

THE COSMIC CHRISTIAN VISION OF PRUDENTIUS' *LIBER CATHEMERINON*,  
AND THE INCULTURATION OF AUGUSTAN VATIC POETRY

by

Christopher Gordon McKelvie

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
September 2010

© Copyright by Christopher Gordon McKelvie, 2010

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS

The undersigned hereby certify that they have read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance a thesis entitled “THE COSMIC CHRISTIAN VISION OF PRUDENTIUS' *LIBER CATHEMERINON*, AND THE INCULTURATION OF AUGUSTAN VATIC POETRY” by Christopher Gordon McKelvie in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Dated: September 3, 2010

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Readers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

DATE: September 3, 2010

AUTHOR: Christopher Gordon McKelvie

TITLE: THE COSMIC CHRISTIAN VISION OF PRUDENTIUS' *LIBER  
CATHEMERINON*, AND THE INCULTURATION OF AUGUSTAN  
VATIC POETRY

DEPARTMENT OR SCHOOL: Classics

DEGREE: MA CONVOCATION: October YEAR: 2010

Permission is herewith granted to Dalhousie University to circulate and to have copied for non-commercial purposes, at its discretion, the above title upon the request of individuals or institutions.

---

Signature of Author

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

The author attests that permission has been obtained for the use of any copyrighted material appearing in the thesis (other than the brief excerpts requiring only proper acknowledgement in scholarly writing), and that all such use is clearly acknowledged.

## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family,  
to my parents Lorraine and Gordon,  
to my Sisters Katie and Christy,  
to all my Brother Franciscans,  
who put up with me while I wrote it:  
Peter, Paul, James, Nathanael, Francesco, Grant, and Pio,  
to Fr. Roberto,  
and to Dr. Peter O'Brien, my adviser.

Lastly, and most importantly,  
this work is devoted to the Lord God Almighty,  
Through the hands of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
my Mother and Queen.

May the Holy name of Jesus be forever praised,  
adored, glorified, honoured, and loved  
by every human heart both now and forever!

*Ad Iesum Per Mariam!*

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	vii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
Prudentius the Christian Poet.....	1
Chapter II: Toward a Prudentian Hermeneutic.....	8
A Survey of Recent Scholarship.....	8
Prudentius and Scriptural Exegesis.....	16
Augustan Poetic Exegesis.....	20
The Image of God in Nature.....	22
Chapter III: Reading the Scripture of the World, Hymns 1-6.....	25
Christ Hidden in Nature.....	25
A Primer of Salvation History.....	25
Chapter IV: The Order of Grace.....	41
A New Covenant .....	41
The Final Days.....	52
The Sun, Illumination, and Divine Synthesis.....	60
Chapter V: Prudentius as <i>Vates Christianus</i> .....	62
Reinterpreting the Vatic Poets.....	62
Prudentius and Augustus .....	63
<i>Vates</i> and the Augustan Reforms.....	64
Prudentius' Vatic Vocation and the Conversion of the <i>Camena</i> .....	69
<i>Vates: Rex, Propheta, Sacerdos</i> .....	73
The Christianized <i>Vates</i> -Concept.....	81
Chapter VI: The <i>Locus Amoenus</i> in Salvation History Typology.....	86
<i>In Paradisum Deducant te Angeles</i> .....	86
She Will Crush Your Head, and You Will Strike at Her Heel.....	86
Exodus and Elysium.....	92
The Lord is my Shepherd.....	95
Chapter VII: Prudentius and the Fourth Eclogue.....	100
<i>Tuus iam Regnet Christus Rex</i> .....	100
Chapter VIII: The Heros Reinterpreted.....	111
Aeneas the Priest-King.....	111
The <i>Propheta-Heros</i> .....	112
Israel as <i>Heros</i> .....	115

<i>Christus Heros</i> .....	117
The First Combat.....	121
The Final Battle .....	124
A Way to the Stars.....	126
Light and the Soul.....	127
Chapter IX: Conclusion.....	135
<i>Carmen Saeculare, Carmen Perpetuum, Carmen Historicum, Carmen Christi</i> ....	135
Works Cited .....	140

## Abstract

The object of this study is two-fold: 1) to show that the *Liber Cathemerinon* of Prudentius Aurelius Clemens is not just a series of unrelated hymns, but a poetic *breviarium*, or handbook, of fundamental Nicene Christian belief. Behind the literal narrative lies a salvation history, running through the chief elements of the Old and New Testaments. 2) To examine how Prudentius not only presents the salvation-history narrative, but also translates it into the Augustan poetic idiom through intertextual dialogue with Augustan pagan authors, primarily Vergil, Horace, and Ovid. By reinterpreting and refuting pagan religious sentiment through developed intertextual dialogue, Prudentius produces a hybrid world-view that is both Roman and Christian.

## Chapter I: Introduction

### ***Prudentius the Christian Poet***

In the late fourth century, a Christian layman retired from a successful government career to write Christian poetry in his native Spain. Well-educated in both Christian and pagan learning, a capable and original poet, all that is left to us of Aurelius Prudentius Clemens are his name, a body of poems, and endless speculation, none of which have been definitively resolved by Prudentian scholars, and much of which is out of the scope of the present study.<sup>1</sup> He introduces himself to his audience in a prologue to the hymns and commends his poetic work to God in an epilogue, but apart from this only the internal references to historical events in the Late Antique period help to place Prudentius accurately in time. His poems, however, remained popular up until the Renaissance, and had a lasting impact on the style and metrics of Latin hymnody and prosody. Of his lyrical works, there are three books, the *Liber Peristephanon* (*Book of the Crowns of Victory*), a book of fourteen *passiones* or martyrdom-hymns of early Christian martyrs; the *Dittochaeon* (*Two-Fold Libation*), a series of 49 short poems on episodes from the New and Old Testaments; and the *Liber Cathemerinon* (*Book for all of the Days*), which is the subject of this study. It is a book of twelve hymns for celebrating various daily events and offering them to God, running through the events of the day (hymns 1-6), and specific celebrations in Christian life, such as fasting (hymns 7 and 8), Christmas (hymn 11) and the burial of the dead (hymn 10). They follow the theme of the

---

<sup>1</sup> For a summary of many of these disputes, such as dates of composition, Prudentius' town of birth, and other details, see the introductions of Charlet, Malamud, Palmer, Witke, van Assendelft, and Thomson.



Sun's rise, waxing, waning, and setting (hymns 1-6), as well as its departure and return that marks the seasons (7-12). The whole work is shaped and informed by its solar theme, which unifies the work. The light of the Sun provides a Christian allegory for God's presence in the world, and the individual soul, whose light is derivative from God. It is generally agreed that the hymns are too long to be sung, though portions of them have come into the Roman breviary and provided modern hymns in translation.<sup>2</sup>

The interesting aspect of the hymns which makes them valuable for literary study is their hybrid character, partaking both of the Christian Scriptural and Patristic tradition, as well as the Roman poetic heritage, bringing together the best of Augustan poetic diction with Nicene Christianity and Patristic Scriptural exegesis. Prudentius transcends practically every convention, mixing various modes together within a single poem, though the *Cathemerinon* as a whole is considered a lyric work on account of its lyric meters.

While Rome was now thoroughly Christianized, apart from a scarcely-clinging minority, the education of the wealthy Roman was still a pagan literary and oratorical education, relying mainly on the works of Vergil, Horace and Ovid, as well as the Imperial poets.<sup>3</sup> Although many Christian authors had lent their minds to replacing these pagan works with Christian equivalents no Christian texts as yet existed that could match the perfection of style of the Golden and Silver-age poets. Prior to Prudentius, early Christian poetry was limited to only a few narrow genres such as iambic hymns, acrostics, Vergilian centos, and Biblical hexameter epics which either drew minimally

---

<sup>2</sup> Raby, 45.

<sup>3</sup> Roberts, 38-65.

upon the pagan tradition, or exclusively on Vergil.<sup>4</sup> This entailed the use of either simple or non-traditional metres, but tended to exclude both the cultivated diction of the best pagan poetry, as well as its tropes, themes, and cultural echoes. Many remnants survive which fall into three broad categories: didactic hexameter works, Biblical epics, and hymns, some of which were written in hexameter verse, but with little originality, and a marked departure from classical pronunciation in their metrical arrangement. Christianity was only beginning to become a religion of the learned, and this was reflected in the limited genius of the early Latin poetic works.

The intention was to surpass pagan literature on its own grounds, showing Christ to be greater than any mere invention, and communicating his redemption in a way that would speak to the Roman heart. This means that Christ and his followers must become the very embodiment of the best of *romanitas*, which was dying a slow death in the corrupt late Empire. Prudentius grafts himself onto this movement, but with a greater sympathy towards the pagan literary achievement. Though it may be devoid of religious truth, symbols abound that can be grafted on to the Gospel, and serve as a medium of translation for Christian revelation in terms the pagan mind could grasp more easily. The sheer aesthetic value of the works makes them a desirable model of imitation.

Unfortunately, critics have tended, on the whole, to treat Prudentius harshly, dismissing his work as either an unsuccessful Christian emulation of Golden Latin poetry or an attempt to dilute Christianity with pagan poetry for the sake of mere aesthetics. Much of the work prior to the 1970's even reduces Prudentius to a source for long lists of allusions to other authors, without any attention to Prudentius' adaptation of these

---

<sup>4</sup> Raby, 11-43.

quotations for his own poetic project.<sup>5</sup> Thankfully recent Prudentian scholarship, pioneered by Jacques Fontaine's more sympathetic readings,<sup>6</sup> has turned back to Prudentius' undertakings with renewed interest, seeing in his work an attempt at dialogue and synthesis with his own Roman culture and the Patrician class where paganism still remained a vital force in Late Antique Rome.<sup>7</sup> The main body of Prudentius' work tends towards a polemical didacticism, and in this, he reflects the oratorical and polemic spirit of his age, as we see in the works of Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and the iconic Tertullian. Yet unlike these great Fathers of the Church, Prudentius possesses an altogether unique confidence in Roman poetry as a way to incarnate Christianity in the Roman world.<sup>8</sup>

Though most of the great men of the Late Antique world were raised on the classics, much can be found in their pages condemning close connections between the two. Thus Jerome's "what has Horace to do with the Psalter, or Vergil with the Gospel, or Cicero with the Apostle,"<sup>9</sup> and Tertullian's "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"<sup>10</sup> Prudentius' position is quite the opposite, for his lyric style in the *Cathemerinon* looks to the best Alexandrian models of Golden Latin poetry.

The Greek fathers were in a separate camp on this issue. St. Basil writes a famous letter to a nephew of his, as to how to read Homer allegorically, so as to arrive at Christian virtues "hidden" in the text. In this letter he is confident that what is good and

---

5 See Palmer 1.

6 See Fontaine "Le Mélange Des Genres Dans La Poésie De Prudence," "La poésie comme art spirituel," "La louange des heures," and "Trois variations de Prudence sur le thème du paradis."

7 Cochrane, 331-338.

8 Palmer, 98-100.

9 Palmer 99.

10 Palmer 99.

noble is universal, and to be found even in Homer.<sup>11</sup> One need only lay down simple interpretive principles, most especially allegory to diminish the immorality of the texts, and find an analogue to Christian virtue contained within. The *Cathemerinon* stands out among Prudentius' other works as a rich source of an emerging Roman Christianity.

While the mainstay of the Christian world are Greek-speakers, a Latin Christian culture is starting to take its definitive shape in his same time. He stands at a crucial turning-point in the history of the West, an age of great tension and excitement, as Latin Christians, with Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Cyprian, and others as spiritual fathers, began to forge a new culture. This need to inculturate and own the Gospel in a distinctly Roman idiom was to be realized in the works of the Latin Fathers, and yet much contention still remained as to what could be kept, and what was still too near to pagan Rome and her idols.

The purpose of the present study is two-fold. In the first part, I aim to show that the *Cathemerinon* is not just a haphazard collection of liturgical hymns, but an ordered, organic whole, with a definite purpose, and a directed narrative flow.<sup>12</sup> Using the daily and annual movement of the sun as the central metaphor that informs the work, Prudentius delivers a two-fold *catechesis* on nature and grace. Specifically, he uses nature as the medium to explore the Christian understanding of the relationship between God and the world that is called salvation history, and grace as the divinization of the material world, specifically fallen man. As Witke notes, “[Prudentius'] hymns in the

---

11 cf. Basil. *To Young Men*.

12 A significant number of scholars believed that more hymns were to follow, but were cut short for reasons we do not know, and that an organic unity in the work is not to be found. See especially Charlet's tidy summary of Puech, Bergman, and Labriolle's thoughts on the matter, who were very influential Prudentian scholars. See Charlet, 45-47.

*Cathemerinon* and *Peristephanon* successfully body forth the Christian world-view in classical meters...”<sup>13</sup> This reading of the *Cathemerinon* looks primarily at the allegorical content of the text itself, and the movement of the Christian understanding of time as a creature whose life runs from the creation to the consummation of the cosmos. Christian salvation history begins with the making of the world, the fall of creation through Adam and Eve's disobedience, its redemption and divinization through Christ who is God and man, and his final *parousia* in glory when the world will be judged for everlasting union with God or separation from him.

In the second part, having shown that salvation history is the strand that unites the *Cathemerinon*. I will examine the pagan *topoi* of Augustan poetry that Prudentius subsumes into the Christian context, so as to fuse the traditions into a new Roman, Christian context. I will be looking primarily at intertextual elements in the hymns of the *Cathemerinon* which are drawn from the works of Vergil, Ovid, and Horace, three of the most prolific poets of Golden Age Latin, and the manner in which Prudentius appropriates the Augustan *uates*-concept to become a valid successor of the poets. By examining how Prudentius reinterprets pagan material in light of the Christian world-view, particularly cosmic themes such as the Golden Age, the *locus amoenus*, the Underworld; and the pagan *heros* recast in light of Jesus Christ, who becomes the definitive Christian *heros* by redeeming the whole cosmos. My hope is to show that Prudentius was much more than an imitator whose intention was to dress Christianity in the poetic language of Augustan Rome, but an innovator who realized that if he could tap into the desires that underlie pagan poetry, he could redirect the pagan imagination to

---

13 Witke, 102.

Jesus Christ, and thus evangelize a still-pagan Rome.

## Chapter II: Toward a Prudentian Hermeneutic

### *A Survey of Recent Scholarship*

The *Liber Cathemerinon* has received a significant amount of European attention, but has been greatly neglected in English scholarship as a text that stands on its own merits. As Michael Roberts notes in his work on the *Liber Peristephanon*, "English-speaking scholars have preferred to write about the *Psychomachia*... [but] on the continent of Europe the *Cathemerinon* has been most studied..."<sup>14</sup> The most recent studies of Prudentius in the English scholarly world have focused on the *Peristephanon's* relationship to Late Antique popular piety and the cult of the martyrs, notably those by Roberts himself, Martha Malamud, and Anne-Marie Palmer.<sup>15</sup> Palmer and Malamud published in the same year, but take two very different approaches to the work. Malamud presents Prudentius as a kind of Christian Ovid who is critiquing his Christian culture in the *Peristephanon* by means of pagan literature. The main value of her study is that she provides interesting insights into Prudentius' re-interpretation of classical models. Her study, however, leans too closely on Prudentius' models rather than his own work, whose literal level she refuses to take as sincere, leading her to conclusions which do not always match with other aspects of Prudentius' corpus.<sup>16</sup> Both Roberts and Palmer are more interested in the cultural context of Prudentius' martyr-poems, and their observations have

---

14 Michael Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993, 4.

15 Malamud, *A Poetics of Transformation: Prudentius and Classical Mythology*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989; Anne-Marie Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; and Roberts "Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs."

16 As per her conclusions that Prudentius is critical of the cult of the martyrs, and uses them as a focus for "poetic exploration," see Malamud 177-180.

contributed greatly to this present study. Roberts, receiving the world-view of Prudentius in the *Peristephanon* as sincere, sees there a reworking of *Romanitas* which links the *Cathemerinon* and the *Peristephanon* together. Roberts concludes:

It is as though Prudentius has redrawn the map of the Roman world and reinterpreted the course of Roman History [...] The Roman Empire -- in Prudentius' case the Western Empire -- has become sacred space, demarcated by the *monumenta piorum*, the shrines of the martyrs. [...] In this way, the *Peristephanon* complements the *Cathemerinon*. Both are concerned with the sacralization of time. The *Cathemerinon* circumscribes the daily round of Christian devotion and marks it off as sacred time. (Roberts (1993), 189-190; 193)

He goes on to mention that this project was very much in the air, and that Prudentius' contemporary Pope Damasus, was the one who “spiritualized” the traditional Roman calendar and realigned the civic year in accordance with sacred time.”<sup>17</sup> Roberts' own convictions mirror those of Fontaine, who sees in the *Cathemerinon* and *Peristephanon* an attempt to create a lyrical breviary for the educated Christian faithful.<sup>18</sup> More importantly, Roberts sees this endeavour as a catechetical movement, an attempt to Christianize the pagan world-view through poetry, setting the tone of praise and catechesis at the centre.

Palmer's study is indispensable because of its keen observations of Augustan poetic models informing Prudentius' *poesis*, and the kinship he feels with his classical predecessors:

I hope to show here that Prudentius imitates and assimilates classical models in such a way as to give Christian significance, not only to the formal aspects of secular poetry, but also to many of the major values which it expresses.[...] His art assumes an audience equally familiar with his secular models, since often an appreciation of the original context is required in order to achieve the fullest

---

<sup>17</sup> Roberts “Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs” 193.

<sup>18</sup> Fontaine, “*La louange des heures*,” 183-194.



understanding of the new, Christian context. (Palmer 101,103)

Palmer is very clear that Prudentius' artistry involves reinterpretation of his models, not only mere substitution, as his detractors have suggested, and to read his poetry as intended requires a thorough knowledge of the Augustan "language" he is speaking. Yet in his poetry, Christianity is not just a substitution for the devices and motifs of Augustan poetry either. Prudentius brings in the best of the pagan tradition, so as to graft it onto Christianity, in an attempt to direct the pagan to Christ. Both authors present a useful reconstruction of a Prudentian world-view, where Christian and Roman cultural narratives contribute to a synthetic Roman Christian *poesis*. According to Roberts Prudentius reinterprets Augustan poetry from the roots up, recasting profane space as sacred space to achieve this synthesis : The eternal city has become the Holy city, her history intermingled with salvation history, and all of time has become God's time.

The most recent work on the *Psychomachia* also has valuable light to shed on this present study. Marc Mastrangelo finds Prudentius reinterpreting the Roman cultural narrative through the assimilation of the *Aeneid* as a typological text.<sup>19</sup> According to Mastrangelo, Prudentius recasts the battle for a new homeland into the historically incarnated struggle to inherit God's kingdom taking place in each individual soul.<sup>20</sup> The *Liber Cathemerinon* is similar in that its rhetorical goals also rely on assimilation rather than polemics. It is very effective, facilitating the peaceful translation and fusion of the two world-views by translating the new Christian order into terms a pagan can understand. Thus *romanitas* and Augustan universalism become typological

---

19 Mastrangelo, *The Roman Self in Late Antiquity. Prudentius and the Poetics of the Soul*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008, 60.

20 *Ibid.* 160-175.

prefigurements of Christian virtue and Rome's *fatum* becomes divine providence.

In contrast to the diverse approaches to the *Peristephanon* and *Psychomachia*, which, draw on multiple disciplines and methodologies, scholarship on the *Cathemerinon* has tended to be more staid and compartmentalized. The most recent studies of this work are those of Marion van Assendelft, Jean-Claude Charlet, and Willy Evenepoel, only one of which is in English, and none of which are more recent than 1986, in keeping with Roberts' earlier observations<sup>21</sup> By far the most comprehensive is Charlet's encyclopedic *Création poétique dans la Cathemerinon de Prudence*, which examines the work as an organic whole, and summarizes all Prudentian scholarship contemporary and previous to it; one must also consult W. Evenepoel's article in response to several of Charlet's conclusions.<sup>22</sup> Charlet and Evenepoel build mainly on the German critical work that precedes them, much of which has been devoted to a search for the unifying element of the text, which most scholars sense, but cannot adequately deduce. For Charlet, the twelve hymns form a tripartite unity, moving in three nested cycles that represent the Christian spiritual life. The cycle of the whole (hymns 1-12) celebrates spiritual renewal under the allegorical themes of dawn, night, death, and resurrection, and the sustaining power of the Eucharistic meal; this further breaks into the two smaller thematic cycles of prayer for the daily rhythm of life (hymns 1-6), and for the larger liturgical year (hymns 9-12 as corresponding to Lent, Easter, and Christmas).<sup>23</sup> Charlet's impressive work has been the most influential in forming Chapters three and four of this study, owing to his

---

21 J.-L. Charlet, *La Création Poétique dans la Cathemerinon de Prudence*, Paris: Belles Lettres 1982; M. van Assendelft, *Sol Ecce Surgit Igneus*, Groningen: Bouma's Buekhuis, 1976; W. Evenepoel, *Zakelijke en literaire onderzoekingen betreffende het Liber Cathemerinon van Aurelius Prudentius Clemens*, Brussels: Paleis der Academien 1979.

22 Evenepoel "Some Literary and Liturgical Problems" 79-85.

23 Charlet 58-59.

firm conviction that the *Cathemerinon* does contain an organic unity. Many clues point to this, above all the structure of the *Liber* that Charlet discovered which informs the placement of the hymns. Evenepoel responds to Charlet's theses with his own doubts about this arrangement, especially the liturgical significance of hymns 9-12. Evenepoel argues that the titles of the hymns which help Charlet's interpretation were not *necessarily* of Prudentius' own invention, but may have been a later addition, and also that the "liturgical seasons" schema Charlet reads into the hymns represents a later tradition.<sup>24</sup> While Evenepoel's arguments are convincing, he does not negate Charlet's larger assertion of a comprehensive structure, only its liturgical dimension, leaving the order of the poems intact and their thematic content, at least, mirroring Charlet's schema.

Charlet also discovered that Prudentius has devised the *Cathemerinon* so that the meters of specific authors are imitated in ring-cycles, linking the hymns together and creating a pattern that shapes the whole.<sup>25</sup> Hymns 1, 2, 11, and 12 are all written in iambic acatalectic dimeter of Ambrosian hymns, providing a "Christian shell" to the *Cathemerinon*, like book-ends. In pairs, the rest of the hymns follow this nested pattern, like Russian dolls. Hymns 3 and 10 are written in the favoured meters of Ausonius, a shallowly converted poet of Prudentius' own day; 4 and 9 recall either Catullus or Hilary of Poitiers; 5 and 8 recall the meters of Horace's Odes; and lastly, 6 and 7 seem to be in imitation of Seneca's tragic meters. If we take Catullus as Prudentius' model in hymns 4 and 9, then a pattern emerges. Beginning with a Christian author, the poems rely on incrementally more secular authors up to hymn 6 and 7, the midpoint of the twelve

---

<sup>24</sup> Evenepoel "Some Literary and Liturgical Problems" 81-83.

<sup>25</sup> Charlet 58-59.

hymns, after which they return back again to the thoroughly Christian Ambrosian hymn. Charlet does not comment on this movement or engage with the possibilities it suggests. However, it seems plausible that Prudentius is mimicking the movement of the sun in his meters, suggesting an *exitus-reditus* pattern from sunrise to sunrise, a clue that his narrative will take the reader, allegorically, from creation to the fall: the return of all things to God at the end of time. Prudentius will retell the whole of salvation history. It is this insight that helped to shape the present inquiry, which seeks to show that the salvation history narrative is the backbone of the *Cathemerinon*, uniting the work as an organic, teleological whole.

Representing the more philological approach is M. van Assendelft, *Sol Ecce Surgit Igneus*, an interpretive essay and *vade-mecum* commentary which examines the hymns phrase by phrase, noting classical reminiscences that help shape the hymns for which light-imagery provides the central allegory,<sup>26</sup> as well as Prudentius' use of light as an extended Christian allegory. Her thorough familiarity with preceding studies is itself an asset,<sup>27</sup> as well as her observations on Prudentius' Augustan influences, which are largely in accord with Palmer's.<sup>28</sup> Paying close attention to Prudentius' rejection of the dualism which characterized the many "Christian" heretical systems of thought in his day through the theme of light and darkness, she notes:

[...] [Prudentius] is consistent in his attack on the representation of the devil as a god, as an entity with a creative power of its own . . . Salvation is not, as is so often the case in dualistic systems, the severing of good and bad, of light and dark, but rather the restoration *to light* of the dark." (van Assendelft, 1976, p. 33,

---

26 *i.e.* Hymns 1, 2, 5, and 6.

27 As van Assendelft 10-21.

28 Especially van Assendelft 1-38.

emphasis added).

For van Assendelft, a poetics of *synthesis* dominates the work of Prudentius, where the darkness signifies the permanent absence of light (i.e. the damned, Satan, and the fallen angels), or the capacity to be enlightened (i.e. man, pagan Rome). For Prudentius, darkness (evil) is dispositional, and not ontological: it is found in a will that chooses darkness over light, with Satan sitting at the centre of the darkness that menaces the cosmos. Thus, Prudentius presents the strong anti-dualistic conviction that both matter and man are good and redeemable through the mystery of Christ's Incarnation, and that evil will never be equal to God. Prudentius shows a great confidence in God's likeness found in creation, and creation's participation in the divine will. This vision informs the *Cathemerinon* and confounds any hints of dualism that may be read in. The ecumenical extent of this sentiment is far-reaching, as for Prudentius, Rome merely needs to be enlightened to be saved. To disparage Rome is to heap despair on God's creation, because although the city of Romulus sits in darkness, it can still receive the light, and will be ennobled when it finally cooperates. This synthetic approach to paganism allows Prudentius to help extend the universal kingdom of God to all, and recalls the prophecy of Anchises to mind, with a slight emendation: *parcere **volentibus**, et debellare superbos*.<sup>29</sup>

Another of van Assendelft's essential contributions is her desire to reform and refocus the discussion surrounding the nature of Christian allegory. In her summary of the debate, she points out that some define Christian allegory to include symbols, signs,

---

<sup>29</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 6.852-853, with emendation and emphasis added.

metaphors and types, while others restricting their scope only to Christological typology in the spirit of Daniélou and De Lubac, who follow St. Paul.<sup>30</sup> After this helpful and well-documented synopsis of scholarly approaches, she chooses Quintilian's definition of allegory as sustained metaphor.<sup>31</sup> From this basic definition, van Assendelft takes the middle ground by defining *Christian allegory* as sustained metaphor with a particular attention to eschatology, and prophecy-fulfilment.<sup>32</sup> Thus, according to van Assendelft, Prudentius merely takes the symbols, tropes, and types established by the tradition and shapes them into an allegorical whole in each hymn.<sup>33</sup> While her approach is helpful for discerning the essentially Christian character of the work, van Assendelft fails to grapple with Prudentius' interaction with pagan texts in any systematic way and by limiting her examination of light to only four of the hymns, she fails to find a cohesive structure in the *Cathemerinon* apart from light-imagery, which is the main intent of her study. Unfortunately, this study, too, adds to an impression of disarray in the *Cathemerinon*, especially since hymn 6 fails her criteria as a Christian allegory, as it follows Scripture too literally.<sup>34</sup>

In light of these studies on the *Cathemerinon*, it is clear that Prudentius maintains a dialogue with the poetry of the Augustan age, especially with Vergil, Horace, and Ovid, and that his goal is a fusion of the Christian cultural narrative with the Roman, communicated through reinterpreted Augustan poetry. Not only this, but a macro-

---

30 van Assendelft 20-2, for Daniélou and De Lubac, see note 45 below.

31 *Ibid.* 20.

32 *Ibid.* 20 sqq.

33 *Ibid.* 21.

34 *Ibid.* 26-28.

narrative exists behind the seemingly disparate poems of the *Cathemerinon* which Prudentius conveys through Augustan models, a historical movement that parallels its allegorical analogue of the sun's daily and annual movements. To find this narrative, we must first establish a hermeneutic for reading the *Cathemerinon*, so as to gain insight into Prudentius' allegorical reading of Scripture and poetry together that allows him to reinterpret, adapt and fuse them together.

### ***Prudentius and Scriptural Exegesis***

The influence of the Fathers in Prudentius is pronounced, especially of Ambrose, Tertullian, and Cyprian.<sup>35</sup> In this two-fold study of the cosmic vision Prudentius presents in the *Cathemerinon*, and the hybrid cultural narrative he employs to translate Christian revelation, we will search for our hermeneutic exactly where Prudentius did. We will examine the techniques of Scriptural exegesis which Origin pioneered and the Latin Fathers followed in turn, examining the common ground that this exegesis holds with Augustan poetry.

Reading the Old Testament presented many difficulties to the early Christians. Although they were an outgrowth of Judaism, many aspects of the Old Covenant could no longer be taken literally in light of Christ's teachings, and some had to be abandoned altogether. Some of the New Testament examples include the end of dietary restrictions, circumcision, and the institution of Eucharistic celebrations.<sup>36</sup> And yet, the Scriptures were still the word of God, as Jesus himself had asserted, and within which he had been

---

<sup>35</sup> Raby suspects the Greek Fathers as well, seeing common elements. Raby 69.

<sup>36</sup> See especially the Counsel of Jerusalem recorded in Acts:15:1-29.

revealed, but in a hidden fashion, as Jesus reveals to the disciples on the road to Emmaus.<sup>37</sup> Thus a grave interpretive problem lay at hand: how to lift this veil of the Hebrew Scriptures? Two main styles of Scriptural exegesis gradually emerged, the first of which comes from the letters of Paul, and the other of which is a Patristic extension of Paul's own typological exegesis.

Pauline typology is found in the Scriptures, where Paul frequently uses Old Testament passages to show how they prefigure mysteries which Christ fulfilled. The first example in the Scriptures is found in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians (Grondin 29):

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the freeborn woman. The son of the slave woman was born naturally, the son of the freeborn through a promise. Now this is an **allegory**. These women represent two covenants. One was from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; this is Hagar. Hagar represents Sinai, a mountain in Arabia; it corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery along with her children. But the Jerusalem above is freeborn, and she is our mother. For it is written: "Rejoice, you barren one who bore no children; break forth and shout, you who were not in labour; for more numerous are the children of the deserted one than of her who has a husband." Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of the promise. (Gal.4:21-28, emphasis added)

While St. Paul speaks of allegory, he proceeds to give a typological analysis of the Genesis story of Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, as the representations of those marked for salvation and those who are not, linking past, present and future together.<sup>38</sup>

Thus typology is always historical, recalling a past event with a present relevance, and an antitype that provides the future fulfilment. It is also *Christological*, since Christ is the

---

<sup>37</sup> I have taken all Old Testament and Epistle quotations from The New American Bible, and all Gospel quotations from Aland and Kurt "The Synopsis of the Four Gospels." to better show the coherence of parallel Synoptic passages. Lk. 24:27: "And, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself [Jesus]"

<sup>38</sup> cf. Gen.16:15; 29:2, 9.



veiled content of the Scriptures. The link of type and antitype serves to illuminate additional aspects of the mystery, as in the case of Abraham, who lived long before the Law was revealed. Thus, in Biblical typology, the Old Testament is only understood in light of the New, that is to say, in Christ. Building on this precedent, Origin proposed the three-sense approach to Scripture, inspired by Philo's allegorical exegesis of the Old Testament and Biblical/Patristic New Testament typology.

Philo's allegorical approach consists in finding a solution to a textual inconsistency on the literal level, which is the clue that a deeper significance needs to be found,<sup>39</sup> working on the assumption that since the divine author of Scripture is God, it must all be true. Thus, allegorical interpretation becomes necessary in order to preserve the authority of the text.<sup>40</sup> Philo indicates two senses of Scripture, the literal and the allegorical, which are like body and soul: the one for the unlearned, and the second for the more spiritual elite.<sup>41</sup> Because Philonic allegory in practice tended to exceed the bounds of the literal frequently, and because it tended towards the language of Orphic mysticism it was unsuitable for rabbinical Hebrews and Church Fathers both, who sought a more measured approach with a clearer method.<sup>42</sup>

Origin's derivative three-fold approach consists in dividing a passage of Scripture into three meanings: one for the body, one for the intellect, and one for the soul.<sup>43</sup> The first concerns historical detail, the second, a deeper meaning for those who have progressed somewhat in grace, and the last reveals the mysteries of God hidden in the

---

39 Grondin 26.

40 *Ibid.* 27.

41 *Ibid.* 27.

42 *Ibid.* 27-28.

43 *Ibid.* 30-31.

Scriptures only to perfected souls.<sup>44</sup> Despite his reliance on the Philonic model, Origen's exegesis takes a different turn because it is Christological first and conciliatory only in light of Christ. Origen directs understanding of Scripture towards knowledge of Christ rather than resolving problematic texts into esoteric truths as does Philonic exegesis.<sup>45</sup> The method is similar, but while Philo relies on mystical explanation, Origen has a target which guides the exegesis, and that is Christ revealed in the New Testament.

Gradually, Origen's allegorical method was refined into the familiar four-senses of Scripture, first enumerated by John Cassian, a monastic contemporary of Prudentius, whom he may have read. The four senses resolve into (1) the literal / historical meaning, (2) an *allegorical* / doctrinal meaning, (3) a moral meaning, and (4) an anagogical / eschatological meaning that reveals things to come in the end-times.<sup>46</sup> Through these four senses, the typological meaning of an Old Testament event, person, place, object, or poetic image is connected with its New Testament antitype, so as to be understood in the Christian context, and then is projected into an eschatological meaning to come. This process of working backward leads to the accrual of many images, symbols, and metaphors which are instantly understood for their typological value, rather than their purely narrative meaning, as for instance, Prudentius' use of the crowing rooster to

---

44 *Ibid.* 30-31.

45 The debate on Philonic allegory and the extent to which resembles and informs Patristic exegesis is not one that will be treated here, but for those who are interested, consult especially Jean Pépin, *Mythe et Allégorie: Les Origines Grecques et les Contestations Judéo- Chrétiennes*, Paris: Aubier, 1958; Henri de Lubac *Typologie et Allégorisme*, *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 34, 1947, 180-266; W. De Boer, *Hermeneutic Problems in Early Christian Literature*, *Vigiliae Christianae*, 1, (1947), 150-167; Jean Daniélou, *Herméneutique Judéo-Chrétienne*, *Ermeneutica è tradizione* (Archivio di filosofia) Padua, (1963), 255-261.

46 Grondin 31-32.

signify Christ's *parousia*.<sup>47</sup> Prudentius' own exegesis of Scripture in the *Cathemerinon* tends to follow a similar schema, of which he is fairly self-conscious, often marking allegories as *figura*, *signum*, *imago*, *effigies*, or *aenigma*.<sup>48</sup> Drawing on the stock of symbols that had become well-known, Prudentius centres his *Cathemerinon* around light-imagery and the sun in particular, typologically understood to be the symbol of Christ who is the *lux mundi*.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Augustan Poetic Exegesis***

Christians are not alone in their exegesis of cultural narrative texts, as a similar approach dominated the poetry of Augustan Rome. Instituted, perhaps, by Stoic and Epicurean mistrust of *mirabilia*, a certain demythologizing hermeneutic gained prominence, using an allegorical method similar to that of Philo.<sup>50</sup> Yet in their hands, the goal was not to find religious truth, but to locate historical or philosophical truths hidden within the poetry and dismiss their religious content. The Augustan poets, however, take a very different approach in projecting myth forward, instead of trying to uncover its profane roots. Thus, there exists a kind of typological thinking which equates the past with the present, in a kind of prophecy-fulfilment, like that van Assendelft associates with Christian allegory.<sup>51</sup> Vergil is the best example of this kind of thinking, and it is no mistake that he is the most beloved Roman author of the Christians apart from Scripture itself. Vergil's fourth *Eclogue* is a good example of this pagan typological exegesis.

---

47 cf. Prud. *Cath.* 1.1-8.

48 cf, in order: *figura*: *Cath.* 1.16, 6.31, 6.132, 10.140, 12.143, 12.184; *signum*: *Cath.* 1.45, 6.79, 6.132, 6.135, 6.147, 12.30, 12.56, 12.58, *imago* *Cath.* 2.85, (6.46, in the sense of deception); *effigies* *Cath.* 3.98, 3.194; 10.135; *aenigma* *Cath.* 10.136.

49 cf. John 8:12.

50 Pépin 146-147.

51 van Assendelft 19-21.

Though very different from Biblical typology, which deals with two inspired texts, Vergil applies Sibylline prophecy to a historical event to achieve a similar result: in this case, locating the return of the Golden Age in the reign Augustus<sup>52</sup> and the subjection of the world to Roman Law.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, the *Aeneid* could be called a reverse-typological construction, as it retells history in light of the Augustan reign by fabricating suitable prophecies, some of which are implicitly fulfilled, some of which never were, at least not by Augustus.<sup>54</sup>

Similarly, Horace uses mythical exegesis as a way of contextualizing and ennobling the present. Associating Augustus and Rome as a unit with noble myths of heroes and gods, present reality is cast as the divine order. Obedience to the regime becomes *pietas*, and disobedience *nefas*.<sup>55</sup> Ovid's project also plays on this same technique to reveal its novelty and implausibility. He likes to reveal the loose ends of his predecessors' adaptations which were dropped, and uses them to weave the parodies that result, showing that Augustus is not the culmination of the myths, or that he is the culmination of the less noble ones.<sup>56</sup>

Prudentius responds to the messianic narratives of the Augustans by appropriating and reinterpreting their images and devices. The poets provide a rich language of images and symbols which, with adaptation, can aid the pagan understanding of Christian

---

52 In this reading of Augustan court-poetry, I follow Miller, whose study shows ample links in the Augustan poets' casting of Augustus as Apollo's special protégé, and a secular Messiah. This is a theme which Prudentius was very sensitive to, and merits more extensive study. For Prudentius' ideas on this manifested elsewhere, see Fishwick "Prudentius and the Cult of Divus Augustus."

53 In reference to Vergil's references to Augustus and Actian Apollo: "These typological passages clearly demonstrate that Augustus' association with Apollo helped to shape Virgil's epic vision of the god [Apollo]." Miller 97.

54 Courcelle 308.

55 Miller 337.

revelation. Because of this, an essential element for reading Prudentius' poetry is an awareness of his deliberate engagement with pagan prophecy-fulfilment typology, in order to show that its aspirations and desires are true, but fulfilled in Christ: its contents are pure poetic artifice.

### ***The Image of God in Nature***

In the *Cathemerinon*, Prudentius reads not only Scripture, but even nature exegetically, as a “text” that contains the Gospel. For Prudentius, all of creation is incarnational, since the Incarnation of Christ marks the central moment of history, and so all things point allegorically to Christ. If nature is a vehicle for divine truth, then the consideration of daily actions performed in union with God provide small daily theophanies, hidden in a meal, or the lighting of a lamp at dusk. If nature is itself a testimony to Christ, then the *Cathemerinon* becomes a work which is not only doxological, but catechetical. The poems, together, teach pagans that Christ is not a fiction, but manifest in the world around them. It also allows the *Cathemerinon* to play the anti-Gnostic role that van Assendelft detects by asserting the goodness of matter, and its role in uniting men with God.<sup>57</sup> It is hard not to see St. Paul's inspiration again, writing specifically to the Romans:

The wrath of God is indeed being revealed from heaven against every impiety and wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness. For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a

---

56 “[...] Ovid follows Virgil in imagining history as teleologically directed towards the Princeps, but that illusion dissolves as we are more and more swept along in the Ovidian epic's flow of flux and contingency,” Miller 349.

57 van Assendelft 29-32.

result, they have no excuse; for although they knew God they did not accord him glory as God or give him thanks. Instead, they became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless minds were darkened. While claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image of mortal man or of birds or of four-legged animals or of snakes. (Rom. 1:18-23)

The *Cathemerinon* appears to be a literary attempt to magnify St. Paul's insights into an exegesis of nature in order to trace out God's attributes, and show that what can be known about him is indeed evident in nature. Only in this light, as we will see, do the many layers of the *Cathemerinon* come together in unity and their structure make sense.

Prudentius is trying to find the face of God in nature, and discovers a cosmos thoroughly pregnant with the image of God, seeing in nature a kind of proto-typological revelation which God enters and completes, adding to Paul's words: *testis est orbis, nec ipsa terra quod uidit negat, / comminus Deum docendis proditum mortalibus*. (The world is witness, and the Earth herself does not deny what she has seen, God sprung up mixed among mortals so as to teach them. *Cath.* 9.7-9)<sup>58</sup>

Thus *Cathemerinon* also functions as an allegorical catechism of the Christian faith: a poetic primer of salvation history like the short *breviaria* of local history prepared for new arrivals in Rome.<sup>59</sup> The approach, departure, and return of the light provide the central metaphor for God's action in the world, and in this movement of light, Prudentius finds an analogy for God himself who makes, reveals, sustains, transforms, and synthesizes. The light of the sun, which has been mistakenly worshipped as a god, is truly the *image of the Glory of God*. By delivering a poetic exegesis of that image, Prudentius aims to turn the pagan from the image to the real: from shadow to light.

---

<sup>58</sup> I have supplied my own translations of all primary Latin text citations.

<sup>59</sup> Momigliano 87-90.



### Chapter III: Reading the Scripture of the World, Hymns 1-6

#### ***Christ Hidden in Nature***

In hymns 1-6, Prudentius unites the natural movements of the day to their corresponding aspects of the Christian faith, so that it takes on a soteriological and universal dimension. He examines daily events for their typological, eschatological, and spiritual significances. This allows the Christian to enter more deeply into reality, instead of rejecting or marginalizing it. The exigencies of life (rising, prayer, work, eating, lighting the evening lamp, and sleeping) become a means of praising Christ and a path to divine union. The Christian does not pray so much as life becomes prayer. More importantly, the Christian life does not do away with the natural requirements and patterns of life, but enriches them, fulfils them, and helps the believer to enter more deeply into reality through the contemplation of its maker who willed and designed it in his own image. Reading the poems with attention to these interwoven elements means that each hymn must be analyzed much like Patristic Scriptural exegesis. In order to see the cosmic vision that takes shape, we will examine the first six hymns to see how Prudentius uses the theme of each as a springboard for a typological consideration of reality -- to remove the veil that conceals Christ in nature.

#### ***A Primer of Salvation History***

The historical thread that runs through the *Cathemerinon* is complex to say the least, because it attempts to follow the Christian revelation by mapping it onto the day



and the solar year. This is the first clue that time in the *Cathemerinon* is primarily symbolic. Prudentius examines time as a creature with a fixed life-span, moving from its own birth to its final consummation. Within this flow of time, God reveals himself to man, first in the order of nature, and secondly in the order of grace. The notion of history as the gradual self-revelation which results in union with God is referred to as salvation history. God reveals himself, giving the creature the opportunity to respond or to reject him, resulting either in deification and union or refusal and damnation. Each of the hymns of the *Cathemerinon* shares this basic structure, fitting into the larger narrative by revealing a specific mystery through consideration of a specific aspect of the order of nature, or the revealed order of grace. The reader is then invited to draw near to the mystery, find union with Christ through contemplation, and increase his/her love for Christ as the fruit of this contemplation. And so the work is two-fold: it is catechetical, inviting the converted to a deeper union with God through the consideration of his works, and revealing their full significance to the uninstructed.

The first cycle of hymns (1-6), begins with an introduction (hymns 1 and 2), followed by a consideration of salvation history as revealed through the order of nature (3-6), attaching significant episodes from the Old Testament, using the solar day as its model. The first hymn begins just before the new day, with the crowing rooster who signals the approach of the sun. In the natural pattern of night, day, waking from sleep, Prudentius finds the call away from death and sin into a life in Christ (*Cath.* 1.5-8). The night and sleep symbolize the darkness and sloth of the mind in sin, and the crowing a call to awareness of Christ's kingship and the repudiation of sin before his coming in

glory (*Cath.* 1.9-36). The bird and the approaching sun provide daily types of Christ's saving action in the cosmos. Christ's *parousia* manifests itself in every sunrise, as an admonition to unbelievers. Those who know, await the end with sober expectation, rather than anxiety: *nos soporis liberi / speramus aduentum Dei* (we who are free from sleep / should hope for [his] coming. *Cath.* 1.47-48). Prudentius adds a soteriological significance by linking this moment to Christ's resurrection from the dead:

*omnes credimus  
illo quietis tempore  
quo gallus exultans canit  
Christum redisse ex inferis.*

All of us believe  
it was at that very time of calm,  
when , exulting, cock did crow,  
Christ came back from Hell. (*Cath* 1. 64 - 68)

A hermeneutic pattern begins to emerge which reveals Prudentius' exegetical approach to nature. The dawn of the day provides four types, and the exegesis of these types forms the substance of the poem, illustrated by Scriptural references and *exempla*. The approach of the dawn signifies the call to conversion of life, is the type of the end-times and the preparation for the second coming of Christ. At the same time, historically, Prudentius recalls the moment of creation when Christ, the Word of God, calls all things into being, hovering like a bird over the primal abyss:<sup>60</sup> *nos excitator mentium / iam Christus ad uitam uocat* (Christ, the awaker of souls calls us to life. *Cath.* 1.3-4). Prudentius is preparing us to look at nature exegetically.

The second hymn continues this introductory eschatological journey into a

---

60 cf. Gen. 1:2.

consideration of the morning itself, and the ensuing day as the cosmic type of judgement and repentance. As with the first hymn, night is the type of sin and death, and the sun represents the light of God which penetrates to the heart and scatters the darkness:

*tunc non licebit claudere  
quod quisque fuscum cogitat,  
sed mane clarescent nouo  
secreta mentis prodita.*

Then it will not be permitted for each one  
to conceal the dark thing each one thinks on,  
but the hidden things of the mind,  
will be illuminated, once brought forth,  
in the new morning. (*Cath* 1.13-16)

This new dawn brings a natural repentance, as the after-effects of a night of drinking bring self-loathing and renewed determination even to the *nugator* (*Cath.* 1.32). Shamed by the coming of the light, even men bereft of grace desire chastity and soberness, at least to carry out their daily affairs: *nec teste quisquam lumine / peccare constanter potest.* (nor is one able to continue in sin with the light as witness. *Cath.* 2. 27-28). The presence of sunlight itself brings every man to a natural repentance, because it is the time to work. Prudentius is confident that all know the truth in an instinctive, if obscured, manner, but the faithful Christian also has his/her work to attend to, which is to praise God, even if he is smeared with sin (*Cath.* 2.59). Far from despair, even sin becomes an opportunity for hope, recalling the renewal of baptism:

*durare nos tales iube,*

*quales, remotis sordibus,  
nitere pridem iusseras,  
Iordane tinctos flumine.*

Order us to continue as before,  
having washed all defilement away,  
you ordered us to shine  
dipped in the waters of the Jordan. (*Cath* 2. 61-64)

This exaltation of God's forgiveness continues, clarifying that although the new light of day signifies a judgment of destruction for those who ignore God, it is a call to re-commitment and penitence for the Christian. Like sunlight which illumines and purifies, God's sight both accuses and transforms his faithful: *haec lux serenum conferat / purosque nos praestet sibi...* (may this light bestow its brightness upon us, and reveal us as pure... *Cath.* 2 97-98).

The new day provides a continuation of the creation story begun in hymn 1. There Christ calls the day into being, and now it obediently comes as when the light was created over the primal disarray. Similarly repentance is a call to order and reunion with the divine plan. As light revealed the nascent world and brought it to order, God's presence hovers over the repentant soul, both revealing imperfection and purifying it. Called back to conformity with the divine plan, man wrestles with his imperfection so as to be reunited with the birthright he has forgotten (*Cath.* 1.36). The soul's light is rekindled by Christ, its source, as the earth is lit and warmed by the sun. Eschatologically, hymn 2 brings the reader to a consideration of the *parousia* and final judgement heralded by the cock-crow in hymn 1, bringing both poems into a pair that reveals that creation is also the

type of the end. At the end of this hymn, Prudentius adds a fourth element to his exegesis of nature by using Scripture to confirm his explanations. Choosing Jacob and the angel as the key *exemplum* for this hymn, Prudentius indicates that the Christian must wrestle with God through the night of obscurity, fighting against concupiscence, until the *parousia* which will purify and confer a secure beatitude, just as Jacob lost the *culpae uigorem* in his struggle with the angel when the sun rose (*Cath.* 2.80). Prudentius not only interprets the Jacob-story as an allegorical battle against personal sin, but an image of the universal sunrise that shapes the *Cathemerinon*. In this way, hymns 1 and 2 initiate the project of the *Cathemerinon* as a whole by providing the cosmic context for the rest of the hymns to follow. Both are an admonition to fallen man to sober living, and a return to God. Now that Prudentius has established these elements as central to a life of conversion, he will continue by exploring the fall of man and tracing out God's work in the Old Testament to restore the lost perfection.

Hymns 3 and 4 form a complementary pair centring on the fall and renewal of the cosmic order. Prudentius recalls the creation and fall of man, as well as his preservation,<sup>61</sup> the next significant events in salvation history. Here Christ is *uerbigena* and *edite corpore uirgineo* (*Cath.* 3.3), signalling a move from spirit to body through the invocation of Jesus' divine humanity. The hymn begins with prayerful thanksgiving for man's intelligent dominion over an abundant creation (*Cath.* 3.31-55), the repudiation of meat-eating (*Cath.* 3.56-65), and the praise of the gift of food in the form of plants, milk, and honey (*Cath.* 3.66-80). After this thanksgiving for the natural gifts of God follows a doxological account of the creation and fall of man, the saving Virginal birth and

---

<sup>61</sup> Genesis 1-3.

Incarnation of Christ (*Cath.* 3.81-155), and a final prayer celebrating Christ's victory over death, the future promise of personal resurrection, and a return to the lost paradise (*Cath.* 3.156-205).

The central image of both hymns is food as a source of life or death. The result of Adam and Eve's choice to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree gives this example of death: robbed of paradise by Satan, they are driven from union with God. Above all, true sustenance, for Prudentius, is God's union with creation through the Incarnation, offering the hope of redemption even after the fall. As with the first two hymns, the typological theme, food prefiguring the Eucharist, proves to be insufficient without God's presence. Separated from obedience to his purposes a gift of God only brings harm and even death. Thus the fall provides an admonition against gluttony and drunkenness, which are an abuse of created things.<sup>62</sup> On the heels of the loss comes the hope-filled *Protoevangelium*: the promise of Christ's Virgin birth, death, and resurrection.<sup>63</sup> The unthinkable, creation divorced from God, begins here, identifying man's culpability, and the solution as Christ. While the sun and the day are presented as universal goods in hymns 1 and 2, creation defiled by sin requires divine union for its resuscitation.

A darker vision of a world more thoroughly infected by the fall comes forward in hymn 4 *after the meal*, where food remains the central theme of the hymn. With the body sated, Prudentius turns his attention to the soul's hunger for God, who is the *pastus animae . . . saporque uerus* (*Cath.* 4.35). As in hymn 3, Eucharistic themes abound:

*regnat Spiritus ille sempiternus*

---

<sup>62</sup> Prud. *Cath.* 3.171-185.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 3.136-155.

*a Christo simul et Parente missus.  
intrat pectora candidus pudica,  
quae templi consecrata rident  
postquam conbiberint Deum medullis.*

the eternal Spirit is Lord,  
sent at once by Christ and the Father.  
the pure one enters into modest hearts,  
which then smile, consecrated as his temples,  
after having drunk God down into their very being. (*Cath.* 4.14-18)

The hymn begins by invoking God as life, and focuses in on the indwelling action of the Holy Spirit, which enters the hearts of those who respond to him with faith. Whereas Prudentius associates the Son with God's creative power in hymns 1, 2, and 3, but here he introduces the Holy Spirit as life-giver and inspirational author of the Scriptures which are needed as a result of Adam and Eve's fall, and their loss of illumination. The Scriptures provide the clear knowledge of God that was lost. Nature rebels against its master, and man now lives in a prison surrounded with lions, instead of the paradise he was given to till:

*tu nos tristifico uelut tyranno  
mundi scilicet inpotentis actu  
conclusos regis et feram repellis,  
quae circumfremet ac uorare temptat...*

you guide us, we who are confined  
to the measure of (this) impotent world,  
as if by some gloomy tyrant,

and drive away the wild beast  
which goes around roaring,  
and trying to devour us. (*Cath.* 4, 76-79)

Prudentius uses this image of the lion's den as the symbol of fallen creation into which sin has entered, a familiar Biblical choice, which St. Paul also uses to bring Satan to mind, who is “prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8-10). It is not by the act of an impotent world (*actu mundi inpotentis*) that oppresses man directly, but the power of the tyrannical lion (*leo tyrannus*), the devil who brings darkness, opposes the Holy Spirit who inspires light through the prophets and Scripture. It is noteworthy that Daniel's escape from the lion's den does not provide the *exemplum* for the hymn, but rather the meal which the prophet Habbakuk brings to Daniel in the pit. The allegorical food which Daniel receives is the gift of the Scriptures which the Holy Spirit inspires: *hic sancto satiatus ex propheta / iustorum capiet cibos uirorum* (this man, satisfied by a holy prophet will receive the food of just men. *Cath.* 4.91-92). The intertextual element from the letter of Peter also points, typologically, to Christ, who will become food himself, subdue the tyrant, and break open the prison through his *katabasis*, where the *leo tyrannus* will be forever bound. In the meantime, the Scriptures, the food from Heaven, sustains man as he awaits his promised freedom from death.

A reflection on the evening lighting of the lamp turns Prudentius to the consideration of light as God's and a reminder of his presence as darkness approaches in the fifth hymn:

*incussu silicis lumina nos tamen*



*monstras saxigeno semine quaerere,<sup>64</sup>  
ne nesciret homo spem sibi luminis  
in Christi solido corpore conditam,  
qui dici stabilem se uoluit petram,  
nostris igniculis unde genus uenit.*

...you show us how to find light  
in stone-born flint-stroke,  
lest man forget that his hope of light  
is founded on the strong body of Christ,  
who wished to be called “the rock”  
from which proceed our little fires. (*Cath* 5.7-12)

This dissolution of creation continues from Adam and Eve; as the light departs, bringing on a spiritual night of disorder and rebellion. *Chaos ingruit horrendum*, that is, ontological darkness musters its forces for an attack on the vestiges of God's light in the world: not the Sun, Moon, or stars, but upon human souls (*Cath.* 5.3). Symbolically, Satan and his forces pursue God's people as the light wanes, and his evil is manifested by Pharaoh and his soldiers who march under the Roman Imperial banner of the dragon<sup>65</sup> chasing the Israelites who march towards the Red Sea led by the pillar of fire:<sup>66</sup>

*currus tunc et equos telaque naufraga  
ipsos et proceres et uaga corpora  
nigrorum uideas nare satellitum,  
arcis iustitium triste tyrannicae.*

---

64 Mahoney 136, cf. Verg. *Georg.*1,135; *Aen.* 1, 174.6.6.

65 A banner, apparently, of the Roman Imperial Army, described by Prudentius' pagan contemporary, Ammianus Marcellinus, belonging to the Imperial forces of Constantius II, who was considered an Arian heretic at the time of Prudentius, hence the negative association. cf. Thomson 41; Amm. Marc., *Rerum Gestarum* 16.10, 7.

66 Ex. 14:1-31.

Then could you see chariot and horse and weapons--  
all shipwrecked -- princes and the roving bodies  
of their black thralls floating together:  
gloomy justice for the tyrant's stronghold. (*Cath* 5.77-80)

The hymn engages with hymn 4, recalling *triste* and *tyrannicae* in reference to the *tristifico tyranno* (*Cath.* 4.76), whose reign over Israel has been brought to its gloomy end. Typologically, the Exodus represents Christ's victory over Hell, and the Sacrament of Baptism in the Christian Patristic tradition, as Daniélou points out,<sup>67</sup> and God's people walk safely behind him through the midst of the deep waters of death and chaos (*abyssus*) into the promised land. The water is the symbol of death and disorder, but is obedient to the command of God. As the followers of Christ to pass through safely it swallows the wicked who pursue: *securus pateat te duce transitus, / et mox unda rapax ut uoret impios* (a safe crossing is revealed with you as leader, even as, quickly, the devouring wave swallows the impious *Cath.* 5.87-88). Thus, the evening lamp is the reminder of escape from darkness into light, and the return of order to a world sunk deep in ignorance of God to knowledge and light.

The Exodus has been accomplished for the nation of Israel, leading them out of slavery to pagan ignorance back to freedom under the one God. Nevertheless, while he is again known, God and man are still ontologically separate. Christ, to whom the hymn points, has not yet repaired Adam's sin through the Incarnation. The effects of the former slavery linger on, and man is still subject to the penalty of death. To indicate this

---

67 cf. Daniélou "From Shadows to Reality" 153-217.

difference, Prudentius jumps from the Passover into the New Covenant, describing the paradise where passage over the *freta saeculi* leads the faithful to a place of lush, exotic plants and flowers.<sup>68</sup> The passover becomes a story of universal significance for the Christian, for whom Christ has conquered death:

illa nocte, sacer qua rediit Deus  
stagnis ad superos ex Acherunticis . . .  
. . . terris Domini de cruce tristibus  
maior sole nouum restituens diem.

on that night, when the holy God returned above  
from the pools of Acheron. . .  
. . . restoring to lands saddened on account of the cross of the Lord  
a new day brighter than the Sun. (*Cath* 5, 127-132)

Hymn 6, apocalyptic in character, describes sleep and dreams as the natural type of death and the hope for the resurrection. The coming of the night is a reminder that God is the light of the soul, without whom there is darkness. This turn way from the body to the spirit is demonstrated by Prudentius' invocation of God the Father as *Pater supreme* . . . *quem nemo uidit unquam* (he whom no one has ever seen).<sup>69</sup> In sleep, the body experiences a freedom from suffering and toil, forgetting its pain as it enjoys the rest, which is a gift from God:

*redit et quietis hora,*  
*blandus sopor vicissim*  
*fessos relaxat artus*<sup>70</sup>.

---

68 Prud. *Cath.* 5.113-124.

69 Prud. *Cath.* 6.1-2.

70 cf. Verg. *Aen.* 2, 253, 5, 857; Hor. *C. S.* 62-68. Prudentius is recalling both Vergil and Horace. Sleep, a gift from God becomes the healer, rather than Actian Apollo.

*...lex haec data est caducis  
deo iubente membris  
ut temperet laborem  
medicabilis uoluptas.*

the hour of rest has returned,  
gentle sleep again  
softens a tired body.  
. . . this is the law given by God's command  
to all our fallen members,  
that healing pleasure  
might mellow our labour. (*Cath* 6.10-12; 21-24)

Though fallen, the body retains its nobility, and as it rests, *liber uagat per auras / uariasque per figuras quae sunt operta cernit* (it wanders free through the upper airs, and through various figures discerns things which are hidden; *Cath.* 6.29-31). These *figuras* will vary with the disposition of the soul. The just are conceded special light, and enjoy splendour . . . / *qui dat futura nosse, (a brilliance that gives knowledge of the future Cath.* 6.44) while the unjust, are troubled by a lying image (*mendax imago*), leaving them in *ambage atra* (dark confusion *Cath.* 6.46-48) In Prudentius' examination, sleep takes on an eschatological character as the daily experience of death and judgement. The mind reflects the images it has fastened upon, and remains with its choices. The two Biblical *exempla* of Joseph<sup>71</sup> and the beast of Revelation<sup>72</sup> stress an apocalyptic interpretation that is both cosmic and personal. Dreams, while insubstantial, reveal the quality of soul, so that Joseph can read the guilt of the baker and innocence of the cup-bearer through the

---

71 Gen. 40:1-23.

72 Rev. 5:6-9.

images that manifest their inner dispositions.<sup>73</sup> St. John the Evangelist, in a more universal prophetic vision, sees the last judgement in the form of a dream, where the victory over the bleeding Antichrist (*cruenti Antichristi*) is final.<sup>74</sup> For the first time in the *Cathemerinon*, we have a mixture of both New Testament and Old Testament passages serving as the central *exempla*: John the Evangelist is presented as on par with Joseph, and both men receive the status of *heros*<sup>75</sup>: for Prudentius, apparently, righteous men rewarded with prophetic insight and rulership because of their faithfulness.<sup>76</sup> This is a sign that the *Liber Cathemerinon* is about to move on from the old Covenant, grounded in the order of nature to the new Covenant of grace, especially given that John the Evangelist is the last of the Apostles, and his *Apocalypse* prophesies about the end of the old Earth, and the birth of the new Heaven and the new Earth coming down from heaven.<sup>77</sup>

There is an insufficiency in this cycle, which leads man from sunrise to sunrise and through the daily works of life hand-in-hand with his God, but the life in Christ it encourages is not yet fully revealed. The prayerful repetition of the Old Covenant which awaits the coming of the messiah is allegorized as the cycle of the day leading to the dawn of grace. Just so, for the believer in Christ, every night may be the *parousia*, the day, and the whole cycle of nature, which must be dissolved to give way to the endless day of the vision of God himself. Notably, the hymn ends in an exorcism, driving away

---

73 Prud. *Cath.* 6. 57-64.

74 Prud. *Cath.* 6.101-112 and Rev. 19-20.

75 Prudentius uses the term twice in relation to Old Testament notables, cf. Prud. *Cath.* 6.114, referring to both John the Apostle and Joseph the patriarch, who see revelations in their dreams. In *Cath.* 10.70 he also calls Tobit a *heros*.

76 Joseph as co-ruler over Egypt, and John as an Apostle.

77 Rev. 21:1-27.

the devil.<sup>78</sup> While the soul must entrust itself to God in sleep, it must remain wary of its enemy, who has not yet been fully subdued. The Christian clings to the battle-standard (*signum*) of the cross which drives away his/her foe, and prefigures his full defeat at the end of time (*Cath.* 6.129-148).

---

<sup>78</sup> Prud. *Cath.* 6.125-148.

## Chapter IV: The Order of Grace

### *A New Covenant*

The grace narrative of hymns 7-12 begins with a parallel of hymns 3 and 4 in the *hymn for the fasting*, and the *hymn after the fast* (7 and 8). These hymns before and after the fast introduce a movement that breaks out of the cycle of nature, and prepare the way for the new order of grace. The presence of John the Baptist, Jonah, Elijah, and Moses as examples of fasting ascetics is a clue that this new transition is taking place, as all are key Christological figures.<sup>79</sup> Elijah prefigures John the Baptist, Moses and Jonah prefigure Christ, and all three are mentioned by name in the New Testament. Jesus equates himself with the sign of Jonah, and Moses and Elijah are frequently mentioned in connection with the Law and with great signs, as well as appearing at Christ's side at the Transfiguration on mount Tabor.<sup>80</sup> The presence of a New Testament figure is notable, as only two have appeared so far in the *Cathemerinon*; John the Apostle, and John the Baptist, the first in hymn 6, and the second, now, in hymn 7. Prudentius is confirming the movement from nature to grace by placing these two Johns on either side of the midpoint of the *Cathemerinon*, showing a transitional link from Old Testament to the New: both hymns use a John in their *exempla*: one is the last Apostle and the other the last prophet, effecting a structural chiasmus that links the two series of hymns together. The prophets are presented out of chronological order but move in a sequence of penitential actions

---

<sup>79</sup> Prud. *Cath.* 7.26-80.

<sup>80</sup> For the sign of Jonah: cf. Matt. 12:38-42, Mk. 8:11-12, Lk. 11:16, 29-32, The Transfiguration: Matt. cf. 17:1-9, Mk. 9:2-10, Lk. 9.28-36.

that bring about the presence of God. Elijah, the *uetus sacerdos* (ancient priest *Cath.* 7.27), is said to have left human society, and fasted in the wilderness, where he *spreuisse tradunt criminum frequentiam* (handed over a multitude of sins to scorn; *Cath.* 7.29), and was subsequently lifted up to heaven for his heroic piety.<sup>81</sup> Moses, the *tremendi fidus interpres throni* (faithful intermediary of the fearful throne; *Cath.* 7.37), is noted for his fast of forty days, before which he was not able to see the Lord.<sup>82</sup> After these short praises of the old prophets, a long paraphrase on John the Baptist follows, who was also a notable ascetic, who also fasts, lives in solitude, and prays (*Cath.* 7.61-70). John, *hortator ille primus et doctor nouae / fuit salutis* (he was the first announcer, and the teacher of the new salvation; *Cath.* 7.71), combines the penitential lives and perfection of the other two prophets, and also gets to see the Lord – even to baptize him. John receives no less than 35 lines, compared to Elijah and Moses' 10 lines each, which includes a the mention of the saving power of baptism, after which Prudentius begins his lengthy account of Jonah's call and mission to the Ninevites, giving a weight to his message of penance and preparation. The structure of the hymn prepares the way of the Messiah, by teaching asceticism, purity of heart, and the satisfaction for the sins of man. Elijah and Moses both wait for the Messiah in penance and patient service, and are rewarded with his presence, like John who provides the more proximate link to the Gospel:

*hanc obsequellum praeparabat nuntius  
mox adfuturo construens iter Deo,  
clivosa planis, confragosa ut lenibus  
conuerterentur; neue quidquam deuium  
inlapsa terris inueniret ueritas.*

...

---

<sup>81</sup> Prud. *Cath.* 7.31-32, cf. 1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:1-18.  
<sup>82</sup> cf. Ex. 34:28, as Thomson 59.



nec ante partu de senile effusus est  
quam praedicaret uirginem plenam Deo.

The messenger continued to prepare this assistance,  
arranging a road for God soon to come,  
that the hills be changed into plains, and the hard places mild  
that truth, having come down to earth, might not happen upon  
some winding path.

...  
nor was he yet sent forth, born of an old birth,  
before proclaimed that a virgin was pregnant with God. (*Cath.* 7.51-55, 59-60)

Even as a child in the womb, John announces that the new order of grace has arrived, leaping in his ancient mother's womb at the approach of Mary.<sup>83</sup> The Baptist represents the culmination of the prophetic tradition, as he is the only prophet to see Christ, baptizing Jesus and marking the beginning of his public ministry: of the beginning transformation of nature through grace. The sixth hymn provides the prologue and proclamation of this transformation, as food itself is put off in preference to the direct sustaining power of God himself, now present in the world.

The Old Testament preparation for the messiah culminates in the long Jonah-Nineveh narrative, which details Jonah's flight (*Cath.* 7.101-113), prophetic ordeal in the fish (*Cath.* 7.114-130), his proclamation of Nineveh's imminent destruction, and his hope that the promised destruction will take place (*Cath.* 7.131-140).<sup>84</sup> Surprisingly, the Ninevites fast to obtain God's mercy of their own accord, refusing even milk to children and fodder to the animals (*Cath.* 7.141-170). Nineveh is spared, and Prudentius turns immediately to Christ himself and his fast in the wilderness and his temptation in the desert (*Cath.* 7.176-195). The hymn ends with a final admonition to fasting as a way to

---

83 cf. Lk. 1:39-56.

84 cf. Jonah, 1-4.

subdue the passions, and an exhortation to acts of charity, of which fasting is only one (*Cath.* 7.196-220).

The hymn follows a loose Scriptural chronology, except that Moses and Jonah are curiously out of sync with their actual chronology, which should run Moses, Elijah, Jonah, John, and Jesus. The insertion of the Nineveh episode further breaks up the chronological unity of the hymn, as we should expect Jesus' fast and temptation to immediately follow John's preaching in the Gospel accounts.<sup>85</sup> The only explanation is a soteriological order rather than a chronological one. Elijah's asceticism brings him to personal perfection and Moses, a prophet of his people, prays and fasts, but finally John announces the coming kingdom, forgiving sins through baptism. The way back to God is prepared with self-sanctification, prayer and penance, and lastly fulfilled by the presence of God.

To illustrate this whole tradition in one man, Prudentius turns to Jonah who converted a whole pagan nation back to God by his preaching ( *Cath.* 7.141), and who represents the world, aware of its wickedness and turning back to God through abstention from food. God is pleased, and turns back to his people. No sooner is this done, than Prudentius turns to the beginning of Christ's ministry.<sup>86</sup> Thus hymn 7 complements hymn 3. The first recalls a meal that destroyed man, fasting ushers in the Incarnation promised at the end of hymn 3, and it begins to take effect. The first Adam began in a garden of delights and fell by eating a deadly food; the new Adam, Christ, begins in a desert, with no food, and through abstaining from food, rejects Satan's advances. Jesus is three times

---

<sup>85</sup> Prud. *Cath.* 7.176-195.

<sup>86</sup> Prud. *Cath.* 7.176 sqq.

tempted and three times victorious, compared to Adam's one temptation, and one disastrous fall.

While hymn 8 builds little on this narrative it turns the course of the poems decisively to Christ's saving action as the most essential element of the life of grace. Prudentius bids the faithful remember that fasting, on its own, is not the source of salvation. It is the Good Shepherd (*fide pastor Cath. 7.49*) who rescues the sheep and brings them to the heavenly pasture:

*nulla compensant pretium salutis  
uota precantum.  
Quamlibet spreto sine more pastu  
sponte confectos tenuemus artus  
teque contemptis epulis rogemus  
nocte dieque. . .*

No of our vows, we who pray, could pay the price of salvation,  
Even if we, freely, wore down our bodies to death  
having spurned food without measure,  
even if we were to pray to you without banquets,  
day and night... (*Cath. 8.51-56*)

Thus hymn 8 takes a corrective role in the salvation history narrative. The hymn for those who fast announces the approach of the Messiah, in answer to the repentance enjoined in hymn 2, and breaking the cycle of fallen nature with a newness that penetrates all things. In hymn 8 we see Christ fulfilling the longing of his flock, pasturing them even as they stray, and subduing the wolves.<sup>87</sup> The structure of the hymns reveals that Prudentius has in mind the "Question about Fasting" reported in the Synoptic Gospels. Early in his public ministry, John the Baptist's disciples approach Jesus asking why his own disciples do not fast, as they do. Jesus replies to them: "Can the wedding-guests [lit: sons, i.e.

---

<sup>87</sup> Prud. *Cath.* 8.33-48.

family relations] of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the day will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.” (Matt. 9:15).<sup>88</sup> This parallels nicely with Prudentius' own advice that fasting should be mild and joyful.<sup>89</sup> Like the sick sheep that catches its wool on the thorns (*Cath.* 8.33-36), those who appeal to God for forgiveness with fasting and penance will be swiftly rescued by the Good Shepherd, and brought into his sunny pastures (*Cath.* 8.37-48).

The ninth hymn, *for every hour* provides the central point for the salvation-history narrative, paralleling hymn 5, where the epic crossing of the Red Sea prefigures the great victory on the cross and the harrowing of Hell. Charlet refers to this hymn as one of Prudentius' “narrative hymns,”<sup>90</sup> as it provides a summary of all of Jesus' miracles throughout his public ministry. Prudentius begins the poem by an allusion to David, the psalmist, who composes songs about God's deeds: *Da, puer, plectrum, choreis ut canam fidelibus / dulce carmen et melodum, gesta Christi insignia* (Give me a pick/quill, child, that I may sing a sweet and pleasing song in faithful trochees: the famous deeds of Christ. 9.1-2)<sup>91</sup>. Hymn 9 is especially attentive to the prophecy-fulfilment van Assendelft mentions, with Prudentius eager to show that the prophets spoke the truth:

*ecce, quem uates uetustis, concinebant saeculis,  
quem prophetarum fideles paginae spoponderant,  
emicat promissus olim: cuncta conlaudent eum.*

see the *uates* sang together in the old ages,  
whom the faithful pages of the prophets pledged,  
the promised one shines forth at last! Let all things praise him as one! (*Cath.* 9.25-27)

---

88 cf. Mark 2. 13-17, Luke 5:27-32.

89 cf. Prud. *Cath.* 8.57-72.

90 Charlet 103.

91 cf. Ps. 57, 9; 108:3: “Awake, my soul; awake, lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn.”

The prophets, as *uates*, all faithfully testify to Christ who now reveals himself as divine in his public ministry through miracles. Immediately, Prudentius begins an epic catalogue of Jesus' public ministry, starting with the miracle at the wedding of Cana in the Gospel of John, where *lympa fit Falernum nobile* (water becomes famous Falernian wine. *Cath.* 9.28).<sup>92</sup> With beautiful poetic economy, Prudentius blends the miracles, healings, and exorcisms of all four Gospels into a single narrative leading up to the Crucifixion and the victorious descent into Hell. The wedding of Cana as the first in the sequence Prudentius links his narrative with hymn 7, which ended with Jesus' victory over the temptations in the desert. Here, however, the central concern is the departure of the light, which disappeared while Christ lay dead, but triumphing over Hades:

*sed Deus dum luce fulua mortis antra inluminat,  
dum stupendibus tenebris candidum praestat diem,  
tristia squalentis aethrae palluerunt sidera.  
Sol refugit et lugubri sordidus ferrugine  
igneum reliquit axem seque maerens abdidit;  
fertur horruisse mundus sub noctis aeternae chaos.*

But while God illuminates the caves of death with golden light,  
while he reveals bright day to the stupefied shadows,  
the sad stars grew dim in a roughening sky,  
the sun fled away, and fouled by a gloomy redness  
he left his burning sky and hid himself, mourning.  
It is said that the world lay in dread under the chaos of eternal night. (*Cath.* 9.76-81)

The light-imagery of the *Cathemerinon* reaches its climax at this point, when God's own light seemed lost, leaving only darkness and broken hope. The stars and the sun, sources of created light, cannot bear the loss of God and hide their light in sadness, so that all light is lost at Jesus' death. It is at this very moment that defeat is reversed into victory,

---

<sup>92</sup> cf. John. 2:1-11.

and Prudentius bursts into triumph-song, celebrating Christ's victory on the cross: *Dic tropaeum passionis, dic triumphalem crucem,/ pange uexillum notatis quod refulget frontibus...* (Tell the war-spoils of the passion, tell the triumph of the cross, sing out the banner that shines marked on our foreheads... *Cath.* 9.84-85). The very blood and water from Christ's body bring baptism and martyr's victories (*Cath.* 9.86-87), Satan is bound as man is washed of his sin (*Cath.* 9.88-93), Hell is despoiled of the just contained within it (*Cath.* 9.94-102), and Christ ascends to the skies, freed from death, carrying his divine deeds to heaven (*Cath.* 9.103-108), filling every part of creation with the light of God, and returns to the Father, victorious over all darkness, to sit in judgement over the world when he returns. This hymn has deep connections with hymn 5, *for the lighting of the lamp*, both of which touch upon the same event of salvation history, the first typologically, and the second historically. This allows for Prudentius' boast over Satan, the architect of creation's fall: *quid tibi, profane serpens, profuit rebus nouis/ plasma primum perculisse uersipelli hortamine?* (what has it profited you, impious serpent, to have struck down the first-made [man] when all things were new with your shape-shifting exhortations [to evil]?; *Cath.* 9.91-92) The salvation of man has been achieved, and now time only waits to be consummated as well. As such, hymn 9 represents the culmination and focal point of the whole *Cathemerinon*, the rest of which is either a progression towards the Crucifixion, death, and Resurrection, or a fulfilment of this last prophecy that Christ will come again in the *parousia*. In this way, the victory of Christ over sin and death is both historical and typological and its effects are permanent, but at the same time a prediction of the final victory at the end of time.

Hymn 10, *circa exequias defuncti* represents the next essential element of Christian faith, linked in sentiment with hymn 9, and following on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ: the firm belief in the universal resurrection of the dead. Although man has been saved, Hell broken open, and Satan subdued, the dead must wait until end of time for the universal resurrection of the just following the eschatological triumph of Christ over the world. Thus, hymn 10 comes provides the fulfilment of hymn 6, which deals with the death of the day, and the eschatological themes of final judgement and self-entrustment to God. There, the chief concern is the soul's temporary separation from the body while it sleeps, which is a temporary experience of death with its own rewards and punishments: as the noble soul is illuminated with prophetic dreams, and the wicked soul terrified with nightmares.<sup>93</sup> In hymn 10, this daily type of death is more fully expounded in the trust that God will bring back the dead, and body and soul will live forever in divine union with God. Prudentius uses the classical word for burial-rites, *exequiae*, with the distinction that God will rescue the bodies of his faithful servants in Christ, even if they are reduced to ashes:

*non, si cariosa uetustas  
dissoluerit ossa fauillis,  
fueritque cinisculis arens  
minimi mensura pugilli,  
nec, si uaga flamina et aerae  
uacuum per inane uolantes  
tulerint cum puluere neruos,  
hominem periisse licebit.*

Not if the decayed old age  
breaks the bones down to ashes,  
and the body, drying out into little ashes  
were to become but a measure of the smallest fist-full;

---

93 cf. Prud. *Cath.* 6.41-56.

not even if the wandering winds and warm airs  
that fly through the empty void  
lifted away the nerves with the dust  
shall man ever be permitted to perish. (*Cath.* 10.141-148)

Tobit, the father of Tobias provides the Biblical *exemplum* for this hymn, as a man whose sight was restored for his anxious care to bury the dead, even in danger of his own life (*Cath.* 10.69-80)<sup>94</sup>. So universal is this new salvation in Christ that the Christian is bound not only to bury their own dead, but strangers as well:

*qui iacta cadauera passim  
miserans tegit aggere terrae,  
opus exhibet ille benignum  
Christo pius omnipotenti,  
quia lex eadem monet omnes  
gemitum dare sorte sub una,  
cognataque funera nobis  
aliena in morte dolere.*

Whoever, taking pity, covers bodies cast here and there  
with a mound of earth, that holy one he does a kind work  
for Christ the almighty,  
Because the same law admonishes all-mighty  
to mourn under a common fate,  
and, with respect to death,  
to be pained at another's funeral-rites as a relative's (*Cath.* 10.61-68)

Christ's dominion on earth extends even to the dead. Burial is required as a service of respect to God himself, acknowledging that Christ the *princeps* once lived in the mortal remains (*Cath.* 10.129-132). Death is the new way through the Red Sea, through which men return to God and everyone who would go to the stars must walk it, behind the new pillar of fire, which is the cross:

*patet ecce fidelibus ampli*

---

94 cf. Tobit 11:9-18.



*uia lucida iam paradisi,  
licet et nemus illud adire,  
homini quod ademerat anguis.*

Behold the wide, shining way of paradise  
now lies open to the faithful,  
now may man take possession of that grove,  
which the dragon stole away. (*Cath.* 10.161-164)

While the damage is repaired, and even death has been overcome and transformed into the pathway to eternal life, the final decisive battle that will bring all things back to God, has yet to be fought., which will complete the salvation history narrative of the *Cathemerinon*.

### ***The Final Days***

Christmas and Epiphany seem out of place as the final hymns of the *Cathemerinon*, as their content does not match the Scriptural chronology of the salvation history narrative, which is a clue that another movement is taking place. If Prudentius were following a purely Biblical chronology, we should have expected the Incarnation and Infancy to occur before between hymn 3, when it is prophesied<sup>95</sup> and hymn 7, where Jesus' active ministry begins.<sup>96</sup> Biblically, the infancy narratives of Jesus appear in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, but it is Matthew who adds the miraculous star, the worship of the Magi; scholar-kings from Anatolia; and the massacre of the Holy Innocents, the narrative Prudentius chooses.<sup>97</sup> Scholars have had difficulty deciding exactly how these two hymns fit into the schema of the *Cathemerinon* as a unified text,

---

95 Prud. *Cath.* 3. 136-155, *ecce uenit noua progenies/ aethere proditus alter homo.*

96 *Ibid.* 7.176-195.

97 Matt. 2:1-23.

leading to various interpretations, such as Charlet's liturgical year thesis<sup>98</sup> and others to reject a unified composition, especially Evenepoel who points out that the liturgical year was not yet established in Prudentius' day with Christmas at the end of the year.<sup>99</sup> The key element is Prudentius' eschatological reading of the Nativity and Epiphany, complementing his presentation of time as teleological, and creation in *exitus-reditus*. In narrative spanning hymns 11 and 12 Prudentius presents his poetic account of Christ's infancy as the type of the long-awaited *parousia*, and compresses Jesus' birth and Epiphany into a representation of the Christian *saeculum* running from Christ's birth to his complete cosmic triumph. The hymns still fit into the solar theme that informs the whole and continue the movement of the light, who is Christ:

*quid est quod artum circulum  
sol iam rexurrens deserit?  
Christusne terris nasciitur,  
qui lucis auget tramitem?  
Heu quam fugacem gratiam  
festina uoluebat dies!*

Why is it that the sun, returning,  
has now deserted its brief cycle?  
Is not Christ born on earth,  
he who enlarges the flow of the light?  
Alas how passing was the grace  
the swift day has rolled past! (*Cath.* 11.1-6)

This allegorical day of grace is not just the return of the sun, but the coming of Christ into a world which has lost the light which was placed into it at the moment of creation.<sup>100</sup>

Prudentius references the salvation history that runs through hymns 1-6, beginning with the light of the sun, and ending with the small lamp shining tenaciously amidst

---

98 cf. Charlet 45-59.

99 as Evenepoel "Some Literary and Liturgical problems" 82-83.

100 Prud. *Cath.* 1.33-35; 3.1-3; 9.10-15.

oppressive darkness: a natural order doomed to failure on its own. The light returns, as Christ enters the world to redeem it from darkness: light incarnate restores the light to a world whose days have shortened, and the Christian *nouellum saeculum* (a new age; *Cath.* 11.59) begins, brightening into the eternal day that is union with light itself. Prudentius goes on to recall the ages of darkness which preceded this new Christian age. The confusion of idolatry, described as *caeca uis mortalium* (a blind force of human origin; *Cath.* 11.34), had made men blind to the light, immersing man into “the smoking pit” (*fumido . . . barathro*; *Cath.* 11.37-40), but also drawing down Christ himself as saviour after *milia annalium* into a *peccantem diu . . . orbem* (thousands of new-years . . . a long-sinning world; *Cath.* 11.29-32). As a whole, the hymn presents a poetic paraphrase of the Nativity narrative, tuned to Vergil's bucolic lyre, but ending on a decidedly apocalyptic note which seems out of tune. Framed in an appeal and admonition to the Jewish people, Prudentius presents a stunning vision of the final judgement, presided over by Jesus on the clouds, recalling hymn 1:

*peccator, intueberis  
 celsum coruscis nubibus,  
 deiectus ipse et inritis  
 plangens reatum fletibus,  
 cum uasta signum bucina  
 terris cremandis miserit,  
 et scissus axis cardinem  
 mundi ruentis soluerit.  
 Insignis ipse et praeminens  
 meritis repondet congrua,  
 his lucis usum perpetis,  
 illis gehennam et Tartarum.*

Sinner, you will admire him when  
 he is high on the shining clouds,  
 and you yourself are sunk down and driven out

bewailing your guilt with tears,  
when the huge trumpet sends forth the sign  
for the land to be burned,  
and the torn axis lets fall  
the span of the ruined world,  
He himself manifest and excelling all  
will pay back all according to their merits,  
to these the everlasting enjoyment of the light,  
and to those Gehenna and Tartarus. (*Cath.* 11.101-112)<sup>101</sup>

This is not an image characteristically associated with the birth of Christ, indicating that Prudentius' goal is much deeper. A call to conversion, in light of the coming judgement, while Christ is a benevolent child, rather than the all-requiting judge. As with all of his hymns, the first lines reveal what Prudentius will examine in the lines to follow, and so hymn 12 opens with a curious beginning for recounting the Epiphany narrative, and the star that lead the Magi to the Christ-child:

Quicumque Christum quaeritis,  
oculos in altum tollite:  
illic licebit uisere  
signum perennis gloriae.  
Haec stella...

You who seek Christ,  
raise your eyes on high;  
there you may see  
a sign of eternal glory,  
this star... (*Cath.* 12.1-5)

The swift mention of the star that guided oriental kings to Judea recorded in the Gospel of Matthew seems a mere Prudentius moment of dramatic imagery. However a passage from Isaiah, and another from the Gospel of Luke add an eschatological dimension to the scene:

---

101 cf. Prud. *Cath.* 1.21-36.

Be attentive to me, my people; my folk, give ear to me. For law shall go forth from my presence, and my judgement, as the light of the peoples. I will make my justice come speedily; my salvation shall go forth (and my arm shall judge the nations); In me shall the coastlands hope, and my arm they shall await. Raise your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth below; though the heavens grow thin like smoke, the earth wears out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies, My salvation shall remain forever and my justice shall never be dismayed. (Isaiah 51:5-6)

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens <sup>8</sup> will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. (Lk. 21:25-28)

In Prudentius' mind, even the infancy and Epiphany narratives are typological prefigurements reflecting the Apocalypse of John. While they proclaim the birth of Jesus and proclaim him Messiah, they also point to the *parousia*, when the whole world will be destroyed, and all men, wiling or not, will see Christ as God to their endless joy or dismay. This links hymn 12 with hymn 11 which ends with Christ in splendour, and also recalls the end of creation. The many stars all bow down to the one new star, which is a *uexillum regale* (a royal banner; *Cath.* 28), and before which no other star dares to boast (*Cath.* 12.29-32) The star heralds an eternal change, the Incarnation which reveals the new kingdom of God covering the whole cosmos, and leaving no place in darkness:

*regnum, quod ambit omnia  
dia et marina et terrea  
a solis ortu ad exitum,  
et Tartara et caelum supra.*

A kingdom, which encompasses all things,  
heavens, seas and lands,  
from the rising of the sun to its setting,  
and from Tartarus to heaven above. (*Cath.* 89-92)

At the approach of this kingdom, is the resistance of evil. In this way Prudentius typologically unites the infancy narrative of Moses<sup>102</sup> with the massacre of the Holy Innocents. Eschatologically, however, the narrative points to the martyrs in the book of Revelation, who are killed by the Antichrist for their fidelity to Christ<sup>103</sup>, and also predicted in the “little apocalypses” of the Synoptic Gospels, whose Lucan version Prudentius references in the opening lines of the hymn.<sup>104</sup> His reference to the Holy Innocents complements this reading:

*saluete, flores martyrum,  
quos lucis ipso in limine  
Christi insecutor sustulit,  
ceu turbo nascentes rosas.*

Hail flowers of the martyrs,  
who were carried off by Christ's pursuer  
at the very threshold of the light,  
like young roses in a whirlwind. (*Cath.* 12.125-128)

The martyrs are taken at the “threshold” of the light,” the times of tribulation leading up to the *parousia*. Immediately, the hymn turns to Moses more fully as a type of Christ (*Cath.* 12.157-1172), stopping to recall a minor detail which Prudentius sees as highly relevant. The presence of the battle with the Amalekites.<sup>105</sup> In conjunction with the other eschatological elements of the hymn this episode give the type of the final battle before the *parousia*. In this battle, the Israelites triumph as long as Moses holds up his staff, which Prudentius reads as the type of the cross (*Prud. Cath.* 12.169-172). God commands Moses never to forget this short episode, and to record it as significant:

---

102 Ex. 1:15-2:10.

103 Rev. 13:5-7;11-17.

104 Matt. 24:29-31; Mk 13:24-27; Lk. 21:25-28; cf. *Prud. Cath.* 12.1-5.

105 A pagan tribe whose king tries to keep the Israelites out of the Promised Land. cf. Ex. 17:8-16.

Moses, therefore, said to Joshua, "Pick out certain men, and tomorrow go out and engage Amalek in battle. I will be standing on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses told him: he engaged Amalek in battle after Moses had climbed to the top of the hill with Aaron and Hur. As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israel had the better of the fight, but when he let his hands rest, Amalek had the better of the fight. Moses' hands, however, grew tired; so they put a rock in place for him to sit on. Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other, so that his hands remained steady till sunset. And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this down in a document as something to be remembered, and recite it in the ears of Joshua: I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens." Moses also built an altar there, which he called Yahweh-nissi; for he said, "The LORD takes in hand his banner; the LORD will war against Amalek through the centuries."(Ex.17:14-16)

Amalek takes on the typological form of God's enemies, with whom his people will battle until the end of time.

Finally, Prudentius pronounces Christ king over all of the nations, starting with the tribes of Israel, for whom, typologically, Christ was present in their historical rulers(*Cath.* 12. 173-192). Next, he proclaims him king over the nations of the whole world, even those deluded into idol worship, who now abandon their idols for Christ in the new light (12.193-200). Exhorting all the pagan nations to praise (*Cath.* 12.201-204), with an admonishment to all peoples that there is one king (*rex unus*) who reigns over all, Prudentius ends with the commendation of the whole world into God's hands, both lost and saved:

*laudate uestrum principem  
omnes beati ac perditii,  
uiui, inbecili, ac mortui:  
iam nemo posthac mortuus.*

Praise your king  
all you blessed and lost,  
living, foolish, and dead,

for no man, from now on, is dead. (*Cath.* 12.205-208)

And with this final commendation of all creation to God, willing and unwilling to participate in his final and universal illumination, Prudentius ends his narrative of salvation history.

### ***The Sun, Illumination, and Divine Synthesis***

While on the literal level the poems of Prudentius show a broad allegorical movement following the coming, leaving, and return of the sun through the day and the year, the movement of time in the *Cathemerinon* is chiefly symbolic, referring simultaneously to the measured cycles of time as well as to time conceived as a creature with a definitive beginning and end, whose duration is unknown, but whose bordered finitude, like the cosmos itself, is revealed. Following this framework, the whole of the *Liber* regards time in reference to salvation history, which may also be thought of as God's self-revelation and self-identification with his creation, progressively illuminating and synthesizing it with his own light. In the first cycle of God in nature (1-6), there is a dawn of creation and a call to respond to the light (*Cath.* 1 and 2), a fall which distances man from God's light (*Cath.* 3), a sustaining intervention of God's *mediated* light through the Scriptures (*Cath.* 4), a dispersion of the blindness of paganism and the preservation of faith in darkness (*Cath.* 5), and the loss of God's ostensible presence, without which the world “sleeps” (*Cath.* 6). In the second set, the order of grace (7-10), there is a response to God through prayer and fasting (*Cath.* 7), followed by the assertion that grace alone profits, without which asceticism is vain (*Cath.* 8), the salvation narrative itself, in which Christ is revealed as cosmic hero (*Cath.* 9), and death itself is transformed into the way to



heaven (*Cath.* 10). In the last two hymns, Prudentius asserts Christ's cosmic kingship and dominion, as well as the *parousia* that will consummate time itself, bringing all things into the light of God. This narrative informs the structure of the *Cathemerinon*, bringing the reader through a progressive understanding of all the central elements of the faith, and linking them to a consideration of the natural order, and the transformation of nature in grace, so that all things become one in Christ, who leads creation back to God. This is Prudentius' cosmic Christian vision, through which he reveals that indeed the world is filled with God, and all things must be transformed in his light. One choice awaits man: to be transformed, or to dwell in *noctae aeternae chao*.

## Chapter V: Prudentius as *Vates Christianus*

### ***Reinterpreting the Vatic Poets***

While much debate circles the question of court-propaganda and the sincerity of the canonical poets, it is clear that Prudentius takes the claims that Vergil, Horace, and Ovid make for the Emperor at face value. It appears that this literal reading of the Augustans lead Prudentius to two additional poetic motives. First, Prudentius takes the desires and circumstances of a Messiah-king and a new Golden Age expressed by the poets as their own cultural yearning for Christ by linking it with the Incarnation and victory of Jesus Christ. Second, Prudentius also takes the poets' premature *apotheosis* of Augustus seriously, and attempts to subtly refute it, redirecting all messianic attention to Christ alone through intertext and re-interpretation. Through this analysis, I hope to show that Prudentius was not merely trying to ape Augustan poetry by using it for Christian content, but that he is a valid poetic successor to his models, and that his *poesis* sits in a developed, erudite dialogue with the best classical poets.

Prudentius treats pagan tropes allegorically by reading them in the same way that he reads nature, as Christological allegory: signs that point to Christ when properly interpreted. For Prudentius, the myths of the pagans are a confused attempt to seek Christ, which can be redirected to their proper end, just as a man or woman can be baptized, and incorporated into Christ. The manner in which Prudentius accomplishes this is his process of Incarnation, either by 'baptizing' pagan tropes, or by fusing them with Judaeo-Christian tropes, types, and symbols that provide a close analogue. The result is a

new set of images which are both Roman and Christian, with the Christian end reworking the pagan substrate into the image of Christ, and thus remaining true to orthodox Nicene Christianity. The Roman poetic patrimony resonates and defines Roman culture.

However, its content is misdirected to pagan gods and simply cannot be integrated into a Christian world-view without substantial reinterpretation. It is in making this adaptation that Prudentius inserts himself into the Roman poetic tradition in the *Cathemerinon*.

### ***Prudentius and Augustus***

Prudentius took the Augustan court-poets at their word, and read, literally the message that lies behind it: that Augustus is divine, that he has a special relationship with Apollo the sun-god, and that his rule is the will of Jupiter. Whether or not Augustus' contemporaries, or even the poets themselves, believed in this programme of self-promotion, and whether it was affected or genuine is a non-question for Prudentius, who read Augustan poetry at face value, and saw a problem. The Roman cultural narrative had become so firmly intertwined with the poetic mythology of the Augustan poets, that they would need to be refuted and adapted to align with Christian revealed truth. Specifically, there was the problematic position of the Emperor who was unstoppable after the battle of Actium, and who had become *divus Augustus*, the self-proclaimed *filius dei*, who ordered the state-sanctioned *apotheosis* of his adoptive father.<sup>106</sup> Then, for the first time, Romans openly worshipped a man who had lived and died in their very midst. For Christians this decision had lasting consequences, as the first martyrs of Rome would be killed for refusing to offer incense to the Imperial cult statues.<sup>107</sup> While the official *cultus*

---

<sup>106</sup> Cochrane 25-26.

<sup>107</sup> A case and point example is Prudentius' own martyrdom of St. Eulalia, who was killed as a girl for this same offence. cf. Prud. *Per.* 3.66-130.

of the Empire under Theodosius was Christianity, and paganism was technically illegal, if weakly suppressed, many rich and powerful families maintained their pagan worship, and lamented the loss of the *mos maiorum* to the new Christian order.<sup>108</sup> It is with this backdrop in mind that Prudentius, a lover of both his Church and his culture, attempts his own poetic endeavours in the footsteps of the Augustan poets. He is a Christian poet, and so his poetics must put Christ at the centre. Thus, he must reinterpret the classical Roman narrative to adapt it to Christ.

### ***Vates and the Augustan Reforms***

Prior to Vergil, the term *uates* referred only to prophets and soothsayers: those who preyed on the credulous and superstitious with their "mystic" utterances, a relic of an uneducated past.<sup>109</sup> Following Vergil's bold resuscitation of the word, the *uates* becomes more than mere poet, but a divinely inspired authority on the unseen.<sup>110</sup> In this new vatic understanding, poetry extends its reach beyond history, genius and art to signify the poet's inspired knowledge of the cosmic order. Newman's excellent study on the topic notes that this new formulation of poetics, hinging on the poet himself, is itself a cultural fusion, marking a reaction against the Ennian tendency to demythologization and anti-Greek sentiment, to include a more expansive, mystical vision of reality which was welcomed in the difficult years prior to Augustus' ascent to power.<sup>111</sup> The novelty of the Augustan *uates*-concept involves a change in the poet, who no longer belongs to his patron, but advises him and society at large with his vatic insight.<sup>112</sup> It marks a return to a

---

108 Jones 19-22.

109 Newman 100-101.

110 *Ibid.* 108-112.

111 *Ibid.* 101-102.

112 *Ibid.* 104-105.

mythologized vision of history, where the primitive Golden Age provides the ideal context of humanity -- the union of human with divine and the absence of toil and suffering. Over and against Stoic *apatheia* and Epicurean *ataraxia*, the *uates* responded to the deep spiritual need of Augustan Rome by educating their society in the ways of Heaven, proposing a return to order and peace, through a return to union with the divine. The *uates* effect an impartial, priestly presence, that can be trusted: they speak to the Romans as a people set apart for great things, and direct them in the ways of obtaining the peace they desire. This vision, along with its credibility, dovetailed nicely with Augustus' political programme of renewal by uniting Rome with its mythopoeic history, promoting a vision of unity, lending a tone of religious importance to political revolution. The Augustan poetic project is intimately bound up with this understanding of poetry as a mix of *ingenium*, *ars*, and *religio* working together under divine inspiration. A vision of a world pregnant with *romanitas* and *mos maiorum*: the return, in tumultuous times, to peace with the gods, mediated through law and the *imperium* of *divus Augustus*.

For Ovid and Vergil, the vatic vocation serves to offer historical and moral justification to the reign of Augustus, and solidify its valid union with, and succession from, the cultural narrative of Greece and Rome's past. Vergil accomplishes this by immortalizing the legendary past of Rome, exalting *romanitas* through the dependable *uirtus* and *pietas* of the Trojans over and against Greek ἀσέβεια and πολυτροπία: even defeated, Troy lives on to extend its kingdom over the whole world. Thus his approach is both historical and cosmic in scope. Ovid's work takes in the whole of mythological "history" to show that man's past unsuccessful attempts to live with gods are transcended

and fulfilled in the reign of Augustus, at least superficially. His sense of time as a linear unit and of typological fulfilment readily lend themselves to the Christian world-view. For Horace, the goal is to give the new regime a doxological framework, a hymnary of the Empire that teaches men how they should act in this new regime, which is the will of the gods: a perfect way of life. Thus, pragmatically, the Augustan impetus, as embodied by Vergil, Ovid and Horace, is a kind of *kerygma* in its own right: the proclamation of an earthly kingdom in conformity with heaven, which will endure for ever, which has been prophetically foretold in figures and in signs that designate it as universal. For a Christian poet, this error simply cannot go unchallenged.

To establish Prudentius' vision of the compatibility of Rome and Jerusalem, we need look no farther than his own words on the subject. In the prayer of St. Laurence the martyr, Prudentius expresses his conviction that Rome has been specially chosen as the instrument for bringing Christianity to the world at large with Rome as the centre of the universal Church.<sup>113</sup> Prudentius sees a kind of typological reference to Pentecost in the Augustan achievement upon which the Church can build:

*o factor orbis et poli,  
atque auctor horum moenium,  
qui scepra Romae in uertice  
rerum locasti, sanciens  
mundum Quirinali togae  
seruire et armis cedere,  
ut discrepantium gentium  
mores et obseruantiam  
linguasque et ingenia et sacra  
unis domares legibus,  
en omne sub regnum Remi  
mortale concessit genus,  
idem loquuntur dissoni*

---

113 cf. Prud. *Per.* 2.412-482.

*ritus, id ipsum sentiunt.*

O maker of world and skies,  
even of these very walls,  
You who delivered the sceptre  
onto the heights of Rome,  
Ordaining that the world would serve  
the Quirinal Toga, and yield up its arms,  
that you might subdue the discord of the nations;  
observance, customs, tongues,  
characters and worship,  
under one law.  
Behold mankind has submitted to the reign of Remus,  
and discordant rites now speak the same;  
they understand as one. (Prud. *Per.* 2.415-428)

Prudentius is not alone in this understanding of Rome. As the Empire warmed to Christianity under Constantine and subsequent Emperors, authors like Eusebius of Caesarea began to graft the legends of the Roman foundation into Christianity. According to Eusebius, Eternal Rome was indeed destined to become the capitol of Christ's Church, as the see of St. Peter.<sup>114</sup> It would have been difficult to resist thinking that the social order that united most of the world once subject to Christ, would be the vector of evangelization, and Prudentius sees this opportunity as a providential arrangement. But he stresses that this union does not mean the death of *Romanitas*. The cultural patrimony of Rome is not the problem, but the falsehoods hiding behind them. When Rome has welcomed Christ, her achievements will be welcomed and purified, like a catechumen lead to the baptismal font:

*tunc, pura ab omni sanguine  
tandem nitebunt marmora,  
stabunt et aera innoxia,  
quae nunc habentur idola.*

---

114 cf. Momigliano 79-80.

Then, cleansed of their blood,  
the marbles and the bronzes  
now held as idols  
harmless shall stand, and shine. (*Per.* 2.481-484)

Already, Prudentius shows us that he has implicitly intertwined Rome and Jerusalem into a single historical narrative, a graft onto the continued "flow" of salvation history. This itself is nothing new in the tradition, and is even Biblical. St. Paul speaks of the "wild vine" of the gentiles grafted onto the root-stock of Judaism.<sup>115</sup> Origen, by far the greatest influence on Scriptural exegesis, regarded the whole Old Testament as fundamentally allegorical and typological in nature,<sup>116</sup> making it less of a conceptual leap to read the revered pagan tradition in a similar, but distinct, manner. Just as, for Prudentius, Christ is written into the order of nature, and nature is fulfilled by grace, so the pagan poetic tradition awaits its fulfilment in the Christian patrimony so that the former is fulfilled, laying her gifts at Christ's feet like the Magi approaching the manger. Prudentius' poetry contains a stunning plasticity in this regard, maintaining a dialogue with three traditions at once: the classical, the Jewish, and the Christian. In the *Cathemerinon*, this finds expression in a harmonic vision of a converted and "baptized" Roman cosmos with Christ as her Lord. Thus, the Old Testament, New Testament, Christian writings, and a reinterpreted Augustan poetic tradition provide the constituent elements of Prudentius' universal Roman Christianity.

To accomplish this requires a fusion of traditions achieved by a reinterpretation of

---

115 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place and have come to share in the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. If you do boast, consider that you do not support the root; the root supports you. (Rom. 11:17-18).

116 Grondin 28-29.



pagan *uates* in light of the Judaeo-Christian psalmist-prophet. Prudentius is not in the middle ground, but a thoroughly Christian Roman who has mastered the art of breathing the "soul" of the Christian world-view into an 'exorcised' body of pagan myth. Freed from its polytheistic idolatry the *corpus* of Roman poetry becomes like the newly-formed Adam awaiting the breath of God. With a new understanding of the vatic role, the beauty of the Greco-Roman patrimony can serve Christ and survive in the universal Empire that Prudentius proclaims. Prudentius sees his poetic endeavour as a vocation to announce that Christ is the true Augustus, the fulfilment of Rome's destiny, and *Pax Christi* is the true *Pax Augustana*.

### ***Prudentius' Vatic Vocation and the Conversion of the Camena***

Prudentius begins his works with a prologue that shows a very developed self-understanding of his work as a poet. Nearing the end of his life at fifty-seven years, he recalls his classical upbringing, education, and the impressive Roman career that preceded his 'conversion.' He was indeed a man of his age who lived the Late Antique secular ideal of a high positions and a successful career.<sup>117</sup> Looking back on this history of his life, Prudentius feels as though his successes have all been vanity, that his worldly accomplishments will all blow away in the wind.<sup>118</sup> Palmer gives this preface a thorough analysis, comparing Prudentius' preface to the classical *captatio benevolentiae* and *exordia* which are a stock of poetic rhetoric, aimed at securing the ear of the listener through sympathy, and self-abnegation.<sup>119</sup> Prudentius stands out for the sincere evaluation of his life, and the aims of his poetic project. His life mostly spent, and too old for great

---

117 cf. Prud. *Praef.* 13-27.

118 *Ibid.* 31-33.

119 Palmer 9-10.

deeds, Prudentius chooses to turn his attention to God. Thus his call is a not a communicable religious experience, or a divine commission, but the fruits of a Gospel μετανοῖα and the resulting desire to consecrate his poetic voice to God.

*numquid talia proderunt  
carnis post obitum uel bona uel mala  
cum iam, quidquid id est quod fueram, mors aboleverit?  
dicendum mihi: "quisquis es,  
mundum, quem coluit, mens tua perdidit.  
non sunt illa Dei, quae studuit, cuius habebis.*

For how can such things be of use;  
whether good or evil; after the death of the flesh-  
then when death has done away with whatever it is that I was  
I must be told, "whoever you are,  
Your mind has lost the world which you lived in,  
Those things which you desired are not of God, to whom you will belong." (Prud.  
*Praef.* 28-33)

Prudentius' new vocation announces a turn in his life. He renounces everything he has done to turn his full attention to the poetic praise of God. His subject matter, fittingly, will stem from this abandonment of all things secular, and so his poetic programme too will concern itself with things divine, their earthly incarnations, and the worldly opposition they encounter:

*hymnis continuet dies,  
nec nox ulla uacet quin Dominum canat;  
pugnet contra haereses, catholicam discutiat fidem,  
conculcet sacra gentium,  
labem, Roma, tuis inferat idolis,  
carmen martyribus deuoueat, laudet apostolos.*

Let (my soul) unite the days with hymns,  
nor on any night leave off singing the Lord;  
let her dispute against heresies, plead the case of the catholic faith,  
May she trample down the abominations of the pagans,  
Topple your idols, o Rome,  
let her consecrate a song to the martyrs, may she praise the apostles. (*Praef.* 37-

45)

Despite the thoroughly pagan precedent of this form of introduction, Prudentius' undertaking is fresh and unfeigned. He says little about himself, letting the work speak for itself, and because of this, we know little to nothing else of the man. His desired humility is fulfilled, as we have inherited only his work, and his name: nothing more. Prudentius has fulfilled his own vision of the Christian poet. His work allows him to find union with God, and profits his salvation. He diminishes, so that Christ may increase. Palmer is particularly sensitive to an interesting turn on the pagan trope of immortality through the endurance of one's works. She notes that the purpose of Prudentius' poetry is not to save him, but *the activity of praising God through poetry*.<sup>120</sup> He wishes to praise God to his very last breath, hoping that death comes while he is engaged in this divine service:

*haec dum scribo uel eloquor,  
uinclis o utinam corporis emicem  
liber, quo tulerit lingua sono mobilis ultimo!*

While I write or speak these things,  
Oh that I might shine forth free from the chains of this body,  
To the place where my fickle tongue shall tell with its last sound! (*Praef.* 43-45)

As for his own poems, he doubts their objective value and appears unconcerned with their critical reception so long as he attains the goal of salvation: *quidquid illud accedit, / iuvabit ore personasse Christum* (whatever it has come to, I will rejoice to have sung loudly of Christ. *Prud. Epil.* 33-34). Prudentius ranks the vocation of the Christian poet lower, in fact, than the work of other Christians who do deeds of faith. In his sheepish epilogue, he appears ashamed of his poetic talent, lacking the ability for greater works:

---

120 cf. Palmer 15-16.

*Inmolat Deo Patri  
 pius, fidelis, innocens, pudicus  
 dona conscientiae,  
 quibus beata mens abundat intus.  
 alter et pecuniam  
 recidit, unde victitent egeni.  
 nos citos iambicos  
 sacramus et rotatiles trochaeos  
 sanctitatis indigi  
 nec ad levamen pauperum potentes.  
 approbat tamen Deus  
 pedestre carmen et benignus audit.*

The holy, the faithful, the innocent  
 offers the gifts of his conscience in sacrifice  
 to God the Father,  
 with which his soul abounds within.  
 Yet another prunes back his wealth,  
 that he might provide for the poor.  
 I offer up my quick iambs and revolving trochees,  
 since I am lacking in sanctity,  
 and I have not the power to relieve the poor. (Prud *Epil.* 1-10)

Work, even poetry, does not endure, but any work offered to God with a sincere heart  
 constitutes merit. This is a total about-face from Ovid's self-assured *nomen indelibile*, in  
 the epilogue of the *Metamorphoses*, challenging heaven itself to wipe his words away.<sup>121</sup>  
*Pius Prudentius* fully expects his words to be wiped away, but if they are pleasing to God  
 he too is pleased.

### ***Vates: Rex, Propheta, Sacerdos***

The Judaeo-Christian equivalents of the *uates*, reaching back to times more  
 ancient than the Roman *uates*, are the prophet and psalmist. Inspired by the Holy Spirit to  
 sing in praise of God, the psalmist announces not only God's praise, but also the cosmic  
 order of creation: seen and unseen. He speaks of heaven, earth, and of *sheol* where the

---

121 cf. Ov. *Met.* 15.871-879.

souls of the faithful await resurrection, and the souls of the unfaithful their punishment. Their narratives are also told in the form of cultural history, including long lists of notables, eponyms, and culturally defining events; all read with religious attention and mined for direction in every sphere of endeavour. Through divine inspiration, union with the Holy Spirit, the cosmic *ratio* is within the psalmist's grasp.

Turning to the *Cathemerinon* specifically, Prudentius defines the *uates* by distancing himself from the title and reserving it for the prophets of Scripture. The theme of the work is the Christian cosmos, which reveals the secret workings of God to the poet. In each poem of the *Cathemerinon*, Prudentius invokes divine inspiration to assist the work of the Christian poet, in keeping with the theme. In order to speak of the divine, God himself must be present, and thus Prudentius supplies the invocation of God in each of his poems, under a divine attribute which suits the theme of the poem as in the *hymn before meals*:

*O crucifer bone, lucisator,  
omniparens pie, Verbigena,  
edite corpore uirgineo,  
sed prius in genitore potens,  
astra, solum, mare quam fierent,  
huc nitido, precor, intuitu  
flecte salutiferam faciem  
fronte serenus et irradia,  
nominis ut sub honore tui  
has epulas liceat capere.*

O good cross-bearer, light-Father  
Faithful all-father, Word-born,  
Born of a virgin,  
Yet powerful in the Father, even  
Before stars and sun and sea,  
Bend here, I pray, with glimmering gaze  
Your salvation-bearing face,

And serenely shine with beaming brow  
That this feast be held in honour of your name. (*Cath.* 3, 1-10, emphasis added)

Couched in the central theme of light, the first creation, Prudentius associates Christ (*crucifer bone*) with the light of the eyes and the mind. The invocation of Christ as *Lucisator, verbigena, edite corpore virgineo*, and *prius in genitore potens* tells us that this poem will examine various kinds of generation: the order of creation. In place of the Muse is Christ, both incarnate as man and begotten from the Father in eternity, who provides the poet's inspiration. Prudentius will also recall mankind's origin in Eden, the fall of Man, and Christ's redemption, as we discern from *salutiferam*. Prudentius calls on Christ to reveal what he wants to describe, truths hidden from his eyes. Thus the creative power of God the son takes the place of the Muse, and it is *his* presence at the meal that makes it holy and inspired -- a meal of inspired words, a meal of divine revelation.

The Muse has been definitively displaced by Christ, but she has not completely lost her function. Like Rome she is welcome to continue her work, if only she will put aside her sordid, idolatrous past, be “baptized” and serve Christ. Prudentius rebukes her even as he invokes her help so as to profit both his poetry, and her own salvation:

*sperne, Camena, leues hederas,  
cingere tempora quis solita es,  
sertaque mystica dactylico  
texere docta liga strophio,  
laude Dei redimita comas.*

Spurn, oh Muse, to wear the trifling ivy,  
Which you were used to wearing in times gone by;  
Now, having been taught, weave mystic garlands,  
Binding them into a dactyl ribbon:  
Crowned, adorn yourself with praise of God. (*Cath.* 3, 25-29)

Clearly a Christian *uates*, does not consort with the pagan *Camena*, until she has divested

herself of her former vanity. She must put off her old “trifling ivy,” and weave a “dactylic head-band” of mystic verses, to crown herself with the praise of God, rather than her useless idolatry. This transformation is not only for the poet, but for the good of poetry. To be effective, it must be subordinated to Christ. Otherwise, the Muse has no future. With the “baptism of the muse” accomplished, she can now versify for Christ through the Christian *uates* who is the vehicle of the inspiration required to praise God. A subtle transformation has taken place. *Camena* is no longer the source of inspiration, but the technical skill of versification demoted to a mere metonymy in the hands of the Christian poet. Thus she, too, must learn to praise God alongside the poet. Her conversion symbolically indicates a change in the purpose and nature of poetry, which is now the consecration of the vatic skill to God.

To effect a re-interpretation of the Muse, Prudentius makes use of the thoroughly Christian trope of the converted harlot from the Gospels and the hagiographic tradition. Mary Magdalene, the penitent woman, the Samaritan woman at the well, and many early Saints provide the example here of a turn from the vanities of the world to the properly ordered, sober worship of God. Additionally, polytheism is represented by adultery in the Prophetic literature. That this trope is repeatedly applied to Israel and typologically understood as the Christian Church shows the great value Prudentius places on the Roman poetic tradition. *Camena* is beautiful, but she has squandered her riches on false suitors and flatterers who abused her to cover lies. Converted, there is no need for fine clothes, pomp or ceremony; in the wake of her conversion she exchanges the glittering raiment of a prostitute for Christian simplicity: her new adornment is the unceasing praise

of God. She makes a second appearance in the ninth hymn, where her position is the same:

*Da, puer, mihi plectrum, choreis ut canam fidelibus  
dulce carmen et melodum, gesta Christi insignia.  
hunc Camena nostra solum pangat, hunc laudet lyra.  
Christus est, quem rex sacerdos adfuturum protinus  
infulatus concinebat uoce, chorda et tympano,  
spiritum caelo influentem per medullas hauriens.*

Give me, boy, my quill, that I might sing in faithful trochees  
a sweet song and poem, the famous deeds of Christ.  
This alone our **Muse** may fasten upon, this (alone) will our **lyre** praise.  
It is Christ whose swift coming the mitred **priest-king**  
sang with with voice, strings, and timbrel,  
drinking into his very marrow the spirit flowing out of heaven. (*Cath.* 9.1-6)

Prudentius makes an interesting equivocation in the opening lines of the hymn. As before, the Muse is the personification of poetic skill -- especially given the reference to *choreis*, trochaic verses, and the presence of the lyre. King David, the first psalmist, is invoked as the paradigmatic Christian *uates* who sings inspired songs that speak of Christ. He does not acknowledge that the immediate context of David's songs are at all relevant, but skips immediately to the real content of the psalms, which is Christ. This tells us something vital about Prudentius' conception of the Christian *uates*: He must speak of Christ, who is the word, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, placing his inspiration totally outside of himself. The Muse is an assistant, a human excellence, in the order of nature that devises the meter and composes the lines on the page, while the Holy Spirit incarnates mere words with the presence of Christ:

*nec deficit tamen anxiis medella;  
nam languente truci leonis ira  
inlapsae superingeruntur escae.  
quas si quis sitienter hauriendo,*



*non gustu tenui sed ore pleno,  
internis uelit implicare uenis,  
hic sancto satiatu ex propheta  
iustorum capiet cibos uirorum,  
qui fructum Domino metunt perenni.*

But nonetheless, the remedy for our anxieties is not lacking, for drifting food is abundantly heaped upon us from above, as the lion's rage subsides, which if anyone should wish to weave into his inmost veins, by drinking down thirstily with full mouth, not by delicate tasting, he is satisfied, by the holy prophet; he will receive the food of just men, who reap the food of eternity in the Lord. (*Cath.* 4. 85-93)

While men wait in the lion's den of the world, they are nourished by the inspired words of the *propheta*. By devouring the word, the *uerbum* of John's Gospel, a man reaps the *food of eternity in the Lord*. Thus, for Prudentius, consuming the word of the Scriptures extends prophetic inspiration to the poet, as long as he stays within the bounds of the Scriptures. The theme of food is especially appropriate. The exegetical meditations which the hymns of the *Cathemerinon* present are closely tied to *digesting* and *breaking up the word*, which is a metaphor for the exegesis of Scripture. Through reading Scripture and breaking it down, the Christian *uates* partakes in divine inspiration. By making it a part of one's *inmost being* the poet becomes one with God, and shares in the prophet's divine inspiration. It is this participation itself which brings about the poet's salvation, while the secondary benefit is to extend this inspiration to others through Christian vatic poetry, so long as it too, partakes in the *Word*. Prudentius then makes it clear that he has the vatic vocation in mind as he adds, almost by way of translation for his audience: *nil est dulcius ac magis saporum / nil quod plus hominem iuvare possit, / quam uatis pia praecinentis orsa* (Nothing is sweeter, or more flavorful, nothing is more helpful to man,

than the devout utterances of a prophesying *uates* *Cath.* 4.94-96, emphasis added). Whoever would know God must "drink down the Word" (*haurire*). Prudentius uses this word many times to indicate union with God, described as *drinking him down into the inner self*, or *drinking deep of God*, often with *medulla*.<sup>122</sup> A deep interweaving of God and Man provides the inspiration of the Christian *uates*, who reveals the word of God to the people, and feeds them with it, as Habakuk fed Daniel in the Lion's den. The classical references are very striking in this context, especially of *praecino*, used only twice in the corpus<sup>123</sup>, and *pia orsa*. Both alert us to Vergilian influence: Vergil's words for the prophetic speech of a *uates*.<sup>124</sup> Prudentius is reinforming the pagan concept of *uates* with the Judaeo-Christian *propheta* even as he indicates an important distinction: it is Christ's presence indicates a transforming encounter with God, and reveals knowledge to the *uates*.

In hymn VII, before the fast, Jonah is also a *uates*, at the very moment when he is cast into the sea:

*fit procellosum mare,  
tum causa tanti quaeritur periculi,  
sors in fugacem missa uatem decedit.*

as the sea grows rough,  
then the cause of such danger is sought,  
the lot is cast, it falls upon the fleeing prophet. (*Cath.* 7.108-110, emphasis added)

This association of Jonah with the *uates*-concept gives us another clue for interpreting Prudentius' sense of the the vatic role. Jonah is a prophet who refuses his call from God

---

122 cf. Prud. *Cath.* 4.18; 11.6, 4.18.

123 Here and in *Cath.* 1.2, where it refers to the central image of the bird, announcing Christ's coming.

Both are images of prophetic speech.

124 cf. Verg. *Aen.* 6.562; 7.435.

to prophesy, and tries to flee away.<sup>125</sup> After his admission of guilt, his punishment and his conversion brought about by the fish, he announces God's judgement over a pagan people, who turn to the true God with fasting and prayer.<sup>126</sup> For the Christian, Jonah is a Christological type with whom Jesus identifies himself in the Gospels:

An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. At the judgement, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here. (Matt. 12:39-41)<sup>127</sup>

The "sign of Jonah" points this prophet out as a specific type of Christ, whose captivity in the fish foretold Christ's victory over Hades. Prudentius also calls Jonah a *propheta*, indicating the dual nature of the *propheta/uates*, and his identification with Christ. If Jonah, a *propheta*, provides not only a type of Christ, but his mediated presence, this adds a further dimension to the vatic vocation linked to the food of hymns 3 and 4: In order for the *uates* to speak the Word, he must himself consume the Word, become one with the Word, and speak the Word: in short, Christ is the identity, and content of Christian *uatic* speech. Prudentius may also be inserting himself here into the role of Jonah. If we look at Prudentius' preface, his dissatisfaction with his past life, and his promise to "tread underfoot the sacrileges of the pagans,"<sup>128</sup> we may see Jonah the *uates* as a fitting analogue to Prudentius, who tries to rouse a pagan nation to worship of the true God. This understanding of vatic inspiration, however, does little to help understand Prudentius' place as a Christian poet. If anyone who reads the Scriptures and lives a life in union with

---

125 cf. Jonah 1:1-3.

126 cf. Jonah 1:4-2:11.

127 cf. also Mk. 8:11-12 and Lk. 11:16, 29-32.

128 Prud. *Praef.* 40.

God is has access to the same inspiration, then how does Prudentius define his own role in light of his Christian reinterpretation of the *uates*-concept?

### ***The Christianized Vates-Concept***

Prudentius, in fact, never presumes to call himself a *uates* as do Vergil, Ovid, and Horace.<sup>129</sup> With humility he refers to himself as a *poeta rusticus*.<sup>130</sup> He presents the *propheta* as the true fulfilment of the pagan *uates*-concept, and true vatic inspiration as the Holy Spirit alone. They are not the same, but the one points to the other, in an obscured way. As Prudentius holds nature itself to contain Christ, it is an allegorical presence, that is purified and clarified through Scriptural revelation. In this, Prudentius' own exegesis of poetic inspiration matches his the overall approach in the *Cathemerinon*, showing the order of nature being fulfilled and clarified by the order of grace. For example, the trust that allows us to sleep in peace every night is itself a prefiguration of the resurrection, but does not suggest it on its own -- the light of Scriptural revelation and the deeds of Christ are the sure promise of the resurrection. This reveals that Prudentius regards the pagan *uates*-concept as a mode of expression only, but one which resonates with authoritative force, and can serve as a point of communion and conversion. Much like St. Paul's incorporation of the "unnamed god" on the Areopagus who has no image, part of the truth resides in the pagan vatic patrimony, but revelation alone can satisfy its longing.

As for his own poetry, Prudentius does not appear to regard it as more than doxological literature derived from the Scriptures, in response to St. Paul's desire for the

---

129 Newman 129-130.

130 Prud. *Per.* 2.574, *audi poetam rusticam...* (listen to a simple poet...).

faithful to “be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another (in) psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts [...]” (Eph. 5:18-19). Their true value comes from the use of Scripture in the hymns which gives them their authority. Prudentius himself seems unsure of the value of his own work, which he certainly does not elevate above its worth: *approbat tamen Deus / pedestre carmen et benignus audit* (But God accepts a commonplace song, and kindly hears it.; Prud. *Epil.* 11-12, emphasis added) This explains the prominent role of Scripture in Prudentius' hymns, his subordination of the Muse to the inspiration of the Spirit, his repeated invocations, and his use of food to symbolize the union and the synthesis of man into God. Unlike the pagan tradition, any Christian can partake in the inspiration of the *uates* by consuming and being conformed to "the Word" of Scripture and sacrament, who is Christ. Thus, the Christian vatic privilege is universalized, and extended to all who choose to engage with *the Word*, allowing those who make him a part of their *inmost veins* to truly become priest, prophet, and king through their immediate access to God in Christ.

Prudentius rescues the classical concept of the *uates* by reinterpreting the pagan literary *uates* in terms that Vergil, Horace, and even Ovid would have found acceptable. In doing so he also remains faithful to the Christian Scriptural understanding of prophetic inspiration. Pagan authors believed that the *uates* receive their inspiration from a god and have some closeness to the divine order in the tradition of priests, prophets, and kings. While similar in effigy, it is the content of vatic speech and the source of vatic inspiration that sets the Prudentian *uates* apart.

There is also a practical distinction when we turn to Augustan poetry in particular.

In the Augustan context the prophetic dimension of the literature is static, since it was deliberately formulated to be relevant to the writer's historical context. While *kerygmatic* in their presentation of the Roman achievement under Augustus, they can only provide examples of civic virtue. This is an evident goal of the *Aeneid*, as well as Horace's *Roman Odes*, to inculcate the emulation of virtue, and establish a historical basis for Augustus' new regime. Regardless of possible ulterior motives or hidden agendas in the works which comment on the success or failure of the Augustan project, the prophecies they relate are already *de facto* accomplished, such as the shield of Aeneas, which details the history of Rome, and the prophecies of Anchises in the Underworld.<sup>131</sup> This is why the fourth *Eclogue* was of such great interest to Christians, for there is a prophecy that was not merely history, firmly attached to present reality, but a prediction of things to come in language that paralleled the prophet Isaiah. Moreover, Vergil's "Messianic Eclogue," is easily interpreted as a veiled prophecy pointing to Christ himself, allying it, apparently, with the Christian standards of prophetic speech, that Christ be present.

For Prudentius, this is the content of prophecy. Not mere words or ideas, but the *Word*: Christ. The word of the prophet is alive and extends a dynamic relationship to the reader. The Scriptures allow another to participate in the same inspiration as a prophet, and gain knowledge of God, while the pagan *uates* restricts himself to the practical: knowledge of how the gods would like men to be, rather than divine knowledge about the deity itself. Vergil may tell the story of Aeneas, but he does not *become* Aeneas. The Sibyl may tell us that a Messiah is coming, and that wondrous changes will be brought about, but she can tell us no more. The Christian literary *uates* not only delivers Christ's

---

131 cf. Verg. *Aen.* 8.626-728, 6.756-886.

message, but becomes configured to that message, drawn into Christ so that even the events of the poet's life point to him, as Jonah becomes a “sign” of Christ in his personal history. Thus the Prudentian *uates* is of universal significance, as each represents Christ, and each speaks the *Word*, making his own vatic inspiration available to all.

Prudentius reinterprets the trope of the *uates*-concept substantially, as we have seen, but his most significant departure from the Augustan *uates*-concept is that Prudentius refuses the title of *uates* for himself as well as any claim to private access divine inspiration. The true *uates* is the *propheta*, the *uates* of the Scriptures, and other Scriptural authors who receive knowledge of Christ destined for all men. Thus, we must conclude that Prudentius does not associate his own poetic vocation with the Augustan *uates*-concept tradition, but with his own reinterpreted *uates*-concept, which gives him access to the cosmic ration only through partaking in Scripture. He does not merely replace the *uates* with the *propheta*, but has carefully amended the *uates*-concept to the orthodox Christian understanding of divine inspiration.

## Chapter VI: The *Locus Amoenus* in Salvation History Typology

### ***In Paradisum Deducant te Angeles***

The familiar Alexandrian device of the *locus amoenus* appears throughout Augustan poetry, expressing the Roman nostalgia for a long-past age of Saturn, when men and gods lived in peace, and the untilled earth put forth food of its own accord. As Jacques Fontaine notes in his short study, the *locus amoenus* provides a central point of assimilation of Scripture and pagan poetic tradition where pagan and Christian imagery aesthetically converge.<sup>132</sup> Long a part of the Alexandrian poetic tradition, this sense of an original beatitude, lost through disobedience, and caught only in temporal glimpses of the *locus amoenus* presents itself as an obvious source of imagery for the Judaeo-Christian paradise. Ovid and Vergil provide these scenes in abundance, especially the *Metamorphoses*, to whose sumptuous scenery Prudentius frequently turns for examples. The Augustan fixation on this past age and its return mediated by a divine man provides imagery to adorn these three scenes of the *Cathemerinon*, which are the Eden of hymn 3, the *patria iustorum* of hymn 5, and the pastoral scene of hymn 8.

### ***She Will Crush Your Head, and You Will Strike at Her Heel***

In hymn 3, after admonition and exhortation to μετανοῖα of hymns 1 and 2, Prudentius begins his history of salvation in Augustan fashion, with a nostalgic gaze at the order of creation before the fall of man, examining first the vestiges of the Golden

---

<sup>132</sup> Fontaine “Trois variations” 96-99.



Age, closely following Vergil's description in *Georgics* 1.<sup>133</sup> Like the primordial age of Saturn, Eden is a place of delights, a place of God-given abundance. Pomegranates fall in showers from trees, grain, honey, milk, fish, and birds abound.<sup>134</sup> The abundance of nature provides a reflection on the goodness of creation, impressing the deep tragedy of man's fall, as well as the mildness of God's punishment. The bounty of nature does not abate, but remains full. There is an interesting reworking of the familiar Alexandrian image of bees who toil among the flowers. Prudentius manages to collect and distill the bees of Augustan poetry into an image of original beatitude and Christian virtue:

*mella recens mihi Cecropia  
nectare sudat olente fauus;  
haec opifex apis aërio  
rore liquat tenuique thymo,  
nexilis inscia conubii.*

the honey-comb drips  
fresh nectar-scented, Cecropian honey,  
the worker-bee strains from the dewy air,  
and the delicate thyme,  
she who does not know  
the interweaving of marriage. (*Cath.* 3.71-75)

This passage is in itself a beautiful example of Prudentius' searching memory, of *contaminatio*, and synthesis. Modelling his images on Vergil's bees of the fifth Eclogue where they are *thymo et rore pascentur* (fed on dew and thyme; *Ecl.* 5.77), Prudentius adds that they are *nexilis inscia conubii* (innocent of the embrace of wedlock), a detail gathered from both Vergil,<sup>135</sup> and Ovid whose Pythagoras declares that bees are the

---

133 Note especially the imagery of food-gathering of fish and birds, without mention of meat-animals: Verg. *Georg.* 1.118-159. It is notable that the chief re-imagination of Prudentius lies in presenting Earth's original bounty as intact, but requiring human labour.

134 cf. Prud. *Cath.* 3.41-80.

135 cf. Verg. *Georg.* 4.197-199.

product of biogenesis.<sup>136</sup> Recasting of the familiar, tireless bees receives a new take in the attachment of *nexilis*: a word used by Ovid to describe the border of Arachne's tapestry of interwoven flowers and ivy which frames love-affairs of gods and humans, stressing the word's nuptial dimension.<sup>137</sup> The bees are no longer merely exemplary workers, but Christian consecrated virgins who labour to make nectar, enjoying the bounty of God blamelessly. The innocent labour of these worker bees who distill honey from the nectar of flowers and dew of the air signal the original innocence; both in harmony with nature and productive of good. According to Prudentius, Eve was also *innuba* before eating from the tree, and became a wife only after eating its fruit.<sup>138</sup> Yet the culmination of this image comes in the redemption of man, starting with Mary, whom the bees also symbolize. Like the new, Christian bees, Mary brings forth her work, bearing the son of God as a virgin:

*fit caro uiuida Sermo Patris,  
numine quam rutilante grauis  
non thalamo, neque iure tori,  
nec genialibus inlecebris,  
intemerata puella parit.*

The Word of the Father became flesh,  
whom, pregnant with the shining godhead,  
not through the bridal-chamber, nor by the law of the marriage-bed,  
nor by attractions of marriage:  
a chaste young woman brought to birth. (*Cath* 3.141-145)

Thus, the Virgin Mary becomes a central image in this hymn, and a foil for the generation-story of Augustus, according to which, his mother was impregnated by Apollo

---

136 cf. Ov. *Met.* 15.335.

137 cf. Ov. *Met.* 6.122 sqq.

138 Prud. *Cath.* 3.123-125: *innuba femina quae fuerat, / coniugis excipit imperium, / foedera tristia iussa pati* (the woman, who had been until then unwed, received the *imperium* of her husband, ordered to suffer a sorrowful contract).

in the form of a snake, whereas Jesus' generation is wholly virginal.<sup>139</sup> Prudentius' shows a great confidence in the enduring goodness of nature, which remains even after the fall of man in these passages, and is quick to point out that only free will used against God generates sin, not matter itself, in contrast to the faddish thought of many gnostic and pagan groups in Prudentius' day.<sup>140</sup>

After the creation of man, God bids him live in a garden of *uer perpetuum* (eternal spring) which is sumptuously described as *amoena uirecta* (pleasant green places), *frondicoma* (leaf-shaded), and *multicolora* (*Cath.* 3.101-105). The garden is watered by an *amne quadrifluo*, recalling the stream that flowed through paradise, breaking off into four rivers, and returning us to the scene's Biblical precedent.<sup>141</sup> Ironically, 3.101-105, is quite closely borrowed from Vergil's description of Elysium in the Underworld, one of Prudentius' consistent sources for images of paradise. His choice reveals his reliance on classical imagery and his strong confidence in the goodness of nature.<sup>142</sup>

The plenitude and innocence of the Garden of Eden is quickly transformed from a *locus amoenus* into a *locus inamoenus* by the presence of a *mortifero stipite* (death-bearing tree) in the centre, from which Adam and Eve must not eat and the entry of Satan who tricks Eve into eating the fruit.<sup>143</sup> The quick turn from paradise to ruin calls to mind the beautiful grove of *Metamorphoses* 3, where Cadmus' men are devoured by the serpent

---

139 Miller 18-19.

140 Marion van Assendelft is particularly conscious of Prudentius' reaction to gnosticism. See van Assendelft 29-34.

141 as Fontaine "Trois variations" 101; cf. Gen. 2:10-14.

142 Prudentius' re-interpretation of Elysium in this way is notable, as it will provide Dante with an image not of Heaven, but of Limbo, where souls are deprived of the vision of God, but not of terrestrial delights.

143 Prudentius' identification of the tree of knowledge of good and evil with the cross is evident here in his choice of *stipes* for tree, a work for a stake or post.

of Mars, lurking in a seemingly harmless garden, and leading ultimately to a race of men born of the dragon, who are fratricides from birth.<sup>144</sup> The woman will crush the three-tongued throat with her heel (*colla trilinguia calce*), alluding to the serpent of Mars in whose mouth *tres uibrant linguae, tres stant ordine dentes* (three tongues dart forth, the teeth stand in three rows *Met.* 3.34). Men persist in their errors after the fall, building up a world for themselves *fasque nefasque simul glomerans* (collecting virtue and sin together alike *Cath.* 3.134 ), perhaps a reference to Ovid's mysterious *quisquis deorum* who is the shaper of matter, but not its maker, and who mixes portions of all things together to form the world:

*sic ubi depositam quiquis fuit ille deorum  
congeriem secuit sectamque in membra redegit,  
principio terram, ne non aequalis ab omni  
parte foret, magni speciem glomeravit in orbis.*

Thus, when, whoever of the gods he was ,  
divided up the mass and reassembled the parts into sections,  
in the beginning he molded earth into the image of a great sphere,  
lest it be unequal on every side. (Ov. *Met.* 1.32-35)

Ovid's pagan confusion about the order of creation mirrors man's resultant confusion of good and evil, and of truth and falsity. Hope remains, however, even after this primordial catastrophe. Prudentius points to the subsequent Incarnation, when the devil, defeated, is trampled underfoot by the Virgin Mary, because she has borne Christ:

*edere namque Deum merita  
omnia uirgo uenena domat;  
tractibus anguis inexplicitis  
uirus inerme piger reuomit,  
gramine concolor in viridi.*

---

144 Ov. *Met.* 3.102-128.

the virgin who was worthy to give birth to God  
overcomes all venoms,  
the snake in its intractable coils  
vomits forth a harmless poison  
onto the green grass, similarly-coloured (*Cath* 3.151-155)

The dragon, which provides the model for this battle is shown in similar defeat, bleeding onto the grass after Cadmus has wounded it with his spear-point: *iamque uenenifero sanguis manare palato*

*coeperat et uirides aspergine tinxerat herbas* (and now the blood had begun to drip from its poison-bearing mouth and stained the grass green. [or stained the green grass]; *Ov. Met.* 3. 85-86). To cancel any possible aetiological readings of his borrowed image of the beaten *serpens Martis*, Prudentius shifts his model to show that the poison of the snake did not dye the grass green: it merely shares its colour, for God alone has power over the nature of things, and they cannot be metamorphosed apart from his willing it.

Prudentius' model for this *locus amoenus/locus inamoenus* and the triumph over its dangers stem from Vergilian/Ovidian images with Christian additions. Human strength cannot subdue the wiles of the devil: only God become man. It is possible that an anti-Augustan element helps to inform this passage as well. In addition to Augustus' association with Apollo who killed Python, the chaos-serpent from *Metamorphoses* 1 is also linked with the Nile. Apollo's victory over it coincides with with Augustus' victory at Actium, followed by the institution of *ludi* in both cases.<sup>145</sup> It is possible that the Cadmus-episode is also an Augustan dragon-slaying in Prudentius' mind, repeating the frequent theme of reason overcoming chaos, and nested among so many other close references.

---

145 Miller 338-344.

However, in Prudentius' re-interpretation, it is a Virgin-birth which makes Christ divine, placing Mary in focus in this hymn as the new dragon-slayer: it is the Virgin who tramples the serpent, and it is the victory over sin which will return paradise into the hands of men, not an earthly ruler through an earthly *Imperium*, but a heavenly ruler whose kingdom is *not of this world* (John. 18:36). We will have to wait until hymn 9 in order to see Christ's victory over Satan in Hades.

### ***Exodus and Elysium***

Taking pastoral poetry for his model, and infusing epic poetry into his narrative, Prudentius does not merely re-signify his borrowed images, but further shows a delicate awareness of each word he chooses, or coins, so that the old is re-informed, and shaped to suit the new. The bee loses none of her status enjoyed in the *Eclogues*, *Metamorphoses*, or *Aeneid*, but gains a new dignity as a type of the Christian consecrated virgin, the image of intact nature in spite of the fall. The serpent of Mars does not become Satan, but provides an analogical way to describe him, which is instantly intelligible to the educated reader, with the stunning reinterpretation that no hero or Cadmus slays the dragon, but a young virgin has overcome him with her purity. In this way, Prudentius maintains a dialogue with both the Scriptures and the poets, showing that their types and figures find their real fulfilment in Christian revelation.

The lost *locus amoenus* of Eden is consistently paralleled with the Golden Age in Prudentius, providing a context for the rest of the poems. Original beatitude, its loss, and its super-satisfaction in Christ supply the first aspect of Christian salvation history, presented in terms the pagan may understand. Hymn 3 ends on a hopeful note, professing

a hope of salvation in Christ, extending the conceit of the world as a deceptive *locus inamoenus* into hymns 4 and 5. In the fourth hymn, the world is cast as a lion's den under the rule of a grim tyrant preserved by God's poets, the *uates*. *Inlapsae superingeruntur escae* (fallen food, sent down from on high; *Cath* 4.87), descends from heaven in anticipation of the manna in hymn 5. Prudentius returns to the *locus amoenus* in the fifth hymn which recalls the defeat of Satan, the dragon cast as the Pharaoh, and the journey of God's people to the land of the just. In this description of the *locus amoenus*, Prudentius makes a very interesting reversal; the desert of Sinai where the Israelites wandered for forty years, a *locus inamoenus*, becomes a *locus amoenus* because of God's providing presence. In a notably Ovidian reversal, not only do bitter waters become sweet like *mella Atticum*, but food falls from heaven in the form of the manna *inplet castra cibus tunc quoque ninguidus, / inlabens gelida grandine densius* (a snow-like food then fills the camp, falling more densely than icy hail), along with the quail which come in droves, also without labour.<sup>146</sup> While the setting is far from the *idyllic* Garden of Eden, the Hebrews receive everything that they need, directly from the hand of God. Deprived of their own ability to gather what is needed, they are supplied with food from heaven, and water that is not only fresh, but sweet. Thus the *locus amoenus* topos is again re-imagined, so that God transforms a harsh land into a paradise: a curse into a blessing. Paradise, therefore, for Prudentius, is not so much a place, as it is the state of drawing near to God.

Nevertheless, Prudentius returns to a classical *locus amoenus* the *patria iustorum*, and anagogically expounds on a new paradise, more sensual than that of hymn 3, or the

---

<sup>146</sup> Prud. *Cath.* 5.93-104. *Ninguidus* is used only by Prudentius and Ausonius.

desert of Sinai. It is the promised land which lies *per freta seculi* (over the seas of this age). This is heaven, the final and perpetual *locus amoenus*, a land which breathes cinnamon, and abounds with exotic flowers and spices, a land that is leafy, green, and alive.<sup>147</sup> There the souls of the just are gathered, singing:

*felices animae prata per herbida  
concentu pariles suaue sonantibus  
hymnorum modulis dulce canunt melos  
calcant et pedibus lilia candidis.*

the happy souls sing their sweet song;  
in the resounding measures of hymns,  
all alike in pleasant concord  
they trample the lilies with their white feet. (*Cath* 5.121-124)

The imagery is drawn from Vergil's *Elysium*, where the *felices animae* exercise themselves in many occupations, mainly singing, *pars pedibus plaudunt choreas et carmina dicunt* (some [of the blessed] beat out measures, and sing songs in choruses. Verg. *Aen.* 6.644); and again, some feast, but others are *choro paeana canentis* (singing paeans in a chorus Verg. *Aen.* 6.657). The obvious play on *choreas/ choreos* (trochees) could not have been lost on Prudentius, for whom the souls of the just sing lyric poetry, and hymns (*paeanoi*), just like Christians singing their lyrical hymns and psalms. The two central points of reinterpretation lie in stressing the unity of the blessed, and their purity. Vergil's blessed souls do many things, in diverse groups. Some feast, some exercise, and others sing.<sup>148</sup> For Prudentius, the blessed exercise themselves in only one occupation: praise of God. This song is sung in many measures (*modulis*), but always in unison (*concentu, pariles*), and everyone sings: everyone has become a *uates*. Prudentius

---

147 cf. Prud. *Cath.* 5.113-120.

148 Verg. *Aen.* 6.642-644.



is giving an insight into the afterlife of the just, on Roman terms, but correcting and re-orienting the images from the pagan to their Christian fulfilment in Christ. He is evangelizing Aeneas, and teaching him and all Rome where the souls of the just go, taking his own position as *uates optime*, taking the Sibyl's question to Musaeus, one *uates* to another, at face value: *Dicite, felices animae, tuque, optime uates, quae regio Anchisen, quis habet locus?* (Speak, blessed souls, and you, great *uates*, in what region does Anchises take his place; Verg. *Aen.* 6.669-670) The answer of Musaeus is insufficient, it is denied him: the Augustan, Apolline *uates* must give way to the Christian *uates*, who has welcomed the *Word* of Scripture, and can announce the truth about the cosmos.

### ***The Lord is my Shepherd***

Changing his model ever so slightly, Prudentius recasts heaven in terms of the pasture of the Good Shepherd in hymn 8 which is notable for its lack of a clear, direct Biblical *exemplum* at the centre of its action, providing instead a paraphrase on the Parable of the Good Shepherd taken from the Gospel of John and Psalm 23:

So Jesus said again, "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came [before me] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:7-11)

Prudentius' version takes this Parable as a short metaphorical conceit, returning to a pastoral scene, reminiscent of *Eclogues*, and indebted again, to Ovid. Fontaine rightly

sees multiple reminiscences of Vergil in this passage, especially, *Georgics* 1 and 3.<sup>149</sup> Of the two, *Georgics* 1 is notable for its close similarity to the Eden narrative from Genesis. Not only did the world provide food of its own accord without labor, but also for its assertion that in the Age of Iron, the earth suddenly sprang forth with various spiny plants, for Vergil; *carduus* and *lappa*, as well as *lolium* and *auena*.<sup>150</sup> These brambles, thorns, and poisonous plants signify the dangers of the world, which ensnare the *Christicolae*, and paralyze them outside the pasture of the Good Shepherd which are *frequens palmis nemus; nulla lappis / spina, nec . . . carduus horrens* (no spine of the bur, nor... the bristling thistle; *Cath.* 8.41-44). The absence of these curses indicates a return to the original integrity of paradise, under the care of the Good Shepherd. Fontaine notes, too, that the image of the spines denotes war in Ennius and Vergil, a sign of nature at war with man after the fall, noticeably absent from the *nemus beatorum*.<sup>151</sup>

Ovidian elements from the *Metamorphoses* inform the scenery, where poor Arethusa hides in the cloud of Diana from Alphaeus who pursues her with lustful intent:

*quid mihi tunc animi miserae fuit? anne quod **agnae** est,  
si qua **lupos** audit circum stabula alta frementes,  
aut lepori, qui **uepre** latens hostilia cernit  
ora canum nullosque audet dare corpore motus?*

What then was the state of my poor soul? What but that of the little lamb, when it hears the wolves growling around the tall stables, or of the hare hiding under a thorn-bush who sees the mouths of the dogs, and does not dare to move its body? (Ov. *Met.* 5 626-629, emphasis added)

Note the lexical similarities:

---

149 Fontaine “Trois variations” 110-111.

150 Verg. *Geo.* 1.150-154; 3.

151 Fontaine “Trois variations” 111.

*ille ouem morbo residem gregique  
perditam sano, male dissipantem  
uellus adfixis uepribus per hirtae  
deuia siluae  
inpiger pastor reuocat lupisque  
gestat exclusis umeros grauatus  
inde purgatam reuehens aprico  
reddit ouili...*

When a sheep, sluggish on account of sickness,  
is lost from the healthy flock,  
wasting its fleece badly, caught on thorns  
through the back-roads of the rough wood,  
He, a ceaseless shepherd, calls it back, and,  
when the wolves are driven away,  
bears it up, his shoulders weighted down,  
bringing it back, at last, cleansed,  
to the bright sheep-fold. (*Cath.* 33-40, emphasis added)

As the sheep of hymn 8 is immobilized in the *uepribus* by its wool, and menaced by wolves which the shepherd drives off, Arethusa is also likened to a lamb surrounded with wolves, or a hare hiding from dogs under thorns. The main reference, however, is the image of a little sheep (*agna*) to represent the frightened state of Arethusa's soul affronted by evil. Her prayers heard, she is saved by Diana in a timely metamorphosis<sup>152</sup>, just as the lost sheep is snatched from danger in the arms of the Good Shepherd.<sup>153</sup>

Prudentius also recasts a Vergilian precedent from *Georgics* 3 in his description of the sheep-fold where the Good Shepherd pastures his sheep, and which Fontaine briefly notes for its verbal similarities.<sup>154</sup> Vergil declares that he will build a temple for Caesar, in a green field (*uiridi campo*), after bringing home the *palmas Idumeas* for his poetry.<sup>155</sup>

---

152 Ov. *Met.* 5.619-620; 632-641.

153 Prud. *Cath.* 8.33-40.

154 Verg. *Georg.* 3.1-48, as Fontaine, "Trois variations" 111.

155 Verg. *Georg.* 3.12.

For Prudentius, however, the *palma* is the reward of the martyr after the "battle" of earthly life. This story recalls King David, eager to build a temple for the Lord after peace was restored to Israel, only to be told that God would build *him* a house.<sup>156</sup> Instead of the marble temple built for Caesar to dwell in, God builds an undying "house" for his people in paradise, a Christian paradise which is overshadowed with laurel, the Apolline symbol Augustus identified himself with:

[...] *frequens palmis nemus, et reflexa  
uernat herbarum coma, tum perennis  
gurgitem uiuis uitreum fluentis  
laurus obrumbat.*

[...] a grove abounding with palms, and  
the bent leaves of grass grow strong,  
and also laurel overshadows  
a glass-clear whirlpool of the eternal living stream. (*Cath.* 8.45-48)

Thus, through the poetic re-imagination and interpretive interplay of Scripture and poetry, Prudentius transforms the *laudes divi Augusti* into the *laudes Christi*. Augustus is no more than the "thief who came before," and Christ is the Good Shepherd who leads his people into the true Golden Age. One receives the tribute of a *locus amoenus*, the other provides it for his sheep.

In Prudentius' re-imagined of the *locus amoenus*, Elysium again provides a point of intertextual dialogue with the Roman poetic tradition. Alexandrian paradise-imagery provides Prudentius with his poetic images, which he then fuses with Biblical revelation. The result is a poetic paraphrase of revelation in Augustan poetic imagery, a polished cultural fusion. He is not afraid to coin words, and he corrects the pagan

---

156 cf. 2. Sam. 7:1-17.

tradition he inherits even as he employs it. His implicit critique of the inefficacy of Augustus and Apollo as those who will bring back the Golden Age is noteworthy. Structurally, he tends to proceed by drawing from many sources for a single scene, using not just language which suits the purpose, as some critics have suggested, but initiating dialogue with the poets he recalls, both to reject what he finds erroneous, and to recast what he finds useful, often through a process of *contaminatio*, bringing together multiple, similar scenes from his Augustan models into a new Christian imagery that maintains dialogue with its formal models.

## Chapter VII: Prudentius and the Fourth *Eclogue*

### ***Tuus Iam Regnet Christus Rex***

Christian interpretation and exegesis of the fourth *Eclogue* was an irresistible topic for many of the Late Antique Fathers of the Church, with wide reactions. But the fourth *Eclogue* is filled with parallel imagery to the prophecies of Isaiah, even including a passage which was read allegorically, by some, as a reference to the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection.<sup>157</sup> Thus it was thought, by some, to allegorically contain all of the central mysteries of the Christian faith, and gained the status, among some, as a kind of para-revelation.<sup>158</sup> We will turn briefly to the *Eclogue*:

*magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo.  
iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna,  
iam noua progenies caelo demittitur alto.  
tu modo nascenti puero, quo ferrea primum  
desinet ac toto surget gens aurea mundo,  
casta faue Lucina, tuus iam regnet Apollo.*

the great order of the ages is new-born.  
now the Virgin, the Saturnian kingdom returns,  
now a new tribe is sent down from high heaven.  
Even now, chaste Lucina, look kindly upon this boy who is being born,  
he who will first put an end to the iron race,  
and from whom a golden people will rise up throughout the world,  
Now your Apollo reigns! (Verg. *Ecl.* 4.5-10)

First, it is presented as a prophecy, drawn from the Sibylline Books which Vergil claims to have consulted, and whose priestess plays a significant role in book 6 of the *Aeneid*.

<sup>157</sup> cf. Isaiah 11:1-9; 65:17-25.

<sup>158</sup> For two excellent study on Late Antique Christian exegesis of the fourth *Eclogue*, complete with primary texts, see P. Courcelle, *Les Exégèses Chrétiennes de la Quatrième Éclogue*, *Révue des Études Anciennes*, 1957, 59, 294-319 and A. Hudson-Williams, *Vergil and the Christian Latin Poets*, *Proceedings of the Vergil Society*, 1966, 6, 11-21.

Within this prophecy a virgin returns, heralding the Saturnian Golden Age, and a *noua progenies* is sent down *alto caelo*. He is a *puer*, and he will end the children of Iron, and a *gens aurea* will fill the whole world, and *Lucina casta*, looks on as her “own Apollo reigns” (Verg. *Ecl.* 4.10). The crimes of men will be erased, as well as the earth's fears (Verg. *Ecl.* 13-14). The child will have a *deum uitam* and will see and be seen, by *diuis permixtos heroas* (heroes mingled among gods), and he will rule a world that his father has brought to peace (Verg. *Ecl.* 16-19). The strife between animals ceases, nature rejoices, and marvels spring up around the boy's *cunabula*, which overflows with flowers, exotic spices spring forth from the earth, poisonous plants disappear, and, most importantly, *occidet et serpens*, a theme Prudentius took for model also in hymn 3 prophesying Satan's defeat by the Virgin Mary (Verg. *Ecl.* 18-25).<sup>159</sup>

For many early ecclesiastical authors, well used to interpreting the Old Testament allegorically, exegesis of the fourth *Eclogue* was an easy business, but also a source of division, with many writers weighing in on different terms. The strongest proponents of a Christological interpretation in Prudentius' time were the Emperor Constantine and Lactantius who insisted on the parallels with Isaiah's messianic prophecies, but various interpretations would arise, combine, and separate, creating a debate that lasted well into the Middle Ages.<sup>160</sup> Various details accrued, assigning Christian readings to allegorically interpreted details. The *return* of the *Virgo* (Astraea / Iustitia), was interpreted to signify Mary as the new Eve whose perpetual virginity replaces for Eve's, who became a mother after the Fall. The further presence of *casta Lucina*, a cult-embodiment of Juno

---

<sup>159</sup> cf. Prud. *Cath.* 3.111, 126-130, 146-155; 9,161-164, etc.  
<sup>160</sup> Courcelle 316-319.

etymologized by Cicero to mean “she who brings the light,” served to strengthen a Marian interpretation.<sup>161</sup> The *gens aurea* (golden race) was interpreted to be the Christian people, initiated into the *deum uitam* (divine life) of Christ through their Baptism, annulling the wickedness of the *ferrea gens* (iron race) who lost their original nature along with a disobedient Adam and Eve, in the interpretation of Quodvultdeus.<sup>162</sup> The battle prophesied in the *Eclogue* of the new Achilles and new Troy was also taken as an allegorical prefiguration of the Christian mysteries. Into it, several Christian authors read Christ's Passion, Crucifixion, his descent into Hell, the defeat of Satan, his victorious Resurrection from the dead, and his eventual Apocalyptic confrontation that will end all evil.<sup>163</sup> The *heroes* which “will see and be seen” were allegorized into the martyrs, angels, or as ascetics who became the *heroes* of the Church.<sup>164</sup> Thus, by Prudentius' time, many exegeses of the fourth *Eclogue* were established as a part of Christian literary culture, and were probably learned by Christian school-children as they memorized, recited and imitated pagan Latin poetry. Two of his more prolific contemporaries were equally divided on the subject, Jerome and Augustine.

For Jerome, the real problem of Late Antique Millenarianism pushed him to condemn allegorical readings of the fourth *Eclogue*. He saw the situation resulting from poor exegesis of Vergil and Isaiah, which supported Millenarian heretical beliefs.<sup>165</sup> In a letter to Paulinus of Nola, he accuses loose exegesis as the source of such errors, in addition to carelessly placing Vergil on par with the Scriptures, and that Vergil cannot be

---

161 cf. Cic. *N.D.* 2.68.

162 Courcelle 300.

163 *Ibid.*, 298.

164 *Ibid.*, 304-307.

165 Courcelle 309.



considered a “Christian without Christ” on account of periodically according with Christian sentiment.<sup>166</sup> He was also very cross with Proba's *cento Vergilianus*, which, as he thought, pushes the Gospel so far to accommodate Vergil that it does violence to its own integrity.<sup>167</sup> *Augustine* takes a more delicate approach, insisting that Vergil is surely not a prophet but that the Sibyl may have been pushed by God to utter the words Vergil used apart from her willing it. He is quick to add, however, that pagan learning can only be verified in light of Christian teaching, and adds nothing in itself to revelation, which is complete on its own.<sup>168</sup> Yet he also saw that this remarkable similarity provided a point for pagan dialogue, making his take much more generous than Jerome's, and conceding the possibility of God's own hand in the Sibyl's vatic utterances.<sup>169</sup> Tertullian, of course, would have nothing to do with any of this, and dismissed Homeric and Vergilian centos in particular as unworthy of Christian attention: for Tertullian, these diversions are too dangerously close to the way in which heretics misrepresent Scripture.<sup>170</sup>

Historically, the poem appears to have actually been written for Asinius Gallus, a powerful patron who brought Vergil to Augustus' attention, and for his son.<sup>171</sup> Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the poem took on a Messianic Augustan interpretation in the Emperor's wake, especially given Augustus' Apollonian self-association, the *apotheosis* of his foster-father, the battle of Actium, and his own *apotheosis* following his successful reign. While both Augustan and Christian interpretations outstrip the original intent, it had become clear that neither Gallus nor

---

166 *Ibid.* 309; Jer. *Epist. ad Paulinum* 43, 7.

167 *Ibid.* 310.

168 *Ibid.* 311-315.

169 *Ibid.* 315.

170 *Ibid.* 307.

171 On the fourth *Eclogue*, its addressee, and its Augustan applications, see Miller 254-260.

Augustus had fulfilled the prophecy, as the Golden Age had not come, or at least, it had not remained. Since Christian allegorical reading made the most sense in a newly Christianized Empire, it is not surprising that Prudentius recasts the “Messianic” *Eclogue* into a Christian context while remaining aware of Augustan associations that require re-direction. Reading the *Eclogue* as attributed to Augustus, Prudentius redirects the attention to Christ, while retaining the terms of the original, showing a certain confidence, characteristic of the Latin poets, in its authenticity.

Prudentius' adaptation of the *Eclogue* into his Nativity narrative takes place at the end of the solar cycle theme which informs the *Liber Cathemerinon*, presenting the sun's mid-winter return as the natural analogue of Christ's victory over the darkness of Hell. Prudentius' hymn 11 for the 25<sup>th</sup> of December draws heavily on Augustan messiah-imagery, reinterpreting it in a complex fashion. Prudentius shows that the *puer* of the fourth *Eclogue* is fulfilled and exceeded by Christ: with Scripture taking factual precedence, and allusion providing the allegorical translation.

The Augustan theme of universal sovereignty runs throughout the *Cathemerinon*, but is especially tied to the birth-prophecies of hymns 3, 11, and 12, where Prudentius invokes *Eclogue* 4. Yet unlike 3, hymns 11 and 12 presents the Nativity narrative in terms of the Augustan Golden Age, whereas 3 lingers over the prophecy itself:

*aluus pudica continet,  
ex qua nouellum saeculum  
procedit et lux aurea!  
uagitus ille exordium  
uernantis orbis prodidit,  
nam tunc renatus sordidum  
mundus ueternum depulit.*

O what great joys of the world  
this chaste womb holds,  
from which will procede  
the fresh, new age and golden light!  
Weeping, he has revealed the beginning  
of the springtime of the world,  
For then a world reborn  
put off its unclean sloth. (*Cath.* 11.57-64, emphasis added)

Themes and imagery remain largely the same, but with *aluus pudica* taking the centre stage, instead of the *puer*. The Christ-child in the womb of Mary heralds a *novellum saeculum*, and *lux aurea*, both Apollonian themes which recall the wording of the *Eclogue's* prophecy, and the *gens aurea* which will spring up under his rule. The child, unlike Vergil's, is not exhorted to smile, but comes forth *uagitus*. It is this weeping that heralds the revival of the ages of the world, rather than a smile: a Prudentian addition indicating the sorrows of the suffering Christ, compared to the levity of Vergil's *puer*. It is a word carefully chosen, again revealing Prudentius' clever blending of Vergil and Ovid to achieve effect, and his far-reaching intertextual references. *Vagitus* appears once in the *Metamorphoses*, in the middle of the speech of Pythagoras, who repudiates meat-eating, on account of metempsychosis:

*quam male consuescit, quam se parat ille cruori  
impius humano, uituli qui guttura ferro  
rumpit et immotas praebet mugitibus aures,  
aut qui uagitus similes puerilibus haedum  
edentem iugulare potest...*

how poorly he accustoms himself, how he prepares himself,  
impiously, for human blood who breaks the throat with iron  
and fills the still air with bellowing, or who can cut the throat  
of a goat pouring forth cries like those of children... (*Ov. Met.* 15.463-466)

Prudentius references this passage also in hymn 3 to discourage red-meat eating.<sup>172</sup> Ovid is responding to Vergil's description of the iron age in *Georgics* 1 and 2, which Prudentius also uses to underline the fruitfulness of the Earth, approve the catching of birds with glue and fish with hooks.<sup>173</sup> The killing of the cow or goat points to the sacrifices of Jewish law, which prefigured Christ who becomes the final sacrificial victim. The *uagitus similes puerilibus* (a weeping like that of children) both confirms this reference, and also points towards another. The weeping of children, coupled with the cutting of throats directs us ahead to the slaughter of the innocents, whose throats Prudentius describes as almost too small to be wounded.<sup>174</sup> It was this great *uagitus puerorum* (weeping of children) which forced the Holy Family to flee for Egypt.<sup>175</sup> The Vergilian reference comes in Book 6, in the Underworld, as Aeneas and the Sibyl move towards Elysium:

*Continuo auditaē uoces uagitus et ingens  
infantumque animae flentes, in limine primo  
quos dulcis uitae exsortis et ab ubere raptos  
abstulit atra dies et funere mersit acerbo;  
hos iuxta falso damnati crimine mortis.*

Continuously, voices and a great weeping were heard,  
and the crying souls of infants, in the first threshold,  
those whom a black day deprived of sweet life,  
snatched from the breast and plunged into bitter death,  
next to them were those condemned to death for false crimes. (Verg. *Aen.* 6.426-430)

In referencing this passage, Prudentius marks out the Holy Innocents, which he will

---

172 cf. Prud. *Cath.* 3.58-65.

173 cf. *Cath.* 3.41.-65; Verg. *Georg.* 1.140-142; 2.536-540.

174 Prud. *Cath.* 12.114-116: *vix interemptor inuenit / quo plaga descendat patens, / iuguloque maior pugio est* (scarcely can the murderer find a place for the blow to land: the dagger is bigger than the throat!).

175 cf. Matt. 2:13-23.

celebrate in hymn 12, and who share the plight of the blameless children in the Underworld. Like these children, the children whom Herod will kill in vain, they are deprived of life, pulled away from their mothers, and cruelly killed. Thus the choice of a single word, the *uagitus* of the Messiah contrasts and focuses the scene in opposition to the smile requested of Vergil's *puer*, giving the hymn a greater degree of solemnity.

In both poems, the land abounds with flowers and new growth as the Earth pours forth its riches in adoration:

*sparsisse tellurem reor  
rus omne densis floribus,  
ipsasque harenas Syrtium  
fragrasse nardo et nectare.  
te cuncta nascentem, puer,  
sensere **dura et barbara**,  
uictusque saxorum rigor  
obduxit herbam cotibus.  
iam **mella de scopulis fluunt**,  
iam **stillat ilex arido**  
sudans **amomum** stipite,  
iam sunt **myricis balsama**.  
o sancta **praesepe** tui,  
aeterne rex, **cunabula**,  
populisque per saeculum sacra  
mutis et ipsis credita!*

I believe that every countryside  
scattered the earth with thick flowers,  
and even the sands of the deserts  
smelled of nard and nectar.  
All things tough and savage knew of your birth, child,  
and the harshness of rocks, overcome,  
spread grass over the stones.  
Now honey flows from the rocks,  
now the holm-oak drips perfume,  
seeping forth from its dry trunk,  
and now balsam from the tamarisk.  
O holy the cradle of your manger, eternal King,  
venerated throughout the age by all peoples,

even by the very mute! (*Cath.* 11.65-80, emphasis added)

Prudentius recasts the scene, while at once preserving the imagery of nature's own worship of the child, and expanding it, with several clever changes that express the differences between Vergil's *puer* and Christ. Like the *Eclogue*, nature pours forth its abundance for the child, the one providing a *cunabula* of flowers, the other honouring the *cunabula* praesepis, the manger-cradle, focusing in on the historical detail that distinguishes Christ from his poetic analogue. Not only beautiful things, but the *dura et barbara* are also aware of Christ's birth, and duly render themselves acceptable: even the rocks are covered. Here, too, Prudentius makes clever emendations to change the focus through intertextual reminiscence, blending Scripture and Vergil with Ovidian and Horatian *contaminatio*.

In the *Eclogue*, *amomum* (balm) and *mella* (honey) are both present as signs of divine presence, but on different terms. While for Vergil, *Assyrium uulgo nascetur amomum* (Assyrian balm [a perfume] grows up everywhere; Verg. *Ecl.* 4.25), and *durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella* (hard oaks drip dewy honey; Verg. *Ecl.* 4.30), for Prudentius it is the rocks which flow with honey, and the *ilex sudans, stillat amomum stipite*. The difference in wording comes from two interwoven bits of text, one from the Scriptures, and the other an emendation from Ovid in order to transfer authority from Jupiter to Christ. Deuteronomy 32:13 and Psalm 81:16 both speak of *mel de petra* (honey from the rock), which Prudentius accordingly transfers from the oak to the rocks, from which it not only seeps (*sudabunt*), but flows (*fluunt*), replacing the oak of Jove. Sweetness comes from the rock who is Christ, and it comes forth not lightly, but

abundantly.<sup>176</sup> To the oak tree from the Eclogue, which Prudentius has *sudans* not honey, but a perfumed balm (*amomum*), Prudentius adds another verb, *stillat* (drip), and a different species of tree, the *illex* (holm-oak) in place of Jove's *quercus*. This points us to Ovid's alternate Golden Age, written in response to Vergil's. Ovid is in the middle of describing the bounty of the Golden Age, when men ate fruit from trees, and *quae deciderant patula Iouis arbore glandes* (the acorns which fell from the wide-spreading tree of Jupiter; Ov. *Met.* 1.106). He then goes on to add, *flumina iam lactis, iam flumina nectaris ibant, / flauaque de uiridi stillabant ilice mella*. (rivers flowed now with milk, now with nectar, and honey dripped from the green holm-oak; Ov. *Met.* 1.111-112). Thus, Prudentius adds this distinction in order to push Jupiter completely out of the scene: honey comes from the rock of Christ, and the perfume that drips from the trees, comes from the *illex* rather than the sacred *quercus*.

Prudentius' poetic presentation of the Nativity both follows and departs from its pagan precedent by reinterpreting the *topoi* it borrows, with a great depth of understanding and deliberation. Perhaps the greatest thematic difference is the turn from the classical model of the demi-god, or of Dionysus the wine-deity, born of sexual relations between a god and a human. Mary's conception is virginal, and Prudentius frequently stresses her freedom from the sordid love-affairs of pagan myth. Her womb is *pudica* (pure), and she is called *castitas* (chastity) and *expers coniugis* (unknowing of marriage), resolving the strange classical paradox of veneration for virginity, coupled with mythological "divine adultery." Mary keeps her virginity intact, even as she brings forth Christ from her womb, allowing virginity and divinity to remain together. It is in her

---

<sup>176</sup> *fluere* vs. *sudare*.

womb that the new age begins, and all matter is ennobled by the choice of God to take on flesh, uniting heaven and earth not through law, decree, or reason, but through union, bringing a king both man and God to birth, who exceeds every model that pagan poetry can provide and renews the whole world with his presence. Thus, while Prudentius takes the imagery and prophecy of the fourth *Eclogue* into the eleventh hymn, it is not without critical adaptation and clarifying interpretation. Purified of its every possible pagan reading, the Sibylline prophecy is itself “baptized” and brought into the Christian patrimony. But only once it has left behind its every Augustan, Apolline, and Jovian associations in order to serve Christ alone. This done, it then serves as a model to present *Christus heros* to the pagan mind, as a point of translation and evangelization.



## Chapter VIII: The *Heros* Reinterpreted

### *Aeneas the Priest-King*

There can be little doubt that Vergil's Aeneas is intended, in some measure, to be an idealized type of Augustus, whose acts, allegorically, parallel the great *gestae* of the *princeps*; Aeneas plays the role of *pious* priest-king who leads his people through dangers, through civil war, and wins for them a land of peace bringing ages of war to an end, and rising to the stars as a god forever adored by his people. While reality did not meet Vergil's high expectations, the *Aeneid* remains the Roman epic *par excellence*, as well as the pattern for heroic exploits of cosmic significance. Throughout the hymns of the *Cathemerinon*, Prudentius uses these Vergilian models, both to present Christ as hero, and even to recast prophets, apostles, priests and kings into the same heroic mode. We see a two-fold movement in Prudentius' use of this *topos*: the individual, reinterpreted *heroes* are all treated as typological antecedents to Christ, whose own exploits fulfil and surpass their own and whose circumstances point to the Passion, Crucifixion, descent into Hell, and resurrection which literally provides the *crux* of Christian soteriology, the grounding for all of salvation history. Despite his classical models, Prudentius remains in control of his *poesis*, refusing to allow his models to compromise Scriptural accounts of the heroes of old. Rather, the classical models become vehicles of inculturation for the Gospel. Thus, the *res gestae* of Christ are presented in familiar epic terms in the *Cathemerinon*, especially combat, *katabasis*, and *apotheosis*.

## ***The Propheta-Heros***

Throughout the *Cathemerinon*, the saints of the Old and New Testament take on the character of *uiri* and *heroes*, in a shift of interpretation to the Christian outlook, investing two epic terms with new Christological significance. At the core of the new heroism is Christian *pietas* and *fides*: fidelity to God even in the most difficult circumstances, and a generous fulfilment of his will. Daniel, for example, is cast into the lion's den for refusing to worship the Babylonian idol, *fusile numen execrantem* (cursing the god cast in metal; *Cath.* 4.40). He is preserved from the lions because of his virtue, and his perseverance in trust and prayer, as an example, *o semper pietas fidesque tuta* (oh ever-protected piety and faith; *Cath.* 4.46), on terms very similar to Vergil's conception of these very virtues. Aeneas and Achates provide the pagan examples, faithful ever to the will of the gods and to their community, trusting in the *fatum* that they will reach and conquer Italy. Thus, Prudentius judges the Vergilian understanding of Roman heroic virtue to be a suitable paradigm for his own heroes. Aeneas is not just *pious*, but *insignem pietate* (famous for his piety; Verg. *Aen.*1.10), an exemplar, as are Prudentius' own chosen representatives. Additionally, Daniel experiences a *katabasis*, thrown as he is into the pit where the lions hold sway: a Biblical image of Hell and Satan. Daniel, like each of the other *heroes* of the *Cathemerinon*, makes his particular combat against this adversary, who appears as the enemy in every poem, sometimes subtly. He is the *nox mundi* (night of the world), of hymn 1 the *serpens* of hymns 3,4,7, 9, and 10, the *leo* of hymn 4 *tristifico tyranno* and Pharoah of hymn 5, the *bestiam capacem /populosque devorantem* (the huge beast devouring nations)of hymn 6, the *lupus* of hymn 8, the *perfidus praedo* (false robber)of hymn 9, Herod (hymn 11), the nation of Amalek (hymn 12), and others.

All evil is annexed to Satan's rampage through the world, but like Juno who harasses the Trojans on their way to Italy, Satan can never win against the *Christicolae*: he can only provoke, delay, and belabour Christ's faithful. In the Daniel story of hymn 4, Prudentius reveals his own epic imagination of the scene, as Daniel prays for deliverance in his trials:

*sed cum tenderet ad superna palmas,  
expertumque sibi Deum rogaret  
clausus iugiter indigensque uictus,  
iussus nuntius aduolare terris,  
qui pastum famulo daret probato,  
raptim desilit, obsequente mundo.*

but as he lifted his palms to the highest places  
praying continually to his well-proven God,  
while imprisoned and lacking sustenance,  
a messenger was ordered to fly to the Earth,  
Who would give food to his tested servant,  
quickly he leaped down, and the world obeyed. (Cath. 4.52-57)

The allusion is to Aeneas' prayer for deliverance from the storm that Juno's plotting had released over the ocean, a storm which *ponto nox incubat atra* (black night brooded over the sea; Verg. *Aen.* 1.89). His subsequent deliverance shows that Daniel's ordeal has taken on an epic colour, as the virtue which lead Aeneas to call on the gods in his fear, also motivates Daniel to turn to God in prayer: *pietas*. Daniel lifts his hands *ad superna*, to Heaven beyond the stars, pagan Aeneas lifts them *ad astra*, to the stars. Prudentius' hymn has God himself descending to help Daniel<sup>177</sup>, bringing the prophet Habakkuk, meal in hand, to Daniel's aid. In contrast, Aeneas' help that comes after his prayer is the pagan

---

<sup>177</sup> By *summus Pater angelusque Christi*, Prudentius indicates the Holy Spirit, also typologically interpreted the Old Testament "Angel of the Lord". cf. J. Daniélou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity, Trans. J. Baker. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964, 119.

god Neptune, not from heaven, but *imis uadis* (the deepest waters).<sup>178</sup>

Perhaps the most explicit typological *heros* Prudentius casts in the *Cathemerinon* is Moses, the prophet to whom he refers most frequently throughout the *Cathemerinon*.<sup>179</sup> Like Aeneas, Moses is the leader of a noted race, a *populus sanguinis inclyti/maiorum meritis tutus et inpotens* (a people of famous blood, powerless, and safe on account of the merits of their ancestors; *Cath.* 5.37), whom he is called to lead by a miraculous light in the form of the burning bush; just as Aeneas receives his own call through the shades of Hector and Creusa, the shooting star, and the tongue of fire on the head of Iulus.<sup>180</sup> Moses makes a *katabasis*, leading his people across a sea, to a land that he will not enjoy and which must be won with great battles, like the one recorded against the Amalekites in hymn 12.<sup>181</sup> He is also a king of his people, comes from a greater civilization from which he has escaped, a priest who intercedes with the gods, and consistently offers prayers on behalf of his nation, revealing the will of the gods to them, and leading them on a long journey to a new country which they will have to take by force. We see this same paradigm appearing throughout the hymns, but especially with reference to Daniel in hymn 4; Joseph and St. John in hymn 6; Elijah, Moses, John the Baptist, as well as Christ himself in hymn 7 and Christ again in hymn 9; Tobit in hymn 10; and lastly, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and again Christ himself as their typological fulfilment.<sup>182</sup> In addition to these Biblical *heroes* mentioned by name, is David, allusively in hymns 9 and 12, and the Virgin Mary, cast in the role of dragon-slayer in hymn 3.<sup>183</sup> The exploits of these heroes

---

178 Verg. *Aen.* 1.126.

179 Moses makes an appearance in three hymns overall: cf. 5.63, 7.36-45, and 12.141-172.

180 Verg. *Aen.* 2.268-297, 679-686, 771-795.

181 Prud. *Cath.* 12.169-172.

182 Prud. *Cath.* 12.181-188.

183 Prud. *Cath.* 3.146-150.

are specifically adapted to the new spiritual combat of the Christian, which exceeds the combats of the heroic age: a theme that Prudentius explores in more depth in the *Peristephanon* and *Psychomachia*. In the *Cathemerinon*, a heroic pattern emerges which is familiar to the reader of Augustan poetry. These heroes are tried in adversity, make a *katabasis*, and are rewarded with a heavenly *apotheosis* for their fidelity to God. Allegorically, Prudentius orients these hero-narratives point to Christ, so that heroic labours are always typologically interpreted as the deeds of Christ.

Prudentius is very selective in his material nonetheless, which further strengthens our thesis that a doxological presentation of the Christian salvation history narrative is the central thread of the *Cathemerinon*. If his main goal were to replace Vergil with a new Christian epic, we might expect the book of Judges, the many battles of David, or the Maccabees to provide the material for the poem, but both Prudentius' lyric mode and his choice of prophets in their Christological-allegorical significance reveals attention to prophecy-fulfilment in Christ, the core of van Assendelft's definition of Christian allegory.<sup>184</sup> Heroes take the typological place of Christ, as each does battle with Satan in their own narrative, facing the enemy with God's help. This cosmic battle between light and dark takes place simultaneously through individual *heroes*, God's people as a community, and then, finally, through Christ, the man-God himself, who brings the battle to a definitive end.

### ***Israel as Heros***

The salvation history narrative reaches a communal climax in hymn 5, where God

---

184 van Assendelft 19-21.

himself fights on behalf of his people, with Moses as his delegated *heros*. Following Moses' command, all of Israel makes a *katabasis* through the Red Sea, prefiguring Christ's own *katabasis* into Hell, and the subjugation of death, drawing the link between the defeat of Pharoah and the defeat of Satan achieved by Christ:

*licetne Christum noscere  
tanti per exemplum uiri?  
Dux ille caeso Aegyptio  
absolvit Istrahel iugo;  
at nos, subactos iugiter  
erroris imperio gravi,  
dux noster hoste saucio  
mortis tenebris liberat.*

Can we not know Christ  
through the example of so great a hero?  
That leader, when the Egyptian was slain,  
freed Israel from the yoke,  
so we who are constantly subjugated  
by the burdensome empire of error.  
with the enemy wounded,  
our leader sets us free from the shadow of death. (*Cath* 12.157-164)

Thus the Prudentian *heros* exists to provide a prophetic type of Christ and his heroic combat always takes place in the image of the Exodus and Paschal mystery, and the enemy is always identified as Satan. This is the reason that the Israelites become themselves a type for Christ in their own combat against the Egyptians, extending heroic status to their whole people, but always with Moses as the head:

*hic expiatam fluctibus  
plebem marino in transitu  
repurgat undis dulcibus,  
lucis columnam praeferens;  
hic proeliante exercitu,  
pansis in altum bracchiis,  
sublimis Amalec premit,*

*crucis quod instar tunc fuit.*

He washes again a people expiated by the floods  
with sweet waves  
in their sea-borne passage,  
carrying forth a column of light;  
he stands on the heights,  
and overwhelms Amalek  
arms spread wide while the army fights,  
which was then the sign of the cross. (*Cath.* 165-172)

Prudentius chooses these two epic details from Exodus to examine Moses' intervention on God's behalf, even though there is a forty-year interval between the two.<sup>185</sup>

Nevertheless, Israel, as a nation, experiences a communal purification, a communal *katabasis*, and a communal battle that is won together, after which the Israelites inherit a kingdom uniquely their own. Hymn 12 goes on to indicate others in this typological line, all lining up to point to Christ as king and leader, *dominaeque rex ecclesiae, / templi et nouelli et pristini* ( king of our lady Church, of both the new and old temple; *Cath.* 12.187-188). As with all other gifts won by Christ, they are shared throughout his people, so that even in the typological heroic exploits that prefigure the descent into Hell, all of the resultant *tropaea* reflect upon the people of God. These victories are only types of the final victory won in Christ's own epic combat and *katabasis*.

### ***Christus Heros***

Jesus is Prudentius' paradigmatic *heros*, whose combat on the cross brings an end to death forever, just as the battle of Actium was to bring peace to the world, as foretold on the shield of Vulcan, typologically represented in the combat against the Latins and

---

185 cf. Ex. 14:1-31; 17:8-16.

prophesied by Jove in heaven and Anchises in the Underworld.<sup>186</sup> So too, Christ's victory over Hell is prophesied by the march across the Red Sea, preparing for two great battles; the Passion, in which death and Satan are defeated, and the final battle that will consummate the world and end death forever. The culmination of the *Cathemerinon* lies in the crucifixion, providing a lynch-pin to which Prudentius returns frequently. Following the programme set out for the messiah-hero of *Eclogue* 4, Prudentius frames Christ as the new Achilles, who plunders the new Troy in his *katabasis* and defeat of Hell. Beginning in hymn 1 he indicates that this theme will be central to the work, setting Christ's resurrection at the hour of cock-crow:

*Inde est quod omnes credimus  
 illo quietis tempore  
 quo gallus exultans canit  
 Christum redisse ex inferis.  
 Tunc mortis oppressus uigor,  
 tunc lex subacta est Tartari,  
 tunc uis diei fortior  
 noctem coegit cedere.*

Thus it is that we all believe  
 it was in that time of peace,  
 when the cock sings, exulting,  
 that Christ returned from the dead.  
 then the strength of death was crushed,  
 then was the law of Tartarus conquered,  
 then the mightier power of day  
 forced the night to yield. (*Cath.* 1.65-72)

Marion van Assendelft sees this passage as the apex of hymn 1, and notes the strangeness of Prudentius' diction among poets, as he retains the classical use of *infern* which others

---

<sup>186</sup> As per Miller 95-103; Verg. *Aen.* 1.255-296, 6.787-807, 8.626-728.



discarded for the more Biblical *gehenna* or *Tartarus*.<sup>187</sup> His use of the word links him strongly with the classical tradition, indicating the connection between the heroic *katabases* of poetic tradition, and the final *katabasis* of Christ. Prefigured by Daniel in the lion's den, the Exodus, and Jonah in the great fish, Christ's own *katabasis* takes place in hymn 9. This hymn provides a kind of *res gestae Divi Christi* over and against the *Res Gestae* of Augustus, listing Jesus' many miracles in his public ministry. In one example Christ excels Augustus and Aeneas through overcoming the evil of *Furor impius*. Prudentius casts the Gerasene demoniac of the Synoptic Gospels in light of *Furor* from Jove's prophecy that Rome will end war:<sup>188</sup>

*suetus antro bustuali sub catenis frendere,  
mentis inpos, efferatis percitus furoribus  
prosilat ruitque supplex, Christum adesse ut senserat.*

One used to gnashing his teeth under chains in a hollow tomb  
Out of his mind, stirred with savage fury,  
he rushes forward and falls down on his knees, when he senses that Christ is  
present. (*Cath.* 52-54)

Christ the *heros* will bind Fury forever, not by tying him up, but by exorcising him and untying mankind whom he has possessed. In short, he stamps out every vestige of evil in the world, framed in the format of a Psalm-Ode, reserving the crucifixion and descent to Hell as his greatest feat of all: the miracle unheard-of. Of this miracle, Prudentius says:

*solue uocem, mens sonora, solue linguam mobilem,  
dic tropaeum passionis, dic triumphalem crucem,  
pange uexillum notatis quod refulget frontibus.*

---

187 van Assendelft 81-82.

188 cf. Matt. 8: 28-34, Mk. 5, 1-20, Lk. 8.26-39; Verg. *Aen.* 1.294-296:[...] *claudentur Belli portae, Furor impius intus / saeua sedens super arma et centum uinctis aënis / post tergum nodis fremet horridus ore cruento.* (the gates of War will be closed, with impious Fury inside sitting on fierce weapons, roaring horribly, with bleeding mouth, and his hands behind his back bound with a hundred bronze bindings.).

Set free my voice, resounding soul, release my mobile tongue,  
tell the victory-spoils of the passion, tell the triumphant cross,  
shine forth oh famous banner which shines on our foreheads. (*Cath.* 9.82-85)

The heroic diction, as well as the meter<sup>189</sup> indicates a triumph march, the Roman celebration of a military leader's return after a victory, as well as the *tropaeum*, heroic war-spoils won in combat, so familiar from Homeric and Vergilian *heros*-duels. Lastly, the cross has become a *uexillum*, which has won out over the *signa bellica tumidis draconibus* (battle-standards with swelling dragons; *Cath.*5.55-56) that menaced Israel at the Red Sea, and also been expanded to sign the foreheads of all those who conquer Satan and death under Christ's victory, Christ who is a different kind of hero than expected:

*agnus enim uice mirifica  
ecce leonibus imperitat,  
exagitansque truces aquilas  
per uaga nubila perque Notos  
sidere lapsa columba fugat.*

For by a marvellous change,  
behold, the lamb commands the lions,  
and driving away the fierce eagles,  
through the wandering clouds and the South Wind,  
a dove puts them to flight, coming down from the stars. (*Cath.* 3.161-165)

Certainly, this is quite a reversal on Horace's celebration of Augustus, whom Prudentius is mirroring:

*Caesar ab Italia uolantem  
remis adurgens, accipiter uelut  
mollis columbas aut leporem citus  
uenator...*

Caesar pursuing [Cleopatra] as she fled from Italy,

---

<sup>189</sup> Charlet and van Assendelft both point out that the meter of this hymn, trochaic tetrameter catalectic, is suggestive of a Roman triumph-march.

on oars like the hawk  
pursues the gentle doves, or a fast  
bird of prey chases a hare... (Hor. Car. 1.37.16-19)

Christ, the new *heros*, is a *columba* and *agnus*, who dominates through his mildness, putting the lions and the birds of prey to flight. In this, he exceeds nature in every respect. It is not personal, earthly strength that makes him greater, but his divine authority, which no earthly king can exceed. Thus, Christ's combats will also be works of mercy instead of martial exploits.

### ***The First Combat***

While there is no Scriptural account detailing Christ's descent into Hell, it is a popular theme in Early Christian writings, apocryphal Gospels, and the subject of many Byzantine icons. For Prudentius the crucifixion and death of Christ is a heroic victory, and he combines the *katabasis* and crucifixion into one narrative, following the Gospel of Matthew, but in a *hysteron-proteron* manner, with the *katabasis* narrative preceding the actual Crucifixion.<sup>190</sup> *Katabasis* is related of many classical heroes, but the destruction of the gates of Hades is alien to the ancient world, a deed that the poets even despaired of. As the Sibyl tells Aeneas in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, the road to *Avernus* is easy, as the doors are wide open to receive, but not to return:

*noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;  
sed reuocare gradum superasque euadere ad auras,  
hoc opus, hic labor est. Pauci, quos aequus amaui*

---

190 And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many. The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:51-54).

*Iuppiter aut ardens euexit **ad aethera** uirtus,  
dis geniti potuere.*

Day and night the doors of black Dis stand open  
But to retrace one's steps and escape to the air above,  
this is the task, this is the hardship.  
A few, whom Jupiter the just has loved or who shone with virtue,  
he carried up to the stars, the children of the gods have been able. (Verg. *Aen.*  
6.128-131, emphasis added).

In contrast, Prudentius shows us that Christ not only descended and returned from Hell with ease, but broke open the gates of Hell, responding to the Sibyl with both agreement, and correction, in two passages:

*modo corporeum memini  
de Phlegethonte **gradu facili**  
**ad superos remeasse** Deum.*

As I now recall, God, endowed with a body,  
returned from Phlegethon  
with an easy step to the upper places. (*Cath.* 3.197-200, emphasis added)

Being God, Christ's return from Hades *is* possible and he does *retrace* his steps to the air above without hindrance even though the task is doubtful for Aeneas, *satus sanguine diuum* (born from the blood of the gods; *Aen.* 6.125). Prudentius is showing that Christ's *katabasis* exceeds that of any before him. He enters Hell not as a suppliant, but with *imperium*. Christ is able to return (*remeasse*) from the *ripam inremeabilis undae* (the shore of the waters of no return; Verg. *Aen.* 6.425, emphasis added) There is no doubt as to Christ's supremacy, as he enters Hell, whose gates, so eager to receive the souls of the dead are barred against him, but cannot hold. Now, broken, they stand open to those who arrive as well as those who depart with Christ:

*Tartarum benignus intrat; fracta cedit ianua,  
uictibus cadit reuulsis cardo dissolubilis.  
Illa prompta ad intruentes, ad reuertentes tenax,  
obice extrorsum repulso porta reddit mortuos,  
lege uersa, et limen atrum iam recalcandum patet.*

Kindly, he enters Tartarus; the gates give way, broken,  
the unbreakable hinge falls while the bars are torn back.  
That door, eager for those coming in, jealous of those turning back,  
gives up the dead, bolt thrown back, its law turned back,  
and the black doorstep now stands open to be retrod. (*Cath.* 9.71-75)

Unlike Aeneas, who entered Hades only with an escort, and left by the gate of false dreams,<sup>191</sup> or Orpheus who entered as a suppliant, and left only to lose Eurydice and return there forever,<sup>192</sup> Christ enters by himself, binds Satan, and destroys the gate so that it can be retrod, so that Hell no longer holds anyone captive, and not only he, but even the dead from ages past, the *patres sanctique multi* who follow Christ out of the broken gates. This event stands in sharp distinction to Horace's stark pessimism in an *Ode* meant to comfort the grieving, doubting even Aeneas' apotheosis: *nos ubi descendimus / quo pater Aeneas, quo Tullus diues et Ancus / puluis et umbra sumus...* (once we have gone down where father Aeneas, rich Tullus, and Ancus are we are dust and shadow; Hor. *Car.* 4.7.14-16). How far removed is Prudentius' conquered Hades, where *cerneres coire membra de fauillis aridis / frigidum uenis resumptis puluerem tepescere, / ossa, neruos, et medullas glutino cutis tegi* (you could see limbs coming together from dry ashes cold dust growing warm as veins returned, bones, nerves, and marrow covered with a binding of skin; *Cath.* 9.100-102). Prudentius replies to Horace's doubts that God can command even ashes to come together again, and that even dust will return to at God's command.

---

191 Verg. *Aen.* 6.893-901.

192 Ov. *Met.* 10.1-63.

Because of this, there will be a universal *apotheosis* for the just, and a second death for the wicked at the end of time.

### ***The Final Battle***

Again, *hysteron-proteron* Prudentius deals with the defeat of Hell promised in hymn 6 long before Christ's own epic *katabasis*. It appears in conjunction with John's apocalyptic visions, the Prudentian model of just dreams, and the revelation of the final battle.<sup>193</sup> In his visions, Christ takes on a more particularly heroic aspect tempered with mercy: the *agnus Tonantis* (lamb of the Thunderer), *ultor benignus* (kindly avenger), and *praepotens extincitor Antichristi* (very powerful destroyer of the Antichrist) who wields a *gladius anceps* (two-bladed sword), and whose victory is total: *de furente monstro / pulchrum refert tropaeum* (from this raging monster, he brings back a beautiful war-trophy; *Cath.* 6.81-104). Christ's great war-trophy is his preordained destruction of the beast at the end of time:

*hanc nempe, quae sacratum  
praeferre nomen ausa  
imam petit gehennam  
Christo perempta vero.*

truly this beast, which dared  
to assign to itself the Holy Name  
falls into deepest Gehenna,  
annihilated by the true Christ. (*Cath.* 6.109-112)

This combat is also linked to the victory on the cross, and extended to all the followers of Christ, so that all can best Satan through the sign of the cross which disarmed him. The cross is now a battle-standard (*signum*), which is marked in chrism (*chrismate innotatum*)

---

<sup>193</sup> Prud. *Cath.* 6.45-56.

on the foreheads of the *cultores Dei* (worshippers of God) who have been baptized and anointed (*Cath.* 6.125-132). The very sight of this battle-standard drives Satan away, because *crux pellit omne crimen, / fugiunt tenebrae crucem* (the cross casts out every sin and shadows flee from the cross (6.134-135). In this way, the sacraments take on, for Prudentius, a military character. The Christian becomes a soldier, formed into the image of Christ, before which Satan must flee, as he did when overcome at the crucifixion itself.<sup>194</sup> In a clever turn, Prudentius cries out over this new, personal participation in Christ's own combat:

*procul, o procul vagantum  
portenta somniorum,  
procul esto peruciaci  
praestigiator actu.*

Far, or far away with  
the omens of wandering dreams,  
far away too be the deceiver,  
with his obstinate urging. (*Cath.* 6.137-140)

Prudentius takes this speech very closely from the mouth of the Sibyl, turning her admonition to Aeneas' men into an exorcism:

[...] *o procul, procul este profani,  
conclamat uates, totoque absistite luco;  
tuque inuade uiam uaginaque eripe ferrum:  
nunc animis opus, Aenea, nunc pectore firmo.*

[...]“far, oh far away with the impious,”  
shouted the *uates*, “and leave the whole grove;  
but you, enter the way, draw your sword from its sheath:  
here now is work for the soul, Aeneas, go now with a firm heart.” (*Verg. Aen.*  
6.258)

---

194 cf. Prud. *Cath.* 9.88-90.

Prudentius evokes spiritual combat, in both cases against the shades of the Underworld. Armed with the cross, rather than the sword, the Christian must follow Christ's way with a stout heart, and battle against the devil as he did, so as to share in his *apotheosis*. Christ's heroism is not only effective but total, universal, and extended to all of his people, who follow him through the waters of baptism. All three combats come together in this sacrament, as all Israel walks through the waters of death: waters which destroy their enemies, and enter the land of the just, with a celebratory exhortation and a triumph-song reminiscent of the canticle of salvation from Jeremiah 31:13, and Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*:

*te senes et te iuuentus, paruulorum te chorus,  
turba matrum uirginumque, simplices puellae,  
uoce concordēs pudicis perstrepat concentibus.*

Old men and young, a chorus of children,  
a crowd of mother and virgins, simple girls,  
will resound for you together with one voice in chaste harmonies. (*Cath.* 9.109-111)<sup>195</sup>

### ***A Way to the Stars***

A significant reinterpretation Prudentius makes is his adaptation of pagan *apotheosis* by expanding it to all *Christicolae*. This great labour is no easy task to accomplish even for the children of the gods, and as we showed, Horace doubts that even Aeneas and other *heroes* managed it. Still, we have multiple examples in Vergil, Horace, and Ovid alike, especially in their works dedicated to Julius Caesar and Augustus. In

---

195 cf. Jer. 31:13: Then shall the virgin rejoice in chorus, and the young men and old as well.; Hor. *C.S.* 5-8 [...] *Sibyllini monuere uersus / uirgines lectas puerosque castos / dis, quibus septem placere colles, / dicere carmen.* (The Sibylline verses have counseled that chosen virgins and chaste boys should sing a song to the gods who are pleased with the seven hills).



Book 1 of the Aeneid, Jove assures an anxious Venus that she will indeed carry Aeneas *ad sidera caeli* (*Aen.* 1.259), and that in time, *nascetur pulchra Troianus origine Caesar... famam qui terminet astris, Iulius* (A Trojan Caesar, a Julian, will be born from [this] beautiful race, who will carry his fame to the stars ; *Aen.* 1.286-288), who will likewise be received *in caelo*, and *vocabitur uotis* (called upon with prayers; *Aen.* 1.289-290): he too will be a god. In the Underworld Anchises declares the divinity of the whole line of Iulus, who will *caeli uentura sub axem* (will come under the span of the sky; *Aen.* 6.790). Ovid devotes the last portion of his *Metamorphoses* to Julius and Augustus' deeds, and a long account of Julius' stellar *apotheosis*, whose *recentem animam caelestibus intulit astris* (recent soul was lifted up to the stars; *Met.* 15.846), where he shines, and looks down on Augustus, whose deeds are *maiora suis* (greater than his own; *Met.* 15.851). Horace treats Julius and Augustus as gods with stars, and even promotes them farther speaking of the Romans of renown, adding: *Iulium sidus uelut inter ignis/luna minores* (the Julian star is among other stars, as the Moon among the lesser lights; *Car.* 1.13.47-48). These are only a few noteworthy examples of Augustan adaptation the notion of *apotheosis*, which the poets take as their model for the deification of kings and heroes, but mainly reserved for Julius and Augustus, and mythological models they style them after.

### ***Light and the Soul***

The symbolism of light runs throughout the *Cathemerinon*, especially denoting God's glory and majesty, and the blessings which he radiates to his created sons and daughters. God is likened to the Sun frequently, and in hymn 12 on the Epiphany, Christ is announced by the *stella quae solis rotam / uincit decore ac lumine* (the star which wins

out over the Sun in beauty and light, 12.5-6) Nonetheless, Prudentius is just as eager to show that man, made in God's image and likeness, also possesses his own light which makes him like God. In hymn 5 Prudentius tells the reader that Christ willed for man seek sparks from flint for a didactic purpose hidden in creation:

*ne nesciret homo spem sibi luminis  
in Christi solido corpore conditam,  
qui dici stabilem se uoluit petram,  
nostris igniculis unde genus uenit.*

Lest mankind not know that his hope of light  
is founded in Christ's solid body,  
he who wished to be called the stable corner-stone  
he is the noble birth from which our little sparks come (*Cath.* 5.9-12)

Not only is light a cosmic metaphor for God, but the little sparks of flint symbolize the individual souls as sparks from Christ: little lights from light itself. God is likewise in hymn 10 *for the burial of the dead*, the *igne[a] fons animarum*. (the fiery wellspring of souls; *Cath* 10.1), who breathes forth the souls from heaven down to Earth. Yet Prudentius treads on dangerous ground in this matter, drawing very close to a pagan physics that would identify the soul as made of the heavenly material which it resembles. It is almost as if Prudentius has forgotten the fall of man, as he posits a soul that is heavenly by its very nature, which never ceases like the perpetually moving aether above the sky:

*[...] mens soluta corpore,  
cui est origo caelum  
purusque fons ab aethra  
iners iacere nescit.*

. . . the mind (soul), free from its cares,  
whose lineage is heavenly,

and whose pure source is from the aether,  
does not know how to lie still. (*Cath.* 6.33-35)

The soul is light, bodiless, and in constant activity, like God himself, and the heavens that more fully reflect his divine attributes. Even more, salvation and damnation appear in almost Manichean or Marcionite terms, as a battle won or lost because of physics or external causes: a problem of gravity. Heavenly light is only half of the body-soul composite that makes up the person, and while the soul is naturally given to immortality, the body, the *element[um] moribundum* (10.2-3) of the composite, may drag it down to death through too great a propensity for the corporeal:

*si terrea forte voluntas  
luteum sapit et graue captat,  
animus quoque pondere uictus  
sequitur sua membra deorsum.  
at si generis memor ignis  
contagia pigra recuset,  
vehit hospita uiscera secum,  
pariterque reportat ad astra.*

If, perhaps, an earthy will  
has a taste for mud, and seizes upon the heavy,  
the soul too, overcome by the weight,  
follows its body downwards.  
But if the fire, remembering its noble birth,  
refuses the slothful contagion (of the body)  
it bears up its hosting members with it,  
and they, too, return to the stars. (*Cath.* 10.29-32)

And so a war ensues between the fiery, heavenly element of the person, and its earthly portion. Prudentius assures us both that the body is taken up along with the soul, if it is not bent on earthly things. An earthy will leads the soul down to death, and a fiery will to the skies, with the will making all the difference in this combat that each man must make,

so as to attain to heaven, and to return to the stars. Some have judged Prudentius to be a pagan sympathizer on the grounds of these lines, which ring with an ancient philosophical flavour, but no one system in particular, much like Ovid's creation account in *Metamorphoses* 1, which Roberts has shown to have had a great influence on ecclesiastical authors.<sup>196</sup> There is also the evident influence of Anchises' explanation of the afterlife in *Aeneid* 6, where he reveals that the seeds (*semina*) of all life is the fire from the stars of heaven (*Aen.* 6.724-729). The main difference is that Vergil calls the body harmful (*noxia corpora*; *Aen.* 6.731) and the limbs live in a dark prison (*carcere caeco* *Aen.* 6.734). He imagines the soul alone to be immortal: so much so that it must pay for every taint the body has left upon it in a long purification (*Aen.* 6.735-743). How different is Prudentius' optimistic assertion of the soul, the fire that may grow so hot as to carry even the body to the stars.<sup>197</sup> This Christianized *apotheosis*, which extends divinization to both body and soul, is only possible through the deeds of Christ, which are traced out in hymn 9, the destruction of the gates of Hades. It was Christ alone who *occasum resoluit uitae et hominem reddidit*. (he undid death and restored man to life; *Cath.* 9.103). Prudentius further clarifies by Vergil:

*mors ipsa beatior inde est,  
quod per cruciamina leti  
uia panditur ardua iustis,  
et ad astra doloribus itur.*

Death itself is from this more blessed:  
that through the torments of death  
a hard road is revealed to the just,

---

196 cf. Ov. *Met.* 1. 5-150, also Roberts, "Creation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the Latin Poets of Late Antiquity." *Arethusa* 35 (2002), 403-515

197 Prud. *Cath.* 10.29-32 *At si generis memor ignis / contagia pigra recuset, / uehit hospita uiscera secum / pariterque reportat ad astra.* (but if [the soul] remembers its fiery origin, it will refuse lazy contagions, and it will carry the flesh it stays with, and carry it back, equally, to the stars).

and it is travelled to the stars with sufferings. (*Cath.* 10.90-93, emphasis added)

Two references surface here. The first from Book 10, as Apollo cheers on Ascanius in his first kill, asserting that heroic exploits in battle show the way to the stars: *macte noua uirtute, puer: sic itur ad astra, / dis genite et geniture deos...* (Well done, boy, for your new strength: thus are the stars arrived at, god-begotten and begetter of gods to come; Verg. *Aen.* 10.641-642). The second, which is similar, comes from Book 12, where Aeneas goads Turnus into fighting, and at the end of a series of taunts, counsels him to *opta ardua pinnis / astra sequi* (choose to make for the hard stars on wings; Verg. *Aen.* 12.892-893) to escape his anger, stressing the impossibility of any man, even a *heros* like Turnus, to avoid Hades by reaching the stars. Prudentius asserts that this divine road is not the result of personal heroic labours, but through a participation in Christ's sufferings by which this road was opened, a road where the lights of the just can shine forever, like stars that only sojourned on earth during their life:

*illic, precor, optime ductor,  
famulam tibi praecipe mentem  
genitali in sede sacrari,  
quam linquerat exul et errans.*

There, great leader, I pray you,  
receive your servant, the soul,  
to be sanctified in the seat of her birth,  
which she left behind as an exile and a wanderer. (*Cath.* 10.165-268)

Thus, for Prudentius each soul, allegorically, shines in the image and likeness of God, who is light itself. However, this light is made even brighter during its time on earth, through the sacraments, as a kind of illumination that leads to the state of shining

into eternity, the very act of God's deifying grace, so that the *Christicola* is progressively transformed from the darkness of a fallen will into the light of divinity:

*quodcumque nox mundi dehinc  
infecit atris nubibus,  
tu, rex, Eoi sideris  
uultu sereno inlumina...*

and whatever the night of the world  
until now has corrupted with black clouds,  
do illuminate, Oh King, of the dawn-star  
with your bright face. (*Cath.* 2.65-68)

and this through the power of the cross; triumphalem crucem . . . vexillum notatis quod  
refulget frontibus. (the triumphant cross . . . the flag that shines on our foreheads, 9.84).

And so, transformed by Prudentius, the heroic passage to the stars, the privilege of heroes and emperors, becomes the universal stock privilege of all Christ's faithful, who will shine like the stars, not with their soul alone, but with soul and body reunited. Unlike pagan *apotheosis*, this transformation does not take place after death, a divine reward for heroic deeds, or worth, or noble birth, but is itself a gradual process of transformation, as God progressively illumines the soul, making the light in it resemble himself more steadily, purifying it through suffering. Thus, illumination cannot be divorced from the cross, which leads to the stars only through *cruciamina*, and on account of the cross of Christ which opened the way to divinity, much as in the *Aeneid*, Anchises relates that no soul can enter Elysium, except through sufferings.<sup>198</sup> Yet the sufferings of the Christian, like Christ, are not a payment for sins, but a tool to increase their merit, showing the way to the stars. Thus not only is *no man dead any longer* (*Cath.* 12.208), every man, having

---

198 Verg. *Aen.* 6. 739-740 *ergo exercentur poenis ueterumque malorum / supplicia expendunt.* (Therefore, they are put through punishments, they pay out sufferings for their old evils.).

been divinized in Christ, may walk the hard road through death and suffering which leads to the stars, following the new pillar of light, which is the cross.

Prudentius shows a deep sensitivity and affection for the heroic tradition, and is eager to dialogue with it as a medium of translation. It would be a grave mistake to suppose that the poet who Raby calls “a Catholic first, and a poet second,”<sup>199</sup> is adapting the Gospel to the heroic tradition, as if conformity with poetic tradition validates the Gospel. Rather, Prudentius is adapting the poetic richness of the heroic tradition to show how greatly Christ exceeds the *heroes* of the Greco-Roman tradition. Christ the *heros* not only conquers, but extends the spoils of war to all his people alike, so that his victory is also the victory of all Christians. Christ alone slays the cosmic serpent, repairing the ancient, indefinable wound that the pagan mind feels so keenly, but cannot locate. In his passage through the Underworld he undoes the law of death itself, breaking down the gates of Hades: not to rescue one, beloved soul, but all those who love and serve him. Truly Christ is, for Prudentius, the paradigmatic hero who exceeds every heroic exploit, and who merits the glory as true *heros* whose star eclipses every false god, demi-god, and divinized emperor. His deeds alone are of eternal, cosmic significance, whereas all other heroes were only allegorical types, at best.

---

199 Raby 47.

## Chapter IX: Conclusion

### ***Carmen Saeculare, Carmen Perpetuum, Carmen Historicum, Carmen Christi***

The *Liber Cathemerinon* shows a cohesive structure, held together by the narrative of salvation history which informs the whole work and makes it an excellent piece of poetic catechesis. Using the natural rhythms of the day and the central truths of the Christian faith, Prudentius presents an exegetical walk through the core beliefs of a Nicene Christian, in poetic language aimed at a cultured Latin audience. Prudentius shows a conviction, uncharacteristic for his age, that some elements of pagan poetry remain good, and even evidence a true desire for the true God, and limited knowledge of his ways. Each of the stages of salvation history which Prudentius examines throughout the *Liber* are "translated" into Roman poetic imagery, conveying Christian concepts in the pagan idiom to enrich the reader's response, to teach, and to persuade. Eager to safeguard Rome's many accomplishments, Prudentius plays the role of mediator through a two-fold poetics of synthesis that translates *christianitas* for the Roman while subsuming the best of *romanitas* into the Christian. The result is a poetry which partakes of both streams. Keeping Christian revelation central, it resounds with confidence in the goodness of creation and God's choice to enter into it through his Incarnation.

Nonetheless, Prudentius' poetry is much more than imitation or substitution. He shows a deep knowledge of his pagan poetic models, but also an ability to recast their words with creativity and virtuosity. As we have seen, Prudentian intertext is very often



about evoking an image so as to bend it slightly away from the pagan and into Christian revelation: ultimately to Christ. The *uates* becomes a *propheta*, the *loci amoeni* of Elysium and the Golden Age become images of Eden and paradise, *apotheosis* becomes Christian resurrection, and Christ becomes the new *heros* who saves the whole world from death and Hell. Prudentius uses the *Cathemerinon* as an opportunity to re-imagine the elements of the Augustan poetic movement, and integrate them into his Roman, Christian vision of reality. This approach may not be systematic, but is deliberate, as Prudentius consistently appropriates, re-interprets, and re-presents the central elements of Augustan *uates*-poetry into the Christian context, which interprets pagan poetry as typologically valid, but historically obsolete in light of Jesus Christ. Thus for Prudentius, Christ is the standard of interpretation and adaptation of Augustan poetry. The Millinarianism he encountered in the Augustan poets, whether sincere or feigned, must be subsumed into the Christian cultural narrative, and exposed as a false satisfaction of a real desire fulfilled in Christ.

As we have pointed out before, Prudentius' incarnational approach to poetry is the hallmark of his poetic achievement. All of creation is fallen and imperfect, needing God's on light to be purified and divinized. Christ, written into imperfect nature enters it nonetheless, and ennobles it, bringing even the material into the divine. This process is evident in Prudentius' treatment of nature and grace as two complimentary realities. Nature, even fallen human nature, is destined for synthesis with God in Christ. Pagan poetry too, while fallen and imperfect, resonates with the cry of all nature that St. Paul speaks of: "We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not

only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:19-21). All things yearn for a return to God, and are renewed in grace. Thus Prudentius use of pagan poetry is a redemption in itself: a kind of poetic baptism that cleanses, restores, and deified, like the Good Shepherd of hymn 8.

This reading of the *Cathemerinon*, far from dividing it from the classical tradition, links it even more closely to Augustan poetical themes, especially its strong sense of a divinely revealed order, its universal extension, *theodicy*, and, most importantly, the concentration of all authority, divine and human, into a single person. It is no accident that in order to secure confidence, Augustus was cast publicly and poetically, as the son of a god. Through his associations, real and contrived, with Julius and Apollo, Augustus achievements are elevated to the status of cosmic victories. It is no accident that in the *Cathemerinon*, which reveals and proposes the Christian world-view, Christ is expressed in terms of sunlight, divine illumination, and cosmic *imperium*. Prudentius subtly combats a significant element of lingering paganism in his day, the Imperial *cultus* by reinterpreting and replacing it with Jesus Christ. Prudentius' ingenuity rests in accomplishing this, as with his other reinterpretations, by recasting the words from the poets themselves into new forms. It is a powerful rhetoric, more powerful than polemics, and yet Prudentius does not present himself as a calculating zealot, eager for converts, but rather, a sincere believer to whose *alma mater Roma* is very dear, but misguided.

Ironically, it is this very element makes Prudentius a more valid inheritor of the classical poetic patrimony. The *Cathemerinon*, though only one book in his poetic works,

is an immense achievement for the Augustan poetic endeavour. In it, Prudentius achieves the Callimachean ideal of reducing great matters to relatively short poems, in a focused, lyrical style. Like Vergil, he adapts the historical narrative of the Christian world-view into a cohesive format, in two complementary movements of six books, in close dialogue existing poetic models, making the work a *carmen historicum*. Like Horace, he has crafted the essence of the new world order, the Christian *saeculum*, into a unified body of poetry, creating a *carmen saeculare*, even expressly imitating Horace's own political designs, and proclaiming Jesus Christ as God. Like Ovid, he has created a cycle of hymns which span all time from creation to consummation in Christ, tracing the *exitus-reditus* of creation, and the eternity of deified souls. He has written the true *carmen perpetuum*. Thus, in many ways, the poetry of the *Cathemerinon* is a distillation of the sum of Augustan poetry, re-informed and re adapted to Christianity: a symbolic offering of all poetry to God.

Despite his long-standing reputation as a mere pagan imitator who substitutes content, by means of his *Liber Cathemerinon*, Prudentius announces a completely new cosmic Christian order which is informed and configured to the mystery of the Incarnation, producing a *poesis* that is at once Christian, universal, and Roman. M. van Assendelft's keen observations on light/darkness themes and prophecy-fulfilment occupy a central preoccupation in the *Cathemerinon*, which informs the movement of the text. Because creator has entered his own creation as creature, the finite and the infinite, the material and the spiritual, the particular and the universal, have all been inextricably intertwined through this central historic event: the marriage of God and man.

Consequently, the entire cosmos has begun its *reditus ad Deum*, a progressive illumination. The world patiently awaits the long-expected *parousia* of Christ triumphant, who will finally reconcile all of creation in himself, exalting nature through the infusion of grace, dispersing every shadow, and purifying the good in nature. This is the Gospel that Prudentius wishes to announce to his pagan peers in late Imperial Rome, using a language that they can understand -- the language of Augustan Roman poetry.

## Works Cited

- Aland, Kurt, and Bible. N.T. Gospels. English. Revised Standard, eds. Synopsis of the Four Gospels : Completely Revised on the Basis of the Greek Text of the Nestle-Aland 26th Edition and Greek New Testament 3rd Edition. New York: American Bible Societies, 1985.
- Bible. English The New American Bible, Atlanta: Catholic Bible Press, 1987
- Boissier, Gaston. La Fin Du Paganisme : Étude Sur Les Dernières Luttes Religieuses En Occident Au Quatrième Siècle. 5 éd, Paris: Hachette, 1907.
- Campbell, J. M., and Roy J. Deferrari, eds. A Concordance of Prudentius. Hildesheim: G. Olms Verlag, 1966.
- Charlet, J. -L. La Création Poétique Dans Le Cathemerinon De Prudence. Paris: La Société des Belles Lettres, 1982.
- Cochrane, C. N. Christianity and Classical Culture : A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003.
- Courcelle, P. "Les Exégèses Chrétiennes De La Quatrième Éclogue." Révue des Études Anciennes 59 (1946): 294-319.

- Cunningham, Maurice P. "Notes on the Text of Prudentius." Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 102 (1971): pp. 59-69.
- Daniélou, J. "Herméneutique Judéo-Chrétienne " Ermeneutica e Tradizione (Archivio di Filosofia) (1963): 255-261.
- . From Shadows to Reality : Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers. London: Burns & Oates, 1960.
- . The Theology of Jewish Christianity, Trans. J. Baker. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964.
- De Boer, W. "Hermeneutic Problems in Early Christian Literature." Vigiliae Christianae, 1, (1947): 150-167.
- De Lubac, H. "'Typologie' Et Allégorisme." Recherches de Science Religieuse 34 (1947): 180-226.
- Evenepoel, W. "Explanatory and Literary Notes on Prudentius' Hymnus Ante Somnum." Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire 56 (1978): 55-70.
- . "Some Literary and Liturgical Problems in Prudentius' Liber Cathemerinon: On Jean-

Louis Charlet, La Création Poétique Dans La Cathemerinon De Prudence " Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire 64 (1986): 79-85.

---. Zakelijke en literaire onderzoekingen betreffende het Liber Cathemerinon van Aurelius Prudentius Clemens, Brussels: Paleis der Academien, 1979.

Fishwick, D.. "Prudentius and the Cult of Divus Augustus." Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte 39.4 (1990): 475-486.

Fletcher, G. B. A. "Imitationes Vel Loci Similes in Poetis Latinis." Mnemosyne 1.3 (1933):192-213.

Fontaine, J. "Le Mélange Des Genres Dans La Poésie De Prudence." Études Sur la Poésie Latine Tardive d'Ausone A Prudence. Ed. J. Fontaine, Paris: La Société Les Belles Lettres, 1980: 1-23.

---. "Trois Variations de Prudence sur la Thème du Paradis." Études Sur la Poésie Latine Tardive D'Ausone A Prudence. Paris: La Société Les Belles Lettres, 1980: 96-115.

---. "La Poésie comme Art Spirituel: les Projets Poétiques de Paulin et de Prudence." Naissance de la Poésie dans l'Occident Chrétien: Esquisse d'une Histoire de la Poésie Latine Chrétienne du IIIe au VIe Siècle. J. Fontaine, Paris: Études

Augustiniennes,1981: 143-160.

---. "La Louange des Heures, des Jours et des Martyrs: les Deux Bréviaires lyriques de Prudence." Naissance de la Poésie dans l'Occident Chrétien: Esquisse d'une Histoire de la Poésie Latine Chrétienne du IIIe au Vie Siècle. J. Fontaine, Paris: Études Augustiniennes,1981: 195-209.

Grondin, J. Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics; Einführung in Die Philosophische Hermeneutik. English. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Hagendahl, Harald. "Jerome and the Latin Classics." Vigiliae Christianae 28.3 (1974): 216-27.

---. Latin Fathers and the Classics : A Study on the Apologists, Jerome and Other Christian Writers. Göteborg: Elanders Boktr. Aktiebolag, 1958.

Harrison, C. C. "The Influence of Vergil on St. Jerome and on St. Augustine." The Classical Weekly 17.22 (1924): 170-5.

Horace, N. Rudd, Odes and Epodes. Cambridge: Loeb-Harvard UP, 2004. Print.

Hudson-Williams, A. "Virgil and the Christian Latin Poets." Proceedings of the Virgil



Society 6 (1966): 11-21.

Mahoney, A. "Vergil in the Works of Prudentius." Diss. Catholic University of America, 1934.

Malamud, M. A. A Poetics of Transformation : Prudentius and Classical Mythology. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Mastrangelo, M. The Roman Self in Late Antiquity : Prudentius and the Poetics of the Soul. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

Miller, J. F. Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Momigliano, A., ed. The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century : Essays. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1963.

Newman, John Kevin. Augustus and the New Poetry. Bruxelles, Berchem, Latomus: Revue d'Études Latines, 1967.

Ovid, and R. J. Tarrant. P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoses; Metamorphoses. Oxonii : E Typographeo Clarendoniano; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Palmer, Anne-Marie. Prudentius on the Martyrs. Oxford England : Clarendon Press ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Pépin, J. Mythe et Allégorie :Les Origines Grecques et les Contestations Judéo-Chrétiennes. Aubier: Editions Montaigne, 1958.

Prudentius, H.J. Thomson Prudentius; Works. English & Latin. 2 vol. Cambridge: Loeb-Harvard UP, 1953.

---, b., and Johan Bergman. Aurelii Prudentii Clementis Carmina. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1979.

---, b., James Marshall Campbell, and Roy J. Deferrari, eds. A Concordance of Prudentius. Hildesheim: G. Olms Verlag, 1966.

Raby, F. J. E. A History of Christian-Latin Poetry from the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages. 2d ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953.

Roberts, M.. "Creation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the Latin Poets of Late Antiquity." Arethusa 35.3 (2002): 403-15.

---. Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs : The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius. Ann

Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

van Assendelft, Marion M., and Prudentius. Sol Ecce Surgit Igneus : A Commentary on the Morning and Evening Hymns of Prudentius (Cathemerinon 1, 2, 5 and 6).  
Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1976.

van den Boer, W. "Allegory and History." Romanitas Et Christianitas; Studia Iano Henrico Waszink A. D. VI Kal. Nov. A. MCMLXXIII XIII Lustra Complenti Oblata  
Ed. Jan Hendrik Waszink. Amsterdam: 1973. 15-27.

Virgil, H. Rushton Fairclough, and G. P. Goold. Virgil; Works. English & Latin. 2 vol.  
Cambridge: Loeb-Harvard UP, 1999.

Witke, Charles. Numen Litterarum; The Old and the New in Latin Poetry from Constantine to Gregory the Great. Leiden: Brill, 1971.