

CHAPTER EIGHT

PSALM 1:5 AND THE JUDGEMENT

8.0 Introduction

It was held by many Patristic writers that not everybody would be judged at the Last Day, the incorrigible wicked and the confirmed saints being exempted from examination, as their character and fates were clearly evident. It was those whose character was ambiguous who needed to be examined so their fate could be determined. The Patristic exegesis of Psalm 1:5 and John 3:18 was influential in shaping this position. We can see here that theological systematics predisposed an interpretation of Scripture, which in turn reinforced the systematic position.

8.1 Not to judge, but to be judged

The most common of the explanations of Psalm 1:5 was that the wicked would indeed be raised from the dead, not to take part in the judging, but to be judged, instead of pronouncing judgement on others, as they were wont to do during their lifetimes. Augustine in his interpretation of Psalm 1:5 adopts the view that the desire of the wicked to sit in judgement will be frustrated, when the just will be the judges, and the wicked will be judged by them.

*Therefore the wicked shall not rise again in judgement. Why? Because they are swept away as dust from the face of the earth. The speaker is right in declaring that the ambition of the proud to sit in judgement will be frustrated; this he explains more clearly in the next sentence: Nor sinners in the council of the just...they will certainly rise but not with power to judge, because they are already doomed to inescapable punishment. Sinners, on the other hand, will not rise in the council of the just, to act as judges, but rather to be brought to judgement.*¹

This interpretation is based on the various New Testament passages which indicate that the saints will judge the world and the angels. They will not themselves be judged, but will sit in judgement on those who had persecuted them.² This can be seen in the comments of Cassiodorus.

¹ Augustine. *On the Psalms* 1.4-5. ACW 29, 1960, p. 24.

² The “wicked” were seen in later Patristic writers not as those who had persecuted the saints, but as those who had committed great crimes of various sorts. The change in status of the Christian community from a persecuted sect to the official religion of the Roman Empire was one factor in this change, as the persecution of the saints had largely ceased, occurring only outside the boundaries of the Empire where pagan rulers still held sway, for instance in the persecution of Persian Christians after the establishment of the Christian religion by Constantine, since they were seen by the Persian rulers as possible traitors to a foreign power. See S A Harvey. “Persia.” In: **Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity**, p. 718. Cf. the commentary on Psalm 1 by Cassiodorus, which betrays the concerns of a latter period when it describes the wicked of Psalm 1:5 as those who reject the “holy Trinity,” perhaps referring to Arians and other heretics, as well as those who drive a wedge between the Old and New Testaments. *Explanation of the Psalms* 1.5. ACW 51, p. 54.

Until justice be turned into judgement: and who possess it? All that are upright in heart. Men's justice is turned into judgement when the apostles or those who approximate to their merits will, as was promised them in the gospel, *sit on twelve seats to judge* in the company of Christ. This justice of the faithful, which in this world was subject to the scrutiny of the wicked, will then judge all the wanton and the arrogant.³

Elsewhere he discusses this in more detail.

The council of the just is, when the blessed will judge along with the Lord at the time of the resurrection, just as it is said in the first psalm: *therefore the impious will not rise up in the judgement, neither sinners in the council of the just.* For this in the Gospel the Lord promised especially to his apostles and saints [Matthew 19:28].⁴

Eucherius, bishop of Lyons, deals with the difficult passages in the OT and the NT in question and answer form in his book *Instructiones*. In the section on the Psalms he discusses the eschatological implications of Psalm 1.

Question. Since the first psalm with these first verses distinguished the impious and heretical sinner, what does the conclusion mean at the very end of the psalm, in which he says, *Therefore the impious will not arise in judgement?*

Answer. The beginning of this psalm is about the distinction of merits, and the end is about the distinction of judgements. In which it shows that every one without doubt is to rise, that is, the just, that he may judge, the sinner, that he may be judged, the impious, that he may be punished. For at that time he will not be judged who has already been judged, as it is written, *Whoever does not believe, is already judged* [John 3:18].⁵

³ Cassiodorus. *Explanation of the Psalms* 93.15. ACW 52, pp. 404-405. The Apostles are frequently identified as the ones who will exercise judgement, based on the passage, *you shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel* [Matthew 19:28]. Using this passage, Augustine stresses that it is not only the apostles being spoken of here, since the number twelve signifies "the completeness of the multitude of those who judge." Augustine correlates Matthew 19:28 with 1 Corinthians 6:3 [*Do you not know that we shall judge angels?*] to demonstrate that it is not just the twelve apostles who will be the judges. *The City of God* 20.5. NPNF 1/2, p. 424. See the discussion in C A Evans. "How are the apostles judged? A note on 1 Corinthians 3:10-15." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984) 149-150.

⁴ Cassiodorus. *Explanation of the Psalms* 110.1. PL 70, 800. Cf. also Epiphanius. "Not because they will not rise, but because neither in the judgement nor in the council of the just do they deserve to enter, but they do rise, in order to enter into punishment in punishments." Epiphanius. *Interpretatio Evangeliorum* 38: *De secundo adventu Salvatoris*. PLS 3, 902.

⁵ Eucherius. *Instructiones* 1.1. In *Psalmorum libro*. PL 50, 786.

Here Eucherius stresses that everyone will rise, but not everyone will be part of the council of the just, for the wicked are to be judged by that council and have no part in it themselves. Jerome sees the assembly of the just as the gathering of those who were not to be judged because of their righteousness; they do not appear to serve also as judges.

Therefore in judgement the wicked shall not stand. They shall not rise to be judged because they have already been judged, for he who does not believe in Me is already judged. Nor shall sinners in the assembly of the just. It does not say that sinners shall not rise again; but that they shall not stand in the assembly of the just; they do not deserve to stand with those who are not to be judged. If they believed in Me, says the Lord, they would rise up with those who do not have to be judged.⁶

John Chrysostom specifies this theme in connection with the unbelieving Jews, who would not sit as judges but would be judged by the apostles [Matthew 19:28].

But what is, *Judging the twelve tribes of Israel?* This is, “condemning them.” For they are not surely to sit as judges, but like as He said the Queen of the South should condemn that generation, and the Ninevites shall condemn them; so now these also. Therefore He said not, the nations, and the world, but the tribes of Israel. For since both the Jews alike and the apostles had been brought up under the same laws, and customs, and polity; when the Jews said, that for this cause they could not believe in Christ, because the law forbade to receive his commandments, by bringing forward these men, who had received the same law, and yet had believed, He condemns all those; like as even already He had said, “therefore they shall be your judges.”⁷

The wicked, as well as the sinners, therefore do not have the privilege of judging, as they were wont to do in this life, but instead are to be judged themselves, often, it is stated, by those whom they judged (unjustly) in this present life. The tables are turned on the unrighteous and the saints are thus vindicated. This is a credible and logical alternative to the view that the wicked would not be judged, on the grounds that they had been judged already. But even if they had already been judged, there was a reason for which they would be present on the judgement day: to see the glory of God and the vindication of the saints.

An alternative view found in Diodore of Tarsus was that the unrighteous would not face the judge, rather than not face judgement, as other interpreters understood the verse.

⁶ Jerome. *Homily 1, On Psalm 1*. FC 48, p. 12. Cf. also Quodvultdeus. *Dimidium Temporibus* 18.29. SC 102, pp. 645, 647; *De accedentibus ad Gratiam* 2.11.3-4. CCSL 60, 467.

⁷ John Chrysostom. *Homilies on the Gospel according to Matthew* 64.2. NPNF 1/10, p. 392. Cf. Cassiodorus. *Explanation of the Psalms* 54.21. ACW 52, pp. 26-27. Paulinus of Nola is of the opinion that the Queen of Sheba is worthy of the reward of the resurrection and heaven. *Letter 5.2*. ACW 36, p. 185.

He made it clear that the impious are self-condemned nor are they able to see the face of the Judge, where it is possible actually to obtain mercy, through great forgiveness, from the one who judges. So, he says, nor will the impious see the judge, nor do the sinners share in the assembly of the just.⁸

The wicked thus were not able to come to judgement because they were not allowed to see the judge, or take part in the assembly of the just gathered before the judge. A somewhat similar view is expressed by Augustine, although not with reference to Psalm 1:5. He says that “in the judgement man will be seen, but God will not be seen,” but after the judgement, “God will be seen by those who have prevailed in the judgement, but by the wicked He will not be seen.”⁹

8.2 Believers and unbelievers are not judged

An unusual characteristic of Patristic eschatology is the idea, frequently found, that believers would not be judged at the eschaton,¹⁰ nor would unbelievers.¹¹ The reason why the wicked would not be judged is because they do not believe, and therefore they have been condemned already; any further judgement is superfluous. This idea was based on Psalm 1:5, *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous*, which in isolation perhaps might not have suggested the eschatological judgement to the Patristic authors. But in conjunction with John 3:18, *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*, that interpretation was not for them unfeasible. In the eschatological exegesis of Psalm 1 in patristic literature we find constant reference to John 3:18;¹² it is unusual to find such interpretations of Psalm 1 which do not cite it directly.

⁸ Diodore of Tarsus. *In Psalmum 1.5*. Corpus Christianorum Series Graecae 6, p. 11.

⁹ Augustine. *On the Gospel of John* 22.11. NPNF 1/7, pp. 148-149.

¹⁰ This is not held by all Patristic writers. For instance, Maximus the Confessor thinks the saints will face judgement and only then are they destined to eternal life. “Save us, O Lord, from the difficulties of this world according to Thy kindness, that we may pass over the sea of life with a pure conscience and take our stand untainted and incorrupt before Thy dreadful judgement seat; and then may we be judged worthy of eternal life.” *The Ascetic Life* 39. ACW 21, p. 129. Similarly, Athanasius stated that “Each of us will have to render an account of his deeds in this life on the day of judgement.” *Apology against the Arians* 35. NPNF 2/4, p. 119. Sulpitius Severus was also uncertain of his fate at the judgement. *Letter to the Deacon Aurelius*. NPNF 2/11, p. 19.

¹¹ Various Patristic writers expressed the idea that the devil and his angels will not be judged but are condemned already, as are all those human beings who are also in rebellion against God. Justin Martyr. *First Apology* 28. ANF 1, p. 172. *Fragments of the lost writings of Justin*, 3. ANF 1, p. 300. Tertullian. *Apology* 23. ANF 3, p. 38. Another theme is that the wicked are sent into the hell prepared for the devil and his angels [Matthew 25:41] and are thus condemned along with them. Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 3.23.3. ANF 1, p. 456. Pseudo-Clement. *Recognitions* 4.15. ANF 8, p. 138.

¹² While similar ideas are also expressed in John 5:28-29, John 12:47-48 and 1 Corinthians 11:31-32, Ambrose is the only one to cite John 5:28-29 in conjunction with Psalm 1:5, while John 12:47-48 and 1 Corinthians 11:31-32 are never cited in that connection. *Enarratio in Psalmum 1*, 53. PL 14, 994. Cf. also John Chrysostom's comments on John 5:28-29 for an

However, there are also other reasons why the Patristic writers held that the believers would not be judged, while not exempting the wicked from the judgement. This is related to the different meanings which the Patristic writers gave to the term “judgement.” Some interpreted this as the process of judging, while others understood it to mean the punishment consequent on that process. For instance, Irenaeus used this view in his *Proof of the Apostolic Teaching*, while elsewhere he spoke of judgement in the usual way. Here he says that the righteous will not face the judgement; this is only for those who do not believe. The reason is that he interprets the judgement as the punishment itself, not as a tribunal. Thus the wicked suffer “judgement” in hell.

And judgement has been taken off those who believe in Him, and they are no more subject to it; and the judgement, which is to come by fire, will be the perdition of those who did not believe, towards the end of this world.¹³

The wicked will be separated from the righteous at the resurrection, in order that the wicked can be sent away to judgement,¹⁴ where they will be cut off from life.¹⁵ The righteous will enter everlasting life, while the devil and his angels, and all the wicked, will be sent into everlasting fire.

[Christ will return from heaven] to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race...that He should execute just judgement towards all; that He may send “spiritual wickednesses,” and the angels who transgressed, and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept his commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning [of their Christian course], and others from [the date of] their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory.¹⁶

example of the independent treatment of this passage. *Homilies on St. John* 39.3. NPNF 1/14, p. 140.

¹³ Irenaeus. *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 69. ACW 16, p. 93. Cf. also Augustine. “But certainly not all will go to eternal life by rising and coming forth from the graves - only they that have done well; and they that have done ill, to judgement. For here he has put judgement for punishment.” *On the Gospel of John* 19.18. NPNF 1/7, p. 130. John Chrysostom. “And the *comes not into judgement* means “is not punished,” for he speaks not of death “here,” but of death eternal, as also of the other “life” which is deathless.” *Homilies on St. John* 39.2. NPNF 1/14, p. 139.

¹⁴ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 5.28.1. ANF 1, p. 556.

¹⁵ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 4.11.4. ANF 1, p. 475.

¹⁶ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 1.10.1. ANF 1, p. 330-331. Irenaeus does make the important point that humankind was intended to live, not to suffer eternal punishment, and that hell was originally prepared for the devil and his angels. *Against Heresies* 3.23.3. ANF 1, p. 456. Cf. Augustine. “But as for those who, out of the mass of perdition caused by the first man’s sin, are not redeemed through the one Mediator between God and man, they too shall rise again, each with his own body, but only to be punished with the devil and his angels.” *Enchiridion* 92. NPNF 1/3, p. 266.

Just as those who do not believe are banished to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, so too the righteous are welcomed into the eternal kingdom which had been prepared for all eternity for them.¹⁷ Again Irenaeus attacks the Gnostics in his doctrine of eternal punishment, when he says that it is the same God who prepares good things for the righteous who also prepares hellfire for the wicked.¹⁸ Those who are judged to be righteous are then rewarded with immortality and taken into the eternal kingdom where they receive glory. It is thus after the resurrection, when they are judged and then receive glorious bodies, that the saints are given their rewards, and it is at the same time that the wicked are sent away into punishment.

Some Patristic writers held that the judgement included the allocation of rewards as well as punishments, and thus the saints were included in the judgement in this positive sense. This approach can be found in the commentary by Cassiodorus on Psalm 75:10.

So that you would not think that the Judgement was to be held solely to condemn the wicked, he added: *To save all the meek of the earth.* The meek of the earth are those who are not carried away with flaming desire by any worldly vices, but deport themselves with untroubled self-control, as has been said earlier, and are shown to have placid peace of mind. They are saved when through the Lord's gift they obtain the promised rewards.¹⁹

Augustine has an extensive discussion of the apparent conflict between John 5:24, which says those who believe will not come into judgement, and 2 Corinthians 5:10, which says that we shall all come before the judgement-seat of Christ. Augustine asks whether it means those who will not be judged still appear before the judgement seat, but then decides that "judgement" in John 5:24 means punishment, while in 2 Corinthians 5:10 it means "discrimination." Thus in the latter text, the good are to receive good things, while the evil are to receive evil things. He also says that it means vindication for the saints, as in the Psalm which says, *Judge me, O God.* This should be understood to mean, "Judge me, O God, and discern my cause from an unholy nation." The judgement which is punishment, to be meted out to the unbelieving together with the devil and his angels, is not something to which the believers will be subject.²⁰ Ambrose took a similar approach, and said that it is not the wicked who have a part in the judgement, but only those who have the possibility of pardon for their sins. The judgement is therefore something beneficial to the believer, but terrible to the wicked, since they are manifestly unworthy of being pardoned through the judgement.²¹

Some Patristic writers took judgement to mean "condemnation," and thus on the basis of John 3:18 stated that the unbelievers did not need to come to the judgement, since they had already been condemned. There was no need for a second condemnation.

¹⁷ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 4.28.2. ANF 1, p. 501.

¹⁸ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 4.40.1. ANF 1, p. 523; *Against Heresies* 5.35.2. ANF 1, p. 566.

¹⁹ Cassiodorus. *Explanation of the Psalms* 75.10. ACW 52, p. 236.

²⁰ Augustine. *On the Gospel of St. John* 22.4-5. NPNF 1/7, pp. 145-146.

²¹ Ambrose. *Exposition of Psalm 118* [119]. Homily 5.44. PL 15, 1334.

Jerome makes such comments regarding the judgement in his exposition of Psalm 108 (109).

*When he is judged, let him go forth condemned. Do not let him come into the court of judgement, but let him come into condemnation, for where there is a judicial investigation, there is still uncertainty; but where there is condemnation, the sentence has already been passed and is published.*²²

This same approach can be seen in the treatise of Augustine on the Gospel of John, but Augustine stresses that judgement does not always mean condemnation, as in some places the saints request God to judge them, meaning they desire their situation to be discerned and injustices put right.

You have penal judgement spoken of in the Gospel: *He that believes not is judged already*: and in another place, *The hour is coming, when those who are in the graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgement*. You see how he has put judgement for condemnation and punishment. And yet if judgement were always to be taken for condemnation, should we ever have heard in the psalm, *Judge me, O God*? In the former place, judgement is used in the sense of inflicting pain; here, it is used in the sense of discernment. How so? Just because so expounded by him who says, *Judge me, O God*. For read, and see what follows. What is this *Judge me, O God*, but just what he adds, *and discern my cause against an unholy nation*? Because then it was said, *Judge me, O God, and discern* [the true merits of] *my cause against an unholy nation*; similarly now said the Lord Christ, *I seek not my own glory: there is one that seeks and judges*. How is there *one who seeks and judges*? There is the Father, who discerns and distinguishes between my glory and yours. For you glory in the spirit of this present world. Not so do I, who say to the Father, *Father, glorify me with that glory which I had with you before the world was*. What is *that glory*? One altogether different from human inflation. Thus does the Father judge. And so to “judge” is to “discern.”²³

In another place Augustine indicates that the eschatological judgement is in terms of condemnation; but he understands the distinguishing of the wicked from the righteous as judgement through the condemnation of the one group and the exemption from condemnation of the other. In this way, through some being condemned and others not, judgement is exercised and the sheep are separated from the goats, that is, the righteous are separated from the wicked.²⁴ Theodoret repeats this idea, and sees the judgement as the “council of the righteous,” and thus the wicked will not take part in

²² Jerome. *Homily 35, on Psalm 108* (109). FC 48, p. 258.

²³ Augustine. *On the Gospel of St. John* 43.9. NPNF 1/7, pp. 241-242. In this connection, Mealy suggests that Revelation 20:4a means that “judgement was passed in their favour” and not just delegation of authority to judge. J Webb Mealy. **After the thousand years**, pp. 108-109.

²⁴ Augustine. *The City of God* 20.5. NPNF 1/2, p. 425.

judgement, but will receive condemnation. There is no need to investigate them, since their wickedness is apparent and all that is needed is their punishment.

For this reason the impious will not rise in the judgement, nor sinners in the council of the righteous. With great accuracy the Holy Spirit has expounded everything. For it did not say, the impious shall not rise, but they shall not rise to judgement, meaning, not to judgement but to condemnation. For they have no need of accusation, since their impiety is clear, but they await punishment alone. For just as those who exercise justice do not bring to court killers who are caught in the act to convict them, but to pronounce against them the sentence decreed by law. In the same way those who spend their lives in impiety undergo resurrection, not being brought to judgement but receiving the sentence of punishment. And yet also those who are free of impious beliefs but have lived a lawless life, will end up somewhere far from the council of the righteous. Aquila and Theodotion have translated council as assembly, and Symmachus has gathering. *For the Lord know the way of the righteous, but the way of the impious shall perish.* He says the just judge knows everything even before the judgement, and does not need proofs or conviction. Hence allotting what is deserved to each, he will deem some worthy of commendation and crowns, and others he will send to unending punishment. The words *the way of the impious shall perish* harmonise with that saying of the apostle, *If anyone's work burns up he will be punished*, for the work of righteous men remains brilliant. But the wickedness of impious and unholy men perishes with them.²⁵

The Patristic writers therefore sometimes understood “judgement” to mean “condemnation,” using the comparison of the texts from Psalm 1:5 and John 3:18, whereby the wicked are said to be condemned already when they come to the judgement. Others see the judgement as the process of judging, which is the “council of the just,” from which sinners and the wicked are excluded, but the latter come to be judged, that is, to face interrogation.²⁶

The judgement is also understood to mean the revelation of the state which people are in, in this present life; the unveiling of what only God can see at the moment.²⁷ The basis for this interpretation is the doctrine of God's providence, and it is commonly tied in with the interpretation of John 3:18. This can be seen in the way Augustine ties in providence and judgement. He suggests that if every good deed were to be rewarded in this life, and every evil deed punished in this life, there would be no need of a judgement. Conversely, if no evil deeds received a just recompense, it would be difficult to maintain that God does presently exercise his providence over humankind.

For the good man is neither uplifted with the good things of time, nor broken by its ills; but the wicked man, because he is corrupted by this

²⁵ Theodoret. *On Psalms* 1.6-7. PG 80, 872-873.

²⁶ Athanasius. *Expositions of the Psalms* 1.5. PG 27, 64.

²⁷ This view has also been expressed by G C Berkouwer. **The return of Christ**, p. 313.

world's happiness, feels himself punished by its unhappiness. Yet often, even in the present distribution of temporal things, does God plainly evince his own interference. For if every sin were now visited with manifest punishment, nothing would seem to be reserved for the final judgement; on the other hand, if no sin received now a plainly divine punishment, it would be concluded that there is no divine providence at all.²⁸

Augustine concludes that there is indeed no escape from the justice of God, since "men are punished by God for their sins often visibly, always secretly, either in this life or after death..."²⁹ By this means he can maintain both the purpose of the eschatological judgement, and the present providential governing of God: while his justice is not always evident in this life, that does not mitigate the fact that God will ensure that his justice is ultimately satisfied. Augustine uses John 3:18 to demonstrate that the wicked are already judged, and it is the providence of God which preserves both the righteous and the wicked for the fates which are due to each of them. The judgement has not been revealed, but it has already taken place, as both those who believe and those who do not believe are already judged. The eschatological judgement is to reveal that hidden judgement which God has already made.³⁰

Already, saith He, has been judged. The judgement has not yet appeared, but already it has taken place. For the Lord knows them that are his: he knows who are persevering for the crown, and who for the flame; knows the wheat on his threshing-floor, and knows the chaff; knows the good corn, and knows the tares. He that believeth not is already judged. Why judged? *Because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.*³¹

At the time of the eschatological judgement we shall recognise the justice of God's judgements which have already been made, and will be revealed at that time. This will include not only the justice of those judgements which shall be pronounced then and followed by the appropriate recompense, but also the justice of all the judgements God has made throughout time for which the recompense was made in this life.

But when we shall have come to that judgement, the date of which is peculiarly called the day of judgement, and sometimes the day of the Lord, we shall then recognize the justice of all God's judgements, not only of such as shall then be pronounced, but of all which take effect

²⁸ Augustine. *The City of God* 1.8. NPNF 1/2, p. 5. Cf. Cassiodorus. *Explanation of the Psalms* 91.12. ACW 52, p. 392.

²⁹ Augustine. *The City of God* 20.1. NPNF 1/2, p. 421.

³⁰ It is interesting to note that in spite of the discussions about the revelation at the judgement of that which is presently done in secret, there is little use made of texts such as Matthew 6:1-6, 18, Luke 8:17 [*For there is nothing hidden that shall not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought into the open*], Luke 12:2-3, and Romans 2:16 [*This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares*].

³¹ Augustine. *On the Gospel of St. John* 12.12. NPNF 1/7, p. 85.

from the beginning, or may take effect before that time. And in that day we shall also recognize with what justice so many, or almost all, the just judgements of God in the present life defy the scrutiny of human sense or insight, though in this matter it is not concealed from pious minds that what is concealed is just.³²

Here Augustine asserts that the believer can have confidence in the providence of God and rest assured that the judgements which God is presently making are just, because God is just. We need not therefore be anxious about those who seem to escape punishment or are denied their rewards, since God has taken note and will adjust the balance accordingly, in the eschaton even if not in this present life.³³

Theodoret follows much the same kind of approach as Augustine, and says that while punishments and rewards do not appear to be justly allocated in this present life, the fact that God is just and rules in providence over all things will ensure that there will be a day of judgement when all things will be put right.

When we see both types of people ending their days - those in high standing and those who are quite worthless, members of the common herd - let us consider once more that He has prepared another life in which to reward, according to their deserts, those who have lived the good life. Indeed He has already unmistakably honored some of them by making their crowns of virtue manifest. But the fact that not all men appear illustrious and distinguished in the present life reveals the reality of a future life.³⁴

He stresses again that the fact that the righteous are not rewarded in this life proves that there will be a judgement in the eschaton when this will occur. The rewards and punishments allocated in this life do not complete the administration of God's justice, but act as encouragements and warnings to those still alive, and indicate that there is indeed a just God who rules over all, since the recompense for each still waits to be made.

The honor given to some is a sign of God's justice. The fact that not all virtuous people get equal returns is a proof of a future life, and strengthens the expectation of the things to come. For this reason the Ruler of the universe does not broadcast in this life the names of all the virtuous, nor does He reprove all who live in sin. He singles out some for vengeance, revealing the justice of the verdict, hoping thereby to alarm the others, and He rouses them to repentance. In not destroying all who do evil He gives us another proof of a future life.³⁵

³² Augustine. *The City of God* 20.2. NPNF 1/2, p. 422.

³³ Cf. also Macarius of Egypt. *Homily* 12.13-14. **Intoxicated with God**, pp. 86-87. He says that those who are God's are presently marked with a sign that indicates their allegiance which will be revealed at the judgement (cf. Revelation 7:3). Gregory the Great. *Morals on Job* 25.8.19. LF 23, pp. 108-109.

³⁴ Theodoret. *On Divine Providence* 9.21. ACW 49, pp. 125-126.

³⁵ Theodoret. *On Divine Providence* 9.22. ACW 49, p. 126.

Theodoret is concerned to demonstrate that there is a judgement in the eschaton when justice will be done, since those who are punished in this life, while others are not, are treated unjustly, being singled out in a way other equally sinful people are not.

If there is no life after our departure from here below, those who are reprov'd in this life are done great injustice and those who are not escape great punishment... For there does exist another life in which those who here escape punishment will pay the due penalty, and those who enjoyed no return for their efforts at virtue in the present life will obtain the reward for their strivings.³⁶

Theodoret then takes this doctrine of providence to be a guarantee of the justice of God, since if God truly does govern, he will not allow some to go unrewarded or unpunished, while others are given their deserts and thereby seem to be treated differently from the rest.

8.2.1 Psalm 1:5 and the judgement of the ungodly

In his Homily on Psalm 1, *A Psalm of the lot of the Just Man*, Basil says that in the psalms we learn of “a threat of judgement, a hope of resurrection, a fear of punishment, promises of glory.”³⁷ We find a similar idea in Hilary of Poitiers, who says that “The Holy Spirit made choice of this magnificent and noble introduction to the Psalter, in order to... declare the penalty of the Judgement, to proclaim the two-fold resurrection, to shew forth the counsel of God as seen in His award.”³⁸ Cyril of Alexandria says in commenting on Psalm 1 that “David first taught the resurrection and the judgement and the promise of the life to come clearly, while Moses handed down nothing on these things.”³⁹ Psalm 1:5, *The wicked will not stand in the judgement*, is commonly understood to have an eschatological referent, although few modern interpreters understand this verse in the same way as the Patristic writers.⁴⁰

³⁶ Theodoret. *On Divine Providence* 9.23. ACW 49, p. 126.

³⁷ Basil. *A Psalm of the lot of the Just Man* 2. FC 46, p. 153. Athanasius said: “And if you wish to instruct some people about the resurrection, sing the words in Psalm 65.” *Letter to Marcellinus on the interpretation of the Psalms* 21. Classics of Western Spirituality, p. 119.

³⁸ Hilary of Poitiers. *Homily on Psalm 1*, 5. NPNF 2/9, p. 237.

³⁹ Cyril of Alexandria. *On the Psalms* 1. PG 69, 720. This is a direct citation (with some words omitted) from Eusebius. *Commentaria in Psalmos* 1.6. PG 23, 80. Clement of Rome interprets Psalm 3:6 as referring to the resurrection. *1 Clement* 26. ANF 1, p. 12. Clement of Alexandria takes Psalm 150:3-4 to refer to the resurrection. *The Instructor* 2.4. ANF 2, p. 248. Augustine says that “There are many allusions to the last judgement in the Psalms, but for the most part only casual and slight.” He does not cite Psalm 1, and his references to such allusions in the Psalms are to explicit statements of the destruction of the wicked and the cosmic conflagration. He thus cites only Psalm 102:25-27 and Psalm 50:3-5; the latter he interprets as a reference to the coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead. *The City of God* 20.24. NPNF 1/2, pp. 443-445.

⁴⁰ This interpretation is found in M Dahood [*Psalms I*, pp. 4-5], whose view is severely criticised by Peter Craigie, who seems oblivious to the Patristic precedents, as indeed does Dahood himself. *Psalms 1-50*, p. 61.

The first time we meet the eschatological interpretation of Psalm 1:5 is possibly in the works of Athenagoras, who says that not all will face the judgement, although everyone will rise from the dead.

For there have been many who, in treating the doctrine of the resurrection, presented only the third argument to support their reason for it, thinking that the resurrection must take place because of the judgement. This is clearly shown to be false from the fact that all men who die arise, whereas all who arise are not judged. For if only justice exercised at the judgement were the cause of the resurrection, then even those guilty of no error or incapable of virtue - that is, very young children - would not arise. Since they admit, however, that all will arise, including those who died in infancy as well as all others, the resurrection does not take place primarily because of the judgement but because of the will of the Creator and the nature of those created.⁴¹

Athenagoras does not develop his idea further, so it is difficult to determine who will face the judgement; for instance, are “very young children” to be judged? It would seem, however, that everyone will be present at the judgement, since all are raised, while perhaps not everyone will be judged. Barnard sees in the statement that all the dead will rise again but not all the risen will be judged, an allusion to the Western text of 1 Corinthians 15:51,⁴² which reads: *we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed*. According to Metzger, the Western text is characterised by paraphrase and harmonisation. Words, clauses and whole sentences are changed, omitted and inserted.⁴³ However, the allusion is rather indirect, as Athenagoras does not directly cite 1 Corinthians 15:51, which also does not refer to the judgement. It seems more likely that Athenagoras is using Psalm 1:4-5 and that he understood it to mean “all will rise, but not all will be judged,” the standard interpretation of that passage in later Patristic authors.⁴⁴

Clement of Alexandria appears to have been the first to explicitly give this interpretation of Psalm 1:4-5, and there are indications that Clement had read the works of Athenagoras.⁴⁵ If Athenagoras is indeed alluding to this passage to support his interpretation, then it may be an indication that the disputed association of Athenagoras with Alexandria is perhaps correct. In *The Instructor* Clement says that Psalm 1:1-3 is “an allusion to the resurrection,” while Psalm 1:4 speaks of “the punishment of sinners, and their easy dispersion, and carrying off by the wind,” thereby showing the punishment for wickedness and the justice of God.⁴⁶ He interprets the Psalm as a contrast between the righteous, who will prosper in the

⁴¹ Athenagoras. *Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead* 14.6. Oxford Early Christian Texts, p. 123.

⁴² L W Barnard. *Athenagoras*, p. 72.

⁴³ B M Metzger. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. xviii.

⁴⁴ See also the discussion in Chapter 3.5.3 concerning whether Athenagoras uses 1 Corinthians 15:51 in his *Apology*.

⁴⁵ L W Barnard. *Athenagoras*, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Clement of Alexandria. *The Instructor* 1.10. ANF 2, p. 233.

resurrection like a tree planted by the water by which it is nourished and so does not wither, and the wicked, who will be dispersed and carried off by the wind like dried up dust. Elsewhere Clement gives the first explicit exegesis of Psalm 1 in conjunction with John 3:18-19.

Justly, therefore, the prophet⁴⁷ says, *The ungodly are not so; but as the chaff which the wind driveth away from the face of the earth. Wherefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgement* (being already condemned, for *he that believeth not is condemned already*), *nor sinners in the counsel of the righteous*, inasmuch as they are already condemned, so as not to be united to those that have lived without stumbling. *For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; and the way of the ungodly shall perish.*⁴⁸

John 3:18 is seen as an explanation of why the wicked do not need to be brought to the Judgement: they have already been condemned because of their unbelief. The judgement is to determine the fate of those being judged, but the fate of the wicked is already known. Elsewhere Clement discusses the punishment of the wicked in connection with Psalm 1:4.

But punishment does not avail to him who has sinned, to undo his sin, but that he may sin no more, and that no one else falls into the like. Therefore the good God corrects for these three causes: First, that he who is corrected may become better than his former self; then that those who are capable of being saved by examples may be driven back, being admonished; and thirdly, that he who is injured may not be readily despised, and be apt to receive injury. And there are two methods of correction - the instructive and the punitive, which we have called the disciplinary. It ought to be known, then, that those who fall into sin after baptism are those who are subjected to discipline; for the deeds done before are remitted, and those done after are purged. It is in reference to the unbelieving that it is said, *that they are reckoned as the chaff which the wind drives from the face of the earth, and the drop which falls from a vessel* [Isaiah 40:15].⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Many of the Patristic authors refer to the Psalmist as the “prophet.” This is perhaps based on Matthew 13:34, which cites Psalm 78:2 as that which was “spoken through the prophet,” and Matthew 27:35 (in late manuscripts) in which Psalm 22:18 is similarly cited as “the word spoken by the prophet.” Cf. G W Ashby. **Theodoret of Cyrrhus as exegete of the Old Testament**, p.26.

⁴⁸ Clement of Alexandria. *The Stromata* 2.15. ANF 2, p. 363.

⁴⁹ Clement of Alexandria. *The Stromata* 4.24. ANF 2, p. 438. Clement uses these same two texts together elsewhere [*The Stromata* 7.18. ANF 2, p. 556] when describing the fate of the heretics, making an allegorical interpretation of the distinction between clean and unclean animals in Leviticus. The *Epistle of Barnabas* 10 [ANF 1, p. 143], used this allegory in conjunction with Psalm 1, and was cited by Clement [*The Stromata* 2.16. ANF 2, p. 362]. The same interpretation appears in Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.8.4 [ANF 1, p. 534], the only places in Patristic literature where it appears to have been used, although Novatian made a similar allegorical application of the clean and unclean animals in the Levitical law. *On the Jewish meats* 3. ANF 5, p. 647.

Here he seems to make a distinction between the righteous, those who have been baptised, who are disciplined when they sin, and the wicked, who are punished not for correction but punitively. One of the factors which enabled Clement to make this interpretation of Psalm 1 was his instrumentalist anthropology, which made it possible to assert a judgement after death prior to the resurrection. In this view it was most important that the soul should be judged; the body being dead could be considered to have been judged already. It is clear that Clement postulates the immediate individual judgement of the dead after death, as a result of the synthesis forged between Scripture and Platonism by Clement, which is thus influential in his interpretation of Psalm 1 with reference to the resurrection and the judgement. Clement does not deny the reality or importance of the resurrection, but it is apparent that his doctrine of the resurrection is in tension with his belief, as expressed in the interpretation of Psalm 1, concerning the immediate judgement after death.

Another factor in the origins of the eschatological interpretation of Psalm 1:5 is discussed by Linton with reference to Clement.

Words with a traditional Christian content are interpreted according to this tradition. When we read - in the first Psalm - "The ungodly shall not stand in judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous," both *anastesontai* and *krisis* are interpreted as eschatological terms (Strom. 2.15.69, which, however, also can be the case for Jewish interpretation). Characteristic is, that Clemens, too, has little sense for Hebrew parallelism. He apprehends "the ungodly" and the "sinners" in the verse just quoted as two different categories of sinners.⁵⁰

It is unhelpful to suggest that Clement distinguished two classes of the unrighteous, the "ungodly" and the "sinners," because he failed to see the Hebrew parallelism, as the distinction was not made on this basis alone. However Clement does not distinguish two classes of the unrighteous: the "ungodly" and the "sinners" (a distinction made only in later Patristic writers); all are condemned together. For instance, Jerome distinguishes (as was common by his time) the wicked, the righteous and the sinners, with only the latter facing judgement, drawing once again on John 3:18-19. Linton again states that because Jerome makes this distinction between the "ungodly" and the "sinners," he therefore had "but little discernment of the Hebrew parallelism."⁵¹ Linton has not taken account of the power of tradition in interpretation, and the distinction between the "ungodly" and the "sinners" in Psalm 1 was firmly established by the time of Jerome. It is also rather anachronistic to blame Jerome for not noticing the parallelism, which even modern scholars have been aware of only since Lowth's work, and this feature of the Psalms was not widely recognised in the Patristic period. But it was not completely unknown,⁵² as Augustine comments in his commentary on Psalm 1 on the parallelism of verse 5. He suggests that the Psalmist

⁵⁰ O Linton. "Interpretation of the Psalms in the early church." *Studia Patristica* 4 (1961) 149-150.

⁵¹ O Linton. "Interpretation of the Psalms in the early church." *Studia Patristica* 4 (1961) 154.

⁵² See J L Kugel. **The Idea of Hebrew Poetry**, pp. 147-170.

“habitually repeats his first phrase with greater emphasis,” thus indicating some sensitivity to the Hebrew parallelism.⁵³

Following Clement of Alexandria, Origen also interpreted Psalm 1:5 as a reference to the resurrection. While his commentary on the Psalms survives only in fragmentary form, both Methodius of Olympus and Epiphanius of Salamis preserve Origen’s commentary on Psalm 1 in their writings because here he explicitly expounds his view of the resurrection, a view attacked by these two later writers who focus their criticisms on that work. Dechow states that this is perfectly understandable, since the commentary on Psalm 1 is “characteristic of Origen’s mature thought and, in the portion quoted by way of Methodius, contains in compact form the Alexandrian’s most significant (and controversial) eschatological terminology.”⁵⁴

Origen interprets Psalm 1:5 in the context of his polemics against the “simple believers” who expected a resurrection of the present (and glorified) body. Origen on the other hand sees the resurrection body as a total transformation of this body so that it is no longer material, but “spiritual.”⁵⁵ Here Origen is grappling with the problem of the nature of the resurrection body, a common theme in Patristic literature. Origen adopts an anti-bodily perspective which ultimately denigrates this life.

Therefore the wicked shall not rise up in judgement, etc. Prompted by this passage the simpler sort of believers hold that the wicked will have no share in the resurrection, though they by no means make it clear what they understand by the resurrection, or what sort of idea they have of the judgement. For even if they appear to offer explanations on these points, examination will prove them at fault, for they cannot maintain consistency in further discussion. Thus if we ask them of what part of them it is that a resurrection takes place, they answer that it is of the bodies wherewith at present we are clothed. Then, on our further asking whether it is of the whole of their substance or not, they say without consideration, Yes, of the whole. But if, accommodating ourselves to their simplicity, we put the further question, Whether blood that has been lost through incision of the veins, or the flesh or hairs that previously existed, shall rise again, or only those we had at the time of death, being pressed in argument they take refuge in saying that we

⁵³ Augustine. *On the Psalms* 1.4-5. ACW 29, 1960, pp. 23-24. Cf. Theodoret: “*Not so the impious, not so.* By the doubling of the denial he makes the opposition more evident.” *On Psalms* 1.5. PG 80, 872. Cf. Pseudo-Rufinus, who comments on Psalm 1:4, *Therefore the impious do not rise up in the judgement, Neither sinners in the council of the just.* “This sentence seems to be repeated, so that, as it is said above, the impious are understood as sinners, and what preceded it, in the judgement, this is said of the council of the just. Or if the impious are one thing, sinners are another (for every impious man is a sinner, however not every sinner is impious [from Augustine, in so many words].” *Commentary in Seventyfive Psalms*: Psalm 1.5. PL 21, 649A. The reference to Augustine is to his comments in *On the Psalms* 1.5. ACW 29, p. 24. Augustine also discusses parallelism in *On the Psalms* 3.5. ACW 29, p. 34.

⁵⁴ J F Dechow. **Dogma and mysterium in early Christianity**, p. 353.

⁵⁵ By “spiritual” in this context is meant a body which is of a different substance to the present fleshly body. A more authentically Biblical meaning of “spiritual” is that which is under the control of the Holy Spirit, not something which is in contrast to the “material.”

must allow God to do as He wills. The better sort of them, to avoid being driven by their theory to reassemble the very blood which has happened on various occasions to be lost from our bodies, say it is our body in its last state that will rise again.⁵⁶

Origen thus does not see this passage as a denial that the wicked rise from the dead, nor are judged. It is not that clear, however, what he did think the passage meant.

The exegetical pattern which associates Psalm 1:5 and John 3:18 appears also in Cyprian. In his treatise addressed to Quirinus he provides citations of Biblical texts to demonstrate certain doctrines. Chapter 31 of Book 3 is headed: *That he who does not believe is judged already*. In this section he combines John 3:18-19 and Psalm 1:5, and in his short catena of citations encapsulates the way in which these texts were correlated and interpreted in Patristic literature, leading to the conclusion that neither the believers nor the unbelievers would be judged.⁵⁷ In another place Cyprian says: “even here, before the day of judgement, the souls of the righteous and of the unrighteous are already divided, and the chaff is separated from the wheat.”⁵⁸ He is referring here to people still alive, but the principle remains the same: a distinction has already been made, implying that they are therefore judged already.

Cyril of Jerusalem challenges those who use Psalm 1:5 (as well as Job 7:9 and Psalm 115:17) as a proof that there is no resurrection, by arguing that it means not that the wicked will not be raised, but that they will rise up not to face judgement but condemnation, that is, God does not need to take long to judge them and their punishment follows swiftly on their being raised.⁵⁹ The commentary on Psalm 1 by Pseudo-Rufinus cites 1 Corinthians 15:51 to prove that all the dead will be raised, and the author asserts that Psalm 1:5 does not deny the resurrection of the wicked. While everyone will rise, not everyone will rise to glory, since *we shall not all be changed* [1 Corinthians 15:51].⁶⁰ The author thus sees the distinctions between the sinners, the saints and the wicked as also involving distinctions in the state of the bodies in which they are resurrected. Those who believe will be changed into glorious bodies, while the wicked will receive their bodies unchanged.

In his comments on Psalm 1:5, Hilary of Poitiers argues that the punishment of the wicked involves the denial of access to judgement: they do not have the right or the privilege to have their case heard, since they have consistently refused to believe, and have thereby forfeited all right to further grace from God. They have no opportunity to plead their case, no chance to be rescued from the fate that awaits them. They are not annihilated, but instead raised for punishment, since annihilation is not a punishment but escape from punishment. They do not deserve to be judged, nor

⁵⁶ Origen. *Selections in Psalms. Selections from the Commentaries and Homilies of Origen*, pp. 230-231.

⁵⁷ Cyprian. *Three books of Testimonies against the Jews* 3.31. ANF 5, p. 543.

⁵⁸ Cyprian. *On the Unity of the Church* 10. ANF 5, p. 424. His comment on separating the chaff from the wheat is alluding to Psalm 1:4. Shortly after in this passage he refers to those who illegitimately take office in the church as sitting in “the seat of pestilence” [Psalm 1:1].

⁵⁹ Cyril of Jerusalem. *Catechetical Lectures* 18.14-15. NPNF 2/7, p. 137.

⁶⁰ Pseudo-Rufinus. *Commentary in Seventyfive Psalms*: Psalm 1. PL 21, 649.

indeed do they need to be judged, nor their case be heard, since the judgement has already been passed on the wicked [John 3:18].⁶¹ Another reason why the wicked will not face the judgement when they are raised for punishment is that the phrase *the way of the wicked will perish* [Psalm 1:6] was interpreted to mean that they would be cut off without chance for returning to God.⁶²

Similarly in a metrical paraphrase of Psalm 1, Paulinus of Nola interprets the psalm as a description of the resurrection and last judgement.⁶³ He says that the wicked do not need to come into the judgement, because “Blatant guilt needs no investigation to uncover it, because those who do not bear the sign of salvation on their heads will flaunt before them the mark of impending death.”⁶⁴ There was no need for the wicked to be interrogated, as there was nothing to be learned from them: all that was needed was to distinguish them from the rest of humankind in order to send them away into hell, as their fate was already decided. This idea also appears in the commentary of Theodoret on Psalm 1:5.

For they have no need of accusation, since their impiety is clear, but they await punishment alone. For just as those who exercise justice do not bring to court killers who are caught in the act to convict them, but to pronounce against them the sentence decreed by law. In the same way those who spend their lives in impiety undergo resurrection, not being brought to judgement but receiving the sentence of punishment.⁶⁵

The reason they do not need to be investigated, according to Jerome, is because the Judge knows all about them already, as is evident from Psalm 1:6.

For the Lord know the way of the righteous, but the way of the impious shall perish. He says the just judge knows everything even before the judgement, and does not need proofs or conviction. Hence allotting what is deserved to each, he will deem some worthy of commendation and crowns, and others he will send to unending punishment.⁶⁶

Ambrose added yet more nuances to the concept of the judgement of the wicked. The wicked were to be raised, not to face the judgement, since they had been judged already, but to undergo punishment. The sinners and the righteous were both raised for the judgement, but in different positions: the sinners, those who believed but did not live perfect lives, were raised in order to be judged; while the righteous were raised in order to sit with Christ in judgement.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Hilary of Poitiers. *Homily on Psalm 1*, 20. NPNF 2/9, p. 241.

⁶² Hilary of Poitiers. *Homily on Psalm 1*, 24. NPNF 2/9, p. 242.

⁶³ Apollinaris of Laodicea. also made a poetical paraphrase of Psalm 1, but this is little more than a poetic reworking of the text; there is little explanation incorporated into his poem. *Metaphrasis eis ton Psaltera: Psalm 1*. PG 33, 1313.

⁶⁴ Paulinus of Nola. *Poem 7, based on Psalm 1*. ACW 40, p. 51.

⁶⁵ Theodoret. *On Psalms 1.6*. PG 80, 872-873.

⁶⁶ Theodoret. *On Psalms 1.7*. PG 80, 873.

⁶⁷ H de Lavalette. “L’interprétation du psaume 1,5 chez les pères ‘miséricordieux’ latins.” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 48 (1960) 552. Cf. Cassiodorus, who says that “the just

However, Ambrose stresses, unlike many other Patristic writers, that the saints will indeed be judged, since through judgement we are pardoned for our sins, which even the righteous have committed. The wicked, however, are judged already, as they have not believed. The judgement of their own unbelief is what condemns them to punishment, and they do not have the advantage of being judged, which is reserved only for those who believe.

On the contrary to speak more truly, the saint comes to the judgement, the impious does not come: *Therefore the impious will not rise in the judgement.* The one asks that he may be absolved, the other that he is punished and sent away. But he who is not judged, has not believed, but by the judgement of his own impiety he himself is punished.⁶⁸

Ambrose comments elsewhere on this theme:

And finally, he who has believed that the dead shall rise again *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump* (for the trumpet shall sound) *shall be caught up amongst the first in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*; he who has not believed shall be left, and subject himself to the sentence by his own unbelief.⁶⁹

He makes the same interpretation in another context. “Only those who have confessed Christ will deserve to attain to the grace of the resurrection; because the impious do not rise in the judgement, but they are punished as if a judgement has been held.”⁷⁰ The benefits of the judgement, reserved for those who believe, is spelled out by Ambrose in his exposition of Psalm 118 [119]. Through the terror of punishment, the saints are confirmed in their walk; through the awareness of sin they seek forgiveness.⁷¹

Ambrose was uncertain whether those who were judged already were the impious only, or whether it included also the Christian sinners. For Ambrose it was not the sinners who preferred light more than darkness who were not judged, but the impious who loved darkness. The distinction was between faith and unbelief, not between those works which conformed to the faith and those which did not.⁷² Ambrose rejected the interpretation of Hilary, that “Not every man that is a sinner is also impious, but the impious man cannot fail to be a sinner.”⁷³

man rises to judge, the sinner to be judged, the wicked to be punished without trial.” *Explanation of the Psalms* 1.5. ACW 51, p. 54.

⁶⁸ Ambrose. *Exposition of Psalm 118* [119]. Homily 20.24. PL 15, 1568.

⁶⁹ Ambrose. *On belief in the resurrection* 2.76. NPNF 2/10, p. 186.

⁷⁰ Ambrose. *Exposition of Luke* 7.9. PL 15, 1789.

⁷¹ Ambrose. *Exposition of Psalm 118* [119]. Homily 22.26. PL 15, 1598.

⁷² H de Lavalette. “L’interprétation du psaume 1,5 chez les pères ‘miséricordieux’ latins.” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 48 (1960) 553.

⁷³ Hilary of Poitiers. *Homily on Psalm* 1.6. NPNF 2/9, p. 237. Cf. also Augustine. “*Nor sinners in the council of the just.* The Psalmist habitually repeats his first phrase with greater emphasis. Here *sinners* denote the *wicked*, and *the council of the just* reiterates *in judgement*.”

8.2.2 John 3:18 and the judgement

The idea that neither the ungodly nor the saints would face judgement was based largely on Psalm 1:5, but it was only in correlation with John 3:18 that this interpretation was developed. In the interpretation of John 3:18 in isolation from Psalm 1:5, the idea expressed is not that the wicked would not be judged, but that they will have already been condemned when they come to the judgement. Irenaeus is one who cites John 3:18-19 to demonstrate this idea, without referring to Psalm 1:5.⁷⁴ Irenaeus insists that it is because the wicked have already been condemned that they must come to the judgement. “It is the very purpose of the judgement to separate the righteous from the unrighteous, and that separation is final.”⁷⁵

Clement of Alexandria understands John 3:18 to mean that the wicked will not be judged, and gives this interpretation in his writings without always correlating it with Psalm 1:5.

The Lord is he who judges the earth, *since he that believes not, is, according to the utterance of the Saviour, condemned already.* And there is written in the Kings the judgement and sentence of the Lord, which stands thus: *The Lord hears the righteous, but the wicked he does not save, because they do not desire to know God.*⁷⁶

In his treatise *On the forgiveness of sins and baptism*, Augustine correlates John 3:18 with John 3:36 and Mark 16:16, and insists that it is baptism that separates the believers from the non-believers.

Consequently, if they are not baptised, they will have to rank amongst those who do not believe; and therefore they will not even have life, but *the wrath of God abides in them, inasmuch as he that does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides in him, and they are under judgement, since he that does not believe is condemned*

Possibly, however, the wicked are one thing, sinners another. Every wicked man is a sinner, but not every sinner is a wicked man.” *On the Psalms* 1.5. ACW 29, p. 24. Gregory the Great. “But holy scripture specially calls unbelievers ‘ungodly.’ For sinners are distinguished from ungodly by this difference, that though every ungodly man is a sinner, yet every sinner is not ungodly. For even a man who is godly in the faith can be called a sinner. Whence John says, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.* But a man is properly called ‘ungodly’ who is estranged from the holiness of religion. For of such the Prophet says, *The ungodly shall not rise up in judgement.*” *Morals on Job* 25.10.25. LF 23, p. 116.

⁷⁴ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* 5.27.1-2. ANF 1, p. 556.

⁷⁵ A S Wood. “The eschatology of Irenaeus.” *Evangelical Quarterly* 41 (1969) 40.

⁷⁶ Clement of Alexandria. *The Stromata* 4.26. ANF 2, p. 440. Cf. his comments on John 5:24. “We then alone, who first have touched the confines of life, are already perfect; and we already live who are separated from death. Salvation, accordingly, is the following of Christ: *For that which is in Him is life* [John 1:4]. *Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life* [John 5:24].” *The Instructor* 1.6. ANF 2, p. 216.

*already, and they shall be condemned, since he that believes and is baptised shall be saved, but he that does not believe shall be damned.*⁷⁷

Commenting on John 3:18, John Chrysostom says that the possible meanings are either that there is no specific judgement on those that do not believe, since the failure to believe is itself the warrant for punishment, or else it is a premonition of the future judgement. He draws a parallel with the criminal who is condemned by the nature of his deed, even if he has not yet been brought before the judge for formal, legal condemnation. Similarly, Adam “died” on the day he ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, even though he lived for many years afterwards. But the sentence of death was there since he had become liable to the penalty by the very act he had done. Chrysostom thereby says that those who think that they can escape the penalty for their sin, since Christ declared he had not come to judge the world, are mistaken: they have condemned themselves and are judged already, and will receive the sentence of punishment when Christ returns.⁷⁸

An unusual use of John 3:18 is found in the commentary on 1 Corinthians by Ambrosiaster. He cites this text to demonstrate that those who do not believe have already been judged, but the comparison with the saints is not that they will not be judged, but that they already have something of the resurrection glory about them. The saints will rise up to glory, and be “heavenly” as Christ is, and so they are already worthy of being called “celestial.”

And because he is heavenly, let them also be heavenly, that is, because Christ has not sinned, conquering death, he is heavenly; and so let those be who believe in him, and although also whoever does not believe are going to be spiritual but as the spiritual things of wickedness, in order that they will be dark. For he now speaks of the saints who will rise up to glory: for just as those who do not believe have already been judged, those who do believe are already called celestial [John 3:18].⁷⁹

Zeno of Verona concludes from John 3:18 that the faithful will not need to be judged on the last day, but this does not mean that the unfaithful will be judged. Zeno then addresses the problem that if both the faithful and the unfaithful are not to be judged, how then can they be allocated their rewards appropriate to their deeds?

Therefore since in this particular Psalm the prophet says: *Of mercy and justice I will sing to you, Lord* [Psalm 101:1], how is it that the Lord says in the Gospel, *He who believes in me, will not be judged; but he who does not believe, has been judged already* [John 3:18]? In this he exempts the faithful from the judgement, but he does not admit the unfaithful to the judgement. But if each group is exempt from judgement, how can the payment be made to each for what he has

⁷⁷ Augustine. *On the forgiveness of sins and baptism* 3.3. NPNF 1/5, p. 70.

⁷⁸ John Chrysostom. *Homilies on St. John* 28.1. NPNF 1/14, p. 97.

⁷⁹ Ambrosiaster. *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* 15.48. PL 17, 285.

done? For the just man will seem to be labouring without cause, unless the unjust man receives according to the deeds which he has done.⁸⁰

Zeno solves his problem by asserting that this is an incorrect interpretation of John 3:18, one which is held by the “unwise.”⁸¹ The correct interpretation is rather different. Who then is the judgement for? Zeno takes the position that judgement is for assessing that which is doubtful; there is no doubt about the believers or the unbelievers. Therefore it is the uncertain ones who face judgement.

However what the Lord says, with what weight and with what reason it has been said, the very sense of the words explains: *He who believes in me*, he says, *will not be judged*. With good reason: for why is it necessary to judge the believer? For judgement arises from doubtful things, doubt having been taken away, the weighing up of a judgement is not needed. For which reason it is not necessary for the unbelieving to be judged, because they have already been condemned by their unbelief; for what will he carry with him out of this life, a crown, or punishment?⁸²

Since the unbelievers have been judged already, they carry their punishment with them out of this life; that is, it is in this life that they are judged, and the punishment is allocated to them before they die. There is no need for them to face judgement again at the resurrection or to be allocated additional punishments. This he says is confirmed in Psalm 1:5. “For this principle David expressed in the first Psalm with these words: *The wicked will not rise in the judgement*, he says, *neither the sinners in the council of the just*.”⁸³ Thus the interpretation of John 3:18 is confirmed by the way in which Psalm 1:5 was understood.

The use of John 3:18 to exclude both the wicked and the saints from the judgement is found in other writers as well.⁸⁴ Thus John 3:18 is also cited separately from Psalm 1:5 to demonstrate that neither the wicked nor the saints will face the judgement. It would no doubt not have received this interpretation had this text not frequently been read in conjunction with Psalm 1:5, so that they were used to interpret each other, and thereby acquired this particular meaning which they were then understood to possess independently. Other texts cited to demonstrate that the saints would not be judged are more rare, and tend to be the views of individual interpreters, rather than a tradition of interpretation which is found in a wide variety of writers. For instance, Aphrahat asserts on the basis of Psalm 143:2 that the righteous will not be judged.

And for judgement shall all the children of Adam be gathered together, and each shall go to the place prepared for him. The risen of the

⁸⁰ Zeno of Verona. *Tractatus* 2.21.1. PL 11, 458.

⁸¹ Zeno of Verona. *Tractatus* 2.21.1. PL 11, 458-459.

⁸² Zeno of Verona. *Tractatus* 2.21.1. PL 11, 459.

⁸³ Zeno of Verona. *Tractatus* 2.21.1. PL 11, 459.

⁸⁴ [Caesarius of Arles. *Sermon* 157.4] Simon Tugwell. **Human immortality and the redemption of death**, p. 131. Isaac the Syrian. *Ascetical Homily* 9. **The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian**, p. 73.

righteous shall go unto life, and the risen of the sinners shall be delivered unto death. The righteous who kept the commandment shall go, and shall not come nigh unto judgement in the day that they shall rise; as David asked, *And bring not thy servant into judgement*; nor will their Lord terrify them in that day.⁸⁵

Jerome asserts that the saints will not be judged, but rather will judge, but without giving explicit textual support in that context for the idea. “Those who have died in Christ will rise first, and those saints who are found alive, will be caught up together with them, who will not be judged, but rather will judge.”⁸⁶ He used Psalm 1:5 and John 3:18 elsewhere to support this view, and so this interpretation probably lies behind his comments here, although he does not make it explicit.

Adrio König has discussed the problem of the judgement determined on unbelievers in John 3:18 and shows how it is possible to understand that decision without thereby rendering the eschatological judgement redundant.

The judgement must, in the case of unbelievers, again be seen as the disclosure of a decision already taken. “The unbeliever has already been judged, in that he has not given his allegiance to God’s Son” (John 3:18). “He who disobeys the Son shall not see that life; God’s wrath rests on him” (v. 36). “He who does not possess the Son of God does not have that life” (1 John 5:12). Similarly, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, the ontic decision which has been made is only later pronounced at the judgement noetically, “For when I was hungry, you gave me no food...” So it is clear that for the lost, too, the decision is taken during the interim and reflects their attitude towards Jesus, not their works as such. This is clear from the fact that though on judgement day people will claim that they prophesied and cast out devils in his name, he will reject them, saying, “I never knew you; out of my sight, you and your wicked ways!” [Matthew 7:22-23]. Therefore, works as such have no intrinsic value. What is at issue is that which results from a relationship with God in Christ... This does not mean that unbelievers must wait until the end before hearing, out of the blue, that their works did not, after all, have the correct quality. They are lost because, when they heard the gospel, they did not pay attention and act accordingly...⁸⁷

Such an approach has more to offer than the view of the Patristic writers that the eschatological judgement did not apply to the wicked.

⁸⁵ Aphrahat. *Demonstrations* 22.15. NPNF 2/13, p. 407. He goes on to stress that the righteous shall judge angels, and the twelve tribes of Israel (citing 1 Corinthians 6:3 and Matthew 19:28), so since the righteous are to judge the wicked, they will not themselves be judged. *Demonstrations* 22.16. NPNF 2/13, p. 407. Cf. also *Demonstrations* 6.1. NPNF 2/13, p. 363. *Demonstrations* 8.20-21. NPNF 2/13, pp. 381-382.

⁸⁶ Jerome. *Commentary on 1 Thessalonians* 4:16-17. PL 30, 868C.

⁸⁷ Adrio König. *The eclipse of Christ in eschatology*, pp. 219-220.

8.3 Who then is judged?

Lactantius first introduces into the exegesis of Psalm 1 a consideration which became an intrinsic part of the tradition. Since the wicked have no need to face the judgement, being condemned already, he asks who it is who needs to face judgement. His answer is that the judgement concerns those who know God, unlike the wicked who do not know God. Their deeds need to be assessed to see whether they merit a life of blessedness, or condemnation to punishment along with those who did not know God. Although Lactantius never explicitly cites Psalm 1 with an eschatological interpretation, there is probably an allusion to Psalm 1:5 in the following passage.

Not all men, however, shall then be judged by God, but those only who have been exercised in the religion of God. For they who have not known God, since sentence cannot be passed upon them for their acquittal, are already judged and condemned, since the Holy Scriptures testify that the wicked shall not arise to judgement. Therefore they who have known God shall be judged, and their deeds, that is, their evil works, shall be compared and weighed against their good ones: so that if those which are good and just are more and weighty, they may be given to a life of blessedness; but if the evil exceed, they may be condemned to punishment.⁸⁸

Lactantius assumes that all believers face the judgement, while later Patristic writers distinguished the righteous, who did not need to face judgement, being already approved; the wicked, who were condemned already (citing John 3:18-19); and the ones who were neither fully righteous nor fully wicked. Their fate was uncertain and needed to be determined by judgement. Lactantius does not separate off a class of the righteous who do not need to face judgement. For him, all believers are judged by God and rewarded according to their deeds. This takes place when they are raised from the dead.

After these things the lower regions shall be opened, and the dead shall rise again, on whom the same King and God shall pass judgement, to whom the supreme Father shall give the great power both of judging and of reigning...⁸⁹

Those who are condemned are sent back to join the wicked who had not been raised.⁹⁰ Lactantius rejects the judgement of each individual soul immediately following death,

⁸⁸ Lactantius. *The Divine Institutes* 7.20. ANF 7, p. 216.

⁸⁹ Lactantius. *The Divine Institutes* 7.20. ANF 7, p. 216.

⁹⁰ Aphrahat said that the wicked would rise from the dead, but they would not be allowed to enter the gathering of the righteous, and they would be sent back to Sheol. He based this interpretation on Psalm 9:17, *The wicked shall turn back to Sheol, and all the nations that forget God. Demonstrations* 22.17. NPNF 2/13, p. 408. He discusses this same idea of the wicked being turned back to Sheol elsewhere. "Night has passed away; the light reigns. As to death, its sting is broken and it is swallowed up in life. Those that return to Sheol shall weep and gnash their teeth, and those that go to the Kingdom shall rejoice and exult and dance and sing praises." *Demonstrations* 6.6. NPNF 2/13, p. 367. Cf. *Demonstrations* 6.18. NPNF 2/13, p. 374. This idea is found also in Ephrem. *On patience, the second coming and the last judgement. Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*. vol. 1, p. 13, as well as Irenaeus. *Against*

even though he holds to perhaps the strongest form of dualism in the ante-Nicene period.

Nor, however, let any one imagine that souls are immediately judged after death. For all are detained in one and a common place of confinement, until the arrival of the time in which the great Judge shall make an investigation of their deserts. Then they whose piety shall have been approved of will receive the reward of immortality; but they whose sins and crimes shall have been brought to light will not rise again, but will be hidden in the same darkness with the wicked, being destined to certain punishment.⁹¹

According to Hilary, the ones who will face the judgement are those in between, the ones who believed, but whose lives were nevertheless not free from sin. The sinners are not unbelievers but those who have professed faith although are not free from sin. "For there are many whose confession concerning God, while it acquits them of ungodliness, yet does not free them from sin."⁹² The judgement of the sinners is undertaken by the saints. The distinction between them and the ungodly is that the ungodly are not judged at all and do not have the privilege of the sinners in having their case heard, since they are judged already, while the sinners are not admitted to the counsel of the righteous, and thus are distinguished also from them.

It is precisely the scheme and system thus laid down in the Gospel that the Prophet has followed, when he says: *Therefore the ungodly shall not rise again in the judgement, nor sinners in the counsel of the righteous.* He leaves no judgement for the ungodly, because they have been judged already; on the other hand, he has refused to sinners, who as we shewed in our former discourse are to be distinguished from the ungodly, the counsel of the righteous, because they are to be judged. For ungodliness causes the former to be judged beforehand, but sin keeps the latter to be judged hereafter. Thus ungodliness having already been judged is not admitted to the judgement of sinners, while again sinners, who are yet to be judged, are deemed unworthy of enjoying the counsel of the righteous, who will not be judged.⁹³

For Hilary judgement is to decide an ambiguous case, not to pass sentence on those whose righteousness or wickedness is beyond doubt. The future judgement is not to punish the wicked or reward the good but to exercise discernment on those who stand midway between them. On the basis of John 3:18, he says the believers are exempt

Heresies 4.28.2. ANF 1, p. 501, and Commodian, who says that when the just rise from the dead, the executioners of Jesus rise also to gaze at the spectacle, then they are plunged back again into the abyss. [Commodian. *Carmen Apologeticum* vv. 993-1060.] P de Labriolle. **The History and Literature of Christianity from Tertullian to Boethius**, p. 181. The correlation of Psalm 1:5 with Isaiah 40:15 is also found in two places in Clement of Alexandria (see footnote 48 above).

⁹¹ Lactantius. *The Divine Institutes* 7.20. ANF 7, p. 217.

⁹² Hilary of Poitiers. *Homily on Psalm 1*, 9. NPNF 2/9, p. 238.

⁹³ Hilary of Poitiers. *Homily on Psalm 1*, 23. NPNF 2/9, p. 242.

from judgement while the wicked are judged already. Hence it is the inconstant who are to face judgement at the Last Day.

For by saying, *He that believeth on Me shall not be judged*, He exempts believers, and by adding: *But he that believeth not has been judged already*, He excludes unbelievers, from judgement. If, then, He has thus exempted believers and debarred unbelievers, allowing the chance of judgement neither to one class nor the other, how can He be considered consistent when he adds thirdly: *And this is the judgement, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light?* For there can apparently be no place left for judgement, since neither unbelievers nor believers are to be judged.⁹⁴

Neither believers nor unbelievers need to be judged, because there is no doubt about them: there is no ambiguity to be clarified. The judgement is for those who “stand midway between the godly and the ungodly, having affinities to both, but strictly belonging to neither class, because they have come to be what they are by a combination of the two.” These have some belief, so they cannot be considered unbelievers. But they also have some unbelief, so they cannot be considered believers. The temptations of the world are stronger than their love of God. They are the ones who shall be judged, since “judgement arises out of ambiguity, and where ambiguity ceases, there is no call for trial and judgement.”⁹⁵

Gregory the Great dealt with a question in his *Concordia* as to whether or not the apostles would be judged. He suggests that the apostles have already been tested by fire when the Holy Spirit descended on them at Pentecost, and thus do not need to be tested further. Those believers who are tried in this life do not need to be tried at the eschaton. Having already been tried by fire, they are then in a fit state to judge with Christ when he comes to execute justice in all the earth. Gregory cites John 3:18 and Psalm 1:5 to show that the judgement will apply neither to the believers nor to the unbelievers, but (citing John 3:19) to those “who may know the light has come, but yet are said to love darkness more.” The judgement then will show “whether they ought to belong more to light or to darkness,” and they will then rise to be judged. The righteous will rise to be judges, and the wicked will rise in order to be condemned, having been judged already.⁹⁶ Gregory thus specifies that the judgement is for those who have heard the Gospel, but in spite of that have turned away and loved their evil deeds of darkness more than the light. It is of interest that Gregory sees the judgement as a testing by fire, whether in this life or in the life to come. This is no doubt correlated with his doctrine of purgatory, which is more developed and explicit than with many other Patristic writers.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Hilary of Poitiers. *Homily on Psalm 1*, 21. NPNF 2/9, p. 241. Cf. also *Homily on Psalm 57.7*. PL 9, 373, where he repeats this idea.

⁹⁵ Hilary of Poitiers. *Homily on Psalm 1*, 22. NPNF 2/9, pp. 241-242.

⁹⁶ Gregory the Great. *Concordia Quorundam Testimoniorum Sacrae Scripturae* 12. PL 79, 666-667.

⁹⁷ Cf. Jacques le Goff. **The birth of Purgatory**, p. 88, where he calls Gregory “the last ‘Founder’ of Purgatory,” referring to his pivotal role in establishing the doctrine.

It could be thought that in the view of John of Damascus the saints will not be judged, since at the resurrection their bodies will be transformed to incorruption, and they shall then stand beside (not in front of) the judgement seat of Christ.

We shall therefore rise again, our souls being once more united with our bodies, now made incorruptible and having put off corruption, and we shall stand beside the awful judgement-seat of Christ... those who have done good will shine forth as the sun with the angels unto life eternal...⁹⁸

However, it could be that standing “beside” the judgement seat does not mean the saints will not be judged, but refers to Matthew 25:31-33, when the sheep and the goats are separated before the throne. The saints may then be said to stand “beside the throne” while the wicked are sent away.

8.3.1 Who are the sinners?

Taking this approach to the judgement, the Patristic writers needed to address the question of the identity of the sinners, and how they are distinguished from the just and the wicked. For instance, Zeno of Verona describes them as

...doubtful Christians, and inconstant, who are in the middle between the pious and the impious, not fully holding to either part, while they do not cease to hold to both sides. They are not believers, because they have something of unbelief mingled. They are not unbelievers, because they have a form of faith, professing to serve God, but in fact serving the deeds of this world.⁹⁹

He goes on to describe them further as the ones who are found in church through fear of God, and yet still attracted to worldly pleasures. They honour God, and so are not impious; but they are not pious because of their sins. He says: “They pray, because they fear; they sin, because they desire to.” Zeno says that these are the ones spoken of in Romans 1:21.¹⁰⁰

Jerome uses the distinction between the believer, the unbeliever and the imperfect believer in determining who is to be judged. The believers and the unbelievers will not be judged, but the imperfect believer must be judged. The one who believes, he says, does not sin. But those who waver in faith will sin, since he “performs good acts at the time when he believes, but commits sin when his faith is weak.”¹⁰¹ Jerome also cites Romans 2:12 in this connection. The sinner under the law will be judged and will not perish, while those without the law are the unbelievers who will be punished forever. Since we are none of us without sin, Jerome does not mean that any who sinned will be lost. Otherwise salvation would be available only to mythical

⁹⁸ John of Damascus. *On the Orthodox Faith* 4.27. NPNF 2/9, p. 101.

⁹⁹ Zeno of Verona. *Tractatus* 2.21.2. PL 11, 460.

¹⁰⁰ Zeno of Verona. *Tractatus* 2.21.2. PL 11, 460-461.

¹⁰¹ Jerome. *Homily 1, On Psalm 1*. FC 48, p. 11.

individuals who never existed and never will exist.¹⁰² Jerome discusses the disobedience of the believer who sins (and who therefore must face judgement) in the light of 1 John 3. *Now he who believes does not sin; he who believes according to truth does not sin; he who has true faith does not sin.*¹⁰³ He thus explains what distinguishes the righteous from the sinners in a positive sense rather than a negative sense, although this is part of his interpretation as well.

He distinguishes the sinner from the impious, just as they are distinguished from the saints. *“Not so the wicked. The psalmist did not say, not so the sinners, for if he had said ‘sinners’ we would all then be excluded from reward.”* The wicked are those who deny God, while the sinners are those who acknowledge God, but despite this still commit sin.¹⁰⁴ There is thus a need to judge the sinner, but there is no need to judge the wicked: they are already condemned. But the sinner needs to be examined to see what good deeds and evil deeds he has performed. But this then generates the problem that some are judged even before the day of judgement. Jerome solves this by saying that the day of judgement can mean either the eschatological judgement, or else the judgement immediately after death, as is demonstrated by Tugwell, who draws out the paradoxes inherent in this approach.

And if there is already a discrimination between good and bad souls, it is clear that in some sense they must already be judged when they die, and Jerome is explicit about this: in his commentary on Joel he says that the “day of the Lord” is to be taken as the day of judgement or the day of the individual’s departure from the body, “because what is to come on the day of judgement for everyone is fulfilled in the case of individuals on the day of their death.” But in that case we already have the problem of what is left for the last judgement to judge.¹⁰⁵

Thus there are still problems in Jerome’s view, as it still leaves the difficulty of what is to be done at the eschatological day of judgement. He does however determine who is to be judged, whether immediately after death or at the day of judgement: it is the believer who sins. In another place Jerome says that while the wicked are not judged, the heretics can be judged by God, so that they will be corrected as to the error of

¹⁰² Jerome. *Against the Pelagians* 1.28. NPNF 2/6, p. 463. Cf. also Paulinus of Nola, who also uses Romans 2:12 in this way. *Poem 7, based on Psalm 1*. ACW 40, pp. 51-52. A pseudonymous commentary on the Psalms, drawing on Jerome’s authentic works, states that the sinners are the ones who persevere in their faults, not those who have any fault at all. *Breviarum in Psalmum 1*. PL 26, 866. Cf. also Cassiodorus. *Explanation of the Psalms* 1.5. ACW 51, pp. 54-55, who also cites 1 John 3.

¹⁰³ Jerome. *Homily 1, On Psalm 1*. FC 48, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Jerome. *Homily 1, On Psalm 1*. FC 48, p. 10. Elsewhere Jerome describes the wicked as those who are “perfected in evil.” *Tractate on Psalm 14*. PLS 2, 198. Cf. the comment of Aphrahat, citing Psalm 1:5, that the righteous would not be judged, nor would the wicked “whose sins are many, and the measure of whose offences is overflowing.” *Demonstrations* 22.17. NPNF 2/13, p. 408. The rest of the world, who are called sinners, will be judged. *Demonstrations* 22.18. NPNF 2/13, p. 408.

¹⁰⁵ Simon Tugwell. **Human immortality and the redemption of death**, p. 117.

their ways.¹⁰⁶ They would no doubt be included with the ranks of those who know something of the truth, rather than with the wicked, who do not know God at all.¹⁰⁷

John Chrysostom described the sinner who would be judged as the one who is driven about by every temptation, like the wind driving the chaff (others: dust) of Psalm 1:4.¹⁰⁸ This interpretation is found also in Ambrose, who says that the sinners are the ones who believe in Christ but still sin because they cannot resist temptation.¹⁰⁹

Gregory the Great says that sinners are the ones who believe but still sin, while the impious are the ones who are wicked and do not believe. He distinguishes the sinners into two groups: the ones who are judged and are saved, and the ones who are judged and condemned.¹¹⁰ The judgement is for him a genuine inquiry into those brought before the judge: their fate is not prejudged.

8.4 The orders at the judgement

The Patristic interpretation of Psalm 1:5 required the distinction of humankind into groups at the time of the judgement, a distinction which became more refined and precise with time. In the earliest texts, such as those of Clement of Alexandria, we find simply the two groups, the wicked and the righteous. Later an “intermediate” group is distinguished, those who are neither righteous nor wicked, who must be allocated to one or other group,¹¹¹ which is found in Arnobius.¹¹² Finally there is the four-fold distinction between the righteous who will not be judged and will be saved, the wicked who will not be judged and will not be saved, the partially righteous who will be judged and will be saved, and the partially wicked who will be judged and will not be saved. This is correlated in later Patristic texts with the idea of purging after death for those who were not wholly righteous who would enter heaven only after cleansing, and the fully righteous who would enter heaven immediately.

¹⁰⁶ Jerome. *Commentarioli in Psalmos* 5. PLS 2, 35.

¹⁰⁷ The discussion of how heretics were distinguished from orthodox believers still forms a problem for scholarship. Jerome seemed to consider them erring believers, rather than those outside the church.

¹⁰⁸ John Chrysostom. *Homilies on the Statues* 8.4. NPNF 1/9, p. 397.

¹⁰⁹ Ambrose. *On Psalm* 1.56. PL 14, 996. “And one could understand that those who practice evil deeds nevertheless believing in Christ, wanting indeed to live uprightly; but overcome by the allurements of sins, chose darkness more than light: that is: they chose both, but darkness more so.” This view is also found in Cassiodorus. *Explanation of the Psalms* 1.5. ACW 51, pp. 54-55. Cf. also John Cassian. *Conferences* 1.14. NPNF 2/11, p. 301.

¹¹⁰ Gregory the Great. *Morals on Job* 26.27.50. LF 23, pp. 171-172.

¹¹¹ This distinction of three groups at the judgement is also found in Jewish writers: “Rabbi Sammai teaches this: that there will be three groups at the judgement: one of the truly holy, another of the truly wicked, and a third in between.” *Rosh Hashanah*. Cited in : Jacques Le Goff. **The birth of Purgatory**, p. 40. It appears even earlier in Plato’s *Phaedo*. The in-between souls spend time in purificatory fire before being granted the rewards of their good deeds. The wicked are plunged straight into Tartarus, while the righteous are elevated to a pure home above. *Phaedo* 113-114. **The Dialogues of Plato**. Vol 2, pp. 261-262.

¹¹² Arnobius. *The case against the Pagans* 2.14. ACW 7, pp. 127-128. Ephrem of Syria distinguishes the just who are made perfect and are above judgement; those judged: the just who are still imperfect and the penitents; and those outside the judgement: all the wicked. Ephrem. **Works**. Vol. 1, 255B-C. Cited in: J Tixeront. **History of Dogmas**. Vol. 2, p. 218.

The idea that there must be distinctions between the wicked, the sinners and the righteous is stressed by Hilary of Poitiers in his discussion of Psalm 1.

There must, therefore, be a distinction between the ungodly and the sinner, between the sinner and the pestilent; chiefly because here the ungodly has a counsel, the sinner a way, the pestilent a seat, and again, because the question is of walking, not standing, in the counsel of the ungodly; of standing, not walking, in the way of the sinner. Now, if we would understand the reason of these facts, we must note the precise difference between the sinner and the ungodly, that so it may become clear why to the sinner is assigned a way, and to the ungodly a counsel; next, why the question is of standing in the way, and of walking in the counsel, whereas men are accustomed to connect standing with a counsel and walking with a way. Not every man that is a sinner is impious; but the impious man cannot fail to be a sinner.¹¹³

In a fragment of a Commentary on Matthew identified as that of Victorinus,¹¹⁴ we find the three-fold distinction used.

Again humanity is divided into the three classes of “iusti,” “peccatores” and “impii”, that is to say, good Christians, bad Christians and heathen, a distinction being drawn between the “impii” who perish, and the “peccatores” who are punished in proportion to their sins: and this prominence of the heathen as a separate class in the eschatological conception of the writer points us back to a time when heathenism was still dominant.¹¹⁵

In his treatise on the early death of infants, Gregory of Nyssa tackles the question of what will happen in the judgement to those who have not sinned. He divides humanity into three classes: those who have led virtuous lives and have merited a reward, those who have led evil lives and merit punishment, and children who had no opportunity for good or evil. His answer is that children will partake of the knowledge of God in the future life according to their limited capacity, but will not have the same degree of reward as the virtuous, and are also exempt from the punishments reserved for the wicked.¹¹⁶

According to Zeno of Verona, there is as much difference between the sinners and the just as there is between the sinners and the impious: they cannot be treated together.

¹¹³ Hilary of Poitiers. *Homily on Psalm 1*, 6. NPNF 2/9, 237.

¹¹⁴ C H Turner. “An exegetical fragment of the third Century.” *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1904) 227.

¹¹⁵ C H Turner. “An exegetical fragment of the third Century.” *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1904) 220.

¹¹⁶ E V McClear. “The fall of man and original sin in the theology of Gregory of Nyssa.” *Theological Studies* 9 (1948) 207-209.

Progressively according to their deserts, as if with a certain statement of charges, with the fewest of words he indicates the judgement of the whole human race: for there is the same difference between the impious and the sinners, as there is between the sinners and the just. Finally he himself does not neglect the judgement for the impious, because by their impiety they have already been judged beforehand: neither are the sinners, who are to be judged, does he count worthy to be in the council of the just, who will not be judged.¹¹⁷

Thus Zeno sees humanity distinguished into three groups which will be present in the day of judgement. The righteous will be the judges in the council of the just, while the sinners are excluded from this group. They have secrets in their lives which need to be examined, so appropriate punishments or acquittal can be determined according to their merits. The wicked have already been judged.¹¹⁸

Ambrose classified those who are raised as the wicked, who are already condemned; the righteous, who are already destined for reward; and the “sinners,” whose position was uncertain. They have believed but have not lived perfect lives, and are to be judged, since there are questions about their future to be resolved. While Hilary made the same distinction into three orders, there are, as de Lavalette says, differences between Ambrose and Hilary.

But the differences are equally evident. The ascending order of the impious, the sinners and the just, chosen by Ambrose permits him to insist on the difference between the resurrection for punishment and the resurrection for the judgement. The opposition is less between those who are already judged (as to whether they are good or evil) and those of whom their character is uncertain, the “midway souls,” who are between judgement and punishment. “You have two orders, the third is the impious left over.”¹¹⁹

In the works of Gregory the Great we find the final distinction, added to that which has been developed by the earlier Patristic authors, making it even more complex. The wicked are raised, but to punishment without facing judgement. Others, whom Gregory does not identify, who failed to show mercy, are judged and punished. The righteous are not judged, and reign with Christ. Others again, who are also not identified, are judged and reign. These are presumably those whose status is in doubt but who at the Judgement are seen to be worthy to be placed in the ranks of the righteous.

There are in truth two classes, namely, of the elect and the reprobate. But two ranks are comprised in each of these classes. For some are judged and perish; others are not judged and perish. Some are judged and reign; others are not judged and reign. They are judged and perish,

¹¹⁷ Zeno of Verona. *Tractatus* 2.21.1. PL 11, 459.

¹¹⁸ Zeno of Verona. *Tractatus* 2.21.3. PL 11, 461-462.

¹¹⁹ H de Lavalette. “L’interprétation du psaume 1,5 chez les pères ‘miséricordieux’ latins.” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 48 (1960) 552. [My translation]

to whom it is said in our Lord's declaration, *I hungered, and ye gave Me not to eat; I thirsted, and ye gave Me not to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in; naked, and ye covered Me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not.* To whom it is before said, *Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* But others are not judged in the last judgement, and yet perish. Of whom the Prophet says, *The ungodly do not rise again in the judgement.* And of whom the Lord declares, *But he that believed not is judged already.* And of whom Paul says, *They who have sinned without the Law, shall perish without the Law.* Therefore even all unbelievers rise again, but to torment and not to judgement. For their case is not then examined; because they come into the presence of their strict Judge, with the condemnation already of their own unbelief. But those, who retain their profession of faith, but have not works in accordance with it, are convicted of sin, in order to their perishing. But they, who have not enjoyed even the sacraments of the faith, do not hear the reproof of the Judge at the last ordeal; for, condemned already by the darkness of their own unbelief, they do not deserve to be condemned by the open reproof of Him, Whom they had despised.¹²⁰

The fragment of the *Formulae Hispanicae*, dating from perhaps the seventh century, preserves the same Patristic exegesis of Psalm 1 in conjunction with the use of Matthew 25. Here again we see humanity distinguished into four "orders" whose fate and status at the judgement varies according to the standard form.

There will be four orders in the judgement: two of good and two of wicked. One is the order of the elect, who will sit with the Lord in order to judge others; of whom the Lord said: *You who have followed me, will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel* [Matthew 19:28]. There will be a second order of the elect, who will be judged, to whom the Lord said, *Come, blessed of my Father* [Matthew 25:34]. And there are two orders of the reprobate. There will be one order who will not be judged and will perish; hence he says in the first Psalm: *The wicked will not rise up in the judgement;* and elsewhere the Prophet said: *Let the wicked be taken away so that he may not see the majesty of the Lord.* There will be a second order of the reprobate; who will be judged and will perish, since it is said: *Depart from me you evildoers into eternal fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels* [Matthew 25:41].¹²¹

Thus we see in a text from approximately five hundred years after Clement of Alexandria, still much the same basic interpretation, with the same texts cited in conjunction with Psalm 1.¹²²

¹²⁰ Gregory the Great. *Morals on the book of Job* 26.27.50. LF 23, pp. 171-172.

¹²¹ *Formulae Hispanicae*. PLS 4, 2151.

¹²² This interpretation persisted into the late Mediaeval period, appearing for instance in Paulus Winfridus [*Homilia de tempore* 73. PL 95, 1216] Peter Lombard [*Gloss.* PL 191, 65A. 4 *Sentences* 47.3] and Thomas Aquinas [*Summa Theologica* Q. 72.2; *Summa Theologica* Q. 89.5-7.]. Other Mediaeval authors, such as Walafridus Strabus (9th century) [*Glossa Ordinaria in liber Psalmorum*, On Psalm 1. PL 113, 845], Remigius Antissiodorensis

8.5 Conclusion

The Patristic tradition of interpretation of Psalm 1:5 started with a simple distinction between the righteous, who rose to face judgement, and the wicked, who did not rise to face judgement, being already condemned. This became a three-fold distinction between the righteous, who did not face judgement being already commended, the wicked, who were already condemned, and the sinners, whose fate needed to be determined by the judgement. In the views of Gregory the Great we find a further distinction between these groups, resulting in four classes. Such a development is possible only because of the influence of anthropological conceptions on speculation about eschatology.

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[*Ennarationes in Psalmos*. PL 131, 153] and Bruno Herbopolensis [*Expositio Psalmorum*. PL 142, 51] took the view that the wicked were raised not to take part in the judgement, but to be judged. Erasmus gave Psalm 1 a non-eschatological interpretation [*Enchiridion* 2. LCC 14, p. 304], while Luther gave several differing interpretations in his various treatises on the Psalms, citing and sometimes following Patristic interpretations. **First Lectures on the Psalms**. Luther's Works, Vol. 10, pp. 24, 31-32. **Psalms 1 and 2 from the Words on the First Twenty-two Psalms, 1519 to 1521: A composite translation**. Luther's Works, Vol. 14, p. 288. Melancton interpreted Psalm 1 with reference to the church, giving it a completely non-eschatological interpretation. *Argumentum ac dispositio primi Psalmi*. **Corpus Reformatorum Melancthonis Opera** vol. 13, 1019. It would appear that apart from isolated instances, such as the commentary of Dahood (see note 40 above) a non-eschatological interpretation has prevailed since the reformation, although further study is necessary to ascertain this.