

CARMELUS

COMMENTARII AB INSTITUTO CARMELITANO EDITI

IT ISSN 0008-6673

CARMELUS

COMMENTARII AB INSTITUTO CARMELITANO EDITI

VOLUMEN UNDEQUINQUAGESIMUM

2002

EDIZIONI CARMELITANE
VIA SFORZA PALLAVICINI, 10
00193 ROMA

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CONSILIUM COMMENTARIIS EDENDIS

Directio: Edmondo Coccia

Librorum aestimationes: Joachim Smet, O.Carm.

Bibliographia annualis: David Waite, O.Carm.

Finito di stampare nel mese di giugno 2003

dalla Tipolitografia 2000 sas di De Magistris R. & C. - 00046 Grottaferrata (Roma)

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CARMELUS bis in anno ab Instituto Carmelitano editur de theologia (prae-
sertim spirituali et Mariologica) et historia. Totum volumen 400 circiter constat
paginis.

IT ISSN 0008-6673.

Qui cum Consilio Commentariorum quavis de ratione communicare velint,
ita litteras inscribant: Direzione «Carmelus», Via Sforza Pallavicini, 10 - 00193
Roma.

Pecuniae pro Commentariis pro anno 2002 solvendae: Euro 26,00 in Italia,
vel Euro 31,00 extra Italiam. In quantum fieri potest, pecuniae per «cheque»
vel tabellarios mittantur: C.C.P. 14069009 Edizioni Carmelitane - Via Sforza
Pallavicini, 10 - 00193 Roma.

ELIJAH ACCORDING TO THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

1. INTRODUCTION

On this occasion I would like to present you with Elijah in the thought of the Fathers of the Church. It is not easy to summarize their thought in an article, as the subject is vast. Hopefully, this article will be help to grasp Elijah's spirituality. The allegorical technique of exegesis is the manner of the Fathers to understand Elijah's teachings. It is necessary, then, to explain in summary form the allegorical technique, and then the thought of the Fathers about Elijah.

2. EXEGETICAL METHODS

Generally, the Fathers of the Church used the allegorical and the literal exegetical methods. These methods are based on Greek and Jewish traditions. In the third century, there were two schools, Alexandria and Antioch, and each school has a characteristic as to its exegetical method. Allegory, which is also called typology,¹ was the characteristic

¹ M. SIMONETTI, *Allegoria (tipologia)*, in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, diretto da A. DI BERARDINO, Genova 1994, p. 141: «Va comunque osservato che gli antichi esegeti, mentre designano con nomi diversi i vari tipi d'interpretazione allegorica della Sacra Scrittura (interpretazione spirituale o mistica corrispondente all'odierna tipologia, interpretazione morale riferita alle vicende dell'anima, ecc), adoperano però indifferentemente il termine "allegoria" per indicare in blocco tutti i tipi d'interpretazione non letterale, e più specificamente non distinguono *typos* da allegoria: in effetti ogni interpretazione che è tipologia quanto al contenuto (in quanto ravvisa in un dato dell'Antico Testamento il *typos* di un dato del Nuovo Testamento) necessariamente è allegorica quanto al procedimento ermeneutico adottato (perché dà a quello dato un significato che non è quello letterale)». In another article he says that it is not known when this exegesis began in the Church, *L'Esegesi Patristica in Occidente: Caratteri e Tendenze*, in *L'Esegesi dei Padri dalle Origini a Gregorio Magno*, XXVIII Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana, Maggio 1999, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 68, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma 2000, p. 7. A. ROSE leads that typology is examples, pre-figuration: *Élie dans la Tradition Patristique et Liturgique de l'Eglise*, in «Carmel, Revue Trimestrielle de Spiritualité Chrétienne», 2-no. 76 (1995), p. 57: «Cela leur arrivait pour servir de préfiguration (*typikos*) et a été écrit pour notre instruction, à nous vers qui

of the Alexandrian school; the literal meaning is the characteristic of the Antioch school. And in the West, during the fourth century, the Fathers combined the two methods (literal and allegorical).

Clement of Alexandria and Origen were the famous teachers who accentuated allegory to interpret the Scripture, which was then continued by others teachers. But before them Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish Hellenist,² used this method, in which he combined the Greek and Jewish traditions. Jewish tradition interpreted the Scripture in the literal and allegorical senses in order to apply the sacred text into everyday life.³ The earliest Old Testament interpretation was predominantly oral. In fact, there are two oral traditions, *Targum* and *Midrash*. *Targum* is an oral tradition in the Aramaic language, which was brought from Babylon. In Jesus' time, Aramaic was the spoken language and Hebrew was the written language. In the synagogue the Scripture was read in Hebrew and then translated into Aramaic, but the translation was very free, indeed properly it was a paraphrase. Sometimes halakhic or haggadic insertions were interpreted. Rabbis had the duty of doing this task.⁴ *Midrash* is an oral tradition, which is

la fin des temps s'est rapprochée. On pourrait traduire aussi ce terme par exemples, mais préfiguration exprime davantage l'enseignement de Paul »

² H. CROUZEL, *Filone d'Alessandria*, in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, diretto da A. DI BERARDINO, Genova 1994, p. 1368: «Filone d'Alessandria è il principale rappresentante del giudaismo ellenistico. La sua influenza è stata grande per l'esegesi, la teologia e la spiritualità dei padri per la mediazione di Clemente, Origene, Gregorio di Nissa e Ambrogio che lo conoscevano direttamente. Da Eusebio e Girolamo è stato trattato quasi come un cristiano, e sembra che si debba ai cristiani la conservazione delle sue opere. È di qualche anno maggiore di Gesù e vive ancora nel 41». According to D. M. SCHOLER, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus of Alexandria*, in *The Works of Philo*, Translated by C. D. Yonge, Hendrickson 1997, p. xi, Philo lived from about 20 BC to about AD 50.

³ Cf. M. SIMONETTI, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church, An Historical Introduction to the Patristic Exegesis*, translated by J. A. Hughes, Editors: A. BERGQUIST - M. BOCKMUEHL, Consultant Editor: W. HORNBURY, Edinburgh 1994, pp. 2-6.

⁴ M. SIMONETTI, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, pp. 2-3: «Halakhah is of legislative nature, aimed particularly at responding to questions arising from the practical application of the sacred text to everyday life, which include liturgy, law, moral and activities. While Haggadah concerns the edification of faithful; and had a most important application in the homily, which formed part of the worship of the synagogue. It is more historical theology. The Pharisees are called to perform this task». Rabbis comprise a group of teachers. It was obviously a respectful form of address for someone who knew and taught the Torah, but not yet an exclusive title for a particular group or caste, the educated and ordained teacher. All their activities are to serve or to help the Pharisees, who claim that they know the law and oral traditions well, which were received in heritage from Moses, Joshua and the prophets. They are to observe various activities in the life of the people and in particular the distinction of the pure and impure; cf. H. KONG, *Die Religiöse Situation der Zeit* [English translation: *Judaism: The Religious Situation of our Time*, translated by J. Bowden, London 1992, pp. 130-31].

received by the Pharisees from Moses, Joshua and the prophets. It can indicate either a particular type of actual interpretation of the Old Testament, by a process of combining different passages, or the product of the interpretation itself, i.e. the actual commentary.⁵

Of course, Greek tradition did not have the Jewish Scripture, but through the literal and allegorical methods, Hellenists re-interpreted the poetic and the philosophical texts.⁶

Meaning of literal and allegorical

Saint Paul in his letter *1 Corinthians* uses allegory or typology to interpret the book of *Exodus*⁷ that uses the mirages of rock, water and manna. He says that the rock is the Christ and the manna and water are spiritual food.⁸

In another letter, St. Paul also uses allegory; he says that Adam is the *typos* of Jesus Christ: «Nonetheless death reigned over all from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sin was not the breaking of a commandment, as Adam's was. He prefigured the One who was to come».⁹ Again St. Paul sees Mount Sinai as a pre-figuration of

⁵ M. SIMONETTI, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, pp. 3-4; but after the discovery of the Dead Sea manuscripts, there is the other commentary, which has been termed *peshar* (explanation); and the manner to interpret, Simonetti declares: «Entire Old Testament books, or parts thereof, are quoted verse by verse, followed by a brief interpretation. This type of interpretation actualizes the biblical text (usually prophet), by relating it to the historical developments taking place in the Qumran sect, and in Palestine in general. Fragment 3 of the *peshar* of Nahum mentions the Seleucid king Demetrius, Hasmonaeans' time. Other figures who continually appear on the scene are the teacher of righteousness and the wicked priest, important figures in Qumran literature».

⁶ M. SIMONETTI, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, p. 4: «The Greeks did not have texts with the same normative value as Scripture, but in their schools of Rhetoric and Philosophy there was a custom of reading and explaining literary and philosophical texts, so that advanced exegetical techniques were also brought to bear on them, and among them too there was a progression from a purely oral teaching tradition to a writing down of commentaries on the poets and philosophers. A commentary on the poetic work (Homer, Virgil, etc.) is usually concise. After the quotation of the line, there follows the explanation of any difficulties of language, interpretation, or the like, and clarification of historical, mythological, and antiquarian references».

⁷ Ex 16:13-17:6.

⁸ *1 Co* 10:1-5: «I want you to be quite certain, brothers that our ancestors all had the cloud over them and all passed through the sea. In the cloud and in the sea they were all baptized into Moses; all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, since they drank from the spiritual rock, which followed them, and the rock was Christ».

⁹ *Rm* 5:14.

Jerusalem city and at the New Jerusalem: «The one given on Mount Sinai that is Hagar, whose children are born into slavery; now Sinai is a mountain in Arabia and represents Jerusalem in its present state, for she is in slavery together with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and that is the one that is our mother».

Through these citations, Paul wants to point to other things behind the literal meaning (Greek: ἀλλήγορέω = «to say other things»). So allegory is to say one thing in order to signify another; a writer expresses concepts, which hide a more significant, hidden meaning behind the literal meaning. And the hermeneutical approach consists in discovering in a text another meaning apart from the literal sense, and also beyond the original intentions of the author.¹⁰

Allegorical importance

Through the allegorical method the Fathers of the Church can enrich their interpretation of the Old and the New Testaments. So they did not have difficulty in presenting even the difficult texts of Scripture to their contemporaries. For example, the book of the Song of the Songs is a difficult text, because it speaks about a woman who falls in love with a man. But Origen, who was the first to interpret this book in allegory fashion, thereby expressed the profound spiritual sense. His interpretation influenced the whole history of the contemplative or the mystic life. He interprets the bride as the type of the Church and the soul, and the groom is a type of Christ.¹¹ The union of the bride and groom is a spiritual marriage, the union of the Church and Christ, the union of soul with Christ, which is the goal and ultimate aim of life.¹²

The Fathers of the Church, through the allegorical method, can draw out the moral, spiritual and eschatological senses, as John Cassian explained in his conferences. The moral or tropological sense is an explanation pertaining to the correction of life and practical instruction, as if we understood these in two covenants as *praktike* and as the theoretical discipline of the human being; the spiritual sense is the historical narrative; and the eschatological or anagogical sense is that by which words are directed to the invisible and to what lies in the future.¹³

¹⁰ M. SIMONETTI, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, p. 5.

¹¹ ORIGEN, *Canticum Canticorum*, 1, 1, (SCH 37, pp. 61-62).

¹² Cf E. R. L. TINAMBUNAN, *Is St. John of the Cross a Good Spiritual Guide?*, in «Carmel in the World» 39/2 (2000), pp. 114-116.

¹³ J. CASSIAN, *Collationes*, 14, 1-5, (SCH 54, pp. 189-192). Cf M. SIMONETTI, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, p. 119.

The other example is in the *Moralia in Iob* of Gregory the Great. Job is the figure or type of the Christ and of the Church;¹⁴ so the attitude of Job is an authentic figure of the Christian in temptation, in penitence, in the virtues, in contemplation and action. Through Job's personality, Gregory the Great draws out the moral, spiritual sense and ultimate aim of the human being.

Reinterpretation

The Fathers of the Church stressed spirituality, which is the union of the believer with God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. To grasp this goal, they searched the way to re-interpret the Scripture in the light of Jesus Christ even if there are differences of how to do this in the Fathers themselves. The apostolic fathers live in the period following the time of Jesus Christ. There is still no New Testament, so they meditate in the Old Testament and the Jewish tradition in the light of Jesus Christ, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They meditate on the words and the life of Christ in the light of Tradition. The post-apostolic tradition is a little bit different than apostolic tradition, because the canon of the New Testament was being formulated. They re-interpreted martyrdom as the ultimate aim of life; it is the perfect way to be united to Christ through the imitation of his suffering.¹⁵ After Origen's time, the situation changed, because monastic life was growing. Union with Christ was not only through martyrdom of blood, which is to die in time of persecution, but through white martyrdom, which consists in a constant preparation of self, especially in fighting one's own weakness and sins.¹⁶ Therefore the monk went to the desert to fight against Satan, not to find tranquility or peace. The monk must

¹⁴ GREGORY THE GREAT, *Moralia in Iob*, 5, 23, 3, (BGM 1/3, p. 280). Cf GREGORIO MAGNO, *Moralia*, versione, introduzione e note a cura di B. BORGHINI, Torino 1965, pp. 37-39. Cf C. DAGENS, Introduzione, in *Moralia in Iob*, a cura di P. SINISCALCO, traduzione di E. Gandolfo, Roma 1992, p. 17.

¹⁵ H. EGAN, *I Mistici e la Mistica, Antologia della Mistica Cristiana*, a cura di L. BORRIELLO, Città del Vaticano 1995, pp. 43-44; he cited: ORIGEN, *Azione al Martirio*, 12: «Che sia necessario rinnegare se stessi e prendere la propria croce e seguire Gesù non è solo scritto in Matteo, del quale abbiamo riportato le parole, ma anche in Luca e Marco. Molto tempo fa, perciò, noi avremmo dovuto rinnegare noi stessi e dire: "Non sono più io che vivo (Gal 2:20)". Ora dimostriamo se abbiamo preso la nostra croce e seguito Gesù; questo si verifica se Cristo vive in noi. Se desideriamo salvare la nostra anima per riaverla migliore, prendiamola con il martirio, perché se noi la prenderemo per amore di Cristo, gettandola nella morte per lui, le procureremo la vera salvezza». Cf ORIGEN, *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*, 12, (GCS 2, pp. 11-13).

¹⁶ Cf ATHANASIUS, *Vita S. Antonii*, 46, (PG 26, pp. 909C-912B).

prepare himself with self-discipline, mortification and asceticism to gain *apatheia*,¹⁷ which is to control emotions and temptations, to direct or to submit oneself to Christ. Self-discipline, mortification and asceticism are the new model of martyrdom, not to fight in the stadium but in oneself against the devil, to participate in the suffering of Christ and in his resurrection.

Role of the person in the Scripture

In relationship to *apatheia*, the monks re-interpreted the persons in Scripture in the allegorical manner. Adam, Abraham, Job, Moses, and Elijah are the personages most mentioned, as well as John the Baptist from the time of Jesus. The monks tried to recapture in their time the spirit of these persons because they are men of God.

Elijah is the first choice of prophets and of monks to be the model of the monastic life, because they thought of him as a hermit who practiced *apatheia* successfully. Elijah is the *typos* of monastic life. From him, the monks learned how to live the hermitical life, which includes mortification, self-control and ascetical life;¹⁸ they re-interpreted or

¹⁷ *Apáttheia* (*ἀπάθεια*: impassibility, insensibility, calm, imperturbability) is the tranquility of the soul, to that one can control one's emotions, which easily lead him to sin. Saint Paul expresses this with: «While I am acting as I do not want to, I still acknowledge the Law as good, so it is not myself acting, but the sin which lives in me. And really, I know of nothing good is in me, the power to do it is not: the good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want, that is what I do. But every time I do what I do not want to, then it is not myself acting, but the sin that lives in me. So I find this rule: that for me, where I want to do nothing but good, evil is close at my side. In my inmost self I dearly love God's law, but I see that acting on my body there is a different law which battles against the law in my mind. So I am brought to be a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body» (Rm. 7:16-23) While, St. Anthony expressed *Apáttheia* as the purity of heart, ATHANASIUS, *Vita S. Antonii*, 14, (PG 26, pp. 864C-865B). EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, *Tractatus Practicus*, 56, (SCH 171, pp. 630-632); 64, (SCH 171, p. 648); 81, (SCH 171, p. 670).

¹⁸ For GREGORY THE GREAT, Elijah and Elisha are the figures of ascetical life, *Dial.* 2, 1-38, (SCH 260, pp. 128-230). Cf P. CUSACK, *An Interpretation of the Second Dialogue of Gregory the Great, Hagiography and St. Benedict*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter 1993, p. 11. JEROME, *Epistula* The meaning of the name Elijah is equivalent to alleluia, which is praise of God; cf ALBERTO TRAVERSO, GREGORIO DI NISSA, *Sui Titoli dei Salmi*, Traduzione, introduzione e note a cura di ALBERTO TRAVERSO, Roma, Città Nuova, 1994, p. 9: «Il nostro testo, a questo proposito, presenta un brano interessante, dove l'autore esamina dal punto di vista linguistico la parola 'alleluia', mostrando di sapere che l'ebraico ha vari nomi per indicare Dio e che uno di questi è 'ja', ma dal fatto che egli applica alla parola 'alleluia' e al nome 'Elia', assunto come esempio, delle categorie grammaticali greche (per Gregorio 'allelu' sarebbe il caso retto della parola lode in lingua ebraica, come 'Eliu' lo sarebbe del nome 'Elia'), è evidente che egli ignora in realtà quella lingua.» 58, 5, (PL 22, p. 583).

actualized his figure in their life in order to grasp the ultimate goal of monastic life.

The Fathers also re-interpreted Elijah in another sense. He is represented as *typos* of John the Baptist who is the *typos* of Christ. So Elijah is also the *typos* of Christ. Thus the activity of Elijah is the figure of Christ's activity.

3. ELIJAH ACCORDING TO THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

Through the allegorical or typological method, the Fathers did not have a problem in re-interpreting Elijah to apply his example to their life and to their time.¹⁹ Elijah was one of the persons most cited at time of the Fathers of the Church.

Before presenting Elijah according to the Fathers of the Church, it is advantageous to see his personality. We can know many things about him through the Scriptures, but that is not my intention on this occasion. Therefore, the pilgrim's experience of Egeria in the Holy Land is a preferred source. Elijah originally is a Tishbite,²⁰ thus he is called Elijah Tishbeh.²¹ Tishbite is found in the valley of Jordan, in which Elijah was fed by ravens in the time of famine.²² Egeria also

¹⁹ The meaning of the name Elijah is equivalent to *alleluia*, which is praise of God: cf. GREGORIO DI NISSA, *Sui Titoli dei Sabni*, traduzione, introduzione e note a cura di A. TRAVERSO, Roma 1994, p. 9: «Il nostro testo, a questo proposito, presenta un brano interessante, dove l'autore esamina dal punto di vista linguistico la parola "alleluia", mostrando di sapere che l'ebraico ha vari nomi per indicare Dio e che uno di questi è "ja", ma dal fatto che egli applica alla parola "alleluia" e al nome "Elia", assunto come esempio, delle categorie grammaticali greche (per Gregorio "allelu" sarebbe il caso retto della parola *lode* in lingua ebraica, come "Eliu" lo sarebbe del nome "Elia"), è evidente che egli ignora in realtà quella lingua».

²⁰ 1 K 17:1.

²¹ EGERIA, *Itinerarium Aethiopiae*, 16, 1, (Sch 21, p. 154): «Ac sic ergo euntes aliquandiu per uallem Iordanis super ripam fluminis ipsius, quia ibi nobis iter erat aliquandiu, ad subito uidimus ciuitatem sancti prophetae Heliae, id est Thesbe, unde ille habuit nomen Helias Thesbites».

²² EGERIA, *Itinerarium Aethiopiae*, 16, 2-3, (Sch 21, pp. 154-156): «Ac sic ergo et ibi gratias Deo agentes iuxta consuetudinem perexiimus iter nostrum. Item euntes in eo itinere uidimus uallem de sinistro nobis uenientem amoenissimam, quae uallis erat ingens mittens torrentem in Iordaneam infinitum, et ibi in ipsa ualle uidimus monasterium cuiusdam fratris nunc id est monachi. Tunc ego, ut sum satis curiosa, requirere coepi, quae esset haec uallis, ubi sanctus monachus nunc monasterium sibi fecisset; non enim putabam hoc sine causa esse. Tunc dixerunt nobis sancti, qui nobiscum iter faciebant, id est loci notores: haec est uallis Corra, ubi sedit sanctis Helias Thesbites temporibus Achab regis, qua famis fuit, et iusso Dei coruus ei escam portabat et de eo torrente aquam bibebat».

St. John Chrysostom also accentuates the poverty of Elijah as a model of Christian life. He used the figure of sheepskin to describe the poverty of Elijah.²⁸ When Elijah went to Zarephath, he entered into the house of a widow and asks her to prepare a little scone for him and then for herself and her son.²⁹ On another occasion he says that Elijah is the *typos* of the mendicant,³⁰ which is also the figure of poverty.

According to Quodvultdeus, Elijah teaches charity, love towards one's neighbor even in poverty, because charity must be in first place, and it is transformed into the love of God.³¹ And he also says that poverty is a form of participation in the suffering of Jesus Christ. Elijah and John the Baptist had become models of poverty, which they showed by the wearing clothing of animals' skin.³²

3.3. Chastity

Ephraim mentioned in his hymns that Elijah has vowed celibacy and Elisha has vowed chastity; and these vows are known as treasures before God.³³

Tertullian said that Moses was monogamous and Elijah did not marry; and he also indicated that John the Baptist who received the spirit of Elijah did the same thing.³⁴ This means that Elijah is the *typos* of chastity while Moses is the *typos* of matrimony.³⁵

erat, qui tempore famis cibum a uidua petebat, largiturus ut hydria farinae per triennium et sex menses non deficeret et cottidianos usus olei uas uiduae inopi sufficeret ac ministraret».

²⁸ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (349-407), *Homiliae in Matthaeum*, 56, 3, (PG 58, pp. 552-553).

²⁹ I K 17:13.

³⁰ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *De Inani Gloria et de Educandis Liberis*, 14, It. translation: *Sulla vanità e come i genitori devono educare i figli*, introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di A. CERESA-GASTALDO, Roma 1977, p. 35.

³¹ Cf QUODVULTDEUS, *De Promissionibus et Praedictionibus Dei*, 2, 29, 63, (CCL 60, pp. 129-30).

³² JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *De Poenitentia*, 4, 1, (PG 49, p. 301).

³³ EPHRAIM SYRUS, *Nisibene Hymns*, 21, 4, p. 191: «Thy chastity is as Elisha's, and thy celibacy Elijah's, the covenant with the eyes as Job's, thy tender mercies as David's; without envy as Jonathan, and thy firmness as Jeremiah's, thy gentleness the Apostles! It is the ancient thing of the prophets, the new thing of Apostles, blessed is He who filled thee with their treasures».

³⁴ TERTULLIAN, *De Monogamia*, 8, 7, (CCL 2, p. 1240).

³⁵ JOHN DAMASCENE, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 4, 24, (PG 94, pp. 1208C-1209A). JOHN CLIMACUS, *Liber ad Pastorem*, 15, 221, (PG 88, pp. 1201C-1204A), clarifies that Elijah is the model of chastity. See also EPIPHANIUS, *Ancoratus*, 98, (PG 43, pp. 193C-196A).

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³² JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *De Poenitentia*, 4, 1, (PG 49, p. 301).

³³ EPHRAIM SYRUS, *Nisibene Hymns*, 21, 4, p. 191: «Thy chastity is as Elisha's, and thy celibacy Elijah's, the covenant with the eyes as Job's, thy tender mercies as David's; without envy as Jonathan, and thy firmness as Jeremiah's, thy gentleness the Apostles'! It is the ancient thing of the prophets, the new thing of Apostles, blessed is He who filled thee with their treasures».

³⁴ TERTULLIAN, *De Monogamia*, 8, 7, (CCL 2, p. 1240).

³⁵ JOHN DAMASCENE, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 4, 24, (PG 94, pp. 1208C-1209A). JOHN CLIMACUS, *Liber ad Pastorem*, 15, 221, (PG 88, pp. 1201C-1204A), clarifies that Elijah is the model of chastity. See also EPIPHANIUS, *Ancoratus*, 98, (PG 43, pp. 193C-196A).

Jerome also said that Elijah is the type of the virginity; and Gregory of Nyssa accentuated the same aspect of Elijah's life.³⁶ Through the example and spirit of Elijah monks or nuns can realize their virginity as the way to grasp the love of God on earth.

3.4. Obedience

Elijah is obedient to his superior that is to God, through his laws, which had been given to Moses on Sinai.³⁷ Obedience to God means denying self while following absolutely God's laws in his life. Pachomius's *Praecepta* was the first attempt to organize the monastic life with a Rule; he accentuated the obedience of the monks to the superior, who conducts all the activities of the monastery.³⁸ In this obedience, a monk needs sincerity, purity of heart, to obey the monastic rule.³⁹

3.5. Miracles

Elijah performed some miracles, which prefigure the miracles of Christ. Through the Spirit of God Elijah brought a dead man to life;⁴⁰ and Christ did the same thing.⁴¹ Also the disciples of Jesus Christ did the same thing through the Spirit of God. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central mystery, which assured universal resurrection.⁴²

St. Ambrose reminded the priest that his first duty is to seek to be in the Grace of God, as Elijah did during his lifetime. He was united

³⁶ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *De Virginitate*, 6, 1, (SCH 119, 338-344). JOHN CHRYSOSTOM accentuates the same thing, namely that Elijah together with Elisha and John the Baptist are models of chastity, *De Virginitate*, 79, 1-2, (SCH 125, pp. 376-378).

³⁷ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homiliae in Matthaeum*, 56, 3, (PG 58, pp. 552-553).

³⁸ For example, conversation in the darkness was forbidden: PACHOMIUS, *Regulae S. Pachonii*, 94, (PL 23, p. 78A).

³⁹ Stephan of Hnes, who wrote the life of Apollus Archimandrita, says clearly that Elijah is the figure of the monk with regard to purity; cf STEPHAN OF HNES, *Vita di Apollu Archimandrita*, in *Vite di Monaci Copti*, a cura di T. ORLANDI, traduzione di A. Campagnano e T. Orlandi, Roma 1984, p. 188 (all citations of *Vite di Monaci Copti* are taken from this book, whose original is in the Coptic language).

⁴⁰ Through the same Spirit, he was taken up into heaven, DIADOCUS OF FOTICA (400-476), *Capita Centum de Perfectione Spirituali*, 62, (PG 65, pp. 1187-1188). JOHN DAMASCENE (650/75-754), *Homilia in Transfigurationem Domini*, 14-15, (PG 96, pp. 565D-569A), says that the soft wind is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

⁴¹ EPHRAIM SYRUS, *Nisibene Hymns*, 39, 1, p. 200: «There have come to me ransomers from among the saints, but none has plundered me like the Son of Mary. For lo! Elijah brought a dead man to life; and even though he himself escaped from my hands, yet had I consolation after him, for the dead man whom he quickened, I carried off from him».

⁴² EPIPHANIUS, *Ancoratus*, 98, (PG 43, pp. 193C-196A).

with God, and therefore, Elijah performed the miracle; he spoke an authentic word and rain ceased to fall on the earth for three years and six months. Again he spoke and the barrel of meal did not fail, and the cruse of oil was filled for the whole time of that long famine.⁴³ The most famous miracle is rising of a boy from the dead, which expresses Elijah as *typos* of Jesus Christ.⁴⁴

St. Augustine interpreted the miracle of the flour and oil as a symbol of the unity of the Church. He said this in a polemic context against the Donatists, who go against the unity of the Church. Elijah is sent by God to be fed by a widow woman of another nation. Her meal and oil are blessed, as the fruit of the love of God for all people.⁴⁵ A monk thought that this miracle provided help for the widow, and then applying it to the monastic life, when a monk received this grace, the grace was used to respond to the needs of the people.⁴⁶

In monastic life, through the imitation of Elijah's life, the monks or nuns believe that they receive the same Spirit who was received by Elijah. The apostles also received the same Spirit, therefore they can perform miracle,⁴⁷ and even John the Baptist received the same Spirit.⁴⁸ In the beheading of John the Baptist, Sophronius of Jerusalem sees that Herod⁴⁹ is the new Ahab,⁵⁰ and Herodias is the new Jezebel.⁵¹

3.6. Against Satan

The first enemy of the Christian life is the Satan. The Fathers of the Church interpreted Elijah's deeds as a combat with the Satan, which

⁴³ AMBROSE, *De Officiis*, 3, 1, 4, (BA 13, p. 276): «Sermone locutus est Hellas, et pluvia stetit nec cecidit super terram tribus annis et sex mensibus. Iterum locutus est, et hydria farinae non deficit et uas olei toto famis diurnae tempore non est exinanitum». On another occasion AMBROSE says that the miracle is performed by the power of the Spirit of God who comes down to Elijah, *De Fide*, 3, 4, 27, (BA 15, pp. 204-206).

⁴⁴ ATHANASIUS, *De Incarnatione Verbi*, 7, 38, (PG 25, pp. 161B-164A).

⁴⁵ AUGUSTINE, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, 12, 3, (PL 42, p. 272). CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA expresses same idea, but in context he is not writing against Donatist, but expressing the unity of faith, which Elijah and John the Baptist had prophesized, *In XII Prophetas, Malachia*, 4, 45, (PG 72, pp. 361D-363B).

⁴⁶ STEPHAN OF HNES, *Vita di Apollo Archimandrita*, in *Vite di Monaci Copti*, p. 210.

⁴⁷ RUFINUS, *Historia Monachorum*, 7, (PL 21, p. 417B-C). Cf BARSANUFIUS and JOHN OF GAZA (V-VI), *Epistolario*, 91, traduzione, introduzione e note a cura di M. F. T. LOVATO e L. MORTARI, Roma 1991, p. 161.

⁴⁸ SOPHRONIUS OF JERUSALEM (550-638/9), *Homiliae*, 6, 6, (PG 87, pp. 3318D-3319D).

⁴⁹ Mt 14:1-12.

⁵⁰ 1 K 16:29-34.

⁵¹ SOPHRONIUS OF JERUSALEM, *Homiliae*, 7, 18, (PG 87, p. 3349B-3352B).

was symbolized by Elijah's relationship with Jezebel.⁵² Therefore spiritual food especially of Scripture is needed, as St. Ambrose expressed in his letters, taking Elijah to this activity as an example. He wrote that Elijah was sent to the brook Cherith, and there the ravens nourished him, bringing him bread. Cherith means understanding; Horeb signifies heart; Beersheba is interpreted by him as oath. The Old and New Testaments are the fountain, the living river when they provide look for meditation and understanding. They are the best spiritual direction.⁵³

3.7. *Typology of Christ*

There is one anonymous Father who describes the function of the prophets. He says that after original sin, the prophets and the messengers asked God to descend to his creatures for their salvation. The prophets, as the messengers of God, announced the coming of the Messiah who is God and Savior.⁵⁴ And the lives of the prophets provide a figure of this Messiah.

Many Jewish people thought that Jesus was Elijah who was to come (second coming).⁵⁵ But according to the Fathers, Elijah is the *typos* of Christ. Ephraim makes the comparison between Elijah, who did not die and the newly enlivened Christ after his resurrection, ascension and second coming.⁵⁶

The ascension of Elijah is a *typos* of the ascension of Christ.⁵⁷ The Spirit of God took up Elijah into heaven in a chariot of fire. And

⁵² EPHRAIM SYRUS, *Nisibene Hymns*, 53, 1-3, 12, p. 207: «Come, let us hear how they contend for victory: the guilty ones who never have conquered, nor will conquer. Death said unto the Evil One, in the end victory is mine: for Death is master of the close, as a conqueror. Satan, these were to be Death indeed, wert thou able: to bring to death a living man, by means of lust. Elijah who feared thee not, O Satan: fled before Jezebel's face because he feared me».

⁵³ AMBROSE, *Epistulae*, 63, 77-78, (PL 16, p. 1262B-C).

⁵⁴ PALESTINE ANONYM, *Omelia Arabo-Cristiana dell'Ottavo Secolo*, traduzione, introduzione e note a cura di M. GALLO, presentazione di Samir Khalil Samir, Roma 1994, p. 75: «Che c'è di più chiaro e luminoso di questa profezia relativa al Messia? Dal momento che i profeti hanno profetato e detto che Messia è Dio e Signore e Salvatore. È lui che è disceso dal cielo per salvare i suoi servi senza abbandonare il trono della sua divinità».

⁵⁵ Mt 16:14. On one occasion, JOHN CHRYSOSTOM says that a greater than Elijah is coming, who would give him (Elijah) and Jewish people food, *De Compunctione*, 2, 2, (PG 47, pp. 413-414). CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Quod unus sit Christus*, (SCH 97, pp. 458-460).

⁵⁶ EPHRAIM SYRUS, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 1, translated by J. B. Morris, Edinburgh 1989, p. 224: «They pre-figured (Moses and Elijah) the mystery of his Advent: Moses was a type of the dead, and Elijah a type of the living, flies to meet him at his coming».

⁵⁷ EPHRAIM SYRUS, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 8, p. 241. VENERABLE BEDE, *Expositio Actuum Apostolorum*, 1, 11, (CCL 121, p. 9).

through the same Spirit, God also helps the monks or nuns to lift up their activities so as even to perform miracles, in particular in monastic prayer.⁵⁸ Fire is the figure of the power of the Spirit of God.⁵⁹ Saint Ambrose sees that the ascension of Elijah is the *typos* of the redemption of the whole world, in which all good people enter into Heaven, people both from Old and New Testaments.⁶⁰ Aphrahat, in his book of *Demonstrations* shows extensively that Elijah prefigures Jesus Christ.⁶¹

St. Ambrose sees that the ascension of Elijah is a *typos* of the sacrament of baptism. Elijah was taken up in a chariot of fire, which is the Spirit of God; and in the Baptism, the same Spirit is received⁶². While Irenaeus did not see that the ascension of Elijah is a *typos*, because in his time this method was not usual in exegesis, he accentuates that it is the power of Spirit of God, which works in this prophet. He also says that Elijah was not taken up in the flesh, but the fire of chariot consumed his flesh.⁶³

Origen makes Elijah with a *typos* of Christ in the events on Mount Carmel. The Jewish people refused to believe in God, and turned to Baal. Elijah with some people believed in God. This is corresponded to Christ's time, when the Jewish people refused to believe in him and only some people followed Christ.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ RUFINUS, *Historia Monachorum*, 2, (PL 21, pp. 406B-407A).

⁵⁹ APHRAHAT, *The Demonstrations*, 1, 12, translated by A. E. Johnston, Edinburgh 1989, pp. 349-450: «Again, two princes and a hundred who were with them were burned, because they approached the mountain on which Elijah was sitting, who ascended in a chariot of fire to heaven. The calumniators also were burned because they dug a pit for righteous men. Accordingly, beloved, the righteous shall be tried by the fire, like gold and silver and goodly stones, and the wicked shall be burned in the fire like straw and reed and stubble, and the fire shall have power upon them and they shall be burned». Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 50, 9, (CCL 41, pp. 605-606).

⁶⁰ AMBROSE, *De Fide*, 4, 1, 7-8, (BA 15, p. 260).

⁶¹ APHRAHAT, *The Demonstrations*, 21, 14, p. 398: «Elijah also was persecuted as Jesus was persecuted. Jezebel the murderess persecuted Elijah; and the persecuting and murderous congregation persecuted Jesus. Elijah restrained the heavens from rain because of the sins of Israel; and Jesus by His coming restrained the Spirit from the prophets, because of the sins of the people. Elijah destroyed the servants of Baal; and Jesus trampled upon Satan and his hosts. Elijah raised to life the son of the widow; and Jesus raised to life the son of widow, as well as Lazarus and the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue. Elijah sustained the widow with a little bread; and Jesus satisfied thousands with a little bread. Elijah was taken up in a chariot to heaven; and our Redeemer ascended and took His seat on the right hand of his Father. Elisha received the spirit of Elijah; and Jesus breathed upon the faces of His apostles».

⁶² AMBROSE, *De Poenitentia*, 1, 8, 34, (Sch 179, p. 82).

⁶³ IRENAEUS, *Contra Haereses*, 5, 5, 1-2, (PG 7/2, pp. 1134B-1136C).

⁶⁴ ORIGEN, *Homiliae in Ieremiam*, 5, 4, (Sch 232, pp. 290-292). AMBROSIASTER, *Commentaria in Epistulam ad Romanos*, 11, 2-4, (PL 17, pp. 154D-155A).

The fast of Elijah in the desert is one of the more popular of *typos* regarding Jesus Christ.⁶⁵ The desert is a solitary place, and there through his fast, Elijah achieved *apatheia*, which is the way to be united with God.⁶⁶ Therefore the desert is not dangerous anymore, because of the attacks of Satan, but it becomes the solitude of heavenly realities,⁶⁷ or the city of God.

John Damascene sees that Elijah and Elisha are *typos* of Christ and of his disciples. Elisha who received his authority from Elijah, converted the Jewish people, the disciple of Jesus Christ, who received authority from Him, tried to convert the Jewish people to God.⁶⁸

Quodvultdeus interprets the scene on Mount Carmel as a *typos* of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Elijah's time, Jewish people killed all the prophets of God, and Elijah alone was left. On Mount Carmel, he destroyed all the prophets and the throne of Baal, which is the figure of reign of the Satan. Jesus Christ, through his passion and resurrection, destroyed the throne of Satan.⁶⁹ He also sees the *typos* of the scene in the desert, when Elijah was fed by ravens,⁷⁰ related to the last supper and particularly to the Eucharistic celebration. Elijah received the bread, which came down from heaven, and in the Eucharist, Jesus, who comes down from heaven, gives his body to us for eternal life.⁷¹

Saint Paul cites Elijah in his letter to the Romans noting that Elijah was considered the *typos* of Christ among the Jewish people at the time of Jesus Christ.⁷²

⁶⁵ Eucherius of Lyon, *De Laude Eremi*, 32, (PL 50, p. 708B-C).

⁶⁶ Eucherius of Lyon, *De Laude Eremi*, 18, (PL 50, p. 705D).

⁶⁷ Eucherius of Lyon, *De Laude Eremi*, 3, (PL 50, pp. 702C-703A). The desert was known as the reign of Satan; cf PARNUTE, *Storia dei Monaci Presso Siene*, in *Vite di Monaci Copri*, pp. 79-80.

⁶⁸ JOHN DAMASCENE, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 3, 26, (PG 94, pp. 1093C-1096B).

⁶⁹ QUODVULTDEUS, *De Promissionibus et Praedicationibus Dei*, 2, 28, 61, (CCL 60, pp. 128-129).

⁷⁰ *1K* 17:6f.

⁷¹ QUODVULTDEUS, *De Promissionibus et Praedicationibus Dei*, 2, 28, 62, (CCL 60, p. 129).

⁷² Cf V. UGENTI, in *Commento alla Lettera ai Romani di Cirillo di Alessandria*, traduzione, introduzione e note di V.UGENTI, Roma 1991, p. 23. Paul also makes the typology in: *Rm* 5:14, *1 Co* 10:6. Paul says: «Do you not remember what Scripture says about Elijah and how he made a complaint to God against Israel: "Lord, they have put your prophets to the sword, torn down your altars. I am the only one left, and now they want to kill me?" (*1 K* 19:10,14)". And what has the prophet given? "I have spared for myself seven thousand men that have not bent the knee to Baal (*1 K* 19:18)". In the same way, then, in time, there is a remnant, set aside by grace. And since by grace, it cannot now be by good actions, or grace would not be grace at all» (*Rm* 11:2-6).

Cyril of Alexandria in his commentary wants to show that Elijah is the *typos* of Jesus Christ, insofar as the Israelite people refused Elijah during the reign of Ahab, and thus he takes refuge in the desert. The Israelite people also refused Jesus Christ they even crucified him.⁷³ But Gregory Nazianzenus has a different opinion from the other Fathers, it is quite in contrast to them; he says that Jesus Christ is the New Elijah. The New Elijah is superior to the first Elijah, because he is the Word of God incarnate.⁷⁴

3.8. *Typology of Paul*

Elijah is the *typos* of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, but also the *typos* of Paul.⁷⁵ To show this, John Chrysostom accentuates the aspect of fire, in which Elijah was taken up and on the occasion of the sacrifice on Mount Carmel. He says that Paul after his conversion received the fire to announce the Gospel, to witnesses his faith to the Gentiles, and he even died for it.⁷⁶

3.9. *Transfiguration*

For exegetes the transfiguration is the favorite text of the New Testament to understand the role of Elijah in the Jesus time.⁷⁷ St. Ambrose accentuates the word of Father (this is my Son, the Beloved). He says that this is my Son; neither Moses, nor Elijah is my Son, but Jesus is my Son. St. Ambrose wants to say that Jesus is not equal to his servants Elijah and Moses, but it should be plain to us that the law and the prophets, in agreement with the Gospel, revealed the eternal Son of God. «This is my Son in whom you see me glorified. This is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, who appeared to Moses in the bush. He was who spoke to Moses in the bush in the desert. This, then, is He who gave the law to Moses. This, then, is the God of the patriarchs; this is the God of the prophets».⁷⁸ But according to Cromantius of Aquileia, Elijah and Moses are also witnesses

⁷³ CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Explanatio in Epistolam ad Romanos*, 11, 2-4, (PG 74, p. 845B-C).

⁷⁴ GREGORY NAZIANZENUS, *Oratio in Sancta Lumina*, 39, 15, (PG 36, pp. 352C-353A).

⁷⁵ S. ZINCONI, *Introduzione*, in GIOVANNI CRISOSTOMO, *Panegirici su San Paolo*, traduzione, introduzione e note a cura di S. ZINCONI, Roma 1995, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁶ S. ZINCONI, *Ibid.*, pp. 14-5; JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *De Laudibus Sancti Pauli*, 7, 6 (PG 50, pp. 512-514); 3, 9, (PG 50, pp. 483-486).

⁷⁷ Mt 17:1-8.

⁷⁸ AMBROSE, *De Fide*, 1, 13, 80-83, (BA 15, p. 96). In the apocryphal work, *The Vision of Paul*, 51, translated by A. Rutherford, Edinburgh 1995, p. 166, Paul meets Elijah and Elisha in the heaven: «And turning round, I saw other just ones coming from

from heaven about the Son of God; while James, Peter and John are the witnesses from the New Testament,⁷⁹ the law and the prophets foretell things about Jesus Christ, in particular about his passion.⁸⁰

Leander of Seville sees the transfiguration with another meaning; when he wrote a letter to Florentine, he advised her that the virgin must not speak alone with a man, she must have witnesses, like Jesus Christ in his transfiguration, who brought three witnesses, Peter, James and John.⁸¹ Cyril of Jerusalem interprets the transfiguration as evoking the presence of Jesus Christ for all time, in the past, present and future; he expresses it with: *hierī, hodie et semper*.⁸²

John Damascene interprets the transfiguration in three theological moments: as Christology (because he is Christ, the son of God), as Mariology, (because he was borne by the virgin Mary) and as the eternity of the Word of God, which was revealed in the Old Testament.⁸³ The ascension of Elijah is a *typos* of the ascension of Jesus Christ himself into heaven and the resurrection from the dead.⁸⁴ For John Damascene, Elijah and Moses are the perfect disciples of Jesus Christ from the Old Testament, and James, John and Peter are the perfect disciples from the New Testament. And the tents are the figures of the Church, which united the Old and New Testaments.⁸⁵

afar, and I asked the angel: Sir, who are those? And he answered me: These are Elijah and Elisha. And they saluted me and I said to them, who are ye? And one them answered and said: I am Elijah, the prophet of God; I am Elijah who prayed, and because of my word, the heaven did not rain for three years and six months, on account of the unrighteousness of men. God is just a true, who doeth the will of his servants: for the angels often besought the Lord for rain and he said: be patient till my servant Elijah shall pray and petition for this and I will send rain on the earth». The same sentences are found in the *Apocryphal Revelation of Paul*, translated by A. Walker, Edinburgh 1995, p. 581.

⁷⁹ CROMATIUS OF AQUILEIA (370-407), *Tractatus*, 22, 3, (CCL 9A, p. 101).

⁸⁰ CROMATIUS OF AQUILEIA, *Tractatus*, (*Incipit Sermo de Sancto Helia*), 25, 1-12, (CCL 9A, pp. 113-117).

⁸¹ *Mt* 11:2-3, 7-10, 14; in the gospel of John, the Jewish people think that John the Baptist is Elijah, therefore the Jewish ask him: «Are you Elijah?» And he replied: «I am not» (*Jn* 1:21-22). CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Homiliae in Ioannis Euangelium*, 5, 2, (7:40), (PG 73, pp. 760B-761A).

⁸² CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Catechesis*, 12, 16-17, (PG 33, pp. 744A-745A).

⁸³ JOHN DAMASCENE, *Homilia in Transfigurationem Domini*, 2, (PG 96, pp. 445B-449A). Cf. A. LOUTH, *St. Augustine's Interpretation of the Transfiguration of Christ*, in *L'esgesi dei Padri Latini, dalle Origini a Gregorio Magno*, XXVIII Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana, Maggio 1999, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 68, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma 2000, p. 376.

⁸⁴ JOHN DAMASCENE, *Homilia in Transfigurationem Domini*, 3, (PG 96, pp. 549B-552A); 14, (PG 96, pp. 565D-568C).

⁸⁵ JOHN DAMASCENE, *Homilia in Transfigurationem Domini*, 16-20, (PG 96, pp. 569B-576B).

3.10. *Master*

Jerome, in his letter said that Elijah and Elisha are the masters of solitary life. Bishops and presbyters take the apostles as their examples. Monks take the lives of Paul, Anthony, Julian, Hilarion, and Macarius as the patterns, which they follow. On the authority of Scripture, we have our masters Elijah and Elisha, who lived in fields and solitary places and set up tents for themselves' tents by the waters of Jordan.⁸⁶ The master indicates the life of Elijah and Elisha as an example of monastic life, which leads to ultimate union with God. That is why the monks followed them to be their model and the guide of life.

3.11. *Model of monastic life*

In the flowering of the monastic life in the third century, the hermits took the example of Elijah's life, and also that of John the Baptist, to be models of their life.⁸⁷ This implied a man of the desert, fasting, with the hope that they received the spirit of Elijah, which would unite them to God, as their ultimate goal. This means that the hermits or the monks adapted themselves to the life of Elijah in order to reach this goal. Thus, some of the hermits or monks received this Spirit, which was received by Elijah from God, and they did as Elijah had done. Miracles and charity are the best fruits of this Spirit. For example, James of Nisibis, miraculously flooded the desert. Theodoret of Cyrrhus wrote about the activity of James of Nisibis.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ JEROME, *Epistula*, 58, 5, (PL 22, pp. 582-583).

⁸⁷ JEROME, *Vita S. Pauli Primi Eremitae*, Prolog, (PL 23, pp. 17-18). JEROME, *Commentariorum In Ezechielem*, 11, 35, (PL 25, p. 334C-D); JOHN CASSIAN, *Conlationes*, 14, 4, (SCH 54, pp. 185-186); 18, 6, (SCH 64, pp. 16-18). TERTULLIAN, *De Monogamia*, 8, 7 (CCL 2, p. 1240); ATHANASIUS, *Vita S. Antonii*, 7, (PG 26, pp. 352B-353C); BASIL, *Regulae Fusius Tractatae*, 23, (PG 31, p. 981B-C).

⁸⁸ THEODORET OF CYRRHUS, *Religiosa Historia*, (PG 82, pp. 1293C-1296A). Cf *Historia Religiosa, seu Ascetica Vivendi Ratio*, translated with an introduction and notes by R. M. PRICE, Kalamazoo, Michigan 1985, p. 14: «Such are the miracles that God wrought in the case of this Hezekiah (2 K 19) also, not inferior to those earlier ones but greater, it seems to me, for what miracles could surpass a city's not being taken despite its wall falling down? I myself, in addition to this, am also filled with admiration at the way James, when applying a curse, did task for the introduction of thunderbolts and lighting, as the great Elijah did when each of the commanders of fifties came to him with his fifty (2 K 1:10-2). So great was the familiar access to God that this man of God possessed, so great too was the grace he enjoyed from above. Persevering in these and growing each day in the things of God, he laid down this life with the greatest renown and set out on his migrations from here».

Fasting or mortification: on one occasion Jerome said that Moses symbolized marriage and Elijah symbolized virginity. Moses is the *typos* of the Law; and Elijah is the *typos* of the prophet and the two are clearly witnessed to by the Gospel. Marriage and virginity are ways to unite a person with God; and the two ways need strict fasting in order to attain their ultimate goal.⁸⁹ Both persons are good before God, but they needed fasting to have *apatheia* in their life, which leads to the virtues.⁹⁰ It brings a person to the vision of God, whom Elijah saw on Mount Horeb, after forty days' fast, and heard his words.⁹¹ Compunction is the fruit of mortification, which is transformed into the doing of good.⁹² How long must the fasting last? Jerome interprets the book of Jonah, and says that 40 days are the classical number for the exercise. Moses fasted 40 days on Mount Sinai;⁹³ Elijah also fasted the same number of days.⁹⁴ For him, these numbers are relative, because our soul needs spiritual food, in particular his Word all the time. To confirm his statement, he cites the Gospel of John,⁹⁵ which says that Jesus is the living water, which again is a quote from the book of Isaiah: «Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink».⁹⁶ Fasting is important; Elijah fasted not just for his own *apatheia*, but also for the conversion of the people from their sins.⁹⁷ Therefore the fasting leads to charity towards God and neighbor.

Evagrius Ponticus describes the cloak of Elijah⁹⁸ as the symbol of mortification and also the symbol of all the passions of the body and the symbol of the love for poverty. And then he adds that the belt is the

⁸⁹ JEROME, *Adversus Iovinianum*, 2, 15, (PL 23, pp. 320C-323B).

⁹⁰ NILUS OF ANCYRA, *De Monastica Exercitatione*, 17, (PG 79, p. 741B-C), 18, (PG 79, pp. 741C-744B), 35 (PG 79, p. 764B-C).

⁹¹ THEODORET OF CYRRHUS, *Religiosa Historia*, (PG 82, pp. 1421C-1424C). *Historia Religiosa, seu Ascetica Vivendi Ratio*, p. 122: Moses, a monk of Syria, followed the step of Elijah in the fasting; see also p. 162. JOHN DAMASCENE, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 4, 23, (PG 94, pp. 1201C-1204B). PETER CHRYSOLOGUS (380-445), *Collectio Sermorum*, 2, 1, (CCL 24, pp. 21-22); 12, 4, (CCL 24, pp. 79-80); 43, 4, (CCL 24, p. 244). For DOROTEUS OF GAZA (VI), forty days is the holy number, *Instructiones*, 15, 159, (Sch 92, pp. 446-448).

⁹² JOHN CLIMACUS, *Scala Paradisi*, 7, 69, (PG 88, p. 816B-D).

⁹³ *Ex* 34:28; *Dt* 9:18.

⁹⁴ *JK* 19:8. Moses and Elijah are the model of the fasting: JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *De Compunctione*, 2, 2, (PG 47, pp. 413-414); NILUS OF ANCYRA (430?), *De Monastica Exercitatione*, 14, (PG 79, pp. 736A-737A).

⁹⁵ *Jn* 7:37.

⁹⁶ *Is* 55:1,3. JEROME, *In Ionam*, 3, 4b, (Sch 323, pp. 364-366).

⁹⁷ CROMATIUS OF AQUILEIA, *Tractatus*, 9, 1, (CCL 9A, p. 232); 14, 2, (CCL 9A, pp. 251-252).

⁹⁸ *JK* 19:13, 19.

symbol of a refused of impurity, and in particular with regards to women.⁹⁹

On another occasion, Stephen of Hnes wrote about the life of Apollinus Archimandrita in which he says that Apollinus used the belt following the habit of Elijah and of John the Baptist in order to control the pleasures of belly and under the belly.¹⁰⁰

Desert man: Elijah, with John the Baptist, is known as the desert man.¹⁰¹ He always went into the desert, not to find the peace, but to fight against Satan. This is very dangerous,¹⁰² because when Satan wins, the monk falls into sin. It is not a *fuga mundi*, but rather appositive settle to achieve victory and to achieve *apatheia*, and finally to be in good rapport with one's ultimate goal. Thus the desert is the place to pray, as Elijah, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ had done. But during the V century the situation was different, because the monastery was also the place to pray,¹⁰³ in particular in the West, because the ambient was different. In monastic life or in the ascetic life, fasting and prayer are central. The monks have to fight against Satan and themselves. Without fasting and prayer, a monk would not be free from sin and Satan.¹⁰⁴

3.12. *Elijah's coming*

The Jewish people believe that Elijah will come before the coming of the Messiah: «Look, I shall send you the prophet Elijah before the great Day of Yahweh comes. He will reconcile parents to their children, and children to their parents, to forestall my putting the country under

⁹⁹ EVAGRIUS PONTICUS, *Tractatus Practicus*, prologue, 6, (Sch 171, pp. 488-490). MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR (579/580-655), *Liber Asceticus, Orationis Dominicae Brevis Expositio*, (*Pater Noster*), (PG 90, pp. 888D-892A).

¹⁰⁰ STEPHAN OF HNES, *Vita di Apollo Archimandrita*, in *Vite di Monaci Copti*, p. 191: «Fu cinto con una cintura secondo l'abito di Elia e di Giovanni il precursore, affinché con essa fosse forte contro i piaceri del ventre e di ciò che è sotto al ventre. Infatti queste sono le cose che la vita ascetica richiede».

¹⁰¹ THEODORET OF CYRRHUS, *Religiosa Historia*, (PG 82, 1324C-1326B). *Historia Religiosa seu Ascetica Viviendi Ratio*, p. 37: «How could we adequately express admiration of the famous Marcellianus? Clearly by classing him with Elijah and John and those like them, who went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and the holes of the earth. The one gave birth to him, the other nurtured him and made him victorious, the third received him as one crowned».

¹⁰² ORIGEN, *Homiliae in Ieremiam*, 14, 16, (Sch 238, pp. 102-106).

¹⁰³ JOHN CLIMACUS, *Scala Paradisi*, 7, 72, (PG 88, p. 816B-D).

¹⁰⁴ ISAAC, *Vita di Samuele di Kalamon*, in *Vite di Monaci Copti*, p. 241.

the curse of destruction». ¹⁰⁵ That great day is completed in the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah. But the Jewish people as whole did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. ¹⁰⁶ So how to resolve this problem? John the Baptist is the second Elijah, so it could said that he is the new Elijah who prophesized the coming of Messiah, who proceeded his coming. When the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus about John the Baptist. ¹⁰⁷

Augustine, in his treatise on the Gospel of John gives a reason. He writes that Jesus Christ wished to prefigure His own advent in John the Baptist; he wished to say that John came in the spirit of Elijah. So the presence of Elijah in John the Baptist is really the second coming of Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah. The judge indeed is the same, but there are two heralds. He sent His first herald before him; He called him Elijah, because in the Second coming Elijah will be what John was in the first. ¹⁰⁸ John Chrysostom and Venerable Bede, have the same idea as Augustine in his interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew. ¹⁰⁹ But John the Baptist himself confesses to the Pharisees that he is not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor a prophet, but the voice of one who cries in the desert: «Prepare a way for the Lord». Make his path straight. ¹¹⁰ According to Cyril of Alexandria, the role of John the

¹⁰⁵ *Mt* 3:23-24. In Jesus' time, this tradition is still to be found. When Jesus asks his disciples about himself, and they said: «Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets» (*Mt* 16:14). Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarium in Joannis Evangelium*, 12 (21: 15-17), (PG 74, pp. 748B-752A).

¹⁰⁶ *Mt* 17:10-13; CROMATIUS OF AQUILEIA, *Tractatus*, 47, 5, (CCL 9A, pp. 432-433).

¹⁰⁷ *Mt* 10:2-14 or *Lk* 7: 18-35: «Now John had heard in prison what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples ask him: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?" Jesus answered: "Go back and tell John what you hear and see". And then Jesus began to talk to the people about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then, what did you go out to see? A man is wearing fine clothes? Look, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in places. Then, what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom Scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger in front of you to prepare your way before you (*Mt* 3:1). And he, if you believe me, is the Elijah who was to return". Cf LEANDER OF SEVILLE, *Regula*, 5, (PL 72, p. 883C-D).

¹⁰⁸ AUGUSTINE, *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium*, 4, 5, (CCL 36, p. 33). Compare with: *De Civitate Dei*, 20, 29, (CCL 48, pp. 752-753). Cf SOPHRONIUS OF JERUSALEM, *Homiliae*, 7, 6, (PG 87, p. 3332A-C); 7, 8, (PG 87, pp. 3333C-3335C). ORIGEN, *In Leuitico Homiliarum*, 16, 1, (Sch 287, pp. 264-266).

¹⁰⁹ *Mt* 17:10: «And the disciples put this question to him: "Why then do the scribe say that Elijah must come first?"» As cited by JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homiliae in Mattheum*, 57, 1 (PG 58, pp. 549-450); VENERABLE BEDE, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, 2, 19, (CCL 122, p. 326). CYRIL OF JERUSALEM (315-387), *Catechesis*, 11, 3, (PG 33, p. 693A-C).

¹¹⁰ *In* 1:19-23. John quotes *Is* 40:3.

Baptist is to present the Messiah, which is the same task as the prophets, in particular Elijah, has.¹¹¹

3.13. *Typology of apostle's life*

This idea is found in John Chrysostom, in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. In the Elijah's time, the Israelite people believed that Baal had killed all the prophets of God and only Elijah himself was left.¹¹² And God answered them: «I have spared for myself seven thousand men that have not bent the knee to Baal».¹¹³ John Chrysostom sees that the seven thousand men left who believed to God are *typoi* of the apostles in their life and activity;¹¹⁴ after Pentecost, three thousand believed in Christ and were baptized by the apostles.¹¹⁵

On another occasion, Palladius says that Elijah and Elisha are *typoi* of the apostles and of the bishops. Because when Elijah ascended in the chariot of fire, he chose Elisha to continue his activity.¹¹⁶ He gave his authority to Elisha,¹¹⁷ just as the bishop received his authority from the apostles.¹¹⁸ Palladius also says that just as Elijah embraces mortification, also a bishop must practice it in his life and must have *apatheia*.¹¹⁹ While Cyril of Jerusalem points out that the apostles received authority from Jesus Christ, he notes that it was a *typos* when Elisha received authority from Elijah, who receives it from God.¹²⁰ Therefore the apostles were not afraid to preach Jesus Christ. According to Paulinus, who wrote the life of Ambrose, the latter had the same spirit as Elijah, because he was audacious to preach the truth in his homilies.¹²¹

¹¹¹ CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Homiliae in Ioannis Euangelium*, 1, 10, [1, 21-23], (PG 73, pp. 184C-185C).

¹¹² *I K* 19:10,14; *Rm* 11:3.

¹¹³ *I K* 19:18; *Rm* 11:4.

¹¹⁴ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homiliae in Matthaeum*, 21, 4, (PG 57, pp. 298-300).

¹¹⁵ *Ac* 2:11.

¹¹⁶ PALLADIUS, *Dialogus Historicus Palladii*, 8, (SCH 341, p. 168). Cf GREGORY OF NYSSA, *De Vita S. Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, (PG 46, pp. 932B-933C).

¹¹⁷ TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Iudeos*, 13, 17-8, (CCL 2, p. 1388).

¹¹⁸ PALLADIUS, *Dialogus Historicus Palladii*, 19, (SCH 341, pp. 380-382). AMBROSIAS, *Commentaria in Epistulam ad Corinthios Primam*, 4, 9, (PL 17, pp. 215D-216B).

¹¹⁹ PALLADIUS, *Dialogus Historicus Palladii*, 12, (SCH 341, pp. 250-252).

¹²⁰ CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Catechesis*, 14, 16, (PG 33, p. 845A-B). An example of this authority is to raise the dead to life, CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, 18, 16, (PG 33, pp. 1036B-1037A).

¹²¹ PAULINUS, *Vita Ambrosii*, 47, (PL 14, p. 46A-B).

3.14. *Example of life*

John Chrysostom, in his homily on the Gospel of Matthew accentuates the effectiveness of the homily as shown through the testimony of life. He indicates the homily of Elijah as certified by his example; he said that Elijah had become admirable for his zeal towards God, for his voluntary poverty, for his garment of sheep's skin and for his cave and his mountain.¹²²

Gregory of Nyssa sees that the life of Elijah is an example for the hermitical life. For him, Elijah lived the perfect life, and to imitate his life is the wealth and ornament of the Church.¹²³ Some monks received the Spirit of God, which was received by Elijah and then they used this Spirit to help the people. One example is Shenute who received the cloak of Elijah, and then he had the power as Elijah had, to establish the monastic life and the Church.¹²⁴

3.15. *Baptism typology*

The controversy between Elijah, the Jewish people and the prophets of Baal on the Mount Carmel,¹²⁵ and the episode of the impure prophets,¹²⁶ are *typoi* of baptism. John Damascene in his *Doctrine of the Faith* says that the water poured around the altar on the Mount Carmel is the *typos* of the water of the baptism, which is purification from sins; and the fire, which burned up the sacrifice, is the *typos* of the Holy Spirit who is received in the sacrament of baptism.¹²⁷

¹²² JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homiliae in Mattheum*, 46, 3, (PG 58, pp. 479-480).

¹²³ GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Homiliae in Canticum Canticorum*, 7, (PG 44, p. 924A-D); 15, (PG 44, p. 1104B-D).

¹²⁴ BESA, *Vita di Shenute*, in *Vite di Monaci Copti*, p. 136: «Apa Pkiol levò gli occhi al cielo e vide un angelo del Signore che sorvegliava il piccolo Shenute che dormiva, e disse l'angelo ad apa Pkiol: "Quando ti sveglierai domattina, l'abito che hai messo su di te mettilo sul piccolo Shenute –era infatti l'abito di Elia Tesbite che il Signore Gesù ti ha mandato per indossarlo– perché ecco egli diventerà un uomo giusto e santo dopo il quale non sorgerà nessun altro in ogni regione simile a lui. Egli fonderà un monastero e sarà di consolazione e protezione per tutti coloro che verranno al suo santuario e la sua Chiesa rimarrà per generazioni". Apa Pkiol si levò al mattino, si tolse l'abito che aveva indossato, chiamò apa Shenute e glielo pose addosso e lo fece monaco ed egli rimase con lui». And then Shenute had a vision of Elijah and John the Baptist: BESA, *Vita di Shenute*, in *Vite di Monaci Copti*, p. 168.

¹²⁵ *IK* 18:20-40.

¹²⁶ THEODORET OF CYRRHUS, *De Providentia*, 8, (PG 83, p. 708A). CROMATIUS OF AQUILEIA gives also the same meaning, *Tractatus*, prologue, 4, (CCL 9A, p. 186).

¹²⁷ JOHN DAMASCENE, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, 4, 9, (PG 94, pp. 1117B-1121B).

Andrew of Crete sees that Mount Carmel is the solitary place of Elijah, where he found nourishment for his spiritual life through his relationship with God.¹²⁸ And Cyril of Jerusalem compared baptism with the water of the Jordan. Before Elijah was taken up into heaven in the chariot of fire, he and Elisha crossed the Jordan River.¹²⁹ For Cyril this event is a symbol of the sacrament of baptism and the baptism of Jesus Christ.¹³⁰

Ambrose sees that the ascension of Elijah into heaven in chariot of fire is a figure of the baptism, in which we receive the Holy Spirit who is symbolized by fire.¹³¹

3.16. *Martyrdom*

Martyrdom is witness to the faith in favor of the Gentile. Martyrdom is an imitation of and union with Jesus Christ in his passion and in his resurrection. Thus it is a perfect way to be united with him. Martyrdom is the victory over one's enemy, just as Jesus Christ triumphed over death. Therefore it is not sadness but a joyous occurrence. Elijah is the *typos* of martyrdom, because he is a witness to God in midst of the Jewish people.¹³² This is clearer to Quodvultdeus, who says that the character of martyrdom is mission. For him, even the mission of Elijah was sealed by martyrdom, when he fights against the prophets of Baal.¹³³ This situation continued in Jesus Christ and even in our time he dies in the person of current martyrs. So many missionaries are killed. Therefore the Church, which has a missionary character, is not separable from martyrdom. But he, who perseveres in his faith, will receive his recompense at the coming of Jesus Christ. Venerable Bede interprets this with the return from Egypt of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to Nazareth.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ ANDREW OF CRETE, *In Annuntiationem B. Mariae*, (PG 97, pp. 900C-901A). In his description of Mount Carmel, NILUS OF ANCYRA says that it is isolated, full of beasts, animals and no food, *De Monastica Exercitatione*, 60, (PG 79, pp. 792D-793B).

¹²⁹ 2 K 2:7-13.

¹³⁰ CYRIL OF JERUSALEM (315-387), *Catechesis*, 3, 6, (PG 33, pp. 433C-436B).

¹³¹ AMBROSE, *De Poenitentia*, 1, 8, 34, (Sch 179, p. 82). GREGORY NAZIANZENUS sees that the fire is the figure of the illumination of Jesus Christ, *Orationes*, 40, 6, (PG 36, pp. 364D-365B).

¹³² M. GIRARDI, in BASILIO DI CESAREA, *I martiri*, introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di M. GIRARDI, Roma 1999, pp. 20-21.

¹³³ QUODVULTDEUS, *Dimidium Temporis*, 13, 22, (CCL 60, pp. 206-207); 14, 23, (CCL 60, p. 208). Cf H. DE L'INCARNATION, *Élie chez les Pères Latins*, in *Élie le Prophète, Selon les Écritures et les Traditions Chrétiennes*, «Les Études Carmélitaines», chez Desclée de Brouwer, 1956, pp. 183-184.

¹³⁴ VENERABLE BEDE, (672/3-716), *Homiliae in Euangelia*, 1, 10, (CCL 122, pp. 70-71).

3.17. *Contemplative life*

Some Fathers see Elijah as a figure of the contemplative life, elements of which they find in his life. There are three steps in the classical description of the contemplative life: purification, illumination and union, which were presented for first time by Origen in his book *Song of Songs*. Elijah's relationship with God is the first source of the contemplative life; all of his life is a communication with God. Paulinus of Nola holds that the ascension of Elijah to heaven in the fiery chariot is a figure of the contemplative life, in which the soul is lifted up before God.¹³⁵ The soul feels joy and wants all times with him. Contemplation is the knowing of God, the participation of soul in the Trinity's unity.¹³⁶

When the ravens brought Elijah something to eat, Origen, in his homily on *Genesis*, interprets this scene as the hunger for the word of God. Elijah was not worried about the food of this world, but about the food of heaven, which is the word of God, which he attained in the contemplative life.¹³⁷

3.18. *Priesthood figure*

Elijah as a *typos* of the priest is found in John Chrysostom's *De Sacerdotio*. In this book, he says that a priest is against idolatry, against heresies, as Elijah was against Baal and his prophets.¹³⁸ And in the priesthood, a priest must always search out silence in order to assure a relationship with God, in the light of the Holy Spirit. Elijah always searched for silence, and, through it, the Holy Spirit guides his tasks for the Jewish people.¹³⁹ Therefore all his work is in the light of the Holy Spirit. John Chrysostom asks the pastor always to have contact with God, even in his priesthood tasks. If a priest does not pray, he will find nothing of value in his priesthood.¹⁴⁰ And then Pseudo-Dionysius says that one of the tasks of the pastor is to be a preacher; and to perform this task, he must be humble; because this is a condition for having of the Word of God.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ PAULINUS OF NOLA, *Poema*, 5, 42, (PL 61, p. 441A-B); 6, 74, (PL 61, p. 443C-D). GREGORY NAZIANZENSUS, *Orationes*, 28, 19, (Sch 250, pp. 138-140).

¹³⁶ CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *Catechesis*, 16, 23, (PG 33, pp. 949B-952A).

¹³⁷ ORIGEN, *Tractatus in Genesim*, 16, 3, (Sch 7, pp. 380-382).

¹³⁸ 1K 18:19-40, JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *De Sacerdotio*, 1, 8, (PG 47, pp. 631-632).

¹³⁹ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *De Sacerdotio*, 3, 4, (PG 48, p. 642).

¹⁴⁰ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *De Sacerdotio*, 6, 3, (PG 48, pp. 679-680).

¹⁴¹ PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS, *Epistulae*, 8, 5, (PG 3, pp. 1096C-1097B).

4. CONCLUSION

The Fathers put Jesus Christ at the center of their exegetical method, on which the two Testaments are based. For instance, Elijah is the *typos* of Jesus Christ, so his whole life is the figure or foretelling of Jesus Christ. And through this exegetical method, the Fathers drew up the moral, Christological, theological teaching, in particular for the ascetical and monastic life.

«Man of God» is the popular name of Elijah according to the Fathers of the Church, because all his life implied a communication with God, and all his life was committed to serve God. He heard the Word of God and he applied it in his life,¹⁴² in order to prepare the Jewish people before God, in particular for the coming of Messiah.¹⁴³ Therefore, the monks and the hermits imitated the life of Elijah in the ascetical and monastic life,¹⁴⁴ with the hope of attaining intimacy with God, their ultimate destination. The Scripture is the fundamental to attain this destination.¹⁴⁵

The Carmelite Order follows Elijah's spirituality and the Fathers open many possibilities to deepen its meaning in Christian lives. The re-interpretation of Elijah's life will help to apply this spirituality here and now. «Here» means, where we live, because we live in different situations. «Now» means that re-interpretation of Elijah's life must be applied at the present time.

¹⁴² ORIGEN, *In Levitico Homiliarum*, 3, 3, (SCH 286, p. 132).

¹⁴³ GERMANUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE, *In Dormitionem B. Mariae*, 1, 4, (PG 98, pp. 345C-348C).

¹⁴⁴ Cf G. BARDY, *Le souvenir d'Élie chez les Pères Grecs*, in *Élie le Prophète, selon les Écritures et les traditions chrétiennes*, «Les Études Carmélitaines», chez Desclée de Brouwer, 1956, p. 131. While the Syrian Fathers accentuated the liturgical celebration of Elijah, for example the feast of Elijah and the exaltation of the cross, cf M. HAYER, *Élie dans la tradition syriaque*, in *Élie le Prophète, selon les Écritures et les traditions chrétiennes*, «Les Études Carmélitaines», chez Desclée de Brouwer, 1956, pp. 159-160: «La fête de saint Élie, fixée de nos jours dans l'Église au 20 juillet, jouissait d'un culte spécial dans les anciennes communautés chrétiennes d'Orient. Ainsi le cycle annuel, symbole du Temps au terme duquel le Christ devra se manifester dans l'exaltation de sa Croix, aboutit au mois de Septembre, qui symbolise donc la fin du temps. Mais Élie, le Précurseur promis, reviendra préparer le triomphe final du Messie, et ainsi on était amené à en faire mémoire spécial pendant les six dimanches successifs qui vont du 6 août au 14 Septembre». The reason is that July 20 was the memorial of the transfer of Elijah relic; cf TH. ŠPAŠKY, *Le culte du prophète Élie et sa figure dans la tradition orientale*, in *Élie le Prophète, selon les Écritures et les traditions chrétiennes*, «Les Études Carmélitaines», chez Desclée de Brouwer, 1956, p. 220: «Il est évident qu'au VIII et au IX siècles on commémorait à Constantinople les deux prophètes ensemble, et même basilique des saints Apôtres. La preuve en est que saint Jean Damascène a composé deux canons différents: pour le 20 juillet au prophète Élie, et pour le 12 juin au prophète Élisée».

¹⁴⁵ *Cromatius of Aquileia, Tractatus*, 32, 1, (CCL 19A, pp. 350-351).

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