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A symposium meeting at St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland in 2004 prompted the studies that make up this collection of twelve essays. The topic is a timely one. Despite the central place of scripture in Christian faith and practice, biblical hermeneutics is an increasingly complex and troubled field, beset by a host of philosophical, literary, and theological problems. The symposium was built on three premises: 1) a serious disconnect exists within biblical scholarship between theological and exegetical endeavors; 2) the Antiochene/Syriac tradition of biblical interpretation represents a distinct and vital tradition; and 3) the latter "has much to contribute to the apparent impasse in biblical scholarship between historical criticism and a desire for theological relevance" (vii). The collection treats a range of topics related to Antiochene/Syriac interpreters and their practices, hoping to stimulate further reflection on that tradition and clarify its contemporary relevance.

The first five essays offer patristic studies. In "The Bible in the Hands of the Persian Sage," Craig E. Morrison analyzes Aphrahat's manner of biblical citation. The study aptly illustrates Aphrahat's creativity in presenting the biblical text, arguing that his adjustments to the wording are not normally due to faulty memory or the stylistic requirements of the homiletic context. Instead, they are intentional and offer key interpretive clues. Aphrahat's citation technique expresses his conviction that an interpreter can never exhaust the full meaning of the biblical text. Sidney H. Griffith studies one of Ephrem's most evocative hymn cycles in, "Syriac/Antiochene Exegesis in Saint Ephrem's Teaching Songs *De Paradiso*." Griffith maintains that Ephrem thought of his metrical homilies (*mêmrê*) and teaching songs (*madrāshê*) as the main media of his biblical interpretation, conditioned as they are for spiritually rich liturgical enactment. The study discusses Ephrem's reading strategies as exemplified in *Hymns on Paradise*, emphasizing the symbological approach by which he correlates the material of occasional liturgical readings with the wider revelation found in scripture and in nature for the sake of teaching Christians. Utilizing

poetry and song, he "evoked a Christian understanding of the scriptural texts within the context of the larger parameters of church teaching, which was itself more a particular way of reading the Bible than it was truly a set of doctrines" (46).

In "Slouching towards Antioch: Biblical Exposition in the Syriac *Book of Steps*," Robert A. Kitchen attempts to characterize the exegetical methods at work in the aforementioned ascetical homilies and determine whether they anticipate an identifiably Antiochene approach. Focusing on the *Book*'s handling of several biblical narratives, Kitchen concludes that it displays some features of "Antiochene exegesis" but not others. Its author shows great respect for the coherence of the biblical narrative, as one might expect from an "Antiochene" exegete, yet its readings are greatly shaped by the author's ascetical agenda. In particular, the *Book of Steps* sees scripture as the source of normative but ongoing stories in which the ascetical readers may locate themselves. Paul Nadim Tarazi turns to the Greek tradition in "Chrysostom on Isaiah: A Paradigm for Hearing Scripture." Underscoring Chrysostom's hermeneutic of love for neighbor, Tarazi presents him as a model interpreter to be emulated today. Chrysostom's supposedly forthright "grammatico-historical" approach and his unwavering trust in biblical authority combine to produce a reading strategy more committed to the moral embodiment of the text than either to the doctrinal polemics of late antiquity or today's clever and arrogant theological posturing. Edward G. Mathews explores several Syriac authors' views on biblical anthropology in, "'What Manner of Man?' Early Syriac Reflections on Adam." Surveying Ephrem, Narsai, Isaac of Antioch, Jacob of Sarug, and Jacob of Edessa, the chapter traces an interpretive tradition that is diverse yet shares a commitment to the biblical view of humanity as essentially elevated in nature, task, and destiny. The Syriac tradition is taken as a reminder that genuinely biblical anthropology stands in sharp contrast to the modern reductionist views of many contemporary exegetes and theologians that construe humanity as mere incidents of matter, or as psychologized loci of personal experiences, rather than in terms of humanity's place in the universe.

Four essays engage contemporary hermeneutical issues more directly. In "What Do Syriac-Antiochene Exegesis and Textual Criticism Have To Do with Theology," Angela Kim Harkins

handsomely tracks the recent discussions in biblical hermeneutics that have led some to propose a partial retrieval of pre-modern reading strategies in order to bridge "the current gulf between biblical studies and theological inquiry" (166). Then she coordinates recent trends in the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible with features of pre-critical exegesis (especially Syriac). She notes that such exegetes as Ephrem or Aphrahat have strong respect for the *littera* of the text, yet also assume and creatively exploit the text's "plurality" of meaning. Similarly, the discipline of textual criticism has come to respect the "pluriformity" that the ancient text enjoyed. Something is to be learned from an approach to the text that recognizes its transcendent nature and authority without obsessing on a precisely fixed text form or narrow singularity of meaning. In the chapter, "Psalm 22 in Syriac Tradition," Stephen D. Ryan describes the various forms that the celebrated psalm has taken in Syriac translation and discusses the related Syriac commentary tradition. He offers a model for presenting the wealth of patristic reflection on a specific text for the sake of stimulating "a more theologically ecumenical exegesis" (208) that is ecclesially diverse (like the Syriac tradition) and synthesizes the strengths of the "patristic-medieval" method and "the modern historical-critical approach."

Anthony J. Salim explores the role that liturgy and catechesis play in forming attitudes towards scripture within a living community, in "Catechetical, Liturgical, and Biblical Implications of the *Husoyo* in Contemporary Maronite Tradition." John J. O'Keefe's essay, "Rejecting One's Masters: Theodoret of Cyrus, Antiochene Exegesis, and the Patristic Mainstream," restates and develops the author's proposal that "Antiochene exegesis" never existed as such but is a "hopeful projection of historically conscious moderns" (247), and that the attempts to conjure this phantom are largely misguided. Whereas some exegetes associated with Antioch—e.g. Chrysostom and especially Theodoret—manifest productive approaches to the biblical text because of their willingness to interpret christologically and figuratively, the ostensibly critical readings that their teachers Diodore and Theodore employed were so spiritually bland that the church was justified in squelching their voices. O'Keefe issues a challenge to contemporary interpreters that they imitate the Fathers by upholding the primacy of the text, rather than the primacy of

historical events behind it, thereby becoming comfortable again with the notion of multiple meanings—albeit responsibly controlled by something like the rule of faith.

The final chapters respond to the preceding essays from three different angles. Paul S. Russell offers a "Response from Patristic Theology," affirming the observation of several of the authors that much discussion of patristic exegesis has overdrawn the distinctions between different practitioners, while overlooking important nuances such as are evident in the Syriac tradition. In "An Historical Critic's Response," Robert D. Miller cautions against caricaturing the historical-critical method of interpretation—for which he finds ample evidence in the preceding essays. He maintains that a pursuit of the author's intended meaning may be conducted as a pursuit of "the divine author's intent" (277) and therefore well serve purposes of faith and worship. Ronald N. Beshara's "A Pastoral Theologian's Response," does not respond critically to the essays but affirms the value of the Syriac tradition for cultivating communal spirituality.

The book concludes without any indices or bibliography, beyond what respective authors cite in the footnotes to their essays.

As one might expect in such a volume, the collection is marked by a certain unevenness. Most of the essays treating particular patristic authors or texts make fine contributions to their topics that patristic scholars will find valuable. Of those that deal with hermeneutical matters more broadly, a few are focused so intently on agendas set by issues of Catholic interpretation and revelation that they will be of interest primarily to Catholic and Orthodox scholars. Several of the essays exhibit little awareness of the expansive literature on biblical hermeneutics and only a few engage current discussions of the theological interpretation of scripture as informed by the patristic and medieval tradition. This may be due to the Catholic/Orthodox orientation of many of the contributors, since some of the most vibrant discussions about these matters are taking place in Protestant biblical scholarship (e.g. *ressourcement*). The essays by O'Keefe, Ryan, and Harkins, and Miller's response, display greater awareness of these conversations and engage them more. Similarly, Salim's article and Beshara's response make worthy proposals, but their impact would increase measurably from a deeper engagement with contemporary discussions amongst

practical theologians about the formational interplay between teaching, ritual, dogma, and ethics within practicing communities. Tarazi's exposition of Chrysostom's ethical hermeneutic deserves a hearing and fits into the growing consideration of the place of virtue in epistemology and of theological commitment in exegetical research. But the presentation adopts such an anti-modernist polemical tone that readers may lose sight of the basic proposal behind the cloud of vitriol. Yet even the book's limitations instantiate the impulse underlying the conference and its essays: a desire for scholars and practitioners across disciplines and confessional lines to engage more fully in constructive dialogue about the function of scripture in Christian faith and practice, with a view not merely towards further understanding but the possibility of synthesis.

A great strength of the volume is that the contributors are divided as to whether an "Antiochene exegesis" actually exists and, if so, whether resuscitating it would be possible or beneficial. Different viewpoints on these subjects supply a healthy energy to the discussion, reminding the reader that the Christian tradition—whether Antiochene/Syriac or otherwise—must in the 21st-century regain its role as a vital resource, yet it is unwise to be dismissive of the problems posed by modern scholarship without genuinely engaging them. Perhaps a next step would involve synthesizing a grand theological-hermeneutical proposal, one genuinely inspired by Antiochene/Syriac modes of interpretation but that attempts to span the alleged "impasse" by fully tackling particular obstacles and charting a robust alternative approach. Such a task exceeds the purpose of the present collection. But as the conversation progresses, it is to be hoped that the appearance of this set of studies and others like them will stimulate projects that attempt such a synthesis.