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The Interpretation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son by Two Latin Patristic Authors, St Jerome and St Peter Chrysologus

Razlagi prilike o izgubljenem sinu dveh latinskih patrističnih avtorjev, sv. Hieronima in sv. Petra Krizologa

Abstract: In this paper, a comparison is made between Jerome's and Petrus Chrysologus' interpretations of the parable of the prodigal son. In *Letter 21*, written in 383/384, Jerome responds to a request by Pope Damasus to clarify specific questions about this well-known parable. After an introduction in which the specific questions are mentioned and briefly discussed, he continues with a verse-by-verse commentary of the Lucan passage, followed by a short conclusion. Petrus Chrysologus (c. 380–c. 450), bishop of Ravenna, delivered five sermons on the parable of the prodigal son, of which the fifth sermon offers a spiritual interpretation. A comparison between the two different approaches to the parable highlights Jerome's usual exegetical method. There is a sharper focus on Jerome's letter, and in comparison with Chrysologus' work, the unique character of Jerome's approach is underlined. An essential aspect of Jerome's commentary is his identification with the contents of the parable and the fact that he uses this work to promote himself as a biblical scholar and exegete.

Keywords: Parable of the prodigal son, sermons, Peter Chrysologus, letter, St Jerome, self-presentation of St Jerome

Povzetek: Prispevek primerja dve razlagi prilike o izgubljenem sinu, Hieronimovo razlago in razlago Petra Krizologa. V *Pismu 21* iz leta 383/384 odgovarja Hieronim na prošnjo papeža Damaza, da bi razjasnil nekatera vprašanja glede te slovite evangeljske prilike. Najprej v uvodu omenja in analizira različna podrobna vprašanja, nadaljuje z razlago vrstic odlomka Lukovega evangelija, na koncu sledi kratek sklep. Peter Krizolog (ok. 380–ok. 450), škof v Raveni, je pripravil pet govorov o isti priliki, med njimi peti ponuja duhovno razlago. Primerjava med dvema različnima pristopoma do razlage prilike poudari Hieronimovo značilno eksegetsko metodo, ki skozi primerjavo postane še bolj jasno razvidna

kot izvirna. Pomemben vidik Hieronimove razlage nastopi, ko v vsebini prilike označi samega sebe in ko to uporabi za identifikacijo sebe kot bibličnega strokovnjaka in razlagalca.

Ključne besede: prilika o izgubljenem sinu, govori, Peter Krizolog, pisma, Hieronimova predstavitev

1. Introduction

This article aims to compare St Jerome's and St. Peter Chrysologus' interpretations of the parable of the prodigal son. In *Letter 21 (Ep. 21)*, written in 383/384, Jerome responds to a request by Pope Damasus to clarify specific questions about this well-known parable. After an introduction in which the specific questions are mentioned and briefly discussed, he continues with a verse-by-verse commentary of the Lucan passage, followed by a short conclusion. Peter Chrysologus (c. 380–c. 450), the bishop of Ravenna, delivered five sermons on the same parable, of which the fifth sermon offers a spiritual interpretation of the parable. Because it is impossible to make a detailed comparison between these works in an article, the idea is to summarize the two authors' work on the parable and identify similarities and differences between their approaches. There is a sharper focus on Jerome's letter, and in comparison with Chrysologus' work, the unique character of Jerome's approach is underlined.

2. Background

Jerome, the older of the two, was born in Stridon, near Emona c. 347 and died on 30 Sept 419 (420?) near Bethlehem. He spent time in several important centres, like Rome, Trier, Aquileia, Antioch, Constantinople, and Bethlehem. During his second stay in Rome from 382–385, he became the protégé of Pope Damasus I, for whom he performed specific administrative or secretarial duties and who commissioned him to revise the Latin text of the Gospels according to the Greek original, which led to several other revisions and translation of biblical texts. Jerome was recognized as an outstanding biblical scholar and received the unique distinction of *Doctor Ecclesiae*. Rebenich describes the variety of Jerome's literary output by referring to him as a novelist, theologian, chronographer, epistolographer, satirist, biographer, biblical scholar, literary historian, translator, controversialist, threnodist, and ascetic expert (2002, 61–136).

St Peter Chrysologus was born at Forum Cornelia (Imola) c. 380 (406?) and died in his hometown c. 450. He was ordained bishop of Ravenna in 433 and served in that position till shortly before his death. He had a good relationship with emperor Valentinian III and his mother, Galla Placidia, and Pope Leo the Great. He got the name *Chrysologus* (Golden word) based on his oratorical abilities and was declared *Doctor Ecclesiae* by Pope Benedict XIII in 1729.

3. The Sermons of Peter Chrysologus

Chrysologus delivered 59 sermons on the Gospel of Luke, and 5 of them deal with the parable of the prodigal son.¹ The first four sermons offer a literal interpretation, while the fifth one provides an allegorical explanation. Almost all his sermons followed the exegetical pattern, and he uses the terms *sermo* or *tractatus* to refer to his sermons. The basic structure of the sermons consists of a short introduction, followed by a verse-by-verse discussion of the specific biblical passage, culminating in a short paraenetic appeal to the congregation. The conclusion is ordinarily concise, often doxological.

It is impossible to discuss the sermons in detail,² and therefore, a summary of the five sermons on the parable of the prodigal son is provided.

The first sermon deals with Luke 15:11-16. The introduction to the first sermon also serves as an introduction to the series of sermons. It, therefore, describes it as a parable about the love of the Father, the jealousy of the Jewish race, and the penitent return of the Christian people. After the introduction, he immediately commences with the verse-by-verse explanation of this passage; about the request of the younger son to get his inheritance, his departure, the wasting of his inheritance, and the terrible consequences of this decision. This is followed by a paraenetic appeal to stay with the Father, the Church, and fellow Christians.

In conclusion, he announces the themes for the next sermons in the form of the following questions: »Who is the father so ready to forgive, and readier still to welcome back his son? Who is the brother grieving over his brother's return? Who is the younger brother, foolish in his departure but most wise in his return?« (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 1.7)³

The second sermon deals with Luke 15:17-19. In the introduction, he refers to the first sermon, which discussed the prodigal son who deserted his father. He then announces the happier theme of the second sermon as the return and repentance of the lost son. In the verse-by-verse explanation, he then treats the son's decision to stand up and return home, his intention to confess his sins, and his request to be treated as a hired worker. In the paraenetic appeal of this section, Chrysologus emphasizes the relevance and purpose of the message. He warns his congregation against the devil's cruelty and appeals to them to stay with the father. In the conclusion of the second sermon, he promises to get to the deeper meanings at a later stage.

In his third sermon on the parable, Chrysologus focuses on Luke 15:20-24. In the introduction to this sermon, he refers to the previous two sermons about the prodigal son's departure, return, guilt, and repentance and announces that this sermon is

¹ Olivar's critical edition (CCSL 24) was used.

² Unfortunately, this description of Chrysologus' sermons doesn't do justice to his eloquent style. Even though he states in his conclusion that the simple and uncultivated parable forced him to unfold and explain the allegorical and lofty matters rather than to declaim them, his sermons are not presented in a simple style, but abound in figures of speech, word play, sound play, et cetera. For a detailed analysis of Chrysologus' sermons on the parable of the prodigal son, see Kritzinger 1998.

³ The English translation used for all the quotations from Chrysologus' sermons is that of Ganse 1953.

about the Father meeting his son, his goodness, and his mercy. In the verse-by-verse explanation, he describes how the father welcomes his son back, embraces and kisses him, how he orders his slaves to bring him the best coat and a golden ring, and to kill the fattened calf for his son who has returned. The paraenetic appeal has a dual purpose. On the one hand, he calls on the congregation to stay with the Father.

On the other hand, he encourages those who have left the Father, squandered everything, and come to utter ruin to stand up and return to such a father, inspired by such an example. The conclusion refers to the literal interpretation of the story and hints at revealing the hidden mystery, but it has to wait to describe the grief and envy of the older brother first.⁴ He thus refers to the literal interpretation of the first three sermons and the allegorical interpretation of the fifth sermon, which has to wait until he has dealt with the literal interpretation of verses 25-32 in the fourth sermon.

The fourth sermon then deals with Luke 15:25-32. The introduction refers to the previous sermon's description of the return and safety of the younger son and announces the theme of this one, the envy of the older brother. The verse-by-verse explanation discusses the older son's reaction, who does not want to join the feast. His grievances are mentioned as well as the reaction of his father. The paraenetic appeal of the fourth sermon first provides a digression about envy and ends with the following exhortations: »Let us by vigilant faith and the Spirit's light drive and keep away the foul tricks of envy. Let us suppress this envy with all the force of heavenly arms. For, just as charity unites us to God, so does envy cut us off from Him.« (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 4.1) However, another paraenetic appeal is addressed to the older brother, in which he is asked to bear with his brother's return to the father and the father's welcoming reception of his son. The father also requests him to share his present possessions with his brother to share in any future possessions. Finally, he calls on the elder brother to rejoice because his brother has been found so that he, too, may be glad that his (elder) brother has not been lost. In the conclusion of the fourth sermon, the bishop says that the literal interpretation or narrative sermon should now be brought to an end to reveal the mysterious, more profound meanings.⁵

The fifth sermon provides an allegorical or spiritual interpretation of the whole parable and therefore deals with the entire passage. The introduction refers to the preacher's earlier promise to raise the historical sense to a mystical and extraordinary sense. An allegorical explanation of the whole parable is then offered in the verse-by-verse explanation. There is no clear paraenetic appeal in this sermon. In conclusion, the preacher mentions his inability to thoroughly discuss such extensive matters within a sermon's scope. He finally expresses the wish that the plain and uncultivated parable may be welcomed, a simple message that has forced him to open up and explain allegorical and lofty matters rather than declaim them.⁶

⁴ »Historiam loquimur adhuc, et iam cogitamus arcanum nudare mysterium. /.../ Sed differendum est, ut senioris dolorem vetustum, vetustiore fratri invidiam prosequamur.« (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 3.5)

⁵ »Sed iam sermonem historicum concludamus, ut postea quae sunt mystica, quae profunda, Christo revelante, pandamus.« (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 4.5)

⁶ »Non sit ingrata, simplex et inculta conlatio, quae nos res mysticas et excelsas non narrare, non declamare, sed aperire compulit et explanare.« (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.8)

4. Jerome, *Letter 21 to Damasus*

Letter 21 of Jerome was written to Pope Damasus in 383/384 (Cain 2009, 53). It contains Jerome's reply to specific questions of Damasus about the interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son. Jerome gives a complete exposition of the whole Lucan passage in his reply, and this letter can thus be regarded as a commentary on the parable. *Letter 21* has a straightforward structure: an introduction with the request of Damasus (*Ep.* 21.1); an explanation of the parable's context and the fundamental issue that Jesus addresses here (21.2–3); a verse-by-verse commentary (21.4–41); a short conclusion (21.42).

Jerome's *Letter 21* then responds to the following questions of Damasus: »Who is the father? Who are the two sons? How does the younger one squander his inheritance with prostitutes? What does it mean that he was sent to look after the pigs and that he ate their pods, that he returned to his father, received a ring and a robe, and that the fattened calf was killed for him? Who is the older brother, and why is he jealous of his brother on his return?« (21.1.1)⁷ These questions almost cover the interpretation of the whole parable. After the general questions, Jerome again quotes Damasus, describing and discussing the problems of identifying the older brother with the Jews and the younger brother with the gentiles or the righteous and the sinner. These questions of Damasus confront Jerome with different interpretations of the parable and introduce the difficulties that accompany these interpretations. A fundamental principle of text analysis is introduced here: to ask the right questions to the text, guiding the exegete in his interpretation.

Jerome does not immediately reply with straightforward answers but first makes a remark about methodology. He says that he usually asks why the parable was told if it was not explained by Jesus Himself. With this question, Jerome puts the parable in context. He first refers to Luke 15:1-2 and quotes from Matthew 9:10-13 and says that Mark 2:15-17 agrees and uses the same language. Jerome refers to the envy of the scribes and the Pharisees and explains the reason behind it: »Therefore, all their envy has this source: the question why the Lord did not avoid speech and intercourse with those whom the precepts of the law condemned.« (21.2.2) Jerome concludes that this whole issue arose from the law and then expands on the contrasts between law versus mercy and forgiveness versus punishment. This is a crucial part of the letter in which Jerome summarises the gospel's central message, namely that God has sent his Son to save sinners whom he called to repentance and »tempered the severity of the law by the grace of the gospel« (21.2.3). He says that Jesus has told these three parables to refute the accusation of the scribes and the Pharisees. He clarifies that the three parables (on the lost sheep, on the lost coin, and the lost son) serve the same purpose but focus on the third one. The main theme of the parable is thus identified as an issue about 'law versus grace', and this identification directly results from his di-

⁷ The English translation is that of Mierow 1963 and is used for all the quotations from *Letter 21* in this article.

scussion of the context. An additional but still prominent theme is also addressed here, namely the theme of ‚envy versus joy‘.

Jerome’s verse-by-verse commentary, which follows the introduction, provides us with his allegorical interpretation of the parable. Chrysologus’ allegorical interpretation corresponds to Jerome’s to a large extent,⁸ but Jerome discusses it more fully and provides elaborate reasons for his interpretations. He also provides alternative interpretations in some cases. Concerning the identities of the two sons, he suggests that the older and younger brother could represent either the Jews and the Gentiles or the saints and the publicans and sinners, respectively. It is difficult to summarise this section, but a few examples of Jerome’s allegorical exegesis of this passage are presented, and where it differs significantly from Chrysologus’ interpretation, his interpretation is also mentioned.

Both authors agree that the parable’s father refers to God the Father and explain why God is sometimes likened to man (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.1; Hier., *Ep.* 21.4). The two sons are generally understood as two peoples, the Jews and the Gentiles, but as indicated above, Jerome also argues the possibility of the two sons representing the Jews and sinners in general, respectively (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.2; Hier., *Ep.* 21.4; 39–41). Jerome explains in great detail how the words and attitude of the older brother can also be applied to the saints. He offers this as an additional possibility but does not choose or indicate a preference for a specific interpretation.

After discussing the identity of the man and the two sons, Jerome continues with a creative interpretation of the substance of God (*substantia Dei*). He describes it as follows: »Everything is the substance of God: life, reason, thought, speech. This is the gift God has bestowed upon all alike, and in equal measure.« (Hier., *Ep.* 21.5)⁹ However, after referring to the Greek equivalent of the Latin *substantia*, he states that it is expressed more vividly in the original Greek and says that the Greek word refers to man’s free choice.¹⁰ Chrysologus has a different and exciting explanation for the substance of God. At first, he mentions similar things as Jerome: human character, speech, knowledge, reason, and judgment, belonging to the law of nature. However, he contends that the elder son got a different share, namely the five Books of the Law, which make their inheritance equal in number, but unequal in value (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.3).

Both authors describe the son’s departure to a far-off land as a spiritual departure. Jerome says: »It is not by spatial distances but through affection that we either are with God or depart from Him.« (Hier., *Ep.* 21.7.2) Chrysologus explains

⁸ There is, however, no indication that Chrysologus has seen or made use of Jerome’s commentary in this letter.

⁹ »Substantia Dei est, omne quod vivimus, sapimus, cogitamus, in verba prorumpimus. Haec aequaliter universis et in commune largitus est.«

¹⁰ »In the Greek, the reading is more vivid: διεῖλεν αὐτοῖς τὸν βίον. That is, he gave them free choice, he gave their hearts’ desire, that each might live, not in accordance with God’s command, but to please himself; that is, not out of necessity, but by free will, in order that virtue might have its place, so that, like God, we have the privilege of doing what we wish, differing in this from all the other animals.« (Hier., *Ep.* 21.6)

ins it in similar terms: »It (the Gentile race) sojourned into the foreign country of the Devil more in the spirit than in place,« and »For, this younger son was in his Fathers presence, yet he lacked this Father; although he was in his own house, he did not feel at home.« (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.4)

After the younger son has wasted his inheritance, according to Jerome, by worshipping idols and leading a life without virtue, there came a famine, which indicates a place without God: »Every place in which we dwell without the Father is a place of famine, penury, and want.« (Hier., *Ep.* 21.10)¹¹ Chrysologus indicates that the son has wasted his substance through his desire for secular eloquence, through the brothels of the (philosophical) schools at the meeting places of the philosophical sects, and through his conjectures, he corrupted his portion of speech, knowledge, reason, and judgment. This resulted in an immense need and severe hunger to know the truth (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.4). In his second sermon, Chrysologus describes the famine as an involuntary hunger and compares it to fasting: »Hunger calls back him whom abundance had exiled. Hunger enabled the son to understand his father, whereas abundance had caused him to recognize only a sire. If even involuntary hunger did all this, try by experiment how beneficial a voluntary fast can be.« (2.1)

The younger son then joins one of the country's princes, referring to the devil, who sent him to feed the swine, i.e., the demons. According to Jerome, the pods of the swine, or food of the demons, are drunkenness, luxury, fornication, and all the vices. Nevertheless, it can also be interpreted as the songs of the poets, secular wisdom, and the display of rhetorical language, things which cannot still hunger for truth. For Chrysologus, the pods of the swine refer to »the sinfully sweet pleasures of the body« to which the Epicureans are devoted (5.6).

Both authors interpret the approach of the Father to meet the son as a reference to the incarnation. Jerome describes the father's hurried approach as follows: »Before he returned to his ancient father by worthy works and true repentance, God, with whom all future events are already past and who knows beforehand all that is to be, runs forward to his coming and by His Word, which took flesh by a virgin, anticipates the return of His younger son.« (Hier., *Ep.* 21.19) Chrysologus explains this as follows: »But the father runs out, he runs from afar. ›When as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us.‹ The Father runs out, and He runs out in His Son when through Him He descends from heaven and comes down upon the earth.« (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.6)

Both authors also see the falling upon the son's neck as an image pointing to the incarnation.¹² Jerome complements this interpretation with a statement that refers to the light yoke which Christ placed on the younger son: »So He placed upon the younger son (by grace rather than because of merit) His light yoke, that is, the easy precepts of His commandments.« (Hier., *Ep.* 21.20)¹³

¹¹ »Omnis locus quem patre incolimus absente, famis, penuriae et egestatis est.«

¹² »Incubuit super collum ipsius, id est, corpus sumpsit humanum.« (Hier., *Ep.* 21.20); »Cecidit, cum per Christum divinitas tota nostra decumbit, et incumbit in carne.« (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.6)

¹³ »Ita et jugum suum leve, id est mandatorum suorum facilia praecepta, ex gratia magis quam ex merito

For Jerome, the best robe refers to »that robe which Adam had forfeited by sinning, the robe which in another parable is called a wedding garment, that is, the covering of the Holy Spirit, without which no one can attend the banquet of the King.« (21.23) Chrysologus also mentions the robe Adam lost but explains it as the eternal glory of immortality (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.6).

While the ring signifies to Jerome the likeness to Christ (*signaculum similitudinis Christi*) (*Ep.* 21.2), Chrysologus describes it as »[t]he rings of honour, the title of liberty, the outstanding pledge of the spirit, the seal of the faith, the dowry of the heavenly marriage« (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.6).

Both Jerome and Chrysologus link the shoes to the preaching of the Gospel (following Isa. 52:7, Rom. 10:15, and Eph. 6:15), but Jerome also refers to the shoes as an indication of the dignity of a bridegroom and the readiness to celebrate the Passover (Hier., *Ep.* 21.25; Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.6).

According to Jerome, »[t]he fatted calf, which is sacrificed for the safety of penitents, is the Saviour Himself, on whose flesh we feed, whose blood we drink daily« (Hier., *Ep.* 21.26).¹⁴ Chrysologus likewise mentions the daily sacrifice: »He is the calf who is daily and continually immolated for our food.« (Petr. Chrys., *Sermo* 5.6)¹⁵

4.1 Jerome's Self-Presentation in *Letter 21*

Although the comparison between the verse-by-verse commentary of Jerome and the fifth sermon of Chrysologus shows that there are no significant differences in their allegorical interpretations, there is one crucial aspect in which the two works differ significantly and which illustrates the unique character of Jerome's letter. This aspect concerns the self-presentation of the author in the specific work. While the sermons of Chrysologus reveal almost nothing about the preacher himself, Jerome's letter seems to be a document of self-promotion in which he presents himself to Damasus (Cain 2009, 43–67), the first addressee, but also to other readers as an erudite exegete.

In the letter's introduction, Jerome presents himself as the ‚adviser‘ of Pope Damasus, which means the authority to whom the Pope turns to clarify exegetical questions (Kritzinger 2019, 2–3). The letter starts by complimenting Damasus for asking the right questions (presumably, to the right person).¹⁶ He uses this letter to present himself as a biblical scholar and theologian. He follows the main exegetical principle of explaining one biblical passage by referring to other passages where the same issue is discussed or seems relevant to the commentator.¹⁷ He emphasizes the importance

super juniorem filium collocavit.«

¹⁴ »Vitulus saginatus qui ad poenitentis immolatur salutem, ipse Salvator est, cujus quotidie carne pascimur, cruore potamur.«

¹⁵ »Hic est vitulus qui in epulum nostrum cotidie ac iugiter immolatur.«

¹⁶ »Beatudinis tuae interrogatio, disputatio fuit: et sic quaesisse quaerendo viam est dedisse quaesitis. Sapienter quippe interroganti, sapientia reputabitur. (The question of Your Beatitude was a theme for argument, and to have posed questions thus is to have opened a way for a reply. Indeed ›wisdom will be ascribed to one who questions wisely.‹)« (Hier., *Ep.* 21.1)

¹⁷ Lawler lists more than 150 references or quotes to other biblical passages in the letter.

of the context of the specific passage and describes it exceptionally well. He further pays attention to crucial theological issues such as law and grace, free will, original sin, and the justice of God (Hier., *Ep.* 21.2; 21.6; 21.39–41).

Jerome is first and foremost known for his abilities as a translator of the Bible and his advocacy for the original biblical languages, especially the *Hebraica veritas*, the original Hebrew version of the Old Testament. He preferred the Septuagint, the Greek translation. Jerome refers on three occasions to Greek words and their meanings and three times to the meaning of Hebrew words in this commentary. He explains the meanings of ‚*Naid*‘ (*quod interpretatur ‚fluctuation‘*), ‚*Babel*‘ (*id est ‚confusion‘*; Hier., *Ep.* 21.8), and ‚*meleth*‘, which is referred to when he explains the meaning of the Greek word *συμφωνία* and its Latin equivalent *consonantia* (Hier., *Ep.* 21.29). He mentions the fact that some Latin interpreters mistakenly think that a symphony is a kind of organ. He, as an expert, can correct them. This letter gives him an ideal opportunity to promote himself as a biblical language expert (Kritzinger 2019, 3, n. 17).¹⁸ He also uses the opportunity to advocate his ‚*non /.../ verba, sed sensus*‘-principle, which he uses elsewhere to describe his approach to translation, but here to indicate the priority of meaning over words or style (Bartelink 1980, 46).

Jerome sees himself also as a defender of the orthodox faith when he refers to and criticizes Tertullian’s interpretation in paragraph 3 of the letter. He differs from Tertullian’s opinion that the publicans and sinners mentioned here were not Jews and argues his case with arguments from the Bible.

In a long digression on pagan poetry, philosophy, and rhetoric, Jerome defends his eclectic use of the pagan classics. He refers to a passage from Deuteronomy (21:10-13) where certain precepts are given to any Jew who wants to take a Jewish woman as a wife. He prefers to see the figure of a captive woman as a type of secular wisdom and interprets it allegorically.¹⁹ He applies this to himself and seems to identify himself with the prodigal son. In *Letter* 11, Jerome compares himself to the lost son and the lost sheep (Hier., *Ep.* 11.3). If Jerome sees himself as the younger son, it might further imply that his opponents are branded as the elder brother, the envious, ignorant son who does not understand the basic message of the Gospel and the Father’s grace.

5. Conclusion

Although a comparison between a sermon (or, in this case, a series of sermons) and a commentary (or a letter containing a commentary) is problematic and works of different genres are compared, the comparison reveals the unique character of

¹⁸ Jerome refers to himself as *vir trilinguis*: »Ego philosophus, rhetor, grammaticus, dialecticus, hebraeus, graecus, latinus, trilinguis.« (Hier., *Apol. c. Rufin.* 3.6)

¹⁹ The theme of Jerome’s use of the classics is also addressed in his famous *Letter* 22, where he is accused in a dream of being a Ciceronian, rather than a Christian.

Jerome's approach. While the sermons of Chrysologus have a moralistic and pastoral character with a solid paraenetic message to his congregation, Jerome treats the questions of Pope Damasus more scholarly, providing a detailed interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son and succeeds in addressing the most critical issues raised in the text. However, he also uses the opportunity to promote himself and strengthen his authority as a biblical scholar. His identification with the parable's content is an essential aspect and offers a new perspective on this letter.

Abbreviations

ANC – Ancient Christian Writers.

CCSL – Corpus Christianorum Series Latina.

CSEL – Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.

FC NT – The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation.

Ep. – *Epistulae* [Hilberg 1910].

Apol. c. Rufin. – *Apologia contra Rufinum*.

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