

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA'S RECEPTION OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

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Introduction: Cyril of Alexandria as Biblical Commentator

Cyril of Alexandria is one of the great biblical commentators from the early Church. Though he is renowned for his teaching on the person of Christ and his defense of Mary as *Theotokos* (God-bearer), the greater part of Cyril's writings are biblical commentaries, filling seven volumes of J. P. Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*.¹ From the Old Testament, we possess two topical commentaries on the Pentateuch and complete commentaries on Isaiah and the twelve Minor Prophets, but we surmise from remaining fragments that Cyril also wrote commentaries on the books of Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. From the New Testament, we have Cyril's monumental commentary on the Gospel of John, extensive homilies on Luke, and fragments from his commentaries on Matthew, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude. This production of biblical commentary is astonishing, considering that Cyril was tasked with direct pastoral care of the city of Alexandria and with pastoral oversight of Egypt and Libya, and that he found himself deeply entangled in the controversy with Nestorius for the final sixteen years of his episcopacy. This immense output of biblical commentary speaks to Cyril's work ethic, as well as his keen regard for the Word of God in Scripture: "scriptural interpretation was truly his passion."²

1 Cyril's entire corpus of writings is in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vols. 68–77. The early critical work on Cyril's biblical exegesis was done by Alexander Kerrigan: *St. Cyril of Alexandria: Interpreter of the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1952), and "The Objects of the Literal and Spiritual Senses of the New Testament according to St. Cyril of Alexandria," *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 63 (1957): 354–374. Kerrigan's work remains valuable, but some of his conclusions have been corrected, for example, by Matthew Crawford, *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 218–219. Other important studies of Cyril's exegesis include: Robert L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); Bertrand de Margerie, *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis*, vol. 1 (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's, 1993), 241–270; and Lois M. Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, A New Testament Exegete: His Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007).

2 Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 65.

Cyril was not a pioneer or trailblazer in biblical exegesis. He drew on many previous authors (though he rarely names them) and synthesized disparate exegetical approaches. Cyril's immediate Alexandrian context is the clearest source of his thinking and exegesis—this is dominated by the figures of Athanasius, Didymus the Blind, and Theophilus. Athanasius was Cyril's most important mentor, especially in theology and a theological reading of the Bible, while Didymus provided Cyril with model biblical commentaries written in an Alexandrian theological key.

Cyril is also heir to his more distant Alexandrian exegetical tradition, especially the towering figure of Origen, but this comes to him indirectly and through the lens of selection and critique. The severe critique of Origen that occurred at the turn of the fifth century, orchestrated by Cyril's uncle Theophilus, put Cyril on his guard concerning certain Origenist doctrines and teachings. Nonetheless, Cyril draws selectively on Origen's allegorical, spiritual approach to the text of the bible.³

The surprising "hinge" figure for Cyril's reception of Origen is the Latin father Jerome, who lived the latter part of his life in the East and became a great friend of Theophilus. In his early period Jerome was a champion of Origen and translator of many of his biblical commentaries. He eventually adopted a critical stance against Origen, siding with Theophilus, but nonetheless was a transmitter of Origen's approach. Studies of Cyril's exegesis show direct borrowings from Jerome's commentaries; Cyril would have had access to these Latin works through Greek translations made in Alexandria.⁴ Thus we have the unlikely circumstance whereby the bishop of Alexandria gained access through Jerome not only to the Latin exegetical tradition but even to his own more distant Alexandrian exegetical tradition.

Cyril also appears to have had access to a wide range of Greek-speaking writers and biblical commentators outside of the Alexandrian tradition. Candidates include Eusebius of Caesarea, Apollinarius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret.⁵ It is unlikely that Cyril would have drawn directly on commentators from the Antiochene school of exegesis (for example, Theodore), but he does seem to have taken to heart their critique of allegorical

3 In her study of Cyril's exegesis, Farag (*St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 9) points to Cyril's active reception of both his distant and immediate Alexandrian heritage: Cyril's *Commentary on John* "shows that he walked in the footsteps of two colossal exegetes—Origen and Didymus. And as this study will demonstrate, Cyril puts into effect the theology of another, unsurpassed Alexandrian theologian—Athanasius of Alexandria."

4 For Cyril's dependence on Jerome, see Kerrigan, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 435–439, and Crawford, *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture*, 30.

5 For the variety of Christian authors to whom Cyril most probably had access, see Kerrigan, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 249–250; Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 50.

excesses: Cyril's exegesis is deeply concerned with a literal, historical, and contextual reading of the Bible, even if in the end he centers on the spiritual, Christological sense.⁶

Because Cyril drew upon many and diverse sources, he has been labelled "eclectic" in his biblical method and judged to lack integrity and compactness in his approach.⁷ On this view Cyril uncritically accepted diverse streams of biblical interpretation, resulting in a muddled amalgam that lacks sharpness and clarity. In my view this is a serious misreading of Cyril's accomplishment. He does stand downstream from the early schools of exegesis in the Church and he has plainly drawn from the different tributaries, learning lessons from earlier imbalances. But in Cyril we encounter not a confused array of voices, but a clear, convinced theological mind and a style of exegesis that is focused, confident, and consistent. His "voice" comes through loud and clear. He nearly always approaches the biblical text by looking at the literal sense and context, asking about the meaning of words and explaining the historical-geographical background. Yet his primary concern is with the spiritual meaning and application of the text: What does it say about God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit? How does it proclaim the coming of the Word in the flesh and his work to redeem and renew humanity? What does it say about how we are to live in holiness, reflecting the image of God in our lives?

Robert Wilken identifies Christ himself as the heart and soul of Cyril's biblical exegesis: "For Cyril the renewal of all things in Christ is the central *skopos* [goal] of the Bible. . . . The subject of Cyril's exegesis is never simply the text that is before him, it is always the mystery of Christ."⁸ Bertrand de Margerie mirrors this assessment: "The spiritual sense is always, for Cyril, in one way or another, relative to the mystery of Christ."⁹ Matthew Crawford offers an important *addition* to this assessment, showing that "Cyril has intentionally constructed his theology of Scripture such that it is Trinitarian in structure and Christological in focus," and that these two together give "decisive shape to his understanding of exegesis."¹⁰ "Trinitarian in structure" means that for Cyril all things come from the Father, through the Son, and in

6 Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. J. A. Hughes (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 81, claims that in Cyril "the literal interpretation is highly developed, much more so than in any other Alexandrian exegete." Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 199, identifies a conscious two-step procedure in Cyril's exegesis: the first is the literary-historical sense of discussing the passage; the second is the spiritual sense applied to Christ and life in him.

7 Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, 81.

8 Robert Wilken, "St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Mystery of Christ in the Bible," *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995): 477, 478.

9 De Margerie, *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis*, 244.

10 Crawford, *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture*, 7, 183.

the Spirit, and that *through exegesis* we are led back by the work of the Spirit to ponder and enter into the life and truth of the Son so that we may fully contemplate and live in the Father.¹¹ I would add to this that Cyril's exegetical focus includes not only the work of the Spirit as illuminating the mystery of Christ and leading us back to the Father, but also the actual *reacquisition* of the Holy Spirit by Christ for the human race. In other words, for Cyril the wider arc of the scriptural narrative, beginning with Adam, is centered on Christ—his work of redemption and restoration of our nature. But it is also centered on the reacquisition of the Spirit, lost in Adam, regained and stabilized in Christ, and fulfilled in eternal life.¹² Cyril's biblical exegesis, then, is Trinitarian in structure and both Christological and pneumatological in focus.

The Apostle Paul as Cyril's Primary Commentator

Cyril is at ease drawing on a wide variety of texts across the range of biblical books, Old and New Testament.¹³ But the Apostle Paul could be said to hold a special place as Cyril's *primary* biblical commentator. De Margerie observes that "it is precisely on Paul and John that Cyril draws most heavily."¹⁴ Kerrigan states more strongly Paul's role in Cyril: "For St. Cyril, Paul is the *mystagōgos* par excellence."¹⁵ Wilken agrees, pointing to the role Paul plays in Cyril's understanding of the core narrative of the Bible: "Paul provided the key to Cyril's reading of the Scriptures."¹⁶

One measure of Paul's role in Cyril's thought is the frequency with which Cyril calls upon Paul in his writings. A brief survey of a selection of Cyril's main writings shows a remarkable and consistent pattern. In Cyril's homilies on Luke, Paul is mentioned *by name* more than 200 times and quoted anonymously a further 200 times.¹⁷ A similar result is found in Cyril's *Commentary on John*. Cyril refers to Paul *by name* more than 350 times and quotes him anonymously even more frequently. What this means is that Cyril

11 Ibid., 228–229.

12 For Cyril's narrative of the gift, loss, and reacquisition of the Spirit in Christ, see Daniel Keating, *The Appropriation of the Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 54–104; and Daniel Keating, "The Twofold Manner of Divine Indwelling in Cyril of Alexandria: Redressing an Imbalance," *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001): 543–549.

13 As De Margerie, *An Introduction to the History of Exegesis*, 263, says, "Cyril has an in-depth knowledge and an ardent love of the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments."

14 Ibid., 248.

15 Kerrigan, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 372.

16 Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 228.

17 Cyril believed Paul to be the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, so citations of Hebrews are included in this figure.

makes reference to Paul's writings (either by name or without attribution) more than once in every two pages of his commentaries on these gospels.¹⁸

We might assume that this heavy use of Paul occurs only in Cyril's biblical commentaries. But a similar pattern occurs in Cyril's polemical treatises against Nestorius. In Cyril's five books against Nestorius, he refers to Matthew twice, Luke three times, John the Evangelist nineteen times, and Paul seventy-six times! In *Quod Unus sit Christus*, Cyril refers to Peter four times, cites John the Evangelist eleven times, and references Paul forty-six times.¹⁹ Whether commenting on the Bible or directly engaging in issues on specific doctrinal issues, Cyril appears to use Paul as his special commentator.

A sample from Cyril's commentary on John 17:14–15 exhibits this typical pattern.²⁰ Cyril is explaining why Jesus tells his disciples that they will be hated on his account. It is because they follow the life and conduct of Christ himself through imitation of his ways. Cyril immediately calls upon Paul, who called us to follow in his footsteps. Then he cites Paul two further times (Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 11:1) to show that Paul also was crucified to the world and called us to be imitators of him as he is of Christ. Cyril then moves directly to the call to proclaim the gospel in the world, once again citing Paul (2 Cor. 5:20) as an example of Christ's ambassador to the people. Maintaining that we are called to remain in the world, even though hated by it, Cyril ends by referencing Paul one last time (Phil. 1:23–24) as a model of someone who was willing to remain "in the flesh" for the sake of the gospel. Cyril turns to Paul five times in one short commentary to elucidate the meaning and application of the text. It is as if Paul is the commentator on Cyril's right hand, waiting to be called in to testify on every topic.

One signature mark of Cyril's writings is his use of varied titles (or appellations) for Paul. Among these many titles are: "the Apostle," "the most wise," "the all-wise," "the very wise," "the blessed," "the divine," "the inspired," "the admirable," "the Spirit-bearer," "the God-bearer," "the mystagogue," "the steward of the mysteries of the Savior," and "the inspired writer who initiates us into the mysteries." These lofty titles indicate Cyril's deep regard for Paul and his teaching.

18 We possess only fragments of Cyril's commentaries on the letters of Paul, but even in these fragments, where the texts are clipped and shortened, there is clear evidence of Cyril using "Paul to interpret Paul" by citing passages from one Pauline letter to interpret that of another.

19 Roughly the same proportions of references to Paul are found in Cyril's *Scholia on the Incarnation* and his treatise *Against the Synousiasts*.

20 The complete commentary on these verses is found in Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* (*Comm. Jn.*), vol. 2, trans. David R. Maxwell, Ancient Christian Texts (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 291–293.

On several occasions Cyril points directly to Paul as an *example* for us: in his character, his zeal for the gospel, and even in his repentance. In the following selection from his commentary on Luke 9:61–62, Cyril sets Paul before us as a model for how to follow Christ without hesitation:

And the wise Paul also writes, “But when God willed to reveal unto me His Son, immediately I counselled not with flesh and blood” (Gal. 1:15–16). You see the valiant mind, and the brave and hearty purpose, not subject to the bonds of indolence, but superior to all cowardice and fleshly lust. Such must they be who would follow Christ.²¹

In the very next section, when commenting on Christ’s words “I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves” (Luke 10:3), Cyril cleverly presents Paul as a former “wolf” now become a “lamb” for Christ:

For the divine Paul was a blasphemer, and persecutor, more injurious and cruel than any wolf against those who believed in Christ. Did he then persist in this conduct? Did he continue to be a wolf even to the end? Far from it: for he was called by Christ, and experienced an unlooked for change. He who in old time was a wolf became more gentle than a lamb, and preached the faith which once he persecuted. And a change so unexpected in its manner was the wonder of all men, and Christ was glorified, who had changed him from a beast of prey into a lamb.²²

Once a “wolf” who persecuted the church, Paul is now presented by Cyril as a “lamb” whose example teaches us how to serve confidently in our mission as “lambs in the midst of wolves.”

Major Pauline Themes in the Theology of Cyril

For Cyril, Paul is especially the great *teacher* of revealed truth, the “mystagogue” who unveils the mystery of Christ through the Spirit. We might expect that Cyril would call upon Paul for certain topics or to handle special questions (for example, justification by faith or the nature of the resurrected body). But what strikes the reader of Cyril’s biblical commentaries is how he seems to call upon Paul for *every* conceivable issue and question. The sheer range of

21 Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke* (Comm. Lk.), Homily 59 (on Luke 9:61–62), trans. R. Payne Smith (New York: Studion, 1983), 254–255 (translation adjusted).

22 Comm. Lk., Homily 61 (on Luke 10:3, 264) (translation adjusted).

topics is extraordinary.²³ From many possible topics, I have selected three for investigation: (1) the Triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit; (2) the place of the law, justification by faith, and the question of supersessionism; and (3) new creation in Christ and the gift of the Spirit. By examining these, we will gain insight into not only how Paul shapes Cyril's theology in decisive ways but also how Cyril interprets Paul within the narrative arc of his biblical theology.

Cyril is not a *systematic* theologian in the sense that, for example, Thomas Aquinas is, but he can be accurately designated a *dogmatic* theologian. His writings, even his biblical commentaries, often focus on a dogmatic topic. Cyril composed three works against the Arians (including his *Commentary on John*), he wrote innumerable treatises and letters against Nestorius on the subject of the Incarnation and Christology, and his earliest biblical works (two commentaries on the Pentateuch) outline and illustrate his principles for a Christological reading of the Old Testament. In modern terms, they represent his biblical hermeneutics.

At the same time, Cyril can also be described as a *narrative* theologian. The biblical narrative exerts a profound influence on the way Cyril thinks about the divine economy in Christ. One characteristic mark of his writing is the way he inserts renarrations of the biblical story into his theology. It seems that he cannot help retelling the story of Adam, or Abraham, or Moses, not as isolated moral examples but as part of a biblical narrative arc that always finds its end, its *telos*, in Christ. There are two primary narrative arcs for Cyril. The first—and deepest—runs from Adam to Christ (the second Adam) and can rightly be identified as the primary narrative for Cyril's thought. The second narrative arc runs from Moses to Christ—this is the story of the Law, of the old and new covenant. And here Paul is decisive for Cyril. The two narrative arcs are tightly and complexly intertwined in Cyril's theology—neither can be grasped without reference to the other.

In the three topics I have chosen to investigate, the first is a properly dogmatic one. Cyril delights in speaking about the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Spirit, and it is fitting to begin by asking how Cyril draws upon Paul for his understanding of the Trinity. The second topic is really an examination of the narrative arc from Moses to Christ. How does Cyril understand this and how does Paul shape his thinking? The third topic illuminates the narrative arc from Adam to Christ in Cyril's thought. Cyril's presentation of the new creation and the Spirit is never far from the narrative of Adam's creation and

23 In addition to the topics investigated below, Cyril also calls upon Paul for the following subjects: the centrality of grace as a gift, the all-sufficiency of Christ for salvation, the inspiration of the Scriptures, our apophatic knowledge of God, faith leading to knowledge, Christian leadership, the example of humility, spiritual gifts, divine providence, the reality of the final judgment, and the second coming of Christ.

fall; Paul provides the key to how Cyril links together the original creation in Adam and the new creation in Christ.

1. *The Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*

In the opening lines of his *Commentary on John*, Cyril identifies the full divinity of the Word made flesh as the core doctrine of the Christian faith: “John gets right to the point, to the chief of all divine doctrines: ‘In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God.’”²⁴ For Cyril, the Incarnation of the divine Word is the hinge doctrine that—at one and the same time—casts light on the identity of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit) and illuminates the saving economy by which we are redeemed and renewed. Cyril’s favorite biblical text for capturing this central truth is Paul’s hymn to Christ in Philippians 2:5–11. Cyril quotes or alludes to this text so frequently in his writings that it can rightly be said to be the “reflex” passage Cyril turns to when he desires to display some facet of the Incarnation of the divine Word.

The True Divinity of the Incarnate Son. In Cyril’s view, Philippians 2:5–11 sums up in condensed form the entire narrative of the Scripture. It begins with the eternal Word who is “in the form of God,” that is, one who is fully God by nature and yet distinct (in person) from the Father. This one “emptied himself” by taking on “human form,” that is, our complete human nature, while remaining always what he is (that is, God by nature). The one who *was* (and *is*) God became what he *was not*, a human being, to suffer and die for us, and this *same one* is then resurrected and exalted by the Father so that in him *we* might be raised up to God and receive new life. For Cyril, the Philippians hymn upholds at once the full divinity and humanity of the single subject, the Word, within the narrative sweep of God’s plan of salvation for the human race. From the “stronghold” of this passage, Cyril can stand and refute nearly any errant teaching about the Christian faith. In the following selection, Cyril calls upon Paul in order to rebuff both Sabellianism (that posits no real distinction between Father and Son) and Arianism (that claims the Son is not fully God by nature):

The blessed Paul, writing to the Philippians about the Son, says, “who though he was in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be exploited.” Who then is the one who did not want to consider equality with God something to be exploited? Do we not have to say that someone who is in the form of God is different from the one whose form it is? . . . Therefore the Father and the Son are not one and same in number, but they are distinct,

24 Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* (*Comm. Jn.*), vol. 1, trans. David R. Maxwell, Ancient Christian Texts (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 5.

and they are seen in one another because of the identity of substance, even if the Son is clearly from the Father as one from another.²⁵

To support the full divinity of the Son, Cyril also appeals to the way Paul yokes together the Father and Son in his prayers. This confirms both the distinct personhood and the full divinity of the Son: "That is why Paul always prays for the supply of blessings to be yoked to the worthy by saying, 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1:2)."²⁶ Cyril reasons that "all blessings are given and the distribution of divine gifts is made by the Father through the Son to the worthy."²⁷ Immediately, Cyril brings in the role of the Spirit to show the reality and activity of the Triune God: "Since the divine nature is one and is understood to be one, the blessings from them will be supplied to the worthy through the Son, from the Father, in the Spirit."²⁸

If all things come from the Father through the Son and in the Spirit, such that the Son "truly is a cogiver and cosupplier"²⁹ with the Father (and the Spirit), how can we account for times when Christ *asks* the Father on behalf of his disciples (for example, John 17:9)? How can the one who is the supplier of all good things also be asking the Father? For, Cyril this is explained by understanding the nature of the economy of salvation. Christ

"asks" on our behalf as man, and as God he seeks the honor of his Father as well. . . . Paul demonstrated this to us with utmost clarity when he said, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:2). He who asks as man, also grants as God.³⁰

Cyril refuses to divide Christ into two by assigning the divine activity to the Word alone and the human activity to "the man" assumed. Citing Paul once again to support the single subject in Christ, Cyril insists that, when Thomas the Apostle addressed Christ as "my Lord and my God," "he did not divide Emmanuel into a pair of sons, but he recognized him as one and the same in the flesh. For there is 'one Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 8:6), according to the Scriptures."³¹

25 *Comm. Jn. 1:1*, vol. 1, 10–11.

26 *Comm. Jn. 14:12–13*, vol. 2, 175.

27 *Ibid.*, 176.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Comm. Jn. 17:9–11*, vol. 2, 282.

31 *Comm. Jn. 20:28*, vol. 2, 376. On numerous occasions Cyril refers to Paul's witness in 1

Divine Fatherhood. This teaching on the full divinity of the Son—in tandem with the distinct personhood of the Father, Son, and Spirit—is complemented by Cyril’s explanation of divine Fatherhood. Paul’s words in Ephesians 3:14–15 serve as the prime authority in this matter:

Strictly speaking, God does not receive the name of family or fatherhood from us, but rather we clearly received it from him. The statement of Paul is trustworthy, who cries out, “From whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” (Eph. 3:15). Since God is the oldest of all things, it is clear that we are fathers by imitation. We have been called to his pattern by being made in his image.³²

Those who claim that God is not really Father and that the term “father” is just a metaphor arising from human and earthly realities turn “the whole matter upside down” by giving God “the name ‘Father’ in imitation of us, rather than him giving it to us.”³³ Cyril thus draws his notion of both fatherhood and sonship from the divine reality as revealed in the Incarnate Son: “Just as from God the Father ‘all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named’ (Eph. 3:15) because he is strictly, primarily, and truly the Father, so also all sonship is from the Son because he is strictly, uniquely, and truly the Son.”³⁴

The Full Divinity of the Holy Spirit. Paul also serves as Cyril’s principal witness for the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Following the logic of his theological mentor, Athanasius, Cyril argues that if by virtue of the Spirit dwelling in us the Scripture says that God dwells in us, then the Spirit must be God by nature. In his commentary on John 14:23, Cyril contends with those who deny the Spirit’s divinity by calling upon the witness of Paul in Galatians 4:6, “God sent the Spirit of his Son into your heart.” From this he reasons that “if the Spirit is created and foreign to the essence of God, as you think, how could God dwell in us through him? How could one who receives the Spirit participate in God?”³⁵ Rejecting this as impossible, Cyril draws the plain conclusion: “No one could become a partaker of him who is by nature

Cor. 8:6 in order to reject any shadow of a two-sons Christology. Notably, Cyril repeatedly rejects a two-sons Christology in his *Commentary on John*, which was written before the outbreak of the Nestorian controversy.

32 *Comm. Jn. 1:1*, vol. 1, 16. Cyril also cites Eph. 3:15 in his *Commentary on John 5:23* (vol. 1, 152) to invoke Paul as the authority for showing that God is Father by nature and to display the “origin of fatherhood.”

33 *Comm. Jn. 5:23*, vol. 1, 152.

34 *Comm. Jn. 1:34*, vol. 1, 85.

35 *Comm. Jn. 14:23*, vol. 2, 193.

God through anything else but the Spirit. Therefore the Spirit is God and from God, not numbered among originate beings as some think.”³⁶

Cyril seeks something further, however. The Spirit is not just the Spirit of the Father; he is also the Spirit of the Son. He is both of the Father and of the Son. Once again, Paul is the primary witness for this conclusion:

Since Christ our Savior dwells in us through the Holy Spirit, the one who begat him will surely be there as well. After all, the Spirit of Christ is also the Spirit of the Father himself. For example, the divinely inspired Paul says in one place that the Spirit belongs to the Father but in another that the Spirit belongs to the Son. He is not making contradictory statements but is telling the truth in each one, since that is how it is by nature.³⁷

Then, citing Romans 8:11 and Galatians 4:6, Cyril concludes: “Do you see how the same Spirit is both of the Father and of the Son?”³⁸ Cyril does not explicitly teach the Western doctrine of the Filioque (that the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father *and* the Son), but he does have a teaching that is recognized as “leaning” in this direction, if not amounting to the same truth. He consistently says that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son and plainly sees an active role for the Son in both the eternal procession and the economic mission of the Spirit.³⁹ And Paul serves as the primary witness for this conclusion.

2. *The Place of the Law, Justification by Faith, and Supersessionism*

In his renowned study of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in Cyril's exegesis, Robert Wilken provocatively claims that “the question of Christianity and Judaism formed the backdrop for Cyril's interpretation of the Bible,” and that “the relationship of Christianity to Judaism is . . . a

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 For a balanced treatment of Cyril's teaching on the procession of the Spirit and the question of the Filioque, see Marie-Odile Boulnois, “The Mystery of the Trinity according to Cyril of Alexandria: the Deployment of the Triad and its Recapitulation into the Unity of Divinity,” in *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, eds. Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel Keating (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 75–111 (especially 106–108). See also Brian Daley, “The Fullness of the Saving God: Cyril of Alexandria on the Holy Spirit,” in Weinandy and Keating, *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria*, 144–148; Crawford, *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture*, 52–55.

central theme of Cyril's exegesis."⁴⁰ In Wilken's view, Cyril's reading of Paul is the key to all this, "but his Paul was not the Paul of St. Augustine, the Paul of Romans 7 or Romans 9 (nor the Paul of justification by faith)."⁴¹ Wilken judges that Cyril was not very interested in justification by faith as such, but rather in the contrast between the Old and New Covenants.⁴² I will want to modify this conclusion. Cyril is, in one sense, intensely interested in "justification by faith" and cites this phrase countless times when contrasting the old covenant law with the new covenant in Christ. Yet his understanding of Paul's teaching on justification by faith follows a more traditional and catholic approach that interprets this phrase as amounting to "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6) and sets this in contrast to a dead faith that produces no works (James 2:14–26).

The Old and New Covenants and the Place of the Law. To take up the question of the old and new covenants in Cyril is to investigate his approach to the narrative arc that runs from Moses to Christ. It is fair to say that Cyril was preoccupied with the Jewish law and especially with the contrast between the shadows of the law and the reality found in Christ. He returns to this theme constantly and cannot seem to let it go. Here we find another exegetical "reflex" in Cyril: whenever he speaks of Christ and our new life in him, he seems compelled to contrast this with the old and passing things that belong to the law (and the Jewish people). In this matter, Paul is not only *an* authority for Cyril but *the* authority.

The lines of Cyril's understanding of the law and gospel emerge in his commentary on John 1:18, "The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Reading the first part of verse 18 as "grace in place of grace," Cyril speaks of "the 'grace' of the gospel given to us by the Savior 'in place of the grace' of the law that was through Moses."⁴³ What was this grace given through Moses, Cyril asks?

The law too used to give "grace" to humanity by drawing the deceived away from the worship of idols and calling them to a knowledge of God. In addition, it pointed out evil and taught good—not perfectly, but profitably, nevertheless, the way a schoolmaster does.⁴⁴

40 Robert Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1971), 77, 84.

41 Robert Wilken, "St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Mystery of Christ in the Bible," *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995): 477–478.

42 Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 228.

43 *Comm. Jn. 1:18*, vol. 1, 68.

44 *Ibid.*, 69.

In contrast to this, the truth and grace that comes through Christ

does not introduce the good to us in types, nor does it make shadowy sketches of what is profitable, but with bright and purest pronouncements it leads us by the hand to perfect knowledge of the faith. The law kept giving "a spirit of slavery to fear," but Christ gives a "spirit of adoption" for freedom.⁴⁵

To show Cyril's reliance on Paul one need only observe how many times Cyril references Paul in two pages of commentary on these verses: Galatians 3:22, 3:24, Romans 8:15, 1 Corinthians 7:19, Romans 2:29, Hebrews 9:24, and 2 Corinthians 3:9.

Cyril runs into a problem when confronted by Christ's words in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you." How is this command *new*, Cyril asks, when the command to love God and neighbor is already found in the law? In answer, Cyril reviews his approach to the law and gospel, citing Paul to show that the law made nothing perfect (Heb. 7:19) but Christ makes all things new (2 Cor. 5:17). Then he explains:

Now we do not assert that the law given through Moses is completely useless and unprofitable. After all, it brought us what is good, albeit imperfectly. So it is found to be a tutor for instruction in the gospel way of life. By introducing an image of the true worship in enigmas and types, it engraved, so to speak, the shadow of Christ's teaching on our mind.⁴⁶

Cyril therefore counsels that we should be well acquainted with both the old and the new law, even while recognizing that Christ's command to love is better than the ancient commands found in the Old Testament. How is Christ's command superior? The law, Cyril reminds us, tells us to love our neighbor *as ourselves*; Christ calls us to love one another *as he loved us*. And this propels Cyril to retell the story of our salvation from Philippians 2:5–11 and 2 Corinthians 8:9: "Do you see what is new about his love for us? The law commanded us to love our brother as ourselves. But our Lord Jesus Christ loved us more than himself."⁴⁷ He became poor so that we could become rich and left us an example that advances us beyond the command given in the law. It is noteworthy that Cyril employs Paul as his primary commentator to explain Christ's words in John's Gospel on the new commandment.

45 Ibid.

46 *Comm. Jn.* 13:34, vol. 2, 138.

47 Ibid., 139.

Justification by Faith. Cyril deeply imbibed Paul's teaching (found in Rom. 4) that, even according to the record of the law, faith *preceded* the law, and so the keeping of the commandments is grounded in a prior response of faith. Therefore, justification by faith in Christ is not something novel but the fulfillment of what is already sketched in the example of Abraham, whose "faith was reckoned to him as righteousness, and the righteousness of faith has become his basis for freedom before God."⁴⁸ Even in the giving of the 10 commandments on Sinai, Cyril perceives the pattern of a call to faith *before* the commandments are laid down. Thus the Lord God "arranged with great care for the condition of our faith," and only after this gives the commandments. He did this,

so that we may not think that we are justified by works or expect that the ungrudging bounty of God is a fruit of our own labors, but rather that we will have it by faith. That is why, before the commands concerning the reverent way of life [for example, the 10 commandments], grace entered by faith as the immediate neighbor of the good things for which we hope.⁴⁹

For Cyril, then, faith plays a decisive role in Christ's saving economy. By faith we freely receive the gift of God's grace—his righteousness—that we did not (and cannot) earn. Why, Cyril asks, is the least in the kingdom of heaven greater than John the Baptist (Luke 7:28)? It is because of faith in Christ and the blessings faith brings: "Faith crowns those who receive it with glories that surpass the law."⁵⁰ Cyril supports this reading by reference to three passages from Paul (Phil. 3:7; Rom. 10:3; Gal. 2:15) to establish that the righteousness that comes by faith is superior to that from the law.

Faith, for Cyril, is "the mother of eternal life," and through faith we come to have knowledge of the true God.⁵¹ But crucially for Cyril it is also through faith that God comes to *dwell* in us: "[Christ] certainly enters us through faith and dwells in us through the Holy Spirit."⁵² Citing Paul to confirm that Christ dwells in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through faith (Eph. 3:14–17), Cyril concludes that "life by nature is once again restored to us by faith."⁵³ The result of the divine indwelling through faith is not only righteousness but also true friendship with God and Christ. Once again referring to Abraham as

48 *Comm. Jn.* 8:33, vol. 1, 354.

49 *Comm. Jn.* 7:24, vol. 1, 278.

50 *Comm. Lk.* 7:24–28, Payne Smith, 162.

51 *Comm. Jn.* 17:3, vol. 2, 273.

52 *Comm. Jn.* 3:36, vol. 1, 115.

53 *Ibid.*

reckoned righteous through faith (Rom. 4), Cyril concludes that "the gospel way of life, that is, faith and friendship with God, is far more ancient than that of the law. . . . The dignity of friendship with God goes with and is joined to the freedom that comes by faith."⁵⁴

If Cyril, following Paul, magnifies the role of faith as superior to the works of the law, he no less underlines that faith must be expressed through love and must produce the fruit of good works—or it is not saving faith at all. Commenting on John 14:15, "If you love me you will keep my commandments," Cyril writes:

Faith is proven not by the empty flattery of words but by the quality of works. Indeed, the divine Scripture says that this faith is dead when works do not follow (James 2:20, 26). . . . Therefore, keeping the gospel teachings and obeying the divine commands is the proof of love and the most perfect definition of faith.⁵⁵

In a strikingly Trinitarian reading of the vine and branches (John 15:1–8), Cyril says that we are connected to the vine that is Christ and have the sap of the Holy Spirit running through us so that we may produce the fruit of good works and so please the Father. In turn, we "cling" to the vine through faith and love. For Cyril, we are joined to Christ through faith but we must also be "united and cling tightly to God through love that is recognized by works, which is the fulfillment of the holy and divine command."⁵⁶

For his teaching on faith being combined with works and the necessity of love, Cyril does not normally rely directly upon Pauline texts: he appeals most commonly to James 2:14–26 and Matthew 7:21. But his teaching on the combination of faith yielding the fruit of love is entirely consistent with Paul's statement in Galatians 5:6 that what counts is "faith working through love."

Supersessionism. When considering Cyril's approach to the two covenants, the place of the law, and the role of faith, we cannot avoid the question of how Cyril views Israel in God's plan. To state Cyril's position succinctly, he teaches a strong form of supersessionism; that is to say, he teaches that after the coming of Christ, Israel has been cut off from God and entirely *displaced* by the Church of the Gentiles.⁵⁷ Though Cyril acknowledges that many of the Jews of Jesus's day (and Paul's time) believed in Christ,⁵⁸ and that it was

54 *Comm. Jn. 15:14–15*, vol. 2, 233.

55 *Comm. Jn. 14:15*, vol. 2, 177.

56 *Comm. Jn. 15:4*, vol. 2, 222.

57 For a summary of Cyril's approach to the question of supersessionism, see Daniel Keating, "Supersessionism in Cyril of Alexandria," *Studia Patristica* 68 (2013): 119–124.

58 *Comm. Jn. 6:68*, vol. 1, 255.

primarily the leaders of Israel (and not the people) who were at fault in Christ's death,⁵⁹ and though he holds a place for all Israel being saved in the last days according to Romans 11:26,⁶⁰ he maintains that in the present time Israel has been entirely cut off from the blessing and favor of God. Cyril judges that "the firstborn Israel is cast out because it did not want to remain God's own, nor did it receive God's Son when he dwelt among his own."⁶¹ Consequently, Israel has been "stripped of sonship" and the Gentiles who have come into their inheritance through faith "will be transplanted into Israel's place."⁶² Cyril speaks of Israel being entirely stripped of grace⁶³ and excluded from the kingdom of heaven;⁶⁴ God has "justly and for good reason" withdrawn his love from Israel.⁶⁵ In Cyril's view, "the temple has fallen and has been completely pulled down. . . . In its place the church of the Gentiles has gone up and been raised up, as it were, because of Christ."⁶⁶ Because of this, the Jewish people are not capable of bearing good fruit, the law's way of life must be rejected,⁶⁷ and Jewish worship (in types and figures) is useless and contrary to God.⁶⁸

Observing that Cyril draws especially on later Pauline texts (Colossians and Hebrews) for his strong supersessionist reading, John McGuckin calls Cyril's approach a "theology of displacement and supersession" in which Christ is not so much a new Moses, but rather "the supreme Mediator who displaces the outmoded and partial type of Moses's mediation."⁶⁹ McGuckin concludes that "Cyril clearly takes the macrostructure of his 'Mosaic' theology from Paul in every significant episode. Even when he is commenting on the *Gospel of John*, Paul is never far from his mind. He uses, however, the terms of the argument in *Hebrews*, *Galatians*, and *Colossians*, to sharpen the polemic noticeably."⁷⁰ McGuckin believes that Cyril arrived at this strong critical reading of Israel because of his own struggle against the Jewish community in the city of Alexandria.

59 *Comm. Jn.* 7:25, vol. 1, 290.

60 For Cyril's expression of Israel's return to faith and obedience to Christ, see *Comm. Jn.* 5:5–6, vol. 1, 137; *Comm. Jn.* 5:8–9, vol. 1, 138.

61 *Comm. Jn.* 1:12, vol. 1, 60.

62 *Ibid.*

63 See for example, *Comm. Jn.* 4:4–5, vol. 1, 118.

64 *Comm. Jn.* 7:34, vol. 1, 305.

65 *Comm. Jn.* 7:9–10, vol. 1, 264.

66 *Comm. Jn.* 8:35, vol. 1, 356.

67 *Comm. Jn.* 15:2, vol. 2, 219.

68 *Comm. Jn.* 21:1–6, vol. 2, 380.

69 John McGuckin, "Moses and the 'Mystery of Christ' in St. Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis," *Coptic Church Review* 21 (2000): 29.

70 McGuckin, "Moses and the 'Mystery of Christ,'" 113.

Robert Wilken adopts a similar perspective on Cyril's reading of the Jewish people. He believes Cyril's approach is grounded in a genuine Pauline perspective but sharpened by his own context of competition with the Jewish people of his day:

There is a curious and perverse logic which drives Cyril to these conclusions [of strong supersessionism]. Much of the impetus comes from Paul's letters and Paul's attitude toward the Mosaic law. But just as much comes from Cyril's adaptation of the Pauline materials and Adam-Christ typology to his own situation.⁷¹

Cyril's sharp denunciation of the Jews, grounded in the rejection of Christ by the Jewish leaders, runs like a bold thread through his writings. It is (to borrow Robert Wilken's phrase) the "Achilles heel" of his exegesis.⁷² Cyril has a profound grasp of the riches that we possess in Christ and he is unmatched in the eloquence with which he describes these riches. But regrettably he proved unable to speak about these riches apart from a strong, unnuanced polemic against the Jews. It is to Cyril's teaching on the newness in Christ and the work of the Spirit, grounded in Paul, that I now turn.

3. *New Creation in Christ and the Gift of the Spirit*

Christ as the New and Second Adam. When we turn to the topic of the new creation in Christ and the gift of the Spirit, we come to the heart of Cyril's theological vision—and his reading of this topic is strongly shaped by Paul. Cyril speaks eloquently throughout his writings on the varied work of Christ. This includes at its core Christ's sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, the decisive defeat of the devil, and the overcoming of death. While Cyril can address any of these as a doctrinal topic in its own right, he prefers to turn to the biblical narrative that displays Christ as *the new and second Adam*. By choosing to follow the narrative arc that runs from Adam to Christ, and by highlighting the "recapitulation" of all things in Christ from Ephesians 1:10, Cyril not only reveals his direct dependence on Paul but also follows in the path set by Irenaeus.⁷³

Robert Wilken describes with special emphasis Cyril's reliance on the Pauline notion of Christ as the second Adam:

71 Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 126.

72 Ibid., 226.

73 It is difficult to establish Cyril's direct dependence on the writings of Irenaeus, but most commentators on Cyril presume that he must have had access to Irenaeus's corpus given the similarity of approach between the two writers. For Cyril's reference to Eph. 1:10 within the Adam-Christ narrative arc, see *Comm. Jn.* 7:39 (vol. 1, 309); *Comm. Jn.* 14:20, vol. 2, 185.

I know of no patristic commentator whose entire exegetical enterprise is so controlled by a single biblical image as is Cyril. The biblical image is that of the second Adam or the heavenly Adam drawn from Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. . . . Further, Cyril's use of the Adam-Christ typology is complemented by the text . . . 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come."⁷⁴

In Cyril's hands, the biblical image of Christ as the second Adam sums up all the major features of his work. Just as in Adam we (the human race) fell under the bondage of sin, the devil, and the power of death *at once*, so in Christ are these enemies all defeated, decisively and forever.

When accenting Christ's victory over *sin*, Cyril appeals especially to Paul's reference to Christ as the second Adam in Romans 5:

In the same way that in Adam [the devil] conquered all of human nature in one man, rendering it subject to sin, so also he is conquered by that nature. After all, he who had no sin was a man, even though he was by nature God. And just as condemnation for transgression was brought about for all through the one man, the first Adam, in the same way the blessing from Christ . . . extends to all through one man, the second Adam.⁷⁵

When underlining Christ's victory over *death*, Cyril turns to Paul's description of Christ as the second Adam in 1 Corinthians 15, focused on the resurrection from the dead:

In ancient times the dreaded specter of death held sway over our nature. . . . And we have "borne the image of the man of dust" (1 Cor. 15:49), enduring death by the divine curse just like he did. When the second Adam appeared to us, the divine man from heaven, and contended for the life of all, he purchased the life of all by the death of his flesh. He destroyed the power of decay and returned to life again.⁷⁶

Whether stated explicitly or not, Christ as the new and second Adam is central to Cyril's theological vision.

74 Wilken, "St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Mystery of Christ in the Bible," 470.

75 *Comm. Jn.* 19:4, vol. 2, 334.

76 *Comm. Jn.* 19:40–41, vol. 2, 355.

New Creation and the Gift of the Spirit. There is an inherent difficulty in describing discrete aspects of Cyril's teaching on the new creation in Christ. Cyril typically weaves them all together as part of one extended narrative that runs from Adam and to Christ, a narrative that usually includes the *return* of the gift of the Spirit to the human race. Cyril's treatment of the baptism of Jesus in John 1:32–33 exhibits this rich tapestry illuminated by constant reference to Pauline texts. First, Cyril sketches a false adoptionist reading of the baptism that claims that Christ was simply a man enriched by the gift of the Spirit at his baptism. In contrast to this, Cyril begins with Philippians 2:5–11 as the key text to show the proper way to interpret the divine economy of Christ: the Son, equal to the Father, “descends to humiliation through the form of a slave and empties himself by means of his humanity.”⁷⁷ Cyril then turns to another Pauline text, 2 Corinthians 8:9 (citing it twice), to show that Christ became poor so that we might become rich. This is “the way of the Incarnation.”⁷⁸

At this point, Cyril steps back and offers what he calls a “proof” of his teaching by renarrating the story of Adam in the garden. In Cyril's retelling, Adam was made in the image and likeness of God but was also sealed with the gift of the Spirit. In a striking exegesis of Genesis 2:7, he views the “breathing” of God into Adam, not as the creation of Adam's human soul, but as the gift of the indwelling Spirit to an already ensouled human being. But Adam was deceived and gave in to this deception, and so our nature in Adam “was stripped of the original grace” and “the Spirit also departed completely.”⁷⁹ Thus for Cyril, the fall of Adam was also the tragic loss of the indwelling Spirit in the human race.

As he retells the story of how we regained all that was lost in Adam, Cyril underscores God's intent to root the Spirit once again in human nature, through the Second Adam who gave the Spirit a secure dwelling place in our nature. For Cyril, this is what John the Evangelist means when he draws attention to the Spirit descending on Christ at his baptism and *remaining* on him (John 1:32):

Since the first Adam did not preserve the grace given by God, God the Father planned to send us the second Adam from heaven. . . . When the Word of God became human, he received the Spirit from the Father as one of us. . . . The one who knew no sin received the Spirit as man in order to keep the Spirit in our nature and root in us once again

⁷⁷ *Comm. Jn.* 1:32–33, vol. 1, 80.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the grace that had left us. . . . The Spirit flew away from us because of sin, but the one who knew no sin became one of us so that the Spirit might become accustomed to remain in us.⁸⁰

This is not a rogue narrative in Cyril's corpus. He returns to it again and again to point us to the center of God's saving work in Christ. This narrative of the gift, loss, and reacquisition of the Spirit is the means by which Cyril handles the *crux* of John 7:39, where the Evangelist says that "the Spirit was not yet given because Christ was not yet glorified." How can this be, Cyril asks, when we see evidence of the work of the Spirit throughout the Old Testament and even in the apostles before the time of Christ's resurrection? Cyril's answer is that in Christ, now glorified, the Spirit has found a secure dwelling place in us—in our nature—in a way that was not true since Adam fell and the Spirit departed. The Spirit works in the saints of the Old Testament, but he does not dwell effectively and securely in them. This happens only in the Second Adam: "Therefore, God the Word, who knows no turning (James 1:17) had to become man so that by receiving the Spirit as man he might preserve the good permanently in our nature."⁸¹ And just here Cyril introduces our becoming new creations in Christ with reference to Paul's text from 2 Corinthians 5:17:

In the second one, that is, Christ, the human race returns to a second beginning, being refashioned into newness of life and returning to its original incorruption, since, "If anyone one is in Christ, they are a new creation," as Paul says. Therefore, the renewing Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit, has been given to us.⁸²

Cyril's way of describing what we have received in Christ can sound as if we attain to nothing other than the original state of Adam—no more, no less. But in fact, Cyril does see a genuine advance in Christ over the state of Adam. We not only return to our original state of blessedness and freedom from sin through the gift of the indwelling Spirit, but now this "presence" of the Spirit is given an eternally secure dwelling in Christ himself, and our nature has now been raised up and seated at God's right hand through the ascension of Christ. The second Adam both restores our former condition and gives to it an incomparably higher dignity.

The Work of the Spirit: Adoption and Spiritual Circumcision. Cyril also relies upon Paul for two of his most consistent ways of speaking about

⁸⁰ Ibid., 82.

⁸¹ *Comm. Jn.* 7:39, vol. 1, 310.

⁸² Ibid.

the *work* of the Spirit in us, namely, adoptive sonship and circumcision of the Spirit. He combines these two when commenting on the phrase "born of God" in John 1:13. The Israelites under the law possessed only "the Spirit of slavery to fear," but those truly born of God have received "the Spirit of sonship" (Rom. 8:15):⁸³

Therefore, the people who were going to ascend to sonship through faith in Christ were described ahead of time in Israel in shadows, just as we of course understand circumcision in the Spirit to be typified ahead of time in ancient days in Israel's flesh.⁸⁴

In Cyril's thinking, the One who is Son by nature has taken on our full humanity so that through the Spirit of the Son we might be born sons by grace (not by nature):

In this way, the slaves ascend to sonship through participation in the true Son since they are called and so to speak raised to the honor that is in the Son by nature. Therefore, we who received the new birth through the Spirit by faith are called born of God, and that is what we are.⁸⁵

The phrase "spiritual circumcision," drawn from Romans 2:28–29, is a signature mark of Cyril's teaching. In a striking twelve-page excursus inserted into his commentary on John 7:24, Cyril expounds on the meaning of "circumcision on the eighth day" in order to explain what Paul means by spiritual circumcision in Romans 2:28–29:

It snatches the human soul from the devil. It frees us and releases us from sin, which tyrannizes within us. And . . . it frees us from both death and decay. And these are not the only benefits of circumcision; it also makes us partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) through participation in Christ our Savior.⁸⁶

Here we glimpse Cyril's understanding of the final goal of our new creation in Christ through the Spirit: our deification, that is, our participation in the

83 *Comm. Jn.* 1:13, vol. 1, 61.

84 *Ibid.*

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Comm. Jn.* 7:24, vol. 1, 286. For Cyril's understanding of "spiritual circumcision" see *Comm. Jn.* 7:24, vol. 1, 281–288; *Comm. Jn.* 15:2, vol. 2, 218; *Comm. Jn.* 20:17, vol. 2, 360–362.

divine life of God. For Cyril, the entire biblical narrative from Adam to Christ, inclusive of the gift of the indwelling Spirit, is ordered to this end, that we might share in the divine life through communion with the Father, Son, and Spirit.⁸⁷

Conclusion

Cyril never aimed to write a theology of Paul (that is, an account of *Pauline theology*). It is safe to say that composing a Pauline theology as such would never have crossed his mind. As a successor to the apostles in his role as bishop, Cyril understood his task as making known the mysteries of the faith, and for this he viewed *the whole of the scripture* as offering one unified statement orchestrated by the inspiration of the Spirit. Cyril called upon Paul as a highly esteemed representative of the apostolic witness and treated Paul as utterly consistent with other biblical witnesses to the divine mysteries. Based upon the sheer number of times Cyril calls upon Paul throughout his writings and the extensive range of topics that Paul is called upon for comment and clarification, we can conclude that Paul served as the privileged apostolic commentator for Cyril.

At the same time we can identify decisive Pauline contributions to central aspects of Cyril's theology. These include: the divine economy as described in Philippians 2:5–11, the role and place of the Law in preparing the way for Christ, the Adam-Christ typology as the basic narrative of salvation history, and the gift and work of the Spirit as decisive for the new creation in Christ. In these, Paul is not just the privileged commentator, but he provides Cyril with the narrative architecture and the main load-bearing walls of his theology.

Correlatively, Cyril offers his own "take" on Paul—his interpretation of Paul—and of the entire biblical revelation. While Cyril has a profound grasp of many aspects of Paul's teaching on the law and the new covenant, in my estimation he misses the Pauline balance regarding the Jews and the law and so underestimates the role of the Jewish people in salvation history.⁸⁸ But when Cyril expounds our new creation in Christ and the gift of the Spirit, joining Paul's witness to the wider biblical testimony, he offers an unparalleled presentation of the divine indwelling in—and transformation of—the human race. From his skillful handling and development of Paul's teaching on the new creation we have much to gain.

87 For a summary account of Cyril's teaching on deification/divinization, see Daniel Keating, "Divinization in Cyril: the Appropriation of Divine Life," in *The Theology of Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, eds. Thomas Weinandy and Daniel Keating (London: Continuum / T & T Clark, 2003), 149–185.

88 See the Vatican II declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, 4, for a contemporary statement that expresses the positive ongoing role of the Jewish people in God's plan.