

## Research Article

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# Reception through Polemics: The Internalization of Theological Otherness in Jerome's Heresiology

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**Abstract:** Early Christian heresiology is, like polemics in general, a genre that has commonly been negatively perceived in scholarship. There is an idea of heresiological texts as not only historically unreliable, but also unproductive, in contrast to the creative thinking that can be found in theological treatises. Considering the understanding of heresiology as reactive and exclusive, it is not surprising that heresiological works have seldom been examined in reception studies. The present article wants to challenge the idea of heresiological work as merely rejecting heresies in the defence of a pre-existing orthodoxy, by applying a dialogical reading to the work *Adversus Iovinianum* by Jerome of Stridon, a treatise in which he defended the superiority of virginity over marriage against Jovinian's idea of the equality of all the baptized. Building on the understanding of dialogue expressed by Mikhail Bakhtin, as well as his concept of hybridity, the article analyses how Jerome, instead of simply rejecting core elements of Jovinian's ideas, such as the goodness of marriage and the natural condition of human beings, rather reappropriates them and integrates them into his making of orthodoxy. The result is a hybrid construction in which anti-ascetic arguments are integrated in a rhetoric of asceticism.

**Keywords:** Jerome of Stridon, the Jovinianist controversy, heresiology, reception studies, asceticism, dialogism, hybridity

## 1 Introduction

Does polemics have any place in reception history? At first glance, considering that reception deals with taking over ideas and using them in new contexts and in new ways, polemics may seem to fall outside of reception. While dialogism and intertextuality have been important concepts in the study of the relations between texts, polemics stands apart, even being seen as opposed to dialogue. In the following assessment of the question about how to relate polemics to dialogue,<sup>1</sup> I will focus on the kind of polemics known as heresiology, which is here defined in a rather broad sense as “the ‘science’ of heresies”<sup>2</sup> or “the science of the errors of others.”<sup>3</sup> According to this understanding, heresiology is, rather than a literary genre, a discourse in which orthodoxy and heresy are mutually constructed as objects of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Polemics is here understood as “the art or practice of disputation or controversy.” Hettema and van der Kooij, *Religious Polemics in Context*, xi. I will discuss the sense in which I use “dialogue” in the next section.

<sup>2</sup> Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ground-breaking for this way of understanding heresiology as well as the notions of “orthodoxy” and “heresy” was Alain Le Boulluec's work *La Notion d'Hérésie* from 1985.

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Heresiological literature has, for various reasons, been shown little appreciation among modern scholars. First, it is seen as having little value as a historical source.<sup>5</sup> The revisionist work that has defined much of early Christian scholarship from the 1950s and onwards<sup>6</sup> has shown how orthodox Christianity's "others" – Jews, heretics, women – have been hidden behind the polemics of the Fathers. Secondly, it is seen as theologically unproductive. When it comes to the history of theology, heresiologists are typically not seen as "real" theologians. All in all, from a church historical, as well as from a theological perspective, heresiology seems to have little to offer. To these reasons, we may add the idea of heresiology as a dark chapter in Christian history.<sup>7</sup> With ideals of diversity and tolerance lying behind a lot of modern research, and with the ecumenical movement's search for a common historical and theological ground for the church traditions of today, the main sources used in recovering Christian history will hardly be those that aim at exclusion and even violence.

The main concern of this article is to question the imagined opposition between polemics and dialogue, as well as the imagined opposition between heresiology and constructive theological thinking. Making an argument for the dialogical nature of polemics, and thereby its performative character, I suggest that polemical texts have a place in the study of reception history.

## 2 Polemics and dialogue

At first sight, a contradiction seems to arise. Dialogue is commonly understood in positive terms, as characterized by openness, equality, symmetry, and cooperation.<sup>8</sup> Further, while dialogue has an open character, aiming at engaging the partner, and is open to being affected and transformed by this partner, polemics is seen as closed, and as refusing to listen to the other. While dialogue is seen as crucial in human development, polemics is, according to this view, impeding development, because of its refusal of, precisely, change in relation to others. The relation to the object of polemics is understood in terms of complete refutation without any intention of understanding this *other* and being informed by the other. Ultimately, polemics appears to be monologic, that is conveying a totalitarian language that excludes difference and otherness.

There are several reasons to problematize this understanding of polemics. In questioning it, I rely on the idea of dialogue presented by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, according to whom meaning is only possible through dialogue,<sup>9</sup> whether we are dealing with personhood, language, or the social life.<sup>10</sup> Essential in Bakhtin's idea of dialogue is the distinction between self and other. The self and the other are seen as mutually independent, but also as mutually presupposing each other.<sup>11</sup> Highly critical of the idea of a coherent subject as the author of his/her own ideas, Bakhtin argued that the self can never exist on its own, but is always dependent on the other: that is, the "self" is dialogic, a *relation*.<sup>12</sup> The other, according to this understanding, is never completely externalized, but is always part of the self. Rather than

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the problems involved in reading heresiological works as historical sources, see Cameron, "How to Read Heresiology."

<sup>6</sup> Important for this development was the find of "Gnostic" writings at Nag Hammadi in 1945.

<sup>7</sup> Cameron has, in her article "The Violence of Orthodoxy," argued that "orthodoxy" (understood as constructed in heresiology) is per definition violent.

<sup>8</sup> Linell, *Approaching Dialogue*, 9–12.

<sup>9</sup> Basically, *dialogue*, in Bakhtin's understanding, is composed of utterance, reply, and the relation between the two. This relation is the most important component, since the other two would not have any meaning without it (Holquist, *Dialogism*, 38). Dialogue had a prominent place in Bakhtin's thinking at large, but an important work is *The Dialogic Imagination*.

<sup>10</sup> As Holquist explains concerning Bakhtin's dialogism, there is an intimate connection between language and selfhood in the sense that they both exist in order to *mean*: Holquist, *Dialogism*, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Holquist, *Dialogism*, 35f; and Nikulin, "Mikhail Bakhtin," 395.

<sup>12</sup> Holquist, *Dialogism*, 19.

interpreting the boundaries drawn between selves and others in terms of exclusion, they are understood as sites of dialogue and, as such, essential for the definition of the self.<sup>13</sup>

Two aspects of Bakhtin's ideas on dialogue are especially important for discussing the dialogical nature of polemics. The first concerns the definition of monologism. The main characteristic of monologue is that it does not consider what the other would have to say. The other is not acknowledged by the monologic self, which does not anticipate an answer from it.<sup>14</sup> This is typically not the case with polemical texts, which precisely have to anticipate possible replies from the antagonists. Even if the texts are not addressed directly to them, their voices cannot be neglected. After all, in Bakhtin's view, there is no pure monologue: all utterances are directed towards an answer, and such anticipations will necessarily influence the utterances. We thus end up with the "ultimate inescapability of dialogue."<sup>15</sup>

The second point concerns the fact that dialogue, in Bakhtin's understanding, is not necessarily benevolent. The opposition of self and other will most likely end up in conflict. Even if communication is possible only through dialogue, and even if this presupposes a common ground, "this common ground may be extremely antagonistic and conflictual."<sup>16</sup> While dialectic (as in the Platonic dialogues) aims at synthesis, resolution, and the overcoming of difference, the opposite is true of dialogue. It does not share the binary either/or concern of dialectic but emphasizes difference rather than consensus.<sup>17</sup> Dialogue is characterized by "unfinalization," open-endedness, rather than closure. Instead of deciding for one idea over another, or merging two ideas into one, it retains opposition and contrast, never arriving at a resolution.

While Bakhtin's work has often been seen as relevant mostly for literary studies, it has been used in many different scholarly disciplines,<sup>18</sup> one of which is postcolonial studies. In this case, his thoughts on the concept of hybridity have been especially important. From describing, in the nineteenth century, the physiological phenomenon of the mixing of two plant or animal species, the meaning of "hybrid" has transformed into describing cultural phenomena in our own times.<sup>19</sup> For Bakhtin, hybridity has the function of showing how language can be double-voiced.<sup>20</sup> He made a distinction between intentional hybridity and unconscious (organic) hybridity. The first instance makes use of conscious contrasts and oppositions, while the second implies (unintended) fusion.<sup>21</sup> Intentional hybrids are dialogic and involve two points of view which are not mixed but set against each other dialogically in a conflictual way.<sup>22</sup>

This idea of hybridization, which has a political aspect in the sense that it enables an undoing of the authoritative voice, has been used in the work of postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha, who applied the idea of hybridization to the dialogical condition of colonialism, in which it served to describe the process that "reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority."<sup>23</sup> Hybridity is, according to Bhabha, the moment when (colonial) authority loses its control over meaning and finds itself open to the influence of the other's voice. Hybridity is described as "a problematic of colonial representation [...] that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority."<sup>24</sup> Being double-voiced in this way, colonial authority ends up undermining colonial power.

The Bakhtinian understanding of dialogue, of self/other, and of hybridity will be central in my discussion of the dialogical nature of polemics. From what we have seen so far, we may conclude that dialogue

<sup>13</sup> de Peuter, "The Dialogics of Narrative Identity," 38f.

<sup>14</sup> Gardiner, "Alterity and Ethics," 137.

<sup>15</sup> Bell, "Culture as Dialogue," 54.

<sup>16</sup> Nikulin, "Mikhail Bakhtin," 393.

<sup>17</sup> Holquist, *Dialogism*, 47; and Nikulin, "Mikhail Bakhtin," 392.

<sup>18</sup> Gardiner and Bell, "Bakhtin and the Human Sciences."

<sup>19</sup> Young, *Colonial Desire*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 358: "What is hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from each other by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor."

<sup>21</sup> Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 358–60.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>23</sup> Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," 154, quoted in Young, *Colonial Desire*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 156, quoted in Young, *Colonial Desire*, 21.

does not necessarily imply a common search for truth on equal terms, but may well take place in contexts of opposition. We will now consider the value of a dialogical approach to such a controversial context, namely that of early Christian heresiology.

### 3 The case of early Christian heresiology

The performative side of polemics has to a certain extent been acknowledged in studies on early Christian heresiology. The idea of heresy as being rhetorically “made” is nowadays widely accepted.<sup>25</sup> However, even if modern scholars tend to abandon the idea of heresiology as defending an ever-present orthodoxy in the face of novel heresy, there is a tendency to focus primarily on the rhetorical making of the heretical other, rather than the simultaneous making of the orthodox self. To the extent that a development in the thought of the orthodox writer is allowed to take place in the context of heresiological writing, this does not tend to be understood in terms of dialogue, but rather as an unavoidable side-effect of rejection and exclusion.<sup>26</sup> Even if it has been argued that the marking of otherness reveals the ambiguity of the orthodox position, and that the purity claimed and the boundaries drawn by heresiologists are fictions with the purpose of concealing an actual proximity,<sup>27</sup> an idea of the heresiologist as not simply being caught up in a necessarily ambiguous position, but as intentionally interacting (i.e. according to the above definition, engaging in dialogue) with the heretic, is largely absent from scholarship on heresiology. The closest we come to such an idea is found in research on early Christian heresiology which has been informed by post-colonial theory, and especially the concept of hybridity, as discussed above.

As Andrew S. Jacobs has pointed out, while the paradox of Christian (rhetorical) unity and (actual) diversity has often been approached by using concepts such as boundaries, conflict, and exclusion<sup>28</sup> – that is a social/anthropological understanding of self and other – there may be reason to ask: “What if the singular language of orthodoxy does not seek to exclude, but rather to internalize and appropriate the so-called deviance of the other?”<sup>29</sup> Building on Bakhtin’s theories of dialogue as well as postcolonial theorizing about hybridity, Jacobs works with a model in which “‘self’ [...] is a partially realized fantasy from which the ‘other’ is never completely separated. [...] the ‘other’ is for the ‘self’ simultaneously an object of identification and distinction. There are no real boundaries; there is never exclusion.”<sup>30</sup>

I share with Jacobs the understanding of early Christian apologetic and polemic texts precisely in terms of dialogue, in which the Christian orthodox self engages in conversation with a religious other.<sup>31</sup> This implies an understanding of ancient heresiologists as receptive in relation to their heretical others, in the

<sup>25</sup> Important for this development was the abovementioned work *La Notion d'Hérésie* by Alain Le Boulluec (cf. n. 4 above).

<sup>26</sup> Le Boulluec’s focus is on the methods of the heresiologists in dealing with Christian division, although he acknowledges what he calls “le paradoxe hérésiologique” (187f; 487; 554), that is, while pictured as exterior to orthodox Christianity, heresy could not be entirely separated from the Christian truth. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*; and King’s, *What is Gnosticism* are examples of works in the tradition of Le Boulluec with a focus on difference making and exclusion in the making of heresy.

<sup>27</sup> King has noticed the reciprocal character of heresiology (*What is Gnosticism*, 25). In her discussion of the concept of boundaries in early Christian identity formation, Lieu pays attention to the fluid character of these (*Christian Identity*, 98–146). Daniel Boyarin introduces the notion of hybridity in his argument concerning the unstable character of orthodoxy in *Border Lines*, and this approach is also seen in Boyarin and Burrus, “Hybridity as Subversion of Orthodoxy?.” In *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church*, Edwards argues that ideas expressed by “Gnostic” writers were essential for the development of what would be known as orthodox theology.

<sup>28</sup> Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 3. Cf. Young, *Colonial Desire*, 4: “Since Sartre, Fanon and Memmi, postcolonial criticism has constructed two anti-theoretical groups, the colonizer and the colonized, self and Other, with the second only knowable through a necessarily false representation, a Manichean division that threatens to reproduce the static, essentialist categories it seeks to undo.”

<sup>30</sup> Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 42: “Indeed, much of our textual resources constitute a cacophonous series of dialogues: heresiologies, apologies, and texts *adversus Iudaeos* that place the Christian self in ‘conversation’ with a heretical, pagan, or Jewish other.”

sense that the voice of the other is always part of the production of orthodox theology. The reception that this pertains to is not one in which ideas are taken over and used in new ways, but one in which ideas and concepts are reappropriated (rather than rejected) and given new meanings for orthodox purposes. In this sense, heretical modes of thinking are internalized in the production of heresiological texts, that is in the rhetorical construction of orthodoxy.

An important aspect to consider, in a discussion about the dialogical nature of polemics, is the methodological danger of perceiving heresiology as a distinct genre. Two points should be made in this regard. The first is that heresiology often appears in writings that are not polemical at first sight, e.g. theological treatises, exegetical works, and creeds.<sup>32</sup> The second (and interrelated) point is that heresiology may take many different forms. The form that is probably the main reason for scholarly resistance towards heresiology is the one found in heresy-catalogues, of which the most (in)famous is perhaps the *Panarion* by Epiphanius of Salamis.<sup>33</sup> It has been argued that this kind of heresiology, which is of an encyclopaedic, mechanical, and static character, became dominant from the fourth century onwards, implying that dialogue gave place to monologue in the Christian identification of true and false teaching.<sup>34</sup> This type of heresiology aims (at least, so it appears) at the identification and outright rejection of heresies and heretics. However, according to the definition presented here, heresiology may also involve more elaborated answers on the part of the heresiologist, that is an orthodox alternative to the heretical ideas is presented. As an example, we may mention Augustine's anti-Pelagian work *On Nature and Grace*.<sup>35</sup> If we accept that constructive works may be fundamentally polemical, this seems to point in the direction that polemics may have a performative side, in the sense of engaging in dialogue with a heretical other through which an orthodox self is constructed.

Having argued that there is good reason to revisit heresiological texts from the perspective of dialogism, I will use this approach in analysing an early Christian polemical text, namely Jerome's *Against Jovinian* (393).<sup>36</sup> What will be studied in this case is not Jerome's polemical strategies, but his reception of the opponent in formulating his own views. I claim that we can speak of Jerome's "refutations" as instances of reception, in the sense that they were instances of dialogue. In this, I certainly depart from the more common idea of reception in terms of appropriation and re-use marked by acceptance. I wish to argue that a perspective on polemics which enhances its dialogical and, thus, performative side opens up for a broadening of how we think of reception and which kinds of texts may be used in reception studies. Before turning to the analysis, I will say something about the context of this polemical work.

## 4 Jerome and the Jovinianist controversy

Jerome has typically been seen as a polemicist rather than a theologian, sometimes in contrast to Augustine. He has also been described as a traditionalist, who guarded orthodoxy against novelties.<sup>37</sup> The main problem with this standard description is that to the extent that Jerome was involved in theological dispute, no "orthodoxy" existed for him to defend: the issues under debate were not settled in any doctrinal formulations, and besides, Jerome's own orthodoxy was far from taken for granted by many of his contemporaries.<sup>38</sup> The orthodoxy that he has become so famous for was one that he had to create and adjust

<sup>32</sup> Henderson has spoken of this in terms of "hidden heresiographies" (*Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 10). Cf. Le Boulluec, *La Notion d'Hérésie*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Panarion*. ed. Holl, GCS 31, 1922.

<sup>34</sup> McClure, "Handbooks Against Heresy," 186–97.

<sup>35</sup> *De Natura et Gratia*, ed. Urba and J. Zycha, CSEL 60, Vienna, 1913, 233–99.

<sup>36</sup> *Adversus Iovinianum* (ed. Migne, PL 23, Paris, 1845, 211–338).

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Kelly, *Jerome*, 334; and Rebenich, *Jerome*, 71.

<sup>38</sup> There is evidence that Jerome was accused of Manichaeism: Adv. Iovin. I.3; 5 (PL 23, 213; 217); cf. ep. 133,9 (CSEL 56/1, 254). His orthodoxy was also question because of his reliance on Origen of Alexandria, some of whose teachings were condemned as a result of the Origenist controversy.

over time, according to changing conditions. Whether he had an interest in theological discussion or not, accusations about heresy forced him to engage in it.

Jerome's involvement in theological debates can be narrowed down to two main issues: asceticism and Origenism. As we analyse his reception of Jovinian, it will become apparent that his reaction to this writer was not directed at him alone; rather, he had a much larger context to consider. In the Jovinianist controversy, the issues under debate concerned the value of asceticism in the life of a Christian.<sup>39</sup> Jovinian, who was himself a monk, had argued that all baptized persons were equal; ascetics were not closer to God than other Christians were.<sup>40</sup> The argumentation was symptomatic of a longer period of conflict concerning asceticism in the West. Jerome was among those who had introduced an oriental, and more radical, version of the ascetic life into the Latin world, and this did not go without opposition. He had already been involved in debates about the value of the ascetic life for Christians, as compared to married life.<sup>41</sup> Jovinian was one of those who turned against the idea of an ascetic elite separated from "ordinary" Christians, arguing instead for the unity of the church and the equality between the baptized. In 393, after Jerome had been living in Bethlehem for several years, writings by Jovinian<sup>42</sup> were sent to him by "holy brothers in Rome."<sup>43</sup> As a result, Jerome wrote *Against Jovinian*, in two books, defending his idea of the superiority of asceticism and a spiritual hierarchy of Christians.

In connection to what has been said about the wider debate over the value of asceticism, it is essential to make clear that context is of central importance in studying polemics as well as dialogue.<sup>44</sup> Neither polemics nor dialogue is ever only a two-way process, but both take place in a wider context that contributes to the content of the exchange, for example in forming the reader's understanding of a text, but also the motives that affect the reader. Polemical utterances concern not only the authors directly engaged, but depend on social and historical factors surrounding the production and consumption of texts. Polemical texts are essentially answers – they relate, per definition, to something that precedes them – and as such, the freedom of their expression is relative because of pre-existing restraints. Being an answer, the polemical utterance is "always conditioned by, and in turn qualifies, the prior utterance to a greater or lesser degree."<sup>45</sup> The self which is produced through dialogue is produced from the categories of others<sup>46</sup> and in connection to prevalent norms.<sup>47</sup> Jerome's ways of replying to Jovinian's critique were not directed to Jovinian alone: the work was expected to be read by ascetic and non-ascetic Christians alike, and Jerome had to make a case for his own orthodoxy in a situation where radical asceticism was fiercely debated.

In a study of the reception of Jovinian in a work directed against him, one may ask, considering that his writings are not extant, how certain we can be that Jerome presented his views in a correct way. To a certain extent, we must be careful with taking Jerome's presentations at face value. In refuting Jovinian, he certainly showed a tendency to quote out of context and reformulate phrases, in order to represent the views of his opponent in an as disadvantageous way as possible. It is beyond doubt that the Jovinian who

<sup>39</sup> For studies of this controversy, see Duval, *L'Affaire Jovinien*; and Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*.

<sup>40</sup> In *Against Jovinian*, Jerome presents Jovinian's four theses: He claimed that virgins, widows, and married women who have been baptized and who do not differ from each other in other works (*si non discrepent caeteris operibus*) are of equal merit; that those who with full assurance of faith have been born again in baptism cannot be overthrown (*subverti*) by the devil; that there is no difference between abstinence from food and its reception in thanksgiving; that for those who have kept their baptismal vow, there is one and the same reward in heaven (Adv. Iovin. I.3, PL 23, 214). It may be noted that Ambrose of Milan added a fifth thesis concerning the virginity of Mary (*Epistulae Extra Collationem*, 15).

<sup>41</sup> His ideas can be found for instance in *Epistula* 22 (ed. Hilberg, CSEL 54, 143–211); and *Adversus Helvidium* (ed. Migne, PL 23, 183–206).

<sup>42</sup> These are not extant. Jerome describes them as small commentaries (*commentarioli*), books (*libri*: Adv. Iovin. 1.1, PL 23, 211–2), and commentaries (*commentarii*: Adv. Iovin. 1.41, PL 23, 270).

<sup>43</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.1 (PL 23, 211).

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion about context in relation to religious polemics, see Hettema and van der Kooij, *Religious Polemics in Context*, xiv–xv.

<sup>45</sup> Holquist, *Dialogism*, 60.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 28f.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 61, 68.



we meet in this work is in many regards Jerome's construction, a heretic against whom he sought to define his own orthodoxy. However, I argue that we may to a great extent trust Jerome's knowledge and presentation of the writings that he refers to. Jerome continuously quotes the arguments of his opponent and answers them. These writings were read by many, and at the time, Jerome's opponent had at least as much public support as he had,<sup>48</sup> so there were limits to how much he could distort the original message. To refute his opponent in a way that would be publicly approved, he had to take Jovinian's arguments seriously, and refute them on their own terms. The fact that Jerome *frames* the ideas of his opponent in disadvantageous ways does not necessarily imply that he misunderstood Jovinian and did not engage with ideas that he had expressed.<sup>49</sup> This being said, it is important to point out that reception does not presuppose "correct" use of the original author; the essential thing is that the author's productions *are* used for new purposes, however distorted his original message may be. After all, once a work has ended up in the hands of another writer, regardless of the writer's intentions, the process of rewriting will necessarily produce new meanings.

## 5 Jerome against Jovinian: A dialogical making of orthodoxy and heresy

An essential aspect of Jovinian's argumentation, as it is represented in *Against Jovinian*, was his multiple references to the Old Testament as well as the New in support of arguments for the equality between celibate and married persons in the church. The Old Testament especially provided him with texts that appeared to support this view. This was true, not least, of the command in Genesis to multiply and fill the earth.<sup>50</sup> In the long tradition of ascetic debate among Christians, the way of approaching such Old Testament texts had been crucial.<sup>51</sup> Of course, certain Christian groups disregarded the Old Testament altogether, but this was not an option for those moderate ascetics who, like Origen of Alexandria, found their belonging within mainstream Christianity while seeking to uphold a hierarchy between ascetics and non-ascetics within the church.<sup>52</sup> For these writers, it was essential not to be suspected of Gnostic or Manichaean heresy, but also to interpret the texts in ways that supported their idea about the superiority of asceticism.

In *Against Jovinian* I.5, Jerome goes through several arguments made by his opponent concerning marriage. Besides the above-mentioned reference to Genesis 1:28, Jovinian had made use of the words in Genesis 2:24 ("Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh") and made ample references to righteous persons who had married and had children, in the Old Testament as well as the New. He had also remarked that after the deluge, the command to multiply was given anew, and besides, permission to eat flesh was given. The heresiological aspect of Jovinian's writings becomes evident when he is presented as directing the charge of Manichaeism against those who oppose marriage and the eating of certain foods. Finally, Jovinian is said to have directed himself to virgins, advising them not to be proud, since they belonged to the same church as did their married sisters.<sup>53</sup> This may very well have been written with Jerome's *Letter* 22 in mind, in which he had exhorted Eustochium (and other virgins) to learn a "holy pride."<sup>54</sup>

In referring to examples of righteous persons who had married and had children, Jovinian is said to have used Adam as his first example. It is precisely the married state of Adam that becomes of great concern

<sup>48</sup> Concerning the popularity of Jovinian, see Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 18, 51–74.

<sup>49</sup> In *Adv. Iovin. I.4* (PL 23, 214–5), Jerome explains his method: He will go through Jovinian's arguments in order and refute them.

<sup>50</sup> Gen 1:28.

<sup>51</sup> Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 70–203.

<sup>52</sup> Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy*, 87–129.

<sup>53</sup> *Adv. Iovin. I.5* (PL 23, 215–7).

<sup>54</sup> Ep. 22,16 (CSEL 54, 163).

in Jerome's reply, as he claims that Adam and Eve were virgins in Paradise. The link of marriage does not exist in the image of the Creator, according to Jerome, and as created in the image of God, Adam and Eve would know no sexual difference.<sup>55</sup> Adam, Jerome points out, means "human" (*homo*), a word used of both men and women.<sup>56</sup> Their sexual life was a result of the Fall, and so was the command to multiply and fill the earth. This does not apply to original humanity, created in the image of God. Jerome also notes that it is specifically said "replenish the *earth*," which he understands as meaning that while marriage fills the earth, virginity fills Paradise. Besides, it is shown that unity is preferred to duality: after the creation on the second day, it does not say that God saw that it was good. "Two is not a good number, because it destroys unity and prefigures the marriage compact."<sup>57</sup> Also, in Noah's ark, the unclean animals went in pairs.<sup>58</sup> Marriage is thus not seen as part of the original creation, and hence in accordance with God's original intention with humankind, but as a necessary concession because of the Fall.

Thus, while Jovinian's argumentation aims at showing the unity of the two Testaments, pointing out that the first human beings married, Jerome draws a clear line between before and after the Fall. To Jovinian's argument that also the eating of flesh was permitted, Jerome replies that the eating of flesh, as well as the practice of divorce, and circumcision – yes, the Law itself – were added after the deluge because of human weakness.<sup>59</sup> With the Incarnation of Christ, a new era began, and marriage is no longer necessary. We are now free to return to the original state of unity, without sexual difference. This is what Jerome describes as the reality of the ascetic person. In the new era, we ought to abandon the old practices and regain Paradise, heeding the Apostle's words in 1 Corinthians 7:29 ("[...] the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none"). As Jerome writes, "It is one thing to live under the Law, another to live under the Gospel."<sup>60</sup>

Jerome's way of treating the Law and marriage has an apologetic side to it in the sense that, knowing that he was liable to accusations of heresy, he had to show that he did not disparage the holy persons of the Old Testament: they served God according to their time.<sup>61</sup> Now, however, a new time has come. The era of the Law has given place to the era of the Gospel; marriage has given way to virginity.<sup>62</sup> Although the argument from a "difference in times"<sup>63</sup> is not absent from Jerome's previous works,<sup>64</sup> it is developed to a much greater extent in *Against Jovinian*, as ideas about the human origin and *telos* are presented in a comprehensive view on salvation history, providing a theological justification of Jerome's ascetical ideal, and defended by biblical passages which he had not formerly put to this use.<sup>65</sup>

The preference of unity over duality, and the understanding of the beginning of the earthly existence in terms of an original unity that became diversified, was common in ancient philosophical and Christian thought, and Jerome's immediate source was most probably Origen of Alexandria.<sup>66</sup> However, considering that the main difference between Jovinian and Jerome lay in their ideas of ecclesiastical unity and diversity,

<sup>55</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.16 (PL 23, 235).

<sup>56</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.29 (PL 23, 251).

<sup>57</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.16 (PL 23, 236): [...] *non esse bonum duplicem numerum, quia ab unione dividat, et praefiguret foedera nuptiarum*.

<sup>58</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.16 (PL 23, 236).

<sup>59</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.18 (PL 23, 236–7).

<sup>60</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.24 (PL 23, 243): [...] *aliud sit in Lege versari, aliud in Evangelio*.

<sup>61</sup> Adv. Iovin. II.4 (PL 23, 288).

<sup>62</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.30 (PL 23, 252): [...] *veteris Legis umbra transierit, et veritas Evangelii venerit*.

<sup>63</sup> This exegetical strategy, which aims to enlarge the differences between the Old and the New Testament and was used by ascetic writers to claim that marriage and childbirth had lost their former importance, is discussed in Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 145–52.

<sup>64</sup> In ep. 22,21 (CSEL 54, 172), Jerome speaks of marriage as an ideal of the old times, and virginity of the new. In the same letter, he claims that the punishment following the Fall still has consequences for married women, but not for virgins (ep. 22,18 (CSEL 54, 167)). In Adv. Helv. 20 (PL 23, 203), he writes that the words in Gen 1:28 were to be followed as long as the Law remained.

<sup>65</sup> One may note especially that the Song of Songs acquires a new function. In earlier works, the Bride had been interpreted by Jerome exclusively as the ascetic person; in *Against Jovinian*, an ecclesiological interpretation is added, as virginity is connected to the emergence of the church in salvation history.

<sup>66</sup> E.g. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 2,6; *Commentary on Romans* III,8,4 (SC 539, 128–30); and *De Principiis* I,6,2.



it should not surprise us that at closer inspection, the unity that Jerome presents as an ideal is not so well confined, nor is his own position in these matters. Engaging in polemics, answering as well as anticipating the answers of his theological other, Jerome's position, according to the idea of dialogue presented above, is necessarily marked by ambivalence and slippage. This is true in at least two regards, and in both cases, I argue that behind the ambivalence lies a simultaneous rejection and internalization of Jovinian's ideas. In the first instance, we are dealing with an ambivalence concerning the ideal of unity, and in the second, with the uncertain and fluid character of the ascetic position. I will elaborate on these points in order, by examining first the place of *marriage*, then the place of *human nature* in Jerome's polemics against Jovinian.

## 5.1 Diversified unity: Marriage and the hierarchy of Christians

First, the unity is incomplete in the sense that Jerome, like Jovinian, sees ascetics and non-ascetics as members of the same church – as he makes very clear, he is not a follower of Tatian,<sup>67</sup> claiming a church consisting only of “perfect,” that is celibate Christians. The perfect are *part* of the one church; we are thus clearly dealing with a church marked by difference. One may of course argue that the *ideal* church, in Jerome's view, would be made up of ascetic members only, and that the social and, more specifically, polemical circumstances in which he found himself, engaging in a discourse of the orthodoxy of asceticism, forced him to accept the place of married people in the church. However, there is nothing that indicates that this was the case. To the contrary, despite his ideas about the original unity of humankind and the return to this unity as the way to perfection, the church that Jerome envisioned was a church of differences. This is, not least, shown by the fact that not even in the world to come does he accept the equality of the members: the hierarchy will remain in Heaven.<sup>68</sup>

Jerome's hierarchy is based on ascetic renunciation, and of course, the great divide is that between married and celibate Christians. In Jovinian's writings, the holiness of marriage was central in his argument for the unity of the church, as well as for the unity of the Old and the New Testaments. In replying to this argumentation, Jerome, I argue, reappropriates marriage for his own purposes and gives it a new meaning, serving in an argument for difference.

If there is no difference (*diversitas*) between virginity and marriage, Jerome asks, why were Adam and Eve virgins in Paradise and married when cast out?<sup>69</sup> We have already seen that Jerome made a clear distinction between the times before and after the Fall, as well as between Old Testament time and the time of the Church. Jerome uses the words of Ecclesiastes about “a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing” to support this same point.<sup>70</sup>

However, it is crucial to consider what kind of difference we are dealing with: even if Jerome tends to maximize the distinction between what has been and what has come instead – “the winter is passed, and the rain is over and gone”<sup>71</sup> – the boundary that he draws between the old covenant and the new, and thus, between married and celibate in the present time, is a very porous one. The difference in times is not absolute. Marriage is still part of the lives of Christians: the time to embrace is still part of Christian time.<sup>72</sup> Why is this so? Of course, we may explain Jerome's ambivalence by referring to apologetic strategies: the orthodox position is typically presented as a middle way between two extremes (in this case, condemning marriage on the one hand, and seeing it as equal to virginity on the other). However, I argue that the

<sup>67</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.3 (PL 23, 213).

<sup>68</sup> Jerome presents his idea about an eschatological hierarchy in Adv. Iovin. 18–34 (PL 23, 312–33).

<sup>69</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.29 (PL 23, 251).

<sup>70</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.29 (PL 23, 250–1).

<sup>71</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.30 (PL 23, 252; cf. Cant 2:11).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised*, 14: “[...] early Christian discourses of boundaries, differences, and distinctions consistently and paradoxically worked to erase boundaries, confound difference, and problematize distinction. That is, early Christian identity emerged out of the simultaneous making, and unmaking, of difference.”

ambivalence rather has the function of serving Jerome in constructing and upholding a hierarchy of Christians. If the time of embracing had passed by, if marriage was no longer an option, how could there be a spiritual hierarchy in the church? Rather, the time to embrace must co-exist with the time to refrain from embracing. Thus, I argue that it was not the case that Jerome, for apologetic reasons, reluctantly accepted marriage, but that the idea of hierarchy, which he elaborated in opposition to Jovinian, demanded the inclusion of marriage. *Marriage* is reappropriated in Jerome's polemics and receives a function which is directly opposite to how it was used by Jovinian; it is used to show the splendiddness of virginity.

Jovinian had used 1 Corinthians 7:25 ("concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord") in arguing against the superiority of virginity over marriage. In Jerome's usage, Jovinian's point is turned against him. Certainly, virginity is not commanded – that would imply that marriage is forbidden. Commanding virginity would be too hard for human beings. This, however, does not mean that marriage is as good as virginity. To the contrary, its *optional* nature is precisely what makes virginity better. This is the option for the strong Christians, who do not only accomplish what they are commanded, but freely give what they are not commanded to give. There is a difference between *praeceptum*, which one must follow, and *consilium*, which one is free to follow.<sup>73</sup> Jerome presents an idea about the absolutely and the relatively good.<sup>74</sup> While virginity is seen as good in itself, marriage is more or less good depending on what we compare it to. Silver will not cease to be silver, only because gold is more precious.<sup>75</sup>

It may be pointed out that marriage is not simply described by Jerome in negative terms, as something worse than virginity. It is more appropriate to say that in Jerome's usage, virginity gets its value from marriage, and marriage gets its value from virginity. After all, virginity would not be possible without marriage; if no wood was planted in the first place, there would be no after-growth to cut down.<sup>76</sup> The Lord would not have condemned marriage, Jerome writes, because that would mean doing away with "the seed-plot of humankind" (*hominum seminarium*) of which virginity is a growth.<sup>77</sup> In Old Testament times, marriage had the function of filling the earth; now, it has the function of producing virgins. If the root is cut off, how can there be fruit? From the worse comes the better: from the Law comes the Gospel, and from marriage comes virginity.<sup>78</sup>

"In a great house, there are many vessels":<sup>79</sup> Jerome's church is a church consisting of differences. There is room for vessels of gold as well as vessels of silver. Diversity was needed for claiming hierarchy; marriage was needed for claiming the superiority of virginity. And, to take this one step further, Jovinian, personifying the anti-ascetical tendencies of the time, was needed for Jerome to construct an "orthodox" theology of asceticism and himself as an orthodox ascetic teacher. In presenting and reacting to Jovinian's understanding of the Old Testament and of marriage, Jerome did not simply refute Jovinian, but used Jovinian's arguments for his own purposes, making them part of his construction of orthodoxy. While blaming Jovinian for seeing the Law as equal to the Gospel, he certainly embraces the Law – but he redefines it. In the same way, while blaming Jovinian for seeing marriage as equal to virginity, he embraces marriage and its value, but uses it in a different way, namely, in a defence of Christian diversity.

In the ascetic theology that Jerome presents as an answer to Jovinian's arguments, marriage has a central role. While *Against Jovinian* has often (at the time when it was written as well as in later times) been seen as very hostile to marriage, we have noticed many instances of Jerome making a positive use of the concept. One of these, the idea that marriage has its value from being the seed-plot of humanity and particularly from producing virgins, is found in earlier works as well.<sup>80</sup> The development of Jerome's

<sup>73</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.12 (PL 23, 227).

<sup>74</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.9 (PL 23, 222–3).

<sup>75</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.3 (PL 23, 213).

<sup>76</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.16 (PL 23, 235–6).

<sup>77</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.12 (PL 23, 227).

<sup>78</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.29 (PL 23, 251).

<sup>79</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.3 (PL 23, 213). Cf. 2 Tim 2:20.

<sup>80</sup> In ep. 22,20 (CSEL 54, 170), Jerome writes that he praises marriage because it produces virgins; in Adv. Helv. 19 (PL 23, 203), virginity is called the fruit of marriage.

understanding of marriage which took place in *Against Jovinian* is seen first and foremost in how it is integrated into an idea of hierarchy. The comparison of gold and silver and the argument from the many vessels clearly point to a view allowing for gradation and relativity. Referring to the parable of the sower,<sup>81</sup> Jerome understands the thirtyfold as referring to marriage, the sixtyfold to widows, and the hundredfold to virgins.<sup>82</sup> It may be noted that in using the same passage in *Letter 22*, Jerome did not mention marriage, but only virginity and widowhood.<sup>83</sup> One may add to this Jerome's point, in *Against Jovinian*, that ascetics and married should join sides against Jovinian, since he did not only degrade virgins, but also married persons, placing them on the same level as the twice-married; and twice-married persons, seeing them as equal to fornicators.<sup>84</sup>

Jerome's ideas on marriage in *Against Jovinian* can, I argue, be regarded as a hybrid construction, in the sense that two contradictory meanings exist together.<sup>85</sup> The value of marriage is far from rejected but reappropriated for heresiological purposes. Jerome is not so much defeating Jovinian as engaged in an ambivalent, dialogic process, in which the other is not – and cannot be – erased.<sup>86</sup> We are not dealing with a reactive theology in the face of heresy, but with a simultaneous rejection and acceptance of the other, internalizing the ideas of this other “into the heart of Christian truth.”<sup>87</sup> Rather than an either/or position, we find ourselves in a both/and position, which is typical of dialogue.

In this connection, we may revisit Bakhtin's idea about *intentional hybridity*, which is not concerned with fusion, but consciously sets against each other two points of view in a conflictual way. Certainly, this political instance of hybridity has foremost been used, by Bakhtin and later by Bhabha, to delineate the unmasking of meaning in the voice of a dominant other, and thus the challenging of authoritative (in Bhabha's case, colonial) discourse. One might ask, whether the heresiologist is representative of precisely this kind of authoritative discourse. Not in this case, I would argue, for a certain weakness exists in the transference of the model colonizer/colonized to early Christian heresiology. Jerome, although he was a heresiologist, was also accused of heresy; that is, he did not find himself in a position of dominance. We must be aware that “orthodox” and “heretical” are relative categories, and one and the same person can be in both positions at the same time. The hybridization we find taking place in Jerome is, I argue, precisely intentional, in turning heresiological presentations of asceticism into an argument for the superiority of asceticism.

In this sense, I also argue that we are dealing with a reception through polemics. Jerome makes use of the very concepts and ideas that had been used against him, reappropriates them, and gives them new functions in his polemical reply.

## 5.2 Imperfect perfection: Ascetics and human nature

The second regard in which Jerome's position is bound up with ambivalence, concerns the uncertainty and fluidity that is ascribed to the ascetic position. Jerome is presenting Jovinian as making an argument from human nature, claiming that “our religion has produced a new teaching against nature.”<sup>88</sup> Jovinian is also presented as making the following argument: Why do we have genital organs, and experience lust,

<sup>81</sup> Mt 13:1–23.

<sup>82</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.3 (PL 23, 213–4).

<sup>83</sup> Ep. 22,15 (CSEL 54, 163).

<sup>84</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.4 (PL 23, 215).

<sup>85</sup> Bakhtin writes that the hybrid construction is “[...] an utterance that belongs to a single speaker but contains mixed within it two utterances, two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction. A word can have two contradictory meanings, two accents” (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 304–5).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised*, 49–50.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 79.

<sup>88</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.41 (PL 23, 270): “[...] *novum dogma contra naturam religio nostra prodiderit* [...]”.

if we are not supposed to engage in sexual intercourse, but are meant to remain virgins? “What does the Apostle mean by exhorting continence, if continence is contrary to nature?”<sup>89</sup>

Jerome replies by giving the examples of Jesus, Paul, John the Apostle, and John the Baptist. These persons had sexual organs, but did not use them; thus, having these organs and functions does not imply that they must be used.<sup>90</sup> Ascetics have the same bodies as non-ascetics, but they live contrary to human nature, making themselves eunuchs (cf. Mt 19:12), and, in this way, they anticipate the sexless state of Heaven. The likeness to the angels, which is promised to everyone in Heaven, is achieved by the ascetics already on earth.

Referring to Paul’s words “I wish that all were as I myself am,”<sup>91</sup> Jerome explains that Paul is the imitator of Christ, a virgin born by a virgin. “Since we are human beings, we cannot imitate the Lord’s nativity, but we can at least imitate His way of life.”<sup>92</sup> The former belonged to divinity alone, the latter to the human condition.<sup>93</sup>

What the best Christians do is to act contrary to postlapsarian human nature. Thus, we return to the argument from command *versus* option. Ascetics do more than is commanded, that is, they return to the state of Paradise which knew no sexual difference. However, at closer inspection, it is clear that this return implies a condition very different from the prelapsarian one. Far from regaining the pure unity of Paradise, the ascetic person is clearly affected by the impurity of postlapsarian humanity, that is, by existence in the flesh, and is never able to escape the risk of temptation and falling. Even ascetics find themselves in the continuing fight between the spirit and the flesh.<sup>94</sup> Again, we find the border that is sometimes so clearly drawn between Old and New Testament times to be all but clear and straight.

We have seen the dialogical both-and position, in opposite to the dialectical either-or, at work in Jerome’s dealing with the question of marriage. However, the both-and position is not only true for his dealings with the church as a whole, consisting of perfect and imperfect individuals, but also for his assessment of the perfect themselves, that is the ascetics. The ascetic person is on earth but has her/his citizenship in Heaven. She/he is in the flesh, but does not live according to the flesh.<sup>95</sup> Ascetics make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven; they are not eunuchs by nature, which would be of no benefit for them, but make themselves such, “refusing to be what they were born to be.”<sup>96</sup> The sexless state of Paradise, and of the angels, is certainly ascribed to the ascetics, but not in the same way. They are not so by nature; to the contrary, they are sexless *despite* their nature. On the one hand, they are sexed persons, men and women; on the other, they have transcended sexual difference. They are perfect but are still not perfect: the weakness of the flesh means that there is a constant risk of falling. It is precisely this imperfection that makes them perfect in relation to other Christians.

Postlapsarian human nature is not rejected in the sense of being left out of the picture. Importantly, it does not only serve to separate better Christians from worse Christians (as we have seen was the case with

<sup>89</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.36 (PL 23, 260): *Quid sibi autem vult apostolus, ut ad continentiam cohortetur, si contra naturam est?* It must be emphasized here that Jerome is not quoting Jovinian; thus, it is difficult to tell whether he is actually referring to what Jovinian had written. The formulation that he will “reply to what you suggest” (*ad proposita respondeamus*) points in that direction, especially since Jerome presents himself as reluctant to reply. However, it cannot be ruled out that Jerome here is speaking to an imaginative Jovinian, since he presents what Jovinian “will ask” (*inquires*) rather than what he has already written. It may be that Jerome is genuinely anticipating a reaction from the opponent (and those of the same mind). In either case, we are dealing with a reception (he makes use of Jovinian) and with a dialogue (the very anticipating that takes place makes this text truly dialogical).

<sup>90</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.36 (PL 23, 260–1).

<sup>91</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:7.

<sup>92</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.8 (PL 23, 221): *Nos quia homines sumus, et nativitatem Salvatoris non possumus imitari, imitemur saltem conversationem.*

<sup>93</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.8 (PL 23, 221).

<sup>94</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.38 (PL 23, 264–5); II.3–4 (284–90).

<sup>95</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.37–38 (PL 23, 261–5).

<sup>96</sup> Adv. Iovin. I.12 (PL 23, 228): [...] *noluerunt esse quod nati sunt.*

marriage), but it is precisely the fact that it is *shared* by these that makes it so effective.<sup>97</sup> Physically, there is no difference; the difference lies in whether a person gives in to the physical needs or not. Jerome retains the flesh and uses it for his own purposes, in his construction of a hierarchy of Christians and an orthodox theology of asceticism: ascetics are better than other Christians because of their strength, their ability to act contrary to nature, and their willingness to give more than is demanded of them. Flesh becomes, thus, a common denominator and *simultaneously* a differentiator of Christians.

We may note that, parallel to what we have seen in our discussion about marriage, a concept used by Jovinian in an argument for unity (human nature as what we all have in common) is reappropriated by Jerome in an argument for diversity. When Jerome separates life under the Law from life under the Gospel, the difference seems complete, the boundaries fixed. However, what Jerome proposes, in the end, is not at all a return to the original unity of Paradise. What he wants to create and uphold is, to the contrary, a state of difference – the hierarchy of ascetics and non-ascetics in the church. After all, against Jovinian's idea about the unity of the church, as well as the unity of Old and New Testament times, difference is precisely the point for Jerome.

I claim that Jerome's polemic against Jovinian is clearly a dialogical enterprise. Far from disregarding the potential answers from his opponent (and other readers), Jerome responds to ideas expressed by the opponent, and in replying, anticipates the other's replies.<sup>98</sup> According to the Bakhtinian understanding, every reply is in itself a microdialogue, anticipating the reply of the other.<sup>99</sup> One may of course raise the general question about the "addressivity"<sup>100</sup> of polemical works (not least, those which appear in the guise of dialogues),<sup>101</sup> and ask whether Jovinian really was the addressee whom Jerome had in mind. This is, however, of less relevance when it comes to assessing the dialogical character of the work: as we remember from the above discussion, dialogue typically involves more than two voices, taking place in a social context with multiple voices to react to and to consider when reacting. In a situation in which his orthodoxy was questioned because of his ideas about asceticism, Jerome did not only have to answer, or convince, Jovinian, but also the Christian community at large, ascetics and non-ascetics alike.

Regardless of whether Jovinian may be seen as a major addressee of the work against him, we can certainly speak of a reception of Jovinian in this work. Jerome uses the writings of Jovinian, goes through the arguments, and replies to them. Most importantly, in these replies, he does not simply refute and exclude, but simultaneously accepts and includes. Engaging in dialogue, his replies are necessarily – and, as I have argued above, intentionally – co-existing with the ideas of the opponent. This form of polemics is certainly performative, in the sense that Jerome does not simply repeat ideas that he has long held, or rely on a well-known, permanent orthodoxy, but constructs a somewhat novel theory of asceticism. Certainly, many ideas that he expresses may be recognized from earlier works, but *Against Jovinian* is the first work in which he develops a coherent theory of asceticism, consisting of protological, anthropological, and eschatological ideas.<sup>102</sup>

Jovinian is for Jerome, as his theological other, simultaneously an object of distinction and identification. He cannot be completely externalized but remains a part of Jerome's "orthodox" self.<sup>103</sup> As Jacobs has written about the "heretic": "Defeated, he is absorbed; absorbed, he is never fully defeated."<sup>104</sup> Jerome's ascetic theology always bears within it the traces of anti-ascetic critique, resulting in ambivalence and contradiction: marriage is right, but wrong; the ascetic person is in the flesh, but not in the flesh. We are dealing with an ambivalent and incomplete separation of self from other.<sup>105</sup> And still, this hybrid of ascetic

<sup>97</sup> Cf. the discussion in Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised*, 94–8, about Jerome and the notion of *flesh*. Jacobs applies the concept of the *abject* to describe how Jerome evades both fully accepting the flesh (as Jovinian) and fully rejecting it (as the Manichaeans).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Bell, "Culture as Dialogue," 54; and Gardiner, "Alterity and Ethics," 137.

<sup>99</sup> Nikulin, "Mikhail Bakhtin," 392.

<sup>100</sup> A Bakhtinian concept: Holquist, *Dialogism*, 48.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised*, 44–5.

<sup>102</sup> Pålsson, *Negotiating Heresy*, 77–122.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Jacobs, *Christ Circumcised*, 5.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

orthodoxy and non-ascetic heresy, which Jerome's work ends up with, appears to be not so much a result of a fear of the other and of mixture, as a conscious setting against each other two opposites in dialogue.

## 6 Conclusion

Andrew Jacobs has written thus concerning early Christian polemic and apologetic writings:

To read such texts dialogically, in a Bakhtinian sense, is to refuse the absolute separation of self and other that ancient Christians anxiously demand. Dialogues do not merely construct a boundary, isolating and segregating a Christian from a non-Christian. Dialogues internalize the other, creating fissures and contradictions within. If Christians persist in defining themselves in contradistinction to some other – pagan, heretic, or Jew – they make that other an indispensable part of “Christianness.”<sup>106</sup>

Having applied a dialogical perspective to Jerome's *Against Jovinian*, I have suggested that the separation made between himself and his theological other was far from absolute. Precisely in the project of refuting Jovinian, some of the core elements of Jovinian's ideas were recuperated by Jerome. We have seen that this was the case with the value of marriage, which, in Jovinian's argumentation, had been used to support the idea of a church of equal members. Answering Jovinian's arguments for the equality between marriage and virginity, Jerome does not reject marriage, but integrates it into his construction of an orthodox ascetic theology. In this, marriage receives a new meaning and a new function, one that retains its basic value while clearly positioning it as a lesser good than virginity. In replying to how Jovinian had, from the condition of human nature, argued for the legitimacy of sexual life, we likewise find Jerome partly accepting the argument of his opponent: he fully agrees that our existence in the flesh implies the *unnaturalness* of celibacy. However, he turns this into a counter-argument, by claiming that it is precisely by living in the flesh, but not following its impulses, that the ascetics are better than other Christians. Basic to his argumentation are the boundaries that he draws between prelapsarian, postlapsarian, and Christian time. The boundaries are far from straight, though, because the postlapsarian condition is still lingering. Marriage still has a role to play, and the return to Paradise which is ascribed to the ascetic condition is bound up with uncertainty and contradiction. The orthodox self takes form in relation to the heretical other, not so much through resistance and exclusion, as through reappropriation and thus inclusion.

It is in this sense that Jerome's ascetical theology in *Against Jovinian* is a hybrid construction: just as the boundaries which Jerome tries to draw in time are far from straight, the boundary between him and Jovinian is not absolute. How could it be? After all, they were writers in the same church, engaged in the same discourse of the orthodoxy/heresy of asceticism, and thus, bound by the same epistemological and normative restraints.

Seeing Jerome's heresiology as dialogue implies acknowledging its performative side. Far from being a project of simply identifying and rejecting heresy, Jerome's heresiology engages with theological otherness in such a way that his own theological thought is shaped by it. An important difference between Jerome's heresiology and the heresiology in catalogue-form, such as Epiphanius' *Panarion*, is that in the case of Jerome, his own orthodoxy was at stake. While Epiphanius' main aim was to identify heretics and, in the long run, make sure that they were excluded from the church, Jerome's aim in *Against Jovinian* was very different. He needed to demonstrate that he, in contrast to Jovinian, held orthodox views. Therefore, the presentations of Jovinian's views serve in the construction of Jerome's self-presentation as an orthodox writer. This means, first, that he had to understand and adequately present the opponent's views, and secondly, that he had to express his own views in relation to them. I have also argued that this position implied that Jerome, rather than finding himself in the dominant position of imperial orthodoxy, produced his polemics from a very vulnerable position. What we find is not a monologue or an authoritative

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 43.



discourse – Jerome cannot afford to neglect his other. The hybridity which is produced is intentional; reappropriating some of the most central ideas of his opponent serves as a defensive strategy.

The question of whether a text that aims at refutation can be seen as a dialogue utterly comes down to the question about the degree to which the polemicist's position is "closed" in the sense of speaking without taking into consideration the words of the other or anticipating the answers of this other. This, as we have seen, may vary significantly between polemical works, depending on their character. Jerome's involvement with Jovinian is certainly dialogical to another degree than catalogues of heresies that were no longer extant. However, it must not be forgotten that all types of polemics are directed at something – even the critique of heresies that no longer exist is certainly a critique of something that *does* exist and needs to be addressed in contemporary times (we may think of the Origenist controversy). As said above, polemics is never a matter only between the polemist and the polemized but takes place in a context of multiple voices to be considered.

In connection to this, we may finally pay some attention to the unfinalizable nature of dialogue as we find it in Jerome's heresiology. Jerome's career was marked by controversy, and this writer, who has come down in history as a dogmatic traditionalist and a guardian of orthodoxy, never seems to have found rest from the struggle for his orthodox reputation. *Against Jovinian* did not make things better. Its reception was catastrophic, to the point that his friend Pammachius made sure to have it withdrawn.<sup>107</sup> In two apologetic letters<sup>108</sup> to Pammachius, Jerome answers the critique that his treatise had elicited, a fact that clearly points to dialogue's contextual and multi-voiced character. Far from being a solid marking of the boundaries of orthodoxy against heresy, this heresiological work clearly shows the ambiguity and slippage of the boundaries of orthodoxy and the open-endedness of its construction.

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<sup>107</sup> Ep. 48,2 (CSEL 54, 347).

<sup>108</sup> Ep. 48 (CSEL 54, 347–50); and ep. 49 (CSEL 54, 350–87).

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