

Enrico Cattaneo S.J., *Il commento a Isaia di Basilio di Cesarea. Attribuzione e studio teologico-letterario, Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 139, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma, 2014, 602 p.

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The Jesuit Father Enrico Cattaneo is well known for his studies on Patristics and especially for his work on expanding the connections between Biblical Studies and Patristic Theology. Leaving aside the presentation of the author's work, let us briefly note that Rev. Dr. Enrico Cattaneo is the chairman of the Patristic Theology department in Naples and an Associate Professor of the *Pontifical Oriental Institute* in Rome. Aside from the author's prominence and the general significance of his volume released this year, this book review is motivated to a large extent by the content related to the work of St. Basil the Great and especially to his commentary on the Book of Isaiah, its Origenic influence and the paternity controversy of this commentary.

The history of this commentary on *Isaiah* (*Com Is.*) is a long one and contains important lessons for us. From the ample introduction of Cattaneo's volume, we learn that there exist more than sixty manuscripts, that a non-critical edition of the text was already attempted in the 16th c., that the text was incorporated in the famous collection of patristic writings of J.P. Migne (*PG* 30) and that it has been translated into various modern languages, starting from the 19th c.: in German (Waissmann 1838-1942), Russian (Moscova 1845-8), French (Roustan 1847); Italian (Pietro Trevisan 1939) and English (Lipatov 2001).

The author of the study is convinced that he has found enough arguments to support the claim that St. Basil of Cesarea has authored the commentary, a fact questioned and even strongly disputed by Patristic theologians of recent centuries. To give just a few examples, *Patrologia Gaeca* includes the text among those with uncertain paternity (see *monitum*, *PG* 30, 118: "id est inter dubia"). Also, Erasmus of Rotterdam's edition of the complete works of St. Basil does not include *Com Is.* Other editors and patristic theologians, such as Prudenzius Maran († 1742) and Otto Bardenhewer followed the same line. Bardenhewer writes in 1912 that the style of *Com Is.* is very different from that of the great Cappadocian Hierarch (p. 43). The only exception

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to this line of thought, which made its way into Patrology textbooks, is Joseph Witting, who questioned the conclusions of his predecessors and found significant similarities between *Com Is.* and other works of St. Basil. More recently, the new collection *CPG* (2867) follows Migne in including the text among the works categorised as “*dubia*” (p. 53).

The problem with all these editions, continues Cattaneo, is that none of them bring sufficient arguments of either the internal kind (literary criticism) or the external kind (related to the history of the text). For this reason, the author undertakes the labourious task of preparing the ground for a critical edition of the text, as required by today's standards. The manner in which he proceeds is not fundamentally different from the previous attempts. However, his attempt is decidedly more profound and dedicated to the question of paternity. Here lies the key difference between the monumental work of Cattaneo and previous publications on the paternity of the commentary, such as those of N. A. Lipatov, who in recent years has been the most prominent upholder of Basilian authorship. While in Orthodox theological milieus the Basilian authorship of the text has been accepted without the complex study of Cattaneo¹, Catholic and Protestant theologians maintained several reservations about the attribution, which the present volume hopes to eliminate.

Cattaneo's study is structured in six parts. He constantly makes reference not only to the connections between *Com Is.* and other works of St. Basil, but also to the connections between *Com Is.* and other commentaries attributed to patristic writers of the first Christian centuries. Following the discussion of the philological aspects in the second part (Ch. 7-9), Cattaneo examines in great detail the vocabulary related to natural phenomena, astronomy, planets, animals and so on (Ch. 10-14), while in the fourth part of the study he extracts the exegetical principles followed by the author of the text and the manner of interpretation of the Law. He also highlights and classifies the etymological definitions of the Hebrew names (Ch. 15-22). It is only in the fifth part that Cattaneo offers samples of annotated commentary to the Book of *Isaiah* (Ch. 23-31), while in the last part he discusses matters of theology and moral theology.

From the substantial content of this convincing study, we selected for this review the discussions around the text *Is. 6, 1-10*, as conclusive and repre-

¹ See for example the Romanian reception, translation and introductory study by Al. Mihăilă in: *Comentariu la cartea Profetului Isaia*, Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești serie nouă, vol. 2, Ed. Basilica, București, 2009; and also J. McGuckin, “Patterns of Biblical Exegesis in the Cappadocian Fathers: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and Gregory of Nyssa”, in: S.T. Kimbrough (ed.), *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, NY, 2005, p. 44.

sentative of the author's attempt. Cattaneo observes that St. Basil the Great, in fact, offers two interpretations of the text *Is. 6, 1-10*. Moreover, the commentary is incomplete, omitting the third verse ("Holy, Holy, Holy..."). The comparison with other authors' commentaries on *Isaiah*, as well as with Origen's works proves in the end that St. Basil consulted the (today lost) commentary of the Alexandrian theologian. The reason St. Basil omits *Is. 6, 3* is that, given the theological developments of the century that followed Origen's death and especially the experience of the first Ecumenical Council, St. Basil's views were not in complete agreement with the Trinitarian theology of Origen, which he developed in connection with this passage from the prophecy of *Isaiah*. Moreover, when St. Basil talks about the "hardening tradition of Israel" from *Is. 6, 9-10*, his discussion resembles that of Origen, in which he makes reference to the Pauline text *Rom 11, 25-26*, where the Apostle says that the hardening of the people was performed only in a partial manner (ἄπὸ μέρους), until "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (p. 291).

Unlike Eusebius of Caesarea and other patristic authors of the 4th -6th c., who completely overlook the biblical correspondence between *Is 6* and *Rom 11*, St. Basil proves a closer familiarity with Origen's works. The fact that the Origenist intuitions on the relations between the hypostases of the Holy Trinity are omitted by St. Basil in *Com Is.* (but developed in other works of St. Basil, such as that on the Holy Spirit), as well as the manner in which he borrows from Origen geographical, natural and etymological data, proves, in Cattaneo's views, that St. Basil had available, at the time, only the commentary of the Alexandrian scholar, which he replicated to a great extent, with certain omissions, merging passages and improving according to his own ideas.

It is impossible to make a summary of the multitude of arguments discussed by Cattaneo. We briefly note one: the fact that St. Basil borrows Origen's etymology of the name "Israel": the true Jacob-Israel is he who sees God ("ὁ ὁρῶν θεόν"), without the variants of interpretation found with St. Jerome, who favours "rectus dei" or "rectissimus dei" (*Malachi 1,2-5*).

E. Cattaneo arrives at the conclusion that in *Com Is.* we meet a "Basilianised Origen" (p. 516) and that his study on the commentary proves once again and with powerful arguments that St. Basil the Great contributed to the dissemination (sometimes in a modified form) of the ideas of the great theologian. Thus, although forever lost, the work of Origen— and especially *Com Is.* — survived through such writings and for many centuries fostered the "inheritance of the universal Church" (p. 522).

Tacitly, Cattaneo's study represents a solid foundation stone for the restoration of Origen's image in the history of Christian thought. This comes

against the background of the last decade in which we experienced the appearance of several important studies which showed the manner in which Christian Theology and especially subjects such as Biblical Hermeneutics have been greatly influenced by Origen. These studies have laid out for the coming generations a new attitude towards the humble theologian of Alexandria.