CHAPTER ONE

IMPLEMENTED LOGOS IN THE INTERPRETATION OF JAMES

Among the earliest extant interpretations of “the implanted logos” (ὁ ἐμφύτως λόγος) described in the Letter of James as that “which is able to save your souls” (Jas 1:21) is that of an anonymous Greek exegete whose explanation is preserved, with some minor variations, in the Greek commentaries attributed to Oecumenius and Theophylactus.¹ The implanted logos, according to this interpreter, is human reason: it is that which makes us “rational” (λογικοί). It is associated, moreover, particularly with the general human ability to distinguish “the better and the worse” (τὸ βελτίων καὶ τὸ χείρονος).²

A quite similar interpretation, though one at least not obviously dependent upon that of Oecumenius and Theophylactus, is found in the commentary of the 12th century Syriac exegete Dionysius bar Salibi. He too explained this phrase with reference to the human ability, “implanted” in our nature by God, to make ethical distinctions: in natura enim inseruit Deus, ut amet bona et odio habeat mala.³ In addition, Dionysius identified the implanted logos itself as “natural law” (legem naturalem); the “perfect law of freedom” of Jas 1:25 is thus

¹ It is difficult to date this interpretation in any precise way. The Oecumenius in question was bishop of Thessaly in the 10th century, and Theophylactus was an 11th century exegete; but M. Dibelius, at least, expresses doubts regarding these attributions, and dates the commentaries (or at least their contents) to “the Ancient Church,” i.e., prior to the Middle Ages (James, 262). The accuracy of these attributions, in any case, matters little for our purposes. It is most doubtful that the interpretation of Jas 1:21 which concerns us here was the original contribution of either one, as both seem to have been above all collectors of prior comments. For the sake of convenience I will refer to the compilers of these commentaries simply as Oecumenius and Theophylactus.

² Oecumenius: MPG 119. 468; Theophylactus: MPG 125. 1145.

³ J. Sedlacek, Dionysius bar Salibi in Apocalypse, Actus et Epistulas Catholicae (CSCO, Scriptores Syri 2/101; Rome: de Luigi, 1910) 91; throughout this study I depend on Sedlacek’s Latin translation of Dionysius’s Syriac. That the natura in question is in fact human nature is clear from the prior paraphrase of 1:21, excipie verbum insitum naturae nostrae (ibid., 91f), as well as from his comment on 1:25, quoted immediately below.
a “law which God from the beginning placed in human nature”
(legem quam Deus ab initio posuit naturae humanae).4

While it has generally been agreed by critical scholars that the author of James does equate the implanted logos with the “perfect law of freedom,” and though it has often been noted that his association of law and freedom finds precedents particularly in the Stoic sources, the interpretation of James’s logos in light of Stoic concepts of human reason and natural law as found in these ancient commentaries has found few advocates.5 It has long been noted that the term ἐμφυτος does not always carry its usual connotation of “innate” or “inborn”,6 and the vast majority of James’s interpreters have argued that the context in which the term is used in this work militates against reading it in this sense.7 This, in turn, is thought to preclude any substantive Stoic influence on James’s use of the phrase ἐμφυτος λόγος. Thus, when mentioned at all, the interpretation of James’s logos offered in these ancient commentaries is viewed as little more than an odd relic of past interpretation, and one that merits no serious consideration.8 Martin Dibelius, whose interpretation of this passage

4 Ibid.
5 On the use of the term “natural law” in connection with Stoicism, see the opening remarks of Chapter Two. On the relation of these early commentaries to the Stoic understanding of human reason and natural law, see Chapter Three, under the heading “Early Interpretation of James 1:21.”
6 Note the analogous discussion of the possibilities for translating this term by those attempting to reconstruct Chrysippus’s doctrine of implanted preconceptions (ἐμφυτο προλήψεις), on which see below, Chapter Two. The term ἐμφυτος, despite the presence of a cross reference for it, is not discussed in TDNT, which omits the promised entry on the term φύς; see TDNT 2. 537. The most extensive discussion of the term seems to be that of H. Heisen, Novae hypotheses interpretandae epistolae Jacobi (Bremen: 1739), which is cited by Hort, Ropes and Adamson. This work remains unavailable to me.
7 A notable exception is F. J. A. Hort, The Epistle of St. James: The Greek Text with Introduction, Commentary as far as Chapter IV, Verse 7, and Additional Notes (London: MacMillan, 1909) 37–38. Hort argued that the author of James would not have used the term ἐμφυτος, the proper meaning of which is “inborn” or “congenital,” to describe the “outward message of the Gospel”: “[h]e could never have used in that sense a word which everyone who knew Greek would of necessity understand in the opposite sense.” A similar interpretation, though one argued more broadly from the context of James 1, is offered by A. T. Cadoux, The Thought of St. James (London: Clarke & Co., 1944) 19–24. Neither author, however, emphasizes Stoic usage in particular. Those who argue for the Jewish authorship of James have argued along similar lines; see on this below.
8 So J. E. Huther, Kritisch exegetisches Handbuch über den Brief des Jakobus (KEKNT; 3d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1870) 84; cf. the later edition of the Meyer commentary by W. Beyschlag, Der Brief des Jacobus (KEKNT; 6th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897) 83. See more recently the summary