It might be thought that to think about the Fathers on Genesis is one of a series of quite similar topics: the Fathers on Exodus, or Deuteronomy, or one of the prophets, or any other book of the Bible. It is simply focusing, for one reason or another, on one of the books of the Bible. That might be true for other periods of church history (though I am not claiming that it is, and indeed, rather doubt it). But in the case of the patristic period, interest in Genesis is quite extraordinary. It is mainly a matter of interest in the account of creation in Gen 1 (often spilling over into the immediately subsequent chapters), for it is striking how frequently Christians in the early centuries reflected on the Six Days of Creation—the Hexaemeron as it appears in Greek. It was a tradition inherited from the Jews: Philo's treatise On the Creation of the World had a great influence on subsequent Christian exegesis. The fourth-century writer, Eusebius, refers in his Ecclesiastical History to eight accounts of commentary on the creation narrative in Genesis, mostly now lost, mainly from the end of the second century of the Christian era. Origen, the great third-century theologian, perhaps the greatest of all Christian exegetes, wrote both a commentary and homilies on Genesis; of the commentary only fragments survive, and in his homilies he moves through Genesis quite quickly, only in the first homily discussing the Six Days. The later Greek tradition is dominated by Basil's Homilies on the Hexaemeron; Gregory of Nyssa's On the Making of Humankind is explicitly supplementary, but there are many discussions of the Genesis account of creation by other Greek thinkers, though Basil's tends to cast a shadow over his successors. This reflection on the Genesis creation account is not at all confined to

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the Greek tradition. One of the longest and most comprehensive commentaries on Genesis, including the Hexaemeron, was composed by St. Ephrem, Basil’s contemporary, who wrote in Syriac, the form of Aramaic spoken in Syria, and there are several later Syriac theologians who discuss the Six Days. The fifth-century Armenian writer, Eznik of Kolb, has a good deal of discussion of the creation account in his treatise, On God. Exposition of Genesis was especially rich in the Latin tradition. The fourth-century Ambrose of Milan was not the first, and Augustine, on whom Ambrose made such an impression while he was still a rhetor, five times made an attempt at exposition of the Genesis creation account. Whereas Basil’s single account seems to have hampered later Greek reflection, Augustine’s five different accounts only stimulated further reflection; in an article surveying the tradition of Hexaemeral commentary, the late Père Yves Congar listed nearly forty Latin commentators between Augustine and the end of the Middle Ages (including the Venerable Bede and the twelfth-century Laurence of Durham), and that list is certainly not exhaustive.\(^2\)

Early Christian interest in the book of Genesis was not, however, confined to the creation account. The account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was also of intense interest, as were the succeeding chapters up to the account of the Tower of Babel. After that there come the accounts of the patriarchs, from Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, to Joseph. All of these attracted immense interest, though not, perhaps, as much as the creation account. In this essay, we shall look at each of these parts of the Genesis narrative, one by one.

**Theophilus of Antioch**

It is perhaps worth beginning with the earliest Christian discussion of the early chapters of Genesis to survive: that contained in the second book of the apology, To Autolycus, by Theophilus of Antioch. The discussion of Genesis is in many ways the heart of the work, and presents the account of creation in Genesis in the context of a refutation of the notions of the Greeks, both those found in the philosophers and the poets. But we need to go back

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