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## A Note on the Critical Use of Instrumenta for the Retrieval of Patristic Biblical Exegesis

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**A Note on the Critical Use of *Instrumenta* for  
the Retrieval of Patristic Biblical Exegesis<sup>1</sup>**

*Steven R. Harmon (bio)*

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The retrieval of patristic biblical exegesis has become something of a growth industry in early Christian studies. The current level of interest is attributable to at least six major developments since the middle of the twentieth century. First, in the 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Pope Pius XII strongly encouraged the study of patristic exegesis along with modern historical-critical methods.<sup>2</sup> Second, the *ressourcement* emphasis of the *nouvelle théologie* movement in mid-twentieth-century Catholic theology sought a renewal of the Church through retrieval of the classical sources of the Christian faith.<sup>3</sup> The work of Henri de Lubac in particular within that movement highlighted the continuing relevance of patristic perspectives on the interpretation of scripture.<sup>4</sup> Third, the 1969 [End Page 95] Strasbourg colloquy on "The Bible in the Fathers" focused international attention on the importance of the topic and the need for ongoing research.<sup>5</sup> Fourth, postwar interaction between Christian and Jewish scholarship has produced a burgeoning literature comparing late antique Jewish and Christian readings of their common sacred text, the Hebrew Bible.<sup>6</sup> Fifth, there has emerged a postmodern consciousness of the limits of historical-critical methodologies for biblical interpretation. While some interpreters have attempted to move beyond these limits through various synchronic methodologies, others have sought aid from pre-modern readings of scripture. Representative of the latter quest are two major anthology projects currently underway: *The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, edited by Thomas Oden and published by InterVarsity Press, and *The Church's Bible*, edited by Robert Wilken and slated for publication by William B. Eerdmans.<sup>7</sup> [End Page 96]

A sixth factor, and the subject of the present note, is the production of a growing number of tools that facilitate the retrieval of patristic exegesis. It is now much easier than ever to locate biblical citations, allusions, and commentary in ancient Christian writers. I will address the merits and limitations of these print and electronic resources, using as a test case the "parable of the householder" in Matt 13.52. Its brevity, the lack of synoptic parallels, the presence of distinctive keywords, and its

relative infrequency of citation make it an ideal text for a concise comparison of the results obtained through the use of these tools.<sup>8</sup>

## I. *Print Resources for the Retrieval of Patristic Biblical Exegesis*

For the researcher working any time prior to 1975 to locate references to Matt 13.52 in early Christian literature through the eighth century, the best set of tools would have been the index volumes of the Migne *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*.<sup>9</sup> An index of the 161 volumes of the *Patrologia Graeca* (PG) was prepared in 1912 by Ferdinand Cavallera.<sup>10</sup> A section on *Scriptura Sacra* lists nineteen Greek patristic commentaries on Matthew.<sup>11</sup> If one consults each of these for commentary on 13.52, one discovers that only the commentaries by Origen, John Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria treat that passage.

The 217 volumes of the *Patrologia Latina* (PL) are indexed in volumes 218 through 221. A general commentary index lists twenty-nine Latin commentaries on Matthew, and an index of specific chapters of each biblical book lists eight treatments of chapter 13.<sup>12</sup> Specific verses within chapters are not indexed. Perusal of these commentaries for interaction with 13.52 discovers five references for that text: one in Hilary of Poitiers, two in Jerome, one in Augustine, and one in Bede. **[End Page 97]**

Four supplemental volumes for PL that appeared between 1958 and 1967 as *Patrologia Latina Supplementum* (PLS) are indexed in a fifth volume, published in 1974, which does contain an index of biblical citations referenced by chapter and verse. This index lists seven citations of Matt 13.52: two in Gregory of Elvira, one in a treatise ascribed to an unknown Pontius Maximus, one in Avitus of Vienne, two in Pelagius, and one in Defensor.

It is therefore possible to locate patristic references to Matt 13.52 using the various index volumes of the Migne patrology, but such work would be hindered by three major limitations. First, with the exception...

## *A Note on the Critical Use of Instrumenta for the Retrieval of Patristic Biblical Exegesis*<sup>1</sup>

STEVEN R. HARMON

The retrieval of patristic biblical exegesis has become something of a growth industry in early Christian studies. The current level of interest is attributable to at least six major developments since the middle of the twentieth century. First, in the 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Pope Pius XII strongly encouraged the study of patristic exegesis along with modern historical-critical methods.<sup>2</sup> Second, the *ressourcement* emphasis of the *nouvelle théologie* movement in mid-twentieth-century Catholic theology sought a renewal of the Church through retrieval of the classical sources of the Christian faith.<sup>3</sup> The work of Henri de Lubac in particular within that movement highlighted the continuing relevance of patristic perspectives on the interpretation of scripture.<sup>4</sup> Third, the 1969

1. Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the annual meeting of NAPS in Chicago in May 2001 and the Southeast Region of the Society of Biblical Literature in Charlotte, North Carolina in March 2001. I wish to thank the hearers of these presentations for their thoughtful questions and observations and the two anonymous JECSS referees for helpful criticism.

2. Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 35 (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1943): 297–326; English tr. in *Rome and the Study of Scripture: A Collection of Papal Enactments on the Study of Holy Scripture Together with the Decisions of the Biblical Commission*, 5th ed., ed. Conrad J. Lusius (St. Meinrad: Grail, 1953), 79–107. On the influence of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* on Catholic biblical scholarship, see Robert Bruce Robinson, *Roman Catholic Exegesis Since Divino Afflante Spiritu: Hermeneutical Implications*, SBL Dissertation Series 111 (Decatur: Scholars Press, 1988).

3. See Fergus Kerr, "French Theology: Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed., ed. David F. Ford (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 105–17; Marcelino D'Ambrosio, "Ressourcement Theology, Aggiornamento, and the Hermeneutics of Tradition," *Communio* 18 (1991): 530–55; John F. Kobler, "On D'Ambrosio and Ressourcement Theology," *Communio* 19 (1992): 321–25.

4. See especially Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 2 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959); English tr., *Medieval Exegesis*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).



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