

A BLIND SPOT IN THE STUDY OF FOURTH-CENTURY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY: THE CHRISTOLOGICAL EXEGESIS OF THEOPHANIES

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Abstract

The notion that christophanic exegesis is, essentially, a pre-Nicene tradition with little or no relevance for the study of later Christian literature is woefully inadequate: it minimizes the continued appeal to theophanies across much of the fourth-century theological spectrum, and does not account for the pervasive and insistent references to theophanies in Byzantine hymnography. This article seeks to demonstrate that the christological exegesis of theophanies, widely recognized as an element of shared tradition, continued to function as a polemical 'adjutant' in fourth-century anti-Jewish, anti-Arian, anti-modalistic, and anti-Apollinarian argumentation.

INTRODUCTION

Theophanies are, in the Hebrew Bible, instances of particularly intense attunement between God and select individuals and communities, which articulate a grand story of divine-human interaction across the many and manifold biblical texts.¹ The christological exegesis of Old Testament theophanies is a prominent and characteristic feature of anti-Jewish, anti-dualistic, and anti-modalistic polemics carried out by writers such as Justin of

¹ Examples of biblical theophanies include God walking in the garden of Eden, conversing with Abraham at Mamre, appearing to Jacob in the dream of the ladder and wrestling with him at Peniel; the 'angel', 'fire', 'pillar', 'cloud', and 'glory' on Sinai, which guided the Israelites out of Egypt, tabernacled in the tent of meeting and, later, in the Temple; the anthropomorphic glory seated on Ezekiel's chariot-throne and the enthroned 'Lord of hosts' in Isaiah; Daniel's 'Ancient of days' and 'Son of Man'; the God seen 'between the two living beings' in the LXX of Habbakuk 3; and the 'commander of the army of the Lord' seen by Joshua (Genesis 3; Gen. 18:1; 28:12-13; 32:24-30; Exod. 3:1-15; 13:21-2; 14:19-20; 24:10, 17; 34:5-8; Josh. 5:13-15; Ezek. 1:26-8; Isa. 6:1-3; Dan. 7:10, 13; Hab. 3:2 LXX).

Neapolis, Irenaeus of Lyon, or Tertullian. It is generally assumed that recourse to theophanies was rendered obsolete during the conciliar era by the development of a ‘technical’ theological glossary in the service of a more nuanced and precise doctrinal articulation. Scholarship on the christological and trinitarian controversies of the fourth century reflects this assumption by paying only scant attention to the interpretation of biblical theophanies.

The established scholarly position was, until relatively recently, that the so-called ‘argument from theophanies’ was forged by Justin of Neapolis in the heat of his engagement against Marcion. More specifically, according to Oskar Skarsaune, Justin would be fusing the traditional testimonia-argument in favour of two Gods (the cluster of Gen. 19:24, Ps. 110:1, and Ps. 45:7) with his own original argument about theophanies as christophanies.² Over the last 20 years, however, a growing segment of scholarship on Christian origins has traced this second-century ‘YHWH Christology’ or ‘Christology of Divine Identity’ back to the writings of the New Testament.³ This development has, quite naturally, changed the perception of Justin’s achievement. According

² Oskar Skarsaune, *Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition. Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), pp. 208–9, 211–2; Benedict Kominiak, *The Theophanies of the Old Testament in the Writings of St. Justin* (Washington, DC: CUA, 1948), p. 4; Demetrios C. Trakatellis, *The Pre-Existence of Christ in the Writings of Justin Martyr: An Exegetical Study with Reference to the Humiliation and Exaltation Christology* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 59, 85.

³ Jarl E. Fossum, ‘Kyrios Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in Jude 5–7’, *NTS* 33 (1987), pp. 226–43; David B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), esp. pp. 51–123, 187–200; Gieschen, ‘The Real Presence of the Son before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology’, *CTQ* 68 (2004), pp. 105–26; C. C. Newman, J. R. Davila, and G. S. Lewis (eds.), *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Sean M. McDonough, *Christ as Creator: Origins of a New Testament Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Chris Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Randy Rheume, *An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of the Son’s Relationship to the Father in John’s Gospel: God’s Equal and Subordinate* (Lewiston, NY and Lampeter: Mellen Press, 2014); Crispin Fletcher-Louis,

to Larry Hurtado, who approaches the issue from the perspective of his massive study of first-century christological developments,

Justin did not originate the basic idea that the preincarnate Jesus could be found active in certain Old Testament passages ... Justin was essentially building upon a line of christological argument already available. He reflects an approach to the Old Testament that had been a feature of devotion to Jesus during the first decades of the Christian movement.⁴

Patristic scholarship on Justin seems to have taken note of this significant advance in the study of Christian origins, and found additional evidence that the argument from theophanies did not derive *from* Justin's second-century anti-dualistic polemics but was the extension *to* such a purpose of a much older exegetical tradition belonging to the Christian discourse 'ad intra', in the context of worship and celebration.⁵

A second area of scholarship on the Christian reception of Old Testament theophanies has documented and discussed the prominent place that the 'primitive' christophanic exegesis held in Byzantine hymnography until the ninth century, and in Eastern and Western iconography until the fifteenth.⁶ It seems, then, that identifying the Old Testament 'Lord', who revealed himself in visions to the patriarchs and prophets, with the 'Lord' Jesus of Christian worship is a robust theological tradition in the first three centuries as well as in the second half of the first millennium CE. What of the all-important period between Irenaeus of Lyon and Romanos the Melodist? This question is all the more intriguing since 'classics' of Byzantine hymnography such as Romanos the Melodist, John Damascene, and Cosmas of Maiuma did not read Justin or Irenaeus, but were instead deeply indebted to fourth-century writers like Ephrem Syrus and Gregory Nazianzen.⁷

Jesus Monotheism, Volume 1: *Christological Origins: The Emerging Consensus and Beyond* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015).

⁴ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, p. 577.

⁵ Bogdan G. Bucur, 'Justin Martyr's Exegesis of Old Testament Theophanies and the Parting of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism', *TS* 75 (2014), pp. 34–51.

⁶ Bogdan G. Bucur, 'Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies in Byzantine Hymnography: Rewritten Bible?', *TS* 68 (2007), pp. 92–112; Gabriel Bunge, *The Rublev Trinity: The Icon of the Trinity by the Monk-Painter Andrei Rublev* (Crestwood, NY: SVS, 2007); François Boespflug, *Les Théophanies bibliques dans l'art médiéval d'Occident et d'Orient* (Geneva: Droz, 2012).

⁷ Peter Karavites, 'Gregory Nazianzinos and Byzantine Hymnography', *JHS* 113 (1993), pp. 81–98; William L. Petersen, 'The Dependence of Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem: Its Importance for the Origin of the

Scholarship on the theological developments in the fourth and fifth centuries seldom or never discusses the question of christophanies.⁸ It is usually only students of Augustine who bring up this issue, inasmuch as it offers the background against which the bishop of Hippo's view on the created manifestations of the Trinity shines brilliantly.⁹ The pages to follow attempt to address this apparent gap in scholarship by considering the use of christophanic exegesis among a selection of notable fourth-century writers including Eusebius of Caesarea, Marcellus, Athanasius, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa. It will become apparent that the christological interpretation of Old Testament theophanies was abundantly present among fourth-century thinkers of a variety of schools, cutting across the barriers established by creeds and

Kontakion', *VC* 39 (1985), pp. 171–87; Petersen, *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist* (Louvain: Peeters, 1985).

⁸ A notable exception: Manlio Simonetti, *La crisi ariana nel IV secolo* (Rome: Augustinianum, 1975), pp. 506–11 ('Le teofanie').

⁹ See John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Pickering, 1878), pp. 136–7: '[T]he Ante-nicene Fathers, as in some of the foregoing extracts, speak of the Angelic visions in the Old Testament as if they were appearances of the Son; but St. Augustine introduced the explicit doctrine, which has been received since his date, that they were simply Angels, through whom the Omnipresent Son manifested Himself. This indeed is the only interpretation which the Ante-nicene statements admitted, as soon as reason began to examine what they did mean. They could not mean that the Eternal God could really be seen by bodily eyes; if anything was seen, that must have been some created glory or other symbol, by which it pleased the Almighty to signify His Presence ... The earlier Fathers spoke as if there were no medium interposed between the Creator and the creature, and so they seemed to make the Eternal Son the medium; what it really was, they had not determined. St. Augustine ruled, and his ruling has been accepted in later times, that it was not a mere atmospheric phenomenon, or an impression on the senses, but the material form proper to an Angelic presence, or the presence of an Angel in that material garb in which blessed Spirits do ordinarily appear to men.' See also Jules Lebreton, 'Saint Augustin, théologien de la Trinité: Son exégèse des théophanies', *Miscellanea Augustiniana* 2 (1931), pp. 821–36; Basil Studer, *Zur Theophanie-Exegese Augustins: Untersuchung zu einem Ambrosius-Zitat in der Schrift De Videndo Deo* (Rome: Herder, 1971); Michel René Barnes, 'The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology of 400', *Modern Theology* 19 (2003), pp. 329–56; Kari Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God: Augustine's Transformation of Early Christian Theophany Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). The theological parti-pris, explicit in Newman, remains present in Studer, who notes Irenaeus's '*allzu* realistisches Verständnis der Theophanien' (*Zur Theophanie-Exegese*, p. 82), or that Hilary 'schrieb den Theophanien des Sohnes eine *zu* grosse Wirklichkeit zu', or that 'diese [Nizäner] die Erscheinungen *zu* ausschliesslich dem Sohne vorbehalten und sie zugleich mit der Menschwerdung *zu* sehr in einer Kontinuität sahen' (p. 37; emphasis added).

councils and theological parties, constituting a deeply honoured and widely shared tradition, and contributing to theological argumentation more than is usually acknowledged by students of early Christianity.

THE ARGUMENT FROM THEOPHANIES IN EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA:
TRADITION AND INNOVATION

In the transition from pre-Nicene theology to the more mature, more technically precise articulation of doctrine by creeds and councils and Christian thinkers within the new socio-political frame of a Christian Empire, the figure of Eusebius of Caesarea occupies an important place.¹⁰ Nevertheless, as an eminent specialist on Eusebius notes:

[t]he argument from theophanies in Eusebius has never been the object of thorough examination. Those few authors who have shown some interest in this topic have not guessed its riches and importance in the history of doctrines. Eusebius' thought intervenes, nevertheless, at a moment, after the death of Origen and before the beginning of the Arian crisis. Arian recourse to the ancient theophanies has led later theologians to distance themselves from the argument. Here just as elsewhere, Eusebius appears to be the last representative of pre-Nicene theology: still a stranger to preoccupations that would only emerge after the council of Nicaea, he offers in the *Proof of the Gospel* and, earlier, in the *Prophetic Eclogues*, the longest, most elaborate, and certainly richest reflection that any pre-Nicene author had ever consecrated to the question of ancient theophanies.¹¹

Like his predecessors, Eusebius finds in theophanies the doctrinal foundation for the qualified reception of wisdom traditions outside of Israel; like Justin Martyr he calls the Logos *δεύτερος θεός*,¹² identifies the Logos with the Tetragrammaton,¹³ and

¹⁰ On Eusebius' exegesis of theophanies, see Jean Sirinelli, *Les Vues historiques d'Eusèbe de Césarée durant la période pré-nicéenne* (Dakar: Mâcon, 1961), pp. 259–92; Sébastien Morlet, *La 'Démonstration évangélique' d'Eusèbe de Césarée: Étude sur l'apologétique chrétienne à l'époque de Constantin* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2009), pp. 442–57.

¹¹ Morlet, *La 'Démonstration évangélique' d'Eusèbe de Césarée*, pp. 440–1.

¹² E.g. Eusebius, *Eclogues* 1.12 (PG 22, col. 1068C); *Dem. Ev.* 5.30 (PG 22, col. 409D; Ferrar 1, p. 271).

¹³ The Logos speaking to Moses was *ὁ Κύριος ὁ ... διὰ τοῦ τετραγράμμου δηλούμενος* (Eusebius, *Eclogues* 1.10–12 [PG 22, cols. 1053D, 1056C, 1065A, C, 1068A]). There are many passages in which Eusebius identified YHWH with the Son, although an identification with the Father also occurs. See Sébastien Morlet, 'Mentions et interprétations du tétragramme chez Eusèbe de Césarée', *REAug* 60 (2014), pp. 213–52, esp. pp. 226–7, 242–7.

understands theophanies as manifestations of the Logos ‘concerning himself with the work of mankind’s salvation even before the Incarnation’.¹⁴ He emphatically rejects the interpretation of theophanies as mere angelic apparitions,¹⁵ and instead interprets Genesis 18 (the Mamre theophany), Genesis 22 (the Peniel theophany), Isaiah 6, etc. as scriptural reports about the manifestations of the Son or Logos of God.

Twice in his *Church History* Eusebius states that the ‘Lord God’ mentioned in Genesis 18 was none other than ‘Christ himself, the Word of God’.¹⁶ There are two more references in the *Life of Constantine*, one by Eusebius himself, and the second time by Emperor Constantine, in a letter addressed to the civilian and ecclesiastical authorities of Palestine—hence also to Eusebius—mandating the destruction of the local shrine, the eradication of all practices deemed ‘sacrilegious abominations’ at Mamre, and the building of a magnificent church.¹⁷ Indeed, the place was at the time a lively inter-religious pilgrimage site attracting Jews, pagans, and Christians.¹⁸ In the *Proof of the Gospel* Eusebius even

¹⁴ Eusebius, *Ecolgues* 1.10 (PG 22, col. 1056A).

¹⁵ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.2.10 (SC 31, p. 8); *Dem. ev.* 5.9 (GCS 23, pp. 231–2); *Eccl. Theol.* 2.21 (GCS 14, p. 130); *Ecolgues* 1.3 (PG 22, cols. 1028–36); *Comm. Esa.* 1.41 (GCS 55, p. 37); *Comm. Ps.* 79 (PG 23, col. 952C). See also *Ecolgues* 1.10 (PG 22, col. 1056 B) on the Lord (Logos/Son) manifesting himself directly (αὐτὸς δι’ ἑαυτοῦ), not by angelic mediation (δι’ ἀγγελου) and *Ecolgues* 1.12 (PG 22, col. 1068C), which declares theophanies to be, undisputedly, neither manifestations of the Father, nor of some angelic power, but apparitions of the divine Logos, the ‘second God’ (ἀναμφιλέκτως οὔτε ὁ τῶν ὄλων Θεός, οὔτε ἀγγελικὴ τις δύναμις ἦν ἢ χρηματίζουσα τῷ Μωσεί, αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεῖος Λόγος, ὃν ἀκριβῶς πεπιστεύκαμεν μετὰ τῶν ὄλων Πατέρα καὶ Κύριον δεύτερον εἶναι τῶν ἀπάντων Θεόν τε καὶ Κύριον).

¹⁶ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.2.7; 1.4.12 (SC 31, pp. 7, 20).

¹⁷ Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.51.1 (SC 559, p. 416): ‘Having heard that the self-same Saviour who erewhile had appeared on earth had in ages long since past afforded a manifestation of his Divine presence to holy men of Palestine near the oak of Mambre, he ordered that a house of prayer should be built there also in honour of the God who had thus appeared’; *Vit. Const.* 3.53.3 (SC 559, p. 420): ‘There first the Saviour himself, with the two angels, vouchsafed to Abraham a manifestation of his presence.’

¹⁸ See Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.51–3. A vivid description of the place is given by Sozomen (*Hist. eccl.* 2.4.2–3 [SC 306, p. 246; trans. NPNF]): ‘Here the inhabitants of the country and of the regions round Palestine, the Phœnicians, and the Arabians, assemble annually during the summer season to keep a brilliant feast; and many others, both buyers and sellers, resort there on account of the fair. Indeed, this feast is diligently frequented by all nations: by the Jews, because they boast of their descent from the patriarch Abraham; by the Pagans, because angels there appeared to men; and by Christians, because He who for the salvation of mankind was born of a virgin, afterwards manifested

mentions having seen a cultic artefact at Mamre, which depicted the scene of the three visitors enjoying Abraham's hospitality, and notes that 'he in the midst surpasses them in honour. *This would be our Lord and Saviour*.'¹⁹ Similarly, at Peniel: 'He that was seen by Jacob was none other than the Word of God',²⁰ and, in Daniel 7, the Son of Man represents the Logos, God's First-Born, Wisdom, and Divine Offspring, 'called *the Son of man* because of his final appearance in the flesh', and foreseen as end-time universal judge.²¹

In his *Commentary on Isaiah*, while presenting his christological interpretation of Isaiah 6, Eusebius revisits all previous theophanies and ascribes them to one and the same agent, the Logos: since 'nobody has ever seen God' (John 1:18) or 'the Father' (John 6:46):

the *Lord of hosts* who appeared to the prophet was another than the unbegotten and invisible and incomprehensible divinity. And who could this be but *the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father* [John 1:18],

Himself there to a godly man. This place was moreover honored fittingly with religious exercises. Here some prayed to the God of all; some called upon the angels, poured out wine, burnt incense, or offered an ox, or he-goat, a sheep, or a cock.'

¹⁹ Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 5.9 (GCS 23, p. 232; Ferrar 1, p. 254): 'they who were entertained by Abraham, as represented in the picture (*ἐπι γραφῆς ἀνακείμενοι*), sit one on each side, and he in the midst surpasses them in honour. *This would be our Lord and Saviour*, Whom though men knew Him not they worshipped, confirming the Holy Scriptures. He then thus in person from that time sowed the seeds of holiness among men, putting on a human form and shape (*ἀνθρώπειον . . . εἶδος τε καὶ σχῆμα*), and revealed to the godly ancestor Abraham Who He was, and shewed him the mind of His Father.' As it happens, archaeology has turned up a fifth-century mould for stamping ritual cakes, with, on one side, the image of three angels seated at table and the inscription 'May the angels be merciful to me', and, on the other, an image of Aphrodite Ourania, perhaps assimilated with the Virgin Mary, with the inscription 'Rejoicing, I receive the heavenly one [goddess]'. The middle figure on the mould is clearly distinguished among the three. If the mould is a Christian artefact, its imagery concurs with Eusebius' report and with his view that Abraham's visitors were the Son of God and two accompanying angels. For image and descriptions, see Margaret English Frazer, 'A Syncretistic Pilgrim's Mould from Mamre(?)', *Gesta* 18 (1979), pp. 137–45.

²⁰ Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 7.2 (Ferrar 2, p. 83; see also, less developed, *Dem. ev.* 4.16, Ferrar 1, p. 210): 'It is the God that dwells therein, Who was seen by Jacob in human form and shape, wherefore he was deemed worthy of the name, Seer of God, for such is the translation of his name. And I have established in the early part of this work that He that was seen by Jacob was none other than the Word of God.'

²¹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.2.24–6 (SC 31, pp. 12–13); *Eclogues* 3.44 (PG 22, col. 1173CD).

who stepped down from his own exalted position, made himself visible and comprehensible to humanity? [Eusebius now rehearses the most important theophanies to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Ezekiel] ... He assumed a certain form before Abraham and was seen in the figure of a man when Abraham was *by the oak* and *washed the feet* and shared a table with the divine stranger ... And Jacob also said concerning this, *For I have seen God face to face, and my life has been preserved*. And the present prophet [scil. Isaiah] saw and also witnessed glory. Thus, as we discussed above, he saw the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ. Thus it was for Moses and for Ezekiel too.²²

In the *Church History*, too, Eusebius puts forth the same conventional view:

The great servant Moses and before him in the first place Abraham and his children, and as many righteous men and prophets as afterward appeared, have contemplated him with the pure eyes of the mind, and have recognized him and offered to him the worship which is due him as *Son of God* ... You will perceive also from the same words that *this was no other than he who talked with Moses*.²³

As Jörg Ulrich observes: ‘Daher werden sämtliche alttestamentliche Theophanien von Euseb (wiederum *in Übereinstimmung mit der antiken christlichen Tradition* der Exegese) ganz selbstverständlich und konsequent als Logophanien beziehungsweise Christophanien gedeutet.’²⁴ What should perhaps be added is that theophanies also anticipate the incarnation, since in all of them the Son descends from his own greatness, ‘making himself small’ (*σμικρύνων τε αὐτὸν*) so as to become visible and perceptible by humans.²⁵

²² Eusebius, *Comm. Esa.* 3.41 (GCS 55, pp. 36–7; trans. in *Commentary on Isaiah: Eusebius of Caesarea*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Jonathan J. Armstrong, ed. Joel C. Elowsky [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015], pp. 27–8). Eusebius retains the christological interpretation of Ps. 79:2 (which he connects with the cherubim of Exodus 25 and the visions of Ezekiel 1 and 10). See Eusebius, *Comm. Ps.* 79 (PG 23, col. 956B, D) and the discussion in Russell Christman, *What Did Ezekiel See?* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 30–1.

²³ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.2.6, 13 (SC 31, pp. 7, 9; trans. NPNF).

²⁴ Jörg Ulrich, *Euseb von Caesarea und die Juden* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), p. 183 (emphasis mine).

²⁵ Eusebius, *Comm. Esa.* 1.41 (GCS 55, p. 36). See also *Dem. ev.* 7.1 (GCS 23, pp. 297–8): before delivering his prophecy of the virginal birth (Isa 7:14), Isaiah bears witness of his glorious vision of Christ’s divinity, by writing ‘I saw the Lord sitting upon a high and lofty throne, etc. (Isa 6:1)’; *Dem. ev.* 9.16 (GCS 23, p. 438).

Eusebius also shows originality in his exegesis of theophanies. Aside from occasional original solutions to this or that text,²⁶ most significant in this respect is the interpretation of the burning bush scene set forth in the *Prophetic Eclogues* and *Proof of the Gospel*. Eusebius adds a distinct and original voice to the rich chorus of Jewish and Christian interpreters of Exodus 3 by positing a disjunction between the visual and the auditory aspects of the theophany (the angel *appeared*, while the Lord *spoke* to Moses), and by depicting Moses as a spiritual neophyte whose attunement to God ranks much lower than that of the patriarchs of old. In a striking departure from the mainstream of Jewish and Christian tradition, Eusebius states that ‘throughout all of Scripture God is *not even once* said to have appeared to Moses’,²⁷ because he was a mere beginner, ‘not fit for aught than angelic visions’,²⁸ spiritually inferior to the patriarchs. This meticulous ‘demotion’ of Moses by means of *exegesis* focused on passages such as Exodus 19, 24, and 33, and Numbers 12, and the reference to the views of other exegetes,²⁹ suggests that Eusebius is attempting to counter an

²⁶ One such exception is Eusebius’ fine analysis of Hab. 3:2 LXX (*ἐν μέσῳ δὲ ζώων γινωσθήσῃ*), which leads him to part ways with the exegesis of his predecessors, to whom he ascribes the reading ‘living beings’. See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Dem. ev.* 6.15.9 (GCS 23, p. 270; Ferrar 2, p. 21): ‘Our Lord and Saviour, too, the Word of God Himself, *was known between two lives*. The word ζώων is plural and accented with circumflex on the last syllable as the plural of the singular noun ζωή (life). It is not ζώων accented acute on the penultimate from ζῶον (a living creature), but *with circumflex on the last syllable* (ζώων) from nominative plural ζωαί (lives). He says, therefore, He was known between two *lives*. One life is that according to God, the other that according to man; the one mortal, the other eternal. And the Lord having experienced both is rightly said to have been made known between two lives in the LXX translation. Aquila translates differently: *In the nearing of the years, cause it to live*. What does *it* mean here but *thy work*? And Theodotion says: *In the midst of the years, cause him to live*, and Symmachus renders: *Within the years, revive him*. They all by the use of ζώωσον (cause to live) shew clearly that the word in the original does not refer to irrational or rational animals. And so following the rendering of the Septuagint, *He was made known between two lives*, and not the commentators who have preceded me, I understand that the two lives of the Subject of the prophecy are referred to, the Divine and the Human.’

²⁷ Eusebius, *Eclogues* 1.9 (PG 22, col. 1052 A): οὐδὲ ἅπαξ ἂν εὐροῖς δι’ ὄλης τῆς νομοθεσίας τὴν γραφὴν σημειουμένην ὡς ὅτι δὴ ὤφθη ὁ Θεὸς ἢ ὁ Κύριος τῷ Μωσῆϊ, ὅπερ ἐπὶ μόνων τῶν τριῶν πατριαρχῶν εἰρημένον ἐμφαίνεται; cf. *Eclogues* 1.12 (PG 22, col. 1061A): οὐδ’ ἅπαξ ὁ λόγος μαρτυρεῖ λέγων ὅτι ὤφθη αὐτῷ ὁ Κύριος, ὡς ἐπὶ τῶν πατριαρχῶν εἰρηκῶς τετήρηται.

²⁸ μηδὲν πλέον ἀγγελικῆς ὀπτασίας χωροῦντι (Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 5.13 [GCS 23, p. 240; Ferrar 1, p. 258]).

²⁹ Eusebius, *Eclogues* 1.12 (PG 22, col. 1061A): ὡς νομίσειεν τις; ὡς οἰηθείη ἂν τις.

established Jewish tradition affirming the spiritual primacy of the Jews over the Gentiles.³⁰

In conclusion, Eusebius' use of theophanies is, for the most part, profoundly traditional—as Morlet showed, 'a privileged place of conjunction between the polemical tradition stemming from Justin and the Alexandrian scholarly tradition of Philo and Origen'³¹—and, on occasion, surprisingly innovative. Although the element of 'demotion' seems to be original, this particular aspect of Eusebius' exegesis of Sinai texts makes sense within the larger framework of his anti-Jewish strategy, which is itself, together with the auxiliary use of christophanic exegesis, an earlier tradition that goes back to Justin Martyr, the Fourth Gospel, and the Pauline epistles.

THE 'ARGUMENT FROM THEOPHANIES' AGAINST MARCELLUS

òThe Arian controversy and the conflict with Marcellus led Eusebius to, as it were, 'recycle' his interpretation of theophanies and redirect it against his opponent. Although Marcellus of Ancyra shares the tradition of viewing Old Testament theophanies as manifestations of the Word of God, his view (as reported by Eusebius) that 'God is an indivisible monad'³² determines an interpretation of theophanies very different from that of Eusebius. The clearest evidence is found in Marcellus' discussion of the burning bush episode, in which the target of his criticism is Asterius (whose position coincides with that of Eusebius):

Who, then, does Asterius think it was that said 'I am he who is': the Son or the Father? For he [Asterius], considering the human flesh assumed by the Word of God and imagining such things on account of it, says that there are two hypostases, the Father and the Son, thus separating the Son of God from the Father, just as someone would separate a human son from his natural father. Now, if he says it was the Father who spoke these things to Moses in order to distinguish himself from the Son, he [Asterius] will be confessing that the Son is not God. For how could he who said 'I am the one who is' not have thereby confessed that 'he is' in contradistinction to one 'who is not'? But if he [Asterius] should claim that it was the Son, as hypostatically distinct (*ὑποστάσει διηρημένον*), who

³⁰ For a more detailed discussion, see Bogdan G. Bucur, "God never Appeared to Moses": Eusebius of Caesarea's Peculiar Exegesis of the Burning Bush Theophany', *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* (forthcoming), esp. section 3.1, 'Anti-Jewish Polemics and the Demotion of Moses'.

³¹ Morlet, *La 'Démonstration évangélique' d'Eusèbe de Césarée*, p. 457.

³² Eusebius, *Ecl. Theol.* 2.19 (GCS 14, p. 123): *μονάδα γοῦν εἶναι ἀδιαίρετον τὸν θεὸν φάσκων*.

said 'I am he who is', then he in turn will be counted as saying the same thing about the Father. Either of these options is impious.³³

The alternative ('who was the one who said *I am He Who Is*—the Son or the Father?) is meant to highlight the absurdity, but especially the 'impiety', of viewing the Father and the Son as two hypostases; indeed, saying that it was the Father who appeared at the burning bush implies that the Father is truly existent *in contradistinction to the Son*,³⁴ and is, therefore, ultimately, a denial of the divinity of the Son. For Marcellus, God and his Word cannot be distinguished any more than one distinguishes a human person from its voice, and a person's will, speech, and action from its exercise of reasoning.³⁵ To say, therefore, that the Word appears and proclaims 'I am He Who Is' expresses the theological notion of the Father speaking through the Word: λέγει μὲν τῷ Μωσεί ὁ πατήρ, λέγει δὲ δηλονότι διὰ τοῦ λόγου.³⁶ Briefly put, for Marcellus theophanies are always 'by the Father through the Word'.³⁷

Eusebius, by contrast, states that it was undoubtedly the Son of God who spoke to Moses at the burning bush, he who appeared to Abraham at Mamre (Genesis 18), who told Moses that he had manifested himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 6:2–3), who later proclaimed himself to 'be' before Abraham 'was' (John 8:56), since he was the 'mediator' (Gal. 3:20) even before the incarnation (πρὶν ἢ τὴν σάρκα ἀναλαβεῖν).³⁸

Thus, in the first decades of the fourth century, the anti-Jewish and anti-modalistic use of theophanies, already exercised by

³³ Marcellus, Fr. 85/63–86/64 = *Eccl. Theol.* 2.19 (GCS 14, p. 123); my translation. The fragments of Marcellus are given two numbers, corresponding to Markus Vinzent, *Markell von Ankyra: Die Fragmente. Der Brief an Julius von Rom* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) and the GCS critical edition: *Eusebius Werke 4: Gegen Marcell. Über die kirchliche Theologie. Die Fragmente Marcellus*, 3rd edn., ed. Heinrich Klostermann, revised by Günther Christian Hansen (GCS 14; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1991).

³⁴ πῶς γὰρ ἐγχωρεῖ τὸν λέγοντα «ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν» μὴ συνομολογεῖν ὅτι κατὰ ἀντιδιαστολὴν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ὁ ὢν ἐαυτὸν εἶναι φησιν.

³⁵ Marcellus, Fr. 87/61 = *Against Marcellus* 2.2; *Eccl. Theol.* 1.17 (GCS 14, pp. 40, 77).

³⁶ Marcellus, Fr. 89/62 = *Against Marcellus* 2.2 (GCS 14, p. 40).

³⁷ Marcellus, Fr. 87/61 and Fr. 89/62 = *Against Marcellus* 2.2, 11; *Eccl. Theol.* 1.17 (GCS 14, pp. 40, 77, 112): 'Just as all creatures are made by the Father through the Word (ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ τοῦ λόγου γέγονεν), so also are all utterances made by the Father through the Word (ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ τοῦ λόγου σημαίνεται)'; 'For whatever the Father says is always expressed by means of the Word's act of speaking (πάντα γὰρ ὅσα ἂν ὁ πατήρ λέγῃ, ταῦτα πανταχοῦ διὰ τοῦ λόγου λέγων φαίνεται).

³⁸ Eusebius, *Eccl. Theol.* 2.21.1 (GCS 14, p. 130).

Christian thinkers of the second and third centuries, had clearly not lost its appeal.

ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

Church tradition as well as the academic guild see in Athanasius the great champion of Nicaea, the definer and defender of the *ὁμοούσιον*. Underneath considerations about the *ὁμοούσιον*, however, lies the bedrock of the ‘christophanic’ reading of the Old Testament. This is not surprising, of course, since Athanasius understands theologizing as, essentially, a process of discerning the revelation articulated in the Scriptures.³⁹ In *Contra Arianos*, for instance, he has no hesitation in rehearsing the pre-Nicene argument for the divinity of the Son: Christ is pre-existent and divine and, as such, always already the object of human and angelic worship, because Abraham worships him in his tent (Genesis 18), Moses worships him at the burning bush (Exodus 3), and Daniel sees him as the Ancient of Days, seated on the divine throne and attended by thousands upon thousands of angelic ministers (Dan. 7:10):

For if the Lord be God, Son, Word, yet was not all these before He became man ... And if He received His worship after dying, how is Abraham seen to worship Him in the tent, and Moses in the bush? and, as Daniel saw, myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands were ministering unto Him?⁴⁰

If then they suppose that the Saviour was not Lord and King, even before He became man and endured the Cross, but then began to be Lord, let them know that they are openly reviving the statements of the Samosatene. But if, as we have quoted and declared above, He is Lord and King everlasting, seeing that Abraham worships Him as Lord ... it is plain that even before He became man, He was King and Lord everlasting, being Image and Word of the Father.⁴¹

³⁹ It was Athanasius (*Syn.* 35.2 [SC 563, p. 300]; *Decr.* 22.3 [PG 25, col. 456AB]; *Afros* 4.2–4 [*AW* II.8, pp. 328–9]) who originated the rich exegetical tradition of defending the use of the non-biblical term *ὁσία* by reference to the *ὁ ὄν* of Exod. 3:14. See Xavier Morales, ‘Introduction’ to *Athanasie d’Alexandrie: Lettre sur les Synodes. Synodale d’Ancyre. Basile d’Ancyre: Traité sur la foi* (SC 563), p. 107; Morales, *La Théologie trinitaire d’Athanasie d’Alexandrie* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 2006), pp. 288–90.

⁴⁰ Athanasius, *CA* 1.38.5 (*AW* I.2, p. 148; trans. NPNF).

⁴¹ Athanasius, *CA* 2.13.1 (*AW* I.2, p. 189; trans. NPNF).

The same exegesis of theophanies occurs in Athanasius' *De synodis* 52:

[We] understand the oneness of the Son with the Father to be . . . according to essence and in truth (*κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ ἀληθείᾳ*) . . . there being but one Form of Godhead (*εἶδος θεότητος*), as the Light and the Radiance. For this was seen by the Patriarch Jacob, as Scripture says, 'The sun rose upon him when the Form of God (*τὸ εἶδος τοῦ θεοῦ*) passed by' [Gen. 32:3]. Beholding this, and understanding of whom He was Son and Image, the holy Prophets say, 'The Word of the Lord came to me'; and recognizing the Father, who was beheld and revealed in Him, they made bold to say: 'The God of our fathers has appeared unto me, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob' [Exod. 3:16]. This being so, wherefore scruple we to call coessential (*ὁμοούσιον*), according to likeness and oneness of godhead, Him who is one with the Father, and appears as does the Father (*φαινόμενον ὡς ἔστι πατέρα*)?⁴²

Like other writers, Athanasius gives much attention to the exegesis of the burning bush theophany. His theological position is, quite clearly, that 'Moses beheld God' just as 'to Abraham appeared God', more specifically the Logos; yet, his interpretation seems to dialogue with Eusebius' view that God occasionally appears and speaks to Moses through angels, as through the pillar of cloud:

For Zacharias saw an Angel; and Isaiah saw the Lord. Manoah, the father of Samson, saw an Angel; but Moses beheld God. Gideon saw an Angel, but to Abraham appeared God. And neither he who saw God, beheld an Angel, nor he who saw an Angel, considered that he saw God; for greatly, or rather wholly, do things by nature originate differ from God the Creator. But if at any time, when the Angel was seen, he who saw it heard God's voice, as took place at the bush; for *the Angel of the Lord was seen in a flame of fire out of the bush, and the Lord called Moses out of the bush, saying, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*, yet was not the Angel the God of Abraham, but in the Angel God spoke (*ἐν δὲ ἀγγέλῳ λαλῶν ἦν ὁ θεός*). And what was seen was an Angel; but God spoke in him (*ἐν αὐτῷ*). For as He spoke to Moses in the pillar of a cloud in the tabernacle, so also God appears and speaks in Angels (*ἐν ἀγγέλοις*). So again to the son of Nun He spake by an Angel (*δι' ἀγγέλου*). But what God speaks, it is very plain He speaks through the Word, and not through another. And the Word, as being not separate from the Father, nor unlike and foreign to the Father's Essence, what He works, those are the Father's works, and His framing of all things is one with His; and what the Son gives, that is the Father's gift. And he who hath seen the Son, knows that, in seeing Him, he has seen, not Angel, nor one merely greater than

⁴² Athanasius, *Syn.* 52 (SC 563, p. 354; trans. NPNF).

Angels, nor in short any creature, but the Father Himself. And he who hears the Word, knows that he hears the Father; as he who is irradiated by the radiance, knows that he is enlightened by the sun.⁴³

Athanasius accepts that the sacred text might impose a distinction between the visual and the auditory components of the theophany, and that the visual component is probably brought about through the mediation of an angelic presence; he maintains, nevertheless, that the auditory component is to be ascribed to the Logos, who may be called ‘angel’ for his role in revealing and announcing the Father,⁴⁴ but is not, like the angel, an instrument of God, but God’s very own expression. Just before the quoted passage, Athanasius has established that the angelic manifestation (as per Eusebius’ exegesis) would not convey perfectly the divine source and content of the revelation. His reasoning is that no creature is able to convey the revelational work of God, because ‘being works, they cannot work what God works’; even the angels are separate and divided (*κεχωρισμένοι καὶ διεστηκότες*) from the only God in nature.⁴⁵ Unlike creatures, however, as we have just seen, the Logos is ‘not separate (*οὐ κεχωρισμένος*) from the Father, nor unlike and foreign to the Father’s Essence’, so that ‘what He works, those are the Father’s works, and His framing of all things is one with His; and what the Son gives, that is the Father’s gift’.⁴⁶ It follows, then, that only the Son can convey the Father’s visual and auditory revelation perfectly: seeing the Son, one sees the Father; hearing the Word, one hears the Father; receiving what the Son works and gives, one receives the Father’s works and gift.

THE ARGUMENT FROM THEOPHANIES IN PRO-NICENE ARGUMENTATION

In subsequent decades the debate between miahypostatic and dyohypostatic theologies continues, with Eunomius sounding

⁴³ Athanasius, *CA* 3.25.14 (*AW* I.3, pp. 322–3; trans. NPNF).

⁴⁴ See Athanasius’ remarks, just a few lines earlier, about Jacob’s prayer for his grandsons (Gen. 48:16, *ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ ῥυόμενός με ἐκ πάντων τῶν κακῶν εἰλόγησαι τὰ παιδία ταῦτα*): ‘But if it belong to none other than God to bless and to deliver, and none other was the deliverer of Jacob than the Lord Himself, and Him that delivered him the Patriarch besought for his grandsons, evidently none other did he join to God in his prayer than *God’s Word, whom therefore he called Angel because it is He alone who reveals the Father*’ (Athanasius, *CA* 3.25.13 [*AW* I.3, p. 322; trans. NPNF]; emphasis added).

⁴⁵ Athanasius, *CA* 3.25.14 (*AW* I.3, p. 322; trans. NPNF).

⁴⁶ *ἃ ἐργάζεται, ταῦτα τοῦ πατρὸς ἐστὶν ἔργα, καὶ μίαν ποιεῖ τὴν δημιουργίαν. καὶ ἃ δίδωσιν ὁ υἱός, τοῦ πατρὸς ἐστὶν ἢ δόσις.*

remarkably like Eusebius of Caesarea, and Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa echoing Marcellus and Athanasius. Indeed, Eunomius radicalizes the Eusebian reading of Exodus 3 and states that '[t]he one that sent Moses was He Who Is, while the one through whom he sent and spoke, is the angel of Him Who Is'.⁴⁷

At the other end of the theological spectrum, the argument, articulated earlier by Marcellus and Athanasius, that the strict separation between $\delta \acute{\omega}\nu$ and $\delta \tau\omicron\upsilon \acute{\omega}\nu\tau\omicron\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ amounts to equating the Son to a $\mu\eta \acute{\omega}\nu$, is now made by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa. Basil buttresses his affirmation about Christ as 'the truly Existing One' and 'the source of being for all beings' with an exegesis of Exod. 3:14 in which 'the angel', 'the Lord', and 'God' all refer to the Son:

Please stop saying that he does not exist when he is the one who truly exists, the one who is the source of life, and the one who produces being for all that exists. Didn't he find a designation well-suited for himself and fitting for his own eternity when he named himself *He Who Is* in his oracle to Moses his servant? He said: I am He Who Is [Exod. 3:14] ... It is written that the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the bush burning with fire. After mentioning the angel at the outset of the narrative, scripture introduces the voice of God when it says that he said to Moses: *I am the God of your father Abraham* [Exod. 3:6]. A little further on, the same one said: *I am He Who Is* [Exod. 3:14]. So, then, who is this one who is both angel and God alike? Isn't it he whom we have learned is called by the name *the angel of great counsel* [Isa. 9:5]? ... when he named himself *He Who Is* before Moses, he is understood to be none other than God the Word, who *was in the beginning with God* [John 1:2].⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Cited in Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 3.9.32 (GNO 2, p. 276, trans. S. G. Hall, p. 210). Cf. *Eun.* 3.9.34 (GNO 2, p. 276; trans. Hall, p. 211): 'he [Christ] is one of the angels'. English translation in Johan Leemans and Matthieu Cassin (eds.), *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III. An English Translation with Commentary and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the 12th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Leuven, 14–17 September 2010)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 42–233.

⁴⁸ Basil, *Eun.* 2.18 (SC 305, p. 70, 72; trans. The Fathers of the Church, 122, pp. 155–6). See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 3.9.34–6 (GNO 2, p. 277; trans. Hall, p. 211): Gregory reads 'angel' in Exod. 3:1 against Exod. 33:15 and 34:2, 9 (Moses's successful prayer that the Lord himself, *not an angel*, should lead Israel). The argument is not very clear, in good part because, as Hall notes (p. 211, n. 187), 'Exodus is itself confusing and repetitive, and Gregory quotes passages out of order'. What is eminently clear, however, is Gregory's theological conviction that, if Exodus 3 speaks of Moses encountering Him Who Is, a Christian reading can only affirm that 'the one who made himself known by the title *He who is*, is the Only-begotten God (3.35) ... either the Only-begotten God never appeared to Moses, or He that is, from

In Gregory, too, metaphysical speculation on ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ is welded to the exegesis of biblical theophanies, so that serious attention must therefore be given to both. Gregory takes the divine *Ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ ὢν* and the *Ἐγὼ εἶμι* statements in Deutero-Isaiah as the scriptural ‘mark of the true Godhead’ and, simply *assuming* the traditional identification of Christ as Moses’ interlocutor on Sinai, concludes that Eunomian theology—‘the sophistic fabrication about the non-existence at some time of Him Who truly is’—is non-scriptural, a departure from Christianity, a turning to idolatry:

The word of holy scripture suggests one way of knowing true godhead, which Moses is taught by the heavenly voice, when he hears him who said, *I am he who is* . . . That is why we affirm that the argument, that the one who truly is, once was not, is a denial and rejection of true godhead. Consider: the one who through light revealed his existence to Moses, named himself as being, when he said *I am that is*; and Isaiah, becoming a kind of an instrument for the one who spoke in him, says in the person of him who is, *I am first and I am hereafter* (Isa. 44:6), thereby making known by each thought the eternity of God . . . Indeed, the great John, announcing the Only-begotten God in his own proclamation in every way ensures that his account allows no access to the idea of non-being in connection with him that is: he says that he was in the beginning, that he was with God, that he was God, that he was Light and that he was forever Life and Truth and all good things, and that he was never at any time lacking any excellence, he who is the fullness of all good things and is in the bosom of the Father (cf. John 1:1–4, 14–18) . . . Therefore, if Moses rules that it should be for us a sort of mark of true deity that the only thing we know about God is this, that he is . . . then, in these circumstances we declare the whole sophistic argument, that the one who truly is, once was not, to be nothing but a perversion of Christianity and a turning to idolatry.⁴⁹

THE ARGUMENT FROM THEOPHANIES IN ANTI-APOLLINARIAN ARGUMENTATION

Gregory of Nyssa also uses theophanies on a second theological front, namely in his anti-Apollinarian polemics. In the *Letter to Theophilus*, for instance, which sets out to counter Apollinarius’ critique of the alleged ‘two sons’ doctrine as ‘absurd and utterly

whom the word comes to the Servant [i.e. Moses, my obs.], is himself the Son (3.36)’.
⁴⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 3.6 (GNO 2, pp. 186–9; trans. Hall, pp. 153–4).

impious',⁵⁰ he argues that the incarnation (*ἐπιφάνεια*) of the Son does not imply a duality of sons any more than the multiplicity of Old Testament theophanies would imply a multiplicity of sons.

Anyone who took the providential manifestation of the Only-begotten Son of God in the flesh as the production of another Son would also have to count within the list of divine manifestations all the theophanies to holy people that occurred before the appearance of the Only-begotten Son of God in the flesh, and also those that happened after that event to those who were worthy, and so would have to assume a multitude of Sons. The being who had dealings with Abraham would be one Son; he who appeared to Isaac, another; he who wrestled with Jacob, another; yet another, he who appeared to Moses in various manifestations: in light, in darkness, in a pillar of cloud, in face-to-face encounter, in the view of his back; still another, he who stood in the line of battle with Moses' successor. Then there is he who conversed with Job from out of the whirlwind; he who appeared on an exalted throne to Isaiah; the being in human form described in Ezekiel's writings; later on, he who struck down Paul in the light; and, before that, he who appeared on the mountain in sublime glory to those with Peter. If it is absurd and wholly impious to assign the various theophanies of the Only-begotten to a number of Sons, it is equally impious to use this manifestation in the flesh as an opportunity to assume that there is a second Son.⁵¹

It is quite clear that Gregory bases his argumentation on the traditional theology of theophanies as christophanies, building on the undisputed assumption that the one and the same Son appeared to the patriarchs and prophets of old and, later, appeared in the flesh and revealed his divine identity to his disciples. As scholars have noted—most often only in passing—Gregory of Nyssa is here deploying *testimonia* used in older polemical contexts (anti-Jewish, anti-Arian) and repurposing them in a novel and 'unexpected' way to argue for the unity of Christ.⁵²

⁵⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Theoph.*: 'they allege that ... some people in the Catholic Church profess two Sons, one Son by nature and one who emerged later by way of adoption. I do not know where they have heard anything like this or who it is they are picking a fight with; I have never heard anyone talking that kind of nonsense' (GNO 3/1, pp. 119–28, at pp. 120–1; trans. The Fathers of the Church, 131, p. 260).

⁵¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Theoph.* (GNO 3/1, pp. 121–2; trans. The Fathers of the Church, 131, pp. 261–2).

⁵² Hélène Grelier, 'L'Argumentation de Grégoire de Nysse contre Apollinaire de Laodicée: Étude littéraire et doctrinale de l'*Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium* et de l'*Ad Theophilum adversus apollinaristas*' (Ph.D. diss., University of Lyon, 2008), p. 627, n. 2635: 'L'argument des théophanies de l'AT comme prophéties du Christ a été abondamment utilisé dans les polémiques antérieures à la controverse anti-apollinariste, et spécialement dans

OPONENTS, IMPERSONATORS, AND A CLOUD OF OTHER WITNESSES

Christophanic exegesis was a venerable, deeply honoured, exegetical tradition, widely shared even among theological opponents. It is noteworthy, in this respect, that the traditional christophanic exegesis defended by Athanasius in *De synodis* 52 is upheld by the ‘Arian’ opponents lambasted a few chapters earlier, in *De synodis* 26–7.⁵³ Similarly, as Gregory of Nyssa reaffirms his belief that the theophany to Moses (ἐν τῇ γενομένῃ Μωϋσεί θεοφανείᾳ) was a manifestation of the Son who both appeared (i.e. as the angel of the

les discussions anti-juives ... L’argument des théophanies n’est pas original en lui-même, mais la façon dont Grégoire le réexploite pour répondre à l’accusation de confesser deux Fils est inattendue. En effet, il se sert des nombreux versets qui étaient utilisés comme prophéties du Christ, afin de pousser jusqu’à l’absurde le grief apollinariste.’ Cf. Brian E. Daley, ‘Divine Transcendence and Human Transformation’, *SP* 32 (1997), pp. 87–95, at p. 89 (emphasis mine): ‘His [Gregory of Nyssa’s] main effort in this brief letter [Letter to Theophilus] is to refute the main Apollinarian charge against him and his colleagues: that by insisting on the completeness of Jesus’ humanity, including a human consciousness or nous, they are teaching “two Sons ... one who is so by nature, the other who has become so later by appointment.” In reply, *Gregory presents the Incarnation of the Word as the culmination of the theophanies of sacred history*—all acts of self-revelation by a single divine Son’; George Dion Dragas, ‘The Anti-Apollinarian Christology of St. Gregory of Nyssa: A First Analysis’, *GOTR* 42 (1997), pp. 299–314, at p. 303 (emphasis mine): ‘Gregory not only denies the existence of such a doctrine [i.e. ‘two sons’], but also invites Theophilus to refute it. At the same time, however, he makes certain observations about this doctrine, which reveal the first elements of his own position ... It is crucial to note here that *for Gregory the incarnate manifestation of the Son of God does not differ in its content from the other divine manifestations which preceded it in the Old Testament.*’

⁵³ First Council of Sirmium, Anathemas 15–17 (= Athanasius, *Syn.* 27 [SC 563, p. 274; trans. NPNF]): ‘Whosoever shall say that Abraham saw, not the Son, but the Ingenerate God or part of Him, be he anathema! Whosoever shall say that with Jacob, not the Son as man, but the Ingenerate God or part of Him, has wrestled, be he anathema! Whosoever shall explain *The Lord rained fire from the Lord?* not of the Father and the Son, and says that He rained from Himself, be he anathema. For the Son, being Lord, rained from the Father Who is Lord.’ The target here, as well as in the *Ekthesis Makrostichos*, which Athanasius quotes before it, is the doctrine of Marcellus and Photinus—‘those who make a pretence of saying that He is but the mere word of God and unexisting, having His being in another—now as if pronounced, as some speak, now as mental ... Such are the disciples of Marcellus and Scotinus of Galatian Ancyra, who, equally with Jews, negate Christ’s existence before ages, and His Godhead, and unending Kingdom, upon pretence of supporting the Divine Monarchy’ (*Ekthesis Makrostichos*, Anathema 5 [= Athanasius, *Syn.* 26; SC 563, p. 264; trans. NPNF]).

Lord) and declared himself to be *ὁ ὄν*, he assumes that Eunomius is familiar with the underlying christological exegesis of Exodus 3.⁵⁴

One should also consider the perception of fourth-century theologians such as Cyril of Jerusalem, Asterius, or ‘blessed papa Athanasius’⁵⁵ in later pseudepigraphic writings. Some of the homilies on the Psalms ascribed to Asterius of Amasea, now thought to be the work of an unknown pro-Nicene theologian in the area of Antioch,⁵⁶ are replete with references to throne-theophanies (Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1 and 3:12) read, of course, as christophanies. This is undoubtedly a mark of the liturgical tradition they reflect.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Refut.* 29 (GNO 2, p. 323; trans. NPNF): ‘Real existence (τὸ ὄντως ὄν) is opposed to unreal existence (τὸ μὴ ὄντως ὄν) ... But if they do not deny the existence of the Maker of all things, let them be content not to deprive of real existence Him Who is, Who in the Divine appearance to Moses gave Himself the name of Existent, when He said, *I am that I am* even as Eunomius in his later argument agrees with this, saying that it was He Who appeared to Moses.’

⁵⁵ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 72.4.4 (GCS 47, p. 259).

⁵⁶ On the question of authorship, see Wolfram Kinzig, *In Search of Asterius: Studies on the Authorship of Homilies on the Psalms* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990). For the Greek text, see Marcel Richard, *Asterii Sophistae commentariorum in Psalmos quae supersunt* (Oslo: Brogger, 1956). See also the thorough study of Homilies 15 and 29 in Hansjörg auf der Maur, *Die Osterhomilien des Asterius Sophistes* (Trier: Paulinus, 1967), pp. 83–94.

⁵⁷ *Hom.* 15.16 calls on the believers to join in the angelic praise of the risen and ascended Christ, and thus to fulfil together with their heavenly counterparts the prophecy of Ps. 8:2, ‘out of the mouths of infants and nurslings you furnished praise for yourself’; since the angelic pattern of worship is a tapestry of biblical passages including, predictably, Isa. 6:3, along with Ezek. 3:12 and Ps. 23:7 (*Hom.* 15.16 [Richard, p. 115]), and elsewhere (*Hom.* 16.12 [Richard, p. 121]) Ps. 8:2 (‘your magnificence was raised beyond the heavens’) is linked with Isaiah’s throne, ‘lofty and raised up’, it is clear that it is, indeed, the angelic Trisagion that constitutes ‘the hymn of the faithful’, sung for the first time by the newly baptized Christians—the ‘babes’ in Ps. 8:2—‘who formerly muddled their lips [cf. Isaiah’s ‘unclean lips’] with dirty songs’ (*Hom.* 16.15 [Richard, pp. 122–3]). The object of angelic and earthly worship is Christ, as can be ascertained from the following: *Hom.* 16.12 (Richard, pp. 121–2) understands both Ps. 8:2 (‘exalted over the heavens’) and its analogon, Isaiah’s ‘lofty’ throne, as references to the Ascension of Christ; *Hom.* 15.15 (Richard, p. 115) says the same about Ps. 8:2, then states that the object of angelic worship is ‘the luminous clay’ (τὸν πηλὸν λάμποντα) of the ascended Christ, for the ‘glory of the Lord from its place’, which is to be blessed according to Ezek. 3:12, is none other than the glory streaming from Christ’s glorified body (*Hom.* 15.16 [Richard, p. 115]: ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτοῦ, τοῦ ἐνδόξου σώματος); in *Hom.* 29.9–10 (Richard, pp. 232–3), ‘the heavens declare the glory of God’ (Ps. 18:2) is interpreted as a reference to the perpetual worship offered jointly by saintly humans (Abraham, Moses, Job, David, and the Evangelists John and Paul are all ‘reason-endowed heavens’) and by the angelic hosts, culminating with the

A fifth-century homily on the Meeting of the Lord ascribed to Cyril of Jerusalem,⁵⁸ for instance, delights in the paradoxical identification of the fragile baby Jesus in the arms of Symeon with the Lord of the Exodus and omnipotent Ancient of Days. For Ps.-Cyril,

it is this child who, of old, parted the sea for Israel, and drowned Pharaoh, and gave the Law to the Israelites, and rained down manna, and led the Hebrew nation by a pillar fire, and rent the rock asunder, and kept the bush unconsumed in a flame of dewy fire.⁵⁹

As such, readers are exhorted to ‘sing and chant and glorify the infant-and-God, both forty-day old and pre-eternal, both a little child and Ancient of Days, both a baby at the breast and the maker of the ages’.⁶⁰ A Nativity homily ascribed to Athanasius revolves around the same paradox by invoking the burning bush theophany and Daniel’s vision:

I behold a strange mystery: in place of the sun, the Sun of Righteousness placed in the Virgin in an uncircumscribed manner . . . Today God, He-Who-Is and pre-exists, becomes what he was not; for being God, he becomes a human being without stepping out of his being God . . . The Ancient of Days is born as a child.⁶¹

There are many more texts that could be brought into the discussion. Among Greek-speaking sources one may quote Cyril of

cherubim of Ezek. 3:12 and the seraphim of Isa. 6:3. The object of their worship—‘God’—is specified when the long list of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles who have also ‘declared the glory of God’ is brought to completion by quotations pointing to Christ: John 1:14 (‘we have seen his glory’) and Titus 2:13 (‘the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus’).

⁵⁸ Ps.-Cyril of Jerusalem, *Homilia in occursum domini* (PG 33, cols. 1183–1204). This homily was probably written around 450 (Michel Aubineau, *Les Homélie festales d’Hésychius de Jérusalem*, 2 vols. [Brussels: Societé des Bollandistes, 1978], vol. 1, p. 4, n. 2). See the translation and thorough discussion of the text by Ellen Alex, ‘Die Homilie *In occursum domini* des Ps.-Cyrill von Jerusalem: Übersetzung und Kommentar’ (MA thesis, University of Regensburg, 2012).

⁵⁹ Ps.-Cyril of Jerusalem, *De occursu* 12 (PG 33, col. 1200 AB): *Τοῦτο τὸ παιδίον ἐστὶν ὁ πάλαι τῷ Ἰσραὴλ τὴν θάλασσαν διαρρήξας καὶ τὸν φαραὼ βυθίσας καὶ τὸν νόμον δοὺς τοῖς Ἰσραηλίταις καὶ τὸ μάνα ἐπομβρίας καὶ στύλον πυρὸς τὸ γένος τῶν Ἑβραίων ὁδηγῆσας καὶ πέτραν ῥήξας καὶ βάτον πυροδρόσου φλογὸς ἀφλεκτον φυλάξας.*

⁶⁰ Ps.-Cyril of Jerusalem, *De occursu* 4 (PG 33, col. 1192A): *πάσα δοξολογησάτω Παιδίον θεόν, τεσσαρακονθήμερον καὶ προαιώνιον, παιδίον μικρὸν καὶ παλαιὸν τῶν ἡμερῶν, παιδίον θηλάζον καὶ τῶν αἰώνων ποιητήν.*

⁶¹ PG 28, cols. 960A–961A: *Μυστήριον ξένον βλέπω, ἀντὶ ἡλίου τὸν ἥλιον τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἀπεργράπτως χωρήσαντα ἐν τῇ Παρθένῳ. . . Θεὸς σήμερον ὁ ὢν καὶ πρῶν γίνεται ὅπερ οὐκ ἦν· ὢν γὰρ Θεός, γίνεται ἄνθρωπος, οὐκ ἐκστάς τοῦ εἶναι Θεός . . . Ὁ Παλαιὸς τῶν ἡμερῶν παιδίον γέγονεν.*

Jerusalem,⁶² Epiphanius,⁶³ John Chrysostom,⁶⁴ Theodoret of Cyrus,⁶⁵ and the *Apostolic Constitutions*;⁶⁶ among Latin writers Novatian,⁶⁷ Gregory of Elvira,⁶⁸ Phoebadius,⁶⁹ Ambrose of

⁶² Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.* 14.27 (PG 33, col. 861A; trans. The Fathers of the Church, 64, p. 50), arguing for the Son's natural and eternal divinity ('He did not gain His throne by way of advancement'): 'The prophet Isaiah, having beheld this throne before the coming of the Savior in the flesh says, *I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne. For the Father no man has at any time seen, and He who then appeared to the prophet was the Son.*'

⁶³ Epiphanius, *Ancoratus* 29.5 (GCS 25, p. 38; The Fathers of the Church, 128, p. 103) on the Mamre theophany: 'that he might point out the one God and the two others following him, his angels'; 39.4 (GCS 25, p. 49; The Fathers of the Church, 128, p. 118): 'the Son of God who came from above with two angels'.

⁶⁴ Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 42.2 (PG 54, col. 387): 'In Abraham's tent both the angels and their master (καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι, καὶ ὁ τούτων Δεσπότης) were seen at the same time'; *Theatr.* 3 (PG 56, col. 546): 'Christ appeared to you, O wondrous one, flanked by two angels; and through [your] care for strangers (διὰ φιλοξενίας) you became a messmate to God and angels (Θεῶν καὶ ἀγγέλους ὁμόσκηρος). O, blessed tent (σκηνή), which by condescension (δι' οἰκονομίαν) housed God accompanied by angels! Christ appeared to you in human form (ἐν ἀνθρώπου σχήματι), disclosing to you the mystery of the divine advent of himself and [his] salvation'; *On the Equality of the Father and the Son* 11 (SC 396, pp. 304–6): Isaiah 6, together with Daniel 7 and 3 Kings 22 are invoked as proof texts for the Son's divinity, expressed visually by his being seated on the divine throne.

⁶⁵ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Qu. 70 on Genesis (The Questions on the Octateuch)*, trans. Robert C. Hill [Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2007], p. 144): the three visitors, who only appear to be eating, were two angels accompanying the master ('they and their Lord', αὐτοὶ καὶ ὁ τούτων δεσπότης).

⁶⁶ *Apos. Con.* 5.20.5 (SC 329, p. 278; trans. NPNF): 'He is the Christ of God ... To Him did Moses bear witness, and said: *The Lord received fire from the Lord, and rained it down* (Gen. 19.24); Him did Jacob see as a man, and said: *I have seen God face to face, and my soul is preserved*; Him did Abraham entertain, and acknowledge to be the Judge, and his Lord; Him did Moses see in the bush; ... Him did Joshua the son of Nun see, as the captain of the Lord's host (Josh. 5:14) ... Him Daniel describes as the Son of man coming to the Father, and receiving all judgment and honour from Him; and as the stone cut out of the mountain without hands ...'. Similarly, *Apos. Con.* 8.12.18–27 (SC 336, p. 188), the Anaphora, suggests that Abraham's call consisted of a vision of the Messiah by which God delivered him from idolatry (Σὺ εἶ ὁ ... ἐμφανίσας αὐτῷ τὸν Χριστὸν σου).

⁶⁷ Novatian, *Trin.* 18.11–17 (CCSL 4, pp. 45–6).

⁶⁸ Gregory of Elvira, *De fide* 80–90 (CCSL 69, pp. 242–4): a list of christologically interpreted theophanies associated with Abraham, Jacob/Israel, and Moses; *Tractates on the Books of Holy Scripture* 2.10–11 (CCSL 69, pp. 11–12).

⁶⁹ Phoebadius of Agen (*Contra Arianos* 16.7–17.3, trans. The Fathers of the Church, 38, p. 130, 132) first ascribes Exod. 3:14 to the Father (16.7), then states that the Son, being the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), could not

Milan,⁷⁰ Hilary of Poitiers,⁷¹ and Jerome.⁷²

The convergence of so many geographically and theologically diverse sources on the christological interpretation of theophanies indicates that we are dealing here with a widespread tradition, remarkably enduring across the centuries but also amenable to a variety of polemical uses. A significant change in the interpretation of theophanies occurs only with Augustine and only West of the Adriatic; but the theological revolution inaugurated by the bishop of Hippo, already thoroughly discussed in scholarship,⁷³ exceeds the limits of this article.

have come into being at a later point, and, finally, reaches the conclusion that the one who spoke to Moses was the Son (17.2).

⁷⁰ Ambrose, *De fide* 1.13.83 (CSEL 78, p. 36): *Non pater in rubo, non pater in eremo, sed filius est Moysi locutus ... Hic est ergo qui legem dedit ... Hic est ergo deus patriarcharum, his est deus profetarum*. Cf. *De fide* 5.1.26 (CSEL 78, pp. 225–6): the *qui est* of Exod. 3:14 establishes the eternity of Christ (*semper est*) as opposed to the created existence of angels (*erat Gabriel erat Raphael, erant angeli ... qui aliquando non fuerint*). See also the opening of Ambrose's hymn *Intende, qui regis Israel, super cherubim qui sedes*. For the biblical exegesis of Ambrose's hymn, see Édouard Cothenet, 'L'Arrière-plan biblique de l'hymne de St. Ambroise "Intende, qui regis Israel"', in A. M. Triacca and A. Pistoia (eds.), *L'Hymnographie: Conférences Saint-Serge XLVIe Semaine d'études liturgiques, Paris, 29 juin–2 juillet 1999* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000), pp. 153–60.

⁷¹ Hilary of Poitiers, *Trin.* 4.23–34 (SC 448, pp. 56–76): a discussion of theophanic texts (Genesis 16, 18–19, 28, 32; Exodus 3) to prove of the divinity of the Son, identified unambiguously as the 'angel of the Lord' and 'the angel of great counsel' (Isa. 9:6, LXX: *μεγάλης βουλῆς ἄγγελος*): 'what says the Scripture of Him Who is called the Angel of God, yet speaks words which belong to God alone? ... He Who is called the Angel of God is also Lord and God. The Son of God is also, according to the prophet, the Angel of great counsel' (4.23).

⁷² Jerome, *Comm. In Esa.* 18.65.1 (CCSL 73A, p. 744), in a casual remark that Exod. 3:14, as well as several other Old Testament theophanies, refers to the Son; *Comm. In Mat.* 2.14.27 (CCSL 77, p. 124), where *ego sum* at the burning bush is linked to *ego sum* in Matt. 14:27 (implying identity of subject); *Comm. In Mc.* 1 (CCSL 78, p. 452), where connecting John 1:1 with Exod. 3:14 offers proof for the eternity and divinity of the Son, who always 'was' (*ἦν*) as opposed to John the Baptist, who came to be (*ἐγένετο*). In *Ep.* 18A 4.1 (CSEL 54, p. 78), Jerome ascribes the Origenian view (the enthroned figure of Isaiah 6 as the Father, and the two seraphim as the Son and the Spirit) to unnamed earlier interpreters, both Greek and Latin. His dissent from their opinion is exegetical: judging from John 12:39–41 and Acts 28:25–7, the enthroned figure was Christ, who therefore cannot be identified with one of the seraphim. The same exegesis is set forth, this time in a more strident polemical tone, in *Comm. In Esa.* 3.6.1–8 (CCSL 73, pp. 83–90). Jerome repeats his fundamental view twice (CSEL 73, p. 84, and again at 73, p. 87): *visus est autem Filius in regnantis habitu*.

⁷³ See Bogdan G. Bucur, 'Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective', *SVTQ* 52 (2008), pp. 67–93, and Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God* (above, n. 9).

CONCLUSION

The christological exegesis of Old Testament theophanies, although perceived as insufficient and rendered obsolete *for the articulation of doctrine* by the development of a more sophisticated and precise technical glossary and argumentation, continued to be widely recognized as an element of shared tradition, and functioned as a polemical ‘adjuvant’ to fourth-century anti-Jewish, anti-Arian, anti-modalistic, and anti-Apollinarian argumentation. It certainly retained its original liturgical setting (in communal worship as well as, one may infer, personal prayer), and would experience a major resurgence in hymnography during the second half of the first millennium CE.

If the continued presence of this exegetical and theological tradition in the fourth century is considered in conjunction with its pervasiveness in prior centuries and renewed proliferation in later hymnographic texts, christophanic exegesis appears as a robust, adaptable, widespread, and long-standing Christian tradition. The contrast with the minimal representation of this tradition in scholarly accounts about fourth-century theology is immediately apparent.

It seems that a blind spot exists, which hides this early Christian tradition from the lights of modern scholarship, making it almost invisible and inconsequential. I can only hope that the pages above have succeeded in signalling the problem, so that we can adjust and sharpen our focus.