

13 Νοεμβρίου 2016

Moses' Life according to Philon the Alexandrian and Gregory of Nyssa (Dimitris Baltas)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

Image not found or type unknown



O? ????. It is the conviction that most of the times it is useful to know the way of acting of some important men that has led to the writing of biographies. Biographies concern the comparative examination of two persons, like *Βίοι Παράλληλοι* of Plutarch, or only one person, for example Moses. Biographies have a historical character, because they include the events, the information and the characteristics of the persons they refer to, but at the same time, they also have an exemplary character through the positive or negative behaviour of persons and the way they act.

Specifically the comparison between two works that concern the biography of one and only person should insist on finding out existing differences. In particular, this happens when the biographies belong to different eras, for example the *Περί ??? ???? ?????? (About Moses' life)*[1] that was written by Philon the Alexandrian (30b.C.-50a.C) and the *Περί τοῦ βίου Μωϋσέως ἢ περί τῆς κατ' ?????? ?????????? (?bout Mose's life)*[2] that was written by Gregory of Nyssa (335-394). They both use the allegorical method, but each one of them interprets the events from his point of view.

For a start we could say that in these two biographies we have two traditions, the syncretic (?????????) Jewish-Greek[3] that was inaugurated by Philon and the Christian that was continued by Gregory.

? ??????????. It is known that the syncretic is trying to join the Greek thought, that was similar to the platonic, and the Apocalypse's truth, as it was stated in the Old Testament. Generally speaking, this effort is unsuccessful[4]. The same thing is happening into *Περί τοῦ Μωϋσέως βίου*, for which Philon has taken into consideration the text of Exodus of O?, since his native language was Greek and not Hebrew[5]. This work of Philon has explanatory or even martial character[6] because it is against physical interpretations and rational tendencies[7].

The allegorical interpretation is known to Philon, who has borrowed it from Greek philosophy, and specifically from the Stoic and Neo-pythagorean philosophers[8]. This fact has an influence on his work *Νόμων ἱερῶν ἀλληγορίας τῶν μετὰ τὴν ἑξαήμερον*[9]. As a matter of fact, Philon and the patristic explanatory, owe a lot to the allegorical interpretation of Aristobulus (150 B.C.- ?[10], which differs from Philon, *τῆς κατ' Ἀριστοτέλην φιλοσοφίας πρὸς τῇ πατρίῳ μετελιηχώς*[11].

?n example of this method is the fact of the inflammable Burning Bush, which is related to the march of the Hebrew nation, and means averting injustice at his expense. To quote Philon' s words: ?????????? ? ??? ?????????? ?????? ??? ??????????????, ?? ?? ??????? ??? ??? ?????????????, ?? ?? ? ?????????????? ?? ?????????? ??? ?? ?????? ??? ?????????????? ?????????????? ?????? ??????????????, ?????? ??? ?????????? ??? ?????????? ?????????? ??? ??????????, ?????? ?? ??? ?????????? ?????????[12].

Philon presents Moses as a King, a legislator, a priest and a prophet[13] and he talks about his virtues such as prudence, endurance, temperance but most of all about the harmony between what Moses used to preach and the way he used to live[14]. This fact shows that Philon follows the tradition because he presents other Jews as examples of virtue, as well. For example he presents Abraham for his piety or Joseph for his political capacity[15]. In The Old Testament it is known that whoever is virtuous isn't characterized as philosopher-king, so we can conclude that Philon follows the platonic perception, because he presents Moses as a philosopher-king[16] but he also places him in the Hellenistic era[17].

When Philon talks about the «legislative addiction» he emphasizes on four ingredients : ?? ??????????, ?? ??????????, ?? ?????????, ?? ?????????[18]. The legislative addiction of the person who legislates, which defines what to be or not be done[19], is an example of the general perception of The Old Testament, which as having been formed by the Pharisees[20] insists on keeping a code of moral behaviour. This observance and implementation of the Law constitutes, according to Philon, the content of philosophy[21].

When Philon talks about Moses as a priest, he writes that *φιλόθεος καί θεοφιλής, καταπνευσθείς ὑπ' ἔρωτος οὐρανίου καί διαφερόντως τιμήσας τόν ἡγεμόνα τοῦ παντός καί ἀνατιμηθείς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ*[22]. In any case, this report of the amatory relationship of the human being towards God, is not so developed in the work of Philon, in order to support that Gregory is based on Philon's texts.

? ??????????. In contrast to the syncretic Jewish-Greek perception of Philon, we notice that *ὁ χριστιανισμός οὔτε ἑλληνισμός τις ὦν οὔτε ἰουδαϊσμός, ἀλλά τό μεταξύ τούτων παλαιότατον τῆς εὐσεβείας πολίτευμα καί ἀρχαιοτάτη μὲν τις φιλοσοφία πλήν ἀλλά νεωστί πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις τοῖς καθ' ὅλης τῆς οἰκουμένης νενομοθετημένη*[23].

Under this point of view, the argument that Judaism is the forerunner of Christianity is demolished.

Similarly Gregory has taken into consideration the text of O?, but also the memorandums that were written and are relevant to the text from the first century A.D. century. Gregory, as opposed to Philon, used the *ἀναγωγή*, which is an allegorical interpretation, and he tried to present the events of *Exodus* within the frames of the church of his era. As is referred to in Gregory, the most important presupposition in order to understand how to apply this allegorical interpretation to the historical events, is the instruction of the holy mystery of belief[24], which is the belief in Christ.

In anyway, we will prove that it is impossible to accept that he is reproducing the views of Philon[25] or that he is his follower[26].

Differently from Philon, Gregory sees the symbolism of Virgin Mary to the event of the Burning Bush, because he writes that *διδασκόμεθα τό κατά τήν Παρθένον μυστήριον ἀφ' ἧς στιγμῆς τό τῆς θεότητος φῶς ἐπιλάμπαν τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ βίῳ διά γεννήσεως ἀδιάφθορον ἐφύλαξε τήν ἐξάψασαν θάμνον, τοῦ βλαστοῦ τῆς παρθενίας μή καταμαρανθέντος τῷ τόκῳ*[27]. For that reason, the original interpretation of the writer can be marked out[28].

However, Gregory has more modern sources than the text of Philon, in order to use them in his allegorical interpretation[29]? for example, the texts of Paul[30] and Origen (185-254)[31]. Among others, Gregory considers that the passage of the Red Sea stands as a symbol for baptizing[32], an explanation that was already given by Origen, which probably is based on Paul's passage[33]. The stone from which Moses pumped water, is according to the allegorical interpretation, the Christ, a symbol which has already been used by Paul[34] and Origen[35]. The blood of the lamb that Jews used in order to mark doors of their houses, stands as a symbol of salvation, through Christ's crucifixion sacrifice[36].

Gregory talks differently from Philon about «????? ?????????»[37], which Moses turned to after the incident of the extermination of an Egyptian and his unjust behavior. "????? ??????????" is referred to the separation of the occupations of living, in order to reach theory through practice[38]? *τῷ δέ ἦν ὄρειος τε καί ἰδιάζουσα ἡ ζωή, πάσης ἀγοραίου τύρβης ἀπηλλαγμένη, ἐν τῇ τῶν προβάτων ἐπιμελεία κατά τήν ἔρημον ἰδιάζοντι.* "????? ??????????" is being identified as the monk life.

Gregory's interpretation stems from the tradition of the Old Testament, but it is mainly based on the new reality of Christianity. According to this reality, the salvation of humanity is based on believing in Christ and not on the observance of Law, as we read in Paul's *Epistle to the Galatians*[39]. That's why Moses, according to Gregory, is an image of Christ[40] and a manifestation of God through man, and not an example of virtue, as it is in Philon.

It is also noticed, that Gregory's interpretation of Moses is based on presuppositions[41]. But this is not about the moral perception of the Old Testament, as it formulated by the Pharisees. It is about morality, as an action which transforms the three parts of the soul? the logical (?? ??????????), the high-spirited (?? ??????????) and the appetitive (?? ??????????????) [42], which are contaminated by sin. According to Gregory, morality is formed by divine love. Thus the perfection which man attains is described as

τό μηκέτι δουλοπρεπῶς φόβῳ κολάσεως τοῦ κατὰ κακίαν βίου χωρίζεσθαι, μηδέ τῇ τῶν μισθῶν ἐλπίδι τό ἀγαθόν ἐνεργεῖν, πραγματευτικῇ τινι καί συναλλαγματικῇ διαθέσει κατεμπορευομένους τῆς ἐναρέτου ζωῆς, ἀλλ' ὑπεριδόντας πάντων καί τῶν ἐν ἐπαγγελίαις δι' ἐλπίδος ἀποκειμένων, μόνον ἠγεῖσθαι φοβερόν τό τῆς φιλίας τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκπεσεῖν[43].

Gregory writes about the soul in order to obtain virtue, which comes from ἐρωτικῇ τινι διαθέσει πρὸς τό τῇ φύσει καλόν τῆς ψυχῆς διατεθείσης καί κινεῖται ἀκαταπαύστως, διότι ὁ σφοδρός ἐραστής τοῦ κάλλους τοῦ χαρακτῆρος τοῦ ἀρχετύπου ἐμφορηθῆναι ἐπιποθεῖ[44]. The issue of ascension of the soul, which is platonic or maybe neoplatonic resonance[45], is developed to the Christian philosophical tradition, which is the same as the Eastern, and more specifically in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, and the texts of John of the Climax (??-??), Maximus the Confessor (580-662) and Symeon the New Theologian (949/950-1022). His ascending movement of the soul is the love for the archetype God[46], who cannot be approached neither intellectually nor through the senses[47]. According these, Moses can be considered as an example of the secret ascension towards God[48] and the Knowledge of God through the incomprehensibility (ἀγνωσία)[49]. Gregory's interpretation refers to continuous practice and struggle of man, because according to him the soul desires to be united to God continuously and insatiably. It can be presumed that is based on Paul's passage[50].

Conclusion. From all the above, I think that it is possible to conclude that Nyssa does not follow Philon in his interpretation, because he has to use modern sources like Paul and Origen[51]. In spite of this, if we accept some influence and dependence on Philon[52], this will certainly concern the first part of Nyssa's work, the "history", that is the historical events, and not the second part, that is "theory". Generally, it is impossible to claim that in the work of Nyssa there's influence of ancient philosophy, which is the same to Neoplatonism, or Philon's influence. It is clear, that it is about some resonances, which regard the form? that is the verbal formulation of the opinions they express and not the content. The era in which Gregory writes, demands a whole new different explanatory within the frames of the Christian philosophical tradition, which begins being formed by the Cappadocian Fathers. This tradition is not a continuation of the Jewish perception, or a compound of the perceptions that existed before Judaism and the new ones of Christianity. It is obvious that in the fourth century, in which Gregory writes his work, he is more interested in the church of his era than the Jewish tradition.

[1] L. Chn, *Philonis Alexandrini Opera quae supersunt*, v. 4, Berlin Reiner, 1902 (????). De Gruyter, 1962), 119-268. Also, F.H. Colson, *Φίλωνος περί τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως*, London 1935, v. VI, 276-595.

[2] PG 44, 297B-429D. Also, J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse, La vie de Moise, Sources Chretiennes* 1, Paris 1968. P. Brousalis, *Gregory of Nysse, In Moses's life*, Athens 1990 (in greek).

[3] Io. Zizioulas, «Hellenism and Christianity in the first three centuries», *History of Greek nation*, v. 6, 521-523 (in greek).

[4] N.G. Politou, *Philosophy in Byzantium*, t. 1, Athnes 1992, 51 (in greek)

[5] ?. G. Politou, 44.

[6] G. Florovsky, *The Eastern Fathers of fourth century*, transl. P. Pallis, Thessaloniki, 1991, 227 (in greek)

[7] J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 18-19.

[8] P. Christou, *Greek Patrology*, t. 1, Thessaloniki 1981, 40 and 158-159 (in greek). Also N.G. Politou, 43-44.

[9] Ed. F.H. Colson-G.H. Whitaker, Cambridge, 1962, 146-473. H.A. Wolfson, *The philosophy oh the Church Fathres*, v. I, Harvard University Press, 1956, 24-72. J. Pepin, «Remarques sur la theorie de l' exégèse allégorique chez Philon

- », *Actes Philon d' Alexandrie* (Lyon, 11-15 Sept. 1966), Paris 1967, 131-167.
- [10] Io. Zizioulas, 522.
- [11] Eusebius, *Εὐαγγ. Προπ.*, 8,9, 38, 3-4. Clem. Alex, *Στρωματέων*, 1,15, 72, 4,4.
- [12] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, ?, 67. J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 118, n.2.
- [13] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, II, 4-6, 12-48, 66-173, 187-274. Clemens the Alexandrian calls him theologian and prophet (*Στρωματέων* 1,22, 150, 5,1). D.T. Runia, *Philo and the church Fathers*, Leiden, 1995, 208-209.
- [14] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, I, 25-31.
- [15] Βίος σοφοῦ τοῦ κατὰ διδασκαλίαν τελειωθέντος ἢ νόμων ἀγράφων, ὃ ἐστὶ περὶ Ἀβραάμ καὶ Βίος πολιτικοῦ, ὅπερ ἐστὶ περὶ Ἰωσήφ, ed. F.H. Colson, London, 1935, v. VI, 4-135 and 140-271.
- [16] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, ??,2. Cf. Plato *Respublica* 473d.
- [17] J. Danielou, *Philon d' Alexandrie*, Paris, 1958, 88.
- [18] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, ??, 8-11.
- [19] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, II, 187.
- [20] Chr. Yannaras, *The freedom of morality*, Athens, 1989, 71, 246 (in greek)
- [21] N. Chronis, *The transformations of philosophy from hellenistic to the first christian centuries*, Athens, 1988, 135 (in greek).
- [22] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, ??, 67.
- [23] Eusebius, *Εὐαγγ. Προπ.*, ?, ??, 10, 1-4.
- [24] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, PG 44, 397C (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 254, 217) Πάντως δέ ὁ πεπαιδευμένος τό θεῖον τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν μυστήριον, οὐκ ἀγνοεῖ, πῶς συμβαίνει τῇ ἱστορίᾳ ἢ κατὰ ἀναγωγὴν θεωρία.
- [25] J. Pépin, «Hellenism and Christianity», in (ed.) Fr. Châtelet, *The philosophy*, transl. K. Papagiorgis, Athnes, 1989, t. A?, 235 (in greek).
- [26] J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 16.
- [27] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, PG 44, 332D (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 118, 21)
- [28] J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 119, n. 3.
- [29] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, PG 44, 344C (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 142, 65), 352D (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 160, 92) 356A-B (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 164-5, 100-102), 429C-D (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 326, 320).
- [30] Cf. S. Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria. An Introduction*, Oxford Univeristy Press, 1979, 150-152.
- [31] Cf. J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 22-23.
- [32] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, PG 44, 361?C (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 178, 121).
- [33] *Homilia in Exodus*, 5,1. Cf. *Α΄ Cor.* 10,2 οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν ἐβαπτίσαντο ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ καὶ τῇ θαλάσῃ.
- [34] ?????? τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως, PG 44, 405C-D (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 274, 244).
- [35] *Homilia in Exodus*, (*Library of Greek Fathers and Christian Theologian*, v. 15, 169) πέτρα παρεικάζεται ὁ Χριστός διὰ τό ἄσειστον καὶ ἀκλόνητον

- [36] ????????? ??????, *ἰς τόν βίον τοῦ Μωυσέως*, PG 44, 353B (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 162, 95).
- [37] ????????? ??????, *ἰς τόν βίον τοῦ Μωυσέως*, PG 44, 305B-C (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 58-60, 19).
- [38] J. Danielou, *L' être et le temps chez Gregoire de Nysse*, Leiden, 1970, 1-17.
- [39] *Gal. 3, 24-25 ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγός ἡμῶν γέγονεν εἰς Χριστόν, ἵνα ἐκ πίστεως διακιωθῶμεν. Ἐλθούσης δέ πίστεως οὐκέτι ὑπό παιδαγωγόν ἐσμέν.*
- [40] ????????? ??????, *ἰς τόν βίον τοῦ Μωυσέως*, PG 44, 396D-397D (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 252-256, 213-217).
- [41] J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 17.
- [42] Plato Phaedros 246a. ????????? ??????, *ἰς τόν βίον τοῦ Μωυσέως*, PG 44, 353C (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 162, 96), 361C-D (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 178-180, 121-123).
- [43] ????????? ??????, *ἰς τόν βίον τοῦ Μωυσέως*, PG 44, 329C-D (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 326, 320).
- [44] ????????? ??????, *ἰς τόν βίον τοῦ Μωυσέως*, PG 44, 401D (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 264, 231).
- [45] Plato Phaedo 79c. Plotinus Enn. 4,7,31 and 6,7,34. Cf. (ed.) A.H. Armstrong, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Medieval Philosophy*, 1970, 449.
- [46] Maximus the Confessor *Capitum quinquies centenorum centuria V*, PG 90, 1384C-1385B *τό θεῖον οἱ θεολόγοι, ποτέ μέ ἔρωτα, ποτέ δέ ἀγάπη ... καλοῦσιν.*
- [47] ????????? ??????, *ἰς τόν βίον τοῦ Μωυσέως*, PG 44, 373D (= J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 206, 157) *ἡ δέ τοῦ Θεοῦ θεωρία οὔτε κατά τό φαινόμενον, οὔτε κατά τό ἀκουόμενον ἐνεργεῖται, οὔτε τινί τῶν συνήθων νοημάτων καταλαμβάνεται.*
- [48] G. Florovsky, 236-240.
- [49] ????????? ????????? ?????????????? *ἰς τό Περί θείων ὀνομάτων*, PG 3, 1024A-B.
- [50] *Phil. 3,13 τό πέρας τοῦ εὐρεθέντος ἀρχή πρὸς τήν τῶν ὑψηλοτέρων εὕρεσιν τοῖς ἀναβαίνουσιν γίνεται.*
- [51] J. Danielou, «Philon et Gregoire de Nysse», *Actes Philon d' Alexandrie* (Lyon, 11-15 Sept. 1966), Paris 1967, 344-345.
- [52] G. Florovsky, 227. J. Danielou, *Gregoire de Nysse*, 20-21.