

Philosophos – Philotheos – Philoponos

**Studies and Essays as Charisteria
in Honor of Professor Bogoljub Šijaković
on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday**

edited by

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Christian Allegoresis of the *Odyssey*?

Abstract: The sections in early Christian writings brought forward and discussed by Hugo Rahner and Jean Pépin gave rise to an impression that Christian allegoresis of the *Odyssey* could be clearly identified in these writings, with its basic shape established before the end of the 2nd c. and evolving in particulars over the following three centuries. The Christian hostility to imputing any theological significance to Homer's poetry seems to be disregarded in the context of this issue, but the conclusion to be drawn from it leaves Christian allegoresis of Homer looking fundamentally undesirable. Platonic and Gnostic Homeric exegesis reflected in part their views on the soul and its relation to the divine. Due to this fact Homeric images colored the language in which these questions were discussed at the time when they were of interest to competing Christian, Neoplatonic and Gnostic thinkers alike. When not merely illustrative or aiding the appeal of an expression, the use of Homeric imagery in Christian authors aims to redefine the issues to which the images are being applied not the images themselves.*

Keywords: allegoresis, *Odyssey*, Clement of Alexandria, Methodius of Olympus, Ambrose of Milan, Maximus of Turin, paradigm

The remains of Ancient and Byzantine exegetical material concerning the wanderings of *Odysseus* testify that the route of allegorical interpretation was not an unpopular one to take. Some of the route's explorers appear to be intent on making sense of *Odysseus'* fabled ordeals; others seem to end up there less advertently, as if merely captivated by the real force of the surreal imagery. According to an existing view, the early Christian authors did not only follow the same – by that time already well-trodden – exegetical paths, but they also sought to expound the Homeric hero and his epic fate as an allegory for Christian teachings, similarly as the Platonists of the middle and later period did in terms of Platonic philosophy. By the end of the 2nd c. in which scholars¹ first iden-

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¹ The key references are Rahner 1931, 1942, 1971: xiii-xxii, 281-390 (the English translation of his book *Griechische Mythen in christlicher Deutung*, the pertinent sections of which rely on articles published in 1931 and 1942) and Pépin 1981. It has to be noted that Rahner's conclusions are often put forward without regard for their context. He describes his own work as "a kind of essay on ancient Christian psychagogy" (xvii-xviii). The conclusions he draws are dependent on his conception of this psychagogy and his understanding of "Christian humanism" at least as much as on his reading of the source material in this light. His work is

tify traces of Christian allegorical exegesis of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' wanderings were already interpreted allegorically in terms less or more specific to different philosophical schools. The interpretation that saw in most of the Odyssean monsters and beauties human vices, due to which friends of Odysseus lose their lives, while the hero himself as a hero of virtue escapes death, stands in concordance with the use of Odysseus as a positive example in ancient philosophical discussions² and draws on it. At least from the mid 2nd c. AD a more complex understanding of Odysseus' trials is present among Pythagorean and Platonic philosophers. The hero's troublesome return is to be seen as an image of the soul in the material world, longing for its immaterial homeland. The 3rd-century Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry, who wrote an essay concerned with the allegoresis of a particular image in the *Odyssey*, describes in the following words the allegorical frame in which his exegesis fits:

For it is my opinion that Numenius and his school were correct in thinking that for Homer in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus bears a symbol of the one who passes through the stages of genesis and, in doing so, returns to those beyond every wave who have no knowledge of the sea.³

The interpretation attributed to Numenius and his followers is the earliest known explicit exegesis of the soul-odyssey.⁴ Sources associate Numenius with Apamea in Syria and with Rome. His *floruit* is taken to fall around the middle of the 2nd c., around the time Clement of Alexandria, the first writer to mention him and the first of the Church fathers to intertwine Homeric allegoresis and Christian teachings, was born. Assessing the extant source testimonies, Dillon (1970: 378) describes the diverse influences present in the teachings of Numenius as Platonic and Neopythagorean, Hermetic and Gnostic, Zoroastrian and Jewish. All these strands were of interest to what Dillon vividly portrays as 'the underworld of Platonic-influenced theorizing'. Gnostic writings also abide in this 'underworld of Platonism', along with other syncretistic corpora which pertain in some way to metaphysical schemes (Dillon 1970: 384). The authors in these circles seem interested in seeing their doctrines reflected in ancient authori-

an attempt "to interpret pictures evoked by Greek mythology in terms of Christian fulfilment" (p. 282). His words on *holy Homer* have nothing to do with the sources, as he himself points out, but with his personal stance on the "deep sense" of this notion and with the intimations of truth he discerns in Homer, whom he finds to be "a forerunner of the Word" (pp. 283-284). See Glockmann 1968: 33-35 on Rahner's tendency to overstate the positive reception of Homer and ignore or alleviate the negative.

2 See Heraclitus, *Allegoriae* 70 (the composition date is not sufficiently clear, probably around 100 A.D., see Pontani 2005: 13) and the material in Montiglio 2011 (esp. p. 17).

3 Tr. Seminar Classics 609, De antro nympharum, 34.13-17: οὐ γὰρ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ οἶμαι καὶ τοῖς περὶ Νουμήνιον ἐδόκει Ὀδυσσεὺς εἰκόνα φέρειν Ὀμήρῳ κατὰ τὴν Ὀδύσειαν τοῦ διὰ τῆς ἐφεξῆς γενέσεως διερχομένου καὶ οὕτως ἀποκαθισταμένου εἰς τοὺς ἕξω παντὸς κλύδωνος καὶ θαλάσσης ἀπείρους. On Neoplatonic allegoresis see Buffière 1956: 392-589, Sheppard 1980, Lamberton 1989.

4 The implicit traces are another matter. Philo's interpretation of the sojourns of patriarchs remains the crux for the history of this line of exegesis. The prevailing assumption is that before his time (c. 20 BC – c. 50 AD) similar Platonic interpretations of the *Odyssey*, rooted in Pythagorean exegesis, already existed (see Boyancé 1967). However, there exists a possibility that Philonic exegesis of biblical narratives involving flight and exile influenced Gnostic and Neoplatonic understanding of the fatherland from which all humans originate and their views of the related enigmas in the *Odyssey* (see Alekniéné 2007, Berthelot 2012). According to Dillon (1970: 378) Numenius was undoubtedly familiar with the results of Philo's allegoresis of the *Septuagint*.

tative or otherwise influential texts and tenets of different traditions.⁵ The exegetical practice associated with such endeavors can come to the point of creating a kind of hypertext from various bodies of literature (sacred histories, philosophical books, poetry, myth, texts related to prophecies, mysticism, ritual, magic, astronomy, etc.). This kind of approach was criticized in the Christian polemical works directed against different heretical groups termed Gnostic. They are described as professing the belief in God's Word while corrupting the teaching of Christ with additions from pagan sources. The polemicists cite Gnostic interpretations that treat lines from the Scriptures and Homer as if they were testimonies of the same nature or of the same order of relevance as evidence of heresy. This brought about charges that heretical interpreters of the Scriptures accept Homer 'as their own prophet.'⁶ Collating external sources together with Christian ones without differentiation is presented as a particular hallmark of heretical exegesis. Authors from the same period and intellectual background, wanting to escape such a charge from fellow Christians (as well as a charge of 'theft' from the other side), make note of causes or of innate differences behind an apparent communality of pagan and Christian tenets on which they wish to comment. Justin Martyr († 165) explains (*Apologia* II 13.2.) that the fact that some pagan teachings are not alien (ἀλλότρια) to those of Christ does not make them in every way alike (πάντη ὅμοια). The case for Christian allegorical interpretation of Homer is often linked with the door opened by St. Justin and Clement of Alexandria († c. 215), with their famous words on the inherent potential of humans to grasp the truth, instilled in them by God.⁷ But for them that meant that the best of the ancient thinkers reached partly truthful conclusions or got some of it right in certain aspects. As regards Homer, for Justin Martyr he belongs among others of his craft dealing with daemon-inspired myths. Any semblance of prophetic value to be found there is in fact a result of the collusion of the daemons who wanted to make things said about Christ seem unbelievable like the fables of the poets (*Apologia* I, 54.2). Clement on the other hand tends to use modifiers to express that the relevant prophetic-like occurrence in a Homeric verse is an unintentional admission of the truth, a lucky hit, or simply an undisclosed borrowing from Jewish wisdom.⁸ As for willingness to follow the philosophical and exegetical currents of his time in interweaving sources of different traditions, the learned head of the catechetical school in Alexandria stands out among the early Church fathers. Yet, Clement would like his audience to believe that the echoes of Christian truth about God in some of Homer's verses come down to the poet's exposure to the words of the 'real prophets', while the poet himself was more like a raven: even if he at times voiced the right words, he did not truly understand them.⁹ Therefore, Clement's general view on

5 On philosophy in late antiquity as an exegesis of canonical texts and traditions revealing of truth see Hadot 1987.

6 Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus haereses* 4.33.3; (Hippolytus of Rome?), *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 5.8.1.

7 For their attitudes and use of the intellectual heritage of their pagan forerunners dealing with questions about God, world and human experience see Lilla 1971: 9-59.

8 For the relevant examples and Clement's view on Homer in context of the contemporary Gnostic approaches see Šijaković 2019.

9 Šijaković 2019: 139.

Homer was not one of respect for the poet's insights in a way which would allow for the interpretation of his poem as an allegory for Christian teachings. Still the conclusion about the existence of Christian allegoresis of the *Odyssey* is based on some of the passages in his works, as well as on other similar segments in early Christian writings, most importantly of the following authors: Methodius of Olympus († c. 311), Ambrose of Milan († c. 397) and Maximus of Turin († first half of the V c.). The contention is that Christian allegoresis of the *Odyssey* took shape with Clement and evolved in particulars over the following three centuries (Pépin 1981: 10). It is important to have in mind that none of these or other early Christian writers actually wrote on Homer or the *Odyssey*, they just mention, use or allude to Homer's verses while discussing issues pertinent to Christian teaching and the life of a Christian.¹⁰

Clement of Alexandria

The two sections recognized¹¹ as Clement's exegesis of the Homeric episode with the Sirens are best judged in the context of the works they are a part of. The first section opens the final chapter of *Protrepticus* (12.118.1-4¹²). The idea of the work is to persuade the Greeks to set forth toward the (revealed) truth and reject all that holds them back, all that turns them away from the truth. The Alexandrine highlights, directly and indirectly the distinction between what they should carry with them on this journey – that which is universally valid and good, and the other – the false and the detrimental, which they should leave behind. Once he is finished scrutinizing the old views on gods, teachings of different schools of thought and worship practices in order to show the error of their ways, he deals with the stratum of the ancestral heritage which involves elements hard to dissolve by arguments and logic alone – the custom (συνήθεια).

10 On the other hand, explicit Neoplatonic and Gnostic allegoresis of the *Odyssey* survives in the texts that have reached us. Porphyry names earlier interpreters who shared the same approach in dealing with Homeric enigmas. *Suda* notes that both Porphyry and Syrianus devoted whole treatises to exegesis of Homer, and later on Proclus famously wrote an exposition on Homer and allegorical interpretation (on which see Sheppard 1980). For gnostic allegoresis of Homer see Droge 1989, Pépin 1981: 17, Pouderon 2003.

11 Pépin 1981: 10-13 describes them explicitly as exegesis, see his note 37. Rahner (above n. 1) in general varies in descriptions between Christian interpretation (in the strong sense and in a more loose sense, as in adaptation of a motif or an image), symbols, and metaphors. He is not interested in delineating exegesis from the productive use of Homeric images. The meaning any use of the imagery renders, no matter how specific to the context, he takes as relevant for the development of intimations in the myth to their "fullness and perfection" and the *psychagogy* he explores.

12 (1) Φύγωμεν οὖν τὴν συνήθειαν, φύγωμεν οἷον ἄκραν χαλεπὴν ἢ Χαρυβδεὺς ἀπειλὴν ἢ Σειρήνας μυθικὰς· ἄγγει τὸν ἄνθρωπον, τῆς ἀληθείας ἀποτρέπει, ἀπάγει τῆς ζωῆς, παγίς ἐστιν, βάραθρόν ἐστιν, βόθρος ἐστὶ, λίχρον ἐστὶν κακὸν ἢ συνήθεια· κείνου μὲν καπνοῦ καὶ κύματος ἐκτὸς ἔργε νῆα (*Od.* 12.219-20). (2) Φεύγωμεν, ὧ συνναῦται, φεύγωμεν τὸ κύμα τοῦτο, πῦρ ἐρεῦγεται, νῆσός ἐστι πονηρὰ ὅστοις καὶ νεκροῖς σεσωρευμένη, ἄδει δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ πορνίδιον ὠραῖον, ἡδονή, πανδήμω τερπόμενον μουσικῇ· δεῦρ' ἄγ' ἰὼν, πολὺαῖν' Ὀδυσσεῦ, μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν./ νῆα κατάστησον, ἵνα θειοτέρην ὄπ' ἀκούσῃς (*Od.* 12.184-5). (3) Ἐπαινεῖ σε, ὧ ναῦτα, καὶ πολυῦμνητον λέγει, καὶ τὸ κῦδος τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἢ πόρνη σφετερίζεται· ἔασον αὐτὴν ἐπινέμεσθαι τοὺς νεκροὺς, πνευμά σοι οὐράνιον βοηθεῖ· παρίθι τὴν ἡδονήν, βουκολεῖ· μηδὲ γυνὴ σε νόον πυροστόλος ἐξαπατάτα./ αἰμύλα κωτίλλουσα, τὴν διφῶσα καλήν (Hesiod, *Opera et dies* 373-4). (4) Παράπλει τὴν ᾠδὴν, θάνατον ἐργάζεται· ἐὰν ἐθέλῃς μόνον, νενικηκας τὴν ἀπώλειαν καὶ τῷ ξύλῳ προσεδεδεμένος ἀπάσης ἔση τῆς φθορᾶς λελυμένος, κυβερνήσει σε ὁ λόγος ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ τοῖς λιμέσι καθορμίσει τῶν οὐρανῶν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον·

In the pertinent segment, Clement says that one should escape the pernicious custom just as (οἶον) one would steer away from a dangerous headland or (ἦ) Charybdis or (ἦ) the mythical Sirens. The depiction then develops through words echoing biblical descriptions of heathen and other mortal snares (παγίς), pitfalls of wrongdoings (βόθρος) and Babylon (βάραθρον).¹³ In the next lines writer describes such a custom as Charybdis (12.118.1.6 κείνου μὲν καπνοῦ καὶ κύματος, 12.118.2.1-2 τὸ κύμα τοῦτο, πῦρ ἐρεύγεται¹⁴) and as a Siren (12.118.2.2-4.1¹⁵), uniting their connotations in one paradigm, appropriate to illustrate the utter destruction which the custom brings. The Siren song, used to portray the custom as the song of death¹⁶ interacts with the description of the Logos in the opening of the same work, as the New Song (ἄσμα καινόν) which brings life¹⁷.

Counting on the already widely known association of the Sirens with the prostitutes or the pursuit of pleasure,¹⁸ the writer seeks to convince his audience that conforming to custom is enslaving and degrading for a man. One gets consumed by the inherited traditions as if by fornication or bonfire, reduced to a pile of bones.¹⁹ His treatment of Sirens here aims not to defy the old exegesis and assert that the Sirens are in fact the pernicious custom. On the contrary, he is trying to show that this custom (a feminine noun in Greek, with sensual connotations) is like a Siren, like a harlot, like a wily woman of Hesiod's cautions, like a Charybdis, like a deadly rock etc. The mast against which Odysseus is strapped figures as a paradigm for that on which one can rely

13 E.g. *Ps.* 7.15-17 (βόθρος); 9.16, 56.7, 123.7, *Is.* 24.17 (παγίς, βόθρος, βόθυνος); *Is.* 14.23 (βάραθρον), *Is.* 13.21 (sirens of Babylon; Papoutsakis 2004 comments on sirens in LXX). Babylon as the harlot figure connected to the Beast stands for the mother of all harlots and abominations of the earth (ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς) in *Apocalypsis Joannis*, 17.1-4.

14 See *Od.* 12.219-22; 237.

15 See *Od.* 12.44-46. Here again allusions are many folded. When it comes to the musical element of the imagery and its carnal and lustful connotations, see the discussion on Aphrodite Pandemos as opposed to Heavenly Aphrodite in *Symposium* 180d-e and Aristoxenus about πάνδημος μουσική in the context of corrupted theaters (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 14.31, see Schlapbach 2018: 178-188 on this and related passages and μουσική as involving not just music but also a context of a bodily centered performance) and Clement's remarks on music in *Stromata* VI 11.89-90.3 (following a Sirens reference treated below). Compare also the harlot song (ἄσμα πόρνης) in *Is.* 23.15-16. A scholium in the cod. Mutinensis Misc. gr. 126 (XI cent.) understands πορνίδιον as pertaining to Circe (ed. Markovich 1995: 126). The singing was also a part of Circe's attraction (*Od.* 10.221). The characters indeed represent the same thing in many ancient rationalizing and ethical commentaries. For the rationalizing tradition of myth investigation Sirens, Circe and Scylla were in reality prostitutes, and the offer of immortality by Calypso denoted a life of abundance and enjoyment (Heraclitus the Paradoxographer, *De incredibilibus*, 2, 14, 16, 32). For Circe's cup of pleasure (ἡδονή) see Heraclitus, *Allegoriae* 72.2.

16 *Protrepticus* 12.4.1: Παράπλει τὴν ᾠδὴν, θάνατον ἐργάζεται.

17 *Protrepticus* 1.4.9-10: Οἱ δὲ τὴν ἀλλῶς νεκροί, οἱ τῆς ὄντως οὐσης ἀμέτοχοι ζωῆς, ἀκροαταὶ μόνον γενόμενοι τοῦ ἄσματος ἀνεβίωσαν. Repeatedly in the work Christ among mankind is referred to as the New Song.

18 The attainment of pleasure is part of the 'promise' the Homeric Sirens give to Odysseus passing by (τερψάμενος νεῖται, *Od.* 12.188, cf. 12.52).

19 As in *Od.* 12.45-46. Compare the description of those enslaved by the evil custom heading for destruction in 10.101.1-2: συνηθεία κακῆ δεδουλωμένοι, ἧς ἀπηρτημένοι αὐθαίρετοι μέχρι τῆς ἐσχάτης ἀναπνοῆς εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑποφέρουσι.

on when faced with a potentially fatal challenge.²⁰ In this case the wood is the Christian Cross. Bound to it one can trust the Logos and the Holy Spirit to help him navigate and reach the heavenly harbor. The road Clement upholds is, as the image suggests, the very road that was searched for from the beginning of cultural memory, but remained elusive up until the coming of Christ.

The well-known Homeric monsters and dead ends are not the object of exegesis. They are an instrument in the interpretation of the custom as a Homeric monster and a dead end. The custom is a seductive but barren habitat for a human; the truth is, on the other hand, rough but nurturing, as Clement says using the Homeric description of Ithaca earlier in the text (10.109).²¹ The first leads to an abyss, the second to heaven, he insists. Throughout the work those seeking to stay true to the customary worship are those who are in error, the actual word being *πλάνη*.²² That is the main use of the word in the literature of the period, but it is a figurative extension of the primary meaning *wandering* and as such, *πλάνη* is the common designation for Odysseus' straying. Clement states he strives to explain the pitfalls of the belief in the false gods in or-

20 See Plutarch's use of the image in *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat*, 15d. One can discern the "scheme" for a use of the image: Sirens as a challenge of a kind, wax in the ears as evading the challenge altogether (if and when applicable) and Odysseus tied to the mast as a model for facing the pernicious challenge in reliance on whatever one can be saved by. To completely shun the Sirens was normally associated with the wax tactic (e.g. Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 33.41.7-11, where *παραπλεῖν* with wax in the ears is the prudent man's option since phenomena he speaks about offer in fact οὐδεμία τέρψις οὐδ' ἴστορία), while the tying to the mast was representative of an approach appropriate when a Sirenic phenomenon carries a kind of ambiguity present in Homeric Sirens (in spite of the deadly nature of it, one would *want* to take pleasure in hearing their voice, as Circe's words to Odysseus suggest: ἀκούμεν αἱ κ' ἐέλησθα, δησάντων σ' ἐν νηϊ [...] ὄφρα κε τερπόμενος ὄπ' ἀκούσης Σειρήνοϊν, 12.49...52), see the relevant *topoi* in Kaiser 1964 and the positive allegoresis of Sirens in Heraclitus, *Allegoriae* 70.9. In this case Clement speaks of a Sirenic lure that has nothing positive to offer, as is evident from the string of other destructive images he chooses to conjoin with the one of Sirens. However, Clement seizes on the ship symbolism already recognizable among Christians (see n. 77 below and *Paedagogus* 3.11.59.2), because it allows for a cross and steersman figures. The wax approach would be a bad fit here for another reason too. It could hardly illustrate a true victory over an enticement. To be free to hear the beguiling words and still to *want* nothing else (ἐὰν ἐθέλης μόνον) but to steer away in the direction the Word of God and the Holy Spirit brings one, makes for a triumphant image. The recurring φ(ε)ύγωμεν exhortations, followed by imperatives *πάριθι* and *παράπλει* in such an image become a matter of exercising a judgment.

21 But within the same work these images can be used in a different key, and Ithaca associated with material home. In 9.86.2 where Clement speaks more generally about the type of people who care not about eternal salvation, but cherish only their place in earthly life, he describes them as bound to the world like seaweed to rocks and compares them to *the old man of Ithaca* yearning not for the truth and the heavenly fatherland, nor for the true light, but for the smoke (echoing *Od.* 1.57): Οἱ δὲ ἄλλοι περιπεφυκότες τῷ κόσμῳ, οἷα φυκία τινὰ ἐνάλοις πέτραις, ἀθανασίας ὀλιγωροῦσιν, καθάπερ ὁ Ἰθακήσιος γέρον οὐ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς ἐν οὐρανῷ πατρίδος, πρὸς δὲ καὶ τοῦ ὄντως ὄντος ἰμειρόμενοι φωτός, ἀλλὰ τοῦ καπνοῦ. Odysseus appears as an old man in Homer after Athena makes him into one upon his return in Ithaca (*Od.* 13.430-432). Clement's wording seems a bit parodic. Old age stood for attaining full comprehension. Heraclitus speaks of it as about a sacred haven in the final stages of a life's journey, when thanks to the body withering away the mind augments its strength (*Allegoriae* 61.5). Buchheit reflects on Clement's Ἰθακήσιος γέρον in 1956: 21. Pépin (1981: 12) treats the passage together with others already listed and tries to harmonize them into a single exegesis. The verses expressing Odysseus longing for Ithaca were often discussed in variety of ways in ancient thought, see Montiglio 2011: 84-87, 92, 146.

22 The word has a strong presence in the NT, see Kittel/Friedrich 1969.

der that those who are following it “may at last cease from πλάνη and run back again to heaven”.²³ The ominous images of Odysseus’ wanderings – with all the allegorical connotations built up in allegorical exegesis and ancient paradigmatic use of the imagery – present an apt tool for portrayal of the ominous custom. The custom is to be perceived as evil, passion inducing and godless (πονηρὸν καὶ ἐμπαθεὺς καὶ ἄθεον, 10.89.2), as a poisonous drug to be refused (οἶον δηλητήριον φάρμακον ἀπωσάμενοι, 10.89.2) and as something that has snatched men and carried them away (συναρπαζόμενοι τῷ ἔθει, 10.89.3). In many interpretations Odysseus’ return to Ithaca has to do with his wisdom and self-restraint above all things, namely with the virtues that were missing in his companions.²⁴ Likewise, the route of the virtues, the only way to salvation, is the theme of Clement’s address. He explains that to take the way to God means choosing knowledge, wisdom, self-restraint, and righteousness over ignorance, folly, licentiousness, unrighteousness.²⁵ To communicate the same thing in a Homeric language meant joining into the larger conversation and affecting the views which were commonly associated with this language.²⁶ Clement is not invoking Homer because he covertly speaks of the Logos and the Holy Spirit,²⁷ but because he accurately presents challenges immanent to human existence and the capacity of a human to be the main vehicle of his own perdition. This thought is universal, but its pervasiveness depends precisely on the way in which it is communicated. Will the recipients simply hear it and then move on to something else, or will they be affected by what they hear, be captured by it, internalize it.²⁸ The latter is enabled by a certain artistic expression, to which a specific audience is ‘sen-

23 2.27.1: Αὐταὶ μὲν αἱ ὀλισθηραὶ τε καὶ ἐπιβλαβεῖς παρεκβάσεις τῆς ἀληθείας, καθέλκουσαι οὐρανόθεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ εἰς βάραθρον περιτρέπουσαι. Ἐθέλω δὲ ὑμῖν ἐν χρωῖ τοὺς θεοὺς αὐτοὺς ἐπιδειξάαι ὅποιοι τινες καὶ εἴ τινες, ἴν’ ἤδη ποτὲ τῆς πλάνης λήξητε, αὐθις δὲ παλινδρομήσητε εἰς οὐρανόν.

24 See Heraclitus, *Allegoriae* 70.2 on Odysseus as a sort of instrument of every virtue (πάσης ἀρετῆς ὄργανόν τι), with which Homer shows his contempt for the vices eating away the life of humans (τὰς ἐκνεμομένας τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον κακίας).

25 *Protrepticus* 10.93.1: Μετανοήσωμεν οὖν καὶ μεταστῶμεν ἐξ ἀμαθίας εἰς ἐπιστήμην, ἐξ ἀφροσύνης εἰς φρόνησιν, ἐξ ἀκρασίας εἰς ἐγκράτειαν, ἐξ ἀδικίας εἰς δικαιοσύνην, ἐξ ἀθεότητος εἰς θεόν. Καλὸς ὁ κίνδυνος αὐτομολεῖν πρὸς θεόν (compare καλὸς κίνδυνος in Plato, *Phaedo* 114d).

26 And in this sense the superb collection of passages gathered by Rahner is very useful. These passages are pertinent to issues of the soul and its relation to the divine, which were in part reflected in Platonic and Gnostic Homeric exegesis. Due to this fact the exegesis in turn colored the language in which these issues were discussed at the time when they were of interest to competing Christian, Neoplatonic and Gnostic thinkers alike. Whereas for the last two groups Homer was a genuine voice of their most ancient tradition and therefore relevant, for Christians he does not fall into the exegetical canon and at best can be seen as echoing the wisdom of the Old Testament prophets. See an example of intertwining imagery of Plato, Numenius and Clement concerning the Divine steersman discussed in Somos 2016 as a way to assume a corrective position or elaborate on predecessors’ views brought forward through the same image.

27 Similar ship imagery, followed by a remark on the superiority of divine guidance over ancestral customs, appears also in *Paedagogus* 1.7.54.2-3. The Instructor as the steersman does not give way to the winds of this world, nor does he let a child – likened to a ship in which his ears are the helm – be wrecked on the beastlike and licentious life path (θηριώδη καὶ ἀσελγῆ προσρηξαι διαίταν) on account of them; but with the Spirit of the truth blowing favorably brings the child safely to the haven of heaven.

28 *Protrepticus* 10.105.4-106.4. Comparing those who refuse to give up false understanding of deities to deaf adders of Psalm 57 and explaining the truth they ignore, he urges his audience to let the words penetrate their inner beings (as in: Ἀκούσατέ μου καὶ μὴ τὰ ὄτα ἀποβύσητε μηδὲ τὰς ἀκοὰς ἀποφράξητε, ἀλλ’ εἰς νοῦν βάλεσθε τὰ λεγόμενα).

sitive, whereby the audience can feel the thought and resonate with it. And Homer indeed strikes a chord with those of Hellenic education.

The paragraph in question, among other things, manages to convincingly demonstrate that the abandonment of ancestral customs, even at the risk of disappointing those ancestors,²⁹ does not mean parting ways with the creditable heritage of ancestors who are claimed to be in many respects better than the gods they worshipped.³⁰ It does not mean forsaking the learning of Athens and the whole of Greece.³¹ The message to be conveyed here is that these parts of the patrimony will thrive, surpassing all their crippling limitations once these limitations are recognized. Clement reaches for the Homeric images, the arch-mirror of Hellenic self-reflection, as for an instrument. The act of using this instrument masterfully goes to show that nothing of true value will be left behind. He explains this newly revealed way with the language of the old way. He proposes a deviation from the traditional course (*παρεκβάσεις*, 10.89.2) by using the traditional voyage imagery. He plays on similarity and correspondence, but simultaneously also on the contrast between the two.

The mention of the Homeric Sirens in *Stromata*, VI 11.89.1-3, is also commented on as if representing exegesis. Clement speaks disparagingly about those Christians who clog their ears to the Siren song, which on this occasion corresponds to Hellenic learning. He compares them to Odysseus' companions (*καθάπερ οἱ τοῦ Ὀδυσσεῦς ἑταῖροι*), who "bypass not the Sirens but the rhythm and the melody" (*οὐ τὰς Σειρήνας, ἀλλὰ τὸν ῥυθμὸν καὶ τὸ μέλος παρερχόμενοι*). It is claimed that only for those who lack in education can that journey become one of no return. But one who approaches Hellenic studies critically, tailoring its material for the sake of the catechumens ("especially the Greeks"), does not have to abstain from the song. Provided that these studies do not steal one's focus, the homecoming to the true philosophy³² will not be hindered. It is implied that the relevance of "the rhythm and the melody" is in better understanding of the *logos*, of the harmony that exists between all that is revealed from Old Testament times to the New (VI 11.88.5). We see here that the musical component of the Siren imagery is, unlike in the previous case, used to portray a decisively positive notion. Earlier in the same work the Sirens play a part in portraying a charming, pleasure-inducing speech which is not a skill that ought to occupy a Christian gnostic (I 10.48.-49.2). Such *logos* is contrasted to the simple and pointed style of the Scriptures. But in another context Clement again approaches the same image from a different aspect and one which shows that the Siren song shares a resemblance with the Scriptures (II 2.9.7³³). There Clement discuss-

²⁹ *Protrepticus* 10.89.2:... καὶν οἱ πατέρες χαλεπαίνωσιν, ἐπὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐκκλινοῦμεν καὶ τὸν ὄντως ὄντα πατέρα ἐπιζητήσομεν... The custom is described as infantile, and its abandonment stands for reaching maturity, the point there being that even if these Sirens have haunted the fathers, the sons should be able to outgrow them and nothing about it constitutes a betrayal of one's roots, parents, or nurses, but a fulfillment of one's potential, see also 10.89.1; 10.109.3.

³⁰ *Protrepticus* 10.43.2.

³¹ *Protrepticus* 11.112.1.

³² Penelope figured as philosophy in a popular paradigm where suitors mingling with her handmaidens correspond to those who turn to general education, see Helleman 1995.

³³ αἱ γοῦν τῶν Σειρήνων ἐπικηλήσεις δύναμιν ὑπεράνθρωπον ἐνδεικνύμεναι ἐξέπληττον τοὺς παρατυγχάνοντα πρὸς τὴν τῶν λεγομένων παραδοχὴν σχεδὸν ἄκοντα εὐτρεπίζουσαι.

es the importance of the voice of God, who bestowed the Scriptures. In this voice alone lies the proof that cannot be challenged. He refers then to the Sirens. While pointing out the superhuman force with which their song mesmerises passers-by, winning them over almost against their will, he highlights solely the positive connotation of such potency.

His manifold use of the Sirens imagery in his writing demonstrates that he indeed is familiar with many strands of Odyssean exegesis, including the Platonic one that understands famous wandering as ordeals of a soul in the material world travelling back to the true source of life. This exegesis no doubt influences the productive use of the imagery. It broadens and nuances the allegorical colors that an Odyssean expression can generate. But as Clement's free use of Odyssean allusions, images and comparisons above shows, he is concerned with communicating something new – with the Odyssean language interpreted in the known allegorical key, not with a new exegesis of the *Odyssey* itself. Alternatively, it has been suggested that he is offering a Christian exegesis of the *Odyssey*. The prepositions of comparison and different uses of one image notwithstanding, if it were true, this would actually make his point weaker and his argument painfully incongruent. If the ancient thinkers understood the true path to salvation and conveyed the truth allegorically, what would be the point on insisting on the error of their ways, on the delusion, the *πλάνη* of the ancestors? He demonstrates at length that even the best of them could not find their way to truth, until he, who is the Way finally came.³⁴ He exhibits awareness of the prior concept of a heavenly homeland, proponents of which saw Homer as one of those who hinted at it, but he wants to show that they were barking up the wrong tree. The main point is that the *right course*, the audience is supposed to *finally* turn to, is *newly disclosed*. It was there from the beginning but not in the books and the thought of the Greeks, which at best reflected imperfect chunks of it, perverted with various delusions and aberrations.

Refutation of All Heresies

In the third century work *Refutation of All Heresies*³⁵ we read that the task of such writing can be described as a battle against *πλάνη* – against an aberration, an error, a delusion, against going astray – with the help of truth (10.5). The use of Odyssean wandering imagery in *Refutatio* 7.13 fits nicely in this larger frame. The section opens with a more

³⁴ *Protrepiticus* 10.100.1; *Evangelium secundum Joannem* 3.13; 14.6. The help of Truth is necessary for the right understanding of the Scriptures which is correlative to following the right path in life which leads to truth, as we read in *Stromata* VII 16.94-95, where the Circe episode is made use of. Clement speaks of those who interpret the Scriptures according to their desires and of others who cling to truth having received the *rule of truth* from the Truth itself. Those who upon reading the Scriptures disregard the tradition of Church and still turn back to opinions of heretics cease to be men of God. Thus they are compared to those who under the influence of Circe's drugs become beasts. Discussing the passage, Rahner notes that "Clement indicates... the evangelical truth hidden in the Homeric myth". Since in the text there is just an indication, a "fleeting sketch", he discerns Clement's "unspoken thoughts" in "a companion picture in which he speaks directly of Christianity" (p. 208). What follows afterwards is Rahner's transposition of what Clement is saying into the language of Homeric imagery by a way of parallels established through collation of passages from different texts irrespective of their contexts (190-207). On the productive use of the Circe myth in Christian authors see Tochtermann 1992: 141-193.

³⁵ There exists a significant doubt about Hyppolitus of Rome as the author of this work, see the history of the discussion in Litwa 2016: xxxiii-xlii.

general likening of heretical doctrines to a wind-tossed sea (πελάγει κλυδωνιζομένην ὑπὸ βίας ἀνέμων). Those seeking the calm haven (τὸν εὐδίων λιμένα) who hear the doctrines should rush to sail by (παραπλεῖν). The sea of this kind (τοιούτον πέλαγος) is then described as both full of beasts and hard to traverse, which is why it resembles the Sicilian sea (ὡς φέρ' εἰπεῖν τὸ Σικελιωτικόν) in which, as the story goes (ἐν ᾧ μυθεύεται), Odysseus crossed paths with extraordinary beasts. The main events of Odysseus' wanderings are then listed and the Sirens episode is summarised according to the Greek poets (φάσκουσιν Ἑλλήνων οἱ ποιηταί). The author then simply advises his readers to do the same, namely sail past the Sirens without danger (παραπλεῦσαι ἀκινδύνως τὰς Σειρήνας). Both modes of resistance to perils with tempting traits comparable to the sweet song of the Sirens' (ὡς τὸ λιγυρὸν ἄσμα τῶν Σειρήνων) are approved of. Either completely refusing to hear the heretical doctrines, mirroring the choice of Odysseus' companions who had wax in their ears, or lending an ear to them but choosing to stand firmly in faith and bound to the cross of Christ (τῷ ξύλῳ Χριστοῦ προσδήσαντα), like Odysseus did when he decided to hear the luring song tied to the mast (τῷ ξύλῳ προσδήσαντα). The sea of troubles analogy for earthly human experience is everywhere to be found. The sea of Odysseus is infested with vivid creatures famous for their dreadful and deadly features. It stands to no reason to believe that the author is here interpreting these much talked about beasts and the well-known wanderings of Odysseus. It is the insufficiently known beastlike doctrines and entrapping doctrinal pathways³⁶ he is interested in unravelling. Evoking the familiar and clearly harmful image builds a mental frame for the reader to use when archiving the less familiar one that he is supposed to perceive in the same way. Nothing in this section suggests otherwise, nor in the work as a whole, since the author is specifically against lining up mythical stories and decoding them in terms of Scripture narratives and Christian revelation.³⁷ However, he is fond of using mythical images to provoke his opponents and portray their teachings. The false doctrines are to be envisioned in terms of a beast-infested sea in this example, and in the closing chapter he speaks of a labyrinth of heresies (10.5.1). The author also compares his refutation of the erroneous tenets, of the πλάνη, to striking the heads of the Hydra – the heads of the serpent (the tenets) grow back essentially the same, changing a word or a name here and there, because they are all held together by the single spirit of πλάνη (συνεχόμεναι ἐνὶ πλάνης πνεύματι, 5.11.1³⁸). In similar fashion, he invites his readers to Herculean efforts when dealing with a certain vile doctrine which evokes the dung of the Augean stables (5.27.6).

Methodius of Olympus

Methodius opens his treatise about free will with the image of “the old man of Ithaca” and the Sirens (*De autexusio*, I 1). He then develops the antithesis of the Siren's song: not one that ends in death but one of eternal salvation. The voice to be heard does not sub-

³⁶ As in *Refutatio* 7. p. 1.../9: Τὰδε ἔνεστιν ἐν τῇ ἑβδόμῃ τοῦ κατὰ πασῶν αἰρέσεων ἐλέγχου.../ Πῶς καὶ ὁ Θεόδοτος πεπλάνηται...

³⁷ As in *Refutatio* 5.26.34-36 where he states that such an approach is typical of the heretical teachings: Ὁμοίως δὲ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον πάντας τοὺς τοιούτους λόγους, μύθοις ἐμπεφεῖς ὄντας, παρατιθέμενοι διδάσκουσιν. Cf. Litwa 2016: xlviii-xlix.

³⁸ See *Epistula Joannis* I, 4.6.

due one with licentious pleasure but teaches him divine mysteries. Those singing are not the death-bringing creatures of the Greeks but a divine choir of prophets. For those who hear it, life does not cease, but they enjoy a better life the more they listen to it and the Holy Spirit becomes their guide. Neither the bonds of Odysseus nor wax for the ears of its listeners are called for on such an occasion. On the contrary, it involves the complete loosening of bonds, and everyone is invited to hear it freely.³⁹ Throughout the opening chapter Methodius engages with Clement⁴⁰ and his play on the Sirens' song as an opposite to the New Song (*Protrepticus* 12.118.2-4), but the stress is inverted. Clement's focus in the paradigmatic passages was on the song of death, while for Methodius it lies on the song of salvation. The difference has to do with the audiences. Clement urges those bound by ancestral habit to false gods (to flee from the Sirenic song). Methodius exhorts those whose prior acceptance of the true God is endangered by false teachings⁴¹ (not to flee from the song of salvation).⁴²

Homeric Sirens resurface again in his *Symposium* (8.1) where a character cautions those committed to virtue about demons. The advice is to flee from the charms of their beautiful sounds and from the appearances (forms) on the surface brushed with the illusion of prudence more than from the Homeric Sirens. The demons then present a danger similar in kind⁴³ to the epic Sirens but far greater. Those who are beguiled with the pleasure of the delusion (κηλούμενοι ταῖς ἡδοναῖς τῆς πλάνης) make themselves to week for the flight upwards.⁴⁴ In another work of his, Sirens are brought into the picture (*De resurrectione* XXVIII 1) to describe a form of communication not intent on presenting the truth and what is useful, but adorned to appear alluring and wise while disguising both its inner inadequacy and its true purpose.⁴⁵ Such are the words of his adversaries in the discussion on the Resurrection, full of deceiving charms just like dressed-up temptresses or Sirens looking to conceal their human-hating nature with their beautiful voice.

39 *De autexusio*, I 2-4: ... οὐκ ἀκολάστῳ φωνῆς ἡδονῇ νενικημένος, ἀλλὰ θεῖα διδασκόμενος μυστήρια ... / τὸ τέλος οὐ θάνατον ἀλλ' αἰώνιον ... σωτηρίαν / ... οὐχ αἱ θανατηφόροι Σειρήνες Ἑλλήνων, ἀλλὰ θεῖός τις χορὸς προφητῶν ... / ... οὐδὲ τὰ Ὀδυσσεῶς δεσμά, οὐ κηρὸς ..., ἀλλὰ δεσμῶν μὲν ἄνεσις πᾶσα, ἐλευθερία δ' ἀκοῆς ...

40 Compare Clement's mentioned portrait of the sage of the old age (*Protrepticus* 9.86.2), as well as his description of the harmony between the Old Testament prophets and the apostles (*Stromata* VI 11.88.5).

41 See Patterson 1997: 40-41.

42 *De autexusio*, I 6: μὴ φύγῃς, ἄνθρωπε, ὕμνον πνευματικόν, μηδὲ ἀπεχθῶς πρὸς τὴν ἀκρόασιν διατεθῆς. θάνατον οὐκ ἔχει· σωτηρίας ἐστὶν διήγημα ἢ παρ' ἡμῖν ᾠδή.

43 *Symposion* 5.5.23: θανατηφόρος ὁ διάβολος.

44 The segment concerns earthly life as a drama of truth, where protagonists, humans, are supposed to strive upwards, while the contriving antagonists, the devil and the demons, playing on the corruptive body, seek to bring them down.

45 An interesting example of the comparison between the sweet chant of Sirens deadly for those who listen to them, and the sweet phrases of pagan philosophers (Plato and his followers) in opposition to the unembellished words of the Savior and his disciples, appears two centuries later in *Ammonias* (2.153-169), a dialogue by Zacharias of Mytilene. Further in the text, Sirens are compared to the lure of the ancients bewitching the ear with choice words and polished diction (tr. S. Gertz). The opinions of the ancients are not to be honored because of their age or their charms (just as those reasons were not enough to save Homer's poems from the harsh judgment in Plato's *Republic*). That which is false causes trouble. It is right to honor what is ancient only when it contains the truth that flourishes with time (2.467-482).

In *Symposium* (4.3.22) Homer comes up as a reference to corroborate the negative effect on fertility that willow can supposedly exercise, since he describes it as losing its fruit (ὠλεσικάρπος). A character in the *Symposium* expounds the opening image of the Psalm 136 involving the rivers of Babylon and the willows on its banks.⁴⁶ Homer's use of the adjective presents an ancient testimony as to the widely assumed properties of willow. The Homeric description was cited as appropriate in botanical handbooks too, since the willow sheds its fruits before they mature.⁴⁷ It was believed that willow extinguishes the urge to procreate in humans. This physiological effect of the plant is one of the arguments in the interpretation of the willow as a symbol of chastity in the divine Scriptures (αἱ θεῖαι γραφαί).⁴⁸

Buchheit (1956: 23-24) reads more into this Homeric reference and connects with it a passage that comes up later in the *Symposium* text (9.2.7-10), in a different speech, where it is said that οἱ παλαιότεροι and the law heralded the advent of the Church prophesying (προφητεύοντες) to us its characteristics. He suggests that οἱ παλαιότεροι should be understood as *ancient poets and philosophers* although this does not fit the context.⁴⁹ The passage criticizes the Jews for not acknowledging the depth in the Scriptures, for not seeing the shape of the things to come in what the *law* and the *prophets* say (9.1.72-75⁵⁰).

46 Ἐν τύπῳ γὰρ τῆς παρθενίας τὴν ἰτέαν πανταχοῦ παραλαμβάνουσιν αἱ θεαῖαι γραφαί, ἐπειδὴ περ τὸ ἄνθος αὐτῆς εἰς ὕδωρ ἀποτριβέν, ἐὰν ποθῆ, πᾶν ὅσον εἰς ὀχείας ἀναζεῖ καὶ ἐρεθισμοὺς κατασβέννυσιν ἔστ' ἂν εἰς ἄρδην ἀποστειώσῃ καὶ ἄγονον ἀπεργάσῃται πᾶσαν τὴν ἐπὶ παιδοποιῖαν φορᾶν. ὥσπερ δὲ καὶ Ὅμηρος ἐμήνυσε (just as also Homer indicated), διὰ τοῦτο καλέσας ὠλεσικάρπους τὰς ἰτέας. Other mentions of the willow in LXX (*Lev.* 23:40, *Is.* 44:4) Methodius treats earlier. The use of ὥσπερ δὲ καὶ comes up often in the work.

47 Theophrastus, *Historia plantarum* III 1.3, cf. Rahner 1934: 247-248 for the list of other relevant comparative material. Rahner thinks that symbolism connected to the water-loving willow has to do with a quality apparent to the ordinary powers of observation" and therefore "needs no special effort of a specifically Greek imagination and no elaborate myth to call it into being" (1971: 309). In contrast, he finds the coupling of willows and chastity foreign to Scriptures, presenting it as a symbolical outgrowth of "fruit-destroying willow", a case of "arbitrary introduction of something wholly Greek into the thought of the Bible, an *eisegesis*". It remains unclear whether the willow species which indeed possess caducous features were easy to be observed, but that question seems less important than the fact that this feature was a matter noted in botanical handbooks – that is to say, it was a part of Greek botanical knowledge.

48 The role of the subsequent reference to prophet Isaiah (Καὶ ἐν Ἡσαΐα δὲ οἱ δίκαιοι ὡς ἰτέα λέγονται φύειν ἐπὶ παραρρέον ὕδωρ.) is different, since he provides a comparison between righteous people and willow. Rahner takes "the profound mythical meaning" of Homer's willow to be unconsciously conveyed by the virtue of true poetic genius and he deems all subsequent elucidations of the willow (in very different contexts) as an attempt to explain the hidden significance of the willows growing about the portals of Hades (1971: 289). These words should not be understood too simplistically, to be sure, but Rahner's understanding of the mythical depths creates a specific analytical context which has more to do with his intent to expose what "lurks" hidden in these mythical images than with the intent of the authors whose passages he is analyzing. Without regard for his stated point of view, one might mistake reception characterized by cultural and educational influences for a kind of crypto-exegesis, as is implied by reading expressions tinted with Homeric colors presuming they present an exegesis.

49 Οἱ γὰρ παλαιότεροι καὶ ὁ νόμος τοὺς τῆς ἐκκλησίας προεξήγγειλαν ἡμῖν προφητεύοντες χαρακτήρας. Other places in *Symposium* also do not allow παλαιότεροι to be understood as *ancient poets and philosophers*, but reflect the general use (those belonging to an older period, ancestors) made specific by individual context: 8.14.63; 8.15.14; 10.1.21 (e.g. of patriarchs and their posterity for whom the law alone was not enough to free them from ruin).

50 Ὅθεν αἰσχυνέσθωσαν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τὰ βᾶθη τῶν γραφῶν μὴ συνηθημένοι καὶ πάντα σωματικά τὸν

The speech revolves around Jewish canonical texts⁵¹ and the way that what is said in them relates to the Church in a prophetic manner (προφητεύοντες). In that context παλαιότεροι are simply a designation for the writers and prophets of the Old Testament, who predate the Church of the New Testament.⁵²

Buchheit speaks of “sanctification of Homer” (1956: 26) when discussing the play on Homer’s verses by Methodius. The slightly adapted verses about the Homeric Chimera alongside Methodius’ own verses in the style and vocabulary of Homer are used to describe the devil and the Christ’s victory over him (*Symposium* 8.12.20-24). Methodius knows his Homer and uses this knowledge to tint his writings with Homeric colors as Buchheit shows (1956: 27-35). Using Homeric language here goes beyond reuse of phrases, diction echoes and allusions. In its nature his short poetical patchwork reflects the *cento* play on Homer’s verses, and the phenomenon has primarily to do with disentangling the glory of the poetic words from their original content. Even the actual Christian centos, whole works which recast Homeric verses to have them speak of biblical events or the life of Christ, can hardly be described as somehow involving the sanctification of Homer. For that matter, the centoists may even describe the original events the verses narrate as “demonic and sacrilegious”, while valuing highly the craftsmanship of the verses which they recast to speak of Christian narratives (Sandnes 2011: 187).

Ambrose of Milan

In his treatise *De fide*, dealing with Arian misconceptions, Ambrose, one of the last Latin fathers with good knowledge of Greek,⁵³ describes heresies via comparison (*velut*) with Hydra and Scylla of the fables (I 6.46-47). He speaks of shipwrecks of faith (*naufragia fidei*), of ferocious fangs of the abominable doctrine and of the echo of the dogs⁵⁴ that resounds throughout the whole surroundings of the monster’s cave amid the rocks of perfidy (*perfidiae saxa*). One should pass by such an unhallowed strait having one’s ears closed. Ambrose then proceeds to cite from the Scriptures lines containing similar motifs: fencing off one’s ears⁵⁵ and a juxtaposition of evildoers and dogs (*ad Philippenses* 3.2), together with a quotation on why to avoid a heretic after reproof (*ad Titum* 3.10-11). Afterwards he comes back to nautical imagery concluding that we should do as good steersmen (*boni gubernatores*) and spread the sails of faith, looking to pass safely by and pursue the course of Scripture.

νόμον ἡγούμενοι καὶ τοὺς προφήτας εἰρηκέναι, ἅτε τῶν κοσμικῶν ἐφιέμενοι καὶ τὸν ἔξωθεν πλοῦτον τοῦ περὶ ψυχὴν προκρίνοντες.

51 The lines the speaker quotes or refers to while discussing the “bare letter” approach to the Scriptures and *Leviticus* 23.39-43 come from the books of Moses, wisdom books and the prophets. Nowhere do the ancient Greek sources come up in the discussion.

52 Essentially the syntagm οἱ παλαιότεροι καὶ ὁ νόμος corresponds to the preceding mention of *prophets and the law* as a designation for the Old Testament on the whole (BDAG 678^{aa}; *Symposium* 10.6.16, 10.6.21), possibly also avoiding the repetition with the following προφητεύοντες (cf. Mt. 11.13: πάντες γὰρ οἱ προφήται καὶ ὁ νόμος ἕως Ἰωάννου ἐπροφήτευσαν).

53 For his use of Greek models and literature see the studies collected in Nauroy 2013, for a survey of the features of his preaching and exegesis with references to specific studies see Dunkle 2016: 52-84.

54 The Scylla was often envisioned as having canine attributes, uncertainties about her appearance stem from the description of the sound she produces in *Od.* 12.86, see *Scholia in Odyseam*, HQ μ86, V μ91.

55 *Ecclesiasticus* 28.28: *Sepi aures tuas spinis.*

The graphic quality⁵⁶ of poetical monsters made them a handy tool for portraying different bestial phenomena.⁵⁷ We see in the example above, and not for the first time, Homeric monsters used to interpret the nature of erroneous doctrines. Likewise, in another case that got more attention in scholarship, the Sirens are a tool to explain the difference between a place of suffering and the cause of suffering (*Explanatio psalmorum* XII 43.75). The starting point is the verse that concerns humans humbled by God in the 'place of affliction' (Ps. 43.20). Next to the *loco afflictationis* variant there exists another rendering⁵⁸ *loco sirenum* which Ambrose takes to be especially apt to reflect the nature of the place referred to by the prophet as the place of temptation.⁵⁹ Taking note of the fact that both Scripture and the pagan tradition know of Sirens, he introduces the old account of the maidens that enchanted the sailors with the pleasure of their sweet voices. Ambrose then points out that it is not because of the deadly rocks that sailors find their end there; it is because of the melodious delight. Succumbing to it makes one drop one's guard and steer one's ship towards the rocks. This distinction matters here since the bishop cautions his readers against confusing suffering in body with suffering because of the body and its nature. The incentive to sin lies not in the body, but in worldly pleasure (*saeculi uoluptas*) which causes turmoil in the body. The example of the Sirens episode is followed by that of the serene sea that can turn dangerous if the storm rages.

The theme of pleasure which enslaves and wrecks, presented in light of 'the tale colored by poetic fiction'⁶⁰, appears also in Ambrose's commentaries on Luke (*Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, IV 3), where Homeric colors are applied together with a few Vergilian shades.⁶¹ There he makes a distinction between the old story of singing maidens and the poetic treatment of it. In the preceding passages (*Expositio* IV 1-2) the bishop paints an engaging picture portraying contemplation of the Gospel as sailing upon the high seas. Reflecting on the different aspects of a voyage, he invokes the famous route of Odysseus. His short recapitulation of the hero's return brings to the fore the Lotus eaters, the gardens of Alcinous and the Sirens, ending in a list of points contrasting the two seafaring experiences, that of Odysseus and that of a Christian: the sweetness of mere fruit on the one hand, the Bread that comes down from heaven on the other; instead of the herbs from Alcinous' garden, the mysteries of Christ are to be marvelled at; rather than turning a deaf ear, listening to Christ's voice leaves one with no fear of shipwreck. A Christian needs not tie himself with material ropes to the wooden mast like Odysseus, he needs only fasten his soul with spiritual bonds to the wood of the Cross. When Ambrose invokes the episode in a different context, he says that the Greek poet

56 The description of the purpose of comparisons in *Ad Herennium* (IV 59) includes a provocation of a vivid mental picture, bringing a certain thing before one's eyes (*ante oculos ponendi*).

57 See Ambrose's use of the tool in *De Tobia* 16.

58 Ambrosius ascribes it to Aquila. John Chrysostom (*Expositiones in Psalmos*, 149.43) notes the same variant in Greek ἐν τόπῳ Σειρήνων, next to the more common translation is ἐν τόπῳ κακώσεως.

59 On Ambrose's understanding of the psalm see Auf der Maur 1977: 131-143.

60 *Figmentis enim poeticis fabula coloratur*.

61 See editor's notes on IV 3.13 and 3.14. The lured sailors expecting a place reminiscent of Aeneas' Italy are met with the unhallowed land mirroring the shores of fallen Troy. See also O'Connell's (1994: 175) remarks on the accord between Neoplatonists and Ambrose in their treatment of the sea.

has the wise hero escape the deadly song as if wrapped in chains of his own prudence (*quasi quibusdam prudentiae suae circumdatus vinculis*, *De fide* III 1.4). In this *De fide* passage the invocation of Odysseus serves to show that from an early age of humanity it was understood that pleasure brings utter destruction to a man, and that before the coming of Christ its lure was judged so difficult to avoid that even those more steadfast than the others could not escape it altogether.

It seems rather evident that none of these examples are concerned with interpretation of Homer or the myth per se. Moreover, Ambrose directly addresses the issue and describes his mythical comparisons as applying color⁶² extracted from poetical fables to his argument.⁶³ He expects that those who might disapprove of his manner of speaking (*sermo*) would do so only because they are not able to find faults in (the matters of) faith he speaks of. Accordingly, his use of poetical fables falls into the category of modes of expression. It is a question of *language and style*, and a biblical style at that.⁶⁴ According to Ambrose, it is because of the similarity in the natures of particular things discussed, that we find poetic diction embedded in the divine Scriptures. He finds that the prophet judges it right to associate and liken the snares of Babylon – the havoc surrounding human earthly existence, to the stories of the licentiousness in the old times, like that of the Sirens.⁶⁵ He is explicit about poetic imagery being fiction (as mentioned above), but he considers it valuable since it reflects human experience and does so in rich colors.

Maximus of Turin

Pépin (1981: 14) thinks that in the introductory passages of the sermon of Maximus of Turin we see the developed Christian exegesis of the *Odyssey* (*Sermo* 37.1-37). The bishop of Turin was very fond of using imagery in his sermons and the influence of Ambrose's writings on his preaching is considerable.⁶⁶ The topic of the sermon in which the story of Odysseus comes up is the mystery of the Cross. We have seen that Ambrose contraposes the Cross of the Lord and the wood of the mast. Maximus here takes the comparison⁶⁷ further. The passage is reflective of his style on the whole, since he is very prone to analogies. He builds the sermon starting from a lesser example containing the

⁶² The color he speaks of has the sense of *ornatus*, an embellishment, see the mentioned section on the purpose of using comparisons in *Ad Herennium* IV 59.

⁶³ *De fide* III 1.3: *si quis contra licitum putat colorem disputationis eiusmodi a poeticis fabulis derivatum, et cum in fide nihil quod vituperare possit invenerit, aliquid in sermone reprehendit; agnoscat non solum sententias, sed etiam versiculos poetarum Scripturis insertos esse divinis.*

⁶⁴ See also *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* IV 2.

⁶⁵ *De fide* III 1.4. He refers to *Jeremias* 27.39.

⁶⁶ See Weidmann 2018: 363.

⁶⁷ Comparison can proceed through similarity or contrast, and apart from these two the typology could involve separate types depending on how detailed or abridged was the comparative portrayal or depending on the comparanda, e.g. greater compared to the lesser or other way around. The outlining of the types varies in ancient rhetorical treatises (McCall Jr. 1969) and chapters on *synkrisis* in *progymnasmata* also deal with the subject (but comparison is part of the discussion under other headings too, *topoi*, *enkomiion* etc.). It is generally noted that *exemplum*, to which a similar typology also applies, bears a dual semantic *voluntas*, ensuing from the fact that the meaning an example assumes when applied in a certain context goes beyond the meaning this example has on its own. The same holds true for *similitudo* as well, see Lausberg 2008: §421. Cf. Demoen 1997: 141-147.

sign of the Cross and proceeding to an example comprising an actual prophecy of what is to be completed in Christ himself. After retelling the story of the Sirens and Odysseus he opposes it, as fiction to fact, to the real event of Christ on the cross. The Odyssean image in opening lines provides two insights through comparisons. The first insight occurs through comparison with Christ's crucifixion (37.16-30). The fable is represented by the image of Odysseus on the mast facing the Sirens surrounded by his companions. The crucifixion of Christ next to the thief – whose life journey can be understood as one of a drifter and a shipwrecked man who will after many wanderings end up returning to his heavenly home – epitomizes the true event. The issue here is not one of interpreting the myth. The myth is taken to be one of salvation in the world of temptation (37.19-37), and is understood and used in its allegorical key formulated in the Pythagorean and Platonic overtones discussed above. It is this exegetical context that renders the renowned Odyssean tale of salvation suitable to serve as a backdrop to the true story of salvation, which is clearly to be seen as far more worthy of attention. If people are mesmerised by the image of Odysseus tied to the mast saving his ship from ruin, how much more should they appreciate the Lord Christ on the Cross who saved the whole human kind. The point is that, if the first as mere fiction has such fame, there is much more reasons to speak about the other.⁶⁸

When the life of an individual is compared to a sea voyage it can be said that it is liable to shipwrecks and much straying off course, but yet is redeemable by the power of the Cross. On the other hand, the Church as a ship is the only vessel that cannot be wrecked. Whoever boards this collective ship, whether binding himself to the Cross or filling his ears with Scripture, has no reason to fear the sweet storm of lust; the Church cannot be led astray, and this is the second insight the bishop provides through the Odyssean image (37.30-37). He elaborates on both paradigms – sea journey standing for life and ship standing for Church⁶⁹ – through images of Odysseus' seafaring. What was a mast for Odysseus is the Cross for Christians, just as wax placed in the ears of Christians is Scripture. Those on board the ship of the Church have no reason to fear the Sirens that brought dread to those before Christ.

The allegorical lesson that the poetical fable is understood to contain is deemed compatible with a Christian experience of this world, and the fable itself is deemed popular and appealing. The sentiment of the time was that the audience with secular education was more prone to respond to a poetically colored address.⁷⁰ This is the rea-

68 *Sermo* 37.16-19: *Si ergo de Vlixee illo refert fabula quod eum arboris religatio de periculo liberarit, quanto magis praedicandum est quod vere factum est, hoc est quod hodie omne genus hominum de mortis periculo crucis arbor eripuit?* See also Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 108.10-13, on the argument from comparison to the lesser.

69 *Sermo* 37.30-33: *Arbor enim quaedam in navi est crux in ecclesia, quae inter totius saeculi blanda et perniciose naufragia incolumis sola servatur. In hac ergo navi...*

70 An explanation of a 5th c. Christian poet Sedulius about his choice to compose the Paschal song and use the allurements of verse to retell the life of Christ according to the Gospels, records the strong inclinations to delights of poetry that those with secular education sought to gratify, see *Epistola ad Macedonium* 1, tr. C. P. E. Springer (2013: 213): "...there are many for whom instruction in worldly letters is all the more attractive because of the delights of poetry and the pleasures of verse. These readers pay slighter attention to whatever they read in the way of oratorical eloquence, since they take hardly any pleasure in it; but what they see hon-

son we see the Homeric fables used in Christian rhetoric – not to reinterpret Homer, but to bring before one’s eyes a certain point of Christian teaching with the help of Homeric charms; to win the attention of the addressees and make the point stick in their mind. The bishop is not saying that the wax in the ears of Odysseus’ companions are the Scriptures, but that Christians should behave like Odysseus’ companions, and *their* wax should be Scripture.

Like many other Christian authors, Maximus does not deem it irrelevant that the mast has the features of the Cross. But this does not imply a new exegesis which would infer Christian content to the myth, no more than the mast infers that the ship is a secret bearer of Christian teaching. In a broader sense, however, both do bear a testimony of the truth which is to be read in everything that surrounds us, as we learn from another sermon of the same author (*Sermo* 38). The presence of a sign of the cross in a ship, mythical or otherwise, as in other artefacts of men and in all of God’s creation is understood to be a token of great mystery. To that extent even a sail hung on the mast is a kind of figure of the mystery of the crucifixion, as if it were Christ lifted up on the Cross (38.11-17).⁷¹ Embarking on the turbulent waters and facing stormy winds while confident in the mast, figured generally as an image of the Christian experience of the world. The Odyssean fable, containing such imagery and salvation motifs, presented one of the popular ways to render this image, and that is why it is discussed as an example in an earlier sermon. But it is clearly delineated from the example showing the saving powers of the Cross from the divine Scriptures, which stems from real events, whose full significance can be seen only after they came to fruition in Christ himself (37.39-43). Although the very fact Maximus discusses it as he does acknowledges the prominence of the Odyssean salvation story, his repeated insistence on it being a fabrication (37.18; 37.40) counters the portrayal of the passages as evidence for Christian infatuation with the poet as being something more than a poet. The description of the thief on the cross by Maximus (37.25-30) bears more resemblance to the Neoplatonic Odysseus and seems more interesting with regards of Christian use of the myth than does the collating of Christ and Odysseus images. Both the thief in this interpretative paradigm and the Neoplatonic Odysseus illustrate a universal human experience.⁷² In preceding lines the fabled hero may be taken to be a kind of figure of Christ implicitly, as is generally the case, just as the mere sail hung on the mast in another sermon (quoted above) is such a figure explicitly. Neither however implies a Christian exegesis, whether of the myth or of ships, but a Christian rhetorical use of it.

eyed with the allurements of verse they take up with such eagerness in their hearts that by repeating it again and again they become sure of it and store it up in the depths of their memory. So, I think that these readers’ habits should not be disregarded but handled in accordance with their established customs and nature, so that each of them should be won for God of their own will in greater accord with their own disposition.” At the beginning of the letter Sedulius assures his addressee that God is his steersman and no shipwreck has befallen him.

⁷¹ *Figura enim sacramenti quaedam est velum suspensum in arbore, quasi Christus sit exaltatus in cruce...*

⁷² Cf. O’Connell (1994: 174-196) for the fusion of images of the prodigal son, the Neoplatonic Odysseus, apostles on the stormy sea and Aeneas in Augustine, and his discussion on constraints one has to keep in mind when trying to isolate literary referents since associative thinking and “combinative logic of imagination” may not allow for a clear reconstruction of all the ingredients or layers of an image(-cluster).

Conclusion

In cases where the productive use of Homer's imagery hinges on an allegorical understanding of the Sirens, the Christian authors work with existing pagan allegoresis. By doing so they engage in the wider intellectual discourse on the ethical, psychological or soteriological matters reflected in these interpretations for which Homer was a kind of language. In that sense, neither the poet nor his poetry were the objects of attention, but rather they were tools to win attention for those other issues under discussion. The allegorical interpretations informing the authors' use of Homeric images are the following: the Sirens as pleasure and as wily women; the sea as the material world of temptation; and Odysseus' return as the way to the divine source of life (Clement, *Protrepticus*; Methodius, *Symposion*; Ambrose, *Explanatio*; Maximus, *Sermo 37*).⁷³ In addition we find more straightforward comparisons in these examples: the Siren's song contrasted to the Logos as the New Song implicitly (Clement, *Protrepticus*) and the Siren's song contrasted to the prophets' song explicitly (Methodius, *De autexusio*); the Odysseus' voyage contrasted to the Christian voyage (Ambrose, *Expositio*); heretical doctrines compared to Odyssean beasts (*Refutatio*; Ambrose, *De fide*) and other briefer comparisons. The use of the Odyssean episodes in the passages analyzed reflects the general approach to classical literature which was not one of Christianization, but one of critical reading and extraction of the useful.⁷⁴ The useful in the methodological sense could be characterized as all that contributed to a better command of the language in all its functions (explanative, descriptive, expressive, persuasive etc.). The useful in terms of content was whatever one could find in non-Christian wisdom and texts (ἡ ἔξω σοφία, τὰ θύραθεν) that was in line with the Christian sources (τὰ ἡμέτερα). An interpretation that would give a myth-maker and a pagan poet the status of a Christian prophet, the status of a Christian source as oppose to "external" source of wisdom was in principle, undesirable. Crossing that line constituted a heresy, as the case with the Gnostics shows. In addition, such appropriation of Homer could not possibly escape a cultured reader and on the pagan side it would bring about a reaction. Yet the reactions that reach us suggest that the Christian appropriation of Homer made him into a poet stripped of any theological significance.⁷⁵ It is also worth noting here that in the centuries to come, we see that there is no confusion about the "owners" of the soul-odyssey exegesis.⁷⁶

⁷³ One should keep in mind the close relation between these authors: Methodius' Odyssean imagery echoes Clement's, Maximus echoes Ambrose's use.

⁷⁴ *De legendis gentilium libris* by Basil of Caesarea marks the end result of the battle for the differentiation between the falsities of the content and the beautiful words of the poet. This development is surveyed in Sandnes 2009. Due to the unsettled questions concerning the place of Christian intelligentsia in the wider society and the value of classical education for a Christian way of life, early Christian writers deal more carefully with the challenges posed by *paideia* and Homer's role in it. But in time they grew content with Homer as simply the most charming of the pagan poets, even if one should not approach those charms too lightly.

⁷⁵ Cf. Julian, *Epistulae*, 61c; Proclus, *In Platonis Rem publicam commentarii*, I 74.1-30; Lamberton 1997: 47 ("...Christians – whose scriptural canon, along with the history of its interpretation, was a powerful stimulus to hermeneutic sophistication, were able to neutralize the theological authority of polytheist texts"); Sandnes 2009 (on p. 243 he describes Christian approaches as 'secularization of Homer').

⁷⁶ E.g. Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Commentarii ad Homeri Odysseam* 1389.43-48 (*ad Od.* 1.50-54). Some Byzantine scholars who notoriously introduced Christian notions in Neoplatonic allegoresis openly speak

Homeric pictures of rough seas, ships and shipwrecks, uncertainties of navigation, Odysseus at the mast and the ominous and enticing world around him, must have resonated with the Christian audience strongly if one has in mind the encounter of rich nautical metaphors in Greek overall tradition with the cognate ecclesiastical ship iconography⁷⁷ and biblical images of raging seas. Odysseus was already “polished” as the hero of virtue through many pagan interpretations and literary uses, allegorical and non-allegorical alike.⁷⁸ Those are all obvious reasons why a Christian audience would find the hero to be a dear paradigm of their own torments among the murky waters of this world. The discussed sense in which the *Odyssey* held true for them does not involve imputing any apprehension of Christian doctrine to Homer, nor reverence for him as a prophet or a holy man. For that matter, it does not require him to be anything more than an excellent story-teller surmounting the mythical trifles – the occupational hazards of the poetic craft – with clever perception and apt expression. The unforgettably crafted images that seem to be innately in tune with the human condition called out to all students of Homer. The Platonic interpretative key which explores the confrontation between an earthly existence and a higher sort of existence in an allegorically read *Odyssey* has, of course, a significant place in the Christian reception. However, productive reception which modulates Odyssean themes viewed through soteriological motifs and understood in general terms of resisting enslaving temptation, should not be equated with an exegesis.

The proposition common to Platonic schools of thought and Christian teaching was that earthly experience was not all there was to life and that human existence was derived from divine. The belief in a heavenly fatherland, in the point *beyond the sea*, was coupled with the belief in the possibility of reaching it by following the way of the truth and refraining from wandering off it.⁷⁹ The fact that different schools of thought held opposed views on many crucial issues of this general outline, should not veil the other fact

of their reworkings and display them as miraculous workings of rhetoric, which allows one to transform the content (no matter how *hideous*), to turn lies into (*our*) truth, see Psellus, *Opusculum* 42 (and Miles 2017: 82-89 on Psellus' interpretation of pagan material in general); Galenos, *Allegoriae in Homeri Iliadem* 4.1-4.

77 The episode with Christ and apostles on the boat at the stormy sea (*Evangelium secundum Marcum* 4:35-41), the ark of salvation (*Genesis* 6.9-22) and other relevant biblical material provided the key reference points. The earliest fully developed image of the Church as the ship travelling through the sea of the world that we find in Hyppolitus (*De antichristo* 59) arises from an interpretation of the words belonging to the prophet Isaiah (18). See also New Testament images in n. 79 below. Narrative sources aside, the fact was that the mast and the yard-arm formed a cross, the symbol of victory over death for Christians. The figure of the cross was thus not only a prominent feature of a vessel but a vital one for the sailing – the victory over the sea. A ship was, for these reasons, a Christian symbol from the earliest period. See Rahner 1942, 1942/1943.

78 See Montiglio 2011.

79 Cf. Porphyry cited at the beginning of this paper and Gnostic and Platonic exegesis cited in Pépin 1981 with the NT notions of heavenly fatherland, the moment when the sea no more exists and the earthly existence of humans as one of strangers and sojourners, e.g. *Apocalypsis Joannis* 21.1-2 (ὁ γὰρ πρῶτος οὐρανός καὶ ἡ πρώτη γῆ ἀπῆλθαν, καὶ ἡ θάλασσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι. καὶ τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν Ἰερουσαλὴμ καινὴν εἶδον καταβαίνουσαν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ...), *ad Hebraeos* 11.13-16 (...καὶ ὁμολογήσαντες ὅτι ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοὶ εἰσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· οἱ γὰρ τοιαῦτα λέγοντες ἐμφανίζουσιν ὅτι πατρίδα ἐπιζητοῦσιν. ... νῦν δὲ κρείττονος ὀρέγονται, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐπουρανοῦ. Cf. LXX *Paralipomenon* I, 29.15: ὅτι πάροικοί ἐσμεν ἐναντίον σου καὶ παροικοῦντες ὡς πάντες οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν· ὡς σκιὰ αἱ ἡμέραι ἡμῶν ἐπὶ γῆς, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὑπομονή.)

that they were essentially discussing the same kind of questions in the same language, ingrained with verses sung for centuries and shaped by centuries-old discussions. Homeric images were a part of this language and their use aimed to redefine the issues they were being applied to, not the images themselves. Images used this way could however in turn exert a different influence on subsequent audiences, give rise to new links in associative thinking and explanatory endeavors or gain a new semantic value. This makes their productive use important for the question of development of an exegesis but it does not make it tantamount to an exegesis. The distinction allows for a better appreciation of the driving forces behind expositions on Homer's many depths as well as of the lingering compulsion to keep digging.

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Јована Шијаковић Хришћанска алегореза *Одисеја*?

Сажетак: На основу појединих одјељака у ранохришћанским дјелима, које су издвојили и коментарисали Х. Ранер и Ж. Пепен, створен је утисак да се хришћанска алегореза *Одисеје* може јасно идентификовати у овим списима. По том суду, тумачење које уноси садржај хришћанског учења у *Одисеју* појављује се у II вијеку и развија се у појединостима кроз наредна три вијека. При томе се занемарује да било какво придавање теолошког значаја Хомеру није наилазило на одобравање међу хришћанима, чији начелни ставови према пјеснику не остављају простор за егзегетско христијанизовање епа. Добро посвједочена хомерска егзегеза код платоничара и гностика одражавала је њихове погледе на душу и њен однос према божанском. Због тога је и језик на коме се о тим питањима расправљало био прожет хомерским сликама у вријеме када су она била предмет спора међу различитим хришћанским, платоничарским и гностичким школама мишљења. Тамо гдје није посреди само уобличавање пријемчивијег израза, употреба хомерских слика код црквених отаца има за циљ да редефинише питања илустрована хомерским сликама, а не саме слике.

Кључне ријечи: алегореза, *Одисеја*, Климент Александријски, Св. Методије Олимписки, Св. Амвросије Милански, Св. Максим Торински, парадигма