The Purpose of Rhetoric in Late Antiquity

Edited by
ALBERTO J. QUIROGA PUERTAS

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From Performance to Exegesis

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Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas

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Foreword

Rhetoric has commonly been used as an umbrella term. A quick glance at any bibliographical catalogue in the field of Humanities will suffice to note that 'rhetoric' is a mercurial term that can be applied to issues relating to subjects as varied as philosophy, literature, architecture, theology, gender studies, poetics, and cinematography, to name but a few. Rhetoric has overcome all kinds of prejudices that have portrayed it as the quintessence of garrulousness and futility. In this context, the purpose of this volume is to claim the indisputable centrality of rhetoric in the religious and cultural milieu of Late Antiquity. The twelve papers of the present work deal with the role and impact of rhetoric in the fields of Theology, Literature and Politics in Late Antiquity (more specifically, in the fourth century AD). In recent decades, Late Antiquity has been approached from many perspectives, and it has been agreed that the impact of rhetoric on its cultural development was crucial. Thus, the working assumption of this volume is that rhetoric was a key element behind every single aspect of importance in this transcendental period: rhetoric was the bedrock upon which the composition of orations, speeches and sermons was built at a time when opportunities for public speaking were numerous in the religious and political arenas; rhetoric was also at the heart of Christian theology, as it provided it with a logical means of interpreting the Scriptures and with literary forms to divulge; rhetoric was, of course, at the inception of many literary works that had an extraordinary impact on the culture of Late Antiquity.

Several factors influenced the advance of rhetoric as a cultural phenomenon in Late Antiquity. The massive administrative organization of the Roman Empire and its cultural system involved a number of tasks − networking, writing letters, interpreting the Scriptures, composing homilies, or delivering oratorical pieces – in which commanding rhetoric became a *sine qua non* by which one could remain anchored to the elites. The fact that its complex set of theoretical precepts was consolidated within the pagan culture did not prevent the protean nature of rhetoric from integrating itself into the *Zeitgeist* of the period of frantic religious activity that witnessed the ascendancy of Christianity.

The prevalent scenario in the cultural milieu of Late Antiquity – a period in which sophists, bishops, philosophers and other public figures competed to be under the spotlight – shows rhetoric to be a critical element in the characterization of public personas and their religious and cultural tenets. Every single member of the cultural elites used rhetoric as a distorting mirror with which to criticise those who failed to comply with their own conception of what the real purpose of rhetoric was. Libanius of Antioch, for instance, considered rhetoric a panacea for the difficulties of his time (*Or*. 23.21), and the philosopher Themistius deemed it a propaedeutic discipline suitable for the learning of philosophy, yet both censured those who turned rhetoric into mere entertainment (Lib., *Ep*. 742; Them., *Or*. 28), devoid of knowledge. Ammianus Marcellinus also complained about the increasing influence of performing artists in Rome, whose presence was detrimental to those who cultivated rhetoric for fruitful purposes (14.6.18: *pro philosopho cantor et in locum oratoris doctor artium ludicrarum accitur*). On the Christian side, Synesius of Cyrene (*Dio* 12) detailed what torture it was for a sophist to prepare the delivery of a speech; Gregory of Nazianzus (*Or*. 2; 47) chastised those bishops whose main concern was declaiming to mesmerize their audience; in the same vein, Ambrose of Milan (*De Off*. 1.18.72-73; 19.84) and Jerome (*Ep*. 22) devoted efforts to censuring a type of *anêr theatrikos* that was in vogue and invaded the areas of influence dominated by the cultural elite. Concurrent with its utilization as a trivial pastime, late antique rhetoric also became the cornerstone of religious and theological debates. In this sense, it was perceived to be a hermeneutical tool, indispensable when arguing or refuting in cultural, philosophical and religious controversies. Rhetoric took refuge in theological, exegetical and polemical works, thus distancing itself from its pyrotechnical and Philostratean dimension denounced by most late antique authors.

This volume opens with a prologue by Prof. Robert J. Penella, in which an account of the recent history of the study of late antique rhetoric is given, stretching from the reinvigoration of this discipline in the second half of the twentieth century to the new approaches and terminologies ('Third Sophistic') in the first decade of our century. After this, the volume is divided into three sections. The first, *Words and the Word: Rhetorical Strategies and Theology*, deals with how rhetoric became a central constituent in the making of religious writings and Christian orthodoxy. Philip Rousseau, in his work "Homily and Exegesis in the Patristic age: comparisons of purpose and effect," provides us with a comprehensive survey of the relationship between rhetoric and semiotics based on an analysis of literary (sub)genres such as commentaries, homilies and exegesis. The implications of this relationship went beyond the realm of literature and deeper into religious themes. Thus, Rousseau surveys the place of Scrip-

tural commentaries and homilies in the reformulation of the concept of Christian scholarship that took place in the fourth and fifth centuries. By challenging the notion that the rhetorical dimension of commentaries and homilies overshadowed the pedagogical and (less audience-dependant) philological side of such works, Rousseau's work aims to examine to what degree those genres were permeable. Next, Nicholas Baker-Brian, in "Between Testimony and Rumour: strategies of Invective in Augustine's *De moribus manichaeorum*," examines the rhetorical strategies deployed by Augustine in his attacks against Manichaeans in *De moribus Manichaeorum*. Augustine drew not only on rhetorical exaggeration, on the stereotypical portrait of the religious 'Other,' and on topics from the iambic tradition to chastise Manichaeans, but also consolidated a 'rumour strategy' that made his work a piece of invective literature. Ilaria Ramelli's work, "A Rhetorical Device in Evagrius: Allegory, the Bible, and Apokatastasis," studies Evagrius Ponticus' use of allegory in his *Kephalaia Gnostika* as a key instrument when interpreting this cryptic work. Evagrius' claims that the Scriptures were a multi-layered text helped him to develop a theological discourse concerning the spiritual understanding of things, the relationship between sensitive and intelligible perception, the unity of virtue and knowledge, and apokatastasis, a concept central to Christian eschatology. Finally, Josef Lössl's "Profaning and Proscribing. Escalating Rhetorical Violence in Fourth Century Christian Apologetic" explores how Firmicus Maternus' *De errore profanarum religionum* resorted to rhetorical strategies to exteriorize his conversion to Christianity. Firmicus' work was intended to influence emperors to implement laws against pagan culture by emphasizing the sexual and obscene nature of pagan rites.

The second part of the book, *Sacred and Profane in Late Antique Literature*, understands rhetoric as a literary device which was essential when composing any piece of literature, a fundamental part of the internal architecture of speeches, novels or scholarly texts of a pagan or Christian nature. This second part begins with Laura Miguélez-Cavero's work, "Rhetoric for a Christian Community: the poems of the *Codex Visionum*," a thorough analysis that deals with the form and Christian content of the *Codex Visionum*. Intended for the improvement of the spiritual life of a Christian community, the *Codex* is studied as a literary work – highly influenced by rhetoric and the genre of biography – that provides us with important insights into key Christian concepts (μετάνοια, σωφροσύνη) and their deployment within the rhetorical nature of the *Codex*. In the following chapter, "Rhetoric or Law? The Role of Law in Late Ancient Greek Rhetorical Exercises," Manfred Kraus explores the great interest displayed in Law in collections of progymnasmata (mainly those by Libanius and Aphthonius), and interprets the plethora of allusions to legal traditions in

such rhetorical exercises, not as an example of nostalgia for the glorious past of the classical tradition but as evidence of surviving and active Greek laws in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. Aglae Pizzone's work, "When Calasiris got pregnant: rhetoric and storytelling in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*," is a meta-literary study in which analysis of rhetorical vocabulary and practices (mainly ἀφήγησις, διήγημα, διήγησις, and πλάσμα) is, in the light of a psychagogic conception of rhetoric, vital to understanding the interaction between the characters and issues pertaining to the plot (and numerous subplots) of Heliodorus' imbricated narrative. In "Themistius and Julian: their Association in Syriac and Arabic Tradition," John W. Watt gives an account of the problematic relationship between Themistius and Julian in quite a different light by exploring Greek, Syriac, and Arabic texts in which the role of Themistius and Julian with regard to Christianity is based on a non-Greek set of ideas and religious beliefs, thus providing us with uncharted sources that supplement our knowledge of the emperor and the philosopher.

The third part of the book, *Rhetoric and Political Speeches*, aims to explore those symbouletic compositions that have furnished us with relevant information and data on the state of affairs in the political arena in a period in which politics and religion were becoming increasingly intertwined. With "Themistius' on Royal Beauty," David Konstan explores the extent to which Themistius managed to blend rhetoric and philosophy in his panegyric to Gratian, paying particular attention to the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of love and beauty on which Themistius relied. Guadalupe Lopetegui's "The *Panegyrici Latini*: Rhetoric in the service of imperial Ideology" uses that corpus of speeches in order to extract information related to the situation of the schools of rhetoric in Gaul and what was expected from the declamation of panegyrics by the authorities and the emperor himself, thus highlighting the strong bonds between rhetoric, education, and political propaganda in the *Panegyrici Latini*. In "'No stories for old men': Damophilus of Bithynia and Plutarch in Julian's *Misopogon*," Lieve Van Hoof and Peter Van Nuffelen reflect on the literary sources that the emperor Julian used for the composition of his *Misopogon* – arguably one of the most famous examples of fourth century pagan religious literature – and how such sources had an evident intertextual function. Finally, Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas' "Libanius' Horror Silentii" investigates the importance of references to silence in the works of the sophist Libanius of Antioch in order to shed light on the political, religious and cultural significance of such allusions from an author whose bequest is one of the biggest corpus of letters, progymnasmata, and speeches of the fourth century AD.

The editor wishes to thank the contributors to this volume for their enthusiasm and effort in producing the papers that compose it. My gratitude

goes to Dr. Henning Ziebritzki, Professor Martin Wallraff, and the editors of Mohr Siebeck's *Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity*, who accepted the volume and offered support and advice. Thanks are also due to Prof. Robert J. Penella, for his illustrative prologue, to Tanja Idler and Galván, for their patient guidance and advice on editorial issues, and finally to the Department of Greek Studies at the University of Granada for granting permission for research stays.

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Prologue

Robert J. Penella

Studies of late ancient rhetoric are on the rise, and a collection of articles on late ancient rhetoric such as this one will find a more welcoming readership today than it would have done a generation or two ago. In the first place, we have witnessed a revived, sympathetic interest in rhetoric in general, which derives ultimately from the so-called linguistic turn of the twentieth century. In structuralist and post-structuralist discourse rhetoric is no longer the dirty word it had been for the Romantics. Even when recent ancient rhetorical studies are not imbued with contemporary critical theory, they surely have been encouraged and have otherwise benefited from this new interest in rhetoric.[1] In the second place, late ancient studies in general have been thriving since the 1970s. Second Sophistic studies, too, which got off the ground around the same time, have aided the growth of late ancient rhetorical studies: under the influence of late ancient studies, Dio Chrysostom has pushed us to Themistius, Aelius Aristides to Libanius, Philostratus's *Lives of Sophists* to Eunapius's *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists*. The fourth century, on which the contributions to this volume focus, is, of course, a rich period for late ancient rhetorical investigations. But it is not surprising that, in addition to a first jump from the second and third to the fourth century, there has recently also been a second jump, from Libanius to Procopius and Choricius of Gaza, the so-called School of Gaza of the fifth and sixth centuries being the next notable thickening of late ancient rhetorical activity, at least in the East and so far as our extant texts allow us to discern.[2] In addition to rhetoric's new status and the combined influence of late ancient and Second Sophistic studies, we should also note the recently renewed interest in ancient edu-

[1] See Dugan (2007), 14–15. Similarly, feminism has encouraged studies of women in antiquity even in quarters not imbued with theoretical feminism.

[2] I restrict myself to a few titles that have appeared since the turn of the millenium: Amato (2010); Greco (2010); Lupi (2010); Penella (2009); Saliou (2005); Webb (2006); Westberg (2010).

cation: this interest encourages rhetorical studies because ancient education was so markedly rhetorical.[3]

The move from the Second Sophistic to an intensified interest in the sophistic of Late Antiquity has led to the introduction of a new term for the latter, the Third Sophistic, a term that does not occur in this volume.[4] Although not everyone who studies imperial rhetoric would use the word 'sophistic' to name his or her interest, it is nonetheless a useful designation for 'rhetorical culture.' What should and should not be included under 'rhetorical culture' is not immediately self-evident, since rhetoric bleeds into so many areas of ancient culture, but it would be advisable not to overextend the application of the term 'Third Sophistic,' as has happened with 'Second Sophistic;' a category that embraces too much soon loses its *raison d'être*.[5] Late Antiquity is not the only scholarly area that has claimed a Third Sophistic for itself. The term has been applied to twelfth-century Komnenian Hellenism.[6] Or was a Third Sophistic ushered in by Thomas Magister in the fourteenth century?[7] Or is there a postmodern Third Sophistic currently in existence?[8] Unfortunately we cannot patent the term for exclusive use by late ancient enthusiasts.

If we adopt the term 'Third Sophistic' to name the rhetorical culture of Late Antiquity, some ambiguities do remain. First, what are its chronological boundaries? Philostratus invented the term 'Second Sophistic.' He thought of it as beginning with the orator Aeschines in the late fourth century BC – although he is virtually silent on its membership before the late first century AD (*Lives* 507–511) – and extending to his own times, that is, to the publication of his *Lives of Sophists*, perhaps as late as 242–244.[9] The Second Sophistic is peculiarly Philostratean, distinctively conceived by him; the term and his conceptualization do not appear to have caught on much in antiquity after his death.[10] I would, therefore, not be inclined to

[3] I mention only a few studies that have been particularly helpful to me in my recent work: del Corso and Pecere (2010); Cribiore (2001; 2007); Fernández Delgado (2007); Hugonnard-Roche (2008); Kaster (1988); Lee Too (2001); Morgan (1998). Recent work on the *progymnasmata* and on declamation could be listed either under the rubric 'rhetoric' or the rubric 'education.'

[4] The term is discussed at length by Quiroga (2007), 31–42, and by Malosse and Schouler (2009). See also Amato (2006).

[5] Cf., e.g., Whitmarsh (2001), 42–43; Heath (2004), xv.

[6] Kaldellis (2007), 238.

[7] Grafton *et al*. (2010), 935.

[8] E.g., Vitanza (1991): the 'representative sophists' of the Third Sophistic are Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Paul de Man, with Gorgias as 'proto-Third.'

[9] Jones (2002).

[10] See Jones (2008).

extend it beyond his usage.[11] I would let the Third Sophistic begin in the third century – right after the last mentioned sophists in Philostratus's *Lives* – rather than with Constantine and the beginning of the fourth century.[12] (Why create a gap between a Second and a Third Sophistic?) This seems also to be Eugenio Amato's preference; he hopes that the term 'Third Sophistic' will take hold for the 'siècles de l'Antiquité tardive (iii–vi ap. J.-C.)'[13] – although those who see Late Antiquity ending with the rise of Islam rather than with Justinian will want to extend his formula chronologically. Secondly, although the Philostratean Second Sophistic was a Greek phenomenon, Latin figures (e.g., Fronto, Apuleius, Aulus Gellius) have been readily associated with it, and early advocates of a Third Sophistic welcomed Latin rhetorical culture into their tent.[14] This is as it should be; nothing is gained by segregating Greek and Latin rhetorical developments. And thirdly should Christians be admitted? I would answer with an enthusiastic 'yes.' By Late Antiquity, Christians have mastered the traditional rhetorical skills as fully as any pagan; their religious beliefs and use of rhetoric in their own cause are not grounds for segregating them, as Laurent Pernot appears to do in his *La rhétorique dans l'Antiquité*.[15] Of course, assigning someone to a sophistic is properly done with reference to that individual's use of traditional rhetorical genres, or genres readily derivable from them (e.g., the Christian sermon), although we shall still want to explore the influence of rhetoric elsewhere (e.g., in scriptural commentary).

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[11] Kustas's definition of the Second Sophistic as (1970), 55 'that movement in thought and letters which extends from the time of Augustus to the end of the ancient world' is un-Philostratean on both ends.

[12] *Pace* Quiroga (2007), 31–35.

[13] Amato (2006), v. On the principle that Sophistics 'non multiplicandae sunt praeter necessitatem,' I would resist the suggestion of Milazzo (2002), 15 that we call the fifth- and sixth-century School of Gaza a 'Fourth Sophistic.' Malosse and Schouler (2009), 163 n. 3, and Van Hoof (2010), 213 n. 12, erroneously report that Milazzo makes the first century AD a Third Sophistic.

[14] See the contents of Amato (2006) and the papers of the session on the Third Sophistic at the annual meeting of the American Philological Association, 2009 (apaclassics.org, under 'Meeting'). Three of those papers have been published in the *Journal of Late Antiquity* 3 (2010).

[15] Pernot (2000), 271–272 also excludes Latin rhetors there: 'Le domain grec païen connut un tel éclat que les savants modernes parlent parfois, à ce propos, d'une 'Troisième Sophistique,' représentée par . . . Libanios et Himérios, . . . Thémistios, l'Empereur Julien, . . . Aphthonios. En latin . . . Cependant la rhétorique chrétienne . . .' Quiroga (2007), 40–41 rightly objects to Pernot's exclusion of Christians. Pernot (*ibid.*) says of the fourth century, 'la rhétorique chrétienne prit le pas sur la rhétorique païenne.' Is there such a thing as 'rhétorique chrétienne'?

These ambiguities aside, though, the more fundamental question is this: should we adopt the concept of a Third Sophistic as a new periodization at all? A new period not only implies difference, but, once reified, it may have the effect of pushing us to see more difference in it than there actually is.[16] My own sense is that, although there certainly is significant political, social, and religious change in the fourth century, in the fundamentals of rhetorical culture – the educational system, rhetorical theory, and the various rhetorical genres and modes – there is far more continuity than difference between the Second and the so-called Third Sophistic, with no 'disruption or dislocation in rhetorical culture' during the crisis of the third century.[17] Of course, in any human phenomenon, there is never continuity without change. But I am not sure that, say, a putative diminution in the sophist's social status or the sophist's taking on a greater moralizing or educative role in Late Antiquity[18] would be a change that goes to the heart of the phenomenon in question. I am thus more comfortable referring to 'imperial sophistic,' which can then be fine-tuned by means of the adjectives 'early' and 'late,' and even 'Greek' and 'Latin,' reserving the term 'Second Sophistic' for the distinctively Philostratean periodization and conceptualization. Yet, to return to the point with which I began, the recent increase in late ancient rhetorical studies, it is perfectly understandable why the term 'Third Sophistic' has been proposed in the course of this development: like a new infant, a new (or newly augmented) scholarly interest begs for a name.

[16] I therefore share Westberg's worry (2010, 19) that the term Third Sophistic 'presupposes too large a cultural break [with the Second Sophistic],' although I do not object, as he does, to 'bundl[ing] together, on chronological grounds, authors with very different attitudes (such as Gregory of Nazianzus and Himerius).' I would bundle them on rhetoric-sophistic grounds.

[17] See Heath (2004) 85, and 84–89 generally on the third century. All acknowledge continuity: Amato (2006), v–vi; Quiroga (2007), 41; Malosse and Schouler (2009), 163, 165 n. 11, 186. I would question the notion that there was a reduction of extempore eloquence (Malosse and Schouler, *ibid*., 164) and of declamations on imaginary themes (Quiroga, *ibid*., 35) in Late Antiquity. Or, put differently, how could one demonstrate either of these suggestions? Philostratus's enthusiasm for extempore declamation testifies to the importance of both extempore eloquence and declamation in the early Empire, although this enthusiasm may have represented only one strand of the sophistic of his day (see Jones [2008], 117). Extempore declamation does not come up often in Eunapius (*Lives* 10.4.5–5.3 [488–489], 10.7.7–8 [492] Giangrande); but when it does, one senses an enthusiasm equal to that of Philostratus. Pernot (2006–2007), emphasizes a kind of teleological continuity between the Second Sophistic and Late Antiquity – he ventures the term 'Third Sophistic' for Late Antiquity in this article only once – specifically finding in the Second Sophistic anticipations of developments of Late Antiquity.

[18] Malosse and Schouler (2009), 163–164, 170. Van Hoof (2010) argues against the notion that there was a diminution in the social prestige and socio-political influence of sophists and rhetoric in Late Antiquity.

It was only after I had completed a first draft of this prologue that I discovered Lieve Van Hoof's article 'Greek Rhetoric and the Later Roman Empire: The Bubble of the 'Third Sophistic'.' It is the first fully argued objection to the term 'Third Sophistic,' precisely on the ground that there is far more continuity than discontinuity between early and late imperial rhetoric. But Van Hoof goes on to make another point. Those who have recently been working on late ancient rhetoric 'have largely failed to bring to bear the methodologies that have produced such stimulating readings of the Second Sophistic; and, as a result of this, they have confirmed the image of classicizing Greek literature in Late Antiquity as static, moribund, and no longer engaged or influential in society' (p. 212). 'Rather than a new name, then, late antique rhetoric is in need of a new approach' (p. 224). This new approach will show late antique sophists 'dynamically engaged in, and [seeking] to influence, the political, cultural, and religious debates of their times' (p. 212) and using the past, not as an escape, but 'as a sign of sophistication and a way of acquiring authority' (p. 214).[19] It will highlight identity-construction and sophistic theatricality. This call and challenge is welcome. My only criticism would be to temper the disappointment with recent late ancient rhetorical studies that one might be left with after reading this article. Van Hoof, for example, hopes that a new approach to late ancient rhetoric will make Libanius appear 'less as a man of the past who withdrew into his classroom as he no longer mattered in fourth-century Antioch' (p. 224). But I find it hard to think of many Libanianists of recent decades who would have such a gloomy view of Libanius's position in the fourth-century East. Conversely, not every contribution to recent Second Sophistic studies will be unanimously judged to deserve the highest marks.

Rhetoric, like philosophy, is a fundamental cultural category in antiquity. Some of us began our scholarly journeys directly and consciously on rhetoric's, or sophistic's, road. Such was my experience. I came to graduate studies at Harvard University in 1967 with interests in ancient historiography, under the influence mainly of the writings of Ronald Syme and Arnaldo Momigliano, and in textual criticism, having studied at Boston College under Robert Renehan. But at Harvard I was converted to sophistic (not to philosophy!) under the influence of Glen W. Bowersock and Christopher P. Jones. I saw the page proofs of Glen Bowersock's *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) in the spring semester of 1969, when I also was enrolled in Christopher Jones's seminar in ancient biography, in which I wrote a paper on Philostratus's

[19] Van Hoof (2010), 219–220: '[L]ate antique literature,' exclaims Van Hoof, 'is still waiting for its Maud Gleason, its Thomas Schmitz, or its Tim Whitmarsh' – and indeed there is much to learn from these scholars.

Lives. While I was searching for a dissertation topic in Philostratus, my mentor Glen Bowersock felicitously suggested that I work on the letters of Apollonius of Tyana, which, of course, would keep me immersed in Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius*. After I finished a critical edition of and commentary on Apollonius's letters, I returned, not to Philostratus's *Lives*, but, won over to Late Antiquity,[20] to those of Eunapius. Eunapius took me to Themistius (absent in his *Lives)* and to Himerius (a competitor of Eunapius's hero Prohaeresius and only briefly treated in the *Lives*), and then I jumped to Choricius. Mine, then, has been a fairly steady diet of sophistic and rhetoric. Others have different trajectories, grazing rhetorical culture or entering upon its path from other starting points.

A variety of scholarly trajectories have happily resulted in the articles presented in this volume. They embrace the Latin West as well as the Greek East, Christians as well as pagans, rhetorical education (the *progymnasmata*), and lower-register deployment of rhetorical devices (in the *Codex Visionum*) as well as the high-register rhetoric of the *pepaideumenoi*. Imperial panegyric, encomium and invective, the Christian sermon, the novel, and Julian's peculiar *Misopogon* all figure in these contributions. Aglae Pizzone alerts us to the importance of knowing the terminology of ancient rhetorical theory in reading texts whose authors took that terminology for granted. We are reminded, in an article on Evagrius's allegorical reading of the Bible, that allegory is nothing more (or less?) than a rhetorical trope. And John Watt explores the reception of Themistius and Julian in the Syriac and Arabic traditions. The editor of this volume, Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas, writes, meta-rhetorically, on eloquent men musing on eloquence – or rather on its unwanted opposite, silence. We are indebted to him for bringing together these studies of late ancient rhetorical culture.

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[20] Mainly under the inspiration of the work of Peter Brown and of Alan and Averil Cameron.

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I. Words and the Word:
Rhetorical Strategies and Theology

Homily and Exegesis in the Patristic age: comparisons of Purpose and Effect

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'Homily and exegesis' signals an interest in the dual quality of Christian sermons – their rhetorical persuasiveness and their dependence on Scripture.[1] Naturally, we have to place those sermons in a broad literary context (which we often gloss misleadingly 'pagan' or 'classical,' but which is more usefully described as 'traditional'). There was, in the 'patristic age,' plenty of persuasive oratory inspired by a learned analysis of ancient texts and little touched, if at all, by Christian preoccupations. But there was a specifically Christian 'purpose and effect' that hints at its own social context: the interaction of the churchman's mind and the audience's urge or obligation to live a virtuous life. This was where the rubber of theological reflection met the road of pastoral concern – an urgent engagement on the pastor's side and a release of spiritual energy among the people he addressed.

We are concerned also with literary analysis and the dissemination of Scripture's appeal; with learnedness and eager devotion. Encouraging a life of virtue does not cover all of that. Churchman and people faced each other within two broader frames of reference – one cosmic, the other temporal. Both the Scriptures themselves and the texts that recorded what was said about them were thought of as helping Christians to penetrate a barrier between the visible and the transcendent. They also helped to identify the temporal flow, the extended narrative, within which Christians were to place themselves. Christianity's genius resided in making its devotees into historians, with a clear sense of the then, the now, and the yet to be.[2] In this, too, they passed from the visible to the transcendent,

[1] An earlier version of this paper was originally presented as a Plenary Lecture to the Annual Meeting of the North American Patristics Society, Chicago, May 27, 2010.

[2] Much energy has been expended on the attempt to distinguish this sense of 'history' from the broader 'traditional' concept of the *mos maiorum.* One thinks, for example, of Markus (1990), especially 125–136. Rather than depend on older distinctions between cyclical and linear time (which Markus avoids), it is better to focus on eschatology – on

chiefly by submitting space to the demands of time. The Christian experience of God was an experience of change, of difference, of improvement, of fulfilment. The God they worshipped, changeless and timeless in himself, was nevertheless (as the Scriptures revealed) the agent of the novelties thus opened to them.

A subscriber to traditional cult, therefore, venturing into a basilica, hearing the Scriptures read out and explained, witnessing a Eucharist shared in, would have sensed quite rightly something new. These Christians found themselves moving to someone else's choreography, caught up in the forward rush of God's purposes, beneficiaries of divine foresight and scriptural prophecy. Recollection was made the source of incentive. An individual life, wayward and wandering, was reassured and redirected by the guarantees of inspired writings and a clear vision of the future. This engagement with a *durée plus longue* (made available by words from the past, by the circumstances of their rehearsal, by their being heard anew, by the intervention of the preacher and the priest) acquired a dynamism, a vitality that made both text and ceremonial vibrant with hope.

In the heyday of the 'Fathers,' the ability to achieve such a *transitus* depended in part on a change in Christian circumstance. Appeal to the Scriptures had long been a feature of the Church's *paideia*. The Constantinian dispensation, however, had made its teaching voice more public and thereby differently related to broader traditions of moral discourse. Averil Cameron (in *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*), Peter Brown (in *Power and Persuasion*), and Frances Young (in *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*) have irreversibly compelled us to observe how the Scriptures, in the hands of fourth-century and fifth-century commentators and preachers, were made to validate their own culture in a new way.[3] Frances Young offers a succinct expression of principle: '[S]cripture,' she writes, 'replaced the classics in the formation of a distinctive culture, which nevertheless assumed that texts were the source of cultural identity.'[4]

But the novelty of the situation after Constantine needs to be carefully defined. No matter, first, how 'rhetorical' toleration may have allowed the Church to become (sometimes to its embarrassment or misgiving), it remained resolutely 'scholarly': it wished to teach as much as to excite. There are no grounds for suggesting that traditions we rightly associate with Origen, for example, were suddenly abandoned in the heady days of fresh liberty. As an assessor of the scriptural text, Origen remained essen-

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the effect of fulfillment, which reaches well beyond one's hopes in and obligations towards posterity.

[3] Cameron (1991); Brown (1992); Young (1997).

[4] Young (1997), 219.

tial to the arsenal of the post-Constantinian exegete. Jerome, to give an obvious instance, drew upon Origen's homilies in his *Commentarioli in Psalmos*[5] and referred to them again in his commentary on *Isaiah*.[6] Yet, the fact that Origen seems to have been indispensable in a context very different from his own will qualify, second, the ways in which we ascribe continuity to the uses made of him. We need to be attentive not only to the debts but also to the hesitations reflected in the work, for example, of the Cappadocians and of Hilary and Ambrose, not to mention Jerome himself. Indeed, the so-called 'Origenist Controversy' reflected exactly the anxieties of those fourth-century legatees, as they attempted to redefine (rather than merely preserve) the notion of 'Christian scholarship' in relation to the sacred text – an adjustment forced upon them precisely by the opportunities and responsibilities they now enjoyed; opportunities and responsibilities that Origen himself could never have dreamed of. So, while it remains true that the teacher (and therefore the scholar) was central to the estimation of any exegete – in the words of Ineke Sluiter, 'the commentator is essentially a teacher'[7] – the 'public' era of the tolerated Church encouraged a freshly developed notion of what 'scholarship' had come to mean.

Understanding the nature of this development is a major driving force behind Frances Young's *Biblical Exegesis* – examining in particular what she calls 'contexts of interpretation.'[8] The shift is not *away* from serious learning but *within* new settings. She provides a 'map' of literary *genres*: a series of concentric circles, with 'liturgy,' 'spirituality,' and 'prayer' at the centre, and 'doctrinal debate' and 'apologetics' as it were at the frontiers of the Church. 'Homily' has its circle close in, 'commentaries' a little further out. This is a social map, therefore, but with literary labels.[9] The homilist (most often a bishop) operates right next to the liturgy: homiletic texts are related to the places where homilists stood, to the audiences who listened (reactive to a greater or lesser degree, varying in their level of understanding), to different sorts of celebration (certain feasts, certain saints or martyrs, certain sacramental rites). Commentaries, on the other hand, are

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[5] *Ea quae in tomis uel in omiliis ipse* [Origen] *disseruit,* from G. Morin's edition (1959), 178.

[6] The *Vigintiquinque Homiliae et Sēmeiōseis, quas nos Excerpta possumus appelare,* Hieron. *In Esaiam,* vid. Adriaen (1963), 3.

[7] Sluiter (1999), 173. The commentator, she suggests, will read himself into the text in the very process of making the text didactic. (We shall see Jerome, below, doing exactly that). But, because what she calls the 'metaphors for teaching' did not include anything analogous to the homily, 191–202, the homily becomes, at least in its later forms, the novelty requiring explanation.

[8] See her entire chapter (1997), 217–247 with that title, *Biblical Exegesis,* with the question clearly posed on 218.

[9] Young (1997), 220.

more remotely placed (beyond catechesis), and imply focussed reflection, the systematic analysis of a text's historical, mythical, or rhetorical character: there is no suggestion that they were read aloud in churches. So, where were they read, and by whom? The fact that they occupy a place on Professor Young's map at all implies that the circumstances of their composition, of their dissemination and preservation, have to be taken into account, if we are to understand what they were for, and how we should relate them to other forms of exegesis.

We are faced here with what Brian Stock first called 'textual communities;'[10] but that simply forces us to rephrase our question. Are the concentric bands of ecclesial territory on Professor Young's map textual communities in any formal sense? She talks about 'vast areas of overlap,' which illustrate perfectly her contention that '[o]ften the same person embodied scholarly interest and preacher's concern.'[11] Karla Pollmann suggests that, 'apart from the specific didactic function of exegesis in a school context, interpretation permeated practically every other literary *genre* ... every mode of communication' in Late Antiquity.[12] What distinction, social in form, is being made here between 'exegesis' and 'interpretation'? Marco Formisano is prepared to see the commentary as what he calls 'a metaphor for the literary system,' *tout court*. He is referring to a cultural habit that reached beyond Christianity; but, if commentary in pagan hands could analyze, dismantle, decode, and reassemble, as he puts it, the 'classical tradition,' then perhaps Christian commentators were doing the same to the scriptural tradition.[13]And while the form of the endeavour was a fresh and scholarly presentation of the scriptural text, its effect could be intentionally behavioural and social – could reach well beyond the 'school context.'

Frances Young's argument affords some contrast to the influential emphases of Manlio Simonetti.[14] She points, as we have seen, to the endurance of a learned yet more than philological interpretation of the Scriptures well beyond the time of Constantine. 'Often,' she writes, 'the use of texts in doctrinal debate presupposes typological, allegorical or Christological senses [and she is thinking not least of the Arian dispute] which had developed in the context of liturgy or apologetic, and which we would not rec-

[10] See, in the first instance, Stock (1983). He brought his approach firmly into the Patristic period in two works especially (1996; 2001). See also Haines-Eitzen (2000).

[11] Young (1997), 219.

[12] Pollmann (2009), 259.

[13] Formisano (2007), 282–283.

[14] With whom she engages from the very first page of *Biblical Exegesis*. She seems to have chiefly in mind his *Profilo storico dell'esegesi patristica*, (English translation by Hughes, J.A. [1994], *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark).

ognise as "literal".'[15] Simonetti, in a later paper,[16] highlighted in a particularly useful way an aspect of the problem about which Professor Young has less to say. As in his longer work, Simonetti still has his own take on the 'novità' that came with Constantine. Toleration, and therefore the Church's more 'public' *persona*, transformed the homily, making it more obviously 'rhetorical,' more part of an ecclesial spectacle, the theatre of cult (and, as with so much traditional 'theatricality,' such an address could be contentious and provoking). In the process, homilists gradually parted company with the didactic and therefore 'philosophical' associations of exegesis (pre-eminent in Origen) and the related dependence (so clearly 'Alexandrian') on allegory. Origen preferred discussion over conclusion, and presented that discussion as a string of inquiries (*zētēseis*), leaving choices to his pupils (who were obviously considered, therefore, capable of making them). Even as a preacher (and he preached often), Origen acceded to the demands of the schoolroom: he adopted a manner of expressing himself 'more suited,' as Simonetti puts it, 'to awakening the understanding of his hearers than to stirring their emotions [a interessare l'intelligenza degli ascoltatori piú che a muoverne gli affetti].'[17] It becomes necessary (for Simonetti), therefore, to find something *different* in the post-Constantinian homilies; and sure enough he uncovers more 'emotion' (specifically in Basil and Chrysostom, using again his own phrase 'muovere gli affetti'). Jerome the monk plays the scholar, but in the drier philological style of his old master Donatus. Fallen by the wayside are particularly the taste for allegory (so, 'Antioch' triumphs) and the Christological foreshadowings of the Old Testament.[18]

This is an extraordinarily simplistic view of literary development. The notion that 'intelligenza' ceded to 'affetti' carries with it more than a whiff of the old prejudice according to which one deplored the decline of reason in an age of popular superstition and excitability. Because rhetoric had supposedly displaced instruction – or at least instruction as to *meaning* – the learned, sequential, and open-ended reading of the scriptural text, with its attention to differing levels of understanding and response, experienced a visible and irreversible decline.

It is perfectly true, of course, that scholarly Christians could condescend to the supposed simplicity of their audiences. A telling prejudice appears to be lodged in a brief exchange between Jerome and Gregory of Nazianzus, probably when their paths crossed in Constantinople in the early

[15] Young (1997), 246.
[16] Simonetti (1995).
[17] Simonetti (1995), 371.
[18] Simonetti (1995), especially at 375 and 379.