

THE 'PROPHET' ABRAHAM IN THE WRITINGS OF IRENAEUS, TERTULLIAN, AMBROSE AND AUGUSTINE

The patriarch Abraham is, after Moses, the Old Testament person most frequently referred to in the New Testament. He often figures in important passages. We come across him repeatedly in Irenaeus and Tertullian. Ambrose considered him sufficiently important to devote a monograph to him. Augustine mentions him with extraordinary frequency. In short, the patriarch was in the west a prominent figure; which is not to say that he was not in the east, where Origen attended to his reputation. There is, however, no unanimous tradition in the early Christian literature about Abraham's function in revelation¹.

ABRAHAM AS A RABBI, AS A PHILOSOPHER, AND AS A PROPHET

The synagogue frequently depicts Abraham as a rabbi. The Midrash presents an Abraham who not only knew the Torah, but observed it. Indeed, he even observed the teachings of the Scribes². From the world of Hellenistic Judaism Flavius Josephus produces the picture of an Abraham gifted with powers of persuasion and rarely failing judgement. That is why he challenged mistaken concepts of God and promoted a monotheistic idea of God. Abraham's view of nature brought him to this (*Ant.* I.7.1). The opposition of the Chaldeans and other peoples of Mesopotamia led him to return to Canaan (cf I.19.1). Josephus observes with satisfaction that non-Jewish authors appreciated Abraham as a philosopher (I.8.2)³. Also from the Hellenistic world are the views of Philo Iudaeus, who merges Jewish traditions with Greek Philosophy. The patriarchs are embodiments of the written laws which were only later to be formulated. These laws are nothing other than commentaries on the works of the patriarchs (*De Abrah.* 3-

¹ T. KLAUSER, in voce *Abraham*, in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* I (1950) 21 sq.; K. BERGER, in voce *Abraham*, in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* I (1977) 380 sq.

² O. SCHMITZ, *Abraham im Spätjudentum und im Urchristentum*, in *Aus Schrift und Geschichte*. Theologische Abhandlungen Adolf Schlatter zu seinem 70. Geburtstag angebracht. K. Bornhäuser (Stuttgart 1922) 105 sq.

³ SCHMITZ, 110.

6). More than that: to Philo the patriarchs are men in appearance only: in reality they are virtues (*De Abrah.* 54). Scripture presents Abraham as a symbol of virtue acquired by instruction (*De Abrah.* 52). Philo develops this dual point of view by first taking the events of Abraham's life literally and interpreting them panegyrically, and then interpreting them according to their deeper allegorical significance. Abraham, he suggests, did not confine himself to the visible natural world nor regard that as the supreme deity. But his thoughts rose higher, and he discerned a better world, viz. the purely spiritual world, and God who is the creator and the ruler of both worlds (*De Abrah.* 88)⁴. Philo, too, regarded Abraham as a philosopher. To these three Jewish views, which show us how later Judaism considered Abraham to be a rabbi or a philosopher, we must add a fourth, which arose in early Christian circles and regarded the patriarch as a prophet. As with Philo, we find here a dual meaning in the text. Whereas Philo offered a literal and an allegorical interpretation, the early Christians worked with a literal and a typological interpretation. The latter is the characteristically Christian element. For the sake of clarity, we offer here a few pages on typology.

TYPOLOGY

The Greek word *τύπος* has a variety of meanings. In addition to these, there is also a Christian meaning, which refers to a prophetic figure⁵. Paul uses the term twice in this sense. In *Rom.* 5.14, Paul refers to Adam as *τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος*. And in *1 Cor.* 10.6 he uses the plural to describe the experiences of Israel as bearers of prophetic and messianic messages: *τύποι ἡμῶν*. The apostle uses the term with a view to the coming of the Messiah. After Paul, Irenaeus of Lyons uses the Greek term in Latin: *Typus futuri dictus est ipse Adam (Adversus haereses III.18.1-7, where he cites Rom. 5.14)*. The word has been latinised⁶. Tertullians custom is sometimes to keep the Greek word, and sometimes to use a corresponding Latin word. The former Greek *typus* occurs three times (twice in *De idol.* 24.1, and once in *Exh.* 6.1), and the adjective *typicus* once (*Pat.* 6.1.)⁷. As synonyms of *typus* Tertullian uses *forma, figura, sacramentum*;

⁴ SCHMITZ, 111 sq.

⁵ See L. GOPPELT. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* [ThWNT] (Stuttgart 1933 sqq.) VIII.249-251 for the other interpretations.

⁶ A. G. HAMMAN, *La typologie biblique et sa formulation chez Tertullien*. in G.J.M. BARTELINK, A. HILHORST et C.H. KNEEPKENS. *Eulogia. Mélanges offerts à A.A.R. Bastiaensen*. (Instrumenta Patristica, 24). (Steenbrugge 1991) 138.

⁷ HAMMAN 138.

he translates Paul's μέγα μυστήριον in *Eph.* 5.32 consistently with *sacramentum* (*Marc.* V.18.9-19; *Exh.* 5.3; *An.* 11.4; 21.2; *Mon.* 5.7; *Iei.* 3.2)⁸. According to Tertullian, the great mystery of *Eph.* 5.32 refers to the words which Adam utters ecstatically in *Gen.* 2.24 without himself grasping their meaning. The apostle Paul is given the task of revealing its significance. Thus *sacramentum* here assumes the meaning of a 'symbolic text'⁹. Christians have used the word *figura* for a riddle, a parable, 'picture language', and prefiguration. The verb *figurare* is even more common in typological usage. *Allegoria* is akin to *figura* as the bearer of a hidden sense. This also assumes the meaning of *figura* in Tertullian's writings (*Marc.* IV.25.1; *Res.* 20.7; 28.5; 30.1)¹⁰. Paul expresses the relation between the Old and the New Testament by σκιά (*umbra*)¹¹, but this term is not taken up in the earliest Christian writings to any great extent, in contrast with its influence on the interpretations of Origen, Gaudentius and, especially, Augustine in this matter¹².

Having considered these most important terms in the language of typology, let us turn to Bultmann's definition of typology. His understanding of typology sees it as a hermeneutic method for the interpretation of the Old Testament, practised in the Church from New Testament times onward. It uncovers in persons, events and institutions of the Old Testament prefigurations of corresponding persons, events and institutions of the time of salvation, which started with the coming of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament *typus* corresponds to an *antitypus* of the Christian era, e.g. 1 *Pet.* 3.21; *Hebr.* 9.24¹³. However, Bultmann points out that the typological approach is not tied to this terminology. Related to it is the exegetical method by which sayings from the O.T. are regarded as predictions that have found their fulfilment in the time of salvation or will yet do so. But the two methods must be kept strictly separated. Typology is associated with the idea of repetition; the proof from prediction, on the other hand, is concerned with the end of time. The two methods operate with different ideas of time. The proof from prediction assumes a linear model of time;

⁸ P. MATTEI, *Tertullien. Le mariage unique*. (Sources Chrétiennes, 343). (Paris 1988) 49.

⁹ MATTEI, 49.

¹⁰ HAMMAN, 142.

¹¹ In *Col.* 2.17. Cf. S. SCHULZ in voce σκιά, in ThWNT VII, 400.

¹² AUGUSTINUS, *De pecc. mer.* 3.5.11; *Contra duas ep. Pelag.* 3.4.11; *Tract. in Io.* 120.3; *De spiritu et litt.* 15.27.

¹³ R. BULTMANN, *Ursprung und Sinn der Typologie als hermeneutische Methode*, in W.J. KOOMAN en J.M. VAN VEEN, *Pro regno, pro sanctuario*. Bij de zestigste verjaardag van prof.dr. G. van der Leeuw (Nijkerk 1950) 89.

typology assumes a cyclic idea of time. The proof from prediction springs from the Old Testament notion of a divine plan that proceeds teleologically, and a saving history which heads for its consummation. Alternatively, typology reckons with a cosmological idea of time that assumes the eternal return of all things¹⁴. It seems to me unnecessary to postulate with Bultmann a cyclic idea of time lying behind typology. After all, the literal, historical interpretation of the Old Testament text continues with the Christians quite normally, as does the allegorical interpretation of Philo Iudaeus. Bultmann warns that not every instance of parallelism between people and events in eschatology, or in the Christian present, and Old Testament counterparts is necessarily a case of typology. When figures from the history of Israel are presented to the Church as examples, such as Job (*Jas.* 5.11) or Elijah praying (*Jas.* 5.17), then this is not typology but the traditional method of paraenesis, which always uses examples from the past. Other instances of this are lists, such as those in 4 *Macc.* 16.20ff; 18.10-19; 1 *Clem.* 4.12; and the 'cloud of witnesses' in *Hebr.* 11. The same holds true for references to judgements executed on sinners from the past (*Jud.* 5.6ff; 2 *Pet.* 2.4ff; cf *Sir.* 16.6-10; *Sap.* 10.1-20; 3 *Macc.* 2.4-8). Nor is typology at work when it is not a matter of parallels which admonish one to do right and abstain from wrong, but is, instead, a matter of understanding an evil destiny. When the rejection of Jesus by his own people is compared with what happened to the prophets, this is not an example of typology¹⁵. *Matt.* 23.32 already shows that the destiny of Jesus can be regarded as a continuation of that of the prophets, rather than a repeat of their fate in the last days¹⁶: "(do not) fill up, then, the measure of your fathers". Of course, this argument may be right as far as it goes, but it is confined to the level of historical exegesis, and does not touch the level of the deeper sense, the mystery of the same text. I would, therefore, add to Bultmann's definition that typological exegesis leaves the historical exegesis of the same words undisturbed. Tertullian in particular shows the necessity of this addition.

To Irenaeus the Old Testament is the book of types. This is where the Logos speaks. This is where the Spirit rules. Irenaeus provides a definition of typology. *Typus* and figure sometimes differ from the reality in matter and substance. But they must preserve their similarity to it by their form and by showing a similarity in what is present and what is not

¹⁴ BULTMANN, 89.

¹⁵ GOPPELT, 92.

¹⁶ BULTMANN, 97 sq.

(*Adv. haereses* II.23.1)¹⁷. Irenaeus, however, was not the first Christian to use allegoresis-turned-typology. The learned writer of the Letter to the Hebrews introduced typology into Christianity after Paul. He was followed by Barnabas, Justin and Irenaeus — who was the first to treat the Old Testament typologically through and through. Then Tertullian provided a theory of allegorical and typological method. Tertullian assures us that he studied both Justin and Irenaeus intensively. He also praises the excellent interpretation of the law by the writer to the Hebrews (*Pud.* 20)¹⁸.

Tertullian states clearly that allegories, besides their surface meaning, have a deeper significance. The same applies to parables and riddles (*Scorp.* 11)¹⁹. Zimmermann concludes that Tertullian was decidedly opposed to any allegorical blurring of bible texts which would make them lose their definite form. His careful judgement saw the saving truths of the Christian faith more clearly than did the heretics²⁰. By this clear reasoning he does justice to the literal meaning of the text. Tertullian regularly provides theories to justify practises followed by Irenaeus. He distinguishes between two sorts of prophecy. Christ was the subject of prophecy not only in the words of the prophets, but also in the testimony of the events (*Marc.* IV.13.3; *Res.* 28.1). It is notable that in the last-cited text of Tertullian, Tertullian uses the word *prophetare*, which is otherwise rarely used in this sort of context: "Et vocibus ita et rebus prophetatum" (*Res.* 28.1). Typology, in Tertullian's writings, is not a simple matter. The word *sacramentum*, in the sense of saving mysteries in Christ, is quite difficult because it means both the reality signified and the sign itself. In fact, the word has no exact definition²¹. There have been many warnings that the typological method of working with Old Testament data is threatened by a mass of absurdities and banalities. Typology — according to Goppelt — is not a systematic interpretation of the Scripture but a pneumatic way of thinking²². I would, therefore, again expand upon Bultmann's definition: typology is a pneumatic way of thinking. Tertullian applies the word *figu-*

¹⁷ "Typus enim et imago secundum materiam et substantiam aliquotiens a veritate diversus est; secundum autem habitum et liniamentum debet servare similitudinem, et similiter ostendere per praesentia quae non sunt praesentia"; *Adv. Haer.* II,23,1.

¹⁸ G. ZIMMERMANN, *Die hermeneutischen Prinzipien Tertullians. Inaugural Dissertation* (Leipzig 1937) 7 sq.

¹⁹ "Si non ita accipiuntur, quemadmodum pronuntiantur, sine dubio praeter quam sonant sapiunt, et aliud in sensibus erit, aliud in sensibilibus, ut allegoriae, ut parabolae, ut aenigmata"; *Scorp.* 11.4.

²⁰ ZIMMERMANN, 18.

²¹ J.E.L. VAN DER GEEST, *Le Christ et l'Ancien Testament chez Tertullien. Recherche terminologique. Dissertatie* Nijmegen (Nijmegen 1972) 141.

²² GOPPELT, 183.

ra, which he uses frequently, to the earthly life of Christ, as well as to facts relating to the fellowship of the Church. But he sometimes gives it a more general scope, as, e.g., in *Idol.* 5.4., "dummodo apostolus affirmet omnia tunc figurate populo accidisse". This is probably an allusion to 1 *Cor.* 10.6. Tertullian has here changed Paul's ταῦτα into *omnia*. He is evidently of the opinion that the entire Old Testament secretly witnesses to Christ. Paul, he says, "totum ordinem Moysei figuram ignorati apud Iudaeos, agniti vero apud nos Christi fuisse testatur" (*Marc.* V.11.8). All that God did in the old order led to Christ. The Old Testament, therefore, stands in reference to Christ²³. Thus Tertullian makes it possible for us to revise Bultmann's definition a third time: typology, at least for Tertullian and Augustine, exists against the background of a view of the Bible in which the whole of the Old Testament is regarded as being itself one large *typus*. In searching for the 'prophet' Abraham in the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Ambrose and Augustine, it is essential to have a clear understanding of typology.

THE 'PROPHET' ABRAHAM IN IRENAEUS

Irenaeus follows Paul's Letter to the Galatians, which depicts Abraham as a patriarch and a prophet of our faith: "... in Abraham praefigurabatur fides nostra ... patriarcha nostrae fidei et velut propheta fuit ... una eadem illius et nostra sit fides" (*Haer.* IV.21.1; cf IV.7.2; V.34.3). Irenaeus uses in Latin the word *propheta* which had entered into Christian Latin through preaching and translated Bibles. Words of this sort already existed before Tertullian, so they were not invented by this linguistic virtuoso²⁴. The verb *praefigurare* shows that we are dealing with a *typus*. And within this *typus*, Abraham is called a prophet. Abraham knew God as one who created heaven and earth through His Word. God called Abraham and instructed him (*Haer.* IV.7.1). Abraham had already desired to see the day of Christ's coming: "Abraham, qui et concupiverat diem adventus Christi videre" (*Haer.* IV.7.1). He learned about God's coming among men, through which Abraham's offspring would become as numerous as the stars in the firmament: "... descendente quidem exultatione Abrahae in eos qui erant ex semine eius" (*Haer.* IV.7.1). Abraham was a prophet, who, through the Spirit, saw the coming of the Lord: "Propheta ergo cum esset Abraham et videret in Spiritu diem adventus Domini ..." (*Haer.* IV. 5.5). Abraham's great joy at the coming of the Word was manifested in

²³ VAN DER GEEST, 163 sq.

²⁴ VAN DER GEEST, 100.

Simeon in the temple (*Haer.* IV.7.1) and in the other witnesses to Jesus's birth. Irenaeus stresses that they are descendents of the patriarch. Simeon realized Abraham's joy anew, which infected those of his offspring who believed in Jesus (*Haer.* IV.7.1). These joyous descendents of Abraham are not involved in a *typus* but form a group. Moreover, the key lies not in the New Testament, but in the Old. The patriarch does, however, emerge from all this as a prophet. It is not merely typology which makes him thus. This is a matter of ordinary prophecy that is, albeit, extraordinary in the experience of the joy that is closely connected with the patriarch. Behind this close connection lies the notion of Israel as the chosen nation. Abraham, Irenaeus argues, did indeed follow, according to his faith, the command of God's word, and obediently offered his only beloved son as a sacrifice to God, so that God might be favourable towards his entire offspring, in order to present His only Son as an offering for our redemption. The patriarch anticipated the sacrifice of Christ²⁵. We are dealing here with ordinary literal exegesis. We have already made reference to this passage: "Propheta cum esset Abraham et videret in Spiritu diem adventus Domini ..." (*Haer.* IV.5.5). At the same time, we note here that the story of Isaac's sacrifice also contains a *typus*. We must take up our cross as Isaac took up the wood: "Tollentes crucem quemadmodum ligna Isaac" (*Haer.* IV.5.4). This is pneumatic exegesis. This is typology. But the sacrifice demanded of Abraham is also a *typus*, for in it he anticipated the sacrifice that God the Father will make: "Abraham prono animo unigenitum et dilectum filium concessit sacrificium Deo, ut et Deus beneplacitum habeat pro universo semine eius dilectum et unigenitum Filium suum praestare sacrificium in nostram redemptionem" (*Haer.* IV.5.4). This also is typology. Patriarchs and prophets are cited as those who predict and prefigure the future. The patriarchs function as prophets: "Christus qui tunc quidem per patriarchas suos et prophetas praefigurans et praenuntians futura" (*Haer.* IV.21.3). In Abraham's case we must regard everything as figurative speech: "nihil enim vacuum neque sine signo apud eum" (*Haer.* IV. 21.3). According to Roldanus, it is clear that this work in history, for the heritage of a numerous ecumenic offspring that will extend across the earth, shows continuity from the calling of Abraham to the final stage²⁶. This argument suggests that typology does not operate with cyclic time, as Bultmann thought. So Irenaeus called Abraham a 'prophet' for two rea-

²⁵ J. ROLDANUS, *L'héritage d'Abraham d'après Irénée*, in *Text and Testimony. Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A.E.J. Klijn*. Edited by T. BAARDA, A. HILHORST, G.P. LUTTIKHUIZEN, S. VAN DER WOUDE (Kampen 1985) 116.

²⁶ ROLDANUS, 222.

sons: because he prophesied and because he is a subject of typology. Irenaeus refers to both Moses and Abraham, the two Old Testament figures most frequently mentioned in the New Testament, 'prophets'. As we have seen, this designation also applies to Isaac and Jacob. Indeed, Irenaeus sometimes refers to all the Old Testament writings as the προφῆται. This means that he, evidently, regards the Prophets as the most important part of the Old Testament, in contrast with the Jewish tradition, which gives — of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings — pride of place to the Law²⁷. Occasionally, he also refers to the Old and the New Testaments together as "universae Scripturae, et prophetiae et evangelia" (*Haer.* II.27.2; III.9.2; III.10.3; IV.34.1; V.22.1)²⁸. All this is evidence of a process of christianising, in which the idea of 'prophecy' is regarded very highly.

THE 'PROPHET' ABRAHAM IN TERTULLIAN

According to Tertullian, a prophet is a man worthy of knowing and making known God: "vir dignus Deum nosse et ostendere" (*Ap.* 18.2). In his prophetic function, a prophet is one with God, and God speaks through the prophet's lips: "omne os prophetarum eiusdem Dei vocibus sonat" (*Scorp.* 2.14). And Tertullian is aware that the prophets speak "non de humano sensu, sed de Dei spiritu" (*Marc.* V.8.12). The prophet's function is many-sided, but predicting the future is his most important task²⁹. Tertullian uses typology in his discussion of the mysteries of the Old Testament. There is nothing new in this, but he also speaks of the mysteries of the whole Bible. The New Prophecy enables him to do this. The Paraclete expounds the words of Jesus and Paul as well, and theirs is the decisive exposition. In some works of his Montanist period Tertullian fixes the moment of revelation at the words of the Holy Spirit as he then grasped them (*Res.* 63.9)³⁰. Is it possible that Tertullian's avoidance of the terms 'prophet' and 'prophesying' in connection with typology is related to his reverence for the New Prophecy of Montanus, Prisca and Maximilla? They are prophets: they speak 'in the name of ...'. What is left to the Old Testament prophets is *prae-fari*, speaking before the event. And that is indeed the verb that our author uses for them. This may be why Tertullian never called Abraham a prophet when the patriarch figured in his writings as a

²⁷ J. KUNZE, *Glaubensregel, Heilige Schrift und Taufbekenntnis*. (Leipzig 1899) 110.

²⁸ J. HOH, *Die Lehre des hl. Irenäus über das Neue Testament*. (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, VII. Band; 4.5. Heft (Münster i.W. 1919) 36.

²⁹ VAN DER GEEST, 102.

³⁰ VAN DER GEEST, 144, note 2.

typus. In typological contexts Tertullian uses *praedicatio*, *praefatio*, *prae-figuratio*, *praestructio*. We should note, however, that *prophetia* means the prophetic message as such³¹. This obviates the possibility of Abraham's being called a prophet in every typological context, because other, related nouns may be used in the same way. In this, Tertullian follows a path other than that of Irenaeus. The latter had too keen a sense of the apostolic character of the word *kerygma* to use it for Christological announcements in the Old Testament. Tertullian — according to Braun — had no such scruples. He frequently uses *praedicatio* to mean *prophetia*, *praedicare* to mean *prophetare*, and does not use *prophetizare* at all. The same is true of *praedicere*, *praenuntiare*, *praecanere*, *canere*³². This shift in meaning developed as follows. Initially these words referred to the proclamation of the religious truth by the apostles, but Tertullian gave them meanings that did not refer to the apostles. He thinks of the *kerygma* of God's revelation as having begun right away with the Old Testament. So Moses and his successors were able to *praedicare* (Ap. 18.2)³³. This makes it impossible for us to find him referring to Abraham as a prophet. One reason for this is certainly his approach to the Old Testament, which differs from Irenaeus's. But I suspect that another reason lies in the New Prophecy's influence on Tertullian. In this movement the Great Three — Montanus, Prisca and Maximilla — occupied a tremendous position as prophets. Maximilla died in 179³⁴. Her prediction concerning the period after her death is important: "After me there will be no more prophets, but the συντέλεια" (Saying 12)³⁵. We may, therefore, assume that the adherents of the New Prophecy would not readily regard themselves as prophets. Saying 12 shows the distinguishing form of the oracles of the Great Three. Their oracles usually appear in the first-person form. The prophet's tongue delivered the words of God. Revelations received by other inspired people were submitted to a testing of the spirits (An. 9). Schepelern argues from the phrase, "ut etiam probentur"³⁶. He points out: we have here hit upon

³¹ HAMMAN, 143.

³² R. BRAUN, *Deus Christianorum*. Recherches sur le vocabulaire doctrinal de Tertullien (Paris 1977) 432. *Praedicatio*: Iud. 7.1; 10.5; Bapt. 9.1; Marc. III.3.4 in the usual sense, but meaning *prophetia* on 23 Loci. Idem *Praedicare* meaning *prophetare*: Marc. II. 4.6; III.17.4; IV.39.19. *Praenuntiare*: Marc. V.8.12; 17.3. *Praecanere*: Marc. I.21.1; III.20.1. *Canere*: Marc. V.9.7; 18.5.

³³ "A primordio in saeculum emisit (Deus) spiritu divino inundatos, quo praedicarent Deum unicum esse, qui universa condiderit"; (Ap. 18.2).

³⁴ D. POWELL, *Tertullianists and Cataphrygians*, in *Vigiliae Christianae* 29 (1975) 42.

³⁵ POWELL, 43.

³⁶ W. SCHEPELERN, *Der Montanismus und die Phrygischen Kulte*. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung (Tübingen 1929) 15.

a great difference between the Great Three and their disciples. And we see clearly the force of what Tertullian meant when he called Montanus, Prisca and Maximilla *prophetae proprii* of the Spirit (*Pud.* 12.1; cf *Acta Perpet.* 21). So the woman of *An.* 9 has a rank other than the one held by the Great Three, through whom the Spirit has given revelations that continue the revelation in Christ and His apostles. In place, and especially in time, the woman's visions come outside the closed period of the Paraclete. Dauntton-Fear has examined the difference between the prophecy of the Great Three and the visions of their followers. "For the Montanists, Tertullian, when declaring that *ecstasis*, which is *amentia*, is the true prophetic state, admits this is a contentious point between his party and the 'psychics' (*Marc.* IV.22.5; cf *An.* 11.4; 21.2)"³⁷. It may well have been that the Great Three alone among the Montanists prophesied in ecstasy. In Tertullian's writings Abraham is not a prophet. It is true that Christ came down to earth to make patriarchs and prophets share in his nature (*An.* 55.2). And Tertullian says that Abraham, Jacob, and the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel have seen God (*Prax.* 14.2). But here too, Abraham and Jacob are called patriarchs. Tertullian did not regard Abraham as a prophet.

THE 'PROPHET' ABRAHAM IN AMBROSE

The mystic-ecstatic element found in Philo's and Origen's picture of Abraham is absent from Ambrose's view³⁸: he does not regard the patriarch as a paragon of perfection, because, before Christ, there was no perfection on earth (*Abr.* I.3.12). Abraham is an example of a human being with great merits, an example of righteousness by good works (*Abr.* II.2.5: "Omnia enim fecit quae statuta sunt"). His merits invite the faithful to follow his example: "Opera Abrahae faciamus, ut luceant opera nostra coram Deo" (*Abr.* I.2.4). And, because of his willingness to sacrifice Isaac he merits the *benedictio* (*Abr.* I.3.15; 3.18; 8.67; 8.79). Here western spirituality, according to Völker, ousts the Stoic philosopher of Philo and Origen³⁹. One might wonder to what extent the rabbinic element in Philo may also have played a part. All that is left is the Stoic ethic, which Ambrose had got to know in the form of Cicero's moralism (*De officiis ministrorum* I.24). Abraham's life is discussed with the aid of the concept of

³⁷ A. DAUNTTON-FEAR, *The Ecstasies of Montanus*, in *Studia Patristica* 17, Part 2. Edited by Elizabeth LIVINGSTONE (Oxford 1982) 648.

³⁸ W. VÖLKER, *Das Abraham-Bild bei Philo, Origenes und Ambrosius*, in *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 103 (1931) 205.

³⁹ VÖLKER, 206.

the great Greek virtues. At the sacrifice of Isaac, all four great virtues were present and combined⁴⁰. With Ambrose, his attention to Philonic Greek philosophy mixed with rabbinic thinking, does not allow him to see Abraham as a prophet. This way of thinking, via a path other than Tertullian, provides no access to Irenaeus's idea of a prophet. We would scarcely expect otherwise from Ambrose, whose allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament is, as is well known, closely connected to the views of Philo Judaeus.

THE 'PROPHET' ABRAHAM IN AUGUSTINE

Augustine, in his appreciation of Abraham, clearly differs greatly from Ambrose, though he admired Ambrose. In general terms, Augustine combines the Alexandrian picture of Abraham with Pauline thinking. He, consequently, sees the patriarch as the herald of justification through faith. This establishes a link with the New Testament on a crucial point. Thus argues Völker⁴¹. However, this does not appear to offer an opportunity to regard Abraham as a prophet. For Augustine delimits the period of Israel's prophets. His *terminus a quo* is Samuel; the *terminus ad quem* is the return from the Babylonian captivity (*Civ.* 17.1). But he accepts also a wider notion of 'prophet', based on a mandate to preach. For this he appeals to Scripture⁴². Bardy remarks, concerning *De civitate Dei* 17.1 — the *locus* to which Mayer referred — that the Hebrew Bible extends the time of the prophets. It includes the early prophets in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, and the later prophets in the Twelve Minor Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel⁴³. Augustine also wants to count Noah among the prophets, and all those who in one way or another made predictions about the City of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, or in some way prefigured something connected with those (*Civ.* 17.1). Such special cases must be dated before the time of the kings. It is right, says Augustine (*Civ.* 17.1), that we find them referred to as prophets, and this is particularly true of Abraham and Moses. In *Genesis* 20.7, Abraham is indeed referred to in the biblical text as a prophet. Augustine expresses himself cautiously: "legimus nuncupatos". He regards this as very proper: "non inmerito". Irenaeus goes one step further by himself using the title

⁴⁰ VÖLKER, 207.

⁴¹ VÖLKER, 207.

⁴² C. MAYER, *Augustinus-Lexikon*. (Basel-Stuttgart 1986 sqq.) Vol.I,27.

⁴³ G. BARDY, *La cité de Dieu*. Livres XV-XVIII. (*Bibliothèque Augustinienne* 36). (Paris 1960) 341, note 2.

for them. In *De civitate Dei* 18.37, Augustine mentions a well-known theme of Christian anti-pagan apologetics: our prophets already enjoyed great prestige in the world before the great Greek philosophers were born. Only very few theological poets of the Greeks precede the Hebrew prophets, and even they did not precede Moses. And Moses and Abraham were prophets ("Abraham propheta fuit", 18.37). Here Augustine uses the title himself. Augustine also points out that prophetism is not confined to those who are specifically called prophets, but that, to those who examine the history of the Old Testament in a spirit of piety, this whole history is prophecy (*De div. qu.* LXXXIII.58.2). Among examples of this symbolism, he mentions Abraham and his sacrifice of Isaac, for whom a ram was substituted. The animal died in his place and can be recognised by us as one who was crucified (*Gen.* 22.3-13): "tanquam crucifixus agnoscitur" (*De div. qu.* LXXXIII 58.2). And the two sons of Abraham, one of them born from a slave and the other from a free woman, are understood to be the two testaments: "duo Testamenta intelliguntur" (*Gal.* 4.22-24). These and other examples are referred to as prefigurations. When Augustine speaks of the whole Old Testament as one great prophecy, we see the influence of Tertullian. And when he calls the persons in his typological examples prophets, we see Irenaeus's influence. For the latter also called Abraham a prophet, both on account of his predictions and on account of the part he played in typology. Prophetic speech is connected directly with the preaching of Christ, who himself spoke through the prophets and Abraham (*In Johannis evangelium tr.* 45.9). This passage shows that Augustine discusses these matters not only before the world of scholars, but also before his parishioners. And there are numerous prefigurations, which, just like *Gal.* 4.21-31, *secundum sanctae fidei regulam*, as *tantae rei sacramenta* refer to Christ and the Church (*Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum libri duo* 2. 34)⁴⁴. Here he concurs entirely with the biblical tradition of his predecessors. Augustine also uses the combination of patriarchs and prophets. Before he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man, Christ, as God, began in the patriarchs and prophets, to found the New City (*De civ.* 17. 16.2; cf *En.in Ps.* 61.4; 63;14; 86.7; 142.3). In all the authors, I notice that, in this combination of patriarchs and prophets, they allude to a mutual difference as well as an agreement. The difference lies in the fact that the patriarchs and prophets represent two successive periods. The agreement becomes clear when we realise that they do not speak of 'the Law and the Prophets', or of 'Patriarchs, judges and kings'. God has especially close contact with patriarchs and prophets.

⁴⁴ MAYER, I,27.

All in all, it is evident that, with Augustine, Abraham emerges again as a prophet. This can be regarded as one element in a return to the Bible, where Abraham is referred to by God as a prophet (in *Gen.* 20.7). The scanty frequency of references by Augustine to Abraham as a prophet may be related to the great number of views on Abraham which converge in Augustine's wide-ranging mind. Think of Augustine's Abraham as the bearer of the promises; as the father of sons who indicate christological and ecclesiological meanings; as one whose obedience in faith is an example of justification through faith; as one in relationship with God; and as one who experienced the theophanies; as one exemplary in chastity and not enslaved by possessions. And consider the significance of the numerous references to Abraham's bosom.

CONCLUSION

Abraham is referred to by Irenaeus as a prophet, but the theological climate of Tertullian and Ambrose was not conducive to this. Augustine followed in Irenaeus's tradition.

Soest

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