

Learning the Language of Scripture: Origen, Wisdom, and the Logic of Interpretation. By Mark Randall James. Studies in Systematic Theology 24. Leiden: Brill, 2021. vii + 339 pp. \$68.00 paper; \$127.00 e-book.

Mark Randall James returns to the longstanding, yet recently neglected, debate concerning Origen's allegorical exegesis. Was it arbitrary or not? James argues that Origen's exegesis was not an arbitrary movement from a literal to an allegorical meaning of the Bible. Instead, James reads Origen's hermeneutics within the context of a Stoic theory of language, in which the inner logic of language corresponded to the inner logic of the world. Thus, the interpreter's task was to render the logic, or wisdom, of the text accessible to readers by cultivating in them the rational capacity to speak rightly according to scripture. The aim of the interpreter, as James understands it, was not to teach the meaning of the Bible but to help his audience "acquire the capacity to speak according to the example of scriptures," what James calls "learning the language of scripture" (22). The end is the deification of discourse, characterized primarily as speaking with boldness (*parrhesia*) in front of God.

James meticulously analyses Origen's Greek *Homilies on the Psalms* with philosophical acumen. As James notes, the discovery of these homilies in 2012 has provided a "rare opportunity" for scholars to examine Origen's practice as a biblical exegete (19). His task, he states, is not to determine any exegetical "method" but rather to analyze the rules of logic governing Origen's interpretation of the Bible. This is what he calls a "descriptive logic," or a "method of logical inquiry," following in the footsteps of his doctoral supervisor, Peter Ochs (18–19).

Each chapter builds upon the previous, rendering the argument easy to follow. By beginning with Origen's debt to Stoic logic, James provides a significant correction to Origen scholarship, which has traditionally read him against the backdrop of Platonic metaphysics. It follows from this, as the next chapter persuasively demonstrates, that Origen's movement from a "literal" sense to an "allegorical" sense has been broadly misunderstood. James shows how Origen's exegesis, not at all arbitrary, began with the words on the page (the *κατὰ λέξιν*, or its synonym, *ἐπὶ τοῦ ῥητοῦ*) and proceeded to the logic underpinning them. Since, for Origen and the Stoics, language had a natural relationship to the world, when the Bible utters something, it makes a claim about the world. For example, when the Bible gives God unchanging names, it says something about the nature of God—namely, that God is unchangeable (50–52). Because such an observation might not be readily apparent to the reader, the task of the interpreter was to cultivate the rational capacity to apply the biblical text to the different circumstances in one's own life, what James calls "rational linguistics," or "learning to integrate the words of the psalm into the entirety of one's own discourse" (75).

James calls this the deification of discourse, manifest particularly in the one's capacity to speak boldly (*parrhesia*) before God. The principal text James employs in this argument is not *Homilia in Psalmum 81*, with Origen's extended discourse on deification. Rather, it is *Homilia 1 in Psalmum 67*, in which Origen expends a great deal of effort to explain how the Bible often uses optatives to express imperatives, demonstrating that human beings can, in fact, make commands of God. While not explicitly about deification, this is a very appropriate text for James, who contends that boldness of speech in front of God is an integral part of the deification of human beings. Conforming one's speech to that of scripture both demands that the reader challenge his/her intellect and provides the freedom to create new scriptural speech, going beyond the very words of the Bible.

I do have some minor critiques of James's book. First, he writes in a dense style that might be inaccessible to nonspecialists. Even when he defines terms, his expressions are sometimes almost impossible to interpret. For example, he says "interpreting scripture is an inductive mode of inquiry that involves reasoning analogically from particular examples of linguistic usage to the underlying habits and rules of scriptural language as a complex of rational linguistic behavior" (156).

Second, the historian is left wanting more historical details. James does not address questions about the audience. Is there any evidence in these homilies of the audience's own linguistic capacities or literacy in general? Similarly, James makes significant use of *Homilia 1 in Psalmum 67* as evidence of the deification of discourse, especially *parrhesia*. However, he overlooks an important historical detail with which Origen began that homily: the bishop was present! The bishop's presence prompted Origen to ask his audience to join him in a prayer so that he would be able to speak well. One wonders if that was not in the back of Origen's mind as he was articulating a vision of *parrhesia*. He also argues that, imitating the habits of scripture, which often speaks in obscure language, Origen too spoke in ambiguous language. However, in the very next homily, Origen says that the role of the teacher is to remove stumbling blocks for his pupils (*Homilia 2.5 in Psalmum 67*, in *Origenes Werke 13: Die neuen Psalmenhomilien; Eine kritische Edition des Codex Monacensis Graecus 314*, ed. Lorenzo Perrone, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte 19 [De Gruyter, 2015], 211.9–20; Joseph W. Trigg, trans., *Origen: Homilies on the Psalms; Codex Monacensis Graecus 314* [The Catholic University of America Press, 2021], 167). If Origen understood this to be his role as a teacher, what purpose would obscure speech serve?

Despite these very minor criticisms, James' thesis is highly persuasive and is a significant contribution to the subject. This book is essential reading for Origen scholars, scholars of the history of biblical interpretation, and those interested in relationship between Hellenism and Christianity in the Roman Empire, especially the intersection of Stoic philosophy and Christian scholarship. In directing our attention to the logical substructure of Origen's exegetical procedure, James has established a highly innovative approach that should direct the course of future research into the subject for years to come.

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***Ambrose of Milan's On the Holy Spirit: Rhetoric, Theology, and Sources.* By Andrew M. Selby. Gorgias Studies in Early Christianity and Patristics 71. Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2020. xvi + 468 pp. \$158.00 hardcover.**

Much recent scholarship on Ambrose of Milan, a fourth-century bishop deeply enmeshed in the trinitarian disputes of the day, has created a dichotomy between Ambrose as a politician and Ambrose as a theologian. As Andrew Selby argues, this situation has led to an unfortunate neglect of Ambrose's *De Spiritu Sancto* (hereafter, *DSS*), inasmuch it is both deeply enmeshed in ecclesiastical politics and demonstrates skilled theological reasoning. *Ambrose of Milan's On the Holy Spirit: Rhetoric, Theology, and Sources*, a revision of Selby's dissertation, attempts to remedy this neglect