

The Whole Story Matters: An Orthodox Christian Perspective on Israel's Covenantal Life and the Jewish Jesus

Part of a special volume on the ["Jesus the Jew / Jesus the Christ" Research Project](#)

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Introduction

Despite decades of scholarship and ecclesial statements recognizing the Jewishness of Jesus, the Christian imagination remains largely untouched. Jesus is imagined as a universal savior who happened to be Jewish, rather than as one whose entire vocation is unintelligible apart from Israel's covenantal life with God.

This failure of imagination arises, at least in part, from the way Christians have learned to read the Scriptures.¹ Recovering the Jewishness of Jesus requires more than recovering historical information about first-century Judaism. It requires recovering the theological significance of his Jewishness and, with it, a way of reading Israel's Scriptures in which Jewish covenantal life is itself indispensable to understanding the Messiah. What follows proposes such a reading, grounds it in patristic theology, and explores its implications for Orthodox Christian² understanding of Scripture, Christ, and the church's relation to the Jewish people.

It will be helpful at the outset to distinguish three ways Christians have commonly related the Scriptures of Israel to Christ. The first is a proof-text approach, which searches chiefly for isolated predictions fulfilled in Jesus and often detaches

¹ Throughout this article, "the Scriptures" refers to the books Christians traditionally call the Old Testament. The term is preferred not because the designation "Old Testament" is rejected, but because it reflects the predominant language of the earliest Christian tradition. The New Testament writers ordinarily speak simply of "the Scriptures" (*hai graphai*), and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed likewise confesses that Christ rose "according to the Scriptures" (*kata tas graphas*). Although the designation "Old Testament" emerged early in Christian usage and became an important theological term, the earlier and more fundamental habit was to speak simply of "the Scriptures." The terminology adopted here also accords with the central contention of this article: that Israel's Scriptures possess their own covenantal integrity even as they find their telos in the one whom the church confesses as Christ.

² Throughout this article, "Orthodox" and "Orthodoxy" refer to the Eastern Orthodox Church and its theological and liturgical tradition, not to Orthodox Judaism. Liturgical evidence comes specifically from the Byzantine rite. Several of the fathers treated here, notably Tyconius and Augustine, belong to the undivided church and to the Latin West in particular; naming the tradition Orthodox is a claim about who has continued to embody and pray these texts, not a claim of exclusive inheritance.

them from their literary and historical settings. The second, here called *christocentric*, rightly establishes Christ as the center of Scripture and therefore attends to the principal persons, institutions, and events that bear most directly upon him: the promises to Abraham and David, the Exodus, Passover, the Temple, the prophets, and the Psalms. Yet this approach can unintentionally create a “canon within the canon,” leaving large portions of Israel’s covenantal life comparatively neglected. The third, which I am calling *christotelic*, retains Christ as Scripture’s *telos*—the ultimate destination toward which the entire story is moving—while refusing to treat any part of Israel’s story as incidental. Because the Messiah³ brings not isolated prophecies but Israel’s covenantal life as a whole toward its telos, every commandment, feast, genealogy, lament, prophecy, and historical episode possesses its own integrity and contributes to understanding him. The question is no longer simply where Scripture speaks of Christ, but how the whole life of Israel becomes intelligible in the light of the incarnate Messiah and, conversely, how that life enables the church to know him more fully.

The proof-text approach illustrates the logic in its starkest form. It treats the Scriptures chiefly as a code of predictions. Their meaning is located in verses that most clearly anticipate Christ. The interpreter’s task becomes one of identification and extraction: uncover the prophecy, match it to its New Testament fulfillment, and move on.

The christocentric approach marks a genuine advance. Rather than isolating individual predictions, it recovers the broad sweep of Israel’s history and recognizes that the promises, institutions, and great events of Scripture bear witness to Christ together. Yet it can still become selective, concentrating attention upon those moments that most obviously culminate in Christ while allowing much of Israel’s covenantal life to recede into the background.

This practice, though ancient, produces a “canon within the canon.” Passages like Isaiah 7, Psalm 22, or Genesis 3:15 gleam brightly, while Genesis 17’s covenant of circumcision or Leviticus’s ritual legislation fade into the background. Even within Exodus, the Passover lamb and the Red Sea crossing command attention, but the long chapters of Sinai law are treated as a tedious subplot. In effect, Israel’s history is reduced to a theatrical stage set awaiting its protagonist.

The theological cost is immense. Once Israel’s covenantal life is seen as provisional, Jesus’s Jewishness becomes decorative. The incarnation no longer

³ “Messiah” is used throughout in its Christian sense, and the christotelic reading described here is a confession made from within Christian faith rather than a historical claim binding on Jewish readers. Jewish messianism has been plural from the beginning. The Hebrew Scriptures apply *mashiach* to reigning kings, to priests, and once to a Persian emperor (Isa 45:1). Second Temple sources anticipate a Davidic king (Pss. Sol. 17), two messiahs of Aaron and Israel (1QS 9:11), and heavenly figures of judgment (1 En. 37–71; 4 Ezra 7, 13). Maimonides insists the messianic king will be a human ruler who restores Torah observance and the kingdom, with no suspension of the natural order (*Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Melakhim 11–12). Later movements have hoped for a messianic age without a personal messiah at all. Nothing in the argument that follows requires that these expectations be construed as failed approximations of the Christian claim, and the thesis of this article is that they should not be.

requires embodiment within Israel; it could, in principle, have occurred anywhere. Christ fulfills abstract symbols rather than a concrete way of life.

A christotelic reading inverts this logic. It regards the whole of Israel's story—commandments, covenants, celebrations, exiles—as an ordered progression whose telos is the Messiah. The Word (*Logos*) who becomes flesh is the same Word who called Abraham, gave Torah, and inspired the prophets. Nothing in Israel's narrative is spent, because none of it was ever empty.

To read christotelically is therefore to read maximally. It requires attention to the literal and historical sense, to Israel's language and law, trusting that the more deeply we grasp the Jewish coherence of Scripture, the more fully we discern Christ. The incarnation is not the Word becoming abstract humanity but becoming the Jew Jesus of Nazareth, circumcised, Sabbath-keeping, and Temple-worshipping. The flesh he assumes is covenantal flesh; the life he lives, the life of Israel before God. A christocentric reading can accommodate a Jesus who is accidentally Jewish; a christotelic reading requires a Jesus who is essentially so.

Christotelic Reading: A Borrowed Term and Its Patristic Reach

The term “christotelic” belongs to Peter Enns, who introduced it in his book *Inspiration and Incarnation*⁴ to describe what he takes to be apostolic hermeneutics, and who has since defended it through a protracted controversy in evangelical circles.⁵ The term is worth borrowing, and the reasons Enns gives for preferring it are largely the reasons for adopting it here. But it will not survive the transfer into an Orthodox register unaltered, and the alterations are themselves instructive.

Enns prefers “christotelic” to “christocentric” or “christological” because the latter have been used to express what he calls a very different notion: that every verse, passage, or image of the Scriptures leads the reader to Christ, or that Christ is present in every last portion of it.⁶ Telos means end or goal; to read the Scriptures christotelically is to read the texts already knowing that Christ is somehow the end toward which its story is heading. Crucially, Enns insists this does not flatten what Scripture says on its own terms. Grammatical-historical reading is not merely permissible but vital, since it allows the church to see the trajectories actually set

⁴ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic, 2005).

⁵ The controversy at Westminster Theological Seminary, which followed the publication of *Inspiration and Incarnation*, turned on whether a christotelic reading concedes too much. Its critics held that the method drives a wedge between the divine and human authors of the Scriptures by denying that Christ is objectively present in those texts on their own historical-grammatical terms and proposed “christomorphic” or robustly christocentric alternatives more congenial to the Westminster Confession. The dispute led to Enns's departure from the seminary in 2008 and, later, to the forced retirement of the Old Testament professor Douglas Green. The terms of that debate are internal to confessional Reformed hermeneutics and have little purchase on the argument advanced here, but they are worth noting for a reason that bears on it. The objection Enns faced was that his reading was insufficiently christological, and the anxiety underlying it was that Christ might not be found in the Scriptures (Old Testament) unless he is discovered there directly. The difficulty pursued in this article is the reverse: a hermeneutic that finds Christ everywhere in Israel's Scriptures and Israel nowhere.

⁶ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 154.

within Israel's Scriptures rather than the ones a Christian reader would like to find there.

A christotelic reading, he suggests, is like a second reading of a novel.⁷ The first read-through of Scripture does not know where the story is going; the second reading, knowing the end, sees what the first could not, without thereby cancelling what the first read. Enns is emphatic that the first reading is not thereby made superfluous, and insists that the literal reading will not on its own lead to the christotelic one. The apostles did not derive Christ from the text by exegetical procedure. They came to the text already knowing him, having been illumined by his Spirit, and read backward from the resurrection. This is why Enns can say that it is Jesus who reveals the sense of Hosea's words (Matthew 2:14, Hosea 11:1) rather than Hosea who foretells Jesus: words that in their original historical context did not speak of Jesus of Nazareth now do.⁸

Every element of that account has a patristic analogue, and the convergence is not coincidental. The fathers read backward from Pascha (Easter); the spiritual insight and interpretation of the Scriptures they called *theōria* is not a technique for extracting meanings but a mode of perception granted to those already illumined. Enns's own instinct that christotelic coherence is something sought after over a long period, in community, with humility and patience, rather than achieved by rules of exegesis,⁹ would be at home in almost any Orthodox account of how Scripture is rightly read. He is describing, in the idiom of a discipline that had largely lost it, something the fathers took for granted.

Yet two differences matter, and they are what make the term do more work here than it does in its original setting.

The first concerns the location of the reading. Enns's christotelic reader is, in the end, an interpreter facing a text, and the eschatological moment that authorizes the second reading is one the reader occupies as a function of his historical position. For the Orthodox tradition, that moment is not simply occupied but entered liturgically. The second reading of the novel is not a scholar's rereading; it is the church's rehearsal of the story in the Paschal Vigil, in the canon at Matins,¹⁰ in the Psalter distributed across the hours. Enns's argument is that the apostles read the Scriptures in light of the resurrection. The Orthodox claim is that the church has never stopped doing so, and that the place where this happens is not primarily in study but in worship.

The second concerns Enns's stated worry. He wants "christotelic" precisely because he does not wish to find Christ in every last portion of the Scriptures; the term is a brake on a maximalism he regards as forced. The patristic tradition points the other way. What the fathers demonstrate, and what Cyril demonstrates most extravagantly, is that every text of the Scriptures is theologically inexhaustible,

⁷ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 153.

⁸ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 132-134, 153.

⁹ Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 171.

¹⁰ The canon is a highly structured poetic hymn consisting of nine distinct sections called odes. Each ode corresponds to and builds on a specific biblical song or canticle, mainly from the Scriptures (Old Testament).

down to the garments and the measurements. The point is not that Christ is hidden in every verse as a cipher to be extracted, which is the christocentric error Enns rightly resists, but that no part of Israel's life is spent, because the entire covenantal existence of that people is what the incarnation assumes. Enns refuses the proof-text, and so does the reading proposed here. The divergence is over what the refusal licenses. Enns concludes that some passages simply do not point to Christ and should not be made to. The christotelic reading proposed here concludes that every passage participates in Israel's story as it is taken up in the church's experience of the incarnate Logos, which is a different claim and a stronger one, and which requires reading those passages more attentively rather than less. The root of the divergence is what each of us means by *telos*. For Enns it is an event, the death and resurrection of Christ, and a story that culminates in an event can be completed from a point. For the fathers it is a person, and a person who assumed not humanity in the abstract but the covenantal flesh of Israel, so that what is gathered is a way of life and not only a climax. Enns's christotelic hermeneutic can, in principle, be held by someone for whom Jesus's Jewishness remains a datum only of first-century history. A patristic christotelic hermeneutic cannot leave it at that.

None of this is offered as a correction of Enns, whose concerns are those of a different guild answering different questions under different pressures, and whose account of apostolic hermeneutics stands on its own ground. It is offered rather as an account of why a term forged in one controversy illuminates another. Enns argued that the apostles' way of reading was christotelic and that the church should follow them. *The claim here is that one part of the church never stopped, that it preserved the practice chiefly by singing it, and that what it preserved thereby is the Jewishness of Jesus itself, held in the memory of a worship that cannot proceed without Israel's songs, Israel's feasts, and Israel's whole unedited story.*

Theological Foundations

Three concepts give this christotelic reading its structure: teleology, divine pedagogy, and recapitulation.

God's work in history is purposive rather than reactive. Creation, covenant, and redemption form one economy oriented toward the *telos* of new creation and the union of God and humanity, and Israel's election is the central trajectory of that plan rather than a detour within it. But a story ordered toward a goal is not a story whose early chapters are waiting rooms. A life ordered toward an end is not thereby deficient in the meantime, and Israel's covenantal existence was never a rehearsal for a reality it did not yet possess.

Divine pedagogy or instruction is easily misdescribed. Torah is not a preparation for recognizing the Messiah; that formulation makes it instrumental to something later than itself and collapses Israel's life with God into a propaedeutic. The commandments were given to Israel for Israel's own life with God, and they conferred that life rather than promising it at a distance. God was not withholding anything from Sinai pending a better arrangement. The Torah was God's instruction, the Spirit spoke in the prophets, and the Temple was where God truly dwelt.

What *paidagōgia* names is the character of a relationship God chose to conduct in history, at human pace, with a particular people, in such a way that the form of that life could become the form God himself assumed.

Recapitulation carries the same weight. The Messiah “gathers up” all things (Ephesians 1:10), and *anakephalaiōsis* means a gathering under one head of what is already there. The word does not mean supplementation. Each stage of Israel’s life retains its dignity, not merely because it contributed to something later, but because Christ takes it up without negating its integrity. In him, Christians confess, Israel’s covenantal history is gathered into the messianic and universal horizon promised within its own Scriptures; yet it is gathered as a living history with God, not redefined as material whose true meaning only the church can disclose.

Fulfillment, then, is neither replacement nor supplement. It is manifestation and extension. Christ does not bring reality in place of shadow. In him, Christians confess, the reality already given in Israel’s life with God is gathered into a new saving disclosure without ceasing to be the reality Israel had already received and known. He is not the substance of which Israel’s life was the outline but the archetype toward which that life was ordered and which it always, in its own manner, bore. And what he extends is not a new covenant replacing an exhausted one but the reach of the covenant that was made. The promise to Abraham was from the first that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). The nations coming in to worship alongside Israel arrive at what was promised. Paul’s olive tree says this and no more: the root supports the branches, the wild branches receive from Israel’s fullness.

The Patristic Witness

While the fathers’ method of reading is christotelic with remarkable consistency, what they do with it varies and sometimes contradicts what it truly is. The language of shadow and reality, of the partial and the whole, has patristic warrant, and it carries a logic that runs toward a theology of replacement or diminishment of Judaism however carefully it is qualified.

This is uncomfortable to say of witnesses one wishes to claim, but the discomfort is the point: the christotelic instinct is genuinely there in the tradition, genuinely deep, and genuinely betrayed by the same pastors and teachers who display it. Tracing where it holds and where it collapses is more useful than a roll of approving names.

Irenaeus: The Method and Its Limit

Irenaeus (ca. 130 to 202 CE) is the natural first witness, because his polemical situation forced precision on exactly the question at issue. Marcion had proposed that the God of the Law was not the Father of Jesus Christ, and that Israel’s Scriptures recorded an inferior deity’s dealings with a people Christians could disown. Against this, Irenaeus insists absolutely on the unity of the divine economy. The covenants form one continuous work of one God, and Book Four of his treatise

Against Heresies returns to the point with almost liturgical repetition: it is *one and the same God* who called Abraham and who sends Christ, who gave the Law and who gives the gospel, who spoke through Moses and through the Evangelists. Against those who would divide the testaments between two deities, Irenaeus offers the householder of Matthew 13:52 who brings out of his treasure things new and old and observes that the Lord “did not teach that he who brought forth the old was one, and he that brought forth the new, another; but that they were one and the same” (*Against Heresies* IV.9.1).

The consequence for reading is exactly the christotelic one. Israel’s Scriptures cannot be discarded, because they are God’s own speech; the Law cannot be alien, because its giver is the Father of Jesus Christ. And *anakephalaiōsis*, Irenaeus’s governing category, has the right grammar built into it. To sum up under one head is to gather what exists. Israel’s covenantal life is drawn up into Christ intact, or the recapitulation has nothing to recapitulate. Irenaeus can even say that the Decalogue’s precepts, spoken by the Lord in person to all alike, “remain permanently with us, receiving by means of His advent in the flesh, extension and increase, but not abrogation” (*Against Heresies* IV.16.4). “Extension and increase, but not abrogation”: there is no better statement of the case.

And yet the same book undoes it. Irenaeus distinguishes sharply between the Decalogue, which is natural law inscribed on the heart, and the ceremonial law of Moses, which he regards as a remedial imposition. God gave the Decalogue and “did then demand nothing more of them” (*Against Heresies* IV.15.1). Only after the golden calf, when the people “had gone back in their minds to Egypt, desiring to be slaves instead of free-men,” were they “placed for the future in a state of servitude suited to their wish,” subjected to “the yoke of bondage” (*Against Heresies* IV.15.1). He quotes Ezekiel (20:25) approvingly to seal it: “I gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments in which they shall not live.” The tabernacle, the temple, the Levites, the sacrifices and oblations and “all the other service of the law” are, on this account, a bridle for a people who could not be trusted with freedom (*Against Heresies* IV.15.3).

The interpretive logic compounds the damage. Where the account of the golden calf empties Israel’s law of goodness, the typology empties it of content. God instructed Israel, Irenaeus writes, “calling them to the things of primary importance by means of those which were secondary; that is, to things that are real, by means of those that are typical; and by things temporal, to eternal; and by the carnal to the spiritual; and by the earthly to the heavenly” (*Against Heresies* IV.15.3). Circumcision was given “not as the completer of righteousness, but as a sign,” and the Sabbath likewise “given for a sign,” and “man was not justified by these things” (*Against Heresies* IV.16.1).

The anti-Marcionite pressure does not, after all, produce an anti-replacement theology. It produces something subtler and, in some ways, worse. Marcion said the Law was not God’s; Irenaeus answers that it was God’s, but that God gave it as a yoke to a people who had asked for slavery. The Law is thereby saved for the church at the cost of Israel, and Irenaeus does not merely harbor the shadow-and-substance structure; he articulates it with fervent clarity.

What survives is the method, and one sentence of the theology. “Extension and increase, but not abrogation” is right, and Irenaeus said it, and it cuts against the yoke of bondage in the same book. Yet he did not notice, and the tradition, receiving both, mostly took the yoke.

Cyril: Maximalism Without Discipline

Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 376 to 444 CE) shows what the christotelic method does when nothing checks it at all. His *Glaphyra* on the Pentateuch is christotelic maximalism at full stretch. Cyril takes what might seem to be the least promising material in Torah, the procedure in Leviticus 14:33-53 concerning a house whose walls have developed a greenish or reddish blemish—the priest’s inspection, the scraping and replastering, the two birds and the cedar and the hyssop—and treats it as inexhaustible. He proposes to open “the earthiness of the literal sense” in order to “bring to light the beauty of the spiritual contemplation contained within it” (*Glaphyra* 11.1). Nothing is beneath attention, because everything is God’s word. A mildewed wall appears on no one’s list of Messianic prophecies, and no proof-texting method would give it a second glance.

But observe what he finds in the wall. The leprous house, Cyril says, reveals “the whole mystery concerning the synagogue of the Jews and those things that happened to them from beginning to end” (*Glaphyra* 11.1). The diseased stones cast outside the town are Israel. The replastering is the church. And elsewhere in the same work the governing logic surfaces without disguise: “we will set aside the earthiness of the types, since we have the actual reality, which is Christ” (*Glaphyra* 9.3).

The literal sense is *earthiness*. It is a husk. Having arrived at the reality, one discards the type, and since the type is Israel’s covenantal life, one discards that too or finds in it the prophecy of its own replacement. Cyril’s method says that every corner of Torah is inexhaustible. His conclusion says that Torah’s corners were shadows whose substance has rendered them dispensable. Christian history took the conclusion.

Yet his practice is better than his theory. The attention he pays to Leviticus 14 is attention no one who sees Israel as replaced has any motive to pay, and he pays it anyway, on the conviction that God does not waste words, that this commandment given to this people about their actual houses is divine speech and therefore endlessly worth hearing. The instinct is sound. What he builds on it is a betrayal of it, and one can receive the first while refusing the second.

Basil: The Pattern Confirmed

Lest this pattern, of wishing to “take up” all Scripture in Christ while effectively replacing it is thought peculiar to Cyril, consider Basil of Caesarea (329 to 379 CE), whose treatise *On the Holy Spirit* holds both halves of the contradiction within a single work and shows no sign of noticing.

Basil's argument requires the Spirit's activity to be unbroken across the whole economy, because his opponents¹¹ would gladly consign the Spirit to the created order and he must show the Spirit inseparable from Father and Son in every divine work. He surveys the entire sweep of God's dealings with Israel and finds the Spirit everywhere in it: the blessings of the patriarchs, the help bestowed in the Torah, the types, the prophets, the brave deeds in wars, the signs worked through the just. All of it, he says, comes about through the Spirit, and the same Spirit is then joined to the flesh of the Lord at his anointing, present at the temptation, present at the miracles, present at the raising of the dead, present at the founding of the church (*On the Holy Spirit* 16). Nothing in Israel's history stands outside the Spirit's work. It is a strong statement of continuity, and it is made under the pressure of his argument, which is the condition in which the fathers tend to say what they most firmly hold.

Yet, five chapters later, Basil turns to the veil over Moses's face and writes that whoever attends merely to the letter and wastes time with its legal observances covers his own heart with the Jewish interpretation of the letter. The bodily observance of the Law, he says, ceases with the coming of Christ, after which the types are to be exchanged for the truth. And then the image: "lamps are not used in the presence of the sun, and the law ceases and the prophets are silenced when the truth is brought to light" (*On the Holy Spirit* 21).

"The prophets are silenced." This from the man who had just established that the Spirit who spoke in them is the Spirit who anoints Christ and founds the church, the man who reproaches those who disparage the truth on account of its types and who fail to see the Law and prophets as a reflection of God (*On the Holy Spirit* 14). Basil does not appear to have felt the strain. The Spirit's presence in Israel's history is invoked when it is needed to prove something about the Spirit, and Israel's history is dismissed as a lamp in daylight when the subject is what Christians should now do with it.

The pattern that appeared in Irenaeus and Cyril is thus not the failure of two particular readers but something closer to a habit of the tradition. Each of them can say, when the argument requires it, that God's work in Israel is one continuous work of one God, real and lifegiving to those who received it. Each of them can also say, when a different argument requires it, that Israel's covenantal life was a husk, a yoke, a shadow, a lamp to be put out. And the second saying is the one that prevailed.

¹¹ Basil's opponents in *On the Holy Spirit* are the Pneumatomachians, or "Spirit-fighters," also called Macedonians, who accepted the Son's consubstantiality with the Father as defined at Nicaea but denied the same of the Spirit, placing him among the ministering creatures on the strength of Hebrews 1:14. The treatise was occasioned by objections to Basil's use of the doxology "with the Son together with the Holy Spirit" alongside the more familiar "through the Son in the Holy Spirit," and the dispute is generally associated with Eustathius of Sebaste, Basil's former ally. Behind them stand the Eunomians, whose subordinationism Basil treats as the root of the same error.

Tyconius: The Road Taken

If the argument stopped here, it would be bleak: a sound method, universally betrayed, recoverable only by reading the fathers against themselves. But the tradition did better than that once, in a quarter that Orthodox theology has had little occasion to visit. The account that follows is substantially Paula Fredriksen's, whose *Augustine and the Jews* traces how a Donatist layman's handbook of exegetical rules reached Augustine and, through him, produced something the tradition had not previously managed.¹²

Tyconius (ca. 330 to 395 CE) was that layman in fourth-century North Africa.¹³ His *Book of Rules* set out seven principles for reading Scripture. Tyconius used the word "Law" to mean not only the Pentateuch or Jewish practice but the whole of the Bible, Scriptures and New Testament together, which he called "a vast forest of prophecy" (*Book of Rules* prologue). As Fredriksen explains, that definition enabled Tyconius "to read the gospel in light of the Law, not just the Law in light of the gospel."¹⁴

Where his contemporaries used typology to establish the relative inferiority of an "Old Testament" to the New, Tyconius used it to argue for their *concinnity*, or their harmony, and even their *identity*. A single divine initiative of redemption binds them. Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, and the believer of Tyconius's own day all share one faith: "The Spirit, the faith, and the grace given by Christ have always been the same" (*Book of Rules* prologue). Before the incarnation Christ gave grace to the righteous within Israel; after it, he made the same grace available to all peoples. The Law itself perdures. What Christ did was take a Law originally revealed to Israel alone and make it available to everyone, so that the difference between the two dispensations is one of *measure (modo)*, not of *kind (genere)* (*Book of Rules* 3.9). Fredriksen sums this up: "The same Law was given, the first time to Israel, the second time to the nations."¹⁵

That is the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:3 read as a hermeneutical principle. But Tyconius goes further, and here he says something none of the Eastern fathers manage: "The significance of the righteous within Israel was not that they

¹² Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (Yale University Press, 2010). The reading offered here is Fredriksen's, and it is a reading rather than a report: her account of *Against Faustus* as an unprecedented defense of Judaism, and of Augustine's later doctrine of witness as purchasing protection at the price of subordination, is an argued position within a contested field. It has not gone unchallenged, and the present article leans on it deliberately, because its account of what Augustine achieved and what he then made of it maps closely onto the pattern this article finds throughout the patristic material.

¹³ Tyconius was marginalized and excommunicated by the Donatists because his writings argued that the true church was globally universal and comprised a mixed body of both saints and sinners. This directly contradicted the Donatist belief that they were the world's only pure, holy remnant. Though rejected as a traitor by his own sect, he refused to join the Catholic Church, living out his life in theological isolation. All this may well explain why his instincts against replacement theology exerted so little influence.

¹⁴ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 158.

¹⁵ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 160.

foreshadowed or represented types or figures of the future church. Rather, it was their historical integrity as witnesses to faith that anchored the church in the Israelite past.”¹⁶

Not foreshadowing, but *anchoring*. The righteous of Israel are not the outline of which the church is the filling-in. They are the historical reality in which the church is grounded, and their significance is their own, held in their own time, not conferred retroactively by what came after. “This line has never been broken,” Tyconius writes (*Book of Rules* 3.2). And the Law, far from being a yoke laid on a people who wanted slavery, is God’s own instrument for leading the pious to faith in both eras: *lex fidei demonstratrix*, the Law points the way to faith (3.9). “For the righteous, the Law does not work wrath, but rather it exercises their faith” (3.19).

Set beside Irenaeus’s view of the Law as statutes that were not good, and beside Cyril’s view that they were mere earthiness to be cast away, the difference is startling. A censured provincial layman, writing a handbook of exegetical rules, arrived at the position that the great patristic authors did not.

Augustine: The Argument That Had To Be Won

Tyconius’s reading might have died with him. It did not because Augustine (354 to 430 CE) read the *Book of Rules* and found in it a way out of an impasse in his own reading of Paul, and because Augustine was then forced, by an opponent, to take it further than Tyconius had.

The opponent was Faustus, a Manichaean bishop and Augustine’s own former teacher, whose *Capitula* attacked Christianity by an ingenious route: it used anti-Jewish rhetoric against fellow gentile Christians. Christians, Faustus charged, were carnal. They venerated the Scriptures of Israel, worshipped its God, trusted his fleshly promises, believed Christ born in a fleshly body, expected a fleshly resurrection. Everything the *adversus Iudaeos* tradition had said about Jews, Faustus said about Christians, and he said it with the tradition’s own vocabulary. Augustine could not answer him with that vocabulary. To defend the flesh of Christ he had to defend the flesh, and to defend the flesh he had to defend the people whose fleshly observance much of Christian tradition had spent three centuries deriding.

He did. Fredriksen calls the result “an utterly novel defense of the religious legitimacy of Judaism,” and “something all but unprecedented within his tradition.”¹⁷ Its core is a single assertion that, as she says, stood centuries of polemic on its head: *the Jews were right to keep all these things* (*Against Faustus* 12.9), but not right to keep them symbolically while missing their meaning. Right to keep them, in the flesh, *secundum carnem* rather than *secundum spiritum*, including, Augustine specifies, blood sacrifices and circumcision. They had done what God commanded them to do. God did not speak only in allegories at Sinai; laws about food really did prescribe what to eat, laws about Sabbath really did prescribe what

¹⁶ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 160.

¹⁷ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 196, 210.

to do, and God charged Israel not merely with preserving his word in a book but with enacting it in history, in the body.¹⁸

The christological consequence follows immediately. “Christ never tried to turn Israel away from their God,” Augustine writes, “but rather, he charged them with being turned away. [...] He not only never broke one of God’s commands himself, but he found fault with those around him who did, [...] for] it was God himself who gave these commandments through Moses” (*Against Faustus* 16.24). So vigilant was Christ in keeping the Law as the Jews understood and enacted it, Augustine adds, that he remained in the tomb, his body resting from all its works through the Sabbath and rose only when the Sabbath had passed. This is a Jesus whose observance is not costume. And against Jerome, who held that no one could be Jew and Christian at once, Augustine insisted that the entire founding generation of the church was both simultaneously, that Paul’s Temple sacrifices and Timothy’s circumcision were sincere rather than tactical, and that to suppose otherwise was to convict the apostles of deceit and land in a heresy worse than the ones Jerome feared.¹⁹

Fredriksen’s comparison of Augustine with Origen makes the achievement measurable. Origen’s Jesus also keeps the Law, but for Origen this merely prefaces Christ’s disowning of Jewish practice after the resurrection; current Jewish doctrines are “myths and trash,” and the decoupling of the prophets from Jewish practice was a purpose of Christ’s mission. “How different from this is Augustine?” she asks. “Very.”²⁰

Theophanies, and an Unperceived Patristic Reversal

Something else was happening in the same centuries, on a question that seems at first unrelated to the standing of Israel: who was it that Moses met at the bush on Mount Sinai?

Bogdan Bucur has documented at length what he calls christophanic exegesis: the reading, ubiquitous in the earliest Christian centuries, that identifies the Lord God of Israel who appears in the theophanies with the Lord Jesus of Christian worship.²¹ It is the man at Mamre, the voice from the bush, the figure who gave the Torah on Sinai, the Ancient of Days on the throne. Justin assumes it; Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Origen, Athanasius, Basil and Gregory of Nyssa all work with it; the Epistle of the Six Bishops treats it as a test of orthodoxy. It is not, as scholarship long supposed, a second-century polemical invention. It is, on Bucur’s account, an expression of the religious experience of the earliest Christians, and it survives the christological controversies to become, as he puts it, ubiquitous in the worship and spirituality of the first-millennium church.

¹⁸ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 244.

¹⁹ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 255.

²⁰ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 355.

²¹ See especially Bogdan Gabriel Bucur, *Scripture Re-envisioned: Christophanic Exegesis and the Making of a Christian Bible* (Brill, 2018) and “Christological Exegesis of Theophanies and the Making of Early Christian Theology,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 86, no. 1–2 (2022): 97–124.

The figure who breaks the identification of the Bible's Lord God of Israel with Christ is Augustine. For Augustine, the theophanies are not actual appearances of the Logos but created manifestations of the Trinity through angels or through matter fashioned for the occasion and discarded when its work is done. Signs, in the strict sense: creatures, evanescent, ontologically other than God, from which no inference about the divine nature may be drawn. Whatever the polemical utility of this reasoning against the Homoeans,²² its effect was to sever the Christ of Christian worship from the God who met Israel in the wilderness. And it prevailed. Bucur traces how the Augustinian reading became normative in Latin Christianity and how the discipline of patristics was subsequently built by scholars formed in it, with the consequence that the older tradition became nearly invisible to modern scholarship.

The East never made this shift. Set the two accounts side by side and a chiasm or reversed pattern emerges. On the question of Israel's standing before God, Augustine went further than any Eastern father: the Jews were right to keep all these things, Christ never turned Israel from their God, the entire founding generation of the church was Jewish and Christian at once. On the question of who met Israel at the bush, Augustine broke a tradition the East preserved intact and sang without interruption. Augustine got Israel right and the theophanies wrong. The East got the theophanies right and Israel wrong.²³

Neither half of that trade was recognized as a trade by those who made it. But the halves belong together more closely than either tradition noticed, because they answer the same question from different directions. If the one who spoke to Moses from the bush is the one who is born of Mary, then the God of Israel and the Lord of the church are not merely the same God in the abstract, as a matter of doctrinal arithmetic; they are the same person, met in the same history, and Israel's encounters with God are encounters with Christ. That is a foundation as strong as anything in Tyconius. The East held it. The East also, in the same patristic breath, preached contempt for the people to whom those theophanies were given.

The Witness "Doctrine," and Its Price

What Augustine built on the Faustus foundation was what scholars call the "doctrine of Jewish witness" to the truth of the gospel, and such a doctrine is not a straightforward gift.

Its protective force was real, and it was enormous. The Jews' continuing observance is, Augustine says, the mark of Cain: not a mark of shame but a warning

²² The Homoeans were a prominent 4th-century Christian theological faction during the Trinitarian controversies that followed the First Council of Nicaea (325 CE). Deriving their name from the Greek word *hómoios*, meaning "like" or "similar," they asserted that Jesus Christ (the Son) was distinct from but "like" God the Father. They are historically categorized as a moderate branch of Arianism.

²³ Fredriksen and Bucur assess Augustine's turn in opposite directions: for Fredriksen, *Against Faustus* marks an unprecedented Christian defense of Judaism; for Bucur, Augustine's reconstrual of the theophanies severs a tradition the East preserved intact. The verdicts are not incompatible, since they concern different questions, but the juxtaposition is not often made.

that its bearer stands under God's protection. That they have never lost the sign of their Law under pagan kings or Christian ones he calls *revera multum mirabile*, a wonder to be greatly respected. Any monarch who tries to force Jews to stop living as Jews strives against God. And in the taxonomy that mattered most to him, Jews are not to be classed with pagans or heretics at all: if we divide all religions into those that worship one God and those that worship many, Augustine writes, "the Manichees must be classed along with the pagans, and we belong with the Jews" (*Against Faustus* 20.10). "Slay them not, lest they forget your law."²⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux would deploy that verse against crusader mobs seven centuries later, and many Jews survived because he did.

But the same doctrine casts Israel as merely the church's librarian. The Jews bear witness by their books and their dispersion; their Scriptures are fulfilled in them "while they read them with blind eyes" (*City of God* 18.46); wandering, always carrying their volumes, they are, in Fredriksen's summary of Augustine's logic, "all unknowing, the servant of the church."²⁵ Augustine can affirm with Paul that the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable, but, as Fredriksen notes, he agrees with the statement and not with Paul's meaning.²⁶

Fredriksen's own verdict on this is a historian's, and it is measured against what the doctrine did: protection purchased at the price of subordination, and a subordination that is theological rather than incidental. The objection to be raised here is a different one, and it arrives earlier. The witness doctrine fails on Augustine's own terms, by the light of the argument he had just won.

Against Faustus, Augustine had established that the Jews were right to keep all these things because God commanded them to, and that the commandment was about food and rest and flesh rather than about something else that food and rest and flesh were standing in for. God did not speak only in allegories at Sinai. The whole force of the reply to Faustus lay in refusing the demand that Israel's observance mean something beyond itself; that demand was Faustus's, and Augustine defeated it by insisting that obedience to God is not a figure for obedience to God. Then the witness doctrine reinstates the demand. Israel's Torah-keeping becomes significant again, and significant precisely as testimony: it points, it attests, it preserves evidence, and the evidence is for a claim its keepers cannot see. Observance is once more a sign whose reality lies elsewhere and whose meaning is available only to those reading it from outside. This is the structure of type and substance that the rest of Augustine's argument had dismantled, restored at the moment it seemed safely gone, with Israel's life placed on the side of the shadow after all.

The connection runs deeper than a lapse of consistency. Augustine's reconstruction of the theophanies performs the same operation.²⁷ An appearance of the

²⁴ Psalm 59:12, cited by Augustine in his *City of God* 18.46.

²⁵ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 289.

²⁶ Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 289.

²⁷ Bucur, *Scripture Re-envisioned*; "Christological Exegesis of Theophanies." While Bucur's analysis has significant implications for a Christian theology of Israel, his immediate concern is the church's reading of Scripture rather than Israel's continuing covenantal significance. Fredriksen's concern is the doctrine of witness. Neither draws the connection proposed here.

Logos becomes a created sign fashioned for the occasion, discarded when its work is done, ontologically other than the God it signifies. The bush is emptied and so is the Sabbath. And the two are joined, not merely parallel: if the one who gave the Torah on Sinai is the one born of Mary, then Israel's keeping of that Torah is communion with the Logos who gave it, and the witness doctrine has nothing left to preserve. What Augustine saw when he answered Faustus was that the flesh is where God works. What he did not see, having already surrendered the theophanies, was that the God at work in that flesh is the one who had met Israel in the wilderness, and that a people keeping his commandments are not witnesses to a story. They are in it.

Maximus: The Grammar of Christotelic Understanding

Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580 to 662 CE) supplies what other Eastern fathers lacked, as metaphysics rather than as polemic. He takes up Irenaeus's *anakephalaiōsis* and enlarges it past the sequence of covenants into the structure of creation itself. Every creature and every event has its *logos*, its inner reason, and all *logoi* find their coherence in the incarnate Logos (*Ambigua* 41). A *logos* is not a potentiality. It is what a thing already is, its truth, given by God in the act of creating it. The Logos does not confer meaning on things that lacked it; he is the ground of the meaning they have always had. Recapitulation, on this reading, cannot mean the improvement of what was deficient, since there is nothing in the summing-up that was not already there to be summed.

Applied to Israel's history, this is the whole of what the argument requires. The *logoi* of the covenants and the prophets do not await Christ in order to become significant. They converge in him because he is what they were always about. Nothing is replaced, because nothing was ever a placeholder. Maximus never turned this on the question of Israel; the framework was built for cosmology, not for Jewish-Christian relations. But the grammar is there, and it is the grammar Tyconius was reaching for, and that Augustine found and then mislaid.

The christotelic method is patristic. So is the drawing out of its consequences for a theology of replacement, but only sporadically, mostly in Latin, and mostly under pressure. What corrupts the method, where it is corrupted, is not exegetical error but the wish to have Israel's Scriptures without Israel. Which raises the question the rest of this article must answer. If the fathers could not hold the reading steadily, what did? The answer, in the Orthodox East, is not a treatise. It is the liturgy.

The Liturgy as Christotelic Reading in Practice

What the fathers articulated as doctrine, the church's worship performs in time. If the christotelic instinct were merely a patristic curiosity, recoverable only by scholars reading Irenaeus or Cyril or Basil, its claim on Orthodox theology would be modest. But the tradition has never confined this hermeneutic to mere commentary. It sings it. Byzantine festal hymnography, as Bucur has shown in detail,

discerns the face of Christ in every theophany of Israel's Scriptures, and does so as the ordinary substance of the feasts. The Transfiguration hymns identify the Christ who shines on Tabor with the one who led Israel through the wilderness in the pillar of fire. The Theophany hymns have John shaken with awe at baptizing the creator of Adam, the God of Jacob, the God of Moses, the Lord who drowned the Egyptians in the sea. The Nativity hymns hold together, in a single line, that he who rained manna on the people in the wilderness is fed at his mother's breast. And the hymns of the Presentation hold the whole of it in a single hymn: the Ancient of Days, who in ages past gave Moses the Law on Sinai, appears this day as a babe, and as maker of the Law fulfills the Law, and according to the Law is brought into the Temple. Orthodox hymnography, more than any treatise, reveals a church whose imagination is saturated with Israel's story, and saturated in a manner that no proof-texting method could produce or sustain.

Consider the Great Canon of Andrew of Crete, chanted in four parts during the first week of Great Lent and again in its entirety in the fifth. Across some two hundred and fifty stanzas, the canon leads the penitent through the whole sweep of Scripture from Adam to the gospels. What is striking is not that it finds Christ in the Scriptures, which any christocentric reading does, but where it goes looking. Cain and Abel, Lamech, the daughters of Lot, the wives and concubines of Jacob, the judges, the kings and their sins: the canon dwells at length on figures that no scheme of messianic prophecy would ever have occasion to mention. Each becomes a mirror for the soul. "I have rivalled in transgression Adam the first-formed man," sings the penitent, and then works forward through Israel's entire history as though every episode of it were their own biography. And in a sense, it is, for the canon assumes that a gentile Christian in any time or place may say "we" of Israel's story because the Jew whose flesh he receives in the Eucharist said "I" of it first. The canon presumes that the whole narrative is spiritually inexhaustible, that no part of it is spent, and that a congregation can be expected to recognize names as obscure as Manoah or Ahitophel. This is christotelic reading not theorized but performed at a level of detail that would be unintelligible if Israel's story were mere scaffolding.

The same logic governs the structure of Orthodox worship at its most basic level. The canon, the principal hymnographic form of Matins, is built upon nine biblical canticles or odes: the two songs of Moses, the prayers of Hannah, Habakkuk, Isaiah, Jonah, and the prayer and song of the Three Youths, and the Magnificat, the Virgin Mary's recapitulation of Hannah's prayer. Every canon in the church's repertoire, for every feast and every saint, is composed to be sung against this armature. The church literally cannot structure her praise without Israel's songs as its skeleton. They are the shape into which all subsequent praise must be poured.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the vespertine Liturgy appointed to be served on the afternoon of Holy Saturday.²⁸ Fifteen readings from the Scriptures are appointed, beginning with the creation account and moving through the binding of Isaac, the Exodus, Jonah in his entirety, and the Three Youths in the furnace. The Exodus reading culminates in the Song of Moses, sung responsorially by the whole assembly: “For gloriously has he been glorified.” The church waits at the tomb, on the threshold of the resurrection, by rehearsing Israel’s story at length. The resurrection is proclaimed through the Exodus, and the length of these readings matters, because Pascha is not merely illustrated by Passover; it is Passover arriving at what it always meant. The one who rises is the one who kept that feast, and the church cannot announce his rising except in the words of the people whose feast it was.

The calendar makes the same confession. The two Sundays before the Nativity of Christ (Christmas) are given over to the commemoration of all the faithful of Israel, when the church proclaims as her gospel the Matthean genealogy in full, forty-two generations of Israel’s ancestry read aloud as the good news of the feast. Before she can announce that God has become human, she announces whose son he is, and does so at length, and calls it gospel. The prophets have their own saint’s days: Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, Moses himself. The Maccabean martyrs are commemorated on the first of August. And on the first of January, the Orthodox church keeps the feast of the Circumcision of the Lord, never suppressed or displaced, whose hymnography celebrates without embarrassment the creator’s own keeping of Torah in his own flesh, the first blood he shed for the salvation of the world. Here the Jewishness of Jesus is not a historical qualification of the incarnation but the content of a feast. That the church should mark the eighth day of the incarnation by singing of a Jewish rite performed on the body of God is precisely the sort of thing a christotelic hermeneutic makes intelligible and a christocentric one cannot.

Honesty requires a caveat. The same Triodion (the Lenten book of hymns) that gives us the Great Canon gives us, in the services of Holy Friday, hymns of bitter polemic against “the Jews” and “the lawless ones,” language that has done real harm and cannot be explained away. The argument here is not that Orthodox worship is innocent. It is that these polemical deposits sit in evident contradiction to the deeper logic of the tradition that carries them. A church that cannot sing without the songs of Moses, that keeps the feast of her Lord’s circumcision, that reads Israel’s whole story to greet the resurrection, has already confessed in her worship what her polemic denies. The hymns of contempt are not the tradition’s inner grammar; they are a betrayal of it, audible as such precisely because the surrounding liturgy testifies otherwise.

²⁸ This service, originally derived from the practice of Constantinople and retaining the form of the early church baptismal vigil, is the first of two paschal vigil services preserved in the Byzantine Rite. The second Easter vigil served at midnight comes from Jerusalem and mirrors the miracle of the light emerging from the darkness of the tomb of Christ.

The Jewishness of Jesus

What the church sings, the gospels record without embarrassment. Jesus lives Israel's covenantal life from within it, in detail, from the eighth day of his life to the last week of it.

On the eighth day he is circumcised (Luke 2:21), receiving in his flesh the sign given to Abraham (Genesis 17:12). This is not legal compliance recorded for the sake of completeness. Circumcision is the mark of belonging to the covenant people, and by receiving it the Word does not offer salvation to Israel from outside but takes his place within Israel, in the only way a Jewish male infant can. The flesh so marked is the flesh that will be broken and raised.

He is presented in the Temple (Luke 2:22-24), and Luke notes what his parents offer: two turtledoves or young pigeons, the sacrifice appointed for those who cannot afford a lamb. He enters Israel's covenantal life not at its comfortable center but among its poor. At twelve, the age at which a boy approaches responsibility for the commandments, he is found in the Temple among the teachers, listening and asking questions, and Luke says plainly that he "increased in wisdom" (Luke 2:46-52). The child is not a divinity in masquerade, temporarily condescending to a classroom. He is learning Torah, in the manner and at the age that Jewish boys learned it, and the wisdom that astonishes his hearers is wisdom formed in that study.

He goes to synagogue on the Sabbath, as Luke says, "according to his custom" (Luke 4:16). He goes up to Jerusalem for the feasts: Passover, Tabernacles (John 7), even the Dedication (John 10:22), which no commandment required. And when he argues, he argues as a Jew arguing with Jews about how Torah is rightly kept. The Sabbath controversies are the clearest case. He does not propose that the Sabbath be set aside; he contends about what the Sabbath is for, and he contends from within the tradition's own resources, citing David and the bread of the Presence (Mark 2:25-26) and appealing to the principle that the Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27). When he is asked for the greatest commandment, he answers with a double commandment of love founded in the Shema and Leviticus 19:18 (Mark 12:29-31), and the scribe who asked agrees with him, repeating the answer back approvingly, an exchange Jesus closes by telling him he is not far from the kingdom of God. This is Torah discussed among those for whom Torah is theirs.²⁹

Jesus is often called the "living Torah," and in a christotelic reading the phrase means more than moral exemplar. Torah, instruction, is the revelation of God's will made tangible in the life of Israel, and it was tangible there long before Nazareth. What the incarnation brings is a single life in which that instruction is wholly kept. His actions uphold the commandments from within: healing on the Sabbath presses the Sabbath's own purpose to its furthest reach; his self-offering at Passover is the sacrifice of one who has kept the feast all his life. The Temple was where God

²⁹ The rabbinic tradition of summarizing Torah in a single principle is best known from Hillel's reply in *b. Shabbat* 31a, though the redaction is much later than the gospels and the parallel is one of form rather than precise content.

dwelt, and Israel knew it. What Christians confess is that the same dwelling is met in the flesh of a Jewish man, and that in him it opens to the nations (John 2:19-21).³⁰

The Sabbath can only be brought to its purpose by someone who keeps Sabbaths; the Passover can only be brought to its purpose by someone who eats it. His Jewishness is not the setting in which the telos was reached. It is the material of what was completed.³¹ And what he assumed he has not laid aside.

Implications for Orthodox Theology and Life

The Continuing Jewishness of Christ

A christotelic approach reorients christology itself. The hypostatic union joins the eternal Word to the specific humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew under Torah. His obedience (Philippians 2:8) is obedience within that covenantal framework. His passion recapitulates Israel's exodus, exile, and restoration. His resurrection is the vindication of Israel's hope. When Orthodox theology speaks of Christ as the new Adam, it should not imagine a figure severed from Abraham. The humanity he gathers to himself is the covenantal humanity formed through Israel and now embracing people from every nation. Universality arises from particularity: because he is truly "the Holy One of Israel" (Canon of the Resurrection for tone one), he can become the savior of all.

Nor does the resurrection reverse the incarnation. The risen Lord remains the Jewish Jesus. Glorification does not erase his humanity; the marks of the nails remain (John 20:27). The ascended Christ is not a de-Judaized abstraction but a son of David seated at the right hand of the Father, and the body received in the Eucharist is not generic flesh but the flesh of a Jewish man, circumcised on the eighth day. Through the Jewish flesh of Jesus, humanity is deified; through Israel's history, the world is redeemed.

This emphasis also enriches Mariology. The Theotokos stands as the daughter of Zion in whom Israel's faith reaches fruition. Her fiat gathers up the obedience of the prophets; her womb becomes the meeting place of covenant and creation. Every hymn about her resounds with the faith of Israel.

The same logic extends to the sacraments. Orthodox sacramental realism has always read the material signs of Israel's covenantal life—water and oil and bread and blood—as belonging to the same divine economy within which the mysteries

³⁰ The Temple itself embodied Israel's universal vocation. While access to its inner courts reflected Israel's covenantal calling and the distinctions of ritual holiness, the Court of the Gentiles witnessed to the expectation that the nations, too, would come to worship the God of Israel (cf. Isaiah 2:2–4; 56:6–8; Zechariah 14:16). Jesus's cleansing of the Temple is directed precisely toward preserving that vocation: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17).

³¹ The intuition that a tradition can be fulfilled only from within has philosophical parallels in Alasdair MacIntyre's understanding of traditions as historically extended, socially embodied arguments. Here that intuition is developed theologically: the incarnation fulfills Israel's covenantal life not by replacing it from without but by assuming it from within. On MacIntyre, see especially *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

of the church are celebrated. But a christotelic reading construes this relation teleologically rather than allegorically. These are the same realities gathered into the church's sacramental life without ceasing to be the realities through which God had already formed Israel: baptism understood through the flood and the Red Sea, the Eucharist celebrated within the horizon of Passover and the coming kingdom. The more fully the church reads Israel's Scriptures in their literal, material concreteness, the more sacramental her theology becomes. Matter is not discarded but glorified; history is not left behind but transfigured.

The Church within Israel's Story

If God's covenantal work in Israel is gathered and affirmed rather than replaced, classical replacement theology cannot stand. Fulfillment in this sense is not succession, and Paul's image in Romans 11 conveys the logic exactly. Gentile believers are wild branches grafted among the natural branches of a cultivated olive tree. The life of the branches depends on the root, and the root is Israel. "Do not boast over the branches," Paul warns; "you do not support the root, but the root supports you" (Romans 11:18). God's gifts and calling are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). The church lives by grace as those grafted into Israel's covenantal life, not in triumph over it.

Orthodox Christian identity is therefore inseparable from Israel's vocation. The church's Scriptures are Israel's Scriptures, extended by the midrashic commentary of the apostolic witness. Her worship is rooted in Israel's festivals: Pascha, in which Christians confess the Passover story reaching its messianic horizon, and Pentecost, in which the gift first given at Sinai is extended to the nations through the Spirit. Her theological language of covenant, sacrifice, priesthood, and kingdom is Israel's inheritance transfigured by the grace God now extends to the whole world. She is not a new people detached from the old but the ingathering of the nations into the covenant of Abraham, made "fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). Chosen, as Israel was, for service, the church inherits the mission to be a light to the nations precisely by being grafted into the people to whom that mission was first given. This ought to ground Orthodox ecclesiology in gratitude rather than triumphalism. The church is not God's new plan, but a part of God's ancient plan brought toward its telos.

What, then, of Israel after Christ? Paul's argument in Romans 9 through 11 resists both triumphalism and relativism. Israel remains the elect people, bearing witness to God's fidelity. Paul envisions a mystery of mutual mercy in which Israel's stumbling³² opens salvation to the nations and the faith of the gentiles will in

³² Read through the lens of replacement theology, the "stumbling" is Israel's supposed rejection of Christ leading to being replaced by the gentiles. Yet Paul specifically excludes that. A more careful interpretation is that the stumbling consists of a failure to realize that the resurrection of Jesus is the sign that the age to come has been inaugurated and the long-awaited ingathering of the nations to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob alongside the people of Israel is beginning. It is that change of *time*, not of faith, that Paul fears his fellow Jews have missed, and it is precisely his ministry to the gentiles that he hopes will provoke them to jealousy. See Mark Nanos, "The Gifts and the Calling of

turn provoke Israel to renewed faithfulness. The drama is ongoing, and its resolution is God's to give. Orthodox theology, with its emphasis on theosis and a salvation narrative of new creation rather than juridical categories, is well suited to articulate this hope: the goal is not substitution but communion. From a christotelic perspective, Jewish observance today—Sabbath, Passover, and the study of Torah—is a living witness to God's continuing faithfulness to Israel.³³ It reminds the church that divine election is not an abandoned chapter of salvation history but an abiding reality, and that Christians themselves have been grafted into a covenantal life they did not create.

This raises the question that any Christian honoring of Torah must eventually face: does a christotelic reading imply renewed obligation to the commandments? The apostolic witness confronted this directly. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) concluded that gentiles, grafted among the natural branches through faith in Christ, participate in Israel's covenantal life without assuming the distinctive covenantal obligations entrusted to Israel. Paul's paradoxical language, upholding the law while not being under the law (Romans 3:31; 6:14), expresses the balance. Paul can therefore speak of love as expressing Torah's deepest intention (Romans 13:10); its commandments, re-read in the light of the Spirit, shape the life of grace. For Orthodox Christians this means that fasting, prayer, and almsgiving remain deeply rooted in the sanctifying practices of Israel's Scriptures. Christians receive these disciplines not as replacements for Torah but as forms of life shaped by the Christ whom they confess and by the gift of the Spirit. Christotelic reading thus affirms Torah's holiness without asserting its jurisdiction over gentiles. For the church the Lord's Day is celebrated as the resurrection's first day, while Christians understand it in continuity with the Sabbath that formed Israel's covenantal life.³⁴ Baptism marks covenantal belonging for those who come from the nations, as circumcision has continued to mark it for Israel; each marks covenantal belonging within its own people. The church's liturgy, ethics, and common life remain profoundly Torah-shaped.

God Are Irrevocable' (Romans 11:29): If So, How Can Paul Declare that 'Not All Israelites Truly Belong to Israel' (9:6)?" *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 11, no. 1 (September 2016), 1–17. See also Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian* (HarperOne, 2009), especially chapters 8–10; Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford, 2016); and, more broadly, Matthew V. Novenson, *Paul, Then and Now* (Eerdmans, 2022).

³³ Michael Wyschogrod argues that God's election remains embodied in the continuing people Israel and cannot be reduced to a merely historical phenomenon. See *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel*, 2nd ed. (Fordham University Press, 2004), especially chapters 1–3.

³⁴ The Orthodox liturgical tradition has never treated the Sabbath as though it simply disappeared into Sunday. Saturday remains Sabbath (*Sabbaton*) in the language of every Orthodox tradition and retains its own distinct liturgical character. Apart from the "Great and Holy Sabbath" (Holy Saturday), it is never observed as a fast day, but always a liturgical day on which the eucharist can be celebrated. Throughout the year it is associated with rest, with the commemoration of the departed, and with the gathering of the Christian community, preserving something of the Sabbath's character even as Sunday celebrates the new creation inaugurated by the resurrection. The relationship between Sabbath and the Lord's Day is therefore one of liturgical continuity and differentiation rather than replacement.

Reading and Praying with Israel

If every part of Israel's Scriptures finds its telos in Christ, Christians should seek to understand those Scriptures in their Jewish fullness. Jewish exegesis, ancient and medieval and modern, offers insights that deepen rather than threaten Christian faith. Rabbinic commentary reveals how the Torah educates desire and shapes communal holiness. The Talmud's meticulous reasoning about Torah can teach Christians how seriously to treat revelation; midrashic imagination can illuminate how Scripture invites participation. True dialogue respects difference. Jews read Torah as covenantal life; Christians read it also as a teleological narrative. Studying together need not blur conviction; it can purify understanding. The christotelic reader approaches such study not as an outsider explaining someone else's book but as one learning the language of his own faith's first grammar.

The gain is christological and not merely contextual. Jesus's parables share the texture of rabbinic *mashal*; his beatitudes resonate with the Psalms and the wisdom tradition; his prayer is Israel's prayer, and he dies with the Psalter on his lips (Psalm 22:1; 31:5). Every advance in our understanding of Second Temple Judaism is an advance in our understanding of him, and the anxiety that historical scholarship might somehow dissolve the Christ of faith into a first-century Galilean is precisely the anxiety a christotelic reading dispels. The Galilean is what the Word became. To learn more about him is to learn more about God's own act.

This has consequences for how Orthodox Christians read their own New Testament. Jesus's polemics against scribes and Pharisees, and the Johannine references to "the Jews," have too often been abstracted from their intra-Jewish setting and heard as divine verdicts against a rejected people. Restored to context, they appear as arguments within a diverse and sometimes conflicted family. The gospels portray Jesus as a participant in contemporary halakhic debates about Sabbath boundaries, purity, divorce, and Temple practice; his arguments differ in emphasis, not in kind. The fourth gospel reflects a painful process of separation, however historians reconstruct it, rather than a repudiation of Israel. Reading these texts christotelically reintegrates them into the single covenantal story. The Messiah's controversies are the climax of Israel's long struggle to discern God's will and they belong within the biblical pattern of prophetic confrontation. Israel wrestles with God and yet remains chosen. The church that forgets this wrestle misreads both Scripture and herself.

Dialogue, on this account, is a christological obligation. If Jesus reprises Israel's experience in his own person, then engagement with his people is intrinsic to fidelity to him. This does not mean collapsing distinctions or relativizing confession; it means engaging the living heirs of the covenant whose Scriptures the church receives also as her own. It also requires honesty about how often the church's members have twisted those Scriptures into weapons. Repentance for anti-Judaism is not an external concession to modern sensibility but a purification of theological vision.

For the christotelic lens exposes anti-Judaism as more than a moral failing. It is a doctrinal distortion. If the Word became Jewish flesh, then contempt for Jews

is contempt for the flesh of the incarnation. The fathers condemned Docetism, the denial of Christ's real humanity, as heresy; anti-Judaism is its cousin, refusing in practice the concrete humanity that Christ assumed.³⁵ To despise the Jewish people is to forget that salvation is "from the Jews" (John 4:22) and to sever the church from her own root. The branch that curses its root denies the sap that gives it life. For Orthodox Christian pastors and theologians, teaching the faithful to honor Israel's continuing vocation is therefore an act of doctrinal fidelity.

The Eschatological Horizon

Christotelic reading is finally eschatological, for *telos* means not only goal but culmination and completion. *Israel's story, and the church's with it, moves toward the transfiguration of all creation in the life of the age to come.* In Orthodox eschatology the future is already at work in the present: the resurrection inaugurates the new creation and the liturgy manifests it sacramentally, yet the fulfillment remains open. "Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Romans 8:19). The church's hope therefore includes the hope of Israel's renewal.

This continuity is the Spirit's work. The same Spirit who inspired the prophets overshadows the Virgin, descends at Pentecost, and abides in the church, so that no era of Israel's life can be thought devoid of grace. Divine pedagogy is continuous, and the faithful who meditate on the Psalms or the Prophets are drawn into a dialogue between God and his people that has never lapsed.

Maximus speaks of the *anakephalaiōsis*, the recapitulation of all things, in which distinctions are not obliterated but harmonized. In that final unity, Israel's election and the church's mission will appear as two movements of one divine symphony. The nations will not replace Israel but join her song. Three affirmations hold the vision together. Revelation is one, for the same Logos acts throughout history, revealing himself truly through Israel and in a concrete person in the incarnation. Israel is indispensable, since every element of her life, Torah and worship and prophecy alike, has its own meaning, and all are caught up in Christ. And particularity is permanent, because universal salvation comes not by erasing difference but by transfiguring it: the Jewishness of Jesus endures eternally as the form of divine-human communion.

Conclusion: The Whole Story Matters

The contemporary call to recover the Jewishness of Jesus is welcome, yet its transformative potential depends on how Scripture itself is read. Whenever Christians approach the Scriptures christocentrically, mining them for predictions that prove Jesus's identity, his Jewishness will remain superficial, a matter of origin rather than essence. A christotelic hermeneutic sees the entire history of Israel as purposeful, continuous, and indispensable. In that light, the Jewishness of Jesus becomes the theological key to the incarnation itself.

³⁵ The analogy is heuristic rather than historical.

The Orthodox Christian tradition, with its teleological and sacramental understanding of history, holds the resources for such reading, though the fathers themselves held them unsteadily. Irenaeus said, “extension and increase, but not abrogation,” and also that God gave Israel statutes that were not good. Cyril read a mildewed wall as inexhaustible divine speech and concluded that the wall was the synagogue. Basil found the Spirit in every page of Israel’s history and then declared the prophets silenced. What none of the Eastern fathers managed, a censured Donatist layman saw plainly and Augustine, cornered by a Manichee, argued his way to: that the same Law was given, first to Israel and then to the nations, and that the Jews were right to keep all these things. Then Augustine surrendered the theophanies as acts of the Logos, and the East, which kept them as such, sang contempt for the people among whom they were given. The pattern is consistent and it is instructive. The method is sound; what corrupts it is the wish to have Israel’s Scriptures without Israel.

What held, where doctrine did not, was worship. The church cannot sing without the songs of Moses, cannot greet the resurrection without rehearsing the Exodus, cannot number her days without the prophets and the forefathers of Christ. What the fathers articulated unevenly, the liturgy performs in time. To read christotelically is therefore not to invent a new method but to recover what the church’s own worship has never stopped confessing. Whatever contempt has accumulated in the tradition’s polemical deposits, the christotelic vision of its worship calls the church to remember what her theology has too often forgotten: that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is her God; that the Theotokos, the apostles, and the first martyrs were Jews; that every sacrament is rooted in Israel’s covenantal life. In remembering, she learns to speak of Israel not as “they” but as the people among whom she has been grafted, for it is from that story that her own life flows.

The telos, in the end, is what decides this. A story that culminates in an *event* can be completed from outside itself, and a Messiah who completes it need not have lived it. A story that culminates in a *person* who assumed Israel’s covenantal flesh can be completed only from within, by someone who kept the Sabbaths and ate the Passover and argued about the commandments as one with standing to argue. That distinction carries the whole argument, and it is why the Jewishness of Jesus is not a fact about his origins but the form of what he continues to accomplish.

Above all, the christotelic vision restores wonder. It teaches the faithful to see their own lives within the story that began with Abraham’s call, so that every baptism becomes a crossing of the Red Sea, every eucharist a participation in Passover, every Lenten fast a wandering in the wilderness toward the land of promise. It reveals that the incarnation was the goal of creation, that Israel’s long life with God was the world’s blessing from the first, that the God who chose one people promised from the beginning that in them all the families of the earth would be blessed. The universality of salvation is achieved not by erasing particularity but by entering it fully. God became the Jew Jesus so that all humanity might be united in him. To confess that truth is to reject every form of anti-Judaism and every theology of replacement, and to proclaim instead that the covenant endures, that God’s fidelity is irrevocable, and that the church’s very existence depends on it. The gospel’s

good news is not that Israel's story has ended but that, through Israel's Messiah, the blessing promised to Abraham has embraced the nations.

The last word belongs to Paul, whose own life embodied this mystery: "Has God rejected his people? By no means!" (Romans 11:1). To read Scripture christotelically is to take that declaration seriously, and to see in Israel's election the shape of God's unwavering love. To confess the Word made flesh is to confess the Word made Jewish flesh; to celebrate Pascha is to celebrate the Passover whose promise embraces the whole creation; to belong to the church is to be grafted among the natural branches of Abraham's covenant. The whole story matters, because in the whole story the faithfulness of God is revealed, and because the God who called Abraham has never ceased to keep his promises.