

## DEBATING HUMAN SACRIFICE IN LATIN PATRISTIC. ON THE VOW OF IEPHTHAH

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### Debating Human Sacrifice in Latin Patristic. On the Vow of Iephtah (Abstract)

For Christian and Pagan exegesis human sacrifice was a weapon or a wound to inflict when fighting each other. The story of Jephthah narrated in chapters XI and XII of the Book of Judges describes how the daughter of Jephthah was offered up as human sacrifice. The present study examines the manner in which the first Christian writers and in particular Augustine, Jerome and Ambrose defended the authority of the Old Testament in the context of anti-Manichaen and anti-pagan polemic in what regards the vow and the sacrifice of Jephthah. It also tries to assess what are the limits of interpretation of this particular episode, namely to define to what extent was the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter equated with Christ's self giving on the cross, sacrifice that would thus become an icon of Christ himself paralleling Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac with which the story of Jephthah was often compared. Thus, the question can be whether it were possible for them to apply an exegesis that would ascribe a Christological meaning to the story of Jephthah. The import of such an approach rests on the fact that their exegesis on the vow and sacrifice of Jephthah can shed more light on how the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was perceived by the authors analyzed here.

I have also tried to approach the subject from the perspective of the Modern scholarship, within which I have laid special emphasis to Girard's theory since his hermeneutic befits very well to this episode from the Old Testament.

**Key words:** human sacrifice, (non)-sacrificial, allegoric, exegesis, patristic.

### 1. The Story of Iephtah and the Contemporary Exegesis. René Girard and the Sacrificial Interpretation<sup>1</sup>

The story of Jephthah is narrated in chapters XI and XII of the Book of Judges<sup>2</sup>. The obvious import of the narrative is that the daughter of Jephthah was

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<sup>1</sup> There are only two studies to my knowledge dedicated to the exegesis of this episode, namely A. Penna, *The Vow of Iephtah in the Interpretation of St. Jerome*, in *Studia Patristica IV*, (TU, 79), Berlin 1961: 162-171 and Houtman Cornelis, *Rewriting a Dramatic Old Testament Story. The Story of Iephtah and his Daughter in Some Examples of Christian Devotional Literature*, *Biblical Interpretation* 13/2 (2005): 167-190. Unfortunately both of them have not been available to me.

<sup>2</sup> Before beginning his campaign against the Ammonites, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, saying: "And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the

offered up as a human sacrifice. The inquiry about sacrifice and in particular about human sacrifice always was a fascinating topic for modern scholars<sup>3</sup>. We follow René Girard's argument which says that: "In the general study of sacrifice there is little reason to differentiate between human and animal victims... Strictly speaking, there is no essential difference between animal sacrifice and human sacrifice, and in many cases one is substituted for the other."<sup>4</sup>

The utility of Girard's hermeneutic method although it was mostly applied to the New Testament can be proved for the Old Testament as well. What counts for

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people of Ammon into my hands, 31 "then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." 34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; *and she was his only child*. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it." 36 So she said to him, "My father, *if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth*, because the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon." 37 Then she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I." 38 So he said: "Go." And he sent her away *for two months*; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. 39 And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man. And it became a custom in Israel. 40 *That the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Galaadite.*" (The text is from New King James Version, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> In the classical works of modern sociology and psychology is to be found the idea that sacrifice has been identified as the origin of civilization. Emile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss argued that "the very nature of sacrifice" is "dependent in fact, on the presence of an intermediary, and we know that with no intermediary there is no sacrifice" and that through the victim is realized the very function of the sacrifice which is the "communication" between the sacred and the profane (*Sacrifice. Its Nature and Function*, trans. W. D. Halls, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964: 100). More relevant things are said about sacrifice by Sigmund Freud, in *Totem and Taboo*. For Freud, sacrifice depicts the ambivalent relation toward authority, that is the desire to repress the father stemming out from Oedipal wishes combined with a certain sense of guilt nurtured by repressed feelings of hostility toward the authority figure. "We find the ambivalence implicit in the father-complex persists in totemism and in religions generally. Totemic religion not only comprised expressions of remorse and attempts at atonement, it also served as a remembrance of the triumph over the father... Thus it became a duty to repeat the crime of parricide again and again in the sacrifice of the totem animal, whenever, as a result of changing conditions of life, the cherished fruit of the crime-appropriation of the paternal attributes-threatened to disappear". Only a certain degree of independence belongs to man who can remain subdued to authority as long as he knows that the authority can be removed. This consciousness that the father can be "removed" by killing of the substitute, the sacrificial victim, perpetuates and reproduces the guilt for the desire of killing the father and thus permits the reestablishment of the authority of the father." (*Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey, New York, W.W. Norton, 1950: 100)

<sup>4</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, 10. See also R. H. Sales, *Human Sacrifice in biblical Thought*, *Journal of Bible and Religion*, 25, 2(1957): 112, "Any religion that required sacrifice would practice human sacrifice, if the theory behind the system were driven to its logical conclusion."

his method is that he tried to identify the origins of violence within the broadest possible anthropological and religious framework. Its usefulness would be enhanced when one looks at early Christian exegesis on certain stories from Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> The story of Iephtah for instance uncovers as well “things hidden since the foundation of the world”.

The essentials of Girard’s thesis on the sacrificial mechanism can be summarized as follows. At the core of his theory stands the concept of *mimesis*. One of his most influential books has as a motto a quotation from Aristotle that defines Girard’s anthropology, and his concept of *mimesis* “Man is different from animal through the fact that he is more capable of imitation”.<sup>6</sup> If *Mimesis* or imitation makes desire to arouse, mimetic desire is the human tendency to long for what has been appropriated already by the others<sup>7</sup>, which leads inexorably to chaotic, self-generating acts of violence, what Girard names “mimetic crisis”<sup>8</sup>.

Human societies are constantly threatened by acts of uncontrolled violence arising out of rivalry. Girard notes that when “two hands... reach for the same object simultaneously conflict cannot fail to result.”<sup>9</sup> *Mimesis*, as noted above, always will lead to violence which if “left unappeased will accumulate until it overflows its confines and floods the surrounding area. The role of sacrifice is to stem this rising tide of indiscriminate substitution and redirect violence into ‘proper channels’<sup>10</sup>. The circle of violence is short-circuited through the fact that “Society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a ‘sacrificial’ victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect”<sup>11</sup>. Thus, through scapegoating, a society succeeds in organizing violence and directing it away from itself. The ‘objects’ for scapegoating are either outsiders (the menace from without) or insiders (persons or objects that are most esteemed because of mimetic desire, such as children, *virgin women*, and animals essential to the community’s welfare)<sup>12</sup>.

Girard’s inquiry into the origins and representations of violence conducted him to a new reading of the New Testament<sup>13</sup>. He develops the idea that sacrifice is the origin of civilization itself and that the Bible is progressively disclosing the sacrificial system. The preaching of Jesus and moreover his death on the cross must be viewed as a critic to the Jewish society still engulfed in violence, despite the

<sup>5</sup> Also, by having his method as a background one will not be compelled to bring forward parallels encountered in the history of religion.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Poetica* 4.

<sup>7</sup> Mimetic desire is Girard’s offspring from his dwelling in literary criticism. He is following in the footsteps of Eric Auerbach’s influential work, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953. Among Girard’s more well-known publications in literary criticism are: *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, trans. P. Gregory, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977; “*To Double Business Bound*”: *Essays on Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978; *A Theater of Envy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987: 78-79, 287-289.

<sup>9</sup> R. Girard, *To Double Business Bound*, 201.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, *Violence and the Sacred*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: 68-88, 250-273; *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 31.

<sup>13</sup> See R. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*.

labor of the prophets. The New Testament holds up Jesus as the “Lamb of God” who, “by submitting to violence...reveals and uproots the structural matrix of all religion” as scapegoating<sup>14</sup>. The death of God’s only begotten discloses what has been “hidden since the foundation of the world,” namely, the *innocence* of the victim. Girard’s view of Jesus as the paradigmatic innocent victim compelled him to see Christianity as the necessary completion of Judaism<sup>15</sup>.

By reading the episode of Iephtah from a Girardian perspective the sacrifice of Iephtah’s daughter will be viewed within a larger anthropological context. The subject for scapegoating in our case is a ‘insider’, the child of the leader, which is the dearest ‘object’ for the community and the text emphasizes this by repeating twice: “*And she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter*”<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, the purity of the victim is repeated over and over again within just few lines: “Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and *bewail my virginity*, my friends and I. So he said, “Go.” And he sent her away *for two months*; and she went with her friends, and *bewailed her virginity on the mountains*”<sup>17</sup>, and again “*She knew no man*”<sup>18</sup>. Like Christ, or Isaac, Iephtah’s daughter does not resist to violence: “My father, *if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth*”.

From a sacrificial point of view, as the one depicted above, the episode of Iephtah could have been used as *typos* for Jesus’s sacrifice for its emphasis on purity, uniqueness and consent to violence of the victim, but, with few exceptions<sup>19</sup>, it was not. However, the sacrifice of Abraham with which the sacrifice of Iephtah was seldom compared often served as *typos* for Christ himself, as we shall see.

Before going any further, however, it is, perhaps, not out of place to consider a very important question, namely the fact that the story of Iephtah’s sacrifice of his only daughter was told without condemnation by Deuteronomic editors. This aspect entailed the conclusion in modern scholarship that the episode of Iephtah would correspond to a certain stage in Jewish religion yet untouched by prophetic denunciations<sup>20</sup>. However, the fact that the victim was presented as

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: 176-179.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*: 167; *The Scapegoat*, 100-11, 210-211;

<sup>16</sup> Jud. 11, 34.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*: 11, 37-38.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: 11, 39.

<sup>19</sup> The most blatant is Augustine, as we shall see.

<sup>20</sup> While the Jephthah’s sacrifice was told without condemnation the D historians and the Chronicler later condemned the child sacrifice of Ahaz, as we find II Kgs. 16: 2-4 [“Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he *did not do what was right* in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David *had done*. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; *indeed he made his son pass through the fire*, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree”] and in II Chr. 28: 3-4 [“He burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, *and burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations* whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.”] In the same way was Manasseh condemned in II Chr. 33: 6 and II Kgs. 16: 2-4 [“*Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire* in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists.

innocent and the very focus on the rueful implications of the story, for both the sacrificer and the sacrificed (when he saw her coming, Iephtah “tore his clothes, and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me!” and the daughter who bewails her virginity for two months) clearly points out that the significance and the emphasis of the story lies not on the sacrifice and its efficacy but on the victim’s viewpoint who can utter his innocence and still submitting to violence. The story of Iephtah resembles Abraham’s sacrifice since the obedience, the innocence of the victim and the faith of the perpetrator are the main features for the Christian exegesis. However, even in the case of Iephtah’s sacrifice the process of deconstructing the cosmology of violence seems to be at work. There is no explicit condemnation of the act, but the very letters of the story cry out by depicting the terrible outcome of the mindless oath. The gruesome reality that human sacrifice might have been practiced and sanctioned by the Law seems to have been neglected by later commentators by stressing the prophetic denunciations of human sacrifice<sup>21</sup>. Apart of what was asked

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*He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.”] The ritual of child sacrifice was again condemned in Leviticus, 18: 21 [“And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through *the fire* to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD”] and 20: 1-5 [“ Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: 'Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, *who gives any of his descendants to Molech*, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, *because he has given some of his descendants to Molech*, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, *when he gives some of his descendants to Molech*, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.”] (ap. Sales, *Human Sacrifice in Biblical Thought*: 112-113)*

<sup>21</sup> The practice of human sacrifice is implied in Ex. 22:29 [“You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices. *The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me.*”] and in Ex.13:1 [Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “*Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine.*”] The possibility for the sons to be redeemed arises from Numb. 18:15-17 [“Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to the LORD, whether man or beast, shall be yours; *nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem*, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. “And those redeemed of the devoted things *you shall redeem* when one month old, according to your valuation, *for five shekels of silver*, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty GERAHS. *But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they are holy.* You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat as an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD.” Numb. 3:11-15 presents the redemption of the sons of Israel through the consecrated Levitical priests who are to replace the sacrifice of the first-born sons of the people [“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Now behold, *I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, because all the firstborn are Mine.* On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the LORD.” Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying: “Number the children of Levi by their fathers' houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above.”] According to Ex. 34: 20 all the first-born sons shall be redeemed [“But the firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem *him*, then you shall break his neck. *All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem.*

by God no story in the Old Testament about human sacrifice was told without condemnation.

For the story of Iephtah the lack of distinction between human and animal sacrifice is relevant when we consider that seldom the sacrifice of Iephtah was assimilated to the sacrifice of Abraham, in which the human victim is substituted by an animal offering<sup>22</sup>. The sacrifice of Iephtah's daughter and the sacrifice of Abraham had had for some writers a Christological meaning, regardless the fact that in the first case we a human offering while in the second the human victim was substituted by a goat<sup>23</sup>.

The narrative of Abraham and Isaac through the rejection of human sacrifice establishes the pattern of the sacrifice of an animal: a surrogate victim is to be slain instead of a human. As Sales argued: "The E story of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac implied that the highest sacrifice that could be made was that of the first-born son, but the writer wanted to insist that such a sacrifice was not needed or required in the worship of the God of Israel and that an animal should be

And none shall appear before Me empty-handed."].

<sup>22</sup> See Brian K. Smith, Wendy Doniger, "Sacrifice and Substitution: Ritual Mystification and Mythical Demystification", *Numen* 36, 2(1989): 189-224. They discuss the place of substitution in accomplishing the sacrifice. "Substitution is in fact the key to the sacrifice" (*Ibid.*: 195).

<sup>23</sup> Would be worth attempting a survey on all the Latin and Greek patristic exegesis on the vow of Iephtah. For example, D. Lerch dedicated an entire volume to Christian commentaries on the sacrifice of Isaac. His survey covered all the Latin and Greek patristic, the medieval until present day. Origen regards the sacrifice of Iephtah's daughter as a prefiguration of Christian sacrifice (Origen, *Commentary on John VI 59*); about Origen's position, see R. J. Daly, "Sacrifice in Origen", *Studia Patristica* XI, 2(1972): 127 and Daly, *Sacrifice in Origen*. This interpretation is rather uncommon in patristic thought. Thomas Aquinas, following Jerome interpretation regards the vow of Iephtah as *impius*, although that "tamen aliquod bonum figurabat": *Summae theologiae secunda secundae quaestio: 88, articulo: 2, responsio ad argumentum: 2*: "Et sic accidit in voto Iephte, qui ut dicitur iudic. XI, votum vovit domino, dicens, si tradideris filios Ammon in manu meas, quicumque primus egressus fuerit de foribus domus meae mihi que occurrerit revertenti in pace, eum offeram holocaustum domino. Hoc enim poterat malum eventum habere, si abere, si occurreret ei aliquod animal non immolativum, sicut asinus vel homo, quod et accidit. Unde, ut Hieronymus dicit, in vovendo fuit stultus, quia discretionem non adhibuit, et in reddendo impius." However in medieval thought often the sacrifice of Iephtah is recalled with praise and serves to illustrate the conception that human sacrifice is to be perpetrated by telling us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. For example in the life of Saint Nilus of Rossano, (*PG CXX, 15-156 = Acta Sanctorum, de Sancto Nilo abbate Cryptae Ferratae in agro Tusculano Italiae ad diem vigesima sexta Septembris, 279-343*) the sacrifice of Iephtah is recalled to tell us that the more horrifying the sin is, the more costly the sacrifice would be. The highest sacrifice Abaras, who killed her son, could offer was her most beloved son, for whom she killed: "Quid enim das, quod tantumdem valeat, quantum abstulisti"<sup>23</sup>: "Trade de duobus tuis filiis alterum consanguineis mortui, et erit tunc a peccato expiata. Dixit enim Deus: De manu hominis fratris eius requiram animam ipsius hominis. Quicumque effuderit humanum sanguinem, fundetur sanguis illius. Et rursus: Omnis, qui acceperit gladium, gladio peribit. Neque enim infirmior es tu Saule et Jephthe iudice, qui lege, quam ipsi sibi constituerant, liberos suos morti tradiderunt. Respondit illa: 'Non possum hoc facere, enim timeo ne illum occidant. Tunc vir sanctus zelo Dei repletus ait: 'Haec dicit Spiritus Sanctus, Filii tui sanguis effundetur pro sanguine, quem tu iniuste effudisti et peccatum hoc de domo tua non delebitur usque in seculum.'"

substituted”<sup>24</sup>. One may simply add that the sacrifice would be even higher when the first-born is the only one, as the story of Abraham and of Iephtah constantly stresses. The logical development of this sacrificial thinking and its uttermost consequence is the depiction of *Christ mission as the sacrifice of God’s son*: the death of the only begotten. This would be the absolute sacrifice and certainly the most powerful possible.

Apparently the accent is put not on the father but on the victim, who expiates the fatherly sin. This aspect is of uppermost importance, because the general interpretation of human sacrifice in Old Testament had a key role in interpretation of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for sins<sup>25</sup>. The idea of sacrifice for sins is related with the thought that blood was necessary to wipe away the sins of men. In this interpretation Jesus through his blood shed on the cross takes away the sins of the world, and thus He reconciles us with the Father<sup>26</sup>. In the earliest Christian community<sup>27</sup> the crucifixion of Jesus was not considered as a sacrifice of

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<sup>24</sup> Sales, *Human Sacrifice*: 112. The story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is told in Gen. 22, 1-19 [“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 2 Then He said, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. 5 And Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.” 6 So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. 7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” Then he said, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” 8 And Abraham said, “My son, *God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.*” So the two of them went together. 9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. 10 *And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.* 11 But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” So he said, “Here I am.” 12 And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me. 13 Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind *him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.* 14 And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, “In the Mount of The LORD it shall be provided.” 15 Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16 and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, *because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son* 17 “blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”]

<sup>25</sup> Sales, *Human Sacrifice*: 114.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Sacrificial material’ is found throughout the works of Origen. Jesus is the true Paschal Lamb who is slaughter for the sin of the world and through we are reconciled with Father (Daly, *Sacrifice in Origen*: 126). A culmination of sacrificial thinking is to be found in Anselm of Canterbury in his famous theory of satisfaction

<sup>27</sup> See C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development*, London, 1936: 25, where he notes that the speeches of Peter in Acts (2: 14-39; 3: 13-26; 4: 10-12; 5: 30-32; 10: 36-

redemption. It was emphasized that the resurrection of Jesus was their main concern:

“Had the earliest community wished to proclaim the death of Jesus as a atoning sacrifice an excellent opportunity was offered when the high priest questioned and charged ‘you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us’ (5:28). Here was the perfect opening for Peter to say that of Jesus had another purpose in the divine plan, but he hastens to proclaim his resurrection faith, not a crucifixion faith: ‘God raised him... we and the Holy Spirit are witnesses (5:30-32).’<sup>28</sup>

Toward the end of the first century, in the Epistle of Hebrews and in other passages in later New Testament<sup>29</sup> a clear sacrificial interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus is attested<sup>30</sup>:

“For if sprinkling defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God (9: 13-14)...and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (9: 22). Therefore brethren we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain (10: 19-20).”

Hence, Sales concluded that, “in Hebrews, the resurrection faith of the earliest community and Paul has been replaced with a crucifixion faith of the sacrifice of the blood of Jesus which makes atonement for the sins of man. Paul’s minor emphasis for the interpretation of the cross has become the prime emphasis for the writer of Hebrews”.<sup>31</sup> Before going any further one has to say that the usage of sacrificial vocabulary in Paul has a conspicuous metaphoric end, where death, sacrifice and resurrection stand for the conversion to the new life in Christ<sup>32</sup>.

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43) do not attest the idea that Christ died for our sins.

<sup>28</sup>Sales, *Human Sacrifice*, 114.

<sup>29</sup> I Peter 1:18-19 [“You were ransomed...with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot”, Ephesians 1: 7 “In him we have redemption through his blood”, and 2: 13 “you...have been brought near in the blood of Christ”.] I John 1: 7 [“the blood of Jesus...cleanses us from all sin”, “he is the expiation for our sins” (2:2), “This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with water only but with the water and the blood (5: 6).] ”Rom. 5:8-9 [“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.”]

<sup>30</sup> This aspect is largely presented by René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*: 263-267.

<sup>31</sup> Sales, *Human Sacrifice*: 116. However, James W. Thompson, in his article *Hebrews 9 and Hellenistic Concepts of Sacrifice*, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, 4 (1979): 567-78, argued that the author of Hebrews went beyond Philo in his criticism of the material cult. Moreover the epistle would display an exertion to spiritualize the concept of sacrifice which was inherited from Jewish tradition.

<sup>32</sup> Chalmer E. Faw, in *Death and Resurrection in Paul’s Letters*, *Journal of Bible and Religion* 27, 4(1959): 295, while explaining 2 Cor. 5: 14-17, says: “One has died for all” and “therefore all have died” pointed out that “the meaning is not immediately apparent until he says, “he died for all that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him” (5:15) and “if any one is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold the new has come” (5:17). The man “in Christ” then is one who has died and who

However, the Epistle to the Hebrews remained a lasting challenge for the hermeneutics of the Fathers since it can hardly eschew a sacrificial interpretation<sup>33</sup>.

In what way this view on the sacrifice of Jesus influenced the opinion on Old Testament sacrifice? Is it possible that the interpretation of Jesus' death as atonement for sins could have changed the emphasis, which was laid on Abraham and Iephthah sacrifice?<sup>34</sup> As we have seen before both stories do not especially stress the value of the sacrifice but what the writer wanted to show was the fidelity, the faith, and the devotion of the actors. Only when the accent was laid on the value, on the efficacy of the sacrifice had emerged an interpretation that could equate both Abraham's and Iephthah sacrifice with Christ's self giving on the cross. The possibility for such an interpretation receives more credit when one recalls the words of Isidore of Seville:

“Tunc *Jephthe Galaadites*, fugiens a facie fratrum suorum, constituitur in principem ob pugnam filiorum Ammon; qui rediens post triumphum, immolavit filiam, quae sibi post victoriam prima occurrerat; sic enim votum sponderat, ut quidquid sibi revertenti primum occurreret, Domino immolaret. *Quis ergo in Jephthe praenuntiabatur, nisi Dominus Jesus Christus, et Salvator noster*, qui a facie fratrum suorum, id est, Judaeorum abscedens, in gentibus principatum accepit? Qui omnia humanae salutis sacramenta, tanquam juratus, explevit, *et quasi filiam, ita carnem propriam pro salute Israelis Domino obtulit.*”<sup>35</sup>

Particularly striking in this passage is the emphasis on the function of sacrifice itself, which was supposed to be enacted for the people's cleansing from sins. The interpretation of Christ's sacrifice as a propitiation through His blood for the sins that were previously committed by the people of Israel enabled Isidore of Seville to interpret the sacrifice of Iephthah in a particular Christological key. At this point, one may suggest that in the case of Iephthah and especially in case of Abraham's near immolation of Isaac the sacrificial interpretation was rather an offspring of later exegesis than a product of the text itself<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, for the

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lives again *in* and *for* Christ.” Faw noted also that “because of Christ's death and the efficacy of his cross, is spoken of as a *crucifixion*, especially in Galatians: “I am crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20). The meaning of this sacrificial imagery is dying to sin and being raised to a new life. Therefore one should carefully distinguish the meaning of the sacrificial imagery employed within New Testament. One can find there whatever he looks for.

<sup>33</sup> “It would seem, then that although a right interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews demands the view that Our Lord in Heaven is offering Himself, that is to say His Sacrificed Body, to the Father, the Greek Fathers with one or two exceptions do not state this plainly.” (H. E. Symonds, *The Heavenly Sacrifice in the Greek Fathers*: 285)

<sup>34</sup> The paper of Israel Lévi, *Le sacrifice d'Isaac et la mort de Jésus*, *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 1912, was not available to me. Although seems to be rather old it might had been very useful.

<sup>35</sup> Isidorus Hispalensis, *Mysticorum expositiones sacramentorum seu Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum. In librum Iudicum*, cap. 7, par. 2, col, 38, linea 41-48. The text is from <http://clt.brepolis.net/clt/text/text.asp>

<sup>36</sup> Throughout the text “sacrificial interpretation” refers to the Girardian notion of reading texts. Namely a text read in this manner will present sacrifice as a mandatory shedding of blood of a innocent victim in the biblical context for the salvation of the people. The sacrificial interpretation is not a product of the text itself (Gen.22:1-9 and Judges 11),

Christian exegesis this interpretation parallels the reading of Jesus mission in a sacrificial manner which was not so in the earliest Christian community. The similarity between Christ<sup>37</sup> and Isaac is enforced by the fact that the exegetes bestowed upon Isaac<sup>38</sup> ultimate and an absolute goal such is the salvation of people.

The typology of Isaac as the symbol of Christ was not self evident, as one might be indulged to believe<sup>39</sup>. What is important for the present inquiry is that the development of the sameness between Isaac and Christ could have created a typology of Iephtah's daughter as symbolizing Christ.

Isaac becoming an icon of Christ parallels the shifting in meaning of Christ's death. The earliest passage in which Isaac on Moriah is equated with Jesus on Golgotha is in the Epistle of Barnabas<sup>40</sup>. Then the image is treated by Clement of Alexandria,<sup>41</sup> Irenaeus,<sup>42</sup> Tertullian<sup>43</sup>, Origen<sup>44</sup> and later by Ambrose<sup>45</sup> and

because, as it was already mentioned, the salvation of the people, the very core of the sacrifice is not at all emphasized.

<sup>37</sup> This is how it the sacrifice of Christ was depicted in Rom. 6: 8-10 ["Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. *Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*"], I Cor. 8:11-12 ["And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ"], I Cor. 15: 3 ["For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: *that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*"], II Cor. 5: 15 ["and *He died for all*, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again."] and in I Thess. 5: 9-10 ["For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who *died for us*, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."]

<sup>38</sup> Art. Isaac, in *DictSpir* vol. VII, col. 1989, while discussing the Jewish haggadah it is noted the function of Isaac's sacrifice for the entire nation "Aussi c'est pour lui, et non pour Abraham, que les cieux s'ouvrent et qu'apparaît visiblement la gloire du Seigneur, ce qui ressort (pour le Targum) de Gen. 27, 1: "ses yeux s'étaient obscurcis au point de ne plus voir". C'est donc au mérite d'Isaac, plus qu'à celui d'Abraham, que recourent les prières d'intercession."

<sup>39</sup> In the New Testament is no explicit typology of Isaac as the symbol of Christ. What seem closest to this are the references from John 3: 16 ["For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"] and from Paul, Rom. 8: 32 ["He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"]. Hans Joachim Schoeps, in *The Sacrifice of Isaac in Paul's Theology*, Journal of Biblical Literature 65, 4 (1946): 386 and, hereafter, Schoeps, in *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, remarks that in Paul's theology is no typology of Isaac as the symbol of Christ, but "he merely says that Christians, like Isaac, are "children of promise"; see Gal. 4: 28 [Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise."] and Rom. 9:7-8 ["nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.]

<sup>40</sup> Barnabas, Epistola, ed. F.X. Funk, Patres apostolici, t.1, Tübingen, 1901 apud *DictSpir* vol. VII, col. 1992.

<sup>41</sup> Strom. 2, 5, PG 8, coll.952.

<sup>42</sup> Adv.Haer. 4, 4, PL 7, coll. 986; Comentarii in IV epistulas Paulinas, Ad Ephesios, lib. 1, col.484, "quod Isaac in typo Domini, crucem suam ipse portavit".

<sup>43</sup> Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem*, lib.3, 11: "Itaque inprimis Isaac, cum a patre in hostiam deditus lignum sibi portaret ipse, christi exitum iam tunc denotabat, in victimam concessi a patre et lignum passionis suae baiulantis." Cf. Idem, *Adversus Iudaeos*, cap.13: "Sed quoniam haec fuerant sacramenta, quae temporibus Christi percipienda seruabatur, et Isaac tum ligno solutus est, ariete oblato in eupre cornibus haerente, et Christus suis temporibus lignum humeris suis portavit inhaerens cornibus crucis, corona spinea capiti eius

Augustine<sup>46</sup>. While it was ascertained that “*in figuris praesignatur, cum Isaac immolatur*” still the daughter of Iepthah did not become a typos for Christ himself.<sup>47</sup> What seems to have matter is that in the first case the sacrifice was actually performed while God stopped Abraham. The distance between the two episodes becomes insignificant when we recall that in Jewish tradition God is believed to have regarded the Abraham’s deed as if it had really been completed. However, as Schoeps noted “the thought that the sacrifice after all could have been completed has always filled Jews with utmost horror”.<sup>48</sup> Save of a relevant hue that the will of God should not be investigated, the same goes for Augustine who argues that if Abraham’s deed had been undertaken on his own initiative, or if were attempted today, it would be deemed either a temptation of the devil or a sign of madness. Moreover, by submitting to God’s will any action of man, even human sacrifice, can be extolled:

*Abraham si filium sponte immolaret, quid, nisi horribilis et insanus? Deo autem iubente, quid, nisi fidelis et devotus apparuit?...* Quapropter, si in occidendo filio spontaneus motus execrabilis, *Deo autem iubente obsecundans famulatus, non solum inculpabilis, verum etiam laudabilis invenitur;* quid Moysen, Fauste, reprehendis, quod exspoliavit Aegyptios? Si te irritat velut humana facientis improbitas, divina terreat iubentis auctoritas. *An talia fieri volentem etiam ipsum Deum vituperare paratus es?*<sup>49</sup>

All the Fathers unanimously praise Abraham’s fidelity and devotion to God’s command. For instance, Ambrose’s *De Abraham* is a meditation on the virtue of *fides* while *De Isaac* is an anthropological inquiry on the nature of human soul and on its means to attain the mystical union with God. Although Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac is by far the main event from his life, significantly, as Nauroy

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circumdata.”

<sup>44</sup> Origenes secundum translationem Rufini, *In Leuiticum homiliae*, hom. 3, par.8: “Iam superius diximus quod omnis hostia typum ferat et imaginem Christi, multo magis aries, qui et pro Isaac quondam a Deo substitutus est immolandum.” Idem, in *Genesim homiliae*, hom.8, par.6, lin.5, “Quod ipse sibi ‘ligna as holocaustum’ portat Isaac, illa figura est, quod et Christus ‘ipse sibi baiulavit crucem’, et tamen portare ‘ligna ad holocaustum’ sacerdotis officium est.”

<sup>45</sup> Ambrosius Mediolanensis, *De Abraham*, lib.1, cap.8, par.71, “Isaac ergo Christi passuri est typus. Uenit in asina, ut crediturus nationum populus significaretur.” Ibid., par 72, “ligna Isaac sibi uexit, Christus sibi patibulum portauit crucis. Abraham comitabatur filium, pater Christum.”

<sup>46</sup> Augustinus Hiponensis, *De Trinitate libri quindecim*, 3, 25. Idem, *De civitate Dei*, 16, 31-37: “dicit Apostolus: Qui proprio filio non pepercit, sed pro nobis ominibus tradidit eum? Propterea et Isaac, sicut Dominus crucem suam, ita sibi ligna ad victimae locum, quibus fuerat et imponendus, ipse portavit. *Postremo quia Isaac occidi non oportebat, posteaquam est pater ferire prohibitus, quis erat ille aries, quo immolato impletum est significativo sanguine sacrificium? Nempe quando eum vidit Abraham, cornibus in frutice tenebatur. Quis illo figurabatur, nisi Christus, antequam immolaretur, spinis iudaicis coronatus?*” (the text is from [www.augustinus.it/latino/cdd/index2.htm](http://www.augustinus.it/latino/cdd/index2.htm))

<sup>47</sup> A notable exception which will be addressed is Augustine.

<sup>48</sup> Schoeps, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*: 391. David Kimchi, apud Schoeps, *op.cit.*: 391, says: “Although the thing was not accomplished and Isaac was not slain, before God the willingness was reckoned as equal to the deed”. Maimonides holds a similar view (More Nebuchim III: 24)

<sup>49</sup> Augustinus, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, 22, 73.

wrote: “le *De Isaac* ne s’intéresse guère qu’à un épisode de la vie du patriarche, sa rencontre et son mariage avec Rébecca, figure de l’union de l’âme humaine et de l’Eglise des nations avec le Christ.”<sup>50</sup>

It is of course questionable to ascribe a sacrificial interpretation of the death of Christ to Augustine. His account of the atonement, the fact that Christ [was] sacrificed for the sins of mankind, is relatively undeveloped, as argues John Rist, “combining something of Ambrosiaster’s ransom theory (especially in his earlier writings) with intimations of the ‘satisfaction’ theory of Anselm”<sup>51</sup>. The story of Iepthah suits very well for a sacrificial interpretation<sup>52</sup>. Because of this Jerome recalled the story of Iepthah when he discusses the function and the validity of sacrifice. He condemns the vow and the sacrifice of Iepthah’s daughter as being entirely despondent and inefficacious for washing off the sin of the father. “*Numquid, ait, dabo primogenitum meo pro scelere meo, sicuti rex Moab fecisse describitur? Aut fructus uentris meae pro peccato animae meae, quod fecit Iephte, pro temeritate uoto offerens filiam?*”<sup>53</sup>. In the same passage, Jerome disregards the sacrificial interpretation that sin can be washed by blood:

“si mille obtulero arietes, si decem millia hircorum, et totas leuitici uictimas spiritaliter intellegens in me exhibuero, et cadant ex latere meo mille, et decem millia a sinistris meis, tamen nihil dignum dare potero, in quo apprehendam, uel suscipiam deum.”<sup>54</sup>

Jerome connects the sacrifice of Iepthah’s daughter with the other types of sacrifices perpetrated under the Law questioning the idea that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins”. Augustine is in a certain sense agreeing with Jerome’s view, ascribing a spiritual meaning to the practice of sacrifice. By quoting Porphyry on the issue of what sacrifices are appropriate for God gives an indirect answer to the question if human sacrifice is or not worthy of God:

“For God indeed, being the Father of all, is in need of nothing; but for us it is good to adore him by means of justice, charity, and other virtues, and thus to make life itself a prayer to him, by inquiring into and imitating his nature. For inquiring purifies us, and imitation deifies us, by moving us nearer to him.”<sup>55</sup>

However for him the validity of sacrifice was not questioned, nor challenged when it pertained to realities circumscribed by the Law. Only the way of

<sup>50</sup> Gérard Nauroy, *L’Ecriture dans la pastorale d’Ambrose de Milan*, in *Le monde Latine antique et la Bible*, ed. Jacques Fontaine and Charles Pietri, Paris: Beauchesne, 1985: 377.

<sup>51</sup> John Rist, *Augustine of Hippo*, in “The Medieval Theologians. An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period”, ed. G.R. Evans, Blackwell Publishers, 2001: 14.

<sup>52</sup> For a sacrificial interpretation of this episode see, e.g. Pseudo-Justinus Martyr, *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos*, Corpus apologetarum Christianorum saeculi secundi, vol. 5, Ed. Otto, J.C.T.Jena: Mauke, 1881, Repr. 1969<sup>3</sup>, section C, line 5: ‘*Ἐπειδὴ οὖν ὁ Ἰεφθαε τὴν εἰς θεὸν εὐσέβειαν φυλάττων διὰ τῆς θυσίας τῆς θυγατρὸς ἀνεδείχθη, διὰ τοῦτο αὐτοῦ γέγονεν ἡ μνήμη ἐν τῷ καταλόγῳ τῶν δικαίων*. “For Iepthah who observed the piety toward God which was shown in the sacrifice of [his] daughter, because of this the he was mention in the catalogue of the righteous [men].”

<sup>53</sup> Hieronymus, *Commentarii in prophetas minores*. In *Michaeam*, lib.2, cap.6. The Latin text is from <http://clt.brepolis.net/clt/text/text.asp>

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *De civitate Dei* XIX 23. The translation is from the *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* server, at Wheaton College.

perpetrating it was debated. There can be perfect human sacrifice: the sacrifice of Abraham<sup>56</sup>. The comparison with the sacrifice of Iephtah's daughter<sup>57</sup> was a problem that emerged naturally for Augustine, because he had to explain why did God prohibit Abraham for sacrificing Isaac and still aloud Iephtah to conclude it. The difference between these two sacrifices lies in the fact that while Abraham did something, which was asked by God, Iephtah acted against what was prescribed in the Law and without having any special command from God<sup>58</sup>. But if God commended the sacrifice of Abraham did it mean that God found pleasure in such actions? How could Abraham think that such a sacrifice can be pleasing to God and why did Iephtah believe that God will accept the sacrifice of his only-begotten daughter<sup>59</sup>? Augustine answered to these questions saying that although Abraham did not thought that God would accept gleefully human sacrifices he believed that he should not spare his son by disregarding the command of God. In the same time, Abraham, Augustine tells us, believed that God ordained him to do so for He desired to resurrect the dead child and thus revealing future realities<sup>60</sup>. Origen explained this episode in a similar manner<sup>61</sup>. Iephtah on the other hand acted against the prescriptions of the Law, and without the command of God promised to the Lord in a vow a human sacrifice. For Augustine it was clear that a human victim was meant in the oath<sup>62</sup>.

The development of exegesis regarding the vow of Iephtah and the sacrifice of Abraham must take in consideration the aforementioned background.

## 2. Through the Eyes of Christ. The Innovating Tradition. Sacrificial and non-Sacrificial Interpretation

The general problem regards the way in which the first Christian writers and in particular Augustine, Jerome and Ambrose analyzed some texts from Old

<sup>56</sup> However, Basil of Caesarea argued that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son was not the perfect sacrifice, for although he had been ready to give his son, he had not yet given his reaches (Serm. *De renunciatione saeculi* I, PG 31, 628).

<sup>57</sup> *Quaestionum in heptateuchum libri septem*, quaestio 49, "magis hoc illi simile uidetur quod fecit Abraham, quod Dominus specialiter fieri praecepit, non generali lege ut talia sibi sacrificia fieret aliquando mandavit, immo etiam fieri omnino prohibuit."

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*: "distat itaque quod Iephte fecit a facto Abrahae, quoniam ipse iussus obtulit filium, iste autem fecit quod et lege vetebatur et nullo speciali iubebatur imperio."

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*: "quomodo pie crediderit Abraham Deum sacrificiis talibus delectari, si haec inlicite offeruntur Deo, et ideo putat recte credidisse etiam Iephte quod tale sacrificium Deo esse posset acceptum, primo consideret aliud esse ultro uouere, aliud iubenti obtemperare."

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, "deinde habebat quod crederet Abraham, ut propter diuinum imperium non parceret filio, non credens deum tales uictimas libenter accipere, sed hoc eum propterea iussisse, ut resuscitaret occisum et hinc aliquid tamquam deus sapiens demonstraret."

<sup>61</sup> Origenes secundum translationem Rufini, In Genesim homiliae, hom.8, "*Abraham ergo resurrecturum sperabat Isaac et credebat futurum, quod adhuc non erat factum*. Quomodo ergo 'filii' sunt 'Abraham', qui factum non credunt in Christo, quod ille futurum credidit in Isaac? Immo, ut apertius proloquar, sciebat se Abraham futurae veritatis imaginem praeformare, sciebat de semine suo nasciturum Christum, qui et offerendus esset totius mundi verior hostia et resurrecturus a mortuis."

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, par.6, "nec ait: *quodcumque* exierit de ianuis domus meae in obuiam mihi, offeram illud holocaustuma, sed ait: *quicumque* exierit, offeram eum. *Ubi procul nihil aliud quam hominem cogitauit.*"

Testament, which testify for human sacrifice. First we will try to see if we can detect continuity between Jewish thought on the vow of Iepthah and the thinking of Augustine in the context of anti-Manichaen and anti-pagan polemic<sup>63</sup>. Another inquiry would be to see how was defended the authority of Old Testament by them in what regards the vow and the sacrifice of Iepthah. Both Augustine and Ambrose or Jerome regarded Old Testament as the divinely revealed word of God. They could not see the Old Testament literature as a product of a many-times-repeated editorial process and therefore they were compelled to read Old Testament in a Christological key<sup>64</sup>. Thus, the question would be if it were possible for them to ascribe a Christological meaning to the story of Iepthah.

The act of Abraham and the decision of Iepthah to fulfill the vow and the submission of Isaac and Iepthah's daughter to the fatherly will were generally viewed with admiration<sup>65</sup>. Moreover, for Abraham's near sacrifice of his only-begotten son there is no critic in patristic literature, Greek or Latin. What counted was Abraham faith and love of God. Moreover, this parallels the love of God toward men, who like Abraham gave his only son out of love for mankind. Thus in the first case we have the love of man towards God which spares nothing while in the second case we have the love of God to men "since he did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for the sake of all of us, then can we not expect that with him he will freely give us all his gifts?"<sup>66</sup> In the case of Iepthah the story differs only by the fact that he acted without any special command from God while Abraham was directly asked to commit the sacrifice. As for Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac which was praised for the enduring faith and devotion towards God, nearly so was regarded the resolution of Iepthah to remain true to his word by Augustine<sup>67</sup>, while Jerome<sup>68</sup> asks rhetorically whether the faith of the father is prevailing upon the purity of the daughter. Elsewhere, Jerome binds Iepthah's sacrifice of his daughter with his recalling among the saints in the Catalogue of the pious men in the Epistle

<sup>63</sup> Giancarlo Rinaldi, *Biblia Gentium. Primo contributo per un indice delle citazioni, dei riferimenti e delle allusioni alla Bibbia negli autori pagani, greci e latini di età imperiale*, Roma, Edizioni Dehoniane, 1981, 301, where shortly discusses the place of Iepthah sacrifice in anti-Christian polemic.

<sup>64</sup> For us seems obvious that the Old Testament literature in its present form is the product of a many-times-repeated editorial process. However, it still is, a somewhat subjective process to establish what elements in the narratives are old and antedate editorial manipulation. Origen and the subsequent Fathers made it clear that the Holy Spirit is considered to be the author of the Biblical books.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Lamarche, Sacrifice, in *DictSpir (Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, vol. XIV: 52), noted that the Bible opposed the common sacrificial idea that what is dearest to men is most requested by Divinity: "plus celle-ci avait de prix pour l'homme, plus elle devait en avoir pour la divinité. Engagés dans cette voie, pourquoi les hommes n'offriraient-ils pas à la divinité ce qu'ils ont de plus précieux: leurs enfants? Sans doute la Bible a-t-elle donné un coup d'arrêt à cette aberration, du moins en pratique, car l'acte d'Abraham s'apprêtant à sacrifier Isaac a été plus souvent commenté avec admiration qu'avec critique."

<sup>66</sup> Rom. 8, 32. Also, John 3, 16: "16 This is the proof of love, that he laid down his life for us, and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." (The New Jerusalem Bible)

<sup>67</sup> Augustinus, *Quaestionum in heptateucum libri septem*, lib. 7 quaestio 49, par. 14: "uerum tamen etiam hic eius error habet aliquam laudem fidei, qua Deum timuit."

<sup>68</sup> Hieronymus, *Aduersus Iouinianum*, I, 5, linea 44-45, "inter Iephte patrem et filiam uirginem, quae immolata sit domino, dicit nullam fuisse distantiam; quin fidem patris praefert ei, quae caesa sit lugens."

to the Hebrews: “Iephte obtulit filiam uirginem et idcirco in enumeratione sanctorum ab apostolo ponitur.”<sup>69</sup> Augustine, however, addressed differently the issue: why could Iephtah have been mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>70</sup> among those who “worked righteousness.” Because of his faith in God, Augustine explained, he was listed among other prophets or rulers who had also won battles, conquered kingdoms although they did not have a blameless life<sup>71</sup>.

An even more difficult hermeneutic problem was raised by the fact that the Holy Spirit descended upon Iephtah<sup>72</sup>. The narrative, as Augustine observed, would have entailed the conclusion that even the vow and the sacrifice of Iephtah’s daughter had been undertaken under Lord’s command. Straightforwardly, Augustine acknowledged that it is not easy to say whether this sacrifice could be attributed to the Holy Spirit as if God had ordained it in the same way He commanded to Abraham<sup>73</sup>.

Ambrose on the other hand, did not inquire about Iephtah’s faith or obedience nor did he try to explain why was he mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews neither had he commented the descending of the Holy Spirit upon Iephtah but pondered whether the vow should have been performed or not<sup>74</sup>. On this point Augustine is unyielding stressing the power and the irreversibility of the vow. When making a vow one should not rely on the example of Abraham who was impeded by God in accomplishing the sacrifice. Thus God did not prohibit Iephtah for He did not want to leave unpunished such a cruel vow<sup>75</sup>. Ambrose addressed as

<sup>69</sup> Hieronymus, *Epistulae*, 118, vol.55, pag. 442, lin. 14.

<sup>70</sup> Hebr 11:32: “And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” (NKJ)

<sup>71</sup> Augustinus, *Quaestionum in heptateucum libri septem*, lib. 7 quaestio 49, 8: “Unum, quod in Epistola ad Hebraeos iste Iephte inter tales commemoratur, ut eum culpae vereamur, ubi sic scriptum est: *Et quid adhuc dicam? Deficit enim me tempus enarrandi de Gedeon, Barac, Samson, et Iephte, et David, et Samuel, et Prophetis; qui per fidem vicerunt regna, operantes iustitiam consecuti sunt promissiones.*”

<sup>72</sup> Judges, 11, 29-31: “*Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah*, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon. *And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD*, and said, If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 49, 10, “Utrum autem quia posteaquam dictum est: Factus est super Iephte Spiritus Domini, ea secuta sunt, ut votum illud voveret, atque hostes vinceret, et quod voverat redderet, Spiritui Domini omnia deputanda sint, ut perinde habeatur et hoc sacrificium, tamquam id Dominus sicut Abrahae fieri iusserit, non facile dixerim.”

<sup>74</sup> Ambrosius Mediolanensis, *De officiis*, vol. 2, lib. 3, cap.12, par. 79: “Denique in Isaac habemus exemplum, pro quo arietem Dominus statuit immolari sibi. Non semper igitur promissa soluenda omnia sunt. Denique ipse Dominus frequenter suam mutat sententiam sicut Scriptura indicat.” However he acknowledges that he can not “accusare uirum qui necesse habuit implere quod uouerat, sed tamen miserabilis necessitas quae soluitur parricidio.” (*Ibid.*, par.78)

<sup>75</sup> Augustinus, *Quaestionum in heptateucum libri septem*, lib. 7 quaestio 49, par.7, “et ideo huiuscemodi patri poenam fuisse retributam, ne impunitum talis voti relinqueretur exemplum, ut aut magnum aliquid se voverere Deo putarent homines, cum victimas humanas

well the question why did God aloud Iephtah to perform the sacrifice and yet stopped Abraham from doing it<sup>76</sup>. For Iephtah could have followed the example set on by Abraham which shows that God is not delighted by human blood<sup>77</sup>. However, the reason for God's decision remained ambiguous for Ambrose while stating that Iephtah sacrifice served as an example for the future<sup>78</sup>. The question seemed to be a common one since figures among Ambrosiater's<sup>79</sup> *Questions on the Old and New Testament*: "Cum sciamus Abraham prohibitum a Deo ne filium immolaret, quare Iephtae, cum filiam suam libaret, non est prohibitus, sed humano sanguine Deo votum exsoluit?"<sup>80</sup>

Another problem that Augustine had to face was the fact that the story of Iephtah was told in the Bible apparently without condemnation (Judges 11)<sup>81</sup>. For modern scholars, as we have seen, this was a clue that enabled them to state that the episode Iephtah's sacrifice belongs to a époque when human sacrifice was still perpetrated. However, what matter for Augustine, although it appeared obvious to him as well the fact that the story was narrated without condemnation appeared obvious to him as well, was the text of the story in itself and not the religious reality from a certain point in the history of Israel. If the text was written apparently without condemnation it must have been for a deep reason and not as a mere historical account. Therefore he did not analyze the function of the sacrifice but pondered on the moral aspects of the story. Was it necessary for the daughter to

voverent, et, quod est horribilius, filiorum; aut non vera, sed potius simulata eadem vota essent, cum velut exemplo Abrahae sperarent qui vovissent, Deum prohibiturum talia vota compleri."

<sup>76</sup> Ambrosius Mediolanensis, *De uirginate*, 2, 7: "Dicet aliquis: qua ratione illic Deus non permiserit parricidium fieri, hic sit passus impleri?"

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*: "Habuit igitur Iephte quod sequeretur exemplum, quia Dominus sanguine non delactaretur humano."

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*: "Certe dum consilium esset ambiguum, signari debuit oraculo quid et ad praesens factum et in reliquum conueniret exemplum".

<sup>79</sup> "Ambrosiaster" is the named conceived by Erasmus to refer to the author of the first complete commentary on the Pauline epistles, once attributed to Ambrose. Later scholars have ascribed to Ambrosiaster a series of *Questiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, which was transmitted under the name of Augustine. The argument for the attribution of the Questiones to Ambrosiaster is found in Alexander Souter, *A Study of Ambrosiaster*, Text and Studies 7/4; Kraus reprint 1967; also see, Coelestinus Martini, *Ambrosiaster: De auctore, operibus, theologia*, Rome: Pontificum Athaeneum Antonianum, 1944: 50-73.

<sup>80</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Questiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* 43 = Rinaldi 173 (see the following footnote).

<sup>81</sup> R. H. Sales, *Human Sacrifice in Biblical Thought*, Journal of Bible and Religion, 25, 2(1957): 114. See also, J. A. Soggin, *Il galaadita Jefte, Giudici XI, 1-11*, Henoah 1(1979): 334; L. Moraldi, *Espiazione sacrificiale e riti espiatori nel'ambiente biblico e nell' Anticuo Testamento*, Roma: Einaudi, 1956: 174; Roland de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, (1964): 52-83. For what human sacrifice in Old Testament and in particular the sacrifice of Iephtah is generally agreed that it represents a stage of the Jewish religion not yet transformed by the prophetic sermons. Roland de Vaux argued against the view that human sacrifices were common in any one of the Near Eastern cultures. Contrary to popular thought, human sacrifice is a feature, not of primitive societies, but of relatively advanced though morally decadent ones, like Phoenicia, Carthage, Maya Empire. He pointed out that in Old Testament human sacrifice were rare, and occurred in time of extreme peril being at the same time roughly condemned. He implies that in Israel human sacrifice is due to Canaanite influence.

die in order to fulfil the vow? Augustine agrees that the sacrifice was due to the mistake of the oath (*error voti*)<sup>82</sup>.

Again, before going any further one should stress that there is no systematic and coherent thinking on the vow of Iephtah in Augustine, Jerome or Ambrose. For example, Augustine on the one hand praises the obedience of Iephtah to accomplish the vow while still pondering if the obedience had rather meant in this case not to perform the sacrifice, since God prohibited this in his Law. However, this would have meant, Augustine continues, that Iephtah cared more for his own person by spearing his own daughter<sup>83</sup>. Here Augustin seems to have understood Iephtah sacrifice as a renunciation of family ties as he interpreted elsewhere Abraham's near-sacrifice<sup>84</sup>.

Jerome on the other hand asked what would have happened if a dog or a donkey had first come across Iephtah after the victory<sup>85</sup>. Thus Jerome found the vow inappropriate in a peculiar way that it could have prejudice the honor of God by disregarding all the possibilities implied in his words. *Error voti* is merely a semantic problem.

### 3. Creating Identity: Human Sacrifice, Polemics and Allegorical Reading. The Case of Iephtah

Human sacrifice was always a discourse that marked identity in a negative way; it always belonged to the other. Both the Greeks and the Roman assessed their own cultural superiority by attributing human sacrifice to other people that usually dwelled on the fringes of the know world<sup>86</sup> or to those who systematically rejected Graeco-Roman civilization<sup>87</sup>. The accusations of human sacrifice made against the Christians followed the same pattern:

To all appearances, they had barbarized themselves, renouncing their

<sup>82</sup> Augustinus, *Quaestionum in heptateucum libri septem*, quaestio 49, par.14, "uerum tamen etiam hic eius *error* habet aliquam laudem fidei, qua Deum timuit, ut quod uouerat redderet, nec diuini in se iudicii sententiam declinauit, siue sperans Deum prohibitorium, sicut fecit Abrahae, siue eius uoluntatem etiam non prohibentis intellectam facere potius quam contemnere statuens." (<http://clt.brepolis.net/clt/text/text/asp>)

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 49, 15: "Quamquam et hic merito quaeri potest utrum uerius intellegitur hoc Deum nolle fieri, et in eo potius Deo, si non fieret, obediretur, quoniam hoc se nolle et in Abrahae filio et in legitima prohibitione monstrauerat. Verumtamen si propterea Iephte non faceret, sibi potius in unica pepercisse, quam Dei uoluntatem secutus esse uideretur."

<sup>84</sup> Augustinus, *De bono coniugali*, 20, 24.

<sup>85</sup> Hieronymus, *Aduersus Iouinianum*, lib.1, 23: "si tradens tradideris filios Ammon in manibus meis, quicumque exierit de domo mea in occursum mihi, cum reuerti coepero in pace a filiis Ammon erit Domino, et offeram illum in holocaustum. *Si canis (inquiunt), asinus occurrisset, quid faceret?* Ex quo uolunt dei dispensatione esse factum ut qui improspecte uouerat, errorem uotorum in filiae morte sentiret."

<sup>86</sup> For detailed discussion see Rives, *Human Sacrifice*, 69-70: "The significance of human sacrifice as a marker of barbarity was widely understood; so widely, in fact, that by the latter part of the fifth century B.C.E. people were able to manipulate its meaning in order to present new and challenging ideas."

<sup>87</sup> This pertains mainly on Jews who maintained a cultural distance toward Graeco-Romans, and thus it was ascribed to them a 'hostile odium' against all other peoples. This is the testimony of Tacitus (*Historiae* V,5). J. Rives, *Human Sacrifice*, 72, added: "the motif of a secret rite of human sacrifice gave perfect expression to this perception of hidden hostility."

membership in Graeco-Roman society. In fact, while the story about child sacrifice were no doubt false, their underlying message was true: Christians were indeed people who in many respects distanced themselves from their general cultural context<sup>88</sup>.

Tertullian and Minucius Felix or Clement of Alexandria employed the *topos* of human sacrifice in exactly the same way as their non-Christians opponents, depicting the other as inhuman and savage<sup>89</sup>. The Romans and the Greeks through their myths and practices that attested human sacrifice, which were lavishly displayed by Christian writers as an example of bad religion, proved to be in the same likeness with the barbarians of whom they claimed to be horrified<sup>90</sup>. How was human sacrifice explained when it pertains to us, to our culture and inheritance when could not have been denied? The discourse of Augustine and Ambrose that discusses episodes of human sacrifice from Old Testament belongs to the “theoretical” époque of engagement with pagan culture. At this time Christianity had won the war. Long before the time of Augustine and Ambrose even the non-Christians agreed that they were false accusations<sup>91</sup>.

With the triumph of the church humanity and civilization were notions that depended on belonging or not to the good religion. “Thus in the later fourth century C.E. we find human sacrifice attributed to the pagans who rejected Christianity and to the heretics who distorted it”<sup>92</sup>. The motive of human sacrifice played a central role in defining identities in Late Antiquity. However, the problem seems to be more complicated than it is presented by Rives:

“The motif of human sacrifice provides particularly interesting insight into the relationship between Christianity and the Graeco-Roman tradition. On one hand, it constitutes a particular example of a broader phenomenon, Christian appropriation and adaptation of pagan culture. Just as Christians from Justin to Augustine presented Christianity as the fulfillment of Graeco-Roman philosophy, so too their attacks on the pagan practice of human sacrifice allowed them to represent themselves as the true caretakers of the civilized values that Greek and Romans had first espoused.”<sup>93</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, 81.

<sup>90</sup> Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* I, 21, 3, apud J. Rives, *Human Sacrifice*, 76: “But in the case of barbarians it is not so astonishing, since their religion corresponds to their culture; but our people, who have always claimed for themselves the glory of gentleness and humanity, are they not shown to be even more monstrous because of these sacrilegious rites? For those people are considered more criminal, who although they have been refined by the study of liberal arts, abandon their humanity, than those who, barbarous and untutored, slip into evil deeds through of good ones.”

<sup>91</sup> Origenes, *Contra Celsum*, 4, 40 (ed. M. Borret in *Sources Chrétiennes* 132, 1967; 136, 1968; 147, 1969.) Important discussions on the issue include J.-P. Waltzing, *Le Crime rituel reproché aux chrétiens du IIe siècle*, *Musée Belge* 29 (1925): 209-38. See also R. M. Grant, *Some Early Christian Immoralities*, *Ancient Society* 23 (1992): 72-82; J. Rives, *Human Sacrifice among Pagans and Christians*, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 85 (1995): 65-85 (hereafter Rives, *Human Sacrifice*). This article proved to be very useful although discusses only the social meaning of accusations of practising human sacrifice, leaving aside the ritual meaning.

<sup>92</sup> Rives, *Human Sacrifice*: 83.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*: 84.

The argument of human sacrifice in defining identity was a dangerous and ambiguous weapon in the polemic with the pagans and with the heretics (mainly Manichaens) and shifted to other shores, such is the authority of Old Testament. In this respect human sacrifice could not have been a tool of marking identity. The polemic regarding sacrifice and human sacrifice moved to more profound aspects, than simple denigration. It was a quest for assessing the validity of sacrifice in pagan religion from the part of the pagans while the Christians strove to point out the essential difference between sacrifice in pagan culture and sacrifice in Christianity. The question that aroused was whether there is significant difference between the Scripture and Pagan culture. The story of Iephtah by its cruelty seemed to give reason to the Manichaens who were shouting loud the “immorality” of Old Testament God. The answer of Augustine and of the Church in general to such critics was the allegorical or typological exegesis. As James Preus observed, the Fathers agreed with Marcion<sup>94</sup> in a very important sense that “taken in its literal, historical meaning, the Old Testament has little to offer as a book for Christians.”<sup>95</sup> Therefore various kinds of interpretations emerged that tried to resist the critics of pagan elite. The hermeneutic principle that lies under the allegoric, *tropological* or *anagogical* interpretation of the Old Testament and the very reason for which the same exegesis was denied<sup>96</sup> for pagan myths was the fact that beyond the words of the text it was possible to discern historical facts. If words signified things it was possible that in turn the things signified by the words can signify other things<sup>97</sup>.

<sup>94</sup> Marcion was regarded the father of all heresiarchs who challenged the authority of Old Testament. Lieu, Samuel N. C. *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East*. Leiden and New York: Brill, 1994, 138. The methods employed in refuting Manichaeism were developed through the centuries in the anti-heretical polemics. As Lieu says: “The Late Roman Church was highly experienced in combating heresies within her ranks. When faced by the challenge of the missionary efforts of the Manichaean, her leaders could draw from the well stocked armoury of ideas and arguments which their predecessors had built up in earlier disputations with Gnostics and Marcionites.”

<sup>95</sup> James Samuel Preus, *From Shadow to Promise. Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to Young Luther*, Cambridge Ma: Harvard University Press, 1969: 10 (hereafter Preus, *Old Testament Interpretation*); John Rist, *Augustine of Hippo*, in “The Medieval Theologians. An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period”, ed. G.R. Evans, Blackwell Publishers, 2001: 4 (“Ambrose... conveyed to Augustine the practice of reading the Old Testament allegorically-which helped resolve Manichean doubts about its worthiness-and the notion that God must be recognized as immaterial spirit.”)

<sup>96</sup> However, the employment of the same allegorical exegesis was denied to Christians by the Pagans. See Giancarlo Rinaldi, *Biblia Gentium. Primo contributo per un indice delle citazioni, dei riferimenti e delle allusioni alla Bibbia negli autori pagani, greci e latini di età imperiale*, Roma, Edizioni Dehoniane, 1981: 180; Celsus apud Origenes, *Contra Celsum* IV 50, ed. M. Borret in Sours Chretiens 13, 1967: “I più ragionevoli fra I cristinai e giudei si sforzano di spiegare allegoricamente quei passi, che non é possibile intendere in qualsivoglia senso allegorico, ma al contrario sono narazioni mitiche, manifestamente e singolarmente schiocche.”

<sup>97</sup> V. Messina, *L'esegesi tropologica presso i padri e le bibliche figure di Abele e di Caino in Ambrogio ed Agostino*, Studia Patristica XV. Papers presented to the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford 1975, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingston, Berlin 1984: Akademie Verlag: 188 (hereafter Messina, *L'esegesi tropologica*). This is the reason for which Origen (and not only him) denies the allegoric capacity for pagan texts. “Tali figure mitologiche, non contenendo dei *tropoi* reali o comunque storicamente sussistiti, sono vuote di significato e quindi non suscettibili di quell'esegesi tropologica che

Throughout the centuries, the method of allegorical interpretation was the main tool used to mitigate earlier texts that were suddenly found culturally shocking<sup>98</sup> in a changed historical, religious, or cultural milieu. Also one should

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può derivare soltanto da un contenuto semantico, riposto ma alla base del rapporto tra significate e significato.” Jesus himself established the validity and righteousness for interpreting allegorically the Old Testament. Luke makes this idea perfectly clear at the end of his Gospel when he appeared on the road to Emmaus to the two disciples: “*Then he began with Moses and all the prophets and interpreted for them what pertained to himself in every part of scripture* (Luke: 24: 13-35)”.

<sup>98</sup> The discussion on concerning “allegorical” exegesis as opposed to “literal” as well as that of a connected issue, namely, whether there is any difference between “typology” and “allegory” has a long history. Jean Daniélou, as early as 1950, advocated a sharp distinction between allegory and typology. In his opinion, the former would be an inheritance from the ‘pagan’ philosophical approach which discarded history by neglecting the historical referent of the texts, while the latter would be “an authentic extension of the literal sense with roots in the Palestinian exegesis.” (*Sacramentum futuri: études sur les origines de la typologie biblique*, Paris: Beauchesne, 1950: 15-16 and 52) Thus for Daniélou, among the Fathers, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Ambrose, and Gregory of Nyssa were the representatives of this antihistoricist approach. Daniélou’s distinction is based on the assumption that there is a sharp distinction between Alexandrian and Antiochene exegesis. However, Karlfried Froeichlich, considered such a distinction to be a modern construct, and he insisted that “the Antiochene theologians admitted a higher sense of Scripture”, which is identical with  $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\iota\alpha$  “allegorical interpretation” (*Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984: 20-21). He also maintained that the Antiochene exegetic approach had the same purpose as that practiced in Alexandria: to lead the reader towards a spiritual truth. For a similar opinion, see Maurice Wiles, *Theodore of Mopsuestia as Representative of the Antiochene school*, in “The Cambridge History of the Bible”, ed. P.K. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970: 20-21; while speaking of Theodor of Mopsuestia, this author acknowledged that “the Antiochene theologians admitted a higher sense of Scripture”. In the same line of thought, see John O’Keefe, *Impossible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology*, Theological Studies 58 (1997): 42, who noted that an “emerging consensus of scholars suggests that the difference between Alexandria and Antioch cannot be explained by an appeal either to method or to historical awareness,” “because there was no historical-criticism in antiquity, and neither school was interested in history [as such].” In an earlier study, *Christianizing Malachi: Fifth-Century Insights from Cyril of Alexandria*, *Vigiliae Christianae* 50 (1996): 140, when characterizing Cyril of Alexandria’s *Commentary* on Isaiah, O’Keefe argued that the methodology of the Alexandrian exegete was “essentially identical to that of his Antiochene counterparts.” Henri de Lubac, ‘*Typologie*’ et ‘*allégorisme*’, *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947): 204, 206-207, also dismissed the distinction between Alexandrian ‘allegory’ and Antiochene ‘theoria’. For a similar rejection, see Jacques Guillet, “Les Exégèses d’Alexandrie et d’Antioche: Conflit ou malentendu?” *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947): 257-302. Jean Pépin, in his *Mythe et allégorie. Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes*, Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1976, seems to avoid any sharp distinction between the two styles of exegesis. As this distinction was increasingly blurred in the scholarship, a new terminology has been suggested in order to avoid distinguishing between the literal-typological and allegorical exegesis. De Lubac, in his ‘*Typologie*’ et ‘*allégorisme*’: 204 and 208, suggested that modern scholars should implement a new vocabulary in order to eschew the shortcomings of the traditional distinction between typology and allegory. This was the aim of Elizabeth A. Clark in *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999: 74-75, where she tried to bring a “small contribution to the development of such a vocabulary and to a revised understanding of one aspect of patristic

bear in mind when analyzing the method of allegory that genuine objectivity has never existed and never will. As Frederick Norris noted the twentieth-century exegesis “is surely a contemporary form of allegory, and no less useful because it is. Positivistic historical treatments of Scripture depend upon their own worldviews and assumptions”.<sup>99</sup> From this point of view, the allegorical method is not merely an interpretative method, but a tool to define and express identity. David Dawson perceived this function of the allegorical interpretation very well when he emphasized the fact that the distinction between literal and non-literal readings “stemmed from efforts made by readers to secure for themselves and their communities social and cultural identity, authority and power.”<sup>100</sup> This very function of allegory emerges plainly from Augustine, Ambrose or Jerome’s works when they had to oppose those critics who contested the authority of Old Testament. However, this does not confine the allegorical method to a mere tool of resisting pagan critics. The method is essentially the perception of the Revelation in its historical dimension<sup>101</sup>. Acknowledging that the Messiah had already come, the Christian intellectuals developed such hermeneutical rules in order to read the Jewish Scriptures in the light of this coming. This new approach to Scriptures is sometimes depicted as being tantamount to a revolution<sup>102</sup>. Among the Fathers only Augustine applied a thorough typological reading to the story of Iephtah.

Augustine records the impious adversaries, of the Scriptures, who on the basis of the episode of Iephtah accused the Jews of having performed and practiced human sacrifice:

“Regarding the daughter of Iephtah which the father offered her in holocaustum to God –because he made a vow when he was at war, that if he wins, he would offer in holocaustum, the first person coming out from his house to meet him. For after he vowed, he won the battle and his daughter showing up he maintained the promise made in the oath. This inquiry is made by some people who are eagerly looking to know what meaning has this story and they try to

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exegesis.” She proposed a new term, “figurative interpretation,” which should stand for both types of exegesis, thus she would say “The Fathers employ ‘spiritual,’ that is, figurative, readings of Scriptures for a variety of reasons” (*Ibid.*, 78)

<sup>99</sup> Frederick Norris, *Gregory Nazianzen: Constructing and Constructed by Scripture*, in “The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity”, ed. Paul. M. Blowers, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997: 150.

<sup>100</sup> David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992: 2.

<sup>101</sup> The temporal dimension of the allegorical method as a development within the Christian-Jewish tradition is brilliantly explained by Marcel Simon, *The Bible in the Earliest Controversies between Jews and Christians*, in “The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity”: 59. We can not say it better words than Marcel Simon, therefore is worth quoting: “In Philo, the temporal dimension is absent, so that allegorical interpretation can be spoken of “vertically”: the literal sense contains moral or metaphysical truths, precepts of the Law or biblical-historical episodes and personages which convey heavenly and eternal realities. Christian allegory, on the contrary, without totally spurning this vertical aspect, adjoined another, more important “horizontal” dimension, as it were: precepts, institutions, figures and personages in the Old Testament signaled Christian realities. Allegory thus became for Christians essentially prefigurative, turning into typology”.

<sup>102</sup> Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Christian Hermeneutical Revolution and its Double Helix*, in “The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World”, ed. L.V. Rutgers, P.W. van der Horst, H. W. Havelaar, L. Teugels, Leuven, 1998: 13.

solved it with a pious spirit, *while others who are opposed to the holy Scriptures are putting this problem with a blasphemous impiety*, presenting this in the highest degree as a crime, saying that *the God of the Law and of the Prophets would have found delight even in human sacrifices. To their calumnies we respond* in the first place, that God of Law and of the Prophets, and to say it clearly, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and the God of Iacob was not even delighted by those sacrifices in which were offered sheep in holocaustum, *but the sacrifices meant that they were rites of symbolical meaning and shadows for future realities (umbrae futurorum).*<sup>103</sup>

Under those who are opposed (*qui scripturis his sanctis inperita impietate adversantur*) to the Holy Scriptures we may discern the Manichaens, who are sharply distinguishing between the God of Old Testament and the God made known by Christ. The same distinction between Old and New Testament was operated by an anonymous writer against whom Augustine wrote *Contra aduersarium legis et prophetarum*<sup>104</sup>. One of the issues that arouse in the polemic was whether God found delight in bloody sacrifices. The anonymous author believed that God of the Mosaic Law and the Prophets was not the true God, but an evil demon since He might have derived pleasure from sacrifices: “et ideo non est credendus Deus verus qui sacrificiis delectatur”<sup>105</sup>. Moreover, he would have been even thirsty for human blood:

“Eat iste et clamet ore aperto et oculis clausis, quasi ‘*confessus sit Deus suam crudelitatem, quia dicit per prophetam: Exacuum sicut fulgur gladium meum, inebriabo sagittas meas sanguine et gladius meus manducabit carnes de sanguine vulneratorum*’. De quibus verbis sic iste accusat Deum, velut ‘*semper humanum sanguinem esurientem*’ quasi dixerit: ‘*Inebriabo me sanguine*’; aut: ‘*manducabo carnes de sanguine vulneratorum*’.”<sup>106</sup>

Augustine without pondering whether human sacrifice is fit for unveiling future realities as he did when he explained the vow and the sacrifice of Iephtah<sup>107</sup> seems to have implied that all the sacrifices of the Old Law foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ: “Sic ergo et sacrificia visibilia, cum sint in terrenis rebus

<sup>103</sup> Augustinus Hiponensis, *Questionum in Heptateuchum libri septem*, questio 49, (<http://clt.brepolis.net/clt/text/text.asp>): “*De filia Iephte quod eam pater in holocaustuma obtulit deo-quoniam in bello uouerat, si uicisset, eum se holocaustuma oblaturum, qui sibi de domo exiens occurrisset; quod cum uouisset, uicit et occurrente sibi filia quod uouerat reddidit-solet esse mage et ad diiudicandum difficillima quaestio quibusdam quid sibi hoc uelit nosse cupientibus et pie quarentibus, quibusdam uero qui scripturis his sanctis inperita impietate adversantur, hoc maxime in crimen uocantibus, quod legis et prophetarum deus etiam humanis sacrificiis fuerit delectatus. Quorum calumniis sic primitus respondemus, ut deum legis et prophetarum, atque ut expressius dicam, deum Abraham et deum Isaac nec illa sacrificia delectauerit, ubi pecorum holocausta offerebatur, sed, quod significatiua fuerint et quaedam umbrae futurorum.*”

<sup>104</sup> Roland J. Teske, *Sacrifice in Augustine's Contra aduersarium legis et prophetarum*, *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997): 254-59.

<sup>105</sup> Augustinus, *Contra aduersarium legis et prophetarum libri duo*, I, 18, 37.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 16, 33.

<sup>107</sup> *Questionum in heptateuchum libri septem*, lib. 7 questio 49, 2.

exigua, magnarum quoniam divinarum signa sunt rerum.”<sup>108</sup>

However he added that just as one reality is signified by many expressions and in many languages, so the one true only sacrifice was previously signified by many symbolic sacrifices:

“venit unicum sacrificium, cuius umbrae fuerunt illa omnia non hoc improbantia, sed hoc significantia. Sicut enim res una multis locutionibus et multis linguis significari potest, sic unum verum et singulare sacrificium multis est antea sacrificiorum significatum figuris.”<sup>109</sup>

The biblical episode of the sacrifice of Iephtah’s daughter was invoked in the anti-Christian debate as well. This emerges from the text of *Questiones et responsiones ad Orthodoxos*<sup>110</sup>. The question 110 displays the believe that through human sacrifices God is better praised than through the sacrifice of irrational beings and this is shown in the sacrifice of Iephtah’s daughter. The highest sacrifice that one could do, that will be regarded more appropriate for God<sup>111</sup>:

“If God in the law established to be made for him sacrifices of irrational beings, so that through those man will manifest praise for him, why are the Greeks regarded to be more impious toward their own Gods, since they are praising God in a better way through the sacrifice of rational beings. For God is rather better praised through the sacrifice of rational beings than through the sacrifice of irrational beings, and for this the sacrifice of rational beings is more holy. However, this is shown by the Iephtah the wiser man, who offering in sacrifice his own daughter, is recalled in the Epistle

<sup>108</sup> *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum libri duo* I, 16, 30.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 19, 38.

<sup>110</sup> The text of *Questiones et responsiones ad Orthodoxos* was discovered along with other two smaller works in the Parisinus Graecus 450 and in the codex 273 from the Monastery of Holy Sepulchre from Constantinopol. Harnack, Diodor von Tarsus vier pseudo-justinische Schriften als Eigentum Diodorus, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, XXI 4 (1901), identified Diodor of Tarsus as being the author of these corpus. More recent studies, G. Bardy, *La littérature patristique des questiones et responsiones sur l’Ecriture Sainte* (hereafter Bardy, *La littérature patristique*), *Revue Biblique* 41 (1932): 210-236, attributes the authorship to Theodoret of Cyrus. G. Bardy argued that the source of these questions would be Celsus, Porphyrius or Iulianus. However he mentions that is difficult to identify what particular question pertains to each author, 216 “il est difficile de donner ici une réponse ferme, car beaucoup d’objections se sont transmises à travers les siècles, de Celse à Porphyre, de Porphyre à Julian, changement à peine de forme et traitées plus o moins come des lieux communs”.

<sup>111</sup> Pseudo-Justinus Martyr, *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos* (0646: 009) “*Corpus apologetarum Christianorum saeculi secundi*, vol. 5, Ed. Otto, J.C.T. Jena: Mauke, 1881, Repr. 1969<sup>3</sup>. Morel page 454, section A, line 7. Ἐρώτησις. Εἰ τὰς ἀλόγων θυσίας ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ προσέταξε γίνεσθαι, ὥστε ταύταις τὴν περὶ αὐτὸν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τιμὴν ἐπιδείκνυσθαι, πῶς διὰ τὸ θύειν ἀνθρώπους Ἕλληνες δείκνυνται [ τοῖς ] ἀσεβέστεροι ( ὅπερ φάσκουσιν ὑπὸ παλαιῶν γεγονέναι χάριν τοῦ πλείονος τιμῆς τοὺς παρ’ αὐτοῖς νομιζομένους θεοὺς ἀξιούσθαι), μειζρόνως αὐτοὺς τῆ τῶν λογικῶν θυσία τιμώντες; ὅσω γὰρ τοῦ ἀλόγου τὸ λογικὸν τιμιώτερον, τοσούτω καὶ ἡ τούτου θυσία σεμινοτέρα ἐκείνης. καὶ τοῦτο δείκνυνται ἐκ τῶν κατὰ τὸν Ἰεφθάε σαφέστερον, ὅς, τὴν ἰδίαν θυγατέρα προσκομίσας θυσίαν, ἐν τῇ πρὸς Ἑβραίους ἐπιστολῇ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀποστόλου ἐν τῷ καταλόγῳ τῶν ἐυσεβῶν μνημονεύεται.

toward Hebrews by the apostle in the catalogue of the pious men.”

The question appears in the context of anti-Christian polemic and alludes to a conception of human sacrifice not yet purified of sacrificial meaning. It can be interpreted as a “set back” in the general framework of understanding sacrifice if we remember the argument of Plutarch from *Peri Deisidaimonia* where he asks whether “would it not have been better, for those Gauls and Scythians to have had absolutely no conception, no vision, no tradition regarding the gods than to believe in the existence of gods who take delight in the blood of human sacrifice and hold this to be the most perfect offering and holy rite?”<sup>112</sup>. This is the very conception on human sacrifice in which the sacrifice of Iephtah is brought forth to resist to the Christian critic of human sacrifice, which was perpetrated in pagan culture<sup>113</sup>. Moreover, the explanation of God’s compliance for Iephtah’s sacrifice was not that He was delighted by human blood but that he wanted to convey a lesson for the dire consequences of the oath<sup>114</sup>.

The sacrifice of Iephtah is employed in the *Questiones et responsiones ad Orthodoxos* in the defense of pagan human sacrifice. It is rather an unusually way of defending pagan sacrifice. The discussion of Christian and Neoplatonist writers was concerned with the fact that whatever gifts were offered to God had to be worthy of him. The dearest thing that men can offer to God, according to the text quoted above is the life itself in its pure concrete sense. Human life offered to God as a sacrifice. This is an up side down interpretation of what thing would best befit God as it is presented in Neoplatonic and Patristic Texts<sup>115</sup>. Augustine did not replied to this type of critique, aspect that can enable us to state that his target where enemies within the Church. Non-Christians used here the argument for pointing out that Jewish gospels were not radically different from pagan scriptures. Human sacrifice is to be found in either of them. The question that arouses for them and in particularly for Augustine was how can be God reconciled with the practice of sacrifice. For human sacrifice the problem is even more stringent and Augustine puts it straightforwardly, inquiring if the future goods can be symbolically represented through human sacrifice:

“But it is worth inquiring if even human sacrifices can signify future realities. It is not that the death of human victims however

<sup>112</sup> Plut., *Superst.* 171b-c, in the Loeb translation of F. C. Babbitt.

<sup>113</sup> The construction of the ‘category’ of pagan parallels the Greek construction of the category ‘barbarian’. See the bibliography from footnote 24 from Rives, *Human Sacrifice*: 69.

<sup>114</sup> Pseudo-Justinus Martyr, *Quaestiones et responsiones ad orthodoxos* (0646: 009), in *Corpus apologetarum Christianorum saeculi secundi*, vol. 5, Ed. Otto, J.C.T. Jena: Mauke, 1881, Repr. 1969<sup>3</sup>. Morel page 454, section A, line 35 συνεχώρησε δὲ ὁ θεός προσενεχθῆναι αὐτὴν εἰς θυσίαν, οὐχ ὡς ἀνθρωπίνῳ αἵματι τερόμενος, ἀλλὰ πρὸς διδασκαλίαν τῶν ἐξῆς ἀνθρώπων τοῦ μηδέποτε ἀόριστως εὐξασθαι τῷ θεῷ.

<sup>115</sup> “Christianity did repudiate the actual practice of sacrifice and proudly proclaimed a purely spiritual cult, but in regarding martyrdom and moral and spiritual qualities as sacrifices, not to mention the death of Christ and the Eucharist, it was the same position as the later Platonists who sought to defend all practices of paganism.” (Frances M. Young, *The Idea of Sacrifice in Neoplatonic and Patristic Texts*, *Studia Patristica XI*. Papers presented to the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford 1967, ed. F.L. Cross, Berlin 1972: Akademie Verlag: 280)

destined to die at some time should inspire us terror and fear, if these victims who willingly accepted to be sacrificed would receive for ever gratification from God. But [should inspire us terror and fear] if would be true this, that these kind of sacrifices are not unpleasing to God. Nonetheless the scripture shows sufficiently clear that [these sacrifices] are unpleasing to God.”<sup>116</sup>

The exegetical method employed by Augustine on the vow and on the sacrifice of Iephtah's daughter distinguishes very sharply between the historical, literary meaning of the story and the allegorical content<sup>117</sup> of this episode and thus befits very well for a case study of Augustine's hermeneutics<sup>118</sup>. The aim of the allegorical interpretation is to find a spiritual meaning of the historical events that do not teach literally faith or love<sup>119</sup>. The result of this distinction is that “the clear sense of Scripture comprises in itself two distinct levels of value: some of it is edifying (teaching faith, hope and love) in itself and some of it is not. And what is not edifying... is to be ‘allegorized’.”<sup>120</sup> We follow here Preus' opinion<sup>121</sup> that Augustine's view tends radically to diminish, quantitatively, the amount of the Old Testament that can be understood in its literally meaning. The outcome would be that the whole Old Testament can be read allegorically, although there can be certain episodes that were regarded unfit from disclosing higher realities.

This would be the very case with Iephtah the judge. Only, Augustine displays an allegorical interpretation to almost every detail of the story, while others, like Ambrose<sup>122</sup> or Jerome<sup>123</sup> are more cautious in ascribing allegorical meaning to the

<sup>116</sup> *Quaestionum in heptateuchum libri septem, questio 49, 2*, “ sed utrum etiam humanis sacrificiis significari oportuerit, merito quaeritur: non quo mortes hominum quandoque moriturorum in hac causa exhorrescere et formidare deberemus, si illi, qui haec de se fieri gratanter acciperent, in aeternam remunerationem commendarentur deo. Sed si hoc uerum esset, hoc genus sacrificiorum deo non displiceret: displicere autem deo satis euidenter eadem scriptura testatur.”

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 49, 16, where Augustine makes a clear distinction between the discussion that pertains to historical issues and the spiritual meaning of the story: “Let's try now to examine and to present briefly, with the help of God, what things wants the Spirit of God to prefigure with this action through Iephtah, through his imprudence or his obedience...”

<sup>118</sup> Preus, *Old Testament Interpretation*: 10-23. On Augustine's hermeneutics see Jean Pèpin, *Saint Augustin et la fonction protreptique de l'allegorie*, in *Recherches Augustiniennes I* (1958): 243-286.

<sup>119</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* III, 10, 14: “quicquid in sermone divino neque ad morum honestatem neque ad fidei veritatem proprie referri potest, figuratum esse cognoscas.” (the text is from <http://clt.brepolis.net/clt/text/text/asp>)

<sup>120</sup> Preus, *Old Testament Interpretation*, 14.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>122</sup> Gérard Nauroy, *L'Écriture dans la pastorale d'Ambrose de Milan*, in “Le monde Latin antique et la Bible”, ed. Jacques Fontaine and Charles Pietri, Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1985: 398, observes that although Ambrose uses for the Bible exegesis the distinction between the three senses of the Scripture, that corresponds to three types of exegesis *secundum naturam*, *secundum fidem*, and *in mysterio* he does not follow “la triple clé exégétique d'Origène, qui croit à la nécessité d'expliquer chaque passage de l'Écriture du point de vue de la lettre, des *moralia* et des *mysteria*, les deux derniers termes pouvant être inversés”. This observation is important if we consider the role of allegorical exegesis in Ambrose's thought. *Ibid.*: 378 “L'exégèse est bien pour Ambrose un mode de pensée fondamental, plus qu'une méthode ou un genre: partout requise, partout présente, on ne saurait l'enfermer dans une catégorie littéraire particulière.”

episode. Regardless of how should be understood Iepthah's act either as a measure of his faith or of his imprudence Augustine proceeds to disclose the hidden meaning of the story<sup>124</sup>. Thus through Iepthah's daughter is symbolized the chastity of the Church and by the very name of "daughter" is signified the Church<sup>125</sup>. Moreover, the daughter symbolizes the Church since she had been sent by her father to bewail her virginity for sixty days, for the Church is composed by persons from the six periods in which is divided the history of humanity. The sixth period unfolds the time of the Church, as if it would be sixty days in which the Church bewails her virginity<sup>126</sup>.

For Ambrose as well as for Jerome the episode of Iepthah was not so much an exercise of their hermeneutical method since they did not read systematically the story of Iepthah in the light of Christ's coming<sup>127</sup>. For Ambrose the story of

<sup>123</sup> Hieronymus, *Contra Iohannem Hierosolytam*, lib.1, par. 23, the translation is from the *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* server, at Wheaton College: "And whereas he prefers the fidelity of the father Jephthah to the tears of the virgin daughter, that makes for us. For we are not commending virgins of the world so much as those who are virgins for Christ's sake, and most Hebrews blame the father for the rash vow he made, "If thou wilt indeed deliver the children of Ammon into mine hand, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be for the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. Supposing (they say) a dog or an ass had met him, what would he have done? *Their meaning is that God so ordered events that he who had improvidently made a vow, should learn his error by the death of his daughter.*" Jerome discusses on the vow of Iepthah in a different context, defending the institution of marriage. In the paragraph number 5 when he lists the episodes from the Bible where God showed to be propitious to those who bore children, even by acting in an impious way, he implies that God prefers procreation to virginity: "He praises Samson, I may even say extravagantly panegyricizes the uxorious Nazarite. Deborah also and Barak are mentioned, because, although they had not the benefit of virginity, they were victorious over the iron chariots of Sisera and Jabin. He brings forward Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, and extols her for arming herself with the stake. He says there was no difference between Jephthah and his virgin daughter, who was sacrificed to the Lord: nay, of the two, he prefers the faith of the father to that of the daughter who met death with grief and tears. (inter Iephte patrem et filiam uirginem, quae immolata sit domino, dicit nullam fuit distantiam; quin potius fidem patris praefert ei, quae caesa sit lugens)".

<sup>124</sup> Augustinus, *Quaestionum in heptateucum libri septem*, lib. 7 quaestio 49, 16, "Nunc iam quid Spiritus Domini, sive per nescientem Iephte sive per scientem, sive per eius imprudentiam sive per obedientiam, sive per offensionem sive per fidem, in hac re gesta praefiguraverit, quantum Deus adiuvat, requiramus, breviterque pendamus."

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 49, 26: "Sed quia huius Iephte coniux virgo esse non potuit, in eo quod filia potius occurrit, et inulta non remansit prohibitum sacrificium voventis audacia, et *virginitas Ecclesiae figurata est. Nec abhorret a vero, quod filiae nomine eadem significatur Ecclesia*"

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*: "Sed quoniam tunc fiet, cum completa fuerit sexta aetas saeculi, ideo sexaginta dierum a virginitate dilatio postulata est. Ex omnibus quippe aetatibus Ecclesia congregatur. Quarum prima est, ab Adam usque ad diluuium: secunda a diluuiio, id est, a Noe usque ad Abraham: tertia ab Abraham usque ad David: quarta a David usque ad transmirationem in Babyloniam: quinta ab hac transmiratione usque ad Virginis partum: *sexta inde usque in huius saeculi finem. Per quas sex aetates tamquam per sexaginta dies flevit sancta virgo Ecclesia virginalia sua*".

<sup>127</sup> The difference between the various types of Christian exegesis was clearly formulated by Gerhard Ebeling in *The New Hermeneutics and the Young Luther*, *Theology Today* 21 (1964): 37-39, where he explains that *allegoria, tropologia, anagogia* correspond to three capital virtues of Christian life, that is faith, love and hope.

Iephtah is an *ethicus sermo* while for Augustine the *tropological exegesis*<sup>128</sup> is replaced by a typological or allegorical one, Iephtah's daughter being a *typos* for the Church as was Isaac a *typos* for Christ himself. Moreover even Iephtah was a *typos* for Christ as well<sup>129</sup>. Augustine's discussion on the allegorical meaning of Iephtah's biography and on all the implications of this episode is certainly unique and more complex than is to be found in the previous and even later commentaries on the story of Iephtah.

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<sup>128</sup> "In quest'orbita dell'esegesi alessandrina si innesta quella prevalentemente morale di Ambrogio e di Agostino, benché i due Padri non adoperino la translitterazione del termine greco (τρόπος), ma facciano uso della volgata traduzione *moralis*." (Messana, *L'esegesi tropologica*: 190)

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