

Chapter Seven

Patristic Ruth

7.1 Introduction

Patristic literature refers to the writings of the Fathers¹ of the Christian church between the latter part of the 1st century CE and the middle of the 8th century CE. It can therefore be distinguished from New Testament literature at the one end and from medieval scholasticism and the Byzantine era at the other.² It reflects the philosophical and religious thought of the Hellenistic and Roman world, which in return reacted to Judaism. The themes found in this vast literature are manifold, but the theological reflection of the Fathers focused for the most part on questions of doctrinal formation as Christianity progressed as newly formed religion. This literature includes mainly the discussion and formulation of Christology and of the Trinity. Other parts are dedicated to the discussion of the relation between the Law, mainly the doctrine of the Old Testament and the gospel on the other hand forming the center of Christianity.

Although writers of the East and West had much in common, vast differences can be found in their theologies, affecting their exegetical approaches.³ A scientific theology developed in the East and was marked by a mixture of biblical theology and Platonic idealism, especially in Alexandria. In Antioch the main trend was Aristotelian realism. On the other hand, in the West, Christian writers generally depended on the Greek theological tradition, which they often clarified in definitions or interpreted in juridical categories until the emergence in the late fourth century CE of a sophisticated Latin theology. The meeting of the East and West introduced a controversial and debatable environment for the growth of patristic literature. Each camp of exegetical school urged for the protection of its own interest and belief. Therefore, this resulted in a vivid and diversified exegetical influence on the patristic interpretation of the book of Ruth. We next aim at comparing the exegetical patterns and principles found in patristic exegesis of Ruth with the early Jewish exegesis of Ruth as discussed in chapter two to four.

¹ The Greek word *patristikos* means "relating to the fathers".

² Refer to Farrar's delineation of the history of interpretation in chapter two.

³ The exegetical features of their were discussed in Chapter Five under the section of "Developmental Processes of Exegetical School"

7.2 The corpus of patristic literature

Defining the corpus of patristic literature is a difficult and confusing task. One cannot approach the subject by assuming that there is available a list of authors compiled according to a logical system. This is not to say that appropriate lists of primary contributors could not be proposed. Many constructive lists of patristic authors have been proposed in the past. Proposals tend to agree on some authors, such as the Cappadocians. However, there is rarely complete uniformity or agreement on which patristic authors are the most significant. So, no specific corpus of patristic literature is preferred here. Most important of all, what the thesis wants to do is making an examination of exegetical trends and approaches found in the early Christian Church. We mainly focus on those patristic exegetical directions or trends, that were imposing influence on exegetes under specific historical and theological circumstances rather than doing detailed work on specific individual patristic commentators.

Unlike the Scriptures, there does not exist any closed canon for patristic literature. Patristic writings represent an ongoing historical process as sacred tradition unfolds through the mind of the Church. The difficulty in defining patristic literature is an absence of clearly defined boundaries. Outside of the defined dogma of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, the Church in her wisdom has allowed for a certain ambiguity, most likely flexibility. This flexibility provides the creative freedom necessary for the transmission of the patristic mind of the Church. A living tradition may be expressed within the historical context of each new generation of the Church. It is for this reason that Florovsky concludes that restrictive definitions of patristic literature is the death to living tradition:

*A restrictive commitment of Seven Ecumenical Councils actually contradicts the basic principle of the Living Tradition in the Church. Indeed, all Seven. But not only the Seven.*⁴

The corpus of patristic literature is not a sealed collection, closed by a form of canon or time restraints. It is rather an instrument of living tradition. The New Testament said that "*not of the letter but of the Spirit.*"⁵ This organic nature of patristic writings is the very reason that strict definitions of its corpus are so elusive.

⁴ Florovsky, Georges, *Aspects of Church History* Volume IV, Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987, 20.

⁵ See II Corinthians 3:6

Patristic literature is recognized by its contents, consisting of a synthesis of several elements. The patristic tradition is consistently harmonious in its Hellenistic and Hebraic epistemology. While some critics view this adaptation of Greek thought as a decline in the purity of the Gospel through the Hellenization of Christianity, Lossky explains that it was quite the opposite:

*...this was not the rationalization of Christianity but the Christianization of reason, a transmuting of philosophy into contemplation, a saturation of thought by a mystery which is not a secret to conceal, but an inexhaustible light.*⁶

We may witness the occurrence of the diversification of exegetical trends in such an absence of defined patristic literature. Flexibility guaranteed the presence of different thoughts. During the patristic age, diversified literature rather than strict verse-by-verse commentary as found in early Jewish exegesis⁷ was made popular. Most important of all, flexibility and creativity assured the patristic type of typology used by exegetes to achieve their theological and apologetic purposes.

7.3 Patristic Literature related to the Book of Ruth

7.3.1 Main translation

In chapter four, we dealt with early Jewish exegesis. The commentators composed their writings in the form of commentary. We indicated two main kinds of Jewish commentary: Ruth Rabbah and The Targum to Ruth as the illustration of the Jewish interpretation on the book of Ruth. When we refer to patristic exegesis, we rather deal with a different form of literature. These are writings rather than commentaries. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson gave us a good explanation for this. The early Christian use of the Scriptures of Israel is extensive. They explained that Israel's Scriptures are not utilized to create systematic commentary as in Jewish writings. Rather they are utilized for quotations, allusion, and echoes of themes and patterns.⁸ Therefore, the format of patristic exegetical works rather in the form of free literature, in which commentators may be free to write a letter or some passages to exegete the

⁶ Lossky, Vladimir. *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978, 38

⁷ See Chapter four at the section of "Commentary development in Jewish community".

⁸ Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, "Introduction and Overview" in *A History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 1: The Ancient Period*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 38

meaning of the text.

My main investigation will be based on the translation, called the Gloss on Ruth. The Gloss on Ruth is made up mostly of Rabanus Maurus's commentary on Ruth, including selections from the exegesis of Isidore of Seville.⁹ We depend on the translation of this work.¹⁰ Almost the entire Ruth Gloss is taken from Rabanus Maurus's (776/84-856) Commentary on Ruth.¹¹ A few of the extra phrases are not from Rabanus, and the meanings of the Hebrew names, especially those in the genealogy at the end of chapter four, are from Jerome's *Book of Interpretations of Hebrew Names*.

Rabanus (sometimes written as Hrabanus), born in 784 CE and died in 865 CE, was a highly influential theologian, poet, and churchman who held the offices of Abbot of Fulda and Archbishop of Mainz. As well as biblical exegesis, he wrote manuals for the clergy and a quasi-encyclopedia, "*On the Nature of Things*", which continued the mystical interpretation of the world promoted in his biblical work. Rabanus as a representative of commenting patristic exegesis did a lot of compilation, translation and exegetical work of early Christian writings, which were so diffused and piecemeal at that period. It was too difficult to find a distinct and comprehensive work at early age of Christianity. Moreover, we cannot reach the patristic exegesis through a closed canon or well-defined commentary. Until eight century, the Rabanus' work was used to illustrate the exegetical trends on the book of Ruth.

The Gloss is not taken verbatim from Rabanus but is usually presented in an abbreviated and paraphrased form. Rabanus often began his comments with questions, which the Gloss turned into statements. These transformations can make the Latin of the text somewhat hard to fathom, especially when the compiler contracts several sentences into one, with a number of sub-clauses more or less obviously dependent on the main subject. Latin syntax makes it rather simpler to understand the structure of the sentences than English being more reliant on word order. An effort was made in the translated English form to retain at least some of the original Latin flavor, so that students can get a sense of the language and method of the Gloss. We have no real idea of who might have compiled the Ruth section of the Gloss.

⁹ Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), xiii

¹⁰ See the translation work of Lesley Smith.

¹¹ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), xv

The Ruth Gloss consists of short allegorical readings, glossing difficult words and adding brief explanations of opaque phrases. There is no central line running through the Gloss. Rather, it is a series of changing allegories, containing a fluidity of imagery that marks much medieval exegesis. The three names of Naomi, Ruth, and Orpha varies in their meaning, with Naomi indicating both the Synagogue and the Church (and sometimes “the faith of the Church”), Ruth as representing the faithful Jewess and obedient Gentiles, and Orpha as both being Jewish and a baptized believer. The Gloss’ interpretation is not anti-Jewish, simply totally Christian, since its allegorical intent ignores most of the Jewish character. It may be summed up in one of its own phrases: the exegesis of the Gloss is intended to illuminate “the spiritual lineage of the race.”¹²

The Gloss on Ruth contains some selections from the earlier exegesis of Isidore of Seville. Isidore of Seville (560-636 CE) was a Spanish monk and bishop known particularly for his *Etymologies*, a sort of encyclopedia of knowledge on many subjects, arranged by definitions of key words. Isidore tried to create a compendium of the best of learning to date, but his desire for completeness means that standards of accuracy vary widely. This very completeness, however, meant that his work was very influential, and many of its explanations and definitions, however, loosely based in fact, became the norm for centuries. Isidore’s short treatment of Ruth here is entirely spiritually interpreted: for him, the story is simply a vehicle for Christian allegory. Isidore’s central point is to show that Christ is prefigured in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, like Peter Comester, he keeps much of the original dialogue and with it the original savor.¹³

The other work having been consulted for this research was the Ordinary Gloss. It comes from the twelfth century CE, but it acquired accretions over the years, so that, by the time it was printed, some texts were much enlarged. The Ordinary Gloss is the name generally given to the commentary on the Bible probably originating in Laon in the early twelfth century. It contained, in effect, a digest of the opinions of all the important patristic commentators, as well as some selected “modern” interpreters on any given text, and apparently functioned as a reference work for teachers and students of biblical

¹² Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), xiv

¹³ Idem

commentary. It achieved something of a best-seller status, and Paris became a center for the production and distribution of manuscript copies, remarkable for their standardized layout ---- a central biblical text with glosses added in the margins and between the lines. There is no difference, apart from length, between the marginal and interlinear glosses; they may change places at will.

7.3.2 Other patristic works

Moreover, we will also include some works of other patristic theologians and commentators. The works are so extensive but diffused due to different exegetical schools and trends. Jerome, on whose translation the Gloss's text is based, is also a major source for the individual glosses, along with Ambrose, Augustine, Bede, Cassiodorus, Gregory the Great, Origen, and their ninth-century editor, Rabanus Maurus. These are the main contributors, but others, especially Carolingian authors, are sometimes quoted on particular *lemmata*, or text-phrases.

(a) Jerome's Vulgate translation of Ruth

It appears twice, first standing alone so that readers can get to know the biblical text a new and, second, forming the base text (the central column) of the Ordinary Gloss. Only Hugh of St. Cher, with his Paris Bible, has slight variations on this central text. Around Jerome's text are arranged the comments of the Gloss, which I have taken from Adolph Rusch's first edition of the text (Strassburg, 1480-81) checked against a sample of Gloss manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.¹⁴

A biblical linguist and commentator of unsurpassed skill in his day, Jerome made new translations of the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew. His best-known translation became to be termed the Vulgate and was the standard text used in Western Europe. He also composed introductory prologues to each of the biblical books or groups of books, which was the standard approach to the overall meaning of the text. His commentaries were the norm for centuries, especially in their linguistic questions and answers. By the thirteenth century, a standard Bible, even if it contained no commentary as such, comprised Jerome's translation, with his prefaces (or those attributed to him), and his book

¹⁴ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), xiii.

on the interpretations of the Hebrew proper names. Jerome's translation is used here as the central text of the Bible and Ordinary Gloss sections. He appears briefly in the Additions to the Gloss to set time and place and to place Ruth in the list of four sinful women from Matthew's Gospel.¹⁵

(b) John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407)

A monk and bishop of Constantinople, Chrysostom ("golden mouthed") was especially famous for his homilies. He was an enthusiast for the literal interpretation of Scripture against allegories. The Gloss on Ruth uses both genuine Chrysostom homilies on Matthew as well as the spurious *Opus Imperfectum*, an incomplete second series of homilies on Matthew widely attributed to him. In fact, the *Opus* was probably the work of a fifth century Arian scholar. Both real and pseudo-Chrysostom are used in the Gloss Additions to ask *why* Boaz married Ruth, by considering what traits are praiseworthy in them both.

(c) Theodoret (ca. 393-ca. 466)

Greek monk and bishop of Cyrrhus, Theodoret attended the crucial early Church councils at Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), where he was on the losing side of the Christological debate with Cyril of Alexandria. Little of his work remains to us, but what is available shows him to be a fine biblical exegete, an early Apologist, and a Church historian. He appears surprisingly often in the Gloss Additions, on the issue of what should be admired in Ruth and Boaz, and on the rewards given to the virtuous.

(d) Ambrose (ca. 339-397)

He was Bishop of Milan famous for being acclaimed bishop by the Milanese laity when still being un-baptized. He was known in the Middle Ages for his Letters, and his works *On the Sacraments*, *On Virginity*, and *On the Offices the Church*. He is, usually little used in the Gloss on Ruth, being simply quoted on widowhood, which he counted as one of the forms of virginity. The Gloss Additions use Ambrose to comment on the goodness of Ruth's and Naomi's souls.

¹⁵ Idem, xiv

In conclusion, it should be remarked that it is strange to exclude the great theologian and commentators, Augustine of Hippo (354-430). This generally used reference lists of patristic exegetes does not mention Augustine of Hippo. Christian theology is sometimes said merely to be a footnote to Augustine, a prolific Latin author who wrote massively on virtually all aspects of Christian life and doctrine. However, Ruth contains few theological problems or doctrinal difficulties. Its problems are more those of understanding the linguistic queries and the Hebrew customs. Thus it is that the Gloss compiler did not choose to include any of Augustine's comments on Ruth, and he is not quoted by any other author.

7.4 Some general patterns arising from the study of patristic exegesis on the Book of Ruth

7.4.1 Law and Gospel

(a) Heretic challenge

The gospel is the main foundation of Christian doctrine. *Keryma* is the preaching of Christian gospel. Since Christianity has been a new born religion, it faced many challenges and influence from surrounding religious thoughts and philosophical trends. Therefore, it was the main task of exegetes to defend Christianity as orthodox against the challenge of heretics.¹⁶ The Book of Ruth 2:22 had mentioned this apologetic purpose. It stated that:

Her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, it is better for you to go out to reap with his girls, in case someone stops you gleaning in another field."

"*Another field*" is interpreted as the doctrine of heretics or schismatics, where there are quarrels and disputes.¹⁷ The book of Ruth 2:8 again illustrated the challenge of Christianity under the heretic and philosophical attack. The Christian church should uphold the role and position of the gospel. Therefore, it stressed the faith of believers to Christ and the Church. Ruth 2:8 said that:

And Boaz said to Ruth, "Here me, daughter. Do not go to another field to collect the grain, nor leave here: but join my young girls, and where they reap the grain, follow them."

¹⁶ See Chapter Five under the section of "the influence of Gnosticism".

¹⁷ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 20

The phrase “do not go to another field” is interpreted, as “do not leave the state of faith, lest you follow the errors of the heretics or schismatics.”¹⁸ Once again, Christianity faced the challenge of heresy¹⁹ or even some kinds of schism.²⁰ Facing this religious diversity, the patristic exegetes encouraged the believers to join with the minds of the saints, so that you fear the Holy Scriptures, meditating them by deeds. The position of the Bible in the community of believers has been strengthened. The Christian interpreters gave the believers the example of the saints. The saints have drunk divine wisdom from the books of the two Testaments. The believers may drink of it too.

Moreover, Ruth 3:10 also echoed the unstable doctrine of heretics. It stated that:

And he said, ‘Daughter, you are blessed by the Lord, and you have surpassed your former pity with your latest pity, because you have not run after young men, poor or rich.

From the above text, it is explained as “heretics and schismatics who do not have mature counsel, because they are always unstable and uncertain.”²¹ Once again, they are not accepted as orthodox in the view of Christian Church. We often witness the comparison between heresy and Christianity in the interpretation of the patristic fathers.

This background of theological challenge imposed direct influence on the patristic Ruth in the early Christian Church. The central place of the struggle between orthodoxy and heresy in the history was neatly summarized by the Jesuit scholar Karl Rahner (1904-84), one of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. He stated that:

*The history of Christianity is also a history of heresies and consequently of the attitudes adopted by Christianity and the Church towards heresy, and so involves a history of the concept of heresy itself. In all religions that possess any kind of definite doctrine...there are differences of opinion about that doctrine and as a consequence quarrels and conflict about it and about the socially organized forms in which the different religious views find expression.*²²

¹⁸ Idem, 17

¹⁹ From the Greek word *hairesis*, it originally means simply “choice”, but eventually coming to denote religious speculations that deviated from correct belief.

²⁰ See chapter five.

²¹ Lesley Smith, 23

²² Karl Rahner, *On heresy* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), 7

It could be said that the debate was visible already in the origins of Christianity being a form of Judaism. This occurred when those who would come to call themselves Christians redefined their relationship with Jewish law and the traditions of ancient Israel, and advocated new truths based on Jesus' teachings. Mark Humphries remarks that just as Christianity splintered away from other forms of Judaism, there was a risk that Christianity itself might fragment, as different groups or individuals came to regard different versions or aspects of Jesus' message as more significant.²³

(b) The importance and role of the Law

The Christian Church committed that, on the other hand, the truth of the Law is forever lasting. The Book of Ruth 3:18 illustrated well this point and stated that:

And Naomi said, "Just wait, daughter, and see what the outcome will be. For the man will not rest until he has done what he said."

"*For the man will not rest*" is interpreted that the Church promises faithfully that Truth will not cease to fulfill the promise. The promise of God is the important doctrine in the theology of the New Testament. It is appropriately presented by the use of typology. This means that the promise made by God in the Old Testament is finally actualized at the times of New Testament.²⁴ It will occur among the community of believers. We may refer to the phrase "*whoever believed and was baptized will be saved.*"²⁵ Actually, the climax of God's promise is the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the believers should study, mediate and obey the law. As a community of faith, the Christian Church should learn and mediate the Law in order to work according to the will of the Lord. The book of Ruth 2:14 also pointed out this command and stated that:

And Boaz said to her, "When it is evening, come here and eat the bread and dip your morsel in the vinegar." And so she sat beside the reapers and he collected barley-flour for her, and she ate and was satisfied and took the rest away.

From the above quotation, patristic interpretation emphasized the role and

²³ Mark Humphries, *Early Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 159

²⁴ See Chapter Six

²⁵ Mk 16:16

position of the Law in the Christian Church. “*She ate*” is interpreted as Ruth refreshed her faithful mind by knowledge of divine Law. “*And was satisfied*” referred to the fact that Ruth considered deeply each word she heard. Moreover, “*Took the rest away*” meant because Ruth retained the words in her heart, and worked so that she might understand more by concentrated meditation.²⁶ We again point out the importance of the Law in the community of Christian believers. The book of Ruth 2:23 states that:

And so she joined herself to Boaz's girls, and reaped with them until the barley and wheat were stored in the granaries.

This means, that as long as Ruth stays with learned men, meditating on the Scriptures, she can store away knowledge of the Old and New Testaments in the storeroom of her heart, to have enough food for her soul.²⁷ This Law should be treasured and respected by the Israelite and Christian community. Ruth 2:2 also illustrated the important role of the Law in the community. It stated that:

Ruth, the Moabite woman, said to her mother-in-law, “If you agree, I will go into a field²⁸ and collect the gleanings which have escaped the hands of the reapers, wherever I meet with kindness from a merciful landowner.” She answered her, “Go, my daughter.”

This field is the knowledge of heavenly study. The harvest is spiritual discernment. The harvesters are preachers. The remaining ears of corn are the opinions of the Scriptures which, by the mystery of concealment, are very often left behind for the exercise of contemplation, like fuller, deeper senses. The Gentile people, therefore, ardently desire the Church’s learning, so that they might be admitted to the contemplation of divine Law and the fellowship of the saints, and they might be refreshed by the lessons and examples of the saints.

Ambrose confirmed the importance of the Law and introduced the fruit of good instruction. It is a great benefit both for the support and for the advantage of widows that they train their daughters-in-law to have in them support in full old age. It was the payment for their teaching and the reward for their training. Naomi has well taught and well instructed her daughter-in-law. Ruth will never

²⁶ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 19

²⁷ Idem, 20

²⁸ Ordinary Gloss interpreted “the field” as the Church. See Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 16

be wanting, will prefer the widowed life of her mother-in-law to her father's house, and if her husband also dies, will not leave her, but will support her in need, comfort her in sorrow and not leave her if sent away; for good instruction will never know need. So that Naomi, deprived of her husband and her two sons, having lost the offspring of her fruitfulness, did not lose the reward of her pious care because she found both a comforter in sorrow and a supporter in poverty.²⁹

(c) The relationship between Gospel and Law

The relationship between gospel and law raised the debate of the meeting between the Old and New. This is the meeting of Christianity and Judaism. Patristic interpreters tried hard to accommodate the old keeping the new values by modifying the former and transforming the latter. Ruth 1:1 states that:

1:1 In the days of a certain judge, when judges ruled, there was a famine³⁰ in the land. And a man went out from Bethlehem of Judah to exile in the country of the Moabites, with his wife and two sons.

1:2 And he was called Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi, and two sons, one Maalon, the other Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem of Judah. And having come to the country of the Moabites, they stayed there.

1:3 And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her sons,

1:4 They took Moabite wives, one of whom was called Orpha, and the other Ruth. And so they continued there for ten years.

The birth of Chilion is interpreted as the theme of fulfillment by the Ordinary Gloss.³¹ These are the apostles who have brought the enigmas of the prophets out into the fulfillment of full understanding. These were born, deservedly, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah who, filled with heavenly bread themselves, gathered the fruits of preaching by preaching the Gospel. “*Ephrathite*” means someone bearing fruit, “*Bethlehem*” means house of bread, and “*Judah*”

²⁹ P. Schaff et al., ed. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 2 series 13 vols (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature, 1887-1894), 396-7

³⁰ The Ordinary Gloss pointed out that the famine meant a famine of the Word.

³¹ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 11

confession. This is the copy of the gospel's doctrine. We can witness this kind of interpretation in the New Testament's theology as well. Whence, *give them these things to eat.*³² Again, *Go out and preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God.*³³ And elsewhere, *I chose you from the world that you should go and bear fruit.*³⁴

From verse one to four of chapter one, Ambrose interpreted that we know that Tamar was included in the Lord's genealogy³⁵ on account of mystery. It is not a usual way to include Tamar because of her foreignness and the Lord's command. The Law of Moses prohibits marriage to Moabites and excludes them from the church. It is written that "No Moabite shall enter the church of the Lord even to the third and fourth generation forever."³⁶

Including Tamar in the genealogy of Jesus, Ambrose believed that we ought also to conclude without doubt that Ruth was not omitted for a similar reason³⁷, which the holy apostle seems to sense when he foresees in the Spirit that the calling of foreign nations will be accomplished through the gospel, saying that the law was given not for the just but for the unjust.³⁸

A second concern related to the law and gospel is marriage. It is unacceptable for Ruth as a foreigner to marry a Jew. Some evangelists believe that this marriage which was forbidden by the weight of the law should not be included in the genealogy of Christ. It is a disastrous result if the Savior descends from an illegitimate heritage.

This discrepancy may be resolved by patristic exegesis. We return to the apostolic principle that the law was not given for the just but for the unjust. This is a new interpretation of law in an outstanding perspective of New Testament exegesis. Under such new interpretation of law, Ruth can enter the church because she was made holy and immaculate by deeds that go beyond the law.

It is because the law was given for the irreverent and sinners and then surely Ruth, who exceeded the limits of the law and entered the church. John R.

³² Mk 6:37; Lk 9:13; Mt. 14:16

³³ Mk 16:15

³⁴ Jn 15:16

³⁵ Mt 1:3 states that "and Judah begat Perez and Zerah of Tamar; and Perez begat Hezron; and Hezron begat Ram."

³⁶ Cf. Dt. 23:4-8

³⁷ See Mt. 1:5

³⁸ See 1Tm 1:9

Franke pointed out that in the ancient Christian commentaries she was made an Israelite and deserved to be counted among the honored figures in the Lord's genealogy. She was chosen for the kinship of her mind, not of her body, therefore setting a great example for us³⁹ because she prefigures all of us who were gathered from the nations for the purpose of joining the church of the Lord.

We should emulate her, therefore, who merited by her deeds this privilege of being admitted to his society, as history teaches, so that we also, by our deeds and accompanying merits, might be chosen for election to the church of the Lord.

Ruth 1:15-17 states that:

15 Naomi said to her, 'Look! Your sister has gone back to her people and to her gods: go with her.'

16 She answered, "Do not oppose me to make me leave you and go away. I shall go wherever you go; I shall stay wherever you stay. Your people are my people, and your God is my God.

17 Whatever earth receives you when you die, I shall die there and I shall be buried there. May the Lord do these things for me, and let him add things, if even death separates me and you."⁴⁰

Thus, the two of them went on to Bethlehem. When Boaz, David's great-grandfather, came to know her deeds, therefore, and her holiness in relation to her mother-in-law and her respect for the dead and her reverence for God, he chose her to be his wife.⁴¹

The final chapter on the book of Ruth included the description of genealogy, which indicated the main principle of the gospel according to the views of patristic exegesis. The book of Ruth 4: 13-17 also proved that foreigners were not excluded. It states that:

13 And so Boaz took Ruth and made her his wife; and he went it to her and the Lord made her

³⁹ John R. Franke ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture: Old Testament IV Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 2005), 182

⁴⁰ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 13-14

⁴¹ H. de Lubac, J. Danielou et al., eds. *Sources Chretiennes* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1941), 45: 136-138

conceive and bear a son.

14 And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord who has not allowed your family to die out, and his name will be known in Israel.

15 And you have someone to console your spirit, and to care for you in your old age. For he is born from your daughter-in-law who loves you, and he is far better for you than if you had seven sons."

16 And Naomi took the child and placed it on her bosom and acted as his nurse and nanny.

17 And, indeed, the neighborhood women congratulated her, saying, "A son is born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse the father of David.

Theophylact commented on the genealogy. Boaz begets Obed of Ruth whereas Ruth was a foreigner. However, she was married to Boaz. So, by typological analysis, the church is from among the Gentiles. For like Ruth, these Gentiles had been foreigners and outside the covenant, yet they forsook their people, their idols and their father, the devil. Ruth was wed to Boaz of the seed of Abraham, and so too was the church taken as bride by the Son of God.⁴² Chapter Four of the book of Ruth also witnesses the fact that the Gospel was fully Christ-centered, which will replace the Law and save the Gentile. First 4:3 mentioned the limitation of the Law. It stated that:

He said to his neighbor, "Naomi, who returned from the country of the Moabites, is selling part of the field belonging to our brother Elimelech.

Boaz offered the lawyers a part of Naomi's land to buy. This "part of the field" refers to that part of the people which was left behind after grace had appeared. He showed it to the matters of the Synagogue as a remedy, so that they should know their sickness and, because they could not heal themselves, they might trust themselves to a true doctor, as was said to the lepers. Go, show yourself to the priests,⁴³ and when they went they were made clean. The Gentiles are accepted and saved by the saving gospel. Therefore, the law can't function as a saving agent but Christ can do that. Christ replaced the Law. Ruth 4:1 stated

⁴² Theophylact, *The Explanation by Blessed Theophylact of the Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew* Introduction by Fr. Christopher Stade (House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom Press, 1992), 16

⁴³ Lk 17:14

that:

Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. And when he saw his relative (whom he had spoken of earlier), go past, he said to him, calling him by his name⁴⁴, "Pause a little while, and sit here." And he paused and sat down.

"Pause a little" indicated the coming of the gospel in a new age. Because Christ saw the Law had been established for the Jews in their time, and He ordered it to submit in him, because He directed it to give witness to the mystery of His over-lordship. In another way, He sees the kinsman "pass by" at the coming of His precursor whom, after the fashion of human life, He saw hurrying past, and He turned, in compassion, to the office of herald.

In the book of Ruth 4: 5 forms the climax of the Law's and Christ's relation to the Gentiles. It stated that:

To which Boaz said, "When you buy the field from the woman's hand, you must also take on Ruth, the Moabite woman whose husband is dead, to keep alive the name of your relative in your heredity."

"To keep alive" indicates that this signifies no other possession of the people (as if it were a part of a field) than the marriage of the Church with Christ, which revived the ancient name "sons of God", that the saints had had from the beginning: *Sons of God, seeing the daughters of men*⁴⁵, and Luke says that Adam was the son of God.⁴⁶ It revived in the Church of the Gentiles through the grace of God, whence, *He gave them power to become the sons of God.*⁴⁷

The Decalogue of the Law was not able to revive this name among the nations. If, however, you refer this to John the Baptist, you will find him yielding to the authority of his kinsman. John, the writer of the Gospel of John described said that *"I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me. I am not worthy to unite the thong of his sandal"*.⁴⁸ He further stated that *"I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.*

⁴⁴ Although Boaz called him by his name, we are not told what this was. The Hebrew tradition says that, because the man was not willing to do his duty by Ruth, he was not worthy to be named.

⁴⁵ Gn. 6:2

⁴⁶ Lk 3:38

⁴⁷ Jn 1:12

⁴⁸ Jn 1:26-27

*He who has the bride is the bridegroom”.*⁴⁹

Thus the Law gives way to the Gospel because the Law entered so that wrongs might abound. However the Apostle Paul believed that where wrongs abounded, grace abounded so much more.⁵⁰ Indeed, reproof was made to the previous covenant on account of its weakness. Rather, the introduction of a better hope, through which we are made neighbors to God, was made through Jesus Christ. 4:7 also reflected the replacement of the Law by Christ. It said that:

*Now this, indeed, was the ancient custom in Israel amongst kinsmen, that whenever anyone ceded his right under the law to another, so that it was conceded definitely, the man undid his own sandal and gave it to his neighbor.*⁵¹ In Israel, this was proof of the giving up of the right.

“Now this was the custom” pointed out the occurrence of the new order replacing the old one. The sandal is a veil of mysteries. The Old Law released the sandal from his foot, and gave it to Christ, because it could not show the sacraments to the magistrates of the people, but reserved this for Christ to do. John, therefore, did not claim the sandal for himself but for Christ, because he understood Christ alone to be fit for the bride, whence he says, I am not worthy to lose the thong of his sandal.⁵²

(d) The Gospels include gentiles

Basically the positions of the gentiles were lowered under the circumstances of the early Christian Church. Ruth 2:10 illustrated the inferiority of the gentiles. It states that:

And she, falling on her face on the ground and revering him, said to him, “Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should think me, a foreign woman, worthy?”

In traditional exegesis the phrase “*Why have I found favor in your sight*” was used to point out the humility expected of the Gentile church. It should not dare to compare itself to the people of God. This showed the traditional view on the

⁴⁹ Jn 3: 28-29

⁵⁰ Rm 5:20

⁵¹ Jerome’s translation is clear here: the man undoes his own (*suum*) sandal. Other writers lost the reflexive pronoun, letting in much confusion about who was to do what to whom.

⁵² Lk 3:16

inequality of the Gentile and the Chosen. The Israelite community believed itself to be a supreme race, accepted by God's promise. The Gentile is seen as inferior and a second-class people. In Christian interpretation, the New Testament focused on the dilemma of this unequal relationship. "She says, *For I am not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs...*"⁵³ And elsewhere, *O Lord, I am not worthy to come in under your roof but only speak the word.*⁵⁴

However, in Christian and patristic interpretation, the gentile is graciously included in God's promise. In verse four of chapter one "*They took Moabite wives*" it is pointed out that these who took gentile wives are the faithful people from amongst the Jews. They were the first to understand the stronghold of faith and the strength of religious service. Among them is found the obedience and trust of the Gentiles, of whom it is said, *People whom I had not known, served me.*⁵⁵ And elsewhere, *Ethiopia hurried to give a hand to God.*⁵⁶ Therefore two peoples, one from faith and the other from the chosen people, will be called to marriage by holy preachers, so that one sheepfold may come from a diverse flock.⁵⁷

The early church promoted that gentiles should be accepted. The Book of Ruth 1:8 said that:

"Go home to your mothers; may the Lord have mercy on you, just as you had mercy on my dead family, and on me.

This verse indicated that the Church does not act indiscriminately, nor accept anyone indiscriminately.⁵⁸ The ordinary gloss was elaborated with the help of the New Testament, *Do not believe every spirit, but test whether the spirits are of God.*⁵⁹ The book of Ruth 1:18 further elaborated the acceptance of the gentiles according to the interpretation of the patristic fathers. It is stated in Ruth that:

Therefore, seeing that Ruth had made up her mind and had decided to go with her, Naomi was not willing to resist her nor to persuade her to return to her own people.

⁵³ See Mt 15:27; Lk 16:21; Mk 7:28

⁵⁴ Mt. 8:8; Lk 7:6

⁵⁵ Ps 18:43

⁵⁶ Ps 68:31

⁵⁷ Jn 10

⁵⁸ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 12

⁵⁹ 1 Jn 4:1

This is interpreted as the Gentile people, having stubborn hearts, followed preachers into the holy land, and into Bethlehem, the city of God, expecting to receive a spouse there, born of the lineage of Abraham, in whom all nations of the earth might be blessed.⁶⁰

The wordplay between “wings (of refuge)” (2:12) and “edge of a garment” (3:9) may also imply a connection between Ruth’s marriage to Boaz and membership of Israel. In any case, its consummation ended in Ruth’s two tragedies, her widowhood and her foreign status (4:9-10). The blessings at the gate (4:11-12) testified to the popular acceptance of Ruth as a full-fledged Israelite, thereby implying that others like her are welcome to its membership. For Christians, Ruth’s acceptance foreshadowed the welcome accorded to Gentiles to become part of the people of God.⁶¹

Ruth 2:20 stated that:

And Naomi replied, “May he be blessed by the Lord, since he has performed a service for the dead with the same kindness which he has shown to the living.”

Mother Church herself was gathered together by God’s gracious kindness. She now experienced the same grace shown to the Gentile people and recognized them as her neighbor. Having heard the Lord’s name, she recalled his past kindness. The Psalmist said that *“I was mindful of ancient days and I meditated on all your works.”*⁶² The Synagogue knows the goodness of the Gentiles, the power of the Lord, and the strength of her protector, through the preaching of the Church. Having grasped the truth, she blesses the name of the Lord who held to His kindness towards the dead as much as He offered it to the living. He offered it to the Jews as well, since they enjoyed kindness through the understanding of the life-giving Law.⁶³

Moreover, the position of the gentile is upgraded. According to patristic exegesis Ruth 3:1 illustrates this point. It stated that:

⁶⁰ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 14

⁶¹ Cf. Gn 12:3; Ps 117; Ac 1:8; 10:34-35; Rm 11:17; Eph 2:19; Rv 5:9; Cf. Archer, *Survey*, p. 281; Bauer, “Ruth,” pp.118-19; et al.)

⁶² Ps 142:5

⁶³ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 20

When, however, she returned to her mother-in-law, she was told by her, "My daughter, I will try to get you rest and provide for your welfare.

The primitive Church takes care of the Gentile Church to make her the bride of Christ. The book of Ruth 3:14 also echoed this view. It stated that:

And so she slept at his feet till daylight. And she arose before men knew each other, and Boaz said, "Take care, in case anyone knows that you came here."

"She arose before men knew each other" indicated that before the Jews had been imbued with the teaching of the Law, they had grasped the rules of its nature. The Gentile Church arose, shaking off the sleep of idleness, being born into the dawn of faith, and hastened to the grace of Christ.

As a whole, the Christian exegetes added an allegorical meaning to the characters. This means that they fit the actors and their actions into a broader and more general interpretation of the story as salvation history. According to this reading, Naomi, Orpha, and Ruth represent stages in the creation of the Church. There was not, however, one single allegorical interpretation. The participants are assigned different roles depending on the context. The story moves through time, so the allegories similarly shift, from pre-Christian to post-Christian times, but their movement is not in a straight line. At the opening of the story, Christ has not appeared, and Naomi is the Synagogue, whose sons are kingly and priestly honored. Later she becomes the Church, whose sons are now learned men. Naomi regularly shifts between being interpreted as the Synagogue and the early or primitive Church, or even the faith of that Church.⁶⁴

The unnamed closer relative was seen to represent John the Baptist, who came before Christ in time but was not himself the Messiah, the Church's bridegroom. This relatively simple allegorical reading is most easily seen in the interlinear comments of the Gloss, where the allegorical representations of each character are glossed above their names as they appear in the text so that the text could be swiftly scanned and the Christian allegory picked up instantly by "reading between the lines".⁶⁵

(e) Historical and theological background governing the relationship

⁶⁴ Lesley Smith, Translated with an Introduction and Notes, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), xii

⁶⁵ Idem, xiii

between law and gospel

The loss of Temple in the time of Titus was the leading cause for the increasing importance of teaching and upholding the Law in the community of the early Christian church. This also introduced another phase in the relation of Christianity to Judaism. Jerusalem temple was destroyed in 70 CE. Richard Norris observed the significance of the temple destruction. One result of that event was the disappearance of the Jerusalem Church, whose leader James had been executed even before the great revolt. Along with it occurred the marginalization of Christian groups whose members, whether Jewish or Gentile, observed the Mosaic Law.⁶⁶ One further far-reaching effect can be pointed out. The disappearance of the Jerusalem Temple, given the insecurities it doubtless brought to some quarters of diaspora Judaism, seems to have been the expulsion of the secluded Jewish-Christian cells that had existed within certain synagogue communities.⁶⁷

The relation between the law and gospel was a hot topic in the early Christian Church. In the middle of the second century CE a Christian apologist named Justin composed a work titled *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, in which this relationship was critically discussed reflecting on the influence of early Christian exegetes. Justin relates to Trypho how he had been converted from philosophy to Christianity whereas Trypho identified himself as a Hebrew who had fled Palestine. These two men are the representation of the meeting of the New (Christ's gospel) and the Old (Jewish commandments). The dialogue was deeply rooted in a historical and exegetical context.

First, Justin defended the accusation of the Christians' that they claim the Old Testament sets forth their religion, while in fact they do not obey the religious laws. Ronald E. Heine commented that the Jews' objection is that Christians do not practice circumcision, do not keep the Sabbath, and do not observe the festal days. In fact, Trypho complains that the Christian lifestyle appears to be

⁶⁶ Richard A. Norris, JR. "Articulating identity" in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Frances Young, Lewis Ayres & Andrew Louth ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76

⁶⁷ Richard A. Norris, JR. "Articulating identity" in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Frances Young, Lewis Ayres & Andrew Louth ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76

very similar to that of the Gentiles or the heathen.⁶⁸ Trypho claims that Christians despise the old covenant, rejects its duties and claim to know the God of the Old Testament. He challenges Justin to defend how he can hope for anything when he does not observe the law.

Trypho in his reaction insists that the Old Testament must be taken as a whole and that the law, especially, must be read and obeyed literally. Christians, however, ignore the literal meaning of the law and claim that the Old Testament is a book about Christ and Christianity. It should be noted that the Jews in the second century, however, are also neglecting to observe all of the Old Testament laws literally. No sacrifices had been offered since the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Marcel Simon pointed out that after the second defeat of the Jews by the Romans in 135 CE all hopes of Jewish sacrifices being offered again in Jerusalem must have been completely shattered. The literal keeping of the law had been rather severely curtailed even by the Jews in the second century.⁶⁹

Justin continues his defense by arguing that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the Christians is the same God. He maintains strongly that Christians and Jews worship the same God. That common God is the God of the Old Testament. However, Justin continues, Christians do not focus on Moses or on the Law of Moses, for then they would be the same as the Jews. The law given through Moses on Sinai has become old, he says, and is exclusively for the Jews. The Old Testament itself anticipates a new covenant. Justin appeals that God had promised to make a new covenant with the house of Israel that would be different from the one he had made earlier when he brought them out of Egypt.⁷⁰ Consequently, there is a new law that has canceled the old one. Ronald Heine concluded that in the patristic mind the new law is eternal and not limited to a particular race of people. The new law, Justin adds, is Christ.⁷¹ Justin asserts that the followers of Christ are the true Israel and true descendants of Abraham. The latter received both testimony and blessing from God before he was circumcised and was promised that he would

⁶⁸ Ronald E. Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 49

⁶⁹ See Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, trans. H. McKeating (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; first published in Paris, 1948), 12-50

⁷⁰ See Jr 31:31-32

⁷¹ Ronald E. Heine, *Reading the Old Testament with the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 50

be the father of “many nations.”⁷² Justin’s argument dismisses the law as antiquated since the coming of Christ, who inaugurated a new covenant. Christ, he argues further, is the new covenant of which the Old Testament prophets had spoken.

7.4.2 A diversified social background in the period of the early church

(a) The patristic exegesis of famine

The occurrence of famine was due to Israel’s disobedience to God’s word. This interpretation illustrates the patristic views on sin and free will of choice of the human being. First, the book of Ruth 1:1 states that:

In the days of a certain judge, when judges ruled, there was a famine⁷³ in the land.

There was a famine of the word of God because of the scarcity of men learned in spiritual matters (to whom the authority to judge is given), for even the Law was corrupted by Jewish traditions.⁷⁴ Amos 8:11 also refer to the people not hearing God’s word. The reason pinpointed the anti-Jewish sentiment. It was a common phenomenon in the early stage of Christianity. We will discuss the relation between Judaism and Christianity in chapter eight.

Jerome accounted for the occurrence of the famine. He pointed out that Elimelech’s involuntary exile was due to the famine, which resulted from disobedience. This is similar to the Jewish cause. Jerome further elaborated on Jewish tradition. The Hebrews’ tradition is that this is Elimelech in whose time the sun stood still, on account of those who did not keep the law, so that, when they had seen such a miracle, they should have turned to the Lord God. Because they scorned to do such a thing, therefore the famine grew worse, and he who seemed foremost in the tribe of Judah not only was expelled from his native land with his wife and sons, made helpless by famine, but even continued in that same exile with his sons.

⁷² Gen. 17:4; *Dialogue* 22

⁷³ The Ordinary Gloss pointed out that the famine meant a famine of the Word.

⁷⁴ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 11, 31

The cause of the famine was deeply rooted in theological and cultural circumstances. Disobedience was closely related to the patristic discussion of free will. The early Christian church was under the influence of Hellenism.⁷⁵ Because the Greeks perceived the world as fundamentally knowable through reason, and because the Greeks saw this world as conforming to certain predictable standards, they naturally concluded that proper moral behavior was the natural product of correct knowing. Conversely, John Keefe pointed out that error and failure had little to do with a failure of the will, but to a great deal with ignorance of the good and the true.⁷⁶

This Greek principle of reason presented a great difficulty for Christian thinkers when the Greek tradition confronted the Scriptures. In the biblical world, reality is not primarily understood as being rational and accessible to human thought through observation of the world. Reality rather depends upon the will of God. God is completely free to create or to destroy. Since God is the author of all reality, all things are contingent upon the divine will. Individuals living in such a cosmological system gain access to the ethical norms and the functioning of the world in a way vastly different from those operating under the Greek model.

Right acting can only be understood in terms of obedience to the will of God as it is revealed in the law. Stability is guaranteed by God's promise and not by any natural necessity. This formed the background to the developing Christian theology of sin and salvation. John Keefe further elaborated that in order to make sense of the ideas inherent in the biblical message, God is free to do whatever he wishes and that human being must make a response, not through "knowing" but in the obedience of faith. Christian theology had need of a clearly defined theory of will.⁷⁷

(b) Human sinfulness urges for the coming of a saving king

It is important to note again that Christ-oriented interpretation dominated the patristic exegetical trends and the direction in the early Christian Church.⁷⁸ This Christological interpretation is presented by typological analysis of the text. Jesus' followers located themselves squarely in that tradition when they used the phrase "in accordance with the scriptures." The statements were not

⁷⁵ See chapter five.

⁷⁶ John J. O'Keefe, *Sin and Freedom of the Will in Gregory of Nyssa*, 52

⁷⁷ *Idem*, 53

⁷⁸ See chapter five

intended as ornamentation. Nor may we view the phrases as indicative of missionary efforts to convince “Jews.”⁷⁹ D. Juel pointed out that the Jews, for whom conversation with the Sacred Scriptures was the primary mode of theological reflection, identified the coming of the Messiah.⁸⁰ Exegesis was fundamental to Christian reflection. It was in the language of the Scriptures that Jesus’ followers spoke about the “gospel.” The study of early Christian exegesis takes us to the heart of the interpretive enterprise, as C. H. Dodd noted in his *According to the Scriptures*:

*The attempt to discover just how the Old Testament was employed to elucidate the kerygma in the earliest period accessible to us and in circles which exerted permanent influence on Christian thought, is one which we are bound to make in seeking the substructure of New Testament theology.*⁸¹

Ruth 1:1’s “A man went” is interpreted as Christ, born in Bethlehem in Judah, who made the pilgrimage of this world with his wife, the Church and with his two sons namely the two orders of prophets and apostles.⁸² The characters represented are identified with the outstanding groups in the Bible. This man is Elimelech. The book of Ruth 1:2 echoed this typology. 1:2’s Elimelech means “my God is king.” This is typified as Christ. The Old Testament had identified a saving figure belonging to the royal kingship of God. The Scripture echoed this expectation. *Listen to the voice of my prayer, my king and my God.*⁸³

Ruth 2:14 indicated the incarnation of Christ and identified the pre-figuration of Christ a long time ago. It stated that:

And Boaz said to her, “When it is evening, come here and eat the bread and dip your morsel in the vinegar.” And so she sat beside the reapers and he collected barley-flour for her, and she ate and was satisfied and took the rest away.

The phrase “dip your morsel” is interpreted as the mystery of the incarnation of Christ. The Law having been practiced for a long time and followed by the first people, has completely lost its native flavor being corrupted by the reasonings and the traditions of the Pharisees. The Church dips her morsel. In doing this,

⁷⁹ The view is espoused by Lindars in his classic study, *New Testament Apologetic*.

⁸⁰ D. Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 8

⁸¹ Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 27

⁸² Lesley Smith, 11

⁸³ Ps 5:2

Ruth shows that the incarnation was taught in the Old Testament already. Therefore, she believes more firmly because she grasps what was prefigured long ago.⁸⁴

Again, the Christian exegesis explained Ruth 4:18 as the climax of God's promise of a royal Messiah from the seed of King David. It said that:

These are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron.

It started with "These are the generations", which indicated the long period of fulfillment of God's promise. The genealogy showed that there are ten generations of the sons of Judah up to David. It was made known that the intention of the whole of the divine Law is directed towards Christ, who was born from the seed of David. Therefore, it proclaims His coming and the fulfillment of the Law is manifested in Him. The theology of Paul also echoed this view. He said that "*For Christ is the end of the Law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*"⁸⁵

Besides the New Testament's interpretation, the Old Testament also prefigured and presumed the coming of the Messiah. Before the Law is given, Jacob says regarding the incarnation of Christ that "*The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the leader from his legs, until he comes who has been sent.*"⁸⁶ Moreover, David joined the group of Messiah exegetes. To David, he is the tenth of the seed of Judah and it was said that "*From the fruit of your womb, shall I place upon your throne.*"⁸⁷ It was clear therefore that the oracle of all prophets and patriarchs refers to the over-lordship of Jesus Christ.⁸⁸

The work of Christ⁸⁹ has been mentioned in the patristic exegesis. Christ came for the salvation of the people. Ruth 1:1 mentioned the work of Christ and indicated the "*two sons*", who might be freed⁹⁰ by the blood of Christ, from kingly and priestly honor to the order of prophets and apostles. Moreover, Ruth 1:6 illustrated well the salvation of Christ:

⁸⁴ Lesley Smith, 18

⁸⁵ Rm 10:4

⁸⁶ Gn 49:10

⁸⁷ Ps 131:11

⁸⁸ Lesley Smith, 29

⁸⁹ See Chapter Five

⁹⁰ The Latin has a possible double meaning here, since *liberi* suggests both "free" and "children", referring back to the two sons.

And she arose in order to start for her native land from the Moabite country, with both her daughters-in-law, for she had heard that the Lord had looked after his own people and had given them food.

From the above quotation, the patristic exegetes explained that the Church pays her debts conscientiously, so that the people whom the apostles and prophets taught might be led in their time to the unity of faith and the society of the Christian religion. The Scripture teaches that the just man will not be abandoned. The Psalm illustrated that people will be accepted and stated that *“neither shall his seed seek bread”*⁹¹ which comes down from heaven.⁹² Ruth 2:23 mentioned the grace of salvation given by the surrender of Christ:

And so she joined herself to Boaz’s girls, and reaped with them until the barley and wheat were stored in the granaries.

“Wheat” means the grace of the New Testament which was gathered to be food for reasonable people, in which the body and blood of Christ is offered. The New Testament writer, John believed that the influence of Christ’s surrender was tremendously great. Once surrender came, salvation resulted. John stated that *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it alone remains.”*⁹³

Ruth 3:4 also echoed the salvation of Christ by stating:

But when he leaves to go to sleep, take note of the place where he sleeps, and go and turn back that part of the blanket covering his feet, and slip yourself underneath, and lie there.

The words “turn back” identified the promise of God to those believe in Christ. It is a common doctrine that Christ died for us. The salvation came with a devout mind and scatter the cloaking letter of the Old Testament in which the sacrament of the incarnation of Christ is covered turning it back. Furthermore, when you have known the salvation promised you, you should humbly take refuge in His help so that you might remain there for all time.⁹⁴

Messianic exegesis expresses the theological hope that existed in the

⁹¹ Ps 36:25

⁹² Lesley Smith, 12

⁹³ Jn 12:24-25

⁹⁴ Lesley Smith, 22

community of the early Christian Church. This formed an important cultural and religious background, which shaped the patristic exegesis on the book of Ruth.

7.4.3 Ruth's type relates to the Christian church

(a) Typology of Ruth

Beside the Holy Scripture, the Church enjoyed authority and legitimacy among the community of believers. Being an example of believers, Ruth is prefigured as representative of the Christian Church. Ruth 1:16 states that:

She answered, "Do not oppose me to make me leave you and go away. I shall go wherever you go; I shall stay wherever you stay. Your people are my people, and your God is my God."⁹⁵

The Ordinary Gloss interpreted 1:16 as indication of the Church, having been called from the Gentiles. The interpreters held a close relation of the formation of the Christian Church to the faith of Israelite patriarchs, who cited Abraham as their representative. The book of Deuteronomy mentioned that Israel abandoned her native land, which is idolatry and gave up carnal longings.⁹⁶ The Church followed suit and declared her God to be that God in whom the saints believed and whom the believers would follow wherever the flesh of Christ ascended. Moreover, for whose name the church would suffer in this world until death, and unite with the people of the saints and patriarchs and prophets. Paul committed this doxology and Rom. 15:10 described that *'Rejoice, you nations, with his people'*, in which the believers celebrated the joyful union with Jesus Christ.

In verse sixteen of chapter one in Ruth's answer to Naomi, we may witness the use of a patristic exegetical method, the use of typology. Ruth prefigures the Christian church. Isidore of Seville advocated that Ruth is a type of the church.⁹⁷ Moreover, he agreed with the Ordinary Gloss. First Ruth is a type because she is a stranger from the Gentile people who renounced her native land and all things belonging to it. She made her way to the land of Israel. And

⁹⁵ **Idem, 13**

⁹⁶ Dt 32:43

⁹⁷ By "type" or typology, Isidore and other patristic and medieval exegetes mean a signification --- something symbolized or (pre-) figured by something else. Christian exegesis often sees an Old Testament person, object, or even as prefiguring some person or object in the New Testament or in the Church. The Old is seen as a "type" of the New. See the discussion in Chapter Six.

when her mother-in-law forbade her from coming with her she persisted, saying, *“Wherever you go, I shall go; your people shall be my people; and your God shall be my God. Whichever land receives you as you die, there I too shall die”*. (Ruth 1:16) The patristic exegesis indicated that this voice without doubt shows that she is a type of the church. This company, by virtue of which Ruth might be joined to, the longed-for-saints from the lineage of Abraham, Moses revealed to us in the canticle, saying, *“Rejoice, you nations, with his people, (that is, people of the Gentiles), pour forth what you believe; exult with those who were first chosen for eternal joy.”*⁹⁸

Ambrose also agreed with Isidore of Seville and interpreted Ruth 1:16 using typological interpretation. Ambrose recognized Ruth as a part of the Church. Ruth entered the church and was made an Israelite. She deserved to be counted among God's greatest servants. She was chosen on account of the kinship of her soul, not of her body. Ruth set a good example for the believers. We should emulate her because she deserved this prerogative because of her behavior. When following her example we may be counted among the favored elect in the church of the Lord. Continuing in our Father's house, we might through her example call upon him who, like Paul or any other bishop, calls us to worship God, your people are our people and your God my God.⁹⁹

Ruth 4:13-22 stated the birth of Obed. The union of Boaz, the son of Abraham, with Ruth, a foreigner, prefigures the marriage of the Son of God to the Gentile-born church. Moreover, 4:13-17 recorded that the Lord provides a next of kin. Ephrem the Syrian advocated that Ruth's love is rewarded. The following Christian hymn praised the works of God:

Let Tamar rejoice that her Lord has come, for her name announced the son of her Lord, and her appellation called you to come to her.

By you honorable women made themselves contemptible, (you) the One who makes all chaste. She stole you at the crossroads, (you) who prepared the road to the house of the kingdom. Since she stole life, the sword was insufficient to kill her.

⁹⁸ John R. Franke ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture: Old Testament IV Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 2005), 184

⁹⁹ Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 32; H. de Lubac, J. Danielou et al., eds. *Sources Chretiennes* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1941), 45:137

*Ruth lay down with a man on the threshing floor for your sake. Her love was bold for your sake. She teaches boldness to all penitents. Her ears held in contempt all (other) voices for the sake of your voice.*¹⁰⁰

(b) Upholding of the position of Ruth

The typology of Ruth was under the influence of its cultural and social background. Ruth should be upheld as an important figure serving as model and example for all believers. Ruth as a foreign woman might have caused some doubt among the believers about her position in the preaching of Christian doctrine. Therefore, the position of women in society formed an integral force in shaping the interpretation of the book of Ruth. John Behr was interested in the position of women in social terms. He pointed out that the preponderance of women, especially among the upper classes, had significant implications not only for their role with respect to family life, but also within the Christianity community becoming the dominant religion. It has already been noted how Pliny examined the case of two deaconesses.¹⁰¹ However, the views on the position of women were controversial throughout the age of the patristic church.

Traditionally there existed an inferior image of women. Women are castigated as inferior and supplementary image. The woman's role in a family and society context was regarded as submissive and supplementary. Helen Rhee first pointed out the role of the husband. The husband's virtue lies in his exercise of authority over his wife as a *"guide, philosopher, and teacher in all that is most lovely and divine."*¹⁰² Plutarch, however, diminished the role of the wife. The wife, in turn, is to be submissive to her husband and *"have to feeling of her own, but she should join with her husband in seriousness and sportiveness and in soberness and laughter"*¹⁰³ and share her husband's gods as well as his friends. Similarly, Pliny, while stressing the moral qualities and public decorum of both husband and wife, expresses the ideal virtue of wife as devotion to her husband's interests and deference and obedience to him.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the ideal of

¹⁰⁰ Lesley Smith, 42.

¹⁰¹ John Behr, "Social and historical setting" in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Frances Young, Lewis Ayres & Andrew Louth ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 63

¹⁰² Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 113.

¹⁰³ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom and A Consolation to His Wife*, ed. S. B. Pomeroy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14

¹⁰⁴ *Ep.* 4:19; 7:19

harmonious partnership also preserves the basic social hierarchy and conforms to the traditional expectations of gender roles.

However, Christianity tended to upgrade the position of women. Most of the early Christian authors regarded by the mainstream churches as fathers, agree that women are created in God's image. This belief accords with Gen 1:27, "*Male and female he created them,*" In most patristic theology the *imago Dei* was regarded as constitutive of human identity and is essential to the process whereby humans attain salvation. These two opposed opinions formed a strong force affecting the patristic interpretation on the book of Ruth.

On the other hand, the Christian Church imposed, in turn, a positive interpretation on the role and position of women. The Antiochene fathers shared the idea that men and women are alike in soul though different in body, and that accordingly they have the same moral and spiritual capacities and tasks and the same ultimate vocation to holiness and salvation. This is a commonplace idea among the Greek fathers. It is found in Clement of Alexandria and in the Cappadocians. Nonna Verna Harrison confirmed that Theodore draws an ontological conclusion that parallels his practical affirmation of woman's moral and spiritual equality with man.¹⁰⁵ He infers from the fact that Adam could not find a helper like himself among the animals that woman as a human being is like man equal in honor. Theodore says that God took a little bit of material from the man and built it up into a woman so that she would be of the same essence as the man.

Theodoret's welcome suggestion that women can be good advisors could serve as an appropriate response to Theodore's condemnation of Adam for listening to Eve when he should have rather commanded her. Nonna Harrison commented that since women have the same means of divine grace to help them fulfill their duties, namely, church attendance, baptism, Eucharist and the ascetic struggle inherent in the life of all Christians.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, Theodoret strongly affirms the equality of men and women in virtue and in the service of God. He recounts how Peter the Galatian exhorts his

¹⁰⁵ Nonna Verna Harrison, "Women, Human Identity, and the Image of God: Antiochene Interpretations" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* Summer 2001 Vol. 9 Num. 2 (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2002), 214

¹⁰⁶ Nonna Verna Harrison, "Women, Human Identity, and the Image of God: Antiochene Interpretations" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* Summer 2001 Vol. 9 Num. 2 (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2002), 234

mother to stop wearing cosmetics, jewelry and other adornments. According to Theodoret, virtue and holiness overcome the inherited shame that burdens women. He does not explain the source of shame whether it is due to Eve's role in the fall or to age-old cultural prejudice. In any case, women ascetics demonstrate their freedom from this disgrace by their actions and show that women are not bound by their nature but can choose between sin and virtue.¹⁰⁷

Frankly speaking, Bradley Nassif commented on the validity and effectiveness of the Antiochene exegetes. He confirmed that they sought to understand biblical events within the stream of human history and avoided viewing them as mere icons making present in symbolic form a spiritual realm that transcends history.¹⁰⁸ Hence Diodore understood the original creation of humanity and by implication Paradise before the fall and God's original intention for his human creation, in terms of the social conditions of his own culture in his own time. In rejecting Alexandrian methods, Diodore and Theodore abandoned interpretive tools that could have enabled them to view the identity and destiny of women in a broader perspective. This was the limitation of literal interpretation. On the other hand, David Dawson affirmed that allegory enabled the Alexandrians to create an interpretive distance between different levels of meaning that opened a space within which they could conceptualize human identity in terms of alternative social structures they perceived as reflecting the ethics of the kingdom of god, such as those of ascetic communities.¹⁰⁹ Allegory could thus serve as a means of cultural critique and cultural transformation. Moreover, it could provide more dimensions of meaning to the text.

7.4.4 Ruth's and Boaz's morality as a good illustration of Christianity being a moral religion

(a) The importance of morality and modeling

Patristic fathers upheld their moral figuration of biblical characters in a positive way. Ruth is described by Jerome, following Origen and John Chrysostom, as one of the four *pec-catrices* or sinful women in the Matthean genealogy of

¹⁰⁷ Irene Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, tr. Anthony P. Gythiel, Cistercian Studies 116 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 273

¹⁰⁸ Bradley Nassif, "Spiritual Exegesis" in the School of Antioch," in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 343-77

¹⁰⁹ See David Dawson, *Allegory Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992)

Christ¹¹⁰ This sobriquet may disguise the possibility that Jerome would have described the male members of the list as *peccatores* or sinful men, themselves. Be that as it may, the inclusion of Rahab¹¹¹ and Bathsheba¹¹² along with Tamar¹¹³ and Ruth has laid an emphasis on the supposed sexual sinfulness of the four.

In fact, this is unjust and misleading. Rahab, a harlot, most often comes under discussion by exegetes because she lied in order to save the Israelites. This sin of untruth was seen as greater than her harlotry, even as she is pronounced just by St. Paul¹¹⁴. Tamar, like Ruth, is only following the dictates of the Law for widows. She disguises herself as a prostitute in order to trick her father-in-law into fathering a new son. The legality, indeed righteousness, of her action is recognized in the Genesis text. Ruth is always seen as blameless, since she is merely following the advice of her Jewish mother-in-law. This leaves only Bathsheba as an adulteress, but in comparison to the sins of David, hers seem relatively minor. Nevertheless, this shared title given to these women was used to single them out to indicate that they carry with them a frisson of sexual impropriety.¹¹⁵

(b) Theme of virtue as indication of the morality of Ruth and Boaz

As quoted before, the Ordinary Gloss added to the words of Ruth 1:16 “*Your people are my people*” the phrase “*through merits, aided by grace alone, by free vocation*”.¹¹⁶ It showed that doing right was a standard of being a part of God’s community. Again morality was given the greater emphasis and importance in the early Christian interpretation, just like in the early Jewish exegesis.¹¹⁷ Morality and virtue was commanded by God. Moreover, Ruth 2:12 illustrated the relationship between morality and reward. God did reward those who have virtue. It stated that:

The Lord repays you for your deeds, and you shall receive full reward from the Lord God of Israel, to whom you came, and under whose wings you flew.

¹¹⁰ Mt 1

¹¹¹ Jos 2

¹¹² 2 Sm 11

¹¹³ Gn 38

¹¹⁴ Heb 11

¹¹⁵ Lesley Smith, Translated with an Introduction and Notes, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), x

¹¹⁶ Idem

¹¹⁷ See Chapter Four

The Ordinary Gloss indicated that reward means eternal glory and linked it to the reference of John 16:24, which tells that *Up to now you have made no request in my name: do so, and it will be answered, so that your hearts may be full of joy.* The reward is paid to those who have done good deeds, that means being faithful. This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He sent.¹¹⁸ The Ordinary Gloss said again that the two Testaments say that God protects those who flee to him. The Psalmist also indicated the protection of the righteousness by God's guidance. He stated that *"I will hope in the shadow of your wings, until I might cross over."*¹¹⁹

Again Theodoret of Cyr pointed out the relationship between reward and virtue. He indicated that divine reward was given for Ruth's virtues in verse twelve. The blessing followed as Boaz said it would. Ruth received the full reward from God, so that she was the progenitor of the blessing of the nations.¹²⁰ Theodoret even commented that God generously rewarded Ruth's virtues as she was deemed worthy to be an ancestor of Jesus.¹²¹

Naomi's attitude to Ruth also indicated the importance of morality in patristic exegesis. Ruth 2:20 illustrated this principle and stated that:

And Naomi replied, "May he be blessed by the Lord, since he has performed a service for the dead"¹²² with the same kindness which he has shown to the living."

Ruth 2:20 identified that Naomi utters a blessing to Ruth as a reward of her kindness and piety to Naomi. Theodoret of Cyr. described the thankful heart of Naomi. With a heart thankful for the remembrance of kindness, Naomi rewarded the absent benefactor of her daughter-in-law with a blessing. The patristic fathers commented that *"May he who has acknowledged you be blessed, for he has filled an empty soul by doing what he did. He took notice not of poverty but only of the Lawgiver, who ordered that widows be shown care."*¹²³

¹¹⁸ John 6:29; Lesley Smith, *Medieval Exegesis in Translation: commentaries on the Book of Ruth*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 18

¹¹⁹ Ps 56:2

¹²⁰ John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 186

¹²¹ Idem

¹²² It is followed by "to the Gentiles [people] who were buried in sin.

¹²³ John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 186

Theodoret of Cyr gave credit to the praiseworthy loyalty of Ruth. The constancy of Ruth, who because of the piety of her spirit and the memory of her husband preferring him to her parents, showing loyalty to a woman worn out in old age and laboring in poverty, is praiseworthy.

It is the merit of Ruth's faith. Boaz married Ruth on account of the merit of her faith because she scorned her own people and land and nation and chose Israel, and because she did not despise her mother-in-law, a widow like herself, and an exile; but she was led by desire to Naomi's people rather than to Ruth's own. She rejected the god of her native land and chose the living God, saying to her mother-in-law, "Do not oppose me."¹²⁴

Moreover, Theodoret of Cyr. indicated that there was a generous minister of kindness. It is the Lord, who recompenses you. The story of Boaz also teaches us about virtue. Theodoret summarized Ruth 2:8-23 as indicating the fact that Boaz treats Ruth kindly. In this text, he commented that Boaz teaches us the virtues of generosity and kindness in his actions toward Ruth.¹²⁵ For he not only liberally shared his grain with Ruth, but also consoled her with words. Not only did he share food with her but also was himself the minister of kindness; so that whoever does not order another person to be his minister, but prepares the flour and bread himself, will have given very liberally indeed.¹²⁶

Referring to the morality and virtue of Boaz, their humility and chastity indeed were praised, because Boaz did not touch her as a lascivious man, who would touch a girl or abhor her as a chaste man would a lascivious girl. As soon as he had heard her speak of the law, he ascribed her actions to religion. Nor did he despise her as a rich man would a pauper, nor was he in awe of her, as a mature man might be of a young woman. However, more experienced in faith than in body, he proceeded in the morning to the gate, calling the neighborhood together and prevailing not by the law of kinship to her but, rather, by the favor of being the chosen one of God.¹²⁷

Ruth 3:11-13 said that:

11 Do not be afraid, therefore; but what you have asked me, I shall do for you. For everyone

¹²⁴ Idem

¹²⁵ Idem

¹²⁶ Idem

¹²⁷ Idem

who lives within the gates of my city knows you to be a woman of virtue.

12 I do not deny that you are my relative; but there is someone who is a closer relative to you than me.

13 Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wishes to preserve the law of propinquity¹²⁸, all well and good; but if he does not wish it, I will receive you into my household without any hesitation, as the Lord lives. Sleep until morning.”

Ruth 3:11-13 emphasized the outstanding virtues of Ruth and Boaz. Unless God's inspiration had been in Ruth, she would not have said what she said or done what she did. She desired to have sons out of the seed of Israel and become one of the people of God. Her simplicity is also praised, because she came in under Boaz's coverlet voluntarily. She feared neither that he would perhaps spurn her, as a just man might spurn a lascivious woman, nor that he might deceive her and, worse, despise a deceived woman, as many men might have done. However, obeying her mother-in-law's plans, she confidently believed that God would bless her action, knowing her conscience, because lust did not push her to it but rather religion was her encouragement.

(c) Teaching Morality and Modeling as the task of patristic commentators

Ruth 4:1-6 stated that:

4:1 Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. And when he saw his relative (whom he had spoken of earlier), go past, he said to him, calling him by his name,¹²⁹ “Pause a little while, and sit here.” And he paused and sat down.

4:2 Then Boaz, bringing over ten men from amongst the town elders, said to them, “sit down here.” And when they were settled,

4:3 he said to his neighbor, “Naomi, who returned from the country of the Moabites, is selling part of the field belonging to our brother Elimelech.

4:4 I wished you to hear this and to tell you this in front of the whole seated assembly and elders

¹²⁸ The law of propinquity or of the closer relation refers to the institution of “levirate marriage” described in Deut. 25:5-10. If a woman were widowed, without a male heir, it was her husband's closest relative's duty to marry her and conceive a son, who would both carry on his father's name and provide for his mother. See further T. Thompson and D. Thompson, “Some Legal Problems in the Book of Ruth,” *Vetus Testamentum* 18 (1968), 79-99

¹²⁹ Although Boaz called him by his name, we are not told what this was. The Hebrew tradition says that, because the man was not willing to do his duty by Ruth, he was not worthy to be named.

of my people. If you wish to have the field, buy it and have it, by the law of propinquity. However, if you do not want it, tell me, so I know what I should do. For there is no nearer relative than you, who have priority, and I who am second.” Whereupon he replied, “I will buy the field.”

4:5 To which Boaz said, “When you buy the field from the woman’s hand, you must also take on Ruth, the Moabite woman whose husband is dead, to keep alive the name¹³⁰ of your relative in your heredity.

4:6 To which he replied, “I cede my right by the law of propinquity; for I should not harm the future of my family. You may have my privilege, which I declare that I give up freely.”

Theodoret of Cyr praised the chastity of Boaz. The man was so virtuous that he did not rush into a marriage outside the law, but he spoke with his neighbors about the marriage. However, his words are also worthy of admiration. For his first words were not about the marriage but about the possession of fields, etc.

Moreover, when, on account of the prospective marriage he (the relative) in fact refused the contract for the land and indeed took off his sandal and gave it to Boaz, in accordance with the law, Boaz then took Ruth to be his wife. Furthermore, because he was not serving lust, he took her in the right spirit that one should take a wife, and his words also showed themselves worthy of praise, You are witnesses today, etc. “I do not”, he said, “transgress the law in marrying a Moabite woman; rather, I diligently fulfill divine law, so that the memory of the dead is not extinguished.”¹³¹

(d) The cultural and social background

Christian morality cannot establish itself in a vacuum. It was rather influenced by its surrounding culture and philosophy. The patristic interpretation of morality and virtue illustrated well the impact of pagan influence and the challenges of its age. One of the most distinctive aspects of the “democratized asceticism” of Christianity was its claim of sexual purity. Helen Rhee commented that the interpreters all boast of Christian purity in contrast to pagan immortality and fornication. However, the Christian renunciation described in them also attests to a sharp dichotomy between the conservative ascetic ideals and the radical

¹³⁰ “Name” is literally “seed”.

¹³¹ John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 188

ascetic ideals that had developed since the inception of Christianity.¹³² They became the subject of bitter disputes as to their concepts of sexual purity, their positions regarding marriage and family and their social repercussions and implications even in their attempt to portray the Christian self-definition under the Greco-Roman culture. In the imperial period, these issues of sexuality and marriage became matters of public concern and were intertwined with the traditional and social conventions and mores. Helen Rhee pointed out that for the patristic interpreters, the issue of sexuality did relate to the women martyrs, whose familial and social renunciations in terms of the traditional family identity and loyalty represented resistance to the established social order.¹³³

With the change of the Roman political system from a republic to a monarchy in the first century BCE, there came a coalition of Stoic ethics with the Roman government in a conservation moral ethos for marriage, family and social order.

Indeed, Stoicism of the imperial period, endorsing the Augustan legal, social, and political acts, provided the ideological backbone of marriage and family with a corresponding conservative ideal and ethos of sexual moderation and restraint.¹³⁴ Concerning sexual purity, Musonius saw procreation in marriage as the only legitimate reason for sexual intercourse and regards sex for pleasure as unjust and unlawful.¹³⁵ In this regard, he condemns all extramarital sex, such as adultery, homosexuality and even relations with slaves, not only for women but also for men, as showing lack of self-restraint.¹³⁶

7.4.5 Marriage

(a) Marriage as a moral example

The patristic fathers believed that Boaz's marriage was an act of piety.¹³⁷ Boaz took Ruth to be his wife because of the merits of her faith, so that a royal nation might be born out of such a holy marriage. For this Boaz was given credit. As an old man, he did not take a wife for himself. For God, this marriage was not on

¹³² Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 108

¹³³ Idem, 109

¹³⁴ Idem, 111

¹³⁵ Lutz, C. E. "Musonius Rufus: The Roman Socrates", *Yale Classical Studies* 10, 1947, 86

¹³⁶ Idem, 87

¹³⁷ John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 189

account of his justice of the law and to revive the seed of his kinsman. It was also not serving love so much as it did religion. The patristic exegetes concluded that he was old in age but youthful in faith.¹³⁸ The marriage was made holy and full of gospel sense by the use of typology. Theodoret commented that Ruth's marriage was free from voluptuous impulses.¹³⁹

Ruth 3:10 stated that:

And he said, "Daughter, you are blessed by the Lord, and you have surpassed your former pity with your latest pity, because you have not run after young men, poor or rich.

Theodoret of Cyr. interpreted Ruth 3:10 as indicating a holy marriage. Boaz praised Ruth's deeds.¹⁴⁰ "You show by your deed", Boaz said, "that this was not done out of voluptuousness. In fact, you might have gone to those who are young and blooming, with only the intent of enjoying voluptuousness, but you went to the man who stands in place of a father to you."¹⁴¹

Ruth 4:7-12 stated that:

7 Now this, indeed, was the ancient custom in Israel amongst kinsmen, that whenever anyone ceded his right under the law to another, so that it was conceded definitely, the man undid his own sandal and gave it to his neighbor.¹⁴² In Israel, this was proof of the giving up of the right.

8 Boaz therefore said to his neighbor, "Take off your sandal." And he immediately undid his sandal.

9 And he said, before the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses today that I will take over all the things which belonged to Elimelech and Chilion and Machlon, handed down to Naomi;

10 and Ruth, the Moabite woman, the wife of Machlon, I will take in marriage, and I will revive the name of his family and brothers will not be lost amongst the people. I call you as witnesses of this act."

¹³⁸ John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 189

¹³⁹ Idem, 187

¹⁴⁰ It was given credit that there was no sex before the marriage.

¹⁴¹ Lesley Smith, 34

¹⁴² Jerome's translation is clear: the man undoes his own sandal. Other writers lost the reflexive pronoun, letting in much confusion about who was to do what to whom.

11 All the people who were at the gate and the elders answered, "We are witnesses; the Lord made this woman, who has come into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who built the house of Israel, so that she may be an example of virtue in Ephrathah, and she may have a name famous throughout Bethlehem.

12 And may your house be from the seed which the Lord will have given to you from this girl, as was the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore of Judah."

Isidore of Seville and Chrysostom both explained that in this text the marriage of Ruth and Boaz has a profound symbolic meaning; it prefigures salvation of all peoples in Christ and his church.¹⁴³

Ruth 4:1-6 described that Boaz speaks with the elders. Through this marriage, a patristic interpreter, Isidore of Seville, made use of typology to prefigure the bride, bridegroom and best man. Moreover, Theodoret used Ruth 4:7-12 as the prophetic saying that the elders' blessing of Ruth's marriage was prophetic as it looked towards the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.¹⁴⁴

First, the text deals with the identity of a kinsman. When Ruth entered the land of Israel with her mother-in-law, it was provided on account of the merits of her prayers that she was married to a man of the lineage of Abraham. That man is whom indeed she at first believed to be her closest kinsman. The nearest kinsman said that he could not marry her. When he had withdrawn, Boaz was married to her with the witness of ten elders. Boaz who previously confessed himself unable to marry that same woman was united with her and was blessed by those ten elders.

It was thought that this passage prefigures John the Baptist who himself was seen by the people of Israel to be Christ and was therefore asked who he really was. John the Baptist did not deny who he was but confessed it, saying that he was not the Christ. Those who were sent to him persisted in these inquiries about who he was. John the Baptist answered, "*I am the voice crying in the desert*. He confessed the good news about the Lord, saying, "He showed that he himself was the friend of the groom [the best man], since he added, "*truly the*

¹⁴³ John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 190

¹⁴⁴ John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 190

friend of the groom is he who stands and hears him and rejoices on account of the groom's voice. The local people thought he was Christ because they did not understand that Christ had come on the day of the visitation and that he who was earlier promised by the prophets' voices was the church's bridegroom.

In the text that kinsman indicated to her that he was not her real kinsman. Afterwards Ruth was united with Boaz he real kinsmen. In the same way Christ is the true bridegroom of the church, to whom all the sayings of the prophets showed. He was deemed worthy to claim the church, to present to God the Father an unnumbered amount of people throughout the whole orb of the world, because his kinsman took off the sandals.¹⁴⁵

Isidore of Seville also identified Christ as the true bridegroom. Traditionally, it was an old custom that if a groom wished to divorce his bride he took off his sandal and this was the sign of the divorce. Consequently, the kinsman was ordered to take off his sandals, lest he approach the church wearing sandals like a bridegroom because this office was reserved for Christ, who is the true bridegroom.

However, the blessing of the ten elders showed that all Gentile peoples were saved and blessed in the name of Christ. The *iota* signifies the number of ten in Greek. This first letter also signified the name of the Lord Jesus in full, showing that all peoples are saved through him and are blessed.

The patristic exegetes indicated the meaning of text from the beginning prefigured by antecedent figures, which were clearly fulfilled in this way through the advent of the Lord. John R. Franke reminded that the antecedent figures were being completed by the accord of all voiced in truth and by all figures of the Holy Scriptures, which God who promised them fulfilled through his son, Jesus Christ our Lord, king, and redeemer and savior, with whom is honor and glory from age to age.¹⁴⁶

Ambrose commented that it was as if Ruth, though she was foreign-born, had possessed a husband from the Jewish people. Although she was seen and loved by Boaz while still gleaning and maintaining herself and her mother-in-law

¹⁴⁵ Idem, 189

¹⁴⁶ John R. Franke ed. *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel Old Testament Volume 4, The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 191

with what she gleaned, she could not become the wife of Boaz before she had first loosed the shoe from him whose wife she ought to have become by law.

However, although the story is a simple one it also has a hidden meaning. Ambrose interpreted that we should find in the words an indication of shame and horror. We should regard these words as intending and conveying the thought of common bodily intercourse. Rather it was the foreshadowing of one who would arise from the Jewish people ---- whence Christ was, after the flesh ---- who should, abided with the seed of heavenly teaching, revive the seed of his dead kinsman, that is to say, the people, and to whom the precepts of the law, in their spiritual significance, assigned the sandal marriage, for the espousals of the church.¹⁴⁷

Chrysostom commented that those things which happened to Ruth should be seen figuratively. She was an outsider and had fallen into extreme penury. Boaz, seeing her, did not despise her on account of her poverty, nor was he horrified on account of her impiety. Christ received the church, which was both a stranger and laboring, and was in need of good things. Ruth is not joined with her consort before forsaking her parents and her nation and her native land: never was anyone so much ennobled by marriage. Thus the church was not made loveable to her spouse before she had forsaken her prior customs. The prophet says, *“Forget your people.”*¹⁴⁸

(b) Cultural and social background

Again, the interpretation of marriage was deeply influenced by the social and cultural atmosphere in the early Christian church. First, Jesus’ teaching formed a backbone of teachings on the marriage. Jesus affirms monogamy and the fundamental indissolubility of marriage. Jesus declared that *“the two shall become one flesh...Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate”*¹⁴⁹ He further explains this by condemning a remarriage after divorcee, whether it be a man or woman, calling it adultery.¹⁵⁰ The Matthean version prohibits remarriage indicating it as adultery, which is defined much more inclusively in that Gospel. This divine sanction of marriage and prohibition

¹⁴⁷ P. Schaff et al. ed. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. 2 series (14 vols. Each) (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature, 1894), 253

¹⁴⁸ Ps 45:10

¹⁴⁹ Mk 10:9

¹⁵⁰ Mark 10:11-12

of divorce and remarriage (or strict regulation of divorce) are certainly distinctive from Greco-Roman practices of divorce and remarriage, which were relatively easy and frequent and even required by the law, in the case of remarriage, though the ideal was still lifelong monogamy.

7.5 Conclusion

The patristic exegetes used all kinds of typology to interpret the text for their own purpose in a certain historical environment. The figures were made parallel with the tradition of Old Testament to the gospel of early Christianity. Ruth was for the church. Torah was replaced or made perfect by Christ. Through this parallel, upholding morality and consolidation of *keryma* preaching were the main tasks as the historical and cultural circumstances were diversified and complicated.

Once again patristic exegesis on the book of Ruth was under the influence of social, cultural, political and religious backgrounds. It proves that the pre-set religious system of the exegetes actually dictated how they interpreted their literature. Though the book of Ruth in Old Testament was not regarded as a fundamental book¹⁵¹, it undoubtedly reflected the intention of early Christian interpreters. They tended to consolidate the legitimacy and orthodoxy of Christianity as a new-born religion. Moreover, the social and cultural context imposed influence on the exegetical work. There is a vivid and controversial religious and theological debate at that age, from 1st century CE to 8th century CE. It is the duty for patristic interpreters to uphold and renew the Christian thought first to the believers and the second to the pagan world.

Christian exegetes connect the new with the old. It is the task of patristic fathers to build the new relationship of Christian church with the Old Testament's tradition. So, they built the link to uphold and consolidate the Davidic line of dynasty. God is still in control of the world through the setting up of kingship on the world through declaration of gospel. In their interpretation they wanted to emphasize Ruth's connection to Jesus, especially in the actual social and religious situations, which seem unstable and controversial in the early development of Christian church history. It seems to be true to say that Jesus' position was to be built up and strengthened at that stage.

¹⁵¹ Robert L. Hubbard, JR. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 23

Chapter Eight

The Combined Results of the Comparison

8.1 Introduction

We have gone through two exegetical trends: early Jewish and patristic interpretation. They fall in more or less the same historical, political, cultural and theological periods. They were compared in terms of their interpretation of the book of Ruth. It is appropriate to end the research of these trends with a check list of some results and principle patterns arising from the preceding discussion.

8.2 The same origin, but different views on authority

The two exegetical approaches analyzed are referring to two important religions in the world: Judaism and Christianity. In what regard do they differ from each other? Jacob Neusner provides the answer: with regard to their views on written authority.¹ Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner indicated that Judaism assigns the Torah revealed at Sinai to an oral tradition, ultimately written down by the rabbinic sages of the first six centuries of the Common Era. Christianity, in return, includes in its Bible not only the Old Testament but also the New Testament.²

Judaism and Christianity share the same view of authority. Theological thought in both, determining their exegetical approach, insists upon a single criterion of truth. For both rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity, a grammar of theological terms, derived from documents valued as authoritative by the faithful, suggests a theological system. Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner pointed out that the common documentary foundation for this system is a set of writings that both Judaism and Christianity accept as revealed by God to mankind, in an act of self-manifestation found in the Hebrew Scriptures of ancient Israel.³ The two religions concur on that fundamental point.

Jacob Neusner indicated the legitimacy of a comparative study of Judaism and

¹ Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), xxi

² Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 7

³ Idem, 21

Christianity. He pointed out that Christianity, in its orthodox form, and Judaism, as constructed by the rabbinic sages intersect in their use of the Hebrew Scriptures of ancient Israel. They represent comparable but also conflicting responses to the same Scriptures.⁴

This phenomenon made vivid and diversified hermeneutics possible. Knowledge of rabbinic exegesis is important for Christianity, because it provides a context for comparison and contrast. It provides perspective on both religious systems.

Relation of patristic exegesis to early Jewish tradition can be established. Antique Christianity first read apocalyptic and prophetic passages of the Old Testament forward towards the New Testament. It then also read back from the New Testament to the Old, finding the meaning of the ancient Scriptures in the person of Jesus Christ. Rabbinic Judaism first read back from the oral tradition to the written, finding validation for the one in the other. It then also read forward from what is called the written Torah to the oral Torah, grounding tradition in Scripture, continuing the story of Israel Scripture told about the holy people. Jacob Neusner commented that Rabbinic Judaism found the meaning of the ancient Scriptures to be realized in Israel's enduring life of sanctification aimed at salvation in the end of days. It insisted that holy Israel, God's people, defined as those who know God and accept his dominion, continue to embody and carry forward the narrative of the Torah.⁵

Because both tell the same story of humanity and God's self-revelation to humanity, both religions organize their thoughts in large-scale structures that exhibit traits of congruence.⁶ With so much in common, Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner confirmed the legitimacy of a comparison between antique Christianity and early Judaism. They remarked that the fact that each organized much of its theological system within structures that are comparable to each other, make early Judaism and original Christianity ideal candidates for the enterprise of comparison and contrast.⁷

⁴ Jacob Neusner, *Questions and Answers: Intellectual Foundations of Judaism* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), xxi

⁵ Idem, xxii

⁶ In brief, both begin their stories with creation and tell the same story of creation. Both speak of those who know God as Israel and affirm the revelation by God to Israel at Sinai. Both see the story of humanity as a tale with a beginning in Eden, and an end with the last judgment and victory over the grave and entry into eternal life.

⁷ Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 21

Right from its beginnings in the first six centuries CE up to the present day rabbinic Judaism defined the normative faith for nearly all practitioners of Judaism. During the development of Judaism there were many diverse heirs and continuators of rabbinic Judaism.⁸ All expressions of rabbinic Judaism give preference to the Pentateuch and find the meaning of Torah in a set of related texts.⁹ The path of rabbinic exegesis can be seen in the Mishnah, a philosophical law code; its amplifications and commentaries: the Tosefta, the Yerushalmi or Talmud of the Land of Israel, and the Talmud of Babylonia and various compilations of exegesis of the Pentateuch and the Five Scrolls, known collectively as Midrash.¹⁰ From these different texts it can be concluded that Judaism experienced a diversified interpretation and manifestation of religious phenomena.

The situation was the same with patristic exegesis. There was no single unified corpus of patristic literature. This means that every patristic father had his own point of view. However, two distinctive groups of exegetical schools were witnessed. They represent a literal (Antiochene) and an allegorical (Alexandrian) interpretation. Among these two trends, the allegorical one dominated and typology was given higher priority of importance.

8.3 The nature of Judaism and Christianity

Some may maintain that Judaism has no official theology. By that remark they apparently mean to claim that Judaism did not set forth any dogmatic or systematic theology. It does not possess any list of convictions that one has to ascribe to when one wishes to claim the status of a normative Israelite, that is, to be a practitioner of Judaism. Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner criticized this view point that rabbinic Judaism is “merely law, orthopraxy lacking orthodoxy, deed lacking all deliberation and conviction.”¹¹

But in fact rabbinic Judaism sets forth a rich corpus of theological formulations of religious truth as was indicated in the previous discussion. That corpus

⁸ See Chapter two

⁹ Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 22

¹⁰ See the section of “early Jewish commentary” of chapter two and the whole chapter three.

¹¹ Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 23

begins with monotheism.¹² It continues with the dogma that God revealed the Torah at Sinai, both written and oral. It culminates in the conviction that all Israel has a portion in the world to come with the exception of those who deny the Torah and the world to come. Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner concluded that these propositions surely comprise not only religious statements but a cogent theological structure and system.¹³

For Judaism, Mishnah stated that “all Israel, with few exception has a portion in the world to come,”¹⁴ which is to say, all Israelites will rise from the dead, stand in judgment, and pass on to eternal life in Eden. Therefore, rabbinic Judaism set forth an abundant corpus of theological convictions.

Taking in mind that rabbinic Judaism provided several forms of prayer for a liturgy that celebrates God as creator of the world, revealer of the Torah, and redeemer and savior of humanity at the end of days, we have no difficulty in outlining the theological dogmas of Judaism. Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner concluded that the proclamation of God’s unity in the liturgy as “Hear, O Israel” formed a fundamental theological statement. This was the theology of rabbinic Judaism.¹⁵ Given the range of diverse, even conflicting opinions in the rabbinic literature cited in the previous discussions, we may see the influence of historical and cultural variations on the Jewish commentators.¹⁶

Referring to early Christian exegesis, Christian faith understands itself to be based on the work of the Holy Spirit, God’s communication of the divine self in all its richness. Access to the Holy Spirit is possible because the Son of God, Jesus Christ, became human. The Incarnation is what provides the possibility of the divine Spirit’s becoming accessible to the human spirit.

Speaking from the perspective of Christian faith then, there is a single source of theology: the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son. Because God’s very nature is love itself, this procession is to all those who are created and blessed with the capacity to know the Spirit in this sense.¹⁷ The Old

¹² See Chapter Four of the section “Monotheism”

¹³ Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 23

¹⁴ m. Sanhedrin 10:1

¹⁵ Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 23

¹⁶ See chapter four

¹⁷ Bruce D. Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 28

Testament is classic for Christians, because it represents the ways in which God's Spirit might be known. At the same time, the New Testament is normative: it sets out how we actually appropriate the Spirit of God, which is also the Spirit of Christ. Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner again confirmed the importance of the Holy Spirit. They stated "that is why the Bible as a whole is accorded a place of absolute privilege in the Christian tradition: it is the literary source from which we know both how the Spirit of God has been known and how we can appropriate it."¹⁸

Therefore, the patristic exegetes were to uphold their agreed principles. After the Roman Empire itself embraced Christianity in the fourth century CE, the church was in a position formally to articulate its understanding of the faith by means of common standards. Orthodoxy emerged. During this period correct norms of worship, baptism, creeds, biblical texts, and doctrines were established. From Augustine in the West to Gregory of Nyssa in the East, Christianity for the first time in its history approached true ecumenicity.

8.4 The Combined Results of the comparison between early Jewish and Christian interpretation

The following issues were identified in the preceding investigation:

8.4.1 Torah and Gospel

Referring to Judaism, the Torah was the foundation of Judaism that determined Israelite behavior and its standards.¹⁹ Religious responsibilities lead to consequences. One who follows the rules of Torah will face punishment if violating them and will receive reward if he is obedient to the law. Therefore, Torah is determining Israel's behavior. According to Jewish interpretation Ruth's conversion was heavily based on the guidelines of the Torah.²⁰

Torah's importance is closely related to the eschatological and messianic emphasis of the early Judaism. It provided the demand for heightened obedience to Torah and even to its perfection. Andrew Chester added that the continuity and intensification of Torah in relation to the final or messianic age is

¹⁸ Idem, 29

¹⁹ See the discussion of "Torah" under chapter four.

²⁰ See chapter four

a theme that is evident in various strands of Judaism and Jewish tradition.²¹

As for early Christianity, the gospel is the main foundation of Christian doctrine. *Kerygma* is the preaching of the Christian gospel.²² Since Christianity has been a new religion, it faced many challenges and influences from its surrounding religious thoughts and philosophical trends. Therefore, it was the main task of exegetes to defend Christianity against the challenge of heretics.²³ Therefore, this background of theological challenge imposed much influence on the patristic exegesis of Ruth in the early Christian Church.

The relationship of Torah to the gospel is the meeting of the old with the new. The debate between these two was visible already in the origins of Christianity, being a form of Judaism, when those who would come to call themselves Christians redefined their relationship with Jewish law and the traditions of ancient Israel, and advocated new truths based on Jesus' teachings.²⁴ Mark Humphries reminded that just as Christianity splintered away from other forms of Judaism, there was a risk that Christianity itself might fragment into various forms, as different groups or individuals came to regard different versions or aspects of Jesus' message as more significant.²⁵

With the Christian interpretation of the book of Ruth, we may witness how the gospel was influenced by the traditional view of the Torah. It can be seen in the motif of "gospel included gentiles."²⁶ This motif was of tremendous importance for patristic exegesis. Those who were rejected before were now accepted. Those who were formerly under divine punishment now received grace. In patristic exegesis, the Christian gospel "fulfilled" the Torah. It can be seen in Jesus' quotation in the book of Gospel that refers to the fulfillment of the Torah in Jesus' teachings.²⁷ Jesus came not to reject the Torah but make it complete. Traditionally, the exegetical relationship between Torah and gospel was close. This directness was due to the different perspectives of the exegetes' historical and cultural background. In some extreme cases the early Christian church represented a deliberate rejection of the Torah, totally replaced by Jesus'

²¹ Andrew Chester, *Messianism, Torah and early Christian tradition*, 335-6

²² See chapter seven.

²³ See Chapter Five under the section of "the influence of Gnosticism".

²⁴ See chapter seven

²⁵ Mark Humphries, *Early Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 159

²⁶ See chapter seven.

²⁷ Mt. 5:17-18

gospel. Moreover, the main controversy between early Christians and Jewish sages was on the topic of Christ Jesus as savior. The latter rejected Jesus so that the position of the gospel did not play any significant role in their exegesis and they remained committed to the Torah only.

8.4.2 The coming of the “Messiah” in a chaotic social environment

Both Jewish and Christian exegetical schools advocated the coming of the “Messiah” as savior or king to give eternal hope to Israel²⁸ and to Christians.²⁹ Surely, the concept of the Messiah was differently interpreted among different commentators. However, all interpretations were deeply rooted in a specific historical and social background. The early Jewish interpretation of the Messiah was based on the tradition of Hebrew cultures. “There is no king” in the book of Judges caused some social chaotic problems such as famine interpreted as divine punishment.³⁰ The unlawfulness indicated the urge for kingship according to the Davidic line of Dynasty. Andrew Chester believed that Jewish evidence as a whole and the rabbinic in particular, points to the expectation of the abrogation of the Mosaic Torah and the bringing in of the messianic Torah in the messianic or final age.³¹

Let us look at the issue of the “messianic Torah”, which provided the background for the use and developments of this theme in the New Testament during the first century CE. Davies is suitably modest about the results of his work, and admits that the evidence is sparse and scanty, even though he still wants to hold on to it to produce some form of this “doctrine” of a messianic Torah.³²

The most famous passage for the discussion of the Messiah is Jeremiah 31:31-4. It is important here that the Torah be internalized and perfectly obeyed within the context of the new covenant God will make. However, Andrew Chester pointed out that this text offers considerable scope for a developed understanding and interpretation concerning the covenant, the law and the final

²⁸ See chapter four

²⁹ See Chapter seven

³⁰ See chapter four.

³¹ Andrew Chester, “Messianism, Torah and early Christian tradition” in *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 319

³² W. D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (Philadelphia, 1952), 85-94

age.³³ The new covenant will contain the law and knowledge of God along with God's forgiveness of their sin. The same basic theme, the contrast between sin and keeping the law or covenant, is found in Isaiah 55:3-8 and 56:1-8. There a strong eschatological emphasis is found in connection with the Torah. The fulfillment of the law of the kingdom guaranteed the right to belong to the messianic kingdom, while failure to fulfill it brings eschatological judgment on the offender. Andrew Chester mentioned that the idea is clearly that of a Torah of the messianic age or kingdom that has eschatological effect.³⁴

The patristic exegesis of the famine referred to in Ruth, resembles early Jewish interpretation. Human sinfulness urges for the coming of Jesus.³⁵ Christianity in origin is a Jewish messianic movement.³⁶ Jewish messianic expectations and movements provide one particular context within which the early Christian movement can be understood.³⁷ Andrew Chester pointed out that one issue of potential significance for early Christianity as a messianic movement is that of a concern with and traditions about Torah and related issues.³⁸ An obvious point of view was the idea that Torah has its true fulfillment in Christ. The fulfillment theme represents one main line of interpretation. Christ is specifically identified in the exegesis of the book of Ruth with the law using typology to link Boaz to Christ.³⁹ Christ brings a new law. Christ represented the continuity and fulfillment of Torah since it was he who brought the true, perfect and final Torah.

This shows the commonality of early Jewish interpretation and patristic exegesis on the matter of the coming of the "Messiah". The political and cultural backgrounds induced by two exegetical trends overlap here and run parallel as they were both in a chaotic situation, which urged the exegetes to interpret the text for an enduring kingship that was expected to restore order and law. On the

³³ Andrew Chester, *Messianism, Torah and early Christian tradition*, 319

³⁴ Idem, 323

³⁵ See chapter seven

³⁶ It is important to note the concept of "messiah" in Second Temple Judaism. See chapter two. Cf. J. Neusner, W. S. Green and E. S. Frerichs, *Judaism and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, 1987), 1-13; Andrew Chester, "Jewish Messianic Expectations and Mediatorial Figures and Pauline Christology", in *Paulus und das antile Judentum* Martin Hengel and U. Heckel eds. (Tubingen, 1991), 17-89.

³⁷ For discussion of various importance themes in Jewish and Christian messianism, such as temple, land, kingdom, new heaven and new earth, cf. R. L. Wilcken, "Early Christian Chiliasm, Jewish Messianism, and the Idea of the Holy Land" *HTR* 1986, 79:98-107; W. Horbury, "Messianism among Jews and Christians in the Second Century" *Augustinianum* 1988, 28:71-88

³⁸ Andrew Chester, "Messianism, Torah and early Christian tradition" in *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 318

³⁹ See Chapter seven

other hand these two exegetical trends acted differently in their identification of the Messiah. Jewish sages pointed out that the Torah was the manifestation of the Messiah through the upholding of the Davidic kingship. This showed some kind of continuity and even reinforcement of the traditional value system. In turn, Christian interpreters replaced the Torah by Christ. This was a new innovation and even broke the continuity of tradition. This accounted for the new-born religion, Christianity. This contrasting difference was again due to different pre-set value of the exegetes' background.

8.4.3 Ruth's and Boaz's virtue and morality in the pagan world

Both early Jewish and Christian exegetes put much emphasis on the morality of the characters they interpreted for different purposes in their different cultural and theological contexts. Referring to early Jewish interpretation, Ruth's position in the royal dynasty was upheld by her *hesed* to Naomi. Ruth's virtue was again important in the continuation of the Davidic Dynasty despite her foreign nationality.⁴⁰ Early Christian exegetes also placed the emphasis on the characters' morality. Ruth's and Boaz's virtue were strongly protected and maintained. As a newly-formed religion, the Christian exegetes were inclined to do so, as Christianity was to build up its own morality in the challenge presented by some pagan cults and philosophy. Morality is the answer to the setting up of orthodoxy and legitimacy.

Morality is the most important constituent of religion. Theology is defined narrowly as the systematization of doctrines or the systematization of communal beliefs about the nature of God. Christianity rests on faith that makes one a Christian, a faith that theology appropriately defines and refines. Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum pointed out the appropriate criteria for this phenomenon. What most centrally define Judaism are not beliefs but actually behavior. This is elaborated through *halakhah*, Jewish law. The energy that Christianity has poured into theology, Judaism has poured into elaborating a legal system that encompasses every aspect of life.⁴¹ Ancient Jewish ethics in the broadest sense cannot properly be understood without reference to its concept of *halakah*. There are significant Graeco-Roman philosophical influences on the form and presentation especially of Diaspora ethical texts. L. H. Feldman commented that Jewish Hellenistic virtue and vice lists do owe a

⁴⁰ See Chapter four

⁴¹ Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum, "Introduction" In *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies* (Michigan: Yale University, 1994), 63

great deal to Stoicism and to the shape of popular Graeco-Roman philosophy.⁴²

The New Testament, coming from the period of Christianity's first beginnings, is concerned with the way converts to the movement of Christianity ought to behave. These documents are addressed not to individuals, but to communities. They have among their primary aims the maintenance and growth of those communities. The documents also reflected the very formation of a Christian moral order and a set of Christian moral practices. As a result, a distinctive community was taking shape. Wayne Meeks commented that defining morals means making a community.⁴³ It is an appropriate strategy to strength morality to unite all believers in a communal setting.

The enhancement of Christian morality was based on a counter challenge from surrounding cultures and philosophies. Ethnography⁴⁴ stated that Christians are obviously not a natural ethnos like Babylonians, Egyptians or Jews. As a matter of fact, opponents of the new movement early on began to ridicule it as a "third race", that is neither Greek nor barbarian but something outside the usual categories. Adolf Von Harnack commented that Christian apologists took up the taunt and gave it a positive sense: outside the usual division and therefore something special.⁴⁵ There is something about the way early Christians understood themselves that can be expressed, at least sometimes in defensive situations, in terms of their being a distinctive community, separate from all others. The apologists stated that "Christians are distinguished from other people in neither land nor speech nor customs."⁴⁶ Wayne Meeks concluded that tension between the sense of sharing the culture around them and the sense of standing opposed to it runs strongly through the history of early Christianity.⁴⁷

The basic rationale of Christian ethics is generally assumed to be both

⁴² L. H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, 1993), 201-31

⁴³ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 5

⁴⁴ Ethnography is the description and study of a particular society or culture, produced by someone who has spent some time living in the society, or a book containing this description.

⁴⁵ The earliest Christian writing to use the motif is the "Preaching of Peter" quoted by Clement of Alexandria: *Jews, Greeks and Christians* (*Strom.* 6.5.41) See Abraham Malherbe, "The Apologetic Theology of the Preaching of Peter" *Restoration Quarterly* 1970, 13:220-21. For the broader developments, see Adolf Von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. James Moffatt (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1972), 240-78.

⁴⁶ *Letter to Diognetus* 5:1

⁴⁷ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 9-10

straightforward and manifestly distinctive. In particular, the New Testament authors share a highly theological approach to ethics and often explicitly ground their appeals on Christology, pneumatology and eschatology. Markus Bockmuehl pointed out that their view of Jewish law as a source of moral authority comes across as highly ambivalent. Paul and the Gospels frequently appear to criticize aspects either of the Torah itself or of Torah observance.⁴⁸

The patristic exegesis focuses on Christ by using typology for the characters in the book of Ruth⁴⁹, assuming a straightforward shift from Torah to Christ. Markus Bockmuehl commented that it is widely assumed that the Torah no longer has any normative place in the canonical writings of the New Testament.⁵⁰ However, the substantive peculiarity of the New Testament approach to law and morality must be accounted for. It is true that the teaching and example of Christ serve as a significant ethical motif.⁵¹

Early Jewish and patristic exegetes shared the same emphasis on the interpretation of biblical figures in moral terms. The political, social and cultural environments led to this result. Early Jewish interpreters faced an unstable and even chaotic social environment. As holder of Torah, morality should be maintained in Jewish exegesis. On the other hand, patristic interpreters were under the threat of hostile cultural heresies and philosophies. Morality could safeguard a newly-born religion, like Christianity, to be appropriate, standing in dialogue with them and having a place in the traditional value system of human kind. Moreover, both exegetical trends paid much importance to morality. It was undeniable that Judaism and Christianity could exert great influence during this stage of world history. They might be moral so as to provide a standard and criteria for human beings. Moreover, to be moral, means to be logical. Judaism and Christianity were two important religions in the world. They were not secret cults. They should be logical in their applying of the principle of faith so as to have any impact whatsoever on the world's affairs.

⁴⁸ Markus Bockmuehl, "Jewish and Christian public ethics in the early Roman Empire" in *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 344

⁴⁹ See chapter seven

⁵⁰ Markus Bockmuehl, "Jewish and Christian public ethics in the early Roman Empire" in *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 344

⁵¹ Messianism itself can arguably function as a catalyst in the development of a sectarian outlook. See Albert Baumgarten, "The pursuit of the millennium in early Judaism" in *Tolerance and intolerance in early Judaism and Christianity*, Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); See also chapter seven.

8.4.4 Morality as the cause of divine reward and punishment

Morality was commanded by God's will through the application of the Torah by early Jewish commentators. Those who practiced righteousness received rewards, but also punishment when rejecting the commands of God. In early Jewish exegesis, morality is the way to divine reward. The importance of morality was illustrated by Ruth's virtue, her *hesed*.⁵² Despite the fact that she was a foreigner she was also accepted. However, in the Christian point of view, we can not be made righteous unless we believe in Christ. In this way, patristic exegesis reduced the role of human morality in the salvation. In turn, the acceptance of Christ, not human morality, is the only way to achieve the standards of God.

The controversial debate between early Jewish and Christian interpretation was found in the issue of work and faith. The former emphasized morality (work) while the latter mentioned the urgency of faith. This is also the reflection of the differences of doctrine between Judaism and Christianity. The former advocates the righteousness by work (morality). As said before, Judaism was a religion of morality. Torah, the standard of behavior, governed the core belief of Judaism. On the other hand, Christianity advocated righteousness by faith and grace.⁵³ Human morality has no place in salvation in the Christian point of view. The declined importance of morality in the role of salvation gradually increased as early Christian exegetes paid much emphasis on human sinfulness. In Christian doctrine, all human being were in a sinful state. They could not save themselves, but only through the salvation of Jesus Christ.⁵⁴ The patristic fathers advocated the grace of God and human faith as the way to the restoration of the human-God relationship.

8.4.5 Monotheism as an uncompromised doctrine

Both early Jewish and Christian interpreters advocated the doctrine of Monotheism being the central doctrine of both Israelite and Christian theology.⁵⁵ They were relatively consistent in the use of monotheism, reflecting a religion that believes in the existence of only one god, when they interpreted

⁵² See Chapter Four on the section of "Theme of *hesed* as indication of the morality of Ruth" at page 51.

⁵³ See chapter seven on the section of "*The Gospels include gentiles*" at page 13.

⁵⁴ See chapter seven on the section of "*Human sinfulness urges for the coming of a saving king*"

⁵⁵ See chapter four on the section of *monotheism* at page 16 and chapter seven at page 6

the book of Ruth.

Referring to early Jewish interpretation, Morton Smith portrayed an essentially polytheistic Israel until the emergence of a “Yahweh-alone” movement in the ninth century BCE and afterward, which eventually gave rise to an expression of Yahweh as the only God during the postexilic period. Jewish exegesis bore this trend of theology.⁵⁶ In early Christian exegesis, the gospel was the main foundation of Christian doctrine. *Kerygma* was the preaching of the Christian gospel, in which the principle of monotheism was upheld.⁵⁷

Beside the existence of only one god, monotheism indicated his sovereignty. In Judaism, God is God of all the nations and has sovereignty over all nations. The concept of Monotheism was demonstrated through God’s connection to other nations and Israel. God can punish when the nations sin against Him and give rewards when they act according to His will. As a whole, the principle of monotheism was the core belief of Jewish exegetes. The Israelite has no other gods but God. This idea agreed with the traditional view found in the Bible.⁵⁸ On the other hand, since Christianity had been a new born religion, it faced many challenges and influences from surrounding religious thoughts and philosophical trends. Therefore, it was the main task of exegetes to defend Christianity as orthodox against the challenge of heretics.⁵⁹

Most important of all, early Jewish interpreters commented that this core belief of monotheism is uncompromised. They pointed out that Israel should uphold this doctrine through the rejection of other gods. When interpreting Ruth’s conversion on the book of Ruth, rejection of idolatry could itself be regarded as conversion to Judaism. In other words, the sage pointed out that “The rejection of idolatry is the acknowledgment of the entire Torah.”⁶⁰ In turn, Christianity faced the challenge of heresies. Karl Rahner stated that:

The history of Christianity is also a history of heresies and consequently of the attitudes adopted by Christianity and the Church towards heresy, and so involves a history of the concept of heresy itself. In all religions that possess any kind of definite doctrine...there are differences of opinion about that doctrine and as a consequence quarrels and conflict about it and about the

⁵⁶ See chapter four

⁵⁷ See chapter seven

⁵⁸ Idem

⁵⁹ Idem

⁶⁰ See chapter four

*socially organized forms in which the different religious views find expression.*⁶¹

It again showed that early Christian exegetes upheld the principle of monotheism, which was not given up despite the challenge and attack of surrounding philosophies and academic thoughts. However, Christian exegetes differed with Jewish sages in the form of monotheism. The former modified the doctrine in a way of trinity. God is one in essence but also three in form. This controversial debate was rooted in the inquiry of Jesus as a saving Messiah.⁶² Again, the identity and position of Jesus mainly lies on the main discrepancy between Judaism and Christianity.

8.4.6 Interpretative method as a cultural product

The above patterns and principles were derived from the application of two interpretative methods: midrash⁶³ from early Jewish interpretation and typology⁶⁴ from early Christianity. We can notice a pattern in interpretative approach and trend. Both early Jewish and Christian interpretations are viewed as a product of cultural and social background. All interpretation methods and trends are continuous and do not stand alone. Therefore, the diversified backgrounds led to the formation of a specific exegetical approach. We can witness the historical-social influence on the formation of these two interpretative method and trends.

Both methodologies were applicable and social relevant. They maintained the interest of community and fulfilled the need of their generation. Referring to early Jewish exegesis, the interpretations upheld the position of Ruth⁶⁵ as a heir of the Davidic dynasty. They advocated the importance of Boaz's and Ruth's virtue as a good illustration of morality in Judaism.⁶⁶ Early Christian exegetes were also interested in the basic values of the social community. They maintained the important social value of marriage as an example of the emphasis on virtue.⁶⁷ They also paid much emphasis on teaching morality.⁶⁸

⁶¹ See chapter seven

⁶² See the previous discussion of "The coming of the Messiah in a chaotic social environment" this chapter.

⁶³ See chapter three

⁶⁴ See chapter six.

⁶⁵ See page chapter four on the discussion of "Upholding of the position of Ruth".

⁶⁶ See page chapter four on the section of "Ruth's *hesed* and modesty as fitting an ancestress of David and also as an ideal of feminine behavior".

⁶⁷ See chapter seven.

⁶⁸ See chapter seven on the section "*Teaching Morality and Modeling as the task of patristic*

Concerning the doctrine and value of Judaism, the sage upheld the principle of monotheism⁶⁹ and the legitimacy of Davidic dynasty.⁷⁰ In turn, patristic fathers urged for the introduction of the gospel through the salvation of Jesus Christ in the process of interpretation.⁷¹

8.5 Conclusion

What does an exegete do? From our investigation, we can formulate the thesis that both early Jewish and Christian exegetes did not explain the text for its inherent meaning, but rather used the text for their own purposes. Normally, the main task and mission of an exegete should be to find the meaning inherent in the text. We clearly indicated that both exegetical schools of interpreters did not find meaning in the text of the book of Ruth, but rather read in some agendas and issues into the text from outside, from the exegetes themselves and their surrounding backgrounds. They tend to meet the requirement of the social and political expectations of their reader community. Interpretation was used as a tool for this purpose. They conducted an application rather than explanation. This thesis can be explained by the fact that the meaning of a text depends on the value and pre-set agenda of the exegete who interprets it. Both the text and its interpreters are part of a specific historical, political, social and cultural environment, which imposed influence on them.

This descriptive observation for the two exegetical trends does not implicate severe criticism. Undeniably, the exegetical process indeed included both explanation and application. Both early Jewish and patristic commentators act correct by applying the text to their contemporary generation and community. The text should be socially relevant and applicable, since it is not a secret code given on another planet. However, the thesis does not pinpoint the inadequacy of the explanation of the text. It rather points out the order of the interpretation and the consciousness of the Jewish and patristic interpreters.

The problem, however, is that exegetes from both trends paid attention to the application of the text first. It is easy to read the thought, value system and pre-set ideas of the reader into the text. In this process the order of

commentators"

⁶⁹ See the section of monotheism on chapter four

⁷⁰ See the section "*Ruth's righteous proselyte (conversion) relates to the Davidic line of dynasty*" on chapter four

⁷¹ See chapter seven

interpretation is severely reversed so that a rational and more objective way of finding any inherent meaning becomes a far off goal. Moreover, the thesis shows the lack of control of the interpreters' consciousness. They are tempted to use the text and put some social issues of their age into it.

Although these trends indicated and analyzed in the thesis reflect the methods and views of their time, it can be expected that a responsible exegete, having knowledge of self-awareness and the influence of his existing background, should be aware of the possibility that this approach may become a determinant issue when evaluating the inherent meaning of a text during the process of interpretation. What an exegete should do is to try hard to merge the horizon of the text with the horizon of the exegete in a self-disciplined manner and control of self-thought. It is very important, especially for the absence of the "original authors" that exegetes act as a medium between the text and the reader. The lack of this kind of knowledge and consciousness do alarm us to provoke a more disciplined and conscious work of the interpretation nowadays.