexts which I would use quite differently) to pair particular biblical verses with particular interpretations, particular signifieds.

The Rabbis of the midrash, on the other hand, produce a new text constructed out of the intertextual re-placing of other texts. Once the Logos has been crucified, given over, as it were, to the Christians, it seems, that is pretty much what remains to do. ‘Scripture’ in midrash is portrayed as anything but ‘self-interpreting, as if the interpreter had played no role in the production of meaning.’ Indeed the notion of meaning as such is almost evacuated through midrashic literary practice. Although the task remains to work this out in much greater detail, nuance, and specificity, it seems that even after we have deconstructed (and I mean this in its precise, technical sense) binary oppositions between midrash and allegory or Judaism and Christianity, there do

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55 My work-in-progress Viron (Bronx, New York: at, least, engaging this
indeed remain at least fuzzily defined features, 'both distinctive and relatively constant, so as to make Christianity [or Judaism] itself visible as an object of historical inquiry' in the realm of biblical interpretation as well.\footnote{My work-in-progress Daniel Boyarin, \textit{Allegory, Midrash, Theology: An Essay in Re-Vision} (Bronx, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006) will, indeed, be an attempt at, at least, engaging this task, if not (surely) completing it.}

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