

Article

Furtive Bread and the Fast of Christ: Receiving, Refusing, and Giving in Origen's Tenth Homily on Leviticus

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Abstract

Rufinus' Latin translation preserves Origen's tenth homily on Leviticus as a sermon on the Day of Atonement fast and the goat sent into the wilderness. The homily begins from Leviticus 16, reads the two-goat rite through Christ's passion, and brings Matthew 6 into the practice of Christian fasting before giving the command *ieiuna ab omni peccato*, "Fast from every sin." In the transmitted Latin order of *Hom. Lev. 10.2*, that command is plainly moral, but the clauses that follow give the moral exhortation an alimentary form: *cibus malitiae, epulae voluptatis, vinum luxuriae, panes furtivos perversae doctrinae*, and *fallaces philosophiae cibos*. The Christian is warned against what may be taken in, desired, or allowed to form judgment. Proverbs 4 and 9 provide a sapiential setting for this food-language, while the Rufinus-transmitted *Commentary on the Song of Songs* offers closer Origenian evidence for the association of food, wine, doctrine, knowledge, false knowledge, and destructive teaching. The homily then returns to bodily fasting: scheduled fasts, *continentia ventris et gutturis*, the cutting away of *ciborum affluentia*, and the fast undertaken to feed the poor. Christian fasting is presented as a discipline of reception, refusal, bodily restraint, and care for another person's hunger.

Keywords: Origen; Rufinus; *Homilies on Leviticus*; fasting; asceticism; Day of Atonement; Proverbs; doctrine; philosophy; sapiential literature; almsgiving

1. Introduction

Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–254) was a Greek-speaking Christian teacher, preacher, and biblical scholar whose surviving work shows how closely early Christian theology was tied to the interpretation of Scripture. His *Homilies on Leviticus* belong to this world of preached exegesis. They are sermons addressed to Christian hearers, not a technical written commentary. They preach a book shaped by ritual prescription: sacrifice, priesthood, purity, food, atonement, and Israel's life before God. The homilist treats this ritual language as Christian Scripture. Sacrificial and priestly terms become speech about Christ, the Church, and the formation of the hearer. Leviticus is not handled as a technical sequence of cultic clauses. Its ritual wording is made to bear on Christian practice.

These sermons survive for modern readers in the Latin translation of Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. 345–411), a monk, theologian, and translator whose Latin versions made Greek Christian writing available to readers in the western Mediterranean. For *Hom. Lev. 10*, Rufinus' translation provides the only continuous form of the sermon now preserved. The Greek is not preserved as a continuous text, and the transmitted Latin therefore sets the limits of the evidence. "Origen" here names the homiletic voice available in that transmission. "Rufinus' Latin" or "the transmitted Latin" marks places where wording, sequence, translation, or comparison with other Rufinus-transmitted texts carries particular weight.



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Hom. Lev. 10 bears a title drawn from Leviticus 16: *De ieiunio, quod in die propitiationis fit, et de hirco, qui in eremum dimittitur*.¹ The title binds the Day of Atonement fast to the goat sent away into the wilderness, and the homily maintains that connection. Fasting is considered from within the Levitical rite, read through Christ's passion, and directed toward the life of Christians.

Moses is introduced as the writer of future mysteries in symbols and figures. The two goats are then interpreted through Christ and Barabbas; Matthew 6 supplies the Gospel practice of fasting. The command *Ieiuna ab omni peccato* belongs to this preached sequence. It comes after the homily has moved from Leviticus 16 to Christ and from Christ to the Christian practice of fasting.

Leviticus 16 itself commands Israel to rest and to afflict or humble the soul on the tenth day of the seventh month. The Septuagint likewise renders the command through the language of humbling the soul, and the Vulgate has *adfligētis animas vestras* (Lev. 16:29, 31). The chapter does not itself use fasting vocabulary, yet the Day of Atonement was identified with fasting in Jewish and early Christian contexts. 1QpHab XI.7–8 names the occasion as the Day of Atonement and describes it as the day of fasting, the sabbath of their rest; Josephus says that on the tenth day the people fast until evening; and *m. Yoma* 8.1 includes eating and drinking among the forbidden practices of the day (1QpHab XI.7–8; García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1999; Josephus, Ant. 3.240; *m. Yoma* 8.1; Thackeray 1961; Danby 1933). *Hom. Lev.* 10 can therefore address the ritual question as ieiunium, even though Leviticus 16 states the command through the language of humbling or afflicting the soul.²

At the opening of *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, the preacher addresses hearers who think that the Jewish fast must still be observed *pro mandato legis*, “as a command of the Law” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:132; Borret 1981b). Their error lies in treating the Day of Atonement fast as a binding legal obligation. The homily rejects that fast when it is sought on earth, in Jerusalem, in legal observances, and in *ieiunium Iudaeorum*. It redirects the hearer toward *ieiunium Christi*, the fast of Christ (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:138; Borret 1981b).

The command *Ieiuna ab omni peccato*, “Fast from every sin,” then opens a food-series: *cibus malitiae, epulae voluptatis, vinum luxuriae, panes furtivos perversae doctrinae, and fallaces philosophiae cibos* (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:138; Borret 1981b). Fasting is extended to wickedness, pleasure, excess, perverse doctrine, and deceptive philosophy. The passage later returns to scheduled fasts, *continentia ventris et gutturis*, the cutting away of *ciborum affluentia*, and the fast undertaken to feed the poor.

In Proverbs 4 and 9, nourishment, instruction, desire, wickedness, and deception already belong together. Proverbs 4:17 assigns food and wine to the wicked; Proverbs 9:5 gives bread and mixed wine to Wisdom's guests; Proverbs 9:17 gives illicit nourishment the attraction of secrecy and stolen sweetness. These parallels establish a sapiential grammar for the homily's language without requiring direct dependence. In the Rufinus-transmitted *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Wisdom's banquet is read through doctrine, knowledge, false knowledge, and destructive teaching (Orig., *Comm. Cant.* III.6; SC 376:540–45; Brésard and Crouzel 1992). That passage supplies a close Origenian comparandum for *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, where corrupt doctrine and deceptive philosophy are named as food within the Latin Origenian corpus. The fast of Christ therefore governs both what the Christian refuses and how bodily restraint is used: wicked action, pleasure, doctrinal perversity, and philosophical deceit are rejected, and bodily fasting is finally directed toward feeding the poor.

2. The Transmitted Latin and the Order of the Homily

Hom. Lev. 10.2 must be read in the Latin form in which the homily survives. The Greek sermon is not preserved as a continuous text, and the Latin terms *cibus, epulae, vinum, panes furtivos*, and *fallaces philosophiae cibos* cannot be used as a transparent route

back to recoverable Greek equivalents. They are nevertheless the words through which the transmitted homily makes its argument. Their order moves the passage from the Day of Atonement fast into warnings about what the Christian receives and refuses, before returning to bodily restraint and food given to the poor.

Studies of Rufinus' translations of Origen, together with Borret's own introduction to the Leviticus homilies, show why the Latin sequence in *Hom. Lev.* 10.2 must be treated as mediated evidence rather than as a transparent substitute for lost Greek. Borret notes Rufinus' freedom in relation to the original, including displacement and suppression that cannot now be verified, a visible tendency to amplification, and a habitual doubling of nearly synonymous terms; he concludes that Rufinus has left his own stylistic mark on the translation (Borret 1981a, p. 56). Hammond Bammel's work on the *Commentary on Romans*, Hill's discussion of ascetic affliction in the Latin Romans commentary, and Limone's analysis of love-language in the Rufinus-transmitted *Commentary on the Song of Songs* converge on the same methodological point: Rufinus' Latin can carry interpretive pressure at the level of vocabulary, verbal clustering, and local exegetical texture (Hammond Bammel 1985, 1992, pp. 131–42; Hill 2010, pp. 145–48, 151–56; Limone 2015, pp. 407–10). The consequence for *Hom. Lev.* 10.2 is methodological rather than speculative. The Latin sequence should not be flattened into a hypothetical Greek wording behind it, as if the surviving translation were only a veil to be removed. It must also be taken seriously as the transmitted form in which the sequence of food, desire, doctrine, and discernment reaches us. That mediated Latin form is the proper textual basis for reading the passage.³

The immediate sequence is compact. After the contrast between *ieiunium Iudaeorum* and *ieiunium Christi*, the preacher gives the command *ieiuna ab omni peccato*. The food-series follows at once: *cibus malitiae, epulae voluptatis, vinum luxuriae, panes furtivos perversae doctrinae*, and *fallaces philosophiae cibos*. The passage later returns to scheduled fasts, *continentia ventris et gutturis*, the cutting away of *ciborum affluentia*, and the fast undertaken to feed the poor.

The order follows the movement of preaching. The preacher begins from a ritual fast, reads it through Christ, and addresses the Christian hearer through food-language. *Ieiuna ab omni peccato* is plainly moral: to fast from sin is to refrain from sin. Its sequel gives that moral imperative an alimentary form, through things eaten, drunk, desired, stolen, or received as teaching. The later return to belly, throat, abundance of food, and the poor keeps the food-language attached to bodily appetite and material almsgiving. Moral refusal, doctrinal discernment, bodily restraint, and care for the poor remain within one preached treatment of fasting.

3. The Levitical Fast After Christ

The transmitted homily turns first to Christians who think that the fast it calls *Iudaeorum* must also be kept by them *pro mandato legis: ad eos, qui putant pro mandato legis sibi quoque Iudaeorum ieiunium ieiunandum* (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:132; Borret 1981b). The argument turns on *pro mandato legis*. To keep the fast on that ground is to receive it within the ritual order of Leviticus 16: priesthood, sacrifice, blood, sanctuary, and the goat sent away. The homily answers by reading that order through Christ. A fast grounded in Christ belongs to the economy of the passion and forms Christian practice beyond the annual boundary of the Levitical calendar.

The opening of *Hom. Lev.* 10 has already prepared this move. Moses is described as a writer of future mysteries in *symbolis et figuris ac formis allegoricis*, “in symbols and figures and allegorical forms” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.1, SC 287:128; Borret 1981b). Leviticus remains Scripture for the Church because its ritual prescriptions are received as figures whose meaning is disclosed through Christ. The opening homily of the collection gives the broader frame for this move: the letter of Leviticus is seen like Christ's flesh, while the

spiritual sense lies hidden within like divinity; if the Levitical letter were received without that turn to Christ and the Spirit, Christian hearers would be bound to sacrifice calves and lambs and to offer fine flour, incense, and oil (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 1.1, SC 286:66–68; Borret 1981a). In Origen's scriptural practice, such figural reading is integral to the pedagogy by which Scripture forms the hearer and directs the soul toward Christ (Torjesen 1986, p. 147; Dively Lauro 2005, pp. 4–5, 196–97). The Day of Atonement fast may therefore be refused as binding law and retained as Christian instruction.

The Caesarean setting gives the polemic its local edge. Origen preached and taught in a city where Jewish Scripture, Jewish interpretation, and Jewish ritual practice were not remote antiquarian materials. The books expounded in the church were also the Scriptures of neighboring Jewish communities, and the ritual commands of Leviticus had visible correlates in forms of contemporary Jewish observance. A Christian hearer could therefore meet the Day of Atonement fast in two ways at once: as a biblical command read and interpreted in the church, and as a practice still associated with Jewish life around them. Origen's own contact with Jewish teachers and traditions sharpened this situation rather than removing its tension. He could consult Jewish readings while still reading Israel's Scriptures as Christian Scripture ordered toward Christ. The fast associated with Leviticus 16 therefore required pastoral judgment, not merely exegetical explanation. Christians had to be taught how to receive a ritual practice that belonged to the scriptural text, remained visible in Jewish observance, and yet could not be imposed on the church as a binding legal obligation. De Lange's account of Origen's relations with Jewish teachers and traditions, Stökl Ben Ezra's treatment of the Day of Atonement in early Christian reception, and Siquans' work on Jewish ritual practice in the Leviticus homilies together clarify this world of proximity, instruction, and boundary-making (de Lange 1976, pp. 21, 82, 96; Stökl Ben Ezra 2003, pp. 270–86, esp. pp. 273, 282; Siquans 2024, pp. 289–90, 296–97). The homily's correction is directed at a practice familiar enough to be taken seriously. The fast may be known, respected, and interpreted by Christians; it may not be kept *pro mandato legis*.⁴

The two goats of Leviticus 16 draw the whole Day of Atonement rite into the passion narrative, rather than isolating the fast from the ritual setting that gives it meaning. The Levitical rite already contains a division of roles: one goat is handed over for sacrifice, while the other remains alive and is sent away into the wilderness. The homily preserves this division by placing Christ and Barabbas within the same figural scene. Barabbas, the living prisoner released in place of Jesus, corresponds to the goat sent away; Christ, handed over to death, corresponds to the goat offered for atonement. Pilate's washing of hands is drawn into this same configuration, so that the rite is narrated through the judicial moment in which Jesus is delivered and Barabbas is spared. Leviticus is not functioning here as a remote background text. Its ritual grammar becomes visible in the passion itself: release and handing over, life preserved and life sacrificed, the wilderness goat and the atoning victim.

Earlier Christian writers had already read the Day of Atonement goats Christologically. Barnabas treats them as figures of Christ's passion, and Justin reads the two goats offered during the fast as signs of Christ's two appearances (Barn. 7.6–10; Holmes 2007; Justin, Dial. 40.4–5; Marcovich 1997). *Hom. Lev.* 10 participates in this Christian habit of reading the rite through Christ, but the identification with Barabbas anchors the figuration more firmly in the Gospel scene. The goat sent away is interpreted through a named figure, the prisoner who lives because another is handed over. The goat offered for atonement is interpreted through Christ, whose death defines the Christian day of propitiation. The fast attached to Leviticus 16 is therefore carried into the passion along with the goats. Its scriptural authority is retained, but its observance is not transferred to Christians *pro mandato legis*. The rite is received through the passion, where its Christian meaning is disclosed through the contrast between Barabbas released and Christ sacrificed.⁵

The Christian day of propitiation is then named: *Nostra igitur, id est qui non umbrae et exemplari servimus, sed veritati, haec est propitiationis dies*—“This, then, is our day of propitiation—that is, of us who serve not shadow and copy, but truth” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:136; Borret 1981b). The surrounding argument identifies that day through Christ’s sacrifice. Hebrews gives the contrast between shadow, copy, and truth; 1 Corinthians 5:7 names Christ as the sacrificed Passover. The day of propitiation called “ours” is therefore the day disclosed through Christ’s offering.

The time of fasting also changes. *Tu si vis ieiunare secundum Christum et humiliare animam tuam, omne tibi tempus apertum est totius anni; immo totius vitae tuae dies habeto ad humiliandam animam tuam*—“If you wish to fast according to Christ and humble your soul, the whole year is open to you; indeed, take all the days of your life for humbling your soul” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:136; Borret 1981b). The phrase *humiliare animam tuam* carries forward the Levitical language of humbling or afflicting the soul. Here, that humbling is ordered by *secundum Christum*. The fast opens across the year and across the whole life because Christ, rather than the annual boundary of Leviticus 16, now governs its practice.

Matthew 6 supplies the Gospel manner of the fast: *Tu autem si ieiunas, unge caput tuum et lava faciem tuam*—“But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:136; Borret 1981b). The preacher reads the verse through a chain of scriptural associations. The oil of the sinner is replaced by gladness, mercy, and faith; the washed face is associated with Paul’s language of unveiled contemplation in 2 Corinthians 3:18. Matthew’s instruction addresses the public visibility of fasting, and the homily applies it to transformation before God. Christian fasting is practiced before God and read through Christ.⁶

The exhortation sharpens in direct address:

noli quaerere in terris Ierusalem nec observantias legis nec ieiunium Iudaeorum, sed ieiunium Christi.

“Do not seek Jerusalem on earth, or the observances of the law, or the Jewish fast, but the fast of Christ.” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:138; Borret 1981b)

The phrase *ieiunium Iudaeorum* is polemical. It names the fast when treated as Jewish legal observance. Earthly Jerusalem, legal observances, and the Day of Atonement fast as legal obligation stand over against *ieiunium Christi*. The Christian fast is grounded in Christ’s passion, the Gospel instruction of Matthew 6, and the freedom to fast *secundum Christum*.

The moral imperative follows: *Ieiuna ab omni peccato*—“Fast from every sin” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:138; Borret 1981b). The command is plainly moral exhortation, and its placement gives that exhortation its particular form. The Day of Atonement has been read through Christ; Matthew 6 has supplied the Gospel manner of fasting; the hearer has been directed toward the fast of Christ. Sin is then described as something enacted and also as something received. The moral command finds its next vocabulary in food, feast, wine, furtive bread, and deceptive philosophical food.

4. Fasting from Sin: Food, Feast, and Wine

The command *Ieiuna ab omni peccato* opens a series of prohibitions:

Ieiuna ab omni peccato; nullum cibum sumas malitiae; nullas capias epulas voluptatis; nullo vino luxuriae concalescas. Ieiuna a malis actibus; abstine a malis sermonibus; contine te a cogitationibus pessimis.

“Fast from every sin; take no food of wickedness; take hold of no feasts of pleasure; be warmed by no wine of excess. Fast from evil deeds; abstain from evil words; restrain yourself from the worst thoughts.” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:138; Borret 1981b)

Ieiuna ab omni peccato states the moral demand plainly. To fast from every sin is to refrain from sin. The following clauses give that demand the language of intake and effect. Sin is something from which one fasts, but also something one may take, grasp, or by which one may be warmed. The series turns abstention into a discipline of what enters and acts within the self.

The first clauses turn on *sumas*, *capias*, and *concalescas*. In *nullum cibum sumas malitiae*, *malitia* appears as food taken into the person. In *nullas capias epulas voluptatis*, *voluptas* has the more elaborate form of a feast, an occasion of enjoyment actively seized. In *nullo vino luxuriae concalescas*, *luxuria* is better understood as excess, dissipation, or loss of measure than as “luxury” in the narrower modern sense. The phrase does not condemn wine as such; it names wine by its power to warm the body into self-indulgent desire. The progression from food to feast to wine follows familiar forms of eating and drinking, but the danger is moral: wickedness, pleasure, and excess become desirable because they feed and affect the subject. *Sumas*, *capias*, and *concalescas* trace an increasing claim on the self—taken, seized, then felt inwardly as heat—a pattern that the later verbs *contingere* and *concupiscere* extend to touch and desire before full reception has occurred.

Once *malitia* can be figured as *cibus*, the warning can move to *panes furtivos perversae doctrinae* and *fallaces philosophiae cibos* without introducing a separate field of imagery. Moral evil and intellectual deception occupy different fields, yet both can be described through nourishment wrongly received. The language of food allows the homily to treat vice, false teaching, and deceptive philosophy as forms of intake.

The second sentence restates fasting through conduct: *Ieiuna a malis actibus; abstine a malis sermonibus; contine te a cogitationibus pessimis*. The order runs from acts to words to thoughts. Visible conduct, speech, and inward deliberation each receive their own verb: *ieiuna*, *abstine*, *contine*. The command reaches the whole field in which sin is enacted, spoken, and formed.

Mali sermones belongs to both utterance and reception: one person produces speech, another receives it. It can form the hearer wrongly. Elsewhere in the *Homilies on Leviticus*, eating can describe hearing, understanding, preaching, teaching, and receiving the word of God, so words themselves belong to the discipline of what enters and shapes the hearer (Siquans 2021, pp. 117–23, 130–32). In *Hom. Lev. 10.2*, *mali sermones* appears between *cibus malitiae* and the later warning against perverse doctrine. Evil speech can become corrupt nourishment.

The final clause presses the fast inward: *contine te a cogitationibus pessimis*. Deeds can be seen and words can be heard, but thoughts must be restrained before they take outward form. *Contine te* presses beyond a general warning against bad thoughts: the hearer is told to hold the self back at the level where desire, judgment, and intention begin to form.

That inward restraint also anticipates the later return to bodily fasting. The phrase *contine te* anticipates *continentia ventris et gutturis*, where restraint is applied to belly and throat. Inward discipline and bodily appetite remain joined. Appetite, speech, thought, and bodily practice belong to the same discipline.

The sequence shapes the command to fast from sin. The Christian fast concerns what one does, says, and thinks, and also what one allows to feed desire and judgment. The next warning extends that discipline to furtive loaves of perverse doctrine and deceptive foods of philosophy.

5. Proverbs, Wisdom’s Table, and Doctrinal Food

The homily then names corrupt teaching as furtive bread and deceptive philosophy as food:

Noli contingere panes furtivos perversae doctrinae. Non concupiscas fallaces philosophiae cibos, qui te a veritate seducant.

“Do not touch the furtive loaves of perverse doctrine. Do not desire the deceptive foods of philosophy, which may lead you away from truth.” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:138; Borret 1981b)

The language of intake now reaches instruction. Doctrina appears as loaves one must not touch; *philosophia* appears as food one must not desire. The verbs sharpen the warning. Contingere gives doctrine bodily proximity: the hearer is told not even to touch these loaves. Concupiscere places philosophical food within desire before it becomes accepted teaching. Error is approached and desired before it is received.

The food-series places the homily near Proverbs 4 and 9. Before the warning against perverse doctrine, wickedness has already appeared as *cibus* and excess as *vinum*. Proverbs 4:17 and 9:5 provide the main scriptural comparanda for this wider pattern. Proverbs 4:17 gives food and wine to the wicked; Proverbs 9:5 gives bread and mixed wine to Wisdom’s guests. Proverbs 9:17 remains relevant for secrecy and illicit attraction, but it does not carry the comparison by itself. The comparison concerns a sapiential field of imagery rather than a reading tied to one verse.

The wording of Proverbs 4:17 limits the comparison with *panes furtivos*. The Vulgate has *comedunt panem impietatis et vinum iniquitatis bibunt*, “they eat the bread of impiety and drink the wine of iniquity.” The LXX, closer to Origen’s likely scriptural horizon, speaks more broadly: οἷδε γὰρ σιτοῦνται σῖτα ἀσεβείας, οἶνω δὲ παρανόμῳ μεθύσκονται—they are fed with foods of impiety and made drunk with lawless wine (Prov. 4:17 LXX; Rahlfs and Hanhart 2006). The Vulgate’s singular panem should therefore not govern the comparison. The sapiential image is wider than one loaf: wickedness can be imagined as nourishment, and lawlessness as wine.⁷

Proverbs 9 adds the setting of rival invitations. Wisdom calls the simple to eat her bread and drink the wine she has mixed. Folly offers illicit nourishment marked by secrecy and stolen sweetness. Instruction in that chapter takes the form both of summons and of food offered to one who may be formed by receiving it. True and false teaching can therefore be imagined as rival forms of nourishment.

Hom. Lev. 10.2 works within this sapiential pattern when it warns against loaves of perverse doctrine and deceptive foods of philosophy. The danger is not only that false teaching contains error; it also presents itself as nourishment, offering something to be touched, desired, and received. A fast from such food is therefore a discipline exercised before acceptance, at the point where appetite, promise, and judgment first begin to converge.

Rufinus’ translation of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* gives more direct Origenian evidence for this doctrinal use of food and wine. In *Comm. Cant.* III.6, on Cant. 2:4, the bride asks to be brought into the “house of wine.” The commentary identifies this house with Wisdom’s banquet, where Wisdom has mixed her wine and calls the simple: “Come, eat my breads, and drink the wine that I have mixed for you” (Orig., *Comm. Cant.* III.6.1–2; SC 376:540–41; Brésard and Crouzel 1992). The “house of wine” is then interpreted as the place where the Church or the soul enjoys the sweetness of feasts and the gladness of wine in *dogmatibus sapientiae mysteriisque scientiae*, the doctrines of Wisdom and the mysteries of knowledge (Orig., *Comm. Cant.* III.6.6; SC 376:542–43; Brésard and Crouzel 1992). Wisdom’s banquet is read through doctrine, knowledge, and spiritual instruction.

The same passage gives the contrary form of wine and knowledge. The commentary speaks of wine pressed from the doctrines of truth and mixed in Wisdom’s cup, then contrasts it with the wine by which sinners are made drunk, including those who receive *falsae scientiae dogmata perniciosa*, “the destructive doctrines of false knowledge.” Proverbs 4:17 is then cited: *Hi autem edunt cibos impietatis, vino autem iniquo inebriantur*—“These eat

the foods of impiety and are made drunk with unjust wine" (Orig., *Comm. Cant.* III.6.7–8; SC 376:542–45; Brésard and Crouzel 1992). Where the Vulgate comparator has the singular *panem impietatis*, Rufinus' Commentary gives *cibos impietatis*, a plural closer to the Greek *σῖτα* and to the *cibus* and *cibos* language of *Hom. Lev.* 10.2. Within the Rufinus-transmitted Origenian corpus, food and wine can name wisdom, doctrine, true knowledge, false knowledge, and destructive teaching.⁸

Against that background, *panes furtivos* is best read with its full genitive phrase. The words may resonate with Proverbs 9:17, where illicit nourishment is marked by secrecy and stolen sweetness. In *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, however, the phrase is *panes furtivos perversae doctrinae*. Furtiveness marks the mode of attraction; *perversae doctrinae* identifies the danger. The loaves are corrupt teaching imagined as illicit nourishment.

The movement from *doctrina* to *philosophia* extends the warning. *Doctrina* names teaching; *philosophia* names a wider field of reasoning, wisdom-claims, and formation of life. The adjective *fallaces* and the relative clause *qui te a veritate seducant* determine the force of the phrase. The food is refused because it deceives and leads the hearer away from truth. The warning does not reject philosophy in every sense; it rejects philosophical food insofar as it is *fallax* and truth-diverting. That limitation is consistent with Origen's ordering of rational argument to revealed truth and with his criticism of dialectical misuse (Crouzel 1962, pp. 11–12, 20, 25; Somos 2014, pp. 195–201).⁹

Philosophical food may look like wisdom, reasoning, or instruction. Its effect reveals its character: it draws the hearer *a veritate*. The phrase belongs within the same alimentary sequence as *cibus malitiae*, *epulae voluptatis*, *vinum luxuriae*, and *panes furtivos perversae doctrinae*. The fast of Christ requires refusal of what would feed judgment away from truth.

6. Belly, Throat, and the Poor

Nec hoc tamen turns the argument back to Christian abstinence:

Nec hoc tamen ideo dicimus, ut abstinentiae christianae frena laxemus; habemus enim quadragesimae dies ieiuniis consecratos, habemus quartam et sextam septimanae diem, quibus sollemniter ieiunamus.

"Yet we do not say this in order to loosen the reins of Christian abstinence. For we have the forty days consecrated to fasts; we have the fourth and sixth days of the week, on which we solemnly fast." (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:138; Borret 1981b)

The preceding warnings have treated wickedness, pleasure, doctrine, and philosophy as forms of intake. Christian abstinence still has its *frena*. The image of reins keeps appetite under discipline. The warning against *fallaces philosophiae cibos* has added deceptive reasoning to what the Christian must refuse, but bodily appetite remains within the same account of fasting.

The reference to quadragesimae dies and to the fourth and sixth days of the week documents regular fasting in the transmitted homily. For the later history of Lent, this witness must be used cautiously, especially given Rufinus' late-fourth-century translation. Its local force is clear: the homily speaks of shared times when Christians abstain from food, as well as of moral and doctrinal discernment (Talley 1991, pp. 190–93, esp. p. 192; Bradshaw and Johnson 2011, pp. 95–97, 104–5).¹⁰

Libertas and *continentia* then define the practice:

Est certe libertas Christiano per omne tempus ieiunandi, non observantiae superstitione, sed virtute continentiae.

"The Christian certainly has freedom to fast at every time, not through the superstition of observance, but through the virtue of continence." (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:138; Borret 1981b)

Libertas distinguishes Christian fasting from *observantiae superstitio* and places it under *virtus continentiae*. Fasting per omne tempus remains open to the Christian because its ground has changed. The same abstention from food may be treated as legal observance or as continence ordered by Christ. The act remains bodily; its rationale is no longer the Levitical calendar as binding law.

The homily next names belly and throat:

Nam quomodo apud eos castitas incorrupta servatur nisi artioribus continentiae fulta subsidiis? Quomodo Scripturis operam navant, quomodo scientiae et sapientiae student? Nonne per continentiam ventris et gutturis?

“For how is chastity preserved incorrupt among them unless it is supported by the stricter aids of continence? How do they devote themselves to the Scriptures, how do they pursue knowledge and wisdom? Is it not through continence of belly and throat?” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:138–40; Borret 1981b)

Venter and *guttur* bring the argument back to bodily appetite. Chastity, scriptural labor, knowledge, and wisdom are supported by *continentia ventris et gutturis*. Fasting belongs with ascetic practices that include prayer, poverty, and scriptural attention, not with isolated dietary restriction (Finn 2009, pp. 100–104). The body’s intake is restrained so that chastity, attention, and understanding may be formed.

The phrase also recalls the earlier *contine te a cogitationibus pessimis*. Restraint had reached inward to thoughts; it now returns to the belly and throat. Venter receives food, and *guttur* marks the passage of intake. The homily keeps thought, appetite, speech, and bodily practice within one discipline of fasting.

Matthew 19:12 gives abstinence its ascetic function:

Quomodo quis se ipsum castrat propter regnum caelorum, nisi ciborum affluentiam resacet, nisi abstinentia utatur ministra?

“How does anyone make himself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven unless he cuts away the abundance of foods, unless he uses abstinence as a servant?” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:140; Borret 1981b)

The object cut away is *ciborum affluentia*, the abundance of foods. Abstinence is *ministra*, a servant or assistant. It serves chastity, attention to Scripture, and the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. The reduction in food supports the wider discipline by which the Christian becomes capable of chastity and attention.

The following turn to the poor extends this logic. Food refused by the faster does not simply disappear into private discipline; it can be transferred to another person’s need. The same practice that cuts back *ciborum affluentia* trains the body away from excess, prepares the mind for attention, and releases material goods for mercy. Belly and throat therefore return to the argument with a precise function. Their discipline gathers the preceding moral and doctrinal concerns back into bodily practice, while refusing to let ascetic practice end in the self. Fasting restrains appetite within the believer, but it also gives the food not eaten a new destination.

The homily gathers this account in a brief formula: *Haec ergo Christianis ieiunandi ratio est*—“This, then, is the rationale of fasting for Christians” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:140; Borret 1981b). The *ratio* includes freedom from legal compulsion, regular bodily practice, continence, chastity, Scripture, knowledge, and wisdom. The Day of Atonement no longer supplies the legal ground of the fast; Christian fasting remains a concrete bodily practice ordered toward the formation of Christian life.

The final movement turns to fasting for the poor:

Sed est et alia adhuc religiosa, cuius laus etiam quorundam Apostolorum litteris praedicatur. Invenimus enim in quodam libello ab Apostolis dictum: Beatus est, qui etiam ieiunat pro eo, ut alat pauperem.

“But there is also another religious practice, whose praise is proclaimed even in the writings of certain apostles. For we find it said by the apostles in a certain little book: Blessed is the one who also fasts for this purpose, to feed the poor.” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:140; Borret 1981b)

The source of the *libellus* is not identified. The saying brings the food left uneaten into view. Fasting has concerned what the Christian refuses to receive: sin, pleasure, excess, false doctrine, deceptive philosophy, and unnecessary abundance of food. The poor give that refusal a material destination. Food withheld from the faster becomes food for another body.

Early Christian parallels show the same charitable pattern: fasting benefits another person when the food not consumed, or its value, is directed to those in need (*Herm. Sim.* 5.3.7; Aristides, *Apol.* 15; Holmes 2007; Harris 1891; Witetschek 2010, pp. 386–90). In these parallels, the meal not eaten by the faster is not simply absent. It is transferred to someone who lacks food.

The quoted blessing is grounded in imitation of Christ:

Huius ieiunium valde acceptum est apud Deum et revera digne satis; imitatur enim illum, qui animam suam posuit pro fratribus suis.

“The fasting of this person is very acceptable before God and truly worthy; for he imitates the one who laid down his life for his brothers.” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:140; Borret 1981b)

Huius ieiunium refers to the one who fasts in order to feed the poor. The allusion to 1 John 3:16 gives this practice its Christological pattern. The acts differ in scale: fasting from food is not laying down one’s life. The likeness lies in direction. Something that might have been retained by the self is yielded for another’s life. The faster imitates Christ by allowing abstinence to take the form of service.¹¹

At the close of the passage, fasting becomes visible as care for another person’s hunger.

7. Conclusions

Hom. Lev. 10.2 takes up the Day of Atonement fast after Leviticus 16 has been read through Christ’s passion. The fast called *Iudaeorum* loses its claim as *pro mandato legis*; fasting *secundum Christum* becomes a practice open across the year and across the whole life. The transmitted Latin places *ieiuna ab omni peccato* within a preached sequence that moves from Levitical rite to passion, Gospel instruction, and Christian formation.

The command to fast from every sin remains a moral exhortation. Its force, however, is carried by food-language. Wickedness, pleasure, excess, perverse doctrine, and deceptive philosophy are imagined as food, feast, wine, bread, and nourishment that may enter, warm, mislead, or form the hearer. The Christian fast accordingly includes conduct, speech, thought, and the nourishment of judgment.

Proverbs 4 and 9 provide the scriptural grammar for this language. Food and wine already mark the contrast between wickedness and wisdom, rival instruction and illicit attraction. The Rufinus-transmitted *Commentary on the Song of Songs* shows that, within the Latin Origenian corpus, Wisdom’s banquet could be read through doctrine, knowledge, false knowledge, and destructive teaching. In that setting, *panes furtivos perversae doctrinae* and *fallaces philosophiae cibos* name corrupt teaching and deceptive reasoning as nourishment wrongly received.

The return to scheduled fasts, belly, throat, and the cutting away of abundant food keeps the reading anchored in bodily practice. Christian fasting is free from the legal

compulsion attached to the Levitical calendar, yet its freedom takes the form of continence. The same discipline that rejects corrupt nourishment for judgment also governs appetite, chastity, attention to Scripture, and the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.

In *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, moral instruction emerges from the handling of Leviticus itself. The sermon does not first complete a ritual exegesis and then append ethical lessons to it. It keeps the Levitical call to humble the soul in view while reading the Day of Atonement fast through Christ's passion, Gospel teaching, sapiential food-language, and concrete ascetic practice. The rite is refused as a legal obligation and retained as a preached rule for Christian discernment. On this basis, moral exhortation, doctrinal vigilance, and bodily restraint are not merely detachable applications laid over the biblical text; they are the form in which the scriptural command becomes operative for a Christian congregation. The hearer is taught to ask what kind of fasting belongs to Christ, what forms of nourishment must be refused, which teachings must not be touched or desired, and how restraint of belly and throat can be turned toward the poor. The sequence of food-terms is narrow in wording, yet it governs a larger account of formation: appetite, speech, doctrine, thought, bodily practice, and obligation to the neighbor fall under the discipline of scriptural interpretation.

The final turn to the poor gives abstinence its outward destination. Food withheld from the faster becomes provision for another body, and the practice is measured by imitation of the one who laid down his life for his brothers. At the end of *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, the fast of Christ is visible both in what the Christian refuses and in the feeding of another person's hunger.

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Notes

- ¹ Latin quotations from *Hom. Lev.* 10 are cited from (Borret 1981b); the citation of *Hom. Lev.* 1.1 is cited from (Borret 1981a). Translations are my own, checked against (Barkley 1990). The heading printed for Homily 10 in SC 287 is *De ieiunio, quod in die propitiationis fit, et de hirco, qui in eremum dimittitur* (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10, SC 287:128; Borret 1981b). Borret's apparatus refers the title to Lev. 16:10.
- ² For the textual witnesses to Lev. 16:29 and 16:31, see (Weber and Gryson 2007; Rahlfs and Hanhart 2006). For the identification of the Day of Atonement with fasting, see 1QpHab XI.7–8 (García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1999, pp. 19–21), Josephus, Ant. 3.240 (Thackeray 1961), and *m. Yoma* 8.1 (Danby 1933). 1QpHab is used here for the historical identification of the Day of Atonement with fasting, not for a verbal argument about Leviticus 16 or *Hom. Lev.* 10.
- ³ On Rufinus' translation of Origen and the methodological caution required by the transmitted Latin, see (Hammond Bammel 1985, 1992, pp. 131–42; Hill 2010, pp. 145–48, 151–56; Limone 2015, pp. 407–10).
- ⁴ The phrase *ieiunium Iudaeorum* is retained only where it belongs to the homily's polemical formulation. In analytical prose, the practice is described as the Day of Atonement fast, the Levitical fast, or the fast construed as legal obligation. For Caesarea, Jewish fasting, Origen's contact with Jewish teachers and traditions, and the boundary between Christian interpretation and Jewish observance, see (Stökl Ben Ezra 2003, pp. 270–86, esp. pp. 273, 282; de Lange 1976, pp. 21, 82, 96; Siquans 2024, pp. 289–90, 296–97).
- ⁵ Barnabas 7.6–10 and Justin, Dial. 40.4–5 are cited as earlier Christian parallels for Christological readings of the two goats, not as sources for *Hom. Lev.* 10 (Holmes 2007; Marcovich 1997).

- ⁶ The homily's interpretation of Matthew 6 draws on a chain of scriptural associations. The anointing of the head is read against the oil of the sinner and the oil of gladness; the washed face is connected with unveiled contemplation before God. The relevant passages include Matt. 6:16–18; Ps. 140:5 LXX/Vulg.; Ps. 44:8 LXX/Vulg.; Prov. 3:3; Col. 3:1–2; Heb. 1:9; and 2 Cor. 3:18.
- ⁷ The Proverbs comparison is used as a scriptural and sapiential comparandum, not as proof of quotation or direct dependence. For the relevant Vulgate and LXX forms of Prov. 4:17, see (Weber and Gryson 2007; Rahlfs and Hanhart 2006). Prov. 9:17 is used for the motif of secrecy and illicit attraction, not as the sole basis of the comparison.
- ⁸ The *Comm. Cant.* III.6 comparison is drawn from the Latin text transmitted by Rufinus (Orig., *Comm. Cant.* III.6.1–8, SC 376:540–45; Brésard and Crouzel 1992). The comparison concerns a shared sapiential idiom in the Rufinus-transmitted Origenian corpus.
- ⁹ On Origen's ordering of rational argument to revealed truth and his criticism of dialectical misuse, see (Crouzel 1962, pp. 11–12, 20, 25; Somos 2014, pp. 195–201).
- ¹⁰ On *Hom. Lev.* 10.2 and the evidence for forty-day fasting, see (Talley 1991, pp. 190–93, esp. p. 192; Bradshaw and Johnson 2011, pp. 95–97, 104–5). The phrase *quadagesimae dies ieiuniis consecratos* is treated here as evidence for scheduled fasting in the transmitted homily, not as an independent basis for reconstructing a precise third-century liturgical calendar.
- ¹¹ Origen introduces the charitable fast saying as found in *quodam libello ab Apostolis dictum*, “said by the apostles in a certain little book” (Orig., *Hom. Lev.* 10.2, SC 287:140; Borret 1981b). The source of the *libellus* remains uncertain. Witetschek discusses the saying in relation to Gos. Thom. 69.2 and to early Christian material in which fasting benefits another person (Witetschek 2010, pp. 386–90). The closest practical parallel is *Herm. Sim.* 5.3.7, where the cost of food not eaten is given to a widow, orphan, or person in need (Holmes 2007; Witetschek 2010, pp. 386–87). Aristides, *Apol.* 15 preserves a similar charitable pattern (Harris 1891). The final Christological phrase in *Hom. Lev.* 10.2 alludes to 1 John 3:16.

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