CHAPTER SIX

THE DOCTRINE OF APOKATASTASIS

6.1. Introduction

Apokatastasis is generally translated in English as ‘restoration’, ‘restituation’, or ‘re-establishment’. In the Hellenic, or Hellenistic scheme of things it is used to refer to the return of things to a former state. Plato refers to the restoration of the sun and moon to their original positions after an eclipse; Aristotle used it as the “making good of what our nature lacks”; which Aretaeus used later in terms of a return to health. Polybius used it to refer to a return to civil peace, whereas the Stoics used it to refer to the cyclic nature of existence and the periodic return of the cosmos to its original condition in the universal conflagration (ἐκπύρωσις). Asclepiodotus used it to refer to the reversal of movement in military formations, while Plutarch used it to refer to the return of the stars to their original positions after their yearly course. Proclus later used it extensively to refer to the restoration of the soul to its former state. Its meanings in the Greco-Roman world were many and varied and generally well summed up by the Latin phrase, restititio in pristinum statum.

In the Septuagint, the noun usually translated from the Hebrew šûwb, ‘to turn back’, is never used. However its cognate verb is used

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2 Ax. 370b. Cf. Tim. 39d (Although the Axiochus is generally agreed not to be a work of Plato).
3 MM. 1205a.
4 S.A. 1.10.
5 Hist. 4.23.1.
6 For example Nemesius, De. nat. hom. 309,5–311,2.
7 Tact. 10.6.
8 De Facie 937f. See also Corp. Herm. Asclepius 13.9.
9 E.g. Inst. 199.
extensively. In Genesis, for example, it is used to express the restoring of the cupbearer in the temple after three days;\(^\text{10}\) in Exodus, the return of the waters after Moses separates the sea to allow the Israelites to escape from the Egyptians;\(^\text{11}\) and as the restoration of the people of Israel to the Promised Land in Jeremiah and Samuel.\(^\text{12}\) Philo had also used the term to speak of the wanderings of the Israelites as an allegory of “the perfect restoration of the soul (τὴν τελείαν ἀποκατάστασιν ψυχῆς)” after a period of tribulation.\(^\text{13}\)

In the New Testament the noun only appears once, in Acts 3.21, where Luke speaks of Christ being received in heaven “until the times of the restoration of all things, (ἀποκαταστάσεως παντόν) which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began”. The passage speaks of the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures prophesying the restoration of Israel, but, in its new context, is seen as Christ awaiting in heaven as fulfilment for all that has been proclaimed in the past. Its verb cognate, ἀποκαθιστήμι, is also used in this connection, with the coming again of Elijah “to restore all things (ἀποκαταστήσει πάντα)”.\(^\text{14}\) The prophet Elijah was understood by some early Christians as a precursor to John the Baptist, who, in baptising Jesus, instigated the Advent of Christ in the world, securing the world’s salvation, or in this instance, its restoration.\(^\text{15}\) These testimonia provide the starting point for a Christian understanding of the restoration, with Christ as the principle in which all things are made new, and as a fulfilment of the role of God as restorer of the kingdom of Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures.\(^\text{16}\)

Accounts of the doctrine in the Church fathers are also many and varied,\(^\text{17}\) from the Clementine Homilies, which spoke of it in terms of restoring one’s self to the image and likeness of God,\(^\text{18}\) to Justin Martyr who spoke of Christ restoring the free sons of Noah and his servants, conferring the same honour on all who keep God’s com-

\(^\text{10}\) Gn 40.13.
\(^\text{12}\) Jer 15.19; 2 Sam 9.7. Also see Str. 1.21.124.1–3; 1.21.140.7.
\(^\text{13}\) “Heres” 293.3.
\(^\text{14}\) Matt. 17:11 & Mk. 9.12 following Mal 3.23.
\(^\text{15}\) See for example Justin Martyr Dial. 49.5 & Origen Comm. in Matt. 13.2.
\(^\text{16}\) See Acts 1.6.
\(^\text{18}\) Clem. hom. 10.6.