THE FOOTPRINTS OF GOD

Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought

Stephen D. Benin

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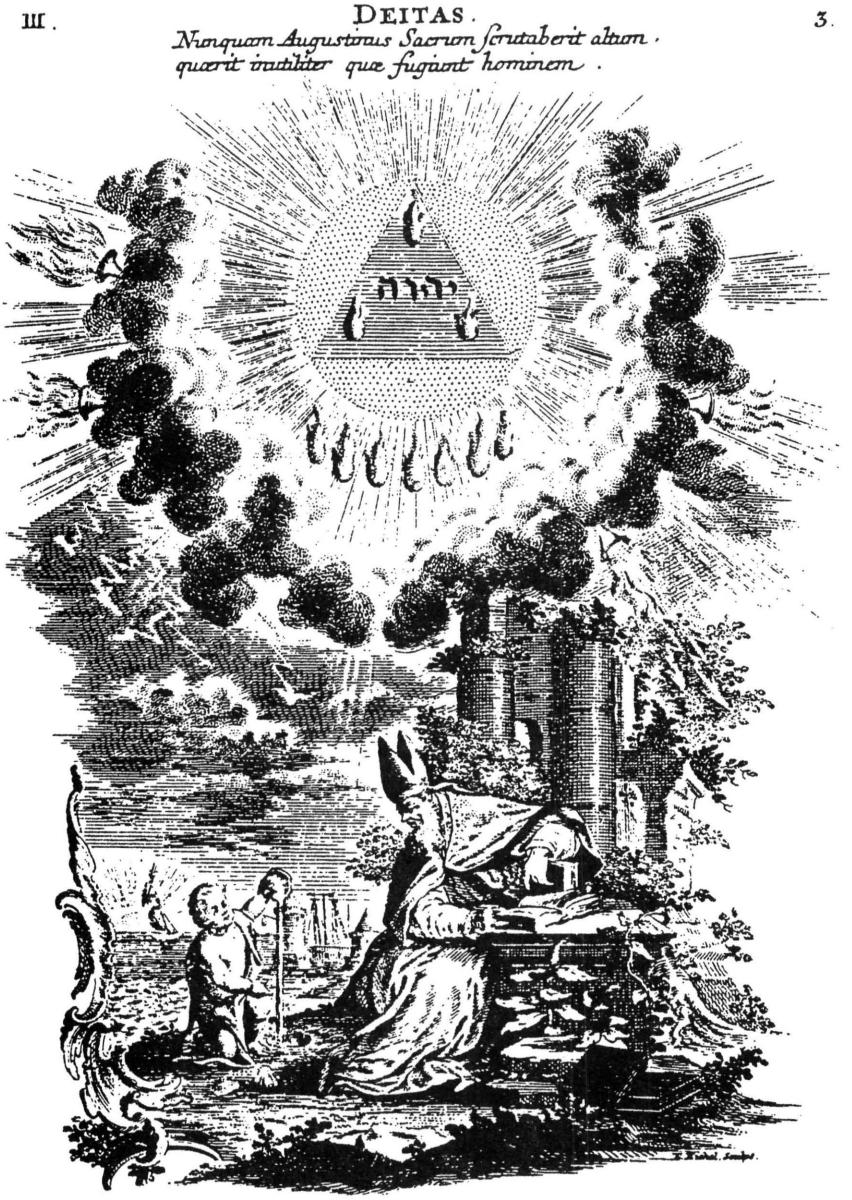
Dedicated to the memory of my parents
Ely and Helen Benin

סוקדש לזכר

אבי ואמי

אליהו בן ישעיהו הלוי ז"ל

חיה אסתר בת אברהם צבי ז"ל



Deitas, plate 3 in *Cesare Ripa Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery* from the 1758–60 Hertel edition edited by Edward A. Maser. Courtesy of Dover Publications, Inc.

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PREFACE

The completion of this book provides the opportunity to acknowledge and thank so many who have helped in its preparation. This book began during a conversation one afternoon with Amos Funkenstein, who, after inquiring if I could read German and Greek, handed me a copy of one of his articles, and asked me if the few pages and footnotes he suggested I read reminded me of anything. When I told him that the material which referred to some writings of Gregory of Nazianzus brought to mind Maimonides' explanation of sacrifice in Part Three of his *Guide of the Perplexed,* Amos said, "Good, then you write the book." With that conversation the work began.

A version of this book was accepted as my dissertation by the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley where it benefited from the comments, suggestions, and criticisms of learned and dedicated scholars. It is a pleasure to thank Amos Funkenstein not only for his initial suggestion, but also for his help at particularly trying times. I wish to acknowledge my debt to Gerard Caspary for his enormous help and the benefit of his immense erudition. For those who have had the good fortune to study with him, and to learn his approach to texts and their exegesis, more need not be said. For Greek patristics and Byzantine sources, I had a sure guide in the late Paul J. Alexander. His exemplary personal and demanding scholarly qualities remain a model and inspiration to me. It is a pleasure to thank William Brinner for his generous help in countless ways; it was he who always had time to listen and provide valued advice. Baruch M. Bokser, who tragically died so young, did not live to see the completion of a work to which, at a very early stage, he made significant contributions.

This study has undergone different incarnations, and I hope that each has been an improvement upon its predecessor. Various scholars have contributed to this process and it is with delightful debt that I thank them. Peter Brown read an earlier draft of this work and sent

me detailed and lengthy comments that forced me to rethink things and look at them in new and constructive ways. He made those suggestions which he alone could have made, and as usual, he saw things which others might have missed. I spent many happy hours reading midrash and other Jewish sources with Zev Gries. As is customary in such study, we argued in the friendliest way possible, but I always came away from our meetings having learned something from him. A kind and timely invitation from Joseph Dan to participate in the Third International World Congress on the History of Jewish Mysticism in Jerusalem in February 1988, enabled me to present some of my ideas on accommodation in mystical sources to an admirable group. Edward Alexander read various drafts of this work and made numerous suggestions about style. It is with gratitude that I thank Michael Fishbane, who not only expressed an early and unswerving interest in this manuscript, has not only seen various versions of it, but has displayed great patience and forebearance.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Mary Freilich, Deborah Brackstone, and Elizabeth Buck of Brister Library who answered my seemingly endless requests for books, articles and bibliographic help with expertise, patience, and above all, good humor. And Frances Evensky cheerfully processed many changes on many floppy disks.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my parents. An additional, incalculable debt is owed to my wife Sara, who makes it all worthwhile, and to Naomi Elana, our daughter, who has taught me much about the nature of accommodation.

ἀλλ' εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες ⟨ἵπποι τ'⟩ ἠὲ λέοντες
ἢ γράψαι χείρεσσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἅπερ ἄνδρες,
ἵπποι μέν θ' ἵπποισι βόες δέ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας
καί ⟨κε⟩ θεῶν ἰδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν
τοιαῦθ' οἷόν περ καὐτοὶ δέμας εἶχον ⟨ἕκαστοι⟩.

But if oxen (and horses) and lions had hands or could draw with hands and create works of art like those made by men, horses would draw pictures of gods like horses, and oxen of gods like oxen, and they would make the bodies (of their gods) in accordance with the form that each species itself possesses.

Xenophanes of
Colophon
Fragment 15

Es ist eine Feinheit daß Gott griechisch lernte, als er Schriftsteller werden wollte,—und daß er nicht besser lernte.

It was subtle of God to learn Greek when he wished to become an author—and not to learn it better.

Friedrich Nietzsche
Beyond Good and Evil, Epigrams and Interludes, 121.

INTRODUCTION

"The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men."
Psalm 115:16

The title of this book, based on Job 11:7, alludes to the discernible and tangible traces of an incorporeal and transcendent God. This enchantingly provocative phrase does not exist in the original Hebrew text—the Hebraica veritas—though references to the "footprints of God" exist in the Septuagint (LXX), and the Vulgate. If the psalmist is correct and the heavens are the Lord's, then where and how did one seek and find the "footprints of God" in the realm given to humans? The translation, or mis-translation, of Job 11:7, the uses and abuses of this provocatively anthropomorphic phrase demonstrate the issue at the heart of this study: how both Jewish and Christian thinkers attempted to discover traces of the Lord and his actions in 'the earth given to the children of men'.

The unalterable division between the human and divine realms insisted upon by the psalmist was contradicted by other scriptural texts asserting the Lord's intimate connection with his creation. Scripture indeed, on ten occasions, relates that "the Lord came down" to his creation.[1] The disparity between the deity's transcendent and absolute nature and his accessibility to humanity vexed religious and secular thinkers.

Means of resolving this seeming paradox lay in the use of diverse interpretive strategems. Studying the career of one such device—divine accommodation/condescension—which permeates Christian and Jewish thought, finds expression in exegetical, legal, homiletical, and philosophical sources from the first through the sixteenth centuries, and conceivably enters the mainstream of post-Enlightenment thought as a possibly undetected element in the rise of historicism, will enable us to follow the trail left by the "footprints of God".

Divine accommodation/condescension alleges, most simply, that divine revelation is adjusted to the disparate intellectual and spiritual level of humanity at different times in history. I use accommodation/condescension since most Latin sources refer to divine actions with the verb *accommodare,* and most Greek sources employ some form of *baínō, katabaínō,* or *sygkatabaínō.* Whatever the language or terminology, the idea remains the same. The Lord accommodates or condescends, freely and benevolently, to the human level lest his salvific message go unheard and unheeded. The Lord, as it were, had to 'come down' to earth in order to effect the proper unfolding of his universe.

Without invoking the concept of divine accommodation in her admirable study of the medieval theory of knowledge Marcia Colish observed that: "The belief that God had manifested His presence, inchoately in the history of Israel, consummately in the Incarnation of Christ, and continuously since Pentecost in His living extension in time and space, the Church, held for medieval thinkers specific epistemological consequences."[2] Whether in the Law of ancient Israel, in the Incarnation of Christ, or in the continuity of the Church, the Lord, though beyond the scope of human ken, nevertheless communicated with humankind, albeit exclusively on his own terms. That is, the divine-human relationship depended on divine intervention in his mutable creation.

It was common medieval belief "that Christ had chosen to manifest Himself under the ecclesiastical dispensation, which would endure until the end of time, for the express purpose of enabling man to know and love God and other men through an integral union with Him in the life of the Church."[3] Believers in Christ's new covenant and dispensation made manifest in the economy of divine grace had "to preach and teach the Word of God."[4] Yet as Jewish and Christian teachers of God's word well understood, their task, to express the Inexpressible, was formidable if not impossible. As Colish further points out, Christians resolved this tension by appeal to the Incarnation of Christ;[5] Jews found a solution by appeal to the Incarnation of divine teaching in the dispensation of the Mosaic Law. As a rabbinic comment on Scripture penetratingly puts it: " Turn it and turn it for all is in it."[6]

The Torah and Christ's Incarnation are both examples of divine accommodation, and since accommodation is a hermeneutical strategy that is broadly available in such a variety of contexts, its specific "meaning" may become hard to grasp. Indeed, the entire Torah, according to a passage in the Zohar, is but an accommodation to the stark fact of human existence. And in other mystical systems, the

total process of the universe is an accommodation to the Absolute's desire for self-knowledge. My aim is not to speculate on the Brobdingnagian vastness of these questions, but rather to compare the career of accommodation in Jewish and Christian sources. That is, I shall focus on the use of this hermeneutical device in these two religious systems with the intent of showing how both systems employed the same idea for similar, as well as different, purposes.

Accommodation began its lengthy, distinguished, and checkered career in the theological arena, appearing prolifically in both Christian and Jewish religious traditions. It remained confined to the theological realm until the early modern conquest of the sacred by the secular, when it then was put to new uses. In attempting to trace the history of any idea, and especially one which is so pervasive, it would be wise to recall Saint-Simon's observation concerning the penetration of intellectual influences. "General ideas," he noted, "may be compared to musk. One does not have to see it or touch it in order to sense its odor." [7]

Accommodation, used interchangeably by patristic writers with divine condescension, pervades countless works. It is best elucidated within certain traditions which influenced religious scholarship from the first through the sixteenth century, if not beyond. One of these traditions held that Scripture was the very word of God; or, in Calvin's phrase, Scripture was the "school of the Holy Spirit". For Judaism, the Hebrew Bible, and for Christianity, the Hebrew Bible—the "Old Testament"—and the New Testament, told all that one needed to know about any and everything.

Once accommodation's connection with the entire ancient medical tradition was introduced into the late antique environment by Galen, and associated not only with creation but with the divine economy—that is, the regulation and management of the universe—it took root and flourished.[8] Like so much else in the patristic garden, accommodation benefited immensely from the animating influence of Philo, and while it is discernible in the philonic corpus, perhaps its most luxuriant patristic examples are displayed in the works of Philo's great student, Origen.

In its development by the Church Fathers during the patristic period, accommodation branches in two directions: I identify them as positive and negative accommodation. Chapter sixteen of Acts, which tells how Paul accommodated his teaching to his audience in order to help spread the faith, is the earliest Christian example of positive accommodation; that is, religion taught on the human level in order to spread the Christian gospel. The negative aspect of accommodation appears in most of the patristic attacks on Jews and Judaism; that is,

the Law given to the Jews was not the ideal Law God wished to give humanity, but rather an accommodation to a rude and uneducated people who would not have understood or benefited from a more sublime revelation. In the words of Galatians 3:24, the law was "our pedagogue in Christ". According to this view, God dealt with his people in a merciful way and gave them, at that particular time in their development, rules and regulations, proper for their particular condition, in order to restrain them from total depravity. Christians might have grudgingly granted that Judaism was better than paganism since it directed human worship toward God and not the gods, but it fell far short of the glory of the Gospel and the truth taught by Christ. Accommodation could therefore be used either to buttress the ties between the Testaments, or sever them.

The old patristic cliché of a "New Israel" replacing the "Old Israel" could now be explained in a different way; the Church was a more developed and fuller teaching suited for a more advanced religious community. Jewish ceremonial and ritual law, including the "bloody sacrifices of old" which were necessary for a less sophisticated people, could now be jettisoned. Judaism was an *éminence grise* that could be explained away and ignored.

For Christianity, Christ's sacrifice had replaced all previous offerings, and had irreparably altered history. The irony in the entire Jewish-Christian dispute was, of course, that after the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of cultic worship, rabbinic Judaism managed to put the "bloody" sacrifices safely away in the past—replacing them with prayer—looking for their renewal only in messianic times, while Christianity built its worship and pinned its soteriological hopes upon yet another "bloody" sacrifice.

The first chapter surveys the use of accommodation in the writings of Church fathers from Justin to Athanasius. It was in this formative period that accommodation was used within nascent Christianity in debates over the form that Christian belief and worship were to take, and one of the more fascinating examples of the use of accommodation in that struggle occurs in confrontations with Gnostics. Gnostics could, and did, argue that they were more spiritual than other Christians; they were more advanced, and hence their Gospels were superior to the less developed "orthodox" gospels. The very fact that the Gnostic Gospels were not an accommodation to less enlightened beings proved their superiority. Only the spiritual elect truly knew how to read them, while other Christians, or so the Gnostics claimed, believed in a "trickle-down" Christianity. What occurs within early Christianity is the phenomenon which accommodation exhibits repeatedly; namely, its resilient and supple nature. It was a pliable

and potent weapon that would be wielded deftly by disparate groups. It was in this seminal period as well that accommodation would first be exploited to develop "Christian history"; that is, to buttress arguments concerning the superiority of the "New" Israel over the "Old" Israel. From Irenaeus to Eusebius, accommodation would become a tool of Christian historical investigation focusing on the development of the divine *oi̓konomía.* The pedagogical aspects of accommodation were introduced into Christian exegesis by Origen, who employed accommodation dazzlingly in his remarkable oeuvre painting poignant word pictures of the Lord speaking "baby-talk" with humanity in order to reveal his grand design.

The second chapter explores the cultivation of divine accommodation in the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers and John Chrysostom, the "father of accommodation." Chrysostom ceaselessly employed this principle, not only in elaborating his ideas on virginity, but in moving from those views to an historical interpretation of Christianity. The Cappadocians relied on various uses of accommodation to shore up their theological systems, and it would impinge intermittently not only on their exegesis, but upon their ideas of time and the Incarnation. The Incarnation presented, of course, the extreme example of the divine juxtaposed with the human, and posed the greatest interpretive religious and philosophical dilemmas. Accommodation was a potent ploy to explain the mystery of the faith.

So powerful and useful was this principle that the Syriac fathers delighted in it, and the unbroken chain of polemical writing based on the doctrine of accommodation and traceable for almost the entire span of Syriac literature is examined in the third chapter. The vituperations of Ephrem, the acerbic if well-reasoned lyrics of Jacob of Sarug, and the mild polemics of Aphrahat all contribute richly to the history of accommodation.

Accommodation's Latin career is reviewed in the fourth chapter, for when Augustine tied accommodation into his theory of signs, and incorporated it into his *City of God,* its future in Latin thought was guaranteed. Augustine also employed accommodation as a means of examining and interpreting history, a task carried further in the twelfth century by Hugh of St. Victor and Anselm of Havelberg. For Hugh, accommodation unearthed reasons for the sacramental system of the Church, and in Anselm's hands accommodation defended the rise and spread of new religious orders as well as the Roman Church against doctrinal attacks from Byzantine Greeks.

Accommodation served Christian religious thought very well, explaining as it did how Christianity could be seen as a superior stage in man's religious development, and why, therefore, all of the rituals

of the Hebrew Scripture no longer obtained after Christ's advent. Indeed, the new dispensation did away with the old, and the Lord's management of his divine "economy" could dispense with plans outmoded for newer purposes. And recourse to the medical tradition saved exegetes from the difficulty of explaining why God seemed to change his mind by giving the Jews one set of laws and Christians another. Did not physicians prescribe different remedies even for the same person at different times?

If accommodation was a wonderful device for Christian polemics and hermeneutics, it also became part and parcel of the Jewish intellectual heritage. Accommodation's career in Jewish thought, surveyed in chapters five and six, came to cluster around certain prominent themes which find some parallels in Christian writings. Rabbinic sources early on emphasized the pedagogical nature of revelation and the different guises in which the Lord made his law known to Israel. The classical source of this educational motif was Proverbs 22:6: "Train a child in the way he should go." This advice could be bent in many directions and could serve both Jewish and Christian uses.

The educational theme finds eloquent expression in midrashic sources, explaining the seemingly different guises the Lord adopted at different historical moments, such as the deliverance from Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea and the theophany at Sinai. Rabbinic texts seem to stress the individuality of revelation according to individual capacities, and this approach and tradition was incorporated into medieval Jewish thought. Baḥya ibn Pakuda's educational program, advanced in his ethical treatise *Duties of the Heart,* would be adapted and incorporated by Maimonides in his introduction to *Perek Ḥelek.*[9] Maimonides' view of the world and the masses shaped his understanding of the role of Torah and commandments, and accommodation's educational allures proved irresistible to him. As we shall see, accommodation's pedagogical pedigree in Jewish sources is a long and venerable one, stretching from the midrash to modern Hasidism.

Accommodation's career in Jewish thought reached its apogee in Maimonides' writings, which form the basis for chapter six, for it enabled him to create a comprehensive explanation not only for puzzling rituals and commandments, but, more importantly, for the interaction and nexus of divine providence in history and human affairs. Using biblical sacrifice as a point of departure, he went on to produce a mesmerizing rationalization for seemingly foolish religious practices, a rationalization which reshaped the contours of Jewish thought. Posterity inherited his arguments as well as the

tumultuous discords and rancor they engendered, and some of those issues as well as the use of accommodation in Jewish thought after Maimonides round out chapter six.

Once Maimonides gave accommodation a place within the Jewish tradition, and once his *Guide* reached the medieval scholastic world in a Latin rehash, a Christian response was inevitable. Christians could now point to Maimonides' views on sacrifice as proof of their arguments about all the ritual observances; who could argue with truth, especially the kind purveyed by Maimonides. Of course there was a catch; Maimonides never suggested that his rationalization of the commandments constituted sufficient cause for non-observance of them. Heaven forbid one think that way and heaven forbid one not observe divine commandments! And yet, as chapter seven shows, when scholars such as William of Auvergne and Thomas Aquinas turned to Latin versions of the *Guide,* each came to grips with Maimonides in his own and unique way. Maimonides' influence on scholasticism is well known; the use of accomodation is but one more link between them.

The seventh chapter also demonstrates that if Chrysostom used accommodation seemingly without end, his closest Christian rival in its usage is Calvin. The chapter tackles the use of accommodation in late medieval and Reformation thinkers. The use of accommodation in Calvin's thought helped interpret, if not solve, the seeming disparity between a sublime God and his mundane creatures. It showed that truth resided in Scripture and not religious institutions; and it gave nascent European science a chance to be free of the shackles forged by centuries of tradition. The Reformation embraced accommodation as heartily as Catholicism had, except now accommodation was accommodating in the opposite direction, and it was turned against its former protector. The final chapter briefly traces accommodation's transition to, and survival in, the modern world. When religious thought yielded its primacy to the secular, signifying the emancipation of the secular from the transcendent, accommodation continued to thrive. The venerable theological language, rather than being abandoned, was vacated of its contents, retained and put to new use.

As extraordinary as the story of accommodation is, perhaps equally remarkable is the almost complete lack of scholarly attention its history and career have received. The "modern" study of accommodation began with John Spencer, who in 1685 published his monumental study *De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus et Earum Rationibus.*[10] Spencer studied Israelite religious practices and sought

to demonstrate that they were the natural outgrowth of Israelite association with other semitic peoples. He argued that the Lord, in an effort to preserve monotheism and the observance of essential moral laws, permitted Israel to borrow certain practices from her environs.[11] With *de Legibus,* Spencer set out on a new path deserting the trails of previous scholars. "He contended that the Lord sanctioned certain practices in His Law which were appropriated from foreign people, and through divine condescension (*sygkatábāsis*) accommodated those practices to divine worship."[12] As Spencer explained it:

> God, when the law was bestowed, tolerated numerous customary antique observances and rites, (and He) made use of them in His worship, in order to accommodate (*ut . . . accommodaret*) Himself to the disposition and customs of the people.[13]

While Spencer was learned enough to appreciate that his use of accommodation was not novel, it was to find eloquent expression in his wake. For example, William Warburton's *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated*[14] expresses a debt "to the learned Spencer" and his "excellent work."[15] Warburton realized that according to the theory of accommodation as set forth by Spencer, "the Ritual Law thus explained is seen to be an Institution of the most beautiful and divine Contrivance."[16] Citing Maimonides as well as Spencer, Warburton felt terribly awkward and uncomfortable about suggesting that the institution of divine law simply aped heathen practice, lest any wrongly conclude that God was not the author of Scripture.[17] However pernicious the charge that divine accommodation was simply "a most beautiful and divine contrivance" may have been, it did not stop religious thinkers from embracing and exploiting it.

Scholars such as Julius Wellhausen and C. P. Tiele merely followed the path blazed by Spencer.[18] It was in 1919, with the publication of Henry Pinard's study of divine condescension, with references to Spencer's work, that a Greek and Latin patristic map of the use of accommodation began to emerge.[19] Accommodation in the writings of John Chrysostom was explored by Fabio Fabbi in 1933.[20] In 1958, Karlfried Grunder devoted a chapter of his study of Johann Hamans to the idea of accommodation,[21] and in 1963, Johanna Kopp, explored the role of divine condescension in her examination of seventeenth-century French spirituality.[22] Seminal articles by K. Duchatelez appeared in 1970 and 1973: the former devoted to idea of divine economy, while the latter considered the role of divine condescension in the history of salvation.[23] And John H. Erickson has examined the notion of divine economy in Byzantine Law.[24]

Amos Funkenstein, who has explored this principle in various publications, has shown the presence of accommodation in Jewish thought and its similarity to Christian use. He has also examined the role of accommodation as a possible intellectual bridge between science and theology from the late Middle Ages to early modern Europe.[25] Additional contributions to diverse aspects of the history of accommodation have been made by F. Dreyfus, Hans W. Frei, John Reumann, and a very few others.[26] My intention in this book is to build on the works of these scholars and present a history of divine accommodation in Jewish and Christian thought.

CHAPTER ONE

THEY WALKED BY DAY AS IN DARKNESS

> I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon.
>
> —Amos 5:21–22

With these and other words of Amos and of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Psalms, early Christian writers attacked Jewish sacrifice. They sought to prove that the sacrifices mandated of old were ordained not as a legitimate form of worship, but rather to combat the Jew's inclination to idolatry. This argument was part of the larger debate concerning the role of the Mosaic Law in a period when Christians understood Jewish messianic hopes to have been fulfilled.

This chapter will examine the course of that debate by tracing a specific exegetical device, which may be termed divine accommodation or divine condescension.[1] Accommodation/condescension is divine revelation in human terms; that is, divinity adapting and making itself comprehensible to humanity in human terms. It is the adaptation and adjustment of the transcendent to the mundane; it is the fine tuning of divine order. Accommodation, as it is used in patristic sources, falls into two broad categories, which may be seen as "positive" and "negative" accommodation.

In patristic texts, accommodation is viewed negatively when it is applied to the Jews and Jewish ritual practice. The punitive understanding of Torah and its ritual observances is a prime example of that attitude. Yet, it must be remembered that any such negative connotation may seemingly be balanced by the preventative nature of that accommodation. That is, the Lord permitted certain ceremonies, such as sacrifices, to keep his people from becoming idolators. Negative accommodation then is both punitive and prophylactic.

Positive accommodation is used in patristic sources when the rise, spread, and triumph of Christianity is being discussed. Accom-

modation in the "Christian era" is a great boon, and as we shall see, the Incarnation will be interpreted as the quintessential example of divine accommodation. There is another aspect to positive accommodation; that is, the very act of God recognizing the bodily dimension of humanity—part of the creation—and thus a good in itself. The church fathers, influenced by Platonism, and occupied with polemics against Jews, pagans, and schismatics, not surprisingly tended to emphasize negative accommodation at the expense of positive accommodation. Yet as we shall observe, both explanations coexisted. One of the earliest apologists to stress negative accommodation was Justin Martyr.

Justin, a convert to Christianity, sought to explain how Christians, who, in Jewish eyes, did not observe the divine precepts—even though they were part of Scripture—hoped to merit any kindness from God and how they differed from Gentiles. Indeed, the task that Justin undertook was to compose an apologia for Christian nonobservance of Torah.[2] His project demanded a full-scale examination of the Mosaic Code: its purpose, its details, and its historical role for the Jews, Gentiles, and Christians. Justin's views may best be appreciated when set against the general background of other theories of the Mosaic Code.[3]

Perhaps the cornerstone for the essentially penal character of the Law, which often occurs in patristic literature, originated with Paul. According to the usual interpretation, Paul had viewed the Law inherently as a guardian (*paidagōgós*) to restrain humanity until the advent of Christ (Gal. 3:24). For Paul, the Law was inferior to faith; Moses inferior to Abraham. The Law in fact made transgressions possible (Rom. 3:20, 5:20, 7:13), and part of the salvific nature of Christ's advent included freedom from the Law and transgression (Gal. 3:13). Indeed, as Paul wrote to the Galatians: "Wherefore then serveth the Law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator" (Gal. 3:19).

Paul's view that the Law was ordained by angels in the hands of a mediator, who is understood, almost universally by modern scholarship, to be Moses, could be, and was understood, differently by other early Christian interpreters.[4] Certain Gnostics would view these angels as demons who created the world and gave it an evil law.[5] Justin had to contend with a wealth of different religious and philosophical beliefs. His wares were being hawked with a voice that had to compete with those of other Christian apologists, Jews, Gnostics, and pagans in a crowded, and noisy, theological market.

Justin's clearest and most elaborate exposition of his views is contained in his *Dialogue with Trypho,* recording a debate that sup-

posedly took place about 135 C.E. in Ephesus between Justin and the Jew, Trypho.[6] Justin is the first Christian author to challenge the unity of Scripture by dividing the Law into three parts.:

> I mean that one commandment was appointed for piety and the practice of righteousness, and another command and action was in the same way spoken either as referring to the mystery of Christ or on account of the hardness [*sklērokardíon*] of your people's hearts.[7]

The Law then as understood by Justin contains ethical teachings, prophetic—Christological—teachings, and historical accommodations. The ethics contained in Scripture were universal in scope and application and are eternally valid. They are independent of the Mosaic Code as well as being embodied within it. They are applicable to humanity at large, and in enumerating them, Justin approaches the rabbinic concept of the "Seven commandments of the sons of Noah."[8] In his prophetic/Christological interpretation set out in chapters 40–42, Justin claims that everything established by Moses can be seen as types, symbols, and proclamations of those things that were to happen as a result of the Incarnation.[9] Justin never conflates the two interpretations save in the case of circumcision, which he interprets allegorically and eschatologically.[10]

It is the third part of the Law, the "ritual commandments"—sacrifice, Sabbath, circumcision, fasts, and so on—that Justin construes as decreed by historical necessity. These rituals were legislated for, and pertain solely to, the Jews. The Law is seen as an historical accommodation for the Jews, and Justin stresses repeatedly that the Law was mandated because of the "hardness of your hearts."[11] In contrast to the ethical teachings, which were universal, these rituals were particularly Jewish. This tension between the universality and the particularism in the Law forms a major component of Justin's exegesis.

Justin's essentially penal understanding of the Law was not the only interpretation current at the time. The Torah multiplied sin, which necessitated God's bestowal of grace. This function of the Law ended with Christ.

Paul further reflects the opinion of the LXX, Josephus and remarks in the New Testament (Acts 7:38, 53; Gal. 3:19–20) that the Law was given through a mediator, or through angels, who could, in extreme instances, be seen as demons who created the world and gave it an evil law.[12] This was not Paul's view, but it was the view that would be advanced by the Marcionites. And it was not only the Marcionites with whom Justin had to contend, but with other Gnostic groups including Valentinians, Basilidians, Satornilians, and others.[13]

Justin's emphasis upon the penal character of the Law provoked Trypho to respond. Indeed, argues Trypho, did not Christ himself observe the Law, thus, in essence validating it?[14] Christ's observance, answers Justin, is part of the divine *oikonomía,* the entire plan of salvation, and since Christ effected universal salvation, his observance of particular rituals, whose observance had nothing to do with salvation, in no way validated those particular rituals.[15] In sum, then, for Justin the Law was neither evil nor unnecessary—it was ordained for a stiff-necked, hard-hearted people. As Justin noted:

> We, too, would observe your fleshly circumcision, your Sabbaths, and in brief, all your festivals, if we did not know why they were ordained, namely because of your sins and obduracy. If we patiently bear all the evils put upon us by cruel men and demons, and yet, amid tortures and death that defy description, beseech mercy for our persecutors, and seek not the slightest retaliation, as our Lawgiver decreed, why, Trypho, do we not observe those rites which can do us no harm, such as circumcision of the flesh, the Sabbaths and festivals?[16]

Justin further elaborates how the Jews' sins and obduracy affected their history and actions. God's munificence is made manifest in contrasting Abraham and Moses:

> The same is said of Abraham and his progeny until Moses, when your people, wicked and ungrateful to God, fashioned a calf in the desert. Therefore, the Lord accommodating [*harmosámenos*] Himself to that people, commanded that sacrifices be brought in his Name lest you practice idolatry. Even then you did not obey, for you sacrificed your children to demons; Sabbath observance was instituted, in order to compel you to remember Him, as Scripture states: "That you may know that I am God your Redeemer."[17]

Justin sharply delineates the difference between the New Israel and "your people" and in so doing distinguishes the particularity and limited nature of the rituals of the Mosaic Code from the ethical teachings. The emphasis again is upon the penal character of the Code. Sacrifices were enacted to prevent idolatry, and Justin applies the same reasoning to the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Lord permitted the Temple to be built—not for his sake—but as a prophylactic device to restrain the inclination for idolatry.[18]

In arguing about rituals of the Mosaic Law, such as circumcision and dietary restrictions, Justin will employ lengthy citations from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, Amos, and Psalms to buttress his

position. His anti-Jewish use of prophecy emerges as one of his most potent weapons. The prophetic citations are employed not only to demonstrate the abrogation of an old, particular law, but to contrast it with the promulgation of a new, universal code.[19]

Justin reiterates these ideas throughout the *Dialogue,* and several of them will be more fully developed by other Christian apologists. His tripartite division of the Mosaic Code, his association of the Mosaic Code with the incident of the calf, his frequent charge of Jewish idolatry—the most common one in the *Dialogue*—and his anti-Jewish use of prophecy seem to be original contributions to Christian exposition of Scripture.

Many of the themes encountered in Justin's work appear in Irenaeus of Lyon's *Refutation of False Gnosis* (*Adversus Haereses*).[20] Irenaeus' discussion of sacrifice occurs within the larger issue of the creation of mankind. God created man because of divine philanthropy and chose the patriarchs *"propter illorum salutem."*[21] He appointed a people to teach the indocile to follow him, and prophets were sent to prepare humanity for the Holy Spirit in order to facilitate communion with God. Like an architect, the Lord sketched out the divine plan of salvation, and to the Jews, who were unruly in the desert, he bestowed a most apt Law (*aptissima lex*). The Law was appropriate to the condition of the people, and the Lord attuned humanity to his "symphony of salvation."[22] Irenaeus then focuses upon the Jews:

> Thus He also gave the people the laws relative to the construction of the Tabernacle, the building of the Temple and the choosing of the Levites, the sacrifices and oblations, the purifications and other things relevant to the cult.[23]

None of these things was needed by the Lord, who educated a people easily inclined toward idols, and the Lord employed pedagogical techniques apposite for the situation. He led them to primary matters by means of secondary ones: by the figurative to the truth, by the temporal to the eternal, by the carnal to the spiritual, and by the earthly to the celestial.[24]

Employing a similar approach to the Law as Justin, Irenaeus mentions "natural precepts" contained in the Decalogue that were universally valid and that permitted people to obey the divine decrees. There were those who did not obey, and when the Children of Israel fashioned a calf and reverted mentally to their condition in Egypt, they were placed under the yoke of servitude.[25]

Irenaeus, in launching his attack upon Jewish idolatry, uses the prophets, especially Amos and Ezekiel, to buttress his attack and

assert the essentially punitive nature of the Mosaic Law. In choosing Acts 7:39–43 as a proof text, Irenaeus accuses the Jews of emotional and intellectual error:

> This man [Moses] received the living precepts of God to give us, whom your fathers did not obey, but thrust him away, and turned back in their hearts [*corde suo*] to Egypt, saying to Aaron, "Make us gods who will go before us, for Moses who led us out of Egypt, we know not what has happened to him." And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their hands.[26]

The error of their ways is clarified by appeal to Amos 5:25–26 and Acts 7:39–43, which recounts Israelite worship of Moloch and the star of Rephan. Thus, the Israelites did not worship natural things, such as the sun or moon, but objects of their own creation. Irenaeus asserts that the Law was given to the Jews not by another God (as some Gnostics might believe), but by the very same God of the new dispensation. However, he adjusted it to their condition at that time. In fact, certain precepts were prescribed not because the people desired them, but because they were needed due to the hardness of their hearts.[27]

Irenaeus contends that human frailties were considered not only when the Old Law was mandated, but even governed the promulgation of the New Law:

> If, therefore, even in the New Testament, the apostles are found granting certain precepts in consideration of human infirmity, because of the incontinence of some, lest such persons, having grown obdurate, and despairing altogether of their salvation, should become apostates from God—it ought not to be wondered at, if also in the Old Testament the same God permitted similar indulgences for the benefit of his people, drawing them on by means of the ordinances already mentioned, so that they might obtain salvation through them, swallowing the saving fishhook of the Decalogue, and being restrained by Him, should not revert to idolatry, nor apostasize from God, but learn to love him with the whole heart.[28]

Irenaeus, in the issues he raises and choice of language, may be reflecting silent polemics over the essential difference in the Jewish-Christian understanding of, and attitudes toward, the Law.

Perhaps a tale about an anonymous righteous man best exemplifies the rabbinic attitude toward the Law:

> It happened to a Hasid that he forgot a sheaf in his field, and was thus enabled to fulfil the commandment with regard to forgetfulness [Deut. 24:19].[29] Whereupon he bade his son go to the temple, and offer for him a burnt-offering and a peace-offering, while he also gave a great banquet to his friends in honor of the event. Thereupon his son said to him: "Father, why do you rejoice in this commandment more than in any other law prescribed in the Torah?" The Hasid answered that it was the occurrence of the rare opportunity of accomplishing the will of God, even as the result of some oversight, which caused him so much joy.[30]

The story reflects the joy with which Judaism taught that the Law must be observed. Rabbis of the Talmudic and medieval period unanimously mention joy as an ingredient necessary for the proper performance of religious obligations. God, his salvation, and his Law are three things in which Israel rejoices. Indeed, the attitude of the rabbis could hardly be in sharper contrast to the punitive theories of Justin and Irenaeus.[31]

In retelling the story of the fashioning of the Golden Calf, Irenaeus follows the account in Acts 7:39 and notes that the people "in their hearts" (*corde suo*) turned back to Egypt. After contrasting the Old and New Law, he affirms that God wished men to love him with the "whole heart." Perhaps Irenaeus was still "Jewish" enough to use this term most calculatedly. For him, the heart was not the seat of emotions, but the seat of the deepest, unsocialized identity (what Freud would call the id). This may not have been simply another penal interpretation of the Mosaic Code, but a challenge to nascent rabbinic views of biblical history. For rabbinic Judaism, the heart was the dwelling of man's evil inclination—the *yetzer ha-rah*—to which all of man's organs show obedience; obeying the *yetzer ha-rah* was tantamount to idolatry.[32]

Irenaeus maintains that after the giving of the Law Jews were subject to idolatrous urges. This assertion flew in the face of certain rabbinic claims to the contrary, which held that the impulse for idolatry no longer existed among Jews.[33] Whether or not Irenaeus knew of, or was responding to, such claims, his punitive view of the Law is antithetical to certain rabbinic conceptions.

The giving of the Torah at Sinai provided Israel with a unique moment and opportunity in history. A Midrashic passage explains:

> When Israel (at Sinai) heard the commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" [Exod. 20:3], the evil inclination was uprooted from their hearts; but when they came to Moses and said

> unto him, "Our master Moses, become the messenger between us [Israel and the Lord], as it is said, 'Speak with us . . . but let not God speak with us lest we die' [Exod. 20:19), the evil inclination came back at once in its place." They came again to Moses and said, "Our master Moses, we wish that God should again reveal himself to us." He answered them, "This is impossible now (but will take place in the future)."[34]

According to this Midrash, the revelation at Sinai had eradicated the evil inclination from the hearts of Israel and would have rendered Israel immune from various sins—especially from idolatry and sexual excesses. However, the opportunity was lost.[35]

Irenaeus' insistence that the Jews were idolaters implies that the Jews had not lost this inclination, and the rabbinic Midrash may be an answer to this Christian polemic. But the attack may have been more pointed; the very value, meaning, and purpose of Torah for Judaism may have been assailed. And it is noteworthy, that certain Midrashic statements speak directly to the issue.

A Midrash on Deuteronomy 11:18—"Therefore impress—*vesamtem*—these My words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand, and let them serve as a symbol upon your forehead"—elucidated the historical and moral importance of the Torah. Interpreting the verb—*vesamtem* (impress)—as two nouns—*sam tam* ("a perfect remedy"), the Midrash continues:

> This may be compared to a man who struck his son a strong blow, and then put a poultice [*retiyyah*] on his wound, saying to him, "My son! As long as this poultice is on your wound you can eat and drink at will, and bathe in hot or cold water, without fear. But if you remove it, it will break out into sores." Even so did the Holy One, blessed be He, speak unto Israel: "My children! I created the Evil Inclination, but I (also) created the Torah, as its antidote; if you occupy yourselves with the Torah, you will not be delivered into its hand . . . but if you do not occupy yourselves with the Torah, you will be delivered into its hand. . . ."[36]

Two antithetical approaches to Torah and its value emerge quite graphically. God had created the inclination and its treatment. In *Sifre,* God says: "My sons, I created for you an evil impulse; I created for you the Law to temper it."[37] What for a Jewish author is a poultice is, for Irenaeus, a straightjacket.

Irenaeus' arguments must be seen in the context of his battle against the entire Gnostic tendency to dismiss the Law entirely as an

oversight of a foolish creator. That approach would have excused the Christians from even trying to fit the problem of the Law into God's providential scheme. Yet, Irenaeus accuses the Valentinians themselves of using accommodation for their nefarious purposes:

> These most vain sophists affirm that the apostles did with hypocrisy frame their doctrine according to the capacity of their hearers . . . so that the Lord and the apostles exercised the office of teacher not to further the truth, but even in hypocrisy, and as each individual was able to receive it.[38]

Irenaeus asserts most emphatically that the glory of Christianity is its truth and that neither the message nor the messengers made any accommodation to the masses. This is in fact a positive aspect of an absolutely explicit accommodation theology, which we shall see approached in Origen's exegesis. Indeed, the author of *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* launched the following attack on "orthodox" Christianity:

> . . .we were hated and persecuted, not only by those who are ignorant (pagans), but also by those who think they are advancing the name of Christ, since they were unknowingly empty, not knowing who they are, like dumb animals.[39]

The criticism of the orthodox for being "dumb animals" implies that they possess an accommodated gospel, while the Gnostics, who possess the "real"—that is, an unaccommodated—gospel, are the true Christians and represent the true Church. If the orthodox established objective criteria for its adherents, the Gnostics stressed spiritual maturity. *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* claims that the true church is composed of members "united in the friendship of friends forever, who neither know any hostility, nor evil, but who are united by my gnosis. . . ."[40]

One of the contested issues was, who possessed the proper understanding of the gospel. The Gnostic critique of orthodoxy centered, not on the fact orthodoxy had a false gospel, but that it did not properly understand the gospel it had. That is, the Gnostic position excoriated the orthodox for being tied solely to the most elementary level of interpretation, which precluded the possibility of obtaining the deeper truth contained in the text. The problem was that the orthodox failed to apprehend and appreciate the deeper gnosis available to those who could dive through the various levels of Scripture and plumb the great depths.[41] All levels of Scripture contained truth,

but the deeper levels were suited to the more mature; the more superficial levels to the immature. This approach led to confrontation with the orthodox positions on doctrine, ritual, and ecclesiastical hierarchy: the basic elements of church organization. The attack of Irenaeus, the orthodox bishop of Lyons, against the Valentinians was part of the ongoing process of Christian self-definition; accommodation played a role in that process.

Irenaeus employs the Gnostic understanding of scriptural accommodation when he turns to the revelation given to the Jews and conflates it with medical imagery, a turn that was to prove very popular with many later exegetes. According to Irenaeus, the Lord did not prescribe medicine according to the whim of the patient, but gave the patient what was needed. "He therefore did not address them in accordance with their pristine notions, nor did He reply to them in harmony with the opinion of His questioners, but according to the doctrine leading to salvation, without hypocrisy or respect of person"[42] Irenaeus insists that the Law was given to the Jews not by any God, but by the same one the Christians worship.[43] Thus, accommodation, as applied by Irenaeus to the Jews, was essentially negative in character; yet, the concept was an accommodating one, and was to develop remarkably.

If the initial interpretations of sacrifice led to an incipient theory of accommodation, the schools and scholars of Alexandria were to refine and embellish it. Supported by the wealth of an intellectual tradition embracing Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian elements, Alexandrian exegetes would justify accommodation's use in Christian thought.

Perhaps it was Philo's comment on Genesis 11:5—"The lawgiver talks thus in human terms about God, even though he is not a human being, for the advantage of us who are being educated, as I have often said in other passages"—which underlay the entire edifice.[44] It fell to Philo's most creative Christian student, Origen, to give accommodation perhaps its most eloquent expression.

Origen's major theological work, *On First Principles,* is a textbook on accommodation; explaining how the divine message is to be interpreted for human salvation. Origen's allegorical system equated the tripartite division of body, soul, and spirit with three levels of interpretation and scriptural truth.[45] Each level has importance and is beneficial for the "multitudes of sincere and simple believers."[46] (This, of course, was the issue between Irenaeus and the Valentinians.) Origen views this threefold nature of Scripture as a very good thing; not only does it enable the spiritual person to attain the highest level of truth, but it shields that level from the masses.

Origen conceded that simpler minds may understand Scripture in a superstitious way, but their only error is to misunderstand the divine purpose. Yet, they may be true in their belief. As Origen observed: "We teach about God both what is true and what the multitude can understand, though intelligent Christians understand it in a different sense." But Plato himself thinks it justifiable to tell a lie to a homicidal lunatic.[47]

This entire process of education was one that accommodated itself to different stages of human development, and for the Christian teacher, the problem was compounded. He must speak without upsetting the simple, yet without boring the more intelligent. Had not Paul accommodated his teachings to the carnal Corinthians, providing milk and not meat?[48]

Origen insists repeatedly that human weakness required a poor and humble style of Scripture.[49] Scripture provided the signposts for salvation; it was a written revelation, but there was even a greater revelation, namely, the Incarnation:

> While the Incarnation is a veritable revelation of God, it is the ladder by which we are to ascend from the flesh to the spirit, from the Son of Man to the Son of God. The incarnate Lord, like the written revelation in inspired scripture, is a veil that must be penetrated. It is an accommodation to our present capacities in this life. The Church's present gospel will one day be superseded by that which the Seer of the Apocalypse calls the everlasting gospel, a heavenly comprehension of truth that will surpass our present understanding by at least as much as the new covenant surpasses the old.[50]

Nor is a superficial reading of Scripture sufficient for proper understanding, for the three levels that Origen delineates are often intermingled:

> A similar method can be discerned also in the law, where it is often possible to find a precept that is useful for its own sake, and suitable to the time when the law was given. Sometimes, however, the precept does not appear to be useful. At other times even impossibilities are recorded in the law for the sake of the more skillful and inquiring readers, in order that these, by giving themselves to the toil of examining what is written, may gain a sound conviction of the necessity of seeking in such instances a meaning worthy of God.[51]

Origen recognizes, as did Irenaeus, the historical accommodations made in Scripture, yet his interpretation differs greatly. Origen

seems to understand two dimensions to positive accommodation. The first is to use scriptural style and language as a challenge, for without impossibilities being recorded in the Law the "more skillful and inquiring readers" would have little incentive to pore over the sacred page. The Lord thus spurs the more skillful student on to deeper truths. The second is the way in which Scripture stoops to accommodate the simpleminded. These dimensions of accommodation would become more prominent in later exegesis.[52]

In concluding his remarks on the proper exegetical method, Origen states his position emphatically:

> Let everyone, then, who cares for truth, care little about names and words, for different kinds of speech are customary in different nations. Let him be more anxious about the fact signified than about the words by which it is signified, and particularly in questions of . . . difficulty and importance. . . . Our aim has been to show that there are certain things, the meaning of which it is impossible adequately to explain by any human language, but which are made clear rather through simple apprehension than through any power of words.[53]

For Origen, this is the second side of positive accommodation and is expressed through the metaphor of the adult stooping to help the child. "He condescends [*sygkatábē*] and accommodates Himself to our weakness [*asthenéia*], like a schoolmaster talking a 'little language' to his children, like a father caring for his own children and adopting their ways."[54] Was that not what Origen was doing for the simpleminded? He labored to bring higher insights to the attention of inferior capacities; to provoke and cajole so that in time they might comprehend things presently beyond their range.[55]

In replying to Celsus' critique of biblical anthropomorphisms, Origen will exploit the same metaphor, though more expansively:

> Just as when we are talking to very small children we do not assume as the object of our instruction any strong understanding in them, but say what we have to say accommodating it to the small understanding of those whom we have before us [*all harmosámenos pròs tò asthenès tôn hypokriménōn*], and even do what seems to us useful for the education and upbringing of children, realizing that they are children: so the Word of God seems to have disposed the things which were written, adapting the suitable parts of his message to the capacity of his hearers and to their ultimate profit.[56]

Perhaps Origen's most extended and dazzling use of the familial metaphor—which would be employed no less spectacularly by Chrysostom—

occurs in his elucidation of Jeremiah 18:6–10, which seems to describe God changing his mind and repenting of evil he contemplated. For Origen, accommodation explains how God could be said to change. After presenting biblical citations culled from both testaments, Origen writes:

> But when divine providence [*oikonomía*] is involved in human affairs, God assumes human intelligence, manners and language. When we talk to a child of two we talk "baby-talk" because he is a child, for as long as we maintain the character appropriate to an adult age, and speak to children without condescending [*mḗ sygkatabainóntas*] to their language, it is impossible for children to comprehend. Now imagine a similar situation confronting God when he deals with humans especially those who are still "babes" [*nḗpion*]. Notice too how we adults change the names of things for children, we have a special name for bread, and we call drinking by another name without using "grown-up" language, but we use another language adapted for infants and nurselings . . . [*lézei tinì paidikḗ kaì brephódei*]. And if we name clothes to children we give the clothes other names, as if we made up a special children's language. Are we then immature because we do this? And if someone hears us speaking this way with children, would he say, "This old man is losing his mind, this man has forgotten that his beard has grown, that he is a grown-up?" Or is it permissible for the sake of accommodation [*symperiphoràn*], when we are speaking with a child not to speak the language of older and mature people [*presbūtikḗ mēdè enteleî*], but to converse in a child's language [*paidikḗ*]? God surely speaks to children.[57]

Origen truly displays his genius in this superb description of divine accommodation. Accommodation helped him explain divine revelation, the relationship between God and man, divine providence, and other issues.[58] It provided him with a powerful tool with which he could try to teach his less gifted brethren truths that they could not, by themselves, grasp. Origen might have employed accommodation as a speculative theologian and philosopher, but as a teacher, he utilized it because it served his needs so well. His embrace of this exegetical device assured it a place in Christian thought. And it is with Eusebius of Caesarea, deeply indebted though he was to Origen for his theology, philosophy, and exegesis, that accommodation, in addition to being an exegetical and polemical device, would emerge as a tool of historical examination.[59]

Eusebius' works must be set in the context of his life. He lived in a part of the Roman Empire that had strong Christian roots. His