THE EXEGETICAL METHODS OF SOME SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ROMAN CATHOLIC PREACHERS IN ENGLAND: FISHER, PERYN, BONNER, AND WATSON

PART II*

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In Part I of this series, I provided an overview of the preaching careers of the four Catholic preachers here under consideration— John Fisher (d. 1535), William Peryn (d. 1558), Edmund Bonner (d. 1569), and Thomas Watson (d. 1584). I also dealt with their use of allegory, noting that although the later preachers Bonner and Watson made little genuine attempt to exegete passages of Scripture, they did move away from the more thoroughgoing use of allegory noticeable in the sermons of Fisher and Peryn. The doctrinal stance of all four preachers was the same and did not undergo modification because of the methodological change—a

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*Part I was published in *AUSS* 23 (1985): 161-180. The following abbreviated forms are used herein for works already cited in Part I:

Bonner = Edmund Bonner, *A Profitable and Necessary Doctrine* (Ann Arbor, Mich., University Microfilms, STC no. 3283, 1555).

DNB = *Dictionary of National Biography.*

Fisher, *EW* = John Fisher, *The English Works of John Fisher,* ed. John E. B. Mayor, Early English Text Society, Extra Series, no. 27 (London, 1876).

Fisher, *TFS* = John Fisher, *Two Fruytfull Sermons* (Ann Arbor, Mich., University Microfilms, STC no. 10909, 1532).

ODCC = *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church.*

Peryn = William Peryn, *Thre godlye and notable sermons* (Ann Arbor, Mich., University Microfilms, STC no. 19789, 1548).

Surtz = Edward Surtz, *The Works and Days of John Fisher* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

Watson, *HCD* = Thomas Watson, *Holsome and Catholyke doctryne concerninge the seuen sacramentes* (Ann Arbor, Mich., University Microfilms, STC no. 25112, 1558);

Watson, *TNS* = Thomas Watson, *Two notable Sermons made . . . before the Quenes Highnes . . .* (Ann Arbor, Mich., University Microfilms, STC no. 25112, 1558).

change which, on the part of Bonner and Watson was undoubtedly intended to address more effectively the "literal" interpretations of the Protestant Reformers.

In the present article I will continue my analysis of the preaching methods of the four preachers, noting specifically their procedures with regard to (1) typology, (2) literal exposition of Scripture, (3) redaction, (4) use of patristic sources, and (5) appeal to classical antiquity.

1. *Typology*

Typology, which borders upon and merges into allegory, is relatively common in Fisher's early sermons and in Peryn's sermons. But this exegetical method is quite rare in Fisher's later sermons and in those of Bonner and Watson. With the exception of Peryn's, the apologetic sermons of these preachers tended to diverge from the interpretive methods of the late Middle Ages. Peryn's sermons were specifically designed to answer heresy. He was concerned by the news that "the horrible heresye, of Berengary and Wikclyfe sacramentaries abbomynable was raysed agayne, of late, and by meanes of evell and pestiferous bookes crept secretlye into the hartes of manye of the yonger and carnall sort."[1] Yet his exegetical method, unlike that of Fisher, Bonner, and Watson in their apologetic sermons, makes large use of allegory and considerable use of typology.

Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the resurgence of Catholicism in England in the latter years of Henry VIII's reign. Peryn's sermons were first published in 1546.[2] Hence they were possibly preached in the preceding year. These were years of reaction against Protestantism, when most Englishmen still regarded themselves as Roman Catholic, and when the methods of biblical interpretation generally accepted in England involved allegory and typology. Although Fisher's controversial sermons made scant use of these techniques, they did make some use of them. The fact that his 1520 sermons, in which allegory was quite well represented, were not published until 1532 would indicate that

[1]Peryn, sig. Aii^r.
[2]*DNB*, "Peryn."

Fisher and his contemporaries by this latter year were by no means weaned away from allegorical interpretations. Evidently Fisher had seen that allegory and typology were not best suited to answering the heretics, even though those methods were quite acceptable to himself. Either Peryn lacked insight into the kind of approach most likely to win his opponents, or he felt sufficiently comfortable in using a time-honored method which, at the point of his preaching, was acceptable to the majority of Englishmen.

By far the greatest instance of typology in Fisher's sermons is to be found in his *Fruytful Sayings of David,* the sermons on the penitential psalms, preached in 1504 and first published in 1508. Preaching on Ps 51, Fisher argues that animal sacrifices in the OT sanctuary services prefigured the shedding of the blood of Christ. He cites the book of Hebrews chaps. 9 and 10 in support of his contention.[3] His typology merges into allegory when he proceeds to use the OT types as the "old-law" counterpart of the sacrament of penance as practiced in his day.[4] In another context, Fisher briefly narrates the parable of the good Samaritan and uses it in a biblical manner to represent the condition of the soul wounded by sin but delivered by Christ.[5] Fisher also uses the story of the Syrophoenician woman (Matt 15:21-28) to illustrate the Christian's pleading with God to hear his petitions.[6]

In his 1521 sermon against Luther, Fisher makes an appeal to the Mosaic system: "But so it is that the lawe of Moyses & the gouernaunce of the synagoge of the Iewes, was but a shadowe of the gouernaunce of the vnyuersall chirche of christ."[7] As evidence he quotes Heb 10:1, which in context says nothing of the government of the church. Then he provides the application. In the government of Israel there were two heads appointed, Moses and Aaron, to lead them through the wilderness to the promised land. But the Jews were but "a shadow of the chrystn people." Their journey was a type of the journey of Christians through this wretched world to heaven. Therefore, Moses and Aaron must be

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[3]Fisher, *EW,* 1:126-127.
[4]Ibid., p. 127; cf. pp. 130-131, 136.
[5]Ibid., pp. 141-142.
[6]Ibid., pp. 143-145.
[7]Ibid., p. 315.

regarded as "the shadowe of chryste & of his vycare saynt Peter whiche vnder christ was also the heed of chrysten people."[8]

It is interesting to note that Fisher rejected the OT Mosaic law in his 1504 sermons, but now found it most useful in 1521 as justification for his concept of the papal primacy. In fact, both instances illustrate how typology very readily merges into allegory. Although Fisher's arguments in his 1521 sermon did not make wholesale use of allegory, his typological applications were so tenuous that they verged on allegory of the late-medieval variety.

William Peryn employs typology quite extensively. He quotes Origen as his authority for the claim that the passing of the children of Israel through the Red Sea was a type of Christian baptism.[9] The water that came from the rock in the wilderness prefigured the "water of eternall lyfe whiche gushed out of the syde of Christ."[10] The manna with which the Jews were fed was a figure of the literal body of Christ which is partaken of in the sacrament of the altar.[11] The sacraments of the Christian Church are the antitype of the Mosaic law.[12] The bread and wine brought to Abraham by Melchizedek after the war of the kings (Gen 14:17-20) was a type of Christ's "very bodye and bloode in the blessed sacrament, under the kyndes of bread and wyne."[13] Peryn cites Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:1-19 to prove that Melchizedek was a type of Christ. The sacrifices of the "old law" were pre-enactments of the sacrifice of Christ.[14] The paschal lamb eaten by the Jews at passover time was a figure of Christ as our Passover Lamb.[15] Indeed, many of Peryn's applications are simply reiterations of biblical motifs, but he also goes beyond the intention of his sources to bolster his doctrinal presuppositions.

In the sermons of Bonner and Watson, there is very little of typological exegesis. As noted in my previous article, they

[8]Ibid., p. 316.
[9]Peryn, sig. Ev[v].
[10]Ibid.
[11]Ibid., sig. Evi[r].
[12]Ibid.
[13]Ibid., sig. Evii[r].
[14]Ibid., sigs. Evii[r-v], liv[v].
[15]Ibid., sig. lvi[v].

used scriptural proof texts to support their world view, evidently realizing that the allegorical and typological approaches of past generations were inadequate to turn the tide of Protestant influence that swept England in the reign of Edward VI.[16] Yet, Watson's *Holsome and Catholyke doctryne concerninge the seuen sacramentes* (1558) does appeal to the argument of his predecessors that the sacraments of the Mosaic system were intended to prefigure the sacraments of the Christian church.[17] Christian baptism, he argues, was typified by Noah's flood as well as the passing of Israel through the Red Sea.[18] Watson's typology becomes distinctively allegorical when he uses the placing of the blood of the paschal lamb upon the two posts of the door as a type of Christ's blood "sprinkled upon both the postes of our doore, when it is received not onelye wyth the mouth of the body for redemption, but also with the mouth of the hearte for imitation."[19]

2. *Literal Exposition of Scripture*

Scriptural exposition, like interpretation of any literature, cannot be regarded as "literal" just because it is not allegorical or typological. Surely, literal interpretation is that which says exactly what the author of the particular literature intended to say. Because there is little allegory or typology in the homilies of Bonner and Watson, it does not follow that their interpretations are all literal. This point will become more evident as we proceed. Nevertheless, there are parts of the sermons of Fisher, Bonner, and Watson which can be regarded as a genuine attempt to explicate the literal meaning of the text. It would be an exaggeration to claim, however, that this is the most characteristic exegetical method employed in their sermons. Fisher's interpretations, as we have seen, were quite characteristically allegorical or typological, and Bonner and Watson often used biblical passages in a manner which was quite unrepresentative of their meaning in context.

[16]Part I in this series, pp. 178-180. (See the first note [marked by *] at the beginning of the present article.)

[17]Watson, *HCD*, fols. vi^v-vii^r.

[18]Ibid., fol. ix^r.

[19]Ibid., fol. xli^r.

In the introduction to his sermons on the penitential psalms, Fisher does make some attempt to put the literature into its historical setting. He tells the background story of David, who was the youngest and least significant of Jesse's sons. Nevertheless, he was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel as king.[20] Fisher proceeds to tell the stories of David and Saul, and David and Goliath. Because of the guidance and protection he had enjoyed, when David became king he should have remained humble and pure. But he committed adultery and manslaughter. Although he was forgiven for all this, he fell into the sin of pride. Again he was forgiven. Fisher indicates that the penitential psalms depict for us the efforts of David to gain forgiveness and cleansing at a time of physical and spiritual calamity.[21]

When preaching the funeral sermon of Henry VII in 1509, Fisher quite literally interpreted Isaiah and Ezekiel on the issue of repentance and forgiveness.[22] He applied the message of Ecclesiastes, in regard to the vanity of this life's activities, to the circumstances of Henry VII.[23] Fisher illustrated loyalty to the monarch by referring to David's servant who refused to forsake him in time of crisis, and Saul's servant who committed suicide on the field of battle after the king had set the example. The moral issue raised by Fisher's use of this incident is interesting, but he did not misrepresent the biblical account.[24] In the same sermon, Fisher quoted 1 John 1:9 to indicate that God forgives sin, and alluded to 1 John 2:1 and 1 Tim 2:5 as support for the concept of Christ as the heavenly mediator.[25]

Preaching the "Month's Mind of the Lady Margaret" in 1509, Fisher gave literal applications of passages from the Psalms and from Jeremiah.[26] His sermon on the Passion contained literal applications of Mary Magdalene's act of anointing Christ at the feast in

[20]Fisher, *EW*, 1:3.
[21]Ibid., pp. 5-7.
[22]Ibid., p. 275.
[23]Ibid., p. 279.
[24]Ibid., pp. 280-281.
[25]Ibid., p. 282.
[26]Ibid., p. 298.

Simon's house, the story of the woman taken in adultery, the story of the crucifixion, and the story of Tamar, who was raped by her brother Amnon (2 Kgs 13).[27]

Bonner sometimes used scriptural passages in a manner which is in no way contrary to their contextual meanings. He provided a literal interpretation of Ps 100 and Gen 1,[28] and of the narrative portions of Gen 2 and 3.[29] Even his use of Rom 5:12-21 stays by a literal exposition of the text, avoiding the extreme Augustinian concept of guilt biologically transmitted.[30] Bonner told the story of the Flood with no attempt to embellish the account or to read allegorical meanings into it.[31] He used Rom 3 and Gal 3 to teach the universality of sin.[32] He quoted Ps 51:5 to prove that David was born in sin. And so on. It was when Bonner broached the controversial issues raised by the Reformation that he allowed his scriptural interpretations to become strained.

Watson, like Bonner, cannot be regarded as famous for literal exposition of the Bible, but it occurs occasionally in his sermons. He briefly outlines the life story of Peter in the fifth sermon of his *Holsome and Catholyke doctryne* (1558).[33] He refers in a quite literal manner to the Bible concept of Lucifer's being cast out of heaven and man's being ejected from Paradise.[34] Watson uses the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son in the same way that Luke does (Luke 15).[35] He deduces the obvious moral from 1 Cor 5, which deals with the problem of incest in the Corinthian church.[36] When he refers to the Sermon on the Mount, Watson treats it quite literally.[37]

[27]Ibid., pp. 404, 416-418.
[28]Bonner, fol. 2ᵛ.
[29]Ibid., fols. 4ʳ-6ʳ.
[30]Ibid., fol. 6ʳ.
[31]Ibid., fols. 8ʳ⁻ᵛ.
[32]Ibid., fols. 8ᵛ-9ʳ.
[33]Watson, *HCD*, fols. xxviᵛ-xxviiʳ.
[34]Ibid., fol. xxxᵛ.
[35]Ibid., fol. xxxxʳ⁻ᵛ.
[36]Ibid., fol. xciʳ.
[37]Ibid., fol. cxxxiiiʳ⁻ᵛ.

3. *Redaction*

Redaction, in the sense of editorial embellishment, is not frequent in the homilies of these sixteenth-century Roman Catholic preachers. In this respect, their sermons reveal a marked evolution of method from that of the late Middle Ages, when homiletical embellishment was an accepted procedure. In the sixteenth-century sermons there are no examples of legends and fabulous miracle-stories that were used to supplement the biblical account in the Middle Ages.

There are a few examples of redaction in the sermons of John Fisher. Speaking on the first penitential psalm (Ps 6), Fisher declares that David prayed that God would neither "punysshe hum eternally by the paynes of hell, neyther . . . correcte hym by the paynes of purgatorie but to be meke and mercifull unto hym."[38] Ps 6 does not refer to David's likely punishment in hell (*Sheol*), nor does it once mention purgatory. Later in the same sermon Fisher cites the Vulgate version of Ps 6:1 as though it were referring to purgatory; and in commenting on vs. 5—"For in death there is no remembrance of thee, in Sheol who can give thee praise?"—he paraphrases:

> . . . therfore the prophete sayth, . . . No creature beynge in purgatory may have the in remembraunce as he sholde. Then syth it is so that in purgatorye we can not laude and prayse god how shal we do yf we be in hell, truely in that terryble place no creature shall neyther loue god, neyther laude him.[39]

Clearly Fisher has read his theological presuppositions into the text.

The "Month's Mind of the Lady Margaret" embellishes the life story of Martha so that she might be depicted as an ancient counterpart of the Lady Margaret. Martha is said to have been commended in ordering her soul to God by frequent kneelings, sorrowful weepings, and continual prayers and meditations, "wherein this noble prynces somwhat toke her part."[40]

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[38]Fisher, *EW*, 1:8.
[39]Ibid., p. 16.
[40]Ibid., p. 294.

The story of Adam is embellished too. The *Two Fruytfull Sermons*, published in 1532, contain the information that, because he had eaten the apple, Adam was kept after death for three thousand years in a prison of darkness (*limbus patru*).[41]

Editorial embellishment in the sermons of Peryn, Bonner, and Watson is closely related to their distinctive interpretations of the text, rather than being a conscious attempt to add to the Bible account. For example, interpreting 1 Cor 5:7-8, which enjoins a right attitude upon those who are to partake of the Lord's Supper, Peryn comments that it should not be eaten or received "with the olde leaven, neither with the leaven of malice, neither with the leaven of wyckednes, That is to say, in obstinate Jewishnes or froward heresie, neither with wicked myne, or unpure lyfe."[42]

The "obstinate Jewishness" and "froward heresie" are Peryn's understanding of "the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil" (1 Cor 5:8). This kind of redaction is quite common in Peryn, Bonner, and Watson. The obvious intent is to render the text of Scripture relevant to the contemporary situation. The effort results in the preachers reading into the text meanings and applications which were not intended by the author.

The method becomes especially potent when the issue being discussed is controversial. Bonner, for example, uses the scriptural passages which speak of Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit to his disciples as evidence that the Spirit was given to the church forever, not to individuals apart from the church. Therefore, he concludes, the individual has no right to arrive at interpretations of the Bible contrary to those of the papal church.[43]

By reading his ecclesiastical presuppositions into the text, Bonner is able to use it to support his claims. In support of his concept of the sacrament of the altar, Watson speaks of Christ's walk to Emmaus, after his resurrection, with two of his disciples. The meal at the end of the journey, Watson says, represents the sacrament of the altar because, as Augustine pointed out, the eyes of the two disciples were opened, just as our eyes are opened when

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[41]Fisher, *TFS*, sig. F3ᵛ.

[42]Peryn, sigs. Fivᵛ-Fvʳ.

[43]Bonner, fols. 37ʳ-39ʳ.

we partake of the sacrament.[44] The interpretation is redactional in that there is no indication in Luke 24:30-31 that the bread which Christ broke and gave to the two disciples was "the blessed bread which is the sacrament of the aultare."[45] The passage seems to be referring simply to an evening meal.

This kind of redactional interpretation of the Bible has been common in every era of Christian church history and has undoubtedly been practiced by every denomination. In the sixteenth century, redactional exegesis was both the result and the source of religious division: the result, in that it was used as a tool for the defense of opinions already well-established in the minds of interpreters; the source, in that the failure of interpreters to confine themselves to the strict contextual meanings of scriptural passages resulted in endless polemical debate and acrimonious vilification.

4. *Use of the Fathers*

Each of our four preachers quite often referred to the early-church Fathers and medieval doctors as a source of authoritative interpretations of the Bible. At the funeral of Henry VII, Fisher appealed to Augustine's teaching that "the prayer of many can not be but herde."[46] Henry would have great comfort in Augustine's doctrine of divine forgiveness, which was that no amount of crime nor the nearness of the individual to death could exclude him from pardon if he truly repented. St. Anthony was the recipient of special revelation: "Saynt Anthony sawe by reuelacyon that all the worlde was full of snares, and he asked this questyon. Blessyd lorde sayd he who shall passe these daungers? It was answered him *Sola humilitas*, Onely humblenes and lowlynesse."[47]

Preaching the "Month's Mind of the Lady Margaret," Fisher cites Boethius on the question of loyalty to the virtuous manners of noble ancestors.[48] On the authority of Bonaventure, Lady Margaret's acts of charity to the twelve poor folk she kept in her house were of

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[44]Watson, *TNS*, sigs. Eii^v-Eiii^r.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Fisher, *EW*, 1:273.

[47]Ibid., pp. 283-284.

[48]Ibid., p. 290.

greater merit than if she had done "all this to the selfe persone of our sauyour Ihesu." [49] Fisher gleaned from St. Gregory the teaching that whoever has enjoyed the pleasures of life after death, as Lazarus did, can only regard this earthly life as a living death. [50]

Edward Surtz virtually admits that Fisher regarded the church and the Fathers to be as authoritative as the Scriptures in theological and religious matters, pointing out that Fisher had difficulty, in particular, with the "demand that controversies be settled by Scripture alone." [51] When the meaning of Scripture is in doubt, whose explanation is to be accepted? Surtz indicates that to this question "Fisher's response is most definite: first, the Sovereign Pontiffs; then, the orthodox Fathers and authors; and finally the preachers who faithfully and assiduously minister the word of God to the people." [52]

On the relationship between the Fathers and Scripture, Fisher asserted that "the Scriptures are surer and stronger in themselves, the commentaries the better known and clearer in our regard, for the Fathers throw light on obscure places in the Scriptures." [53] In his *Defense of the Royal Assertion*, Fisher argued that faith must be placed in that interpretation of the Bible on which the Fathers are uniformly agreed. [54] In fact, this interpretation is more certain than the words of the Gospel as they stand. Surtz summarizes Fisher's overall position as follows:

> It belongs to the hierarchical Church to interpret and set forth the true sense of scriptural texts. Because the Church has made her own any unanimous testimony of the Fathers, the faithful Christian must accept and follow their interpretation. Under no circumstances may a person develop a meaning which sets the inspired authors at odds with one another or with the teaching of the Church. [55]

[49] Ibid., p. 297.
[50] Ibid., p. 306.
[51] Surtz, p. 124.
[52] Ibid., p. 127.
[53] Ibid., p. 130.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid., p. 132.

In practice, Fisher treated the pronouncements of the Fathers on doctrinal issues as being as authoritative as the Scriptures. Preaching against Luther in 1521, he defended the doctrine of the primacy of Peter by quoting Augustine, Ambrose, St. Gregory, Jerome, Cyprian, Chrysostom, and Origen.[56] Introducing Augustine's opinion, Fisher said that he brought "but one doctour," whose testimony should tip the scale against Martin Luther when weighed on the balances of any true Christian's heart.[57] Luther had appealed to Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*). Fisher's answer was that Augustine's interpretation of Scripture should be accepted over Luther's. And why? Because Augustine's interpretation, at least on the question of the primacy of Peter, is that of the church. In fact, Fisher treated the interpretation of the Fathers on this issue as inspired of God. The evidence for the truthfulness of their teaching was supernatural. The validating factor was their holy living which, according to Fisher, was confirmed by miracles done both in their lives and after their death.[58]

Peryn, Bonner, and Watson also considered the Fathers as being as influential as the Bible writers themselves. Peryn accepted the first-century dating for the life and work of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite. He attributed the writings of this late fifth-century author to St. Denys, who in the ninth century was identified with the first-century Dionysius the Areopagite and, therefore, believed to have been the author of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings. In fact, St. Denys was a third-century Christian who was sent to convert Gaul, became a Bishop of Paris, and finally suffered martyrdom. Peryn evidently did not know that the authority of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings had already been questioned by the Reformers and by the Catholic Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534).[59]

Peryn believed without question St. Denys' explanation of the darkness which came down over Calvary at the time of the crucifixion.[60] At noon, the moon came out of the east into the south and, moving between the earth and the sun, caused an unnatural

[56]Fisher *EW*, 1:319-320.

[57]Ibid., p. 319.

[58]Ibid., p. 320.

[59]*ODCC*, 1957 ed., s.v. "Dionysius."

[60]Peryn, sig. Di^r.

and universal eclipse of the sun which lasted six hours. St. Denys was in Egypt at the time and witnessed the whole phenomenon.

Peryn uses Chrysostom as an authority for his view of transubstantiation.[61] In fact, he uses many of the Fathers, and regards them as instructed by the Holy Spirit. The ancient Catholic writers and interpreters, he declares, wrote "in theyr time, not contrary unto the church, but as the holy goost instructed them, specialye, in so weightye a matter."[62]

Watson also appealed to Chrysostom and to the unanimous testimony of the Fathers on the doctrine of transubstantiation.[63] He related the agreement of the Fathers to the consent of the universal church, "the pyller and upholder of all trueth."[64]

In a similar way, Bonner cited Origen, Cyprian, Basil, Ambrose, and Augustine on the question of the Roman primacy.[65]

5. Attitudes to Classical Antiquity

Fisher respects the philosophers sufficiently to cite them occasionally as secondary sources for his remarks. He quotes Aristotle as saying that death is of all things the most terrible.[66] Speaking of the departure of the soul from the body at death, he points out that the natural desire of both is to be knit together again, "whiche thinge not onely the theologyens wytnesse, but the phylosophers also."[67] The philosophers arrived at great knowledge of earthquakes, thunder, lightning, snow, rain, comets, and eclipses of the sun and moon. They searched for causes of these effects. "And so by dyligent searche and inquisition, they came to great knowledge and cunning, which cunnyng men call Philosophie naturall."[68] But superior to this is the philosophy of the Christian,

[61]Ibid., sigs. Fviii^v-Gi^r.

[62]Ibid., sigs. Giv^v-Gv^r; cf. Gvii^{r-v}, Gviii^v, Kiii^{r-v}, Kiv^r, Lvi^r, Miv^v, Nviii^v, Oi^r-Qi^r.

[63]Watson, *HCD*, fol. xxxviiii^v.

[64]Ibid., fol. xlvii^r.

[65]Bonner, fols. 46^r-47^v.

[66]Fisher, *EW*, 1:276.

[67]Ibid., p. 303.

[68]Ibid., pp. 388-389.

who comes to understand the secret of salvation by virtue of Christ's crucifixion.

In praising Henry VIII's literary attack on Martin Luther's understanding of the sacraments, Fisher in 1521 cited Plato's statement that commonwealths shall be blessed when philosophers govern or when rulers give themselves to philosophy.[69] The statement hardly gives evidence of new humanistic leanings by Fisher in 1521, however. After all, Plato's remark really does not fit, since Henry had temporarily given himself to theology of a medieval variety, rather than to the philosophy of antiquity. Nor is there any evidence in his sermons that Fisher was enamored with the thought and literature of antiquity. As for early Italian humanists, he speaks once of Francesco Petrarch, but only to refer to the latter's dream, not to extol Petrarch's humanism nor to identify himself in any way with it.[70]

Bonner and Watson do not use the thought of antiquity at all in their sermons, and Peryn refers to the philosophers with scorn. Speaking of the German Reformers, Peryn remarks that their learning and lives "are as muche unlyke unto the fathers" as were the lives "of Socrates and Sardanapalus, or the lyfe of Diogenes and the lyfe of Epicure."[71] Since he dislikes the Reformers so heartily, the comparison speaks volumes for his impression of the philosophers.

The point in all this seems to be that our four preachers made no attempt to relate the teachings of Scripture to the literature and philosophy of antiquity. Fisher, very briefly and in passing, appealed to the philosophers occasionally, but not in a manner which would lead the listener to assume that he had been seriously influenced by the interests and concerns of humanists. Occasionally he used a story from antiquity as a sermon illustration. In his sermon on the Passion he told the story of Lucretia and Sextus Targuinius to illustrate the evil of immorality.[72] At the funeral of Henry VII he illustrated by reference to Solon, Croesus, Seneca, and Hannibal.[73] In the same funeral sermon he quoted from Cicero's

[69]Ibid., p. 327.
[70]Fisher, *TFS*, sig. E2^r.
[71]Peryn, sig. Sii^{r-v}.
[72]Fisher, *EW*, 1:419.
[73]Ibid., pp. 270-280.

De oratore.[74] But these are incidental references of a kind which are rare in Fisher's sermons. They are not sufficient to indicate humanistic leanings.

Summary

Allegorical interpretation of the Bible and typology merging into allegory are pervading methods in the early sermons of John Fisher and in those of William Peryn, although not so prevalent in Fisher's later sermons or in the homilies of Edmund Bonner and Thomas Watson. Evidently Fisher, Bonner, and Watson found the traditional allegorical method not so suitable for apologetic sermons, which were intended to defend the Roman Catholic Church against the theological innovations of the Reformers. Furthermore, the relative scarcity of allegory from the sermons of Bonner and Watson can be explained by their apparent realization that the exegetical methods which were likely to be influential in Henry VIII's reign were unlikely to be so effective after the influence of Protestantism had become so widespread in Edward VI's reign. Nevertheless, Bonner and Watson do make some use of allegory.

Peryn's sermons, which are apologetic in nature, make large use of allegory and typology, evidently because of the resurgence of Catholicism in England in the latter years of Henry VIII's reign. Peryn preached in 1545, and his sermons were published in 1546 and 1548. Either Peryn lacked insight into the best method of meeting the mind of Protestants, or he felt secure in the use of a time-honored mode of interpretation.

Literal exposition does occur in the sermons of these four preachers, but it is by no means characteristic. Even when the obvious intent of the preachers was to hew to the literal Bible line, they tended to ignore contextual matters and read their own traditional concepts into passages whose original settings dealt with quite different motifs. There is considerably less redactional material in these sermons than in those of the late Middle Ages, in the sense that they contain less homiletical embellishment by means of legends and fabulous miracle-stories. Even so, some redaction occurs in view of the preachers' attempts to render the biblical material relevant to the contemporary sixteenth-century situation

[74]Ibid., p. 285.

and supportive of the positions traditionally held by the Catholic Church.

The church Fathers are regarded by these preachers as authoritative in theological and religious matters insofar as they are unanimous on any issue. On such questions, the Fathers are regarded as taught by the Holy Spirit, and their declarations are seen as representing the beliefs of the church. They are often quoted by all four preachers, and in a manner which suggests that their teachings are as authoritative in religious matters as are those of the Bible.

The thought of ancient Greece and Rome figures very little in these sermons. Fisher occasionally cites philosophers whom he regards as learned in natural philosophy, even though deprived in Christian philosophy. It is interesting to compare Fisher's attitude to philosophy with that of John Colet. Colet used Platonism as a source of material for his lectures on the Bible. Although he rejected Ficino's speculative, intellectual approach, he incorporated many Platonic and Neo-Platonic features into his lectures.[75] Fisher, by contrast, incorporated practically nothing of ancient thought into his sermons and, like the late medieval preachers, attempted no synthesis between philosophy and Scripture. Bonner and Watson did not use philosophers, and Peryn openly scorned them.

The world view and doctrinal stance of these preachers were also those of the traditional medieval church. Thus, on the basis of both homiletical technique and content, the four Catholic preachers —Fisher, Peryn, Bonner, and Watson—were distinctly medieval, as judged by their sermons. These sermons contain no evidence of conformity to the mores of the Renaissance, or to the interests and procedures of humanists. Thus, they stand in somewhat striking contrast to the sermons of the Anglicans and the Puritans whose work I reviewed earlier.[76] The Puritans accepted the Reformation

[75]John Colet, *An Exposition of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. J. H. Lupton (Farnborough, Hants., Eng., 1874 [reprint, 1965]), and *An Exposition of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. H. Lupton (Farnborough, Hants., Eng., 1873 [reprint, 1965]); Sears Jayne, *John Colet and Marsilio Ficino* (London, 1963); Ernest William Hunt, *Dean Colet and His Theology* (London, 1956); Leland Miles, *John Colet and the Platonic Tradition* (LaSalle, Ill., 1961).

[76]My earlier series of articles on Anglican and Puritan preachers are as follows: "The Exegetical Methods of Some Sixteenth-Century Anglican Preachers: Latimer, Jewel, Hooker and Andrewes," Parts I and II, *AUSS* 17 (1979): 28-38, 169-188; and

doctrine of *sola scriptura*, but remained relatively untouched by the humanist literary method and world view. In certain major respects, their exegesis and outlook retrogressed towards the Middle Ages. The Anglicans accepted the method of the humanists and allowed their humanist training to predispose them to philosophical and theological outlooks which projected them, in certain respects, a step nearer to the modern world.

With the sixteenth-century Roman Catholic preachers, it was quite otherwise. Even in the case of John Fisher, not only was the humanist element in his training considerably inferior to that present in the training of Jewel, Hooker, and Andrewes, but also his sermons reveal none of the interests and methods of humanists. He admired humanists and abetted their work, but he was not one himself, nor did he grasp the implications of their work for the future of the church. It is not incorrect to conclude that the changed understanding of religious authority, from that of the Roman Catholic preachers of the late Middle Ages and sixteenth century to that of the Anglicans and Puritans of the sixteenth century, was influenced to a considerable extent by humanism.

"The Exegetical Methods of Some Sixteenth-Century Puritan Preachers: Hooper, Cartwright, and Perkins," Parts I and II, *AUSS* 19 (1981); 21-36, 99-114. Also of interest in this connection is my further study, "Late-Medieval Sermons in England: An Analysis of Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Preaching," *AUSS* 20 (1982): 179-203.