

HOW DID THEY SUPPOSE 'THE PERFECT' WOULD COME?
1 CORINTHIANS 13.8-12 IN PATRISTIC EXEGESIS

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1. *Introduction: Exegetical Issues*

Paul taught the Corinthians the way of love, which alone had the keenness to cut the Gordian knot of their community tensions. The Corinthians were a tangle of factions, where *agape* (ἀγάπη) would have fostered unity; they were caustic in their own enlightenment, where *agape* would have counseled kindness; they were captivated by the flashier *charismata*, where *agape* would have made them unassuming servants. Paul put all their pretensions to flight: only love will abide forever, after tongues and prophecy and even knowledge are rendered obsolete at the coming of 'the perfect'.

What was this higher standard of perfection?¹ The majority viewpoint is and always has been that it is eschatological, thus: 'We know in part, we prophesy in part but when the perfect comes ... (13.10)' is parallel to 'now I know in part, then I shall know (13.12)' and both have reference to seeing Christ at the Parousia, 'face to face' in 13.12 being

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1. See the overview in G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 644 n. 23; also D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), pp. 67-72; and the discussion in W. Grudem (ed.), *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), *in loc.*

drawn from the Old Testament language of divine epiphany.²

A smaller group regards 'the perfect' as some non-eschatological state or event that arrived mere decades or centuries after Paul. Thus, 'perfection' may have meant that the church will reach a higher level of maturity or unity or love. A cessationist approach has commended itself to many Reformed and Dispensationalist Christians over the last century: that if partial revelation was to pass away, it would do so in the light of the completed canon. The neuter τὸ τέλειον, they argue, could not refer to Christ's return (one would have expected the masculine adjective in that case), so this refers to a perfect thing that brings full divine revelation.³ Thus, when the last book of the New Testament was published, the *charismata* of tongues and prophecy were immediately or shortly suspended.⁴

The cessationist reading of 'the perfect' has Paul predicting a turning-point that would have happened before many years had passed. We might, therefore, have expected patristic exegetes, if they held that position, to say: 'Yes, Paul himself was limited in his knowledge, but in

2. So the commentaries by Calvin, Hodge, Godet, Robertson and Plummer, Barrett, Grosheide, Morris, Conzelmann, Lietzmann, Wendland, Meyer, Nicoll, Héring, F.F. Bruce, Orr and Walther, Thrall, Fee, Oster. See too Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 70-72, and Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 270-71; similarly, it is referred to the interim state after death by Kistemacher.

3. The NIV renders this 'perfection'; cf. the neuter cognate in 1 Cor. 1.8, where ἕως τέλους is eschatological, and 1 Cor. 15.24 where τὸ τέλος refers to eschatological fulness. Note that in 13.10 the neuter τὸ τέλειον is matched by a neuter for 'imperfection', even though τὸ ἐκ μέρους has feminine antecedents.

4. See John Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 3rd edn, 1977), pp. 179, 186; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr, *The Charismatic Gift of Prophecy* (Memphis: Footstool, rev. 2nd edn, 1989), pp. 51-60. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), pp. 109-12, offers a highly nuanced exegesis that differs on the one hand from the cessationist view and is similar on the other hand to Chrysostom's (see below). See too my 'Christian Prophecy and Canon in the Second Century: A Response to B.B. Warfield', *JETS* 40.4 (December 1997), pp. 609-26. In it I deal with second- and early third-century references to the gift of prophecy, and demonstrate that the church pictured that *charisma* operating alongside a closed set of apostolic doctrine. Note that Warfield's influential treatment of cessationism does not include an appeal to this text: B.B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918).

hindsight we can see that the canon was completed (or the church reached maturity, or whatever) some decades after his death. The *charismata* ceased forthwith.’⁵

Then too, the Greek fathers might be expected to have worthwhile insight into the matter of the neuter gender of τὸ τέλειον. Would that their views were surveyed in modern commentaries! Unfortunately, in a typical commentary, space demands are such that this sort of overview is limited to one or two key figures.

My quest for a fuller patristic survey began with the standard indices (including the four volumes of *Biblica Patristica*, the Early Church Fathers series by P. Schaff, volumes of the Fathers of the Church series). I augmented them by extensive searches using the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. I have looked at texts from every extant author, coming to focus on 45 comments from the ante-Nicene fathers, and 149 from the Nicene and post-Nicene fathers. 1 Corinthians 13.8-12 was expounded in five extant commentaries (by Origen, Chrysostom, Theodoret, ‘Ambrosiaster’, Pseudo-Primasius) and in scores of apologies, polemics, dialogues, pastoral letters, theological treatises, church histories and so forth.⁶

5. A parallel in that case would be found in Jesus’ rhetorical question in Jn 21.21: ‘If it is my will that [the beloved disciple] remain until I come, what is that to you?’ The evangelist did not state whether he knew the answer to this one himself. It was only after his death that other Christians could say that in fact John did not live until the Parousia, their insight gained through the normal unfolding of historical events. See, for example, Tertullian, *De anima* 50, commenting on Jn 21.23.

6. Electronic technology now allows students to search for snatches of phrasing from scriptural texts, meaning that they are no longer limited to standard indices. Overall, my searches, cross-matched and double-checked, yielded hundreds of quotations and allusions to all or part of 1 Cor. 13.8-12. Not all of the texts of the different authors were analyzed, since, for example, *Biblica Patristica* listed 169 separate references within the extant writings of Origen, a figure I enlarged through *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG), of which total I analyzed 25 from his prominent works. The fact that each new search method yielded fresh data suggests that there is plenty of undiscovered country, particularly in the Latin fathers. This collection and analyses of these ancient references to this text, while not exhaustive, are easily the fullest in print. The full compendium of texts exceeds 100 pages, and can be obtained from the author. For this paper I was helped at every turn by the TLG and by the Electronic Bible Society, PO Box 701356, Dallas, TX and their CD-ROM of Schaff’s edition of the Early Church Fathers. Taking my likely audi-

It turns out that over this text the ancients fought real battles, some dimly remembered today, some in wars that we have forgotten could possibly have involved the 'Love Chapter'. I will turn first to the polemical literature, which happens to yield up a rich lode of comments. The fathers came to believe that certain false teachers were deluding their followers by exploiting 1 Cor. 13.8-12 to their own advantage. These sectarians paraded their systems as latter-day manifestations of 'perfect' truth. The catholic fathers rallied to defend the traditional exegesis.

2. *Sectarian Figures and their Claims of Perfect Knowledge*

a. *Montanus*

In the middle of the second Christian century, a self-proclaimed prophet announced that the Holy Spirit had chosen him and his followers as his mouthpieces. He supposedly embodied the Paraclete, in fulfillment of Jn 14.16-17 and 16.13, that 'when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth'.⁷ Many fourth- and fifth-century references explicitly state that the Montanists synthesized the Johannine texts with 1 Cor. 13.9-10. Thus the apostles and the catholic church had only known and prophesied in part, until the coming of the Paraclete with Montanus.⁸

In fourth-century Alexandria, Didymus Caecus argued that the Montanists were taking 1 Cor. 13.9-10 out of its context, and that the reader must press on to vv. 11-12 to get Paul's true sense. The perfect knowledge will come only when we see Christ with our own eyes, that is, after the resurrection. Then our fragmentary, 'hearsay' knowledge of the future will become full.⁹ The Montanists made two errors—claiming to

ence into account, I quote the accessible Schaff translation wherever possible, correcting it by the original where necessary.

7. See, e.g., Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* 32.17-18.

8. A viewpoint not unlike that of the Latter Day Saints, who argue that their Book of Mormon is a Third Testament, predicted in the prophecy of the Two Sticks in Ezek. 37.15-26.

9. Didymus Caecus, *De trinitate* 41.2. There are two excellent compendia of early writings of the Montanist controversy: P. Labriolle, *Les sources de l'histoire du montanisme* (Fribourg: Librairie de l'Université, 1913); Ronald Heine, *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (North American Patristic Society, Patristic Monograph Series, 14; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989).

know more than Paul, and claiming to possess the perfect knowledge of the eschaton.¹⁰ Later, Didymus's student Jerome said:

[T]hus the mutilated and emasculate Montanus possessed a fulness of knowledge such as was never claimed by Paul; for he was content to say, 'We know in part, and we prophesy in part,' and again, 'Now we see through a glass darkly.' These are statements which require no refutation. To expose the infidelity of the Montanists is to triumph over it.¹¹

So also spoke Augustine,¹² Epiphanius of Salamis¹³ and Theodoret.¹⁴ The Montanists turned to our text with a particular novelty in mind, according to Augustine and Theodoret: the 'Paraclete' had supposedly forbidden widows and widowers to remarry. How did this square with Paul's openness to remarriage in 1 Cor. 7.39? Obviously, because the apostle's understanding of God's will was 'partial', and in 1 Corinthians 13 he himself anticipated the coming of the Paraclete's fuller revelation.¹⁵

It is not clear how early the Montanists commandeered 1 Cor. 13.8-12. However, an anti-Montanist statement from the 190s (quoted by Eusebius) shows that the second-century church was already using that text to return fire on the Montanists, who claimed to be the last prophets from God:

For the apostle thought it necessary that the prophetic gift should continue in all the Church until the final coming [δεῖν γὰρ εἶναι τὸ προφη-

10. There is a record of a debate, *Dialexis Montanistae et orthodoxi*, attributed to Didymus, in which an orthodox Christian and a Montanist pressed their opposing points of view. Predictably, the Montanist argued that Montanus possessed the perfection of the Spirit, fulfilling 1 Cor. 13.9-10; the orthodox countered that 1 Cor. 13.10 and 12 will be fulfilled with the Second Coming, as confirmed by 1 Thess. 4.16.

11. Jerome, Letter 41.4, *To Marcella*.

12. Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* 32.17; cf. also the record of his comment in *De haerisibus liber* 26-27.

13. Epiphanius, *Panarion*.

14. Theodoret, *Praedestinatus* 1.26.

15. It should be remembered that many of the polemics became formalized, so that later authors tended to rely on conventional arguments. This is especially clear in Epiphanius's late fourth-century compendium, the *Panarion*. Jerome too had heard such fathers as Didymus and perhaps both Gregorys. Eusebius quoted an unnamed anti-Montanist and apparently agreed with his reasoning.

τικὸν χάρισμα ἐν πάσῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ μέχρι τῆς τελείας παρουσίας ὁ ἀπόστολος ἄξιόι].¹⁶

In a roundabout way, the Montanists were cessationists: they argued that the church would not experience any prophecies after those of the Montanist pioneers.¹⁷ Their foes countered that all true catholics would continue to accept true prophecies until the ‘perfect’ (τελείας) second coming. With the appearance of the key adjective τελείος, it seems beyond reasonable doubt that ‘the apostle’ is Paul and the reference is to 1 Cor. 13.10.

A different picture emerges from the writings of Tertullian. He is the only extant ante-Nicene father to favor a non-eschatological view of 1 Corinthians 13, and not coincidentally the one father who was most sympathetic (perhaps even adherent) to Montanism in its North African form. Tertullian came to believe that the Paraclete was indeed revealing new doctrine.¹⁸ Nevertheless, he straddled the catholic and Montanist exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13. For him, only the Hebrew prophets saw ‘through a glass, darkly’. Nevertheless, when the Lord was incarnated, the apostles saw him ‘face to face’ on the mountain of transfiguration.¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 13.11 means that ‘even in Christ, knowledge had its stages of growth’, since even Paul had turned away from his earlier opinions.²⁰ In extant literature, Tertullian did not identify Montanus himself with ‘the perfect’ in 1 Cor. 13.10, but he would link him with the Paraclete of Jn 16.13.

Tertullian knew what it was to change one’s mind over time, as he moved toward adopting Montanism. In a text that shows a weaker Montanist flavor than his later works, he seems to have implied that the charismata would cease at the eschatological ‘consummation’.²¹

b. *Mani*

The church fathers often mentioned Mani and Montanus in the same breath. In the third century, Mani claimed to be an apostle of Jesus

16. Quoted by Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.17.4.

17. Not only this passage, but especially in the passages cited from Didymus Caecus (Heine, *The Montanist Oracles*, p. 117), and in the texts I will cite from Epiphanius and Theodoret.

18. Tertullian, *De anima* 9; *De fuga* 9.4 and others.

19. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 14.6-9, 16.3, 8.

20. Tertullian, *De pudicitia* 1.

21. Tertullian, *De patientia* 12.12.

Christ and to possess a final word from God. Augustine had early in life found that message attractive, and he later used his awareness to refute it. In a debate with Augustine, the Manichean Faustus argued that Paul had altered his Christology away from his earlier view that Jesus was the Son of David, to his mature viewpoint that he should know no man 'after the flesh' (2 Cor. 5.16). So even in Pauline theology, 'old things have passed away' (2 Cor. 5.17) and Paul learned to 'put away childish things' (1 Cor. 13.11). Augustine fired back that not only had the Manicheans taken 1 Cor. 13.11 out of context,²² but that they misused 1 Cor. 13.9-10, 12 as well, applying it to the coming of Mani, who supposedly brought people 'face to face' with perfect truth.²³ Mani and his followers aped the Montanist's mishandling of 1 Cor. 13.9-10 and Jn 14.17, 16.13:

And so every heresy arising under the name of the Paraclete will have the boldness to make an equally plausible application to itself of such texts. For there is no heresy but will call itself the truth; and the prouder it is, the more likely it will be to call itself perfect truth: and so it will profess to lead into all truth; and since *that which is perfect* has come by it, it will try to do away with the doctrine of the apostles, to which its own errors are opposed.²⁴

Thus forewarned, Augustine claimed, his readers would more easily evade 'impure seducers and sects of obscene filthiness'.²⁵

There exists an account of a debate from a century earlier, in which Archelaus was said to have debated Mani himself. Notably, it records Mani misappropriating 1 Cor. 13.8-10. Archelaus argued that to fulfill these verses, Mani would have had to have 'done away' with some prior imperfection—but that he had failed to do so was obvious to all. Mani had not made an end of human 'tongues' nor false systems of knowledge. Only Christ can do this, by implication, at his return.²⁶

22. Augustine used virtually the same approach when he said that Paul already spoke as a man (1 Cor. 13.11) when he wished that all would remain celibate (*De opere monachorum* 40).

23. Faustus offers his exegesis in *Contra Faustum* 11.1, and Augustine replies in 11.9 and 15.6; also *Confessions* 5.10 (§20). That Mani himself claimed to be the subject of 1 Cor. 13.9-10 is echoed in the fourth-century compendium of heresies, Epiphanius, *Panarion* 66.61.1-2.

24. Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* 32.17, emphasis added.

25. Augustine, *Tractate on John* 96.4-5.

26. Archelaus, *Acta disputationes* 36-37; the tradition of his authorship is dubious, but is taken by ANF as authentic and dated at 277 CE.

c. *Gnostics*

There is some evidence that Gnostics too may have reinterpreted this text. In their *Gospel of Truth*, the enlightened are restored to perfect knowledge of the Father, with a likely allusion to 1 Cor. 13.9-10:

Since the deficiency came into being because the Father was not known, therefore when the Father is known, from that moment on the deficiency will no longer exist. As with the ignorance of a person, when he comes to have knowledge his ignorance vanishes of itself, as the darkness vanishes when light appears, so also the deficiency vanishes in the perfection.²⁷

In his tome *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus charged that the Gnostics imagined themselves to be ‘perfect’, perceiving the deep things of God, and not just the partial knowledge afforded them in this age according to 1 Cor. 13.9.²⁸ The anti-Gnostic polemic written shortly after by Clement of Alexandria does not state whether the Gnostics themselves employed 1 Cor. 13.11-12, but Clement certainly used it against them. Yes, Paul had been a ‘child’—when he was under the Law, as in Gal. 4.1! Paul grew into a ‘man’ when he became part of the New Covenant; still Paul awaited the ‘clear revelation in the future world ... face to face’.²⁹ Hippolytus of Rome charged that Gnostic docetics claimed that they ‘who are from above, are alone perfect, but all the rest are only partially so’.³⁰

In other references, church fathers spoke against false knowledge and the pride that it engenders; although they do not always mention the Gnostics, that group seems to have been often in mind.³¹

27. ‘Gospel of Truth’, in James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 41. Cf. also the ‘Tripartite Tractate’ (pp. 91, 93).

28. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 2.28.3, 7, 9.

29. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 1.6. Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum* 4.10 (§20), citing 1 Cor. 13.12 and Col. 3.4, reminded the Gnostics that the resurrection was still to come.

30. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 8.3.

31. For example, Augustine’s contemporary Theodoret wrote a commentary on the Pauline epistles, in which he railed against those who ‘slice up’ the church because of their high regard for their own γνῶσις. See Theodoret’s comments *in loc.* on 1 Cor. 13.12 in his *Interpretatio in xiv epistulas s. Pauli*.

d. *Arianists*

It is conceivable that the Arianists appropriated 1 Cor. 13.8-12 to claim a higher attainment of the knowledge of God. A better explanation of the evidence is that the Arianists had this text stuck to them by their opponents. The scant references in Ambrose and Epiphanius suggest that they were offended by the Arianists trammeling in on the holy mysteries, claiming to know more than had Paul and forgetting the limits to human knowledge of the divine.³²

e. *Pseudo-Clementine Tradition*

The touchstone of the Pseudo-Clementine literature was the conviction that Peter was the true apostle and that Paul (in the *Clementine Homilies* thinly disguised as Simon Magus) was of the devil. Thus we have a fictitious debate in which Clement of Rome jibes 'Simon' for the weakness of his prophetic sight. Anyone who admits to knowing the future only 'darkly', Clement argues, is no true prophet:

But the foreknowledge of the one true Prophet does not only know things present, but stretches out prophecy without limit as far as the world to come, and needs nothing for its interpretation, *not prophesying darkly and ambiguously*, so that the things spoken would need another prophet for the interpretation of them; but clearly and simply, as our Master and Prophet [Christ], by the inborn and ever-flowing Spirit, always knew all things.³³

Thus, the *Homilies* make Paul alone 'prophesy darkly', disregarding that the 'we' who do so in 1 Cor. 13.8-12 are Christians as a whole.

f. *Summary*

On many occasions, the catholic church used 1 Cor. 13.8-12 to confound the arrogant claims of special knowledge and revelation offered by its opponents. Christians could not know everything, but the heretics could not either, and furthermore were repudiating the apostolic truth to which all had access.

32. Ambrose, *De fide* 5.237; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 73.32. John Chrysostom took the same approach against the Anomoeans, a radical Arianist group of the late fourth century, in his *Contra Anomoeos*, see below. Theodore of Mopsuestia flung 1 Cor. 13.9-10 against the Arianists in *Historia ecclesiastica* 1.3 and perhaps 13.9 again in Epistle 109, *To Eusebius, Bishop of Ancyra*.

33. *Clementine Homilies* 3.12, emphasis added.

3. *Catholic Christianity and Eschatological Perfection*

With regard to the syntax of 1 Corinthians 13, none of the extant Greek fathers even remarks on any supposed difficulty of applying the neuter gender to the eschaton.

With regard to its interpretation, it should not come as a surprise that the fathers who quoted or alluded to this text more than once did not always give it the same application. An author might quote the text about 'putting away childish things' in 13.11, for example, with a proverbial sense. It is usually possible to assess which reading is a close exegesis and which is an extended application.

a. *1 Corinthians 13.8-12 and the Eschaton*

The evidence demands the conclusion that almost every church father understood the whole text of 1 Cor. 13.8-12 to be a prediction of the return of Christ, at which point partial knowledge would be swallowed up in the light of Christ's personal presence. They regularly adduced as cross-references other texts that concerned eschatological 'knowing' or 'seeing': in roughly descending frequency, 1 Jn 3.2, Col. 3.4, Mt. 5.8, 2 Cor. 5.5, 1 Cor. 2.9 and 2 Cor. 12.4.

I will summarize the statements of each father, giving an occasional quotation. I will begin with those whose comments range over most or all of the passage, then with those whose extant writings contain comments only on one half or the other.

1. *Attested Eschatological Understanding of 1 Cor. 13.8-12 as a Whole.* *Irenaeus* (late second century). The Spirit knows all things, but does not tell the church everything; thus, 13.9 speaks of partial knowledge. Ignorance of this fact leads to the Gnostic error.³⁴ At his coming, Christ will reveal not some new deity, but the one true God, in fulfillment of 1 Cor. 13.9-10, 12, Mt. 5.8 and, here, 1 Pet. 1.8:

...rising through the Spirit's instrumentality, [Christians] become spiritual bodies, so that by the Spirit they possess a perpetual life. 'For now,' he says, 'we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but then face to face'.³⁵

34. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 2.28.3, 7, 9.

35. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 5.7.2. See also 4.9.2.

Origen (late second–early third century). The resurrection of 1 Cor. 15.53-56 is when 1 Cor. 13.9, 12 will be fulfilled:

And hence it happens that it is said, 'The corruptible will put on incorruption, and the mortal immortality.' For although we may now make great proficiency, yet as we only know in part, and prophesy in part, and see through a glass, darkly, those very things which we seem to understand, this corruptible does not yet put on incorruption, nor is this mortal yet clothed with immortality...³⁶

1 Corinthians 13.9 shows that not even Paul or the other apostles knew all mysteries or knowledge in this life.³⁷ In several passages, Origen seems to have found the fulfillment of 1 Cor. 13.12 after death.³⁸

Methodius of Olympus (early fourth century). The 'manhood' of 1 Cor. 13.11 takes place at the renewing of the world; 'face to face' in 13.10, 12 at the resurrection into the spiritual body:

36. Origen, *De principii* 2.3.2, a statement foreshadowed in 1.4.1. The same viewpoint is seen in *De principii* 2.6.7; *De engastrimytho* 9.4-5; *Homiliae in Exodum Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei* 4.5; *Homiliae in Leviticum* 5.3 and 7.11; *Scholia in canticum canticorum* on 1 Cor. 13.9; 12.6 (but he applies 13.11 to Jesus' human growth in 13.26); *Commentary on John* 10.22; *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* 10.43.306.1, 13.15.91.6-7 (SC); *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* 20.34.306.1-4 (GCS, 10); *Commentary on the Gospel according to St John* 1-10 1.93 and 10.305 (FC, 52, 323-24); *John* 13-32 13.58 and 13.91 and 13.113 and 20.306 (FC, 81, 86-87, 91, 269); *Fragmenta in evangelium Joannis* 10.33, 38.13 (GCS, 10); linked with 1 Cor. 2.9 in *Commentaire sur le cantique des cantiques* 2.31 and 36. Cf. the dubious *Selecta in Psalmos* on 1 Cor. 13.9 (PG 12.1432.14).

37. *Fragm 1 Cor* 49.n9-10 (C. Jenkins [ed.], 'Documents: Origen on I Corinthians', *JTS* 9 [1908], pp. 232-47, 353-72, 500-514; 10 [1908], pp. 29-51); *In Jeremiam* 8.7.3-4; *Scholia in canticum canticorum* (PG 17.272.36); *In canticum canticorum* 2.31 and 2.36. The same sentiment is linked with Phil. 3.12 in *Fragmenta ex commentariis in epistulam ad Ephesios* 5.n13, 17 (J.A.F. Gregg [ed.], 'Documents: The Commentary of Origen upon the Epistle to the Ephesians', *JTS* 3 [1902], pp. 234-44, 398-420, 554-76), and *Commentarii in Romanos* 3.5-5.7 (J. Scherer [ed.], *Le commentaire d'Origène sur Rom. III.5-V.7* [Cairo: L'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1957], p. 228 line 4); it also appears in *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* 1.93 (FC, 52); also 10.305-306, 13.113 and 20.3-6.

38. Origen, *De principii* 2.11.6-7; *Contra Celsum* 6.20, 7.38, 7.50.

For now we know 'in part,' and as it were 'through a glass,' since that which is perfect has not yet come to us; namely, the kingdom of heaven and the resurrection, when 'that which is in part shall be done away'.³⁹

Eusebius of Caesarea (early fourth century). 1 Corinthians 13.9 will be fulfilled in the new age.⁴⁰ The church will be anointed fully, not just with the down payment of the Spirit (2 Cor. 5.5) or with partial knowledge and prophesying (1 Cor. 13.9). It will perfectly partake of Christ.⁴¹ Paul says that the nature of immortality is now beyond our grasp.⁴²

Didymus Caecus (fourth century; see above under 'Montanus'). The coming of perfection takes place when we see the reality of the Second Coming, the judgment, and the angels with our own eyes after the resurrection:

That is to say, the things to which our faith attaches itself, on the authority of Scriptures, we will after the resurrection see with our eyes, and we will know in their reality, and *partial knowledge will have an end*. The knowledge that we have acquired with hearing, is a part of that which will acquire by sight and by experience. So it is now by hear-say that we believe the predictions relative to the Second Coming of the Savior... But one day we will know these things by our eyes and by experience.⁴³

39. Methodius, *Symposium* 9.2; also 5.7, 8.11. See also the genuine version of his *De resurrectione* (fragments) 1.48.2, 3.16.7.

40. Eusebius, *De ecclesiastica theologia* 3.16.

41. Eusebius, *Commentarius in Isaiam* 1.73 and 1.85.68; cf. *Commentaria in Psalmos* (PG 23.404).

42. Eusebius, *Contra Marcellum* 2.4.

43. Author's rendering of Didymus Caecus, *De trinitate* 41.2, emphasis added. Cf. also *Comm. Job* 7.20c-11 (U. Hagedorn, D. Hagedorn and L. Koenen [eds.], *Didymos der Blinde: Kommentar zu Hiob* [Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, 3; Bonn: Habelt, 1968], p. 216 line 11); *Comm. Ecclesiasten* 352.13; 353.12; 361.18 and 362.4 (G. Binder and L. Liesenborghs [eds.], *Didymos der Blinde: Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes* [Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, 9; Bonn: Habelt, 1969]; *Fragmenta ii corinthos* 22 line 37 (K. Staab [ed.], *Pauluskommentar aus der griechischen Kirche aus Katenenhandschriften gesammelt* [Münster: Aschendorff, 1933]); *Commentarii in Psalmos* 204 (M. Grone-wald [ed.], *Didymos der Blinde: Psalmenkommentar*, II [Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, 4; Bonn: Habelt, 1968]); *Comm. Zecchariam* 1.337 (L. Doutrelean [ed.], *Didyme L'Avengle zur Zacharie* [SC, 83–85; Paris: Cerf, 1962]); also *Fragm in Psalmos* 194.t, 638a, 846.3 (E Mühlenberg [ed.], *Psalmenkommentare aus der Katenenüberlieferung* [Patristische Texte und Studien, 15–16; Berlin: W. de Gruyter,

Christians have 'part' of the Spirit in this life as a down payment (2 Cor. 5.5), but our experience is still 'in part'.⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 13.10, 12 will be fulfilled with the Second Coming, as predicted in 1 Thess. 4.16.⁴⁵

Athanasius (mid-fourth century). 1 Corinthians 13.9-10 means that God gives us blessings in this age and in the age to come.⁴⁶ Paul was caught up to Paradise in 2 Cor. 12.1-4; after his return, he spoke of the obscurity of future things:

And when he descended, he preached to every man; 'We know in part, and we prophesy in part; here I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.' ... And in relation to all that is future and perfect, the things known by him here were in part; but with respect to those things which were committed and entrusted to him by the Lord, he was perfect; as he said, 'We who are perfect, should be thus minded'.⁴⁷

Basilus (the Great) of Caesarea (mid-fourth century). Our current knowledge of God is good, but limited.⁴⁸ At the resurrection, Christians will know God and see him more clearly than angels do now:

1975–77]); and in the spurious version of *De trinitate* 9.9.1, 22.36-39 (J. Hönscheid [ed.], *Didymos der Blinde: De Trinitate*, I [Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie, 44; Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1975]).

44. Didymus Caecus, *Comm. Job* 12.1–16.8a (U. Hagedorn, D. Hagedorn and L. Koenen [eds.], *Didymos der Blinde: Kommentar zu Hiob*, IV.1 [Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, 33.1; Bonn: Habelt, 1985], p. 310 lines 2-6); the same idea is found in *Comm. Ecclesiasten* 5–6 (J. Kramer [ed.], *Didymos der Blinde: Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes*, III [Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, 13; Bonn: Habelt, 1970], p. 195 line 15); 1 Cor. 13.9 seems to be applied to this life 'under the sun' in the badly corrupted text of *Comm. Ecclesiasten* 9.8–11.20 (M. Gronewald [ed.], *Didymos der Blinde: Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes*, V [Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, 24; Bonn: Habelt, 1979], p. 277 line 13); also *Comm. Ps.* 29–34 (M. Gronewald [ed.], *Didymos der Blinde: Psalmenkommentar*, III [Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen, 8; Bonn: Habelt, 1969], p. 137 line 26; 1 Cor. 13.9 is linked with 2 Cor. 5.5 in *Fragm in Psalmos* 637.23f., 691A.a-b.

45. In the (probably spurious) *Dialexis Montanistae et orthodoxi*.

46. Athanasius, *Expositiones in Psalmos* (PG 27.200).

47. Athanasius, *Epistula festalis* 11.

48. Basilus, Epistle 233.2; Epistle 235.3; Homily on Ps. 33.9; and Homily on Ps. 45.5.

For even [the angels'] knowledge, when compared with the knowledge which is face to face, is dense ... for when we no longer know God in mirrors and not immediately, but approach Him as one and alone, then we shall know even the ultimate end.⁴⁹

Gregory of Nazianzus (mid, late fourth century). When we come to God, our mirrors will pass away in the light of truth.⁵⁰ Paul was not allowed to tell what he had seen in his vision of heaven in 2 Cor. 12.1-4.⁵¹

Gregory of Nyssa (late fourth century). God spoke about his nature through the apostles and the Old Testament prophets, through a glass and darkly.⁵² The perfect knowledge of 1 Cor. 13.9-10 is something we have not yet attained.⁵³

John Chrysostom (late fourth century). (On 13.9-12, not 13.8; see below.) Our partial knowledge will pass away in the eschaton.⁵⁴ 2 Corinthians 5.7-8 and 1 Cor. 13.12 show that when we are present with the Lord we will see him more clearly:

49. Basilus, Epistle 8, *To the Caesareans* 8.7.

50. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Ad patrem* (Oration 12); cf. *De moderatione in disputando* (Oration 32; PG 36.192.13); *De dogmate et constitutione episcoporum* (Oration 20; PG 35.1080.22).

51. Gregory of Nazianzus, *De theologia* (Oration 28.20). Earlier in chapter 17 of that oration, he showed why the Bible could speak of the knowledge that Scripture affords as 'perfect' knowledge. He does not link this knowledge with the gospel or full canon per se, but in the next chapter with the fact that Enosh called on the name of the Lord (Gen. 4.26).

52. Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 2.1; the same thing is said about the Law in *In canticum canticorum* 15 (H. Langerbeck [ed.], *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, VI [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960], p. 45).

53. Gregory of Nyssa, *In canticum canticorum* 15 (Langerbeck [ed.], *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, VI, p. 326 lines 17-18).

54. John Chrysostom, *Contra Anomoeos* 1.9; *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 34.1-2; *In epistulam ad Hebraeos* 28.4; *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 5.2; *Ad eos qui scandalizati sunt* 2.13.8, 2.14.6; *Expositiones in Psalmos* (PG 55.302.19-20); *In Matthaëum* 38.2. See also the spurious work *Encomium in sanctum Joannem Evangelistam* (Hippolytus Monachus [ed.], 'Ιωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου ἐγκώμιον εἰς Ἰωάννην τὸν εὐαγγελιστὴν', *Νέα Σιών* 17 [1922], pp. 665-67, 725-28 [666 line 20]).

‘Are we then estranged from Him whilst we are here [in this life]?’ he in anticipation corrected such a thought, saying, ‘For we walk by faith, not by sight.’ Even here indeed we know Him, but not so clearly. As he says also elsewhere, (1 Cor. xiii. 12.) ‘in a mirror’, and ‘darkly’.⁵⁵

Ambrose (late fourth century). 1 Corinthians 13.8, 11-12 will be fulfilled in the resurrection, in the age to come. Even in the Scriptures we know God only in part:

And taking this stand, let us be united to God by meditating and reading and searching, and let us come to know Him according to our ability. For only in part have we come to know Him here, because here all things are imperfect, but there all are perfect; here we are slight, but there we are strong. ‘We see now through a mirror in an obscure manner, but then face to face.’ Then we will be allowed to look upon the glory of God, and His face will be revealed, but now we are enveloped in the thick substance of the body and covered over by the stains and pollutions of the flesh, as it were, and we cannot see with total clarity.⁵⁶

We will see God ‘face to face’ in the future, according to 1 Cor. 13.12, Phil. 1.21, 23 and 2 Cor. 5.6.⁵⁷

Apollinaris of Antioch (late fourth century). 1 Corinthians 13.9 and 12 show that we know in part and in a mirror in this life; then we will see face to face, as David hopes in Ps. 16.15 (17.15 MT).⁵⁸

Jerome (late fourth–early fifth century). Paul claimed not to have perfect knowledge in 1 Cor. 13.9, 12.⁵⁹ In the age to come we will see God, as in 1 Cor. 13.9-10 and Mt. 5.8:

For the objection you now raise with an air of novelty—‘Blessed are the pure in heart,’ ‘Blessed are the undefiled in the way,’ and ‘Be without spot,’ and so forth—is refuted when the Apostle replies, ‘We know in part, and we prophesy in part,’ and, ‘Now we see through a mirror darkly, but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall

55. John Chrysostom, *In epistulam ii ad Corinthios* 10.4.

56. Ambrose, *De bono mortis* 11.49. Also *De officiis ministorum* 62; *De fide resurrectionis* 2.32, 109; *De excessu fratris Satyri* 2.32, 110.

57. Ambrose, *De interpellatione Iob et David* 2.6.

58. Apollinaris on *Psalm 16:15* (Fragment 109).

59. Jerome, Letter 41, *To Marcella* 4; also *Homilies of St Jerome* (FC; 1.53, 249, 291, 294); *Contra Pel.* 1.14.

be done away.’ And therefore we have but the shadow and likeness of the pure heart, which hereafter is destined to see God, and, free from spot or stain, to live with Abraham.⁶⁰

Augustine (late fourth–early fifth century). The ‘face-to-face’ meeting of 1 Cor. 13.12 is eschatological—at the resurrection, when Christians are no longer weighed down by the earthly body, when they see the beatific vision.⁶¹

For that sight of Thee ‘face to face’ is reserved for those set free in the Resurrection. And the very ‘fathers’ of the New Testament too, although they saw Thy mysteries revealed, although they preached the secret things so revealed to them, nevertheless said that they themselves saw but ‘in a glass, darkly,’ but that ‘seeing face to face’ is reserved to a future time, when what the Apostle himself speaks of shall have come.⁶²

Christians will then see Christ as do the angels now.⁶³ The apostles’ seeing the transfiguration of Jesus is a type of the resurrection, when we shall see Jesus in his glory.⁶⁴ This will be fulfilled eschatologically, at the same time as Mt. 5.8, 2 Cor. 5.6-7, Eph. 4.13, Phil. 1.21-23, Phil 3.10-14, Col. 3.4 and 1 Jn 3.2.⁶⁵ Augustine dealt with the issue of how

60. Jerome, *Contra Pel.* 3.12. In another text, his interlocutor Rufinus used Jerome’s interpretation of this passage to try to prove that Jerome had been influenced by the doctrines of Origen. See Rufinus, *Apologia s. invectiviarum in Hieron* 1.

61. Augustine, Letter 27.4, 395 CE, to Paulinus; Letter 148.1.1-3, 413 CE, to Fortunatianus; *Confessions* 8.1 (§1), 12.13 (§16); *City of God* 21.9; *De trinitate* 6.10 (§11) also 8.4 (§6); Sermon on John 1.1 (NPNF 1,6.461); Sermon on John 1.48 (NPNF 1,6.472); *De catechizandis rudibus* 5 (§4); *Tractate on John* 96.4 (NPNF 1,7.373); *De spiritus et littera* 49, 64; *Contra duas epistolas pelagianorum* 3.17; *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 38, 41, 49 and 64.

62. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 44.4; see also 36.12 and 37.7.

63. Augustine, *City of God* 22.29; *Enchiridion* 63.

64. Augustine, *Sermon on Mt. 17.1* (NPNF 1,6.348).

65. Augustine, Letter 92.3, 408 CE, to Lady Italica; *Confessions* 12.15 (§18) (NPNF 1,1.196); *De spiritus et littera* 41, 64; *Tractates on John*, Tractate 101.5, 102.3 and 124.5, ‘after the end of this world’ (NPNF 1, 7.388, 390, 450); *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* (NPNF 1,8.89, 96, 141, 170, 229, 277, 341, 452, 553, 565); *On the Psalms* (ACW 2.156, 242, 275). The reader should also consult *Confessions* 10.5 (§7); *City of God* 19.18, 22.29; *De trinitate* 1.8 (§§15-17), 1.13 (§§28, 31), 2.17 (§28), 3.4 (§10), 5.1 (§1), 8.4 (§6); *De fide et symbolo* 9 (§20); *Contra Faustum* 11.1; *Tractate on John* 34.9 (NPNF 1,7.203); in 86.1 (NPNF 1,7.353), 1 Cor. 13.10, 13 is linked with Rom. 8.23-24; *Sermons on Mt. 17.1*

we will see God face to face in the eschaton, if God does not possess a body or, by extension, a 'face'.⁶⁶ 'Tongues shall cease ...' shall be fulfilled when the saints rise and see Jesus. Augustine also introduced an interpretation that is unique in extant patristic literature, that 1 Cor. 13.10 predicts the end of sexual intercourse. He linked 'knowledge' with the biblical language of sexual 'knowing'.⁶⁷ Typically, however, Augustine interpreted 'knowledge' in this text with its usual meaning.⁶⁸

Pseudo-Justin Martyr (fourth–fifth century?). Paul went into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12.1-4) and heard unspeakable things. He includes himself when he says 'I know in part ...' in 1 Cor. 13.9, 12.⁶⁹

Theodoret (early–mid fifth century). I myself know in part (1 Cor. 13.9), as did Paul.⁷⁰ An allegorical reading of Song 4.5 shows that in this age we know in part, and see as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13.9-10, 12).⁷¹ In this life we have childish knowledge (1 Cor. 13.11-12). The sacraments are shadows of future realities: baptism of the resurrection, the eucharist of seeing the Lord face to face.⁷²

2. *Attested Eschatological Reading of at least 1 Corinthians 13.8-10.* *Archelaus (277 CE).* Jesus Christ is the perfect one. At his coming, prophecies and the prophetic books will fail; the human languages of

(NPNF 1,6.267); *De perfectione justitiae hominis* 8 (§19); *Contra duas epistolas pelagianorum* 3.21, 4.31; *De consensus evangelistarum* 4.10 (§20).

66. Augustine, Letter 148.1 (§1), 413 CE, to Fortunatianus.

67. Augustine, *De bono conjugali* 8: '“knowledge shall be destroyed,” saith the Apostle: and yet it is necessary for this time: but “charity shall never fail”. Thus also this mortal begetting, on account of which marriage takes place, shall be destroyed: but freedom from all sexual intercourse is both angelic exercise here, and continueth for ever ...'

68. For example, Augustine, *City of God* 19.18 and 21.9. He also used 1 Cor. 13.11 in one passage to show that Paul was already a man when he urged chastity on his readers. See *De opere monachorum* 40.

69. Pseudo-Justin Martyr, *Expositio rectae fidei* 379.D.3.

70. Theodoret, Epistle 109, *To Eusebius, Bishop of Ancyra*; *De incarnatione domini* (PG 75.1476.38).

71. Theodoret, *Explanatio in canticum canticorum* (PG 81.132.48, 81.204); cf. also his *De providentia* 10.3.

72. Theodoret, *Interpretatio in epistulas s. Pauli* on 1 Cor. 13.

the earth (tongues), and human knowledge will cease.⁷³ (Note that he does not deal with glossalalia or prophecy in the sense of Christian *charismata*.)

Epiphanius (late fourth century). We know the depths of the knowledge of God (Rom. 11.33), but only in part now (1 Cor. 13.9). Perfection comes with the Parousia of the Logos.⁷⁴ Agabus and the daughters of Philip prophesied, but only in part; they hoped for the perfect in the eschatological resurrection.⁷⁵

John Cassian (early fifth century). The *charismata* will pass away in the eschaton, but not love:

For all gifts are given for a time as use and need require, but when the dispensation is ended they will without doubt presently pass away: but love will never be destroyed.⁷⁶

Pseudo-Primasius (sixth century?). In the future 1 Cor. 13.9 will be fulfilled when faith and hope are rendered obsolete and Christians will see and grasp the truth itself.⁷⁷

3. *Attested Eschatological Reading of at least 1 Corinthians 13.11-12.*

Clement of Alexandria (late second century). 'Face to face' is eschatological, at the resurrection or beatific vision, as in 1 Cor. 2.9 and 2 Cor. 12.4,⁷⁸ or at the resurrection or after death, in fulfillment of Mt. 5.8.⁷⁹

Cyprian (mid-third century). Our knowledge in this age is limited (1 Cor. 13.12) and our faith ought therefore to be simple.⁸⁰

73. Archelaus, *Acta disputationis* 36-37.

74. Epiphanius, *Ancoratus* 11.8.5.

75. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 3.98.10-11; cf. 3.128.14.

76. John Cassian, *First Conference* 11; cf. *Second Conference*.

77. Pseudo-Primasius, *In epistolam I ad Corinthos commentaria* (PL 68.539-40).

78. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 1.6; *Stromata* 1.19; same sense in *Stromata* 4.3 and 5.11; *Quis Dives salvetur?* 38.2, in which Clement misquotes 13.8 as 'prophecies are done away, tongues cease, gifts of healing fail on the earth'. Although Clement uses the present tense, there is no evidence in the context for or against a reference to the cessation of these gifts in his day; *Excerpta ex Theodotian* 1.15.2, 1.27.4.

79. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.1.

80. Cyprian, *Testimonia ad Quirinum* 3.53.3.

Lactantius (late third–early fourth century). Life on this earth is likened to childhood, while immortality is like maturity.⁸¹

Ambrosiaster (scholarly label for the author of a commentary on the Pauline epistles written at or before 375 CE). The *charismata* give truth, but not all truth, which is an eschatological gift in 1 Cor. 13.11 and 1 Jn 3.2. 1 Corinthians 13.12 will take place when we are present with the Lord.⁸²

Cyril of Alexandria (early, mid-fifth century). The ‘mirror’ in 1 Cor. 13.12 applies to this life.⁸³

Leo the Great (mid-fifth century). Human nature will be transformed so that it will see God face to face in the beatific vision. This will fulfill 1 Cor. 13.12, Mt. 5.8 and 1 Cor. 2.9.⁸⁴

b. *1 Corinthians 13.8-12 and the Three Levels of Knowledge*

Among some of those who took an eschatological reading of 1 Cor. 13.8-12 there existed a theory of three stages of revelation. Clement of Alexandria described it thus in his argument against the Gnostics, who thought there was a time when Paul’s Christian theology was immature:⁸⁵

‘When I was a child’	=	Paul under the Old Covenant, persecuting the church
‘When I was a man’	=	Paul under the New Covenant
‘Face to face’	=	future resurrection life

Basilios the Great (fourth century) took a very similar approach.⁸⁶ Methodius and Ambrose, meanwhile, spoke more generally.⁸⁷

81. Lactantius, *Instit. divin.* 7.5.22.

82. Ambrosiaster, *Commentaria in xiii epistolas beati Pauli, in loc.* (PL 13.266-67). This and the sixth-century commentary by Pseudo-Primasius (see above) both take an eschatological view of this text, and both would have a strong influence on medieval exegesis.

83. Cyril of Alexandria, Letter 55.

84. Leo the Great, Sermon 45.

85. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 1.6.

86. Basilios, *Prologus* 8 and *Sermones de moribus Symeone Metaphrasta* (PG 32.1312.16-17).

87. Methodius, *Symposium* 3.9, 5.7 and 9.2; Ambrose, *De fide resurrectionis* 2.109; *De excessu fratris Satyri* 2.110.

'Shadow'	=	the Jews had the shadow in the Law
'In a mirror, darkly'	=	Christians have a deeper revelation in the gospel
'Face to face'	=	the fullest revelation, in the resurrection and judgment

Clement's disciple Origen took a strongly eschatological view of this passage, but he could also apply 1 Cor. 13.9-10 to the gospel, in this case with an allusion to Gal. 4.1-2:

[T]here is need to us first of the glory which admits of being done away, for the sake of the glory which surpasseth; as there is need of the knowledge which is in part, which will be done away when that which is perfect comes. Every soul, therefore, which comes to childhood, and is on the way to full growth, until the fulness of time is at hand, needs a tutor and stewards and guardians, in order that, after all these things, he who formerly differed nothing from a bond-servant, though he is lord of all, may receive, when freed from a tutor and stewards and guardians, the patrimony corresponding to the very costly pearl, and to that which is perfect, which on its coming does away with that which is in part, when one is able to receive 'the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,' having been previously exercised, so to speak, in those forms of knowledge which are surpassed by the knowledge of Christ.⁸⁸

This is not far from Commodianus's third-century polemic against paganism, in which he likened belief in Jupiter to childhood, and faith in Christ to adult maturity.⁸⁹

A century and a half later, Ambrose twice diverted from his eschatological viewpoint and wrote that Christ fulfilled 1 Cor. 13.10 in his incarnation. This means that Christians in this age experience the perfection that is spiritual circumcision, and even if they do not experience manna from heaven as of old, they experience Christ the perfect bread from heaven.⁹⁰

Later Theodoret in one text took an approach like that of Origen, adding further that our current 'perfection' will seem childish when compared with the life to come.⁹¹

88. Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.9.

89. Commodianus, *Instructiones*; *Biblica Patristica* regards this as an allusion to 1 Cor. 13.11.

90. Ambrose, *Letters to Priests* (*Letters*, FC 252; same teaching in *Letter to Irenaeus*, 232). In the eighth century the last of the great Greek fathers, John of Damascus, took a similar view: the coming of Christ and the Spirit superceded the Sabbath law. See John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei* 4.23.

91. Theodoret, *De providentia* 10.3.

These texts can hardly be taken as evidence for the view that 'perfection' is the full canon nor that the *charismata* ceased with its completion. Rather, these fathers who normally took an eschatological reading, also saw a further application in the coming of Christ.

c. 1 Corinthians 13.8-12 and Christian Humility

Most of the fathers pressed the point that the incompleteness of their knowledge should remind Christians to be humble. The Arianists were mistaken in their doctrine, but they also erred in presuming to plumb all mysteries. So did the Montanists and Manicheans with their new revelations, and the Gnostics with their mystical apprehension of truth. Irenaeus proposed a simple test for those who claimed perfect knowledge:

[L]et him not (arraying himself in vain glory) boast that he has acquired greater knowledge than others with respect to those things which are invisible, or cannot be placed under our observation; but let him, by making diligent inquiry, and obtaining information from the Father, tell us the reasons (which we know not) of those things which are in this world—as, for instance, the number of hairs on his own head, and the sparrows which are captured day by day, and such other points with which we are not previously acquainted—so that we may credit him also with respect to more important points.⁹²

Cyprian declared that 'the secrets of God cannot be seen through, and therefore our faith ought to be simple'.⁹³ Augustine reminded the New Academy that it too knew only 'in part', and that it was permissible for a Christian to have doubts about matters that lay outside the testimony of human senses, reason, the Scriptures or sound witnesses.⁹⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus too weighed in:

[Paul] is lofty in carnal things, he rejoices in things spiritual; he is not rude in knowledge, and claims to see in a mirror, darkly...What is the lesson and instruction he would thus impress upon us? Not to be proud of earthly things, or puffed up by knowledge, or excite the flesh against the spirit.⁹⁵

92. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 2.28.9. See the similar reproach against the Gnostics in Theodoret, *Interp. in epistulas s. Pauli* on 1 Cor. 13.12; also cf. Theodoret, *De providentia* 10.3.

93. Cyprian, *Testimonia ad Quirinum* 3.53.

94. Augustine, *City of God* 19.18.

95. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Apologetica* (Oration 2; emphasis added); cf. John Chrysostom, *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 20.3.

4. *The Semi-Cessationist Interpretation of John Chrysostom*

It is well known that John Chrysostom of Antioch (late fourth century) repeatedly reacted against claims of miracles and healings in his church, and dealt often with questions from the newly baptized who wondered why they did not begin to speak with tongues. Against this background he articulated what was apparently the only cessationist reading of 1 Cor. 13.8 within the catholic church of the first five centuries.

In one polemic, he argued that tongues and prophecy had earlier passed away, after serving preachers of the gospel for a time: 'See how now, at least, there is no prophecy nor gift of tongues.'⁹⁶ Yet, Chrysostom then went on to say that even the knowledge of the gospel will seem childish in the future age. And so he argued that the Anomoeans (a radical Arianist group) were mistaken when they claimed to have perfect knowledge.

He is more explicit in a homily on 1 Corinthians 13. His position is that tongues and prophecy (13.8) were given in order to advance the Christian faith; that faith is now sown abroad, and these *charismata* are now superfluous. We now possess what is still partial knowledge (13.9), which will become clearer in the future when we see 'face to face' (13.11-12). In that sense, even Paul was a 'child' in his lifetime (13.11).⁹⁷ This is the same stance Chrysostom took in a number of other extant passages (see those listed earlier), comparing our text now with 2 Cor. 5.7-8, now with Heb. 11.2, now with the 'savor' of the knowledge of Christ in 2 Cor. 2.14. His view differed from the standard approach to 1 Corinthians, which consistently linked 13.8 with the rest of the paragraph—hence we label his exegesis semi-cessationist. Chrysostom asserted that 13.8 may be treated separately from 13.9-12, telling his hearers: 'But although it be no marvel that prophecies and tongues should be done away, that knowledge should be done away, this is what may cause some perplexity.'⁹⁸ Tongues and prophecy passed away when the gospel was spread to the world; even so, we still have a partial knowledge, and that will be changed when Christ returns. This fact, argued Chrysostom, once more in line with the rest of the church,

96. Chrysostom, *Contra Anomoeos* 1.9.

97. Chrysostom, *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 34.1-2; *In epistulam ad Ephesios* 11. It is worth noting that the fathers did not connect 'knowledge' in 13.8-12 with the *charisma* called λόγος γνώσεως in 12.8.

98. Chrysostom, *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 34.2.

should teach us humility, since 'not even unto us, the faithful, hath been committed entire certainty and exactness'.⁹⁹

5. Conclusion

Over the first five centuries of the church the exegetes of 1 Cor. 13.8-12 broke almost cleanly into two camps. On the one hand were those sectarians who wanted to prove the superiority of their system over common Christian tradition. They went to great lengths to prove that their knowledge was not only fresher, but perfection itself.

On the other hand, the catholic church believed that despite their possession of the Holy Spirit and the full canon (reference to the canon being implicit throughout the fathers, but explicit in Didymus Caecus, Ambrose, Gregory of Nyssa), the church would have to wait for the resurrection to see God's truth perfectly. The sole exception was Tertullian. Line his works up chronologically, and the strobe light of history catches him moving from one camp to the other. Chrysostom, finally, insisted that his exegesis moved within the orbit of catholic eschatology and its concomitant virtue of humility. He diverged from tradition because of his belief that tongues and prophecy had ceased in the interim. Thus, a historical datum affected his exegesis, and he separated the fulfillment of 13.8 from the completion of 13.9-12.

Yet, in the end, what strikes the modern reader most of all is the desire of the early church to go beyond dogmatic/polemic concerns and to recapture Paul's original point—the superiority of love. So John Cassian:

And therefore the blessed Apostle prefers [love] not only above fear and hope but also above all gifts which are counted great and wonderful, and shows the way of love still more excellent than all. For when after finishing his list of spiritual gifts of virtues he wanted to describe its members, he began as follows: 'And yet I show unto you a still more excellent way...'¹⁰⁰

99. Chrysostom, *In epistulam i ad Corinthios* 7.3. We might also mention that he gave a secondary application of 13.10: it corroborated Mt. 5.17, and showed that the Law of Moses was replaced with the new law, an application of that verse that echoed Origen and Chrysostom's contemporary Ambrose (see above). Cf. Chrysostom, *In Matthaëum* 16.6.

100. John Cassian, *Second Conference* (NPNF 2,11.420). See also Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 4.12.2.