WHO IS TO BLAME: ADAM OR EVE?
A POSSIBLE JEWISH SOURCE FOR AMBROSE'S DE PARADISO 12,56

BY

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Ambrose's first tractate De Paradiso (written about 378 C.E.) is an attempt to refute certain interpretations of Genesis that the author considers unorthodox. The majority of these interpretations stem from Apelles, a disciple of Marcion. Marcion's radical severing of the Old and New Testaments is a corollary of his metaphysical dualism that separates God into the "Creator" and the "Father of Christ" respectively. While Apelles does actually moderate Marcion's perceived dualism, his critical approach to the Old Testament remains as severe as his master's. De Paradiso can be considered a major source on Apelles' teachings, though it should be noted that Ambrose makes only one explicit reference to Apelles (5,28). Furthermore, because Ambrose tends to shroud his citations in vague and anonymous terms, like "Rursus faciunt alias quaestiones hoc modo..." (6,30) or "Iterum quae- stiones serunt..." (6,32), tracing such attempted interpretations back to Apelles is no straightforward task.

Von Harnack succeeded in tracing ten different questions of criticism back to Apelles' teachings. It is clear however that Apelles is not the only authority to whom Ambrose is indebted in De Paradiso. Mention must be made of the hellenistic Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, after whom Ambrose was dubbed the "Christian Philo". Philologists once deemed Ambrose's indebtedness as little more than slavish imitation. More recent research has shown, however, that Ambrose's manner of adapting Philo reveals his conscious re-working and re-modelling of the sources. De Paradiso exhibits those traits that are commonly associated with works drawn from a variety of different sources.

In this article I like to draw attention to a passage in De Paradiso in which Ambrose quite extensively quotes an anonymous interpretation (12,56). This interpretation cannot be traced back to either Apelles or Philo. I shall now attempt to explain why it was that Ambrose ultimately rejected it. I shall then suggest a possible source for this interpretation.

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In chapter 12 of *De Paradiso* Ambrose discusses the conversation between Eve and the serpent (Gen. 3,1-3). He remarks that Adam had received the command from God Himself but there are no statements to be found in which God had spoken to the woman. "Hence we must conclude that the command was communicated through Adam to the woman" (12,54). According to the biblical text in Gen. 2,17, Eve's answer contains an element that is alien to God's original command to Adam. She has added the phrase: "neither shall you touch it" (Gen. 3,3). This is how Ambrose comments the addition:

> And the serpent said to the woman: "What did God really say, that you should not eat from any tree which is in paradise?" And the woman said to the serpent: We may eat from any tree of paradise, only of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of paradise God said: You shall not eat of it nor touch it or else you will die". (...) The fault is not in the command but in the rendering of the command. Indeed how much does the present text teach. We learn that we must add nothing to a command, not even for the sake of precaution. For if you add or subtract something, it turns out as a perversion of the command. For the pure and simple form of the command must be preserved and the account of the evidence must be presented. Usually when a witness adds something to the account of the story by himself, he discolours the whole reliability of the evidence by the mendacity of a part. Therefore nothing must be added, however good it seems to be (12,56).

Even if addition enhances overall prohibition, Ambrose disapproves of Eve's addition. Ambrose finds confirmation of his view in Scripture:

> For if John has judged as follows with regard to his own writings: "If someone shall add, he says, to these things, God will add to him the plagues which are described in this book, and who shall take away from these words of this prophecy, God will delete his portion from the book of life" (Apoc. 22,18-19), how much more should nothing be taken away from the divine commandments! From here therefore the first perversion of the command began to be.

Up to this point it is not clear why Eve should have added the prohibition to touch to the original command. Nor is it immediately obvious why this particular insertion would lead to disaster. Ambrose now quotes an exegesis of an anonymus that solves both questions (12,56). Let us examine this passage in detail.

And many believe that this is not the woman's fault but that it was Adam's, that Adam spoke to the woman to make her more cautious and