



ANCIENT CHRISTIAN TEXTS

COMMENTARIES ON
ROMANS,
1–2 CORINTHIANS,
AND HEBREWS

Cyril of Alexandria

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Taken from *Commentaries on Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, and Hebrews*
by Cyril of Alexandria. Translated by David C. Maxwell. Edited by Joel C. Elowsky.
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Downers Grove, IL. www.ivpress.com

INTRODUCTION TO CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA'S COMMENTARIES ON ROMANS, 1-2 CORINTHIANS, AND HEBREWS

David R. Maxwell

Cyril of Alexandria saw himself first of all as an interpreter of Scripture. Though he is best known for his dogmatic and polemical writings against Nestorius, this reputation does not actually correspond to the weight of his literary output. His exegetical writings make up seven out of his ten volumes in Migne's *Patrologia* series.¹ Some of the works, such as the *Commentary on Isaiah* and the *Commentary on John*, are massive.

Perhaps part of the reason his exegetical writings have been overlooked is that they have not been readily available in English. This state of affairs is now changing. Since the turn of the millennium, new English translations have been published of Cyril's commentaries on Isaiah, the Minor Prophets, and John, as well as his *Glaphyra*, which is a commentary on the Pentateuch.² The current volume seeks to continue this trend.

Of course, Cyril's contribution to the Christology of the early and contemporary church is undeniable, and it is no surprise that Cyril is often read with that set of issues in mind. However, his biblical commentaries reveal a full-bodied theology that includes a well-developed soteriology, a clear vision of the Christian life, and an intense concern for pastoral care, not to mention an encyclopedic knowledge of the Scriptures. With the increasing accessibility of Cyril's biblical commentaries in English, readers will be able to gain a deeper and more balanced appreciation for the theologian considered by the ancients to be the "seal of the fathers."

This volume presents, for the first time in English, a translation of Cyril's commentaries on Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews, which are extant in fragmentary form. Despite the fact that we lack the full commentaries, the fragments we do possess are significant enough in their length and wide-ranging enough in their content that

¹Cyril's works are contained in *Patrologia Graeca* 68-77.

²St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, trans. Robert Charles Hill, 3 vols., *Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007-2013); St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyra on the Pentateuch*, trans. Nicholas P. Lunn, 2 vols., *Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018-2019); Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John*, trans. David R. Maxwell, 2 vols., *Ancient Christian Texts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013-2015).

the editors of this series thought they were worth making available. An Armenian translation of Cyril's complete commentary on Hebrews has recently been discovered as well, but that is not included in the present volume.³

The State of the Text

Since the remains of these commentaries are fragmentary, a few comments on the state of the text are in order. The fragments appear in various catenae (literally "chains"), which are lists of quotations of church fathers. Catenae were used for pedagogical purposes in the ancient world, not only in the field of theology, but also in philosophy, medicine, law, and education.⁴ The catenae that concern us here were used to elucidate Scripture. They presented a verse from Scripture, called a lemma, under which they listed quotations from various church fathers commenting on that passage. InterVarsity Press's Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture series would be a modern example of this genre.

The comments from Cyril were collected from these lists in the nineteenth century by P. E. Pusey and published in a critical edition.⁵ Pusey drew mainly on two medieval manuscripts for the material on Romans: the Codex Vaticanus Graecus 762 (tenth/eleventh centuries), edited by Angelo Mai,⁶ and the Codex Monacensis (eleventh century), edited by J. A. Cramer.⁷ The material on 1 and 2 Corinthians comes primarily from the same Codex Vaticanus Graecus 762 along with the Codex Athous Pantokratoros 28 (ninth/tenth centuries).⁸ For Hebrews, the bulk of the material comes from the *Niketae Catena* (perhaps thirteenth century), edited by Mai⁹ and the Codex Parisiensis 238 (perhaps twelfth or thirteenth century), edited by Cramer. In addition, there are a few Syriac fragments from the Codex Syriacus 12155.¹⁰ Some Syriac fragments are from Cyril's commentary, while others are from homilies. Since the present volume is devoted to Cyril's biblical commentaries, only the fragments from the commentary are included here.

Pusey's text serves as the basis for the translation of Cyril's commentaries on Romans, 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews in this volume. In the body of the commentary proper I have included in bolded brackets the page numbers that correspond to the Pusey text. I have done the same for the *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, where we have a recent critical

³Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Letter to Hebrews*, Armenian text compiled by Hakob Keoseyan, ed. Khachik Grigoryan (Yerevan, Armenia: Ankyunacar Publishing, 2020). A subsequent volume will contain both the Armenian text and an English translation: Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Letter to Hebrews*, Armenian text compiled by Hakob Keoseyan, trans. Khachik Grigoryan, ed. Diana Tsaghikyan (Yerevan, Armenia: Ankyunacar Publishing, forthcoming).

⁴William R. S. Lamb, *The Catena in Marcum: A Byzantine Anthology of Early Commentary on Mark* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 91-108.

⁵P. E. Pusey, *Sancti Patris Nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini in D. Joannis Evangelium Accedunt Fragmenta Varia Necnon Tractatus ad Tiberium Diaconum Duo*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1872; repr., Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1965). Though this is volume 3 of a subsection of Pusey's series, it is actually volume 5 of the entire series. Therefore, it is hereafter cited as "Pusey 5."

⁶Angelo Mai, *Bibliotheca Nova Patrum* (Rome, 1845), 3:1-47. It may also be found in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* 74:773-856.

⁷J. A. Cramer, *Catenae Graecorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum*, vol. 4 (Oxford, 1844).

⁸Pusey 5:vii.

⁹Mai, *Bibliotheca Nova Patrum* 3:107-27.

¹⁰Pusey 5:vii, 362.

edition by Konrad Zawadzki.¹¹ Where the two main source manuscripts cover the same material, Zawadzki lays them out side by side so that the reader can compare them. I have adopted the same layout for the *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* because it helps the reader to gain a sense for how much variation there is between different catenae.

The fact that there is variation raises the question of how confident we can be that the quotations ascribed to Cyril actually represent his words. It is possible that the catenist edited the quotations. It is also possible that some of the quotes attributed to Cyril really come from different authors. Pusey tried to verify the authenticity of the quotes as much as possible when he produced his critical edition, and he did eliminate about a dozen passages from the Munich catena on Romans that he found to come from other writings of Cyril or other authors such as Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Photius.¹²

The best way to determine whether a given catena manuscript accurately transmits texts is to examine fragments that are from a work that has elsewhere been preserved in its entirety. In his 1926 study *Die Pauluskatenen*, Karl Staab did exactly that for Codex Vaticanus Graecus 762, which is the most important manuscript for the material in this volume. Staab compared the fragments of Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom in the catena to the complete commentaries of both fathers, which we have from independent sources. Staab reports that in Theodore there are extraordinarily few textual variations between the catena fragment and the complete commentary, while in Chrysostom there are more.¹³ He further notes that in Chrysostom there are a few instances where the text of the source is almost completely lost in the catena fragment. Staab suggests that the rhetorical form of Chrysostom's homilies may not fit very well with the more exegetical aims of the catena and that this may explain the emendations.¹⁴ Despite the variance in the Chrysostom material, Staab concludes that Codex Vaticanus 762 is a reliable witness to the original commentaries: "We may from all these arguments conclude with certainty that the author of our catena is always accurate in reproducing the thought of his source documents and almost always accurate in reproducing their form."¹⁵

If we compare the two main manuscripts for the *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, we see that Staab's conclusion seems to hold, even if he is a bit optimistic about reproducing the exact wording. Often the two provide almost identical quotations, but there are also cases where the quotations have fairly significant variation in wording. The following comment, on 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, illustrates how much variation there can be:

¹¹Konrad Zawadzki, *Der Kommentar Cyrills von Alexandrien Zum 1. Korintherbrief: Einleitung, Kritischer Text, Übersetzung, Einzelanalyse* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015).

¹²C. H. Turner, "Patristic Commentaries," in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, extra vol., ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927), 515 n. †.

¹³Karl Staab, *Die Pauluskatenen nach den Handschriftlichen Quellen untersucht* (Rome: Verlag des Päpstlichen Bibelinstituts, 1926), 31.

¹⁴Staab, *Die Pauluskatenen*, 31.

¹⁵"Wir dürfen aus all diesen Argumenten mit Gewissheit schliessen, das unser Kettenschmied die Gedanken seiner Quellenschriften immer, ihre Form fast immer treu wiedergibt" (Staab, *Die Pauluskatenen*, 32 [emphasis original]).

(Cod. Vat. Gr. 762)

And what happened to the ancients after that? How did they offend God? They were profaned at Shittim, they worshiped idols, and they were consecrated to the Baal of Peor.¹⁶ Since they were entangled with idol worshipers and associated with them and took part in the table of idols, they fell into apostasy and danced in a chorus with women, “and the people entangled itself with a harlot,” as the prophet says.¹⁷ That is what it means that they “rose up to revel.”¹⁸ Therefore, it is dangerous to associate with the wicked and with unbelievers.

(Cod. Pantokrator. 28)

And what happened to the ancients after that? How did they offend God? They were profaned, they worshiped idols, and they were consecrated to the Baal of Peor. Notice how they who were baptized in the cloud and the sea and who ate the bread from heaven and drank the spiritual drink nevertheless entangled themselves with idolatry. Since they associated with idolaters and took part in the table of idolatry, they quickly became distracted and fell into apostasy and worshiped the Baal of Peor. Therefore, it is dangerous to live with the wicked and with unbelievers.

In places, the two versions match verbatim. In others, there is variation in the wording and even the details that are included. Codex Vaticanus Graecus 762 mentions Shittim and quotes Hosea 4:14, while Codex Pantokratoros 28 does not. Nevertheless, the sense of the passage is clearly the same in both manuscripts.

In light of these variations, it seems that we can have a fair degree of confidence that the catenae supply us with an accurate representation of Cyril’s thought, but we must be mindful of the fact that the catenists may have edited the citations, so that the precise wording may not always be Cyril’s. In this regard, it may be good to take Robert Devreesse’s advice: “One should study a collection for what it *is*, without worrying about what it *could* yield.”¹⁹

Another question one might ask about the text is whether Cyril wrote complete verse-by-verse commentaries, or whether the catenae drew their quotations from letters, homilies, or some other writings of Cyril. Here we do have enough evidence to conclude that Cyril wrote continuous commentaries on these books. Some of the citations include references to book and chapter divisions within the original commentaries. The Codex Pantokratoros 28, for example, specifies the *tomus* and *logos* of Cyril’s commentary on 2 Corinthians for many of the fragments it preserves,²⁰ while it and other catenae manuscripts refer to internal divisions in the commentary on 1 Corinthians which indicate that it was divided into seven books.²¹ Cyril’s commentary on 2 Corinthians was also cited in the acts of the Second Council of Nicaea (787).²² For Romans, the evidence is simply the sheer number of fragments that appear in the Cramer and Mai catenae.²³ For Hebrews, not only do we have evidence in ancient authors (Theodoret, Leontius, Facundus, and others) that Cyril had written a commentary on that book,²⁴ but we now have an Armenian translation of the complete work.

¹⁶Cf. Num 25:1-3.

¹⁷Hos 4:14.

¹⁸Ex 32:6; cf. 1 Cor 10:7.

¹⁹Robert Devreesse, “Chaines Exégetiques Grècques,” in *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, supplement (Paris: Letouzey, 1928), 1098, cited in Lamb, *Catena in Marcum*, 47.

²⁰Turner, “Patristic Commentaries,” 515.

²¹Zawadzki, *Der Kommentar Cyrills*, 62-64.

²²Turner, “Patristic Commentaries,” 515.

²³Turner, “Patristic Commentaries,” 515.

²⁴Turner, “Patristic Commentaries,” 515.

The Dates of Cyril's Commentaries

Given that Cyril did write complete commentaries on these books, the next question is, When? The framework for dating Cyril's writings was established by Georges Jouassard in 1945. Jouassard argues that there are two turning points in Cyril's life that are critical for identifying the date of any given writing. The first is the year 424, when he first becomes engaged with the Arian controversy. Cyril's festal letters provide the evidence for this date. Before 424, these letters were concerned primarily with the Christian life, and his main opponents were the pagans and the Jews. The letter of 424, however, shows a sudden preoccupation with the Arians, which suggests that he began to be engaged with them in 423, as he prepared the letter.²⁵ Therefore, writings that engage the Arians were likely written after 423. The second turning point is the year 428, when Nestorius becomes patriarch of Constantinople, initiating the outbreak of the Nestorian controversy. Consequently, writings that engage this controversy were likely written in 428 or later. In view of this timeline, it is helpful, therefore, to pay attention to the main opponents Cyril engages in his commentaries to get a sense of the date of their composition.

The main opponents in view in the Romans commentary are the Jews, the Origenists, and the pagans. In the case of the Origenists, he is concerned primarily with one issue: the Origenist claim that souls were embodied because of a sin they committed in a pre-embodied state.²⁶ In the case of the pagans, the main issue is their view of fate, which would make reward and punishment meaningless. His main argument against the Jews is that they worship types and not realities, and that they fail to realize Christ is God by nature.

This constellation of opponents suggests a date before 424. However, in those passages where he faults the Jews for not recognizing the divinity of Christ, it is possible that he may have the Arians in mind as well. For example, Cyril distinguishes the sense in which Jesus is the Son of God from the sense in which we are sons of God,²⁷ and he criticizes the Jews for failing to recognize that Christ is "God by nature."²⁸ These are both polemics that could be directed against the Arians. If that is what he had in mind, then the *Commentary on Romans* could have been written in 424 or later. On the other hand, he does not constantly bring up Arian issues or mention them by name, as he does in other anti-Arian commentaries like the *Commentary on John*. He seems more engaged by the themes of Christian life and proper typological understanding of the Old Testament. For that reason, I am inclined to offer the tentative suggestion that the *Commentary on Romans* should be dated 424 or earlier.

²⁵See Georges Jouassard, "L'activité littéraire de Saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie jusqu'à 428," in *Mélanges E. Podechard* (Lyon: Facultés catholiques, 1945), 168-69.

²⁶See his comments on Rom 6:6.

²⁷Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 1:3.

²⁸Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 10:2.

The *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, on the other hand, engages not only the Arian controversy but the Nestorian controversy as well. The term *theotokos* appears in the commentary along with other christological formulations that point to an anti-Nestorian context.²⁹ The appearance of the term *theotokos* is significant because it appears frequently in Cyril's writings composed after 428³⁰ but rarely in those written before that date.³¹ This fact is not definitive, however, because the term was used by Cyril's predecessors well before the outbreak of the Nestorian controversy.³² Therefore, the appearance of other themes and terminology from the Nestorian controversy is helpful for confirming a date after 428. If that reasoning is sound, then the *Commentary on 2 Corinthians* may also be dated after 428. In that work, Cyril refers to Mary as *theotokos* and rejects the description of Christ as *theophoros*,³³ both terms that figure prominently in the Nestorian controversy.

The *Commentary on Hebrews* shows both an anti-Arian and an anti-Nestorian concern. It does not mention Nestorius, but it does cite Theodore of Mopsuestia, though without mentioning his name.³⁴ It does not discuss the term *theotokos*, but it does discuss the mode of union, insisting that it is hypostatic and not according to good pleasure. This commentary is the only one of Cyril's exegetical works to use the phrase "hypostatic union."³⁵ This suggests that the commentary was written after the outbreak of the Nestorian controversy in 428. Since Cyril's *Commentary on Hebrews* is referred to in a letter of Alexander of Hierapolis to Acacius of Beroea, written in about 432, the commentary must have been written before that date.³⁶

Cyril's Exegesis

When Cyril comments on a biblical text, he is primarily trying to clear up questions that arise when reading that text, whether those questions arise from the text itself or from heretical interpretations of the text current in Cyril's day. In some cases, that means establishing the punctuation. Texts in Cyril's day had little or no punctuation, so if he thinks a verse should be read as a question, he sometimes makes that explicit.³⁷ If he

²⁹For a more detailed description of the evidence, see Zawadzki, *Der Kommentar Cyrills*, 37-60. Zawadzki concludes that the *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* was written between 433 and 438.

³⁰J. Mahé, "La date du Commentaire de saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie sur l'évangélie selon saint Jean," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 8 (1907): 43-44.

³¹It does appear in the following early works, but the texts are sometimes uncertain: *Expositio in Psalmos* (PG 69:1117B), *Fragmentum in Canticum Canticozum* (PG 69:1292C), *Commentarium in Isaiam Prophetam* (PG 70:1036D).

³²Origen, *Fragmentum 80 in Lucam* 4 (GCS 49); Athanasius, *Expositio in Psalmos* (PG 27:373); Didymus the Blind, *Fragmenta in Psalmos* 693A, 15 (PTS 16:69); cited in Zawadzki, *Der Kommentar Cyrills*, 40n56.

³³Cyril, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians* 1:1 and 2:14. Cf. Zawadzki, *Der Kommentar Cyrills*, 60n96.

³⁴Paul M. Parvis, "The Commentary on Hebrews and the Contra Theodorum of Cyril of Alexandria," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 26, no. 2 (October 1975): 416.

³⁵Henry Chadwick, "Eucharist and Christology in the Nestorian Controversy," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 2 (1951): 146, cited in Parvis, "Commentary on Hebrews," 418.

³⁶Parvis, "Commentary on Hebrews," 417.

³⁷E.g., Cyril, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 6:2b-3.

thinks words or phrases are unclear, he will clarify them. For example, when St. Paul asks, "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age" (1 Cor 1:20), Cyril describes the people he thinks the terms *wise*, *scribe*, and *debater* refer to.³⁸

Paraphrase is another tool that Cyril brings to bear on the text. Sometimes he simply restates the point of the text in a slightly expanded form. Other times he places the text in a larger narrative to help the reader make sense of it. An example of the latter would be his comment on Romans 3:5-8, in which St. Paul responds to the objection that God is not just in his judgments. Cyril provides the background for the objection by explaining that when the Israelites returned from the Babylonian captivity, they made excuses for not rebuilding the temple, and God chastised them for it. In return, they began to consider other races who did not serve God to be better off than they were. This is what Cyril thinks gives rise to the bitter sentiment that God is unjust when he imposes his wrath (Rom 3:5) and the cynical exhortation, "Let us do evil that good may result" (Rom 3:8).³⁹

Very often, Cyril tries to envision and then respond to questions that may arise in the mind of the reader or from one of his opponents. Sometimes the question stems from a tension in the biblical text itself, as when Cyril raises the question of how to reconcile Paul's statement that Abraham was not justified by works (Rom 4:2) with James's statement that he was (Jas 2:24).⁴⁰ Other times Cyril imagines how one of his opponents would interpret the passage and then he offers an explanation to guard against such an interpretation. For example, when Paul says that Christ was "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom 6:4), Cyril wants to make sure that the reader does not infer from this that Christ lacked strength.⁴¹

One point that Cyril is always keen to make is that Christ fulfills the Old Testament. This is what he thinks the statement "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom 10:4) means.⁴² Therefore, he makes numerous connections between the Old Testament and its fulfillment in Christ. For example, Satan is the spiritual Pharaoh, and Christ rescued us from the slavery of demonic oppression through baptism, which was prefigured by the crossing of the Red Sea.⁴³ The veil over Moses' face, mentioned in 2 Corinthians 3:13, indicates that the Old Testament presents the mystery of Christ in shadows, while the New Testament changes the types into truth.⁴⁴

Overall, Cyril's goal is to help the reader understand the text. He certainly has doctrinal points he wants to make, but he spends most of his time and effort unpacking the

³⁸Cyril, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 1:20.

³⁹Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 3:5-8.

⁴⁰Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 4:2.

⁴¹Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 6:3-4.

⁴²Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 10:4, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians* 3:13.

⁴³Cyril, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 10:1-5.

⁴⁴Cyril, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians* 3:18.

Scriptures and understanding them on their own terms. There are a few terms that I have chosen to transliterate so that the reader may more easily follow Cyril's thinking as he does so. The term *prosopon* means "person," but it can also mean "mask" or "character" (in a drama). Cyril consistently fights against the notion that the union of human and divine in Christ is a union of *prosopon* because that term is too superficial. It says that Christ has one outward appearance, or mask, but says nothing about his interior constitution. Cyril prefers to say that the union is hypostatic, since that term signifies that the union takes place on an ontological level. *Oikonomia* means "management" or "arrangement." In Cyril and other patristic authors, it usually refers to God's plan of salvation generally or to the incarnation specifically. The opposite of *oikonomia* is *theologia*, which refers to discourse about God's nature, considered apart from creation or salvation. When Cyril uses these words in their technical sense, I have transliterated them.

Cyril's Audience

From the foregoing, we may infer that Cyril expects his readers to be engaged in the task of biblical interpretation. The most likely candidates for that would be the bishops and presbyters under Cyril's supervision. They are the ones charged with preaching and teaching the faith. They are the likely audience for Cyril's *Commentary on John*,⁴⁵ and there are indications that the same may be true for the commentaries in the present volume.

On a number of occasions, Cyril stops to consider how the simple or less educated might interpret a passage.⁴⁶ Presumably, the readers themselves would have a fair degree of education in order to read the commentaries in the first place. The implication seems to be not that Cyril thinks his readers lack education, but that he envisions them teaching people who are not highly educated. This would certainly be the case if bishops and presbyters are his intended audience.

One passage even suggests that Cyril's readers are presiding at the Eucharist. It is his discussion of speaking in tongues in the *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*. There Cyril explains that the churches have the custom of the presider summing up the people's prayers in the service. The problem, though, is that some of the presiders are offering this summary in tongues so that no one can understand what they are saying. In response to this abuse, Cyril turns to the reader and says, "We must do everything for the sake of building up and benefiting the brothers,"⁴⁷ indicating that among his readers might be one of the presiders or preachers. If this analysis is correct, it suggests that Cyril views his own task as well as that of his readers to be centered on the interpretation of Scripture.

⁴⁵Cyril, *Commentary on John* (Maxwell 1:xvii-xix).

⁴⁶Cf. Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 7:15 and 9:1.

⁴⁷Cyril, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 14:16-17 (emphasis added).

The Narrative of Salvation in Cyril's New Testament Commentaries

In order to understand how Cyril's individual exegetical decisions fit into the larger whole of his theology, it is helpful to have a sense for the way he tells the story of salvation. Here I will present what I take to be the broad contours of that story as Cyril expresses it in his New Testament commentaries.

The key verse that anchors the whole story is Genesis 2:7, God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." This is the point at which Adam was sealed in the divine image by the Holy Spirit and received life.⁴⁸ Because creation has no life on its own but is alive only by participation in God,⁴⁹ the gift of life elevates Adam beyond his nature and in a sense divinizes him.⁵⁰ Genesis 2:7, then, describes the original human condition to which salvation is a return. Key themes in Cyril's description of salvation, such as restoration of the divine image, sharing in the divine life, and justification, are established by this verse.

What humanity gained in Genesis 2:7, however, it lost in Genesis 3:19, when God responded to Adam's sin with the words, "Earth you are, and to earth you will return."⁵¹ For Cyril, this verse imposes the ultimate calamity on the human race. It has two aspects: a juridical one and an ontological one. First, it is juridical because it is a sentence or a curse⁵² against the human race. Cyril refers to it as the "ancient charges" that Christ needed to overcome on our behalf.⁵³ Second, this verse has an ontological aspect in that it imposes death on the human race, thus effacing the divine image and stripping it of the Holy Spirit and participation in divine life. Both of these aspects need to be addressed in order for humanity to be saved. Cyril says, "We possess calamity from Adam's transgression in that we bear the *curse* and *death*."⁵⁴

Christ comes as the second Adam, the new head of the human race, to set things right. He addresses both aspects of Genesis 3:19. His death on the cross is a sacrifice to pay for sins, which addresses the sentence declared against us.⁵⁵ The term that captures the juridical aspect of salvation is the Pauline term "justification," which Cyril defines as the "dropping of the ancient charges,"⁵⁶ referring to the charges expressed in Genesis 3:19. On the ontological side, various events in Christ's life return humanity to its original condition of Genesis 2:7, in which humanity shares in divine life. The incarnation

⁴⁸Cyril, *Commentary on John* 1:32-33 (Maxwell 1:81), 7:39 (Maxwell 1:311).

⁴⁹Cyril, *Commentary on John* 1:4 (Maxwell 1:33).

⁵⁰Cyril, *Commentary on John* 14:20 (Maxwell 2:186, see especially n267).

⁵¹Translated from the Septuagint, which is the wording Cyril consistently uses.

⁵²Cyril, *Commentary on John* 1:29 (Maxwell 1:76), 8:28 (Maxwell 1:342), 13:29 (Maxwell 2:132), 17:18-19 (Maxwell 2:299), 20:15 (Maxwell 2:359).

⁵³Cyril, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 15:17, *Commentary on Romans* 4:2.

⁵⁴Cyril, *Commentary on Hebrews* 1:1 (emphasis added).

⁵⁵Cyril, *Commentary on John* 19:19 (Maxwell 2:345); Cyril, *Commentary on Hebrews* 2:17.

⁵⁶Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 4:2. Cf. Cyril, *Commentary on John* 13:29 (Maxwell 2:132), where Cyril explicitly connects justification with the dissolution of Gen 3:19.

overcomes the curse of death by uniting human nature with the Word.⁵⁷ Christ's reception of the Holy Spirit at his baptism reestablishes the presence of the Spirit in the human race as originally given in Genesis 2:7.⁵⁸ Christ's death and resurrection defeat death, thus rolling back the curse of Genesis 3:19.⁵⁹ This ontological aspect of salvation corresponds to the idea of *theosis*, though Cyril generally describes that process in nontechnical language rather than using the term *theosis*.

Of these two aspects, the sharing in divine life tends to receive most of the attention in scholarship.⁶⁰ However, the juridical aspect is also quite prominent in Cyril's New Testament commentaries.⁶¹ This is true not only in the *Commentary on Romans*, in which Cyril's discussion of justification is prompted by its presence in Paul's text, but in the *Commentary on John* as well. There he refers to justification some sixteen times throughout the entire breadth of the commentary. This suggests that justification is an important soteriological category for Cyril, which he brings to bear on passages even when the passage itself does not contain the term. In fact, Cyril frequently mentions participation in divine life side by side with justification or righteousness. For example, in his *Commentary on John* he states, "We are justified through faith and rendered sharers in the divine nature by participation in the Holy Spirit."⁶² Both aspects should be understood as two sides of the same coin. They both entail the reversal of the curse of Genesis 3:19 and the return of humanity to its original state in Genesis 2:7.⁶³

Other Themes in Cyril's New Testament Commentaries

Beyond the narrative of salvation, Cyril also covers a number of other themes throughout these commentaries. He mentions baptism, marriage, virginity, slavery, the relation between male and female, speaking in tongues, and prophesying, to name a few. There are more-extended discussions of topics such as election, the Christian life, and the resurrection of the body.

Cyril's discussion of election focuses on distinguishing it from a more fatalistic pagan view. His concern is that fate would render any notion of reward and punishment meaningless. To counter that, he insists that humans have free will, and he rejects any interpretation of election that would violate it. Instead, he argues that God chooses to show

⁵⁷Cyril, *Commentary on John* 1:14 (Maxwell 1:63).

⁵⁸Cyril, *Commentary on John* 1:32-33 (Maxwell 1:81-82).

⁵⁹Cyril, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 15:20-23, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians* 5:3.

⁶⁰This has been particularly emphasized by Daniel A. Keating, *The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶¹This aspect has been highlighted by Lars Koen in *The Saving Passion: Incarnational and Soteriological Thought in Cyril of Alexandria's Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991), 108.

⁶²Cyril, *Commentary on John* 14:4 (Maxwell 2:148). Similar connections occur in *Commentary on Romans* 5:11, 8:9; Cyril, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 15:20-23; Cyril, *Commentary on John* 5:24 (Maxwell 1:155), and 10:10 (Maxwell 2:61).

⁶³For a discussion of the relation between *theosis* and justification in Cyril, see David R. Maxwell, "Justification in the Early Church," *Concordia Journal* 44, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 25-40.

mercy on those whom he foresaw would be deserving of it.⁶⁴ When St. Paul says, “So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy” (Rom 9:16), Cyril claims that Paul is not stating his own position but reporting the “ignorant response” of his opponents!⁶⁵

Cyril describes the Christian life primarily as a battle against the passions. He describes Adam as being created free from “alien impulses,”⁶⁶ but Adam’s fall debilitates the human race so that the flesh is now “disposed to pleasure because of its natural impulses.”⁶⁷ These “natural impulses” seem to be biological drives that arise from the body and drag down the soul.

Not all natural impulses are sinful, however. Cyril at one point notes that God implanted certain impulses in the human race to lead us to himself.⁶⁸ He also recognizes that in the incarnation, Christ has natural impulses as well, though only those that are free from the taint of sin, such as hunger, thirst, or weariness.⁶⁹

However, Cyril normally portrays natural impulses as something to be overcome. Christians overcome them first and foremost by being “crucified with Christ.” This frees them from the ancient curse, and it also does away with the “body of sin”—that is, the carnal impulses that drag the mind down into sin.⁷⁰ Cyril does not think it is possible to overcome passions completely in this life,⁷¹ but he does think that Christ’s death and resurrection provide the Christian with a unique power to resist these natural impulses. He also sees the practice of asceticism as an aid in this endeavor.⁷²

Cyril’s discussion of the resurrection in his comments on 1 Corinthians 15 picks up some of the main themes in his account of salvation and of the Christian life. There he emphasizes the soteriological significance of Christ’s resurrection, noting that it both justifies us (Rom 4:25) and overcomes death.⁷³ He also raises the question of what kind of body humans will have at the resurrection on the last day. After rejecting the Origenist notion that souls preexist bodies,⁷⁴ he interprets Paul’s term “spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44) to mean not an incorporeal body but a body that is free from a “carnal earthly mind.”⁷⁵ Thus Cyril’s view of the resurrection is consistent with his vision of the Christian life as a battle against the passions as well as being opposed to the Origenist notion that humans were originally meant to be incorporeal.

⁶⁴Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 9:14-24.

⁶⁵Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 9:14-24.

⁶⁶Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 5:18.

⁶⁷Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 6:6.

⁶⁸Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 5:20.

⁶⁹Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 6:6.

⁷⁰Cyril, *Commentary on Romans* 6:6 and 7:24-25.

⁷¹Cyril, *Commentary on John* 7:24 (Maxwell 1:288).

⁷²Cyril, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians* 4:16.

⁷³Cyril, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 15:20-23.

⁷⁴Cyril, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 15:35-38.

⁷⁵Cyril, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 15:44-45.

When it comes to Christology, Cyril's particular emphasis in a given writing depends on which opponents he has in mind. It turns out that Christology is not a major emphasis in the fragments in this volume the way it is in his *Commentary on John*, for instance. The most extended discussion of Christology in this volume is in his *Commentary on 2 Corinthians*. There he engages both the Arians and the Nestorians, though his primary concern seems to be the Arians. Since his Christology has received so much attention, I will not dwell on it here. I will simply observe that his Christology coheres with his construal of the narrative of salvation. Overturning God's verdict and restoring human participation in God's life are acts that only God can do. If the Savior is less than God, as the Arians claim, or if he operates independently from God, as the Nestorians claim, then the reversal of the curse of Genesis 3:19 does not take place. This is why it is important to affirm that "he who is from holy Mary, *theotokos*, is himself God by nature."⁷⁶

The commentaries in this volume provide a glimpse of Cyril's larger theological vision. They challenge the stereotype that Cyril's contribution is limited to christological questions. In these fragments, Cyril shows himself to be a biblical commentator who strives for a close reading of the text, even down to the level of punctuation. That close reading, in turn, gives rise not only to his Christology but also to a set of issues that span the theology and practice of the church.

⁷⁶Cyril, *Commentary on 2 Corinthians* 1:1.

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