



Ad Imaginem et Similitudinem:
The Creation of Man in Isidore of Seville

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ABSTRACT

Several works of Bishop Isidore of Seville (c. AD 560-636) deal with the creation of the world and mankind, and subsidiary theological questions such as the relation between creator and creature, time and eternity, and fall and salvation. In *De natura rerum*, *Etymologiae* and even in the *Sententiae* Isidore occupies himself with these issues closely related to pastoral and doctrinal concerns. This paper focuses primarily on how Isidore, based on patristic and biblical sources, conceives the creation of man and its consequences. What was the place of man within the divine order? Made in the image of his Creator, man was also a creature, corruptible and mortal. The main question posed by this essay is how this special condition of man impacted Isidore's thought.

ESSAY

The creation of the world and humankind has received widespread attention from exegetes of all generations, raising important questions about nature, the cosmos, time, and eternity, among other significant issues. The story of creation, as narrated in the book of *Genesis*, was, therefore, a central text for early Christian theologians interested in revisiting the variety of theological, anthropological and soteriological aspects contained in divine revelation. Indeed, in the Patristic period, the primeval history



presented by Genesis attracted immense interest among Christian exegetes,¹ a tradition that could be traced back to Jewish exegesis.² This interest resulted in a large body of commentaries and homilies, such as those composed by Irenaeus of Lyon (AD 130-202), Origen (185-c.254), Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-379), Ambrose of Milan (c. 340-397), and Augustine of Hippo (354-430), to name a few.

Isidore (c. 506-636), Bishop of Seville from c. 600 to 636, was no exception. His interest in exploring issues around Creation was reflected in several works, especially in his *De natura rerum* and *Etymologiae*. The question of the origin of the world and mankind played a significant role throughout Isidore's life and career, as it was profoundly related to pastoral and doctrinal concerns. This essay considers the creation of man in Isidore's thought and intends to examine significant aspects of Isidore's understanding of the human condition against the political and religious background of seventh-century Hispania. By addressing this question, I intend to illustrate Isidore's conception of the relation between Creator and creature and elicit his perspectives on the position of man within the plan designed by God.

Isidore's theology draws upon the patristic tradition of biblical interpretation, which he sought to teach and promote; the appeal to the Church Fathers' texts has often been qualified as a simple replication lacking any trace of originality. In this process, however, Isidore selected, organized and even adapted his patristic sources to meet his own contemporary objectives. How did Isidore do this, and how did inherited notions

¹ The literature on this topic is vast. See particularly Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Marie-Anne Vannier, *La creation chez les Peres* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011); Craig A. Evans et al., *The Book of Genesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), and Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, eds., *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

² Cf. Andrew Louth, "The Fathers on Genesis," in *The Book of Genesis*, ed. Craig Evans (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 561-78.

of man impact his thought and writing? Which insights attracted his interest, based on his episcopal concerns? In order to approach these questions, I have limited the main body of this essay to Isidore's *Sententiae*³ and *De ortu et obitu Patrum*.⁴ The study is not exhaustive, and additional Isidorian works could be examined against these questions in future analyses. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this study will demonstrate crucial aspects of the intellectual and religious context in which Isidore wrote and lived.

The Creation of Man in Isidore of Seville. The Interpretation of Gen. 1.26

Man occupies a significant position within the divine order: he is mutable and corruptible, as any other creature, but formed in the image and likeness of God.⁵ Under the guidance of the Church, moreover, man can abandon sin and return to the correct (salvific) path. This condition of man as a sinful creature put enormous weight on the clergy, who needed to be educated to impart the apostolic and patristic teachings. The clergy's education represents one of the major concerns of Isidore, whose life and career was consecrated to improve the discipline of the ecclesiastical offices within the boundaries of the Visigothic kingdom. In fact, an educated clergy was necessary to guide the community to salvation in and through Christ.

³ On the dating of the *Sententiae*, see José Aldama, "Indicaciones sobre la cronología de las obras de S. Isidoro," in *Miscellanea Isidoriana* (Roma: Universidad Gregoriana, 1936), 57-89; and José Carlos Martín, "Une nouvelle édition critique de la 'Vita Desiderii' de Sisebut, accompagnée de quelques réflexions concernant la date des 'Sententiae' et du 'De viris illustribus' d'Isidore de Séville," *Hagiographica* VII (2000): 127-80. Both authors propose an early date of the Isidorian work, around the year 615. An opposite position has been held by Pierre Cazier, who argued that the *Sententiae* was in fact a work from the early 630s. Cf. Pierre Cazier, "Les Sentences d'Isidore et le IV Concile de Tolède," *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* III (1986): 373-386. For specific objections to Cazier's view, see Martín's article.

⁴ According to Aldama's study, the *De ortu et obitu Patrum* dates from the period 598-615. See Aldama, "Indicaciones sobre la cronología."

⁵ It has often been noted that the notion of man as created in God's image is not an idea frequently found in the Scriptures. However, it became central to the thought of most of the Fathers, who interpreted "the notion of the human as being in the image of God from the premise that the image of God is Christ," Andrew Louth, "The Fathers on Genesis," 573.

The task of explaining the doctrine of creation entailed defining the position of man within the divine economy. In addressing these issues, as hinted above, Isidore raised further questions regarding the relation between man and the creator, and between man and the rest of creation. Isidore's *Sententiae* begins with a series of chapters on divinity and the divine attributes. Incorruptible, immortal, immaterial, and immutable, God is both the supreme good and solely responsible for creation. Moreover, God is simple, omnipotent, and invisible: he is everywhere, inside and outside all things. God does not change or occupy space, and no one may escape from him. He is ineffable, that is, he is beyond all human knowledge and comprehension.

Therefore, in the *Sententiae*'s first chapters (*Sent.* I, 1-6), Isidore summarizes a number of theological sentences mainly aimed at tracing the differences between Creator and creation. The latter, material, corporeal and mutable, is considered to be good, but not the supreme good. Isidore finally argues that it is in the beauty of creation that one knows the Creator.⁶ In the same vein, what is most fundamental to Isidore is the fact that neither corporeal forms nor images usually ascribed to God enable man to know his true and divine essence. These theological guidelines are illustrated by various biblical examples. Despite the fact that the Scriptures include several terms for God – such as lamb (Jn 1:29), lion (Rev. 5:5), snake (Num. 21:8; Jn. 3:14), face (Ps. 79, 4.8.20) – none of these names are able to reflect accurately the divine nature,⁷ which, as Isidore asserts, will only be revealed in the future life. In the meantime, man only gets to see God through a mirror – an allusion to Paul's words in 1 Cor. 13:12 – that is, through

⁶ All references in this study are to the critical edition by Pierre Cazier, *Isidorus Hispalensis Sententiae* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998). *Sent.* I.4.1: "Saepe ad incorpoream Creatoris magnitudinem, creaturarum corporea magnitudine conponitur, ut magna considerentur ex paruis, et ex uisibilibus inuisibilia aestimentur, atque ex pulchritudine factorum effector operum agnoscat, non tamen parilitate consimili, sed ex quadam subdita et create specie boni."

⁷ *Sent.* I.5.1-10.

creation.

It is within this framework that Isidore refers for the first time in *Sententiae* to the creation of man, explaining how the famous passage of Gen. 1:26 should be interpreted.⁸ The bishop of Hispalis (Seville), thus, concerned about corporeistic and materialistic theories resulting from literal readings of that passage, sheds light on the comprehension of the sacred text. Unlike Augustine of Hippo, who addressed this concern in the context of the Manichean controversy,⁹ Isidore did not identify *quidam stultorum* that read the Scriptures erroneously. Instead, he noted and corrected the mistake in order to impart the true doctrine: it is not the body but the soul of man that bears the image of God. Isidore relies on patristic teachings, especially Augustine's, with the aim of providing his readers, above all the Visigothic clergy, with an adequate education concerning the inherited standards of orthodoxy.

Isidore returns to the topic of the creation of man and his relation with the created world in chapter XI of the *Sententiae*'s first book. In the beginning of the chapter he asserts the superiority of man regarding the rest of earthly creatures.¹⁰ This position of man is consequently the result of the divine will, and it is already evident in the act of creation: of all the creatures upon earth, man is the only one that has been created *ad imaginem*

⁸ *Sent.* I.5.7: "Falluntur quidam stultorum, dum legunt ad imaginem Dei factum esse hominem, arbitantes Deum esse corporeum, dum non caro, quod est corpus, sed anima, quod est spiritus, Dei imaginem habeat."

⁹ On Augustine see for example: Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber, 1967); David F. Wright, "Augustine: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 701-30; Karla Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1996); *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

¹⁰ *Sent.* I.11.1: "Omnia sub caelo propter hominem facta sunt, homo autem propter seipsum. Inde et omnia per figuram ad eius similitudinem referuntur."

et similitudinem nostram.¹¹ In this, Isidore drew the reader's attention to the singularity of man's creation, as it is different from the creation of the rest of the creatures, and a product of a divine decision. By turning to the literal quote of Gen. 1:26, Isidore embraced the authoritative value of the Word, its quality of Truth. Moreover, the bishop inscribed himself into the Patristic tradition by conceiving man's creation as a result of trinitarian cooperation.

Isidore refers to the central position of man in several other works. In fact, one can find the same idea, for example, in *De ortu et obitu Patrum*,¹² specifically, in Isidore's biographical reference to the first man, Adam.¹³ In the same way, Isidore wrote about Noah, to whom animals had showed obedience,¹⁴ or about Gen. 1:26 in *Expositio in Vetus Testamentum*.¹⁵ In *Sententiae*, Isidore says, however, that the beings created inferior to man in the first place could occasionally, because of the punishment of sin, turn against him, as exemplified in Wis. 16:24.¹⁶

Isidore addressed, once again, the question of the interpretation of Gen. 1:26 in *Sent.*

¹¹ *Sent.*, I.11.1: "Quantum ceteris creaturis praestet homo dignitate uirtutis, ex ipsa reuerentia discitur creationis, dum omnia dixit Deus: Fiat, et facta sunt; creare uero hominem quadam aeterni consilii deliberatione uoluerit dicens: Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram."

¹² All references are to the critical edition by César Chaparro Gómez, *De ortu et obitu Patrum* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1985). For an exhaustive treatment of this particular work see César Chaparro Gómez, "Una aportación a la tradición manuscrita del *De ortu et obitu Patrum* de Isidoro de Sevilla," *Anuario de estudios filológicos* 3 (1980): 51-56; César Chaparro Gómez, "El *De ortu et obitu Patrum* de Isidoro de Sevilla. El problema de su composición y transmisión," in *L'édition critique des oeuvres d'Isidore de Séville. Les recensions multiples. Actes du colloque organisé à la Casa de Velázquez et à l'Université Rey Juan Carlos de Madrid, Madrid, 2002*, ed. María Adelaida Andrés Sanz, Jacques Elfassi and José Carlos Martín (Paris, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2008).

¹³ *De ortu*. 1.1: "[...] ad imaginem Dei factus, uniuersitates praelatus, qui creaturae nomina dedit atque in eis dominandi potestatem accepit."

¹⁴ *De ortu*. 4.1: "[...] cui ferae colla submittunt, alites famulantur."

¹⁵ References follow the edition by Michael Gorman and Martine Dulaey, *Isidorus episcopus hispalensis. Expositio in Vetus Testamentum. Genesis* (Freiburg: Herder, 2009). *Exp.* I.158-61: "Iste etiam accepit potestatem piscium maris, et uolatilium caeli, pecorumque, ferarum quoque, atque reptantium, quia spiritalis quisque effectus, et deo similis factus, secundum Apostolum, Iudicat omnia, ipse autem a nemine iudicatur."

¹⁶ *Sent.* I.9.10: "Vnde et Salomon: Creatura exardescit in tormentum aduersus iniustos et lenior est ad benefaciendum his qui in Deum confidunt."

II.XI. In this chapter, Isidore considers the examples of the saints as valuable resources, since they could guide men *ad boni* in the absence of divine precepts.¹⁷ Therefore, mortals could imitate saints, their virtues and penances in order to perfect their habits, achieve conversion or correct erroneous and deviant behavior. As becomes evident from these assertions, Isidore considered the imitation of saints a means to the realization of a perfect Christian life and morality, especially when biblical precepts could not be apprehended directly. However, in the same chapter Isidore warns his audience against the bad examples that could lead *ad suorum morum peruersitatem*. Moreover, the Bishop of Hispalis exploited the literal biblical quotation of Gen. 1:26 with a different purpose: it becomes the authoritative foundation based on which Isidore exhorts perfect men not to act by imitating any saint's life but rather by contemplating Truth, *ad cuius imaginem facti sunt*.¹⁸ In this sense, saints are regarded as intermediaries between God and man, that is, as Pierre Cazier suggests,¹⁹ as secondary means of providing Christian edification.

One should bear in mind, here, that religious life in the peninsula lacked the uniformity yearned for by the Visigothic clergy, who were deeply concerned about the diversity of experiences and the multiplication of religious phenomena, which alleged a different and immediate relation with the divinity. In this context, the ecclesiastical hierarchy sought to put in order a reality that in their eyes was becoming increasingly

¹⁷ *Sent.* II.11.6: “si enim ad boni incitamentum diuina quibus admoremur praecepta deessent, pro lege nobis sanctorum exempla sufficerent.”

¹⁸ *Sent.* II.11.11: “Perfectorum est iam uirorum non quemlibet sanctorum imitando, sed ipsam ueritatem intuendo, ad cuius imaginem facti sunt, iustitiam operare. Hoc indicat quod scribitur: Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostrum [...]” The same idea expresses Isidore in *Exp.* I, 154-157: “Post haec fecit deus hominem ad imaginem suam, perfectum scilicet uirum, qui non quemlibet sanctorum uirorum imitando, sed ipsam ueritatem contemplabiliter intuendo, operator iustitiam, ut ipsam intellegat, et sequitur, ad cuius imaginem factus est, ueritatem.”

¹⁹ See Pierre Cazier, *Isidore de Séville et la naissance de l'Espagne catholique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1994), 132-35.

heterogeneous and was threatening to blur the boundaries of ecclesiastical control.

Ordering the World

According to Isidore, the world is defined as the sum of all things on earth and in the sky,²⁰ or briefly: *mundus ex rebus uisibilibus*.²¹ In a mystical sense, however, the world is the symbol of man because both are made of four elements. Man is thus composed of four humors which when combined result in a new single being. From this perspective, man is a different created world, a *minor mundus* (microcosmos), which – as the world (macrocosmos) – is formed by the combination of different elements.²² In *De natura rerum* Isidore argues that this idea of man goes back to the ancients who had discerned a close connection between the structure of the world and that of man (an explanation absent from the *Sententiae*).²³ However, immediately after this reference to ancient knowledge, Isidore supplements a scriptural allusion, since in the Bible “world” was in some passages also conceived as *peccatores*, as attested in Jn. 1:10.²⁴ Put this way, Isidore implied that both notions were not contradictory, since ancient knowledge could be occasionally useful as a means of understanding the things and events occurring in the world. The scriptural reference, however, reminded the reader that there was no answer that could not be found in the truth of the Gospels. Furthermore, in the *Sententiae*, Isidore suggests an additional parallel between man and the world: both are affected by time and thus both tend to an end.²⁵ Therefore, despite having

²⁰ This idea is to be found in *De nat. rer.* IX.1: “Mundus est uniuersitas omnis quae constat ex caelo et terra. And, later adds: De quo Paulus apostolus ait: praeterit enim figura huius mundi.” Jacques Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville. Traité de la nature* (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1960).

²¹ *Sent.* I.8.1.

²² See *De nat. rer.*, IX.I.

²³ *De nat. rer.*, IX.II: “Vnde et ueteres hominem in communionem fabricae mundi constituerunt, siquidem graece mundus cosmos, homo autem micros cosmos, id est minor mundus est appellatus.”

²⁴ *De nat. rer.* IX.2: “licet et per mundum nonnumquam scriptura peccatores insinuet, de quibus dictum est: et mundus eum non cognouit.”

²⁵ *Sent.* I.8.2: “Ratio mundi de uno consideranda est homine. Nam sicut per dimensiones aetatum ad finem homo uergitur, ita et mundus per hoc quod distenditur tempore, deficit, quia unde homo atque

previously underscored man's superiority regarding other created beings, Isidore claims that man remains a part of creation and is thus subject to corruption and mutability.

In addition to this distinction between the Creator and the creature, Isidore also thought it relevant to show the differences between angels and man. Angels – who owe their name to their office or role – are not considered immutable because of their nature but on account of the divine and eternal charity.²⁶ Moreover, the difference between these celestial beings and man may be traced to the moment of creation, since angels were created *ante omnem creaturam*, when God said: *Fiat lux* (Gen. 1:3). A hierarchical relationship between celestial and terrestrial beings is, therefore, noticeable in creation, whereby not only man is differentiated from angels, but also from the rest of the earthly creatures. In asserting this, Isidore pictures a divinely ordained universe, a fixed system in which every creature occupies a specific and rightful place.

The mutability of the human condition entailed the possibility of conversion. As Fontaine remarks, Isidore “underlines the point that he (man) possesses a superiority compared to other celestial and immutable beings: man is mutable and thus he can convert himself.”²⁷ In this sense, the Bishop of Hispalis devotes a large part of his *Sententiae* to conversion: he describes the stages involved in it, the conditions, and the possible punishments that could be applied in case it was not fully accomplished. From Isidore's perspective, in theory, true conversion could not be achieved by force or coercion. On the contrary, a genuine conversion should be the result of a complex and

mundus crescere uidetur, inde uterque minuitur.”

²⁶ Cf. *Sent.* I.10.2.

²⁷ My translation from the original French: “[...] note le point sur lequel celui-ci (l'homme) possède une supériorité par rapport aux êtres célestes immuables: étant muable, l'homme peut se convertir.” Jacques Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville. Genèse et originalité de la culture hispanique au temps des Wisigoths* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 238.

voluntary process.²⁸

What were the consequences of Isidore's conception of man? The existence of a mutable and sinful creature, subject to corruption and finitude, would inevitably impact on the way Isidore conceived the government of this world, and the role of man and Church within it. Although this question cannot be fully answered here, a few points can be made in order to gain a better understanding of Isidore's thought and the circumstances in which he wrote.

After sin, death entered into the world and spread to all men, rendering man's life transitory. Given the mutable and corruptible nature of man, subject to constant temptation and a potential fall into sin, the Church was a key institution towards achieving salvation, and the main one responsible for the correction of souls. This task was an important prerogative of the clergy, the body in charge of indicating the way to God in this world, and of rectifying the deviant conduct of the devotees.

The *Sententiae* include a large section on the question of conversion, in which vices and virtues of human condition are recorded, and Christian pastors are provided with instructions and duties. As mentioned before, conversion is conceived as the result of a hard process, divided into different stages,²⁹ and ensuing from a voluntary act, since God has given man free will to do good or evil. Isidore will hence seek to define the right path to true faith, a path which is only feasible *intra ecclesiam catholicam*.³⁰

²⁸ Cf. *Sent.* II.7.4.

²⁹ *Sent.* II.7.7: "Triperititum describitu esse uniuscuiusque conversi profectum, id est primum corrigendi a malo, secundum faciendi bonum, tertium consequendi boni operis praemium."

³⁰ *Sent.* II.7.3: "Indulgentia peccatorum sciendum ubi, quando uel qualibus datur. Vbi quippe, nisi intra ecclesiam catholicam?"

Therefore, the significant attention devoted to this theme in Isidore's work reflects the importance of conversion and religious unity in the bishop's agenda.

Despite the fact that Isidore's exposition in the *Sententiae* leaves no room for doubt regarding the proper method to accomplish a genuine conversion – it should not be based on violence and coercion but on personal effort and will, as well as on the guidance of the ecclesiastical institution – Isidore's point of view was far from being monolithic, especially with regard to the conversion of the Jews. In fact, the bishops gathered at the Fourth Council of Toledo (633), presided over by Isidore, would agree on condemning forced conversion³¹ – an allusion to the measure taken by King Sisebut (r. 612-621) at the beginning of his reign, around 615 or 616 – but would also argue that “it was suitable and obligatory to keep baptized Jews within the Christian faith even by force.”³²

Since every man was considered sinful, not even the king could escape such definition. Moreover, the Bible teaches that kings are often tempted, as the examples of David and Solomon quoted in the *Sententiae* attest. And, even though God himself – Isidore says – determined that both *serui* and *domini* should exist, the Bishop also states – quoting from Col. 3:25 and 1 Cor. 1:28 – that God makes no difference regarding men.³³

³¹ Tol. IV, c. LVII: “De Iudaeis autem hoc praecepit sancta synodus, nemini deinceps ad credendum uim inferre. Cui enim uult Deus miseretur et quem uult indurat. Non enim tales inuiti saluandi sunt, sed uolentes, ut integra sit forma iustitiae. Sicut enim homo proprii arbitrii uoluntate serpenti oboediens periit, sic uocante gratia Dei propriae mentis conuersione homo quisque credendo saluatur. Ergo non ui sed libera arbitrii facultate ut conuertantur suadendi sunt, non potius impellendi. Qui autem iam pridem ad Christianitatem uenire coacti sunt, sicut factum est temporibus religiosissimi principis Sisebuti, quia iam constat eos sacramentis diuinis associatos et baptismi gratiam suscepisse et chrismate unctos esse et corporis Domini et sanguinis exstitisse participes, oportet ut fidem etiam quam ui uel necessitate susceperunt, tenere cogantur ne nomen Domini blasphemetur et fidem quam susceperunt uilis ac contemptibilis habeatur.”

³² Raúl González Salinero, “Catholic Anti-Judaism in Visigothic Spain,” in *The Visigoths. Studies in Culture and Society*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 143.

³³ *Sent.* III.47.2: “Quantum ad penetrationem, non est personarum acceptio apud Deum, qui mundi elegit

Furthermore, Isidore points out that kings, even if they consider themselves as *sublimiores*, should acknowledge their mortal condition and avoid praising secular glory.³⁴

Men in Genesis: Models of Sanctity in *De ortu et obitu Patrum*

Besides providing an account of creation, the Bible – particularly *Genesis* – presents a series of genealogies which function as true models for imitation. In *De ortu et obitu Patrum* Isidore offers a catalogue of biblical figures, borrowed from the Old and the New Testaments, in which their geographical place of birth and death is stated, as well as the virtues these characters held in their life. Based on these examples, Isidore suggests that virtues are first incarnated in the figures of the biblical past, from where they are projected to the present. As in the *Sententiae*,³⁵ behavioral criteria are drawn from sacred text; as a result, by imitating temperance or mercy, among other virtues, man could emulate biblical personalities. Moreover, most of these personalities were figures of Christ and the Church, the real depositories of revealed truth.

The catalogue begins with Adam, the first man, created in God's image, *princeps generis et delicti*,³⁶ responsible for giving name to the rest of creation. Isidore summarizes the Fall and the expulsion from Paradise: Persuaded by Eve, Adam fell in the trap of the serpent, causing the expulsion and the loss of immortality. Through Adam's disobedience all his descendants were affected and condemned. After this

ignobilia et contemptibilia, et quae non sunt ut ea quae sunt destrueret, ne gloriatur omnis caro, hoc est carnalis potentia, coram illo; unus enim Dominus aequaliter et dominis fert consultum et seruis.”

³⁴*Sent.* III.48.9: “Dum mundi reges sublimiores se ceteris sentiant, mortales tamen se esse agnoscant, nec regni gloriam, qua in saeculo sublimantur, aspiciant, sed opus quod secum ad inferos deportent intendant.”

³⁵*Sent.* II, 11, 12: “[...] humilitates ex Christo, deuotionis ex Petro, caritatis ex Iohanne, obedientiae de Abraham, patientiae de Isaac, tolerantiae de Iacob, castimoniae de Ioseph, mansuetudinis de Moyse, constantiae de Iosue, benignitatis de Samuhel, misericordiae de Dauid, abstinentiae de Danihel [...].”

³⁶*De ortu.* I.1.

inaugural description of the first man, Isidore goes on to depict further prominent exemplary figures from *Genesis*. By introducing the biblical stories, he seeks to draw attention to the virtues and values necessary to a life worthy of divine grace.

The next figure in the Isidorian list is Abel, Adam's virtuous and obedient son, whose oblation had so pleased God that his envious brother, Cain, assassinated him. While summing up and transmitting the biblical narration of Abel and Cain to the readers, Isidore emphasizes the obedience and faithfulness of the former, and the envy and impiety of the latter. Enoch, the third of the catalogue, was also a figure outstanding by his faith. Isidore tells that he was withdrawn from the earth to which he would return with Elijah before final consummation.³⁷ Another biblical episode is introduced through Noah,³⁸ a wise and patient character, who – as Isidore remarks – acknowledged the divine order when he built the famous ark which enabled the earth's repopulation after the flood.

Melchizedek, *sacerdos Altissimi primus uerique oblato sacrificii*, is identified with Sem, the eldest son of Noah, based on Jerome's interpretation.³⁹ Following Jerome, Isidore describes Melchizedek as the king-priest who offered for the first time bread and wine as a sacrifice to God, and identifies this act as performed in the image of the Eucharist.⁴⁰ Similarly, Abraham, that essential figure in the Hebrew text, characterized in the Latin as *iustus* and *deuotus*, is interpreted in Christian terms: he contemplated the

³⁷ *De ortu*. III: "Enoc, filius Iareth, septimus ab Adam, placens Deo, malorum nescius, mortis ignarus, qui sceleratorum hominum non ferens angustias, a pernitiosis contractibus mundi subtractus, meruit in eum locum transferri unde fuerat protoplastus expulsus [...] manet autem hactenus in corpore, in consummationem mundi restituens cum Helia mortalem uitae conditionem."

³⁸ Cf. *De ortu*. IV.1-2.

³⁹ *De ortu*. V.1.

⁴⁰ *De ortu*. V.2: "[...] idem in typo ueri sacrificii de frugibus terrae primum panem et uinum Deo hostiam obtulit [...]."

Trinity and venerated the mystery of its unity.⁴¹ Moreover, Isaac is considered also a figure of Christ and praised because of the purity of his life, and his ability to forgive and to express gratitude. Another example can be observed in Judah's description.⁴²

Isidore further illustrates proper virtues by way of more biographies, from Genesis, which represent the Christian life and true morality: humility and simplicity in Jacob (ch. VIII); hospitality, justice, piety, and honesty in Lot (ch. IX); patience, chastity, and wisdom in Joseph (ch. X). These examples demonstrate the importance of biblical figures as a means of providing models of conduct. *De ortu et obitu Patrum* represents, thus, an essential tool aimed at educating the Visigothic clergy in a period in which homogenizing the clerical body was considered of paramount importance.

Conclusions

The Creation of man and, in broader terms, the question of the origin of the world could hardly be ignored by the most prominent ecclesiastical personalities of the period, since its interpretation involved important theological and anthropological issues. Therefore, these key topics encouraged the reflection of several Hispanic bishops, especially of Isidore, who in the *Sententiae* addresses the relationship between man and his creator, and between man and the rest of the creatures. Thus, the famous passage of Gen. 1:26, in which man was portrayed in a special relationship with divinity, was also used to explain the distance between the human and the angelical condition, establishing an ordained universe of earthly and heavenly creatures. According to Isidore, man, created in the image and likeness of God, but at the same time corruptible and mutable, held

⁴¹ *De ortu*. VI.2: "Eo summus ut Trinitatem in typo uideret et unitatem in mysterio ueneraret."

⁴² *De ortu*. XI: "[...] praeponens ut leo in regni uirtutem et clarus in splendore potentiae; cuius quidem imperii posteritas non cessauit, quoadusque Christus quasi catulus leonis ex germine eius ortus ascenderet atque spes gentium ex uirginali utero coruscaret."

the advantage of potential conversion. Moreover, this possibility of conversion granted the Church a significant role, as it was responsible for leading man through this process, which could only take place in earthly life.

The Bishop of Hispalis, therefore, was an authority regarding biblical knowledge: it was he who had the power to convey eternal truths, who decided which statement should be considered orthodox and which should not. This role as an authorized channel of divine revelation also entailed the definition of the contents which should be known, the biblical books which should be consulted and the questions that should be addressed. It is worth noting that the Bible was not in this period a compact and unique volume, nor were all books to be found in the church libraries of the numerous dioceses within the kingdom. Consequently, the treatises composed by the bishops – along with the sermons and homilies – were sometimes the only means of providing access to the sacred Word.

In this sense, addressing the questions raised about creation and additional topics related to the *Book of Genesis* was of significant importance in the education of the peninsular clergy, the body responsible for guiding the Goths towards salvation. This endeavor was a major concern to Isidore who, as Bishop of Hispalis, was committed to making Hispania the most prominent guardian of orthodoxy.

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