**A History of Hermeneutics Lecture 5**

**4-1 prof. MJ Ahn (PTU)**

References of Internet

<http://earlychurch.org.uk/interpretation.php>

<http://hubpages.com/religion-philosophy/Biblical-Hermenuetics-and-Exegesis-in-the-Early-Church>

Early Church Fathers download

<http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html>

Richard Baxter download

<http://www.ccel.org/search/fulltext/baxter>

summary of early church

Jesus and Paul and NT continuity

Alexander School Clement, Origen

Anthoc School Chrysostom

**Biblical literature, The Patristic Period** – Alexandria had long boasted a school of classical study that practiced **the allegorical interpretation** of the Homeric epics and the Greek myths...Later, the Antiochene fathers, represented especially by Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428/429) and John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), patriarch of Constantinople, developed **an exegesis that took more account of literal meaning and historical context**...In the West, the **Alexandrian methods were adopted by Ambrose** (c. 339–397), bishop of Milan, **and Augustine** (354–430), bishop of Hippo…” – Britannica.com

**Hermeneutics of Early Church**

Grant’s Book, SHIB, Ch 5. “The Bible in the Second Century”

**Ignatius of Antioch**

Ignatius apparently finds Christians who are so devoted

to the Old Testament that they can say, “If I do not find it in

the ‘charters’ I do not believe in the gospel.” Ignatius’ reply is

this: **“It is written in scripture.”** But they answer sharply: “That is

just the question.” Ignatius, whose quotations from the Old Testament

are very infrequent, goes on to state that for him the “charters(privilege, license)”are **Jesus Chris**t and his saving works and the faith which

comes through him; he desires to be “justified” by these (Philud.

8.2). Though he knows some of the New Testament books (certainly

1 Corinthians and other Pauline epistles, probably John,

possibly Matthew and Luke), he does not appeal to them at this

point, for the question his opponents have raised is that of the

**Christological interpretation** of the Old Testament. It is significant

that they do not seem to accept it. Ignatius’ own view is clear: the

Old Testament prophets lived “according to Christ Jesus” (Magn.

8.2).

**The Epistle of Barnabas**

We find a wide range of opinion in regard to the place of the Old Testament in the church. In the epistle of Barnabas, the Old Testament has meaning only when it is understood in terms of the gospel. The author’s theme is not new, but his exegetical method is characterized by a somewhat perverse(bad) typology. To him history is really meaningless. God’s covenant has always been

made with us Christians. There is here no analysis of the relation

of the old covenant to the new; there is the simple assertion that

the Old Testament has always been misunderstood by the Jews:

Take heed to yourselves now, and be not made like some, heaping

up your sins and saying that the covenant is both theirs and ours. It

is ours [Barnabas 4:6f.].

Here Barnabas’ **typological** exegesis leads him to the **rejection** not

only of Old Testament **history** but also of the **general Christian understanding**

of the meaning of that history. As Windisch has observed, he is not far from the heretical Gnosticism of the second century.’ And the eccentricity of his exegesis, especially in the celebrated example of the 318 servants of Abraham, does not increase our respect for his intelligence.

**Marcion of Pontus**

denied the need for retaining(keeping) the Old Testament.

Paul was Marcion’s hero, hero worship

and comprehension are not the same thing; Marcion’s attitude towards

the Old Testament could have **horrified** the apostle(Paul).

To understand Marcion’s attitude towards the Old Testament it

is necessary to observe that it is based on a thoroughgoing **dualism**.

Marcion endeavored to interpret Pauline thought in the light

of his own view that there are **two gods: the just God of the Law,**

who **create**d the world and is the **God of the Jews**; and **the good**

**God, who is the Father of Jesus Christ**

Marcion not only rejected the Old Testament as a Christian

book; he insisted on a literal interpretation of it in order to emphasize

its crudity. It was not a Christian book, and in his opinion no

allegorical exegesis could make it one. Jesus destroyed the prophets

and the Law (Irenaeus, Adv. huer. 1.27.2, 1, 217 Harvey). An

interesting example of the rigor of Marcion’s logic is to be found

in his analysis of the ***Descensus ad Inferos (the descent of Christ into hell)***. Jesus preached to the dead of Israel, but he received a mixed hearing. Cain, the men of Sodom, the Egyptians, in fact **all kinds of evildoers were saved** by

him, for they came to him and were received into his kingdom; but

all the righteous, including **the patriarchs and the prophets, were**

**not saved**. They believed that as usual God was testing them. Here

is justification by faith only, with a vengeance! With this kind of

exegesis no value could be placed on the Old ‘Testament.

**Justin Martyr**(100–165),

was an early Christian apologist, and is regarded as the foremost interpreter of the theory of the Logos in the 2nd century.[2] He was martyred, alongside some of his students,

One of the earliest writers **against Marcio**n, one who was also a

leader in the Christian apologetic movement, was Justin Martyr.

In his thought we see foreshadowed what was to become the classical

Christian teaching concerning the Old Testament. Unlike

Marcion, Justin rejects the idea of a **radical cleavage(division) between**

**Christianity and the rest of God’s witness in the world.** (rejected dualism using by Marcion)

He holds that all God’s witness can be called Christianity. He claims that

even such philosophers as Socrates and Heraclitus **truly deserve**

**the name “Christian”** (1 Apol. 46.3, 58 Goodsp). For Justin

there is a difference only of degree between God’s revelation in

the Old Testament and the highest Greek philosophy, and that in

Christ. He constantly emphasizes the **pedagogical rol**e( teaching, didactic) of the

Logos, whether among **the prophets and philosophers** or incarnate

in Jesus Christ, “our teacher.”

The Christian apologist has to provide a thorough analysis of the

relevance of the Law for Christians. Justin, while relying on earlier

insights, sets forth an exegesis of the Old Testament which is

at once **Christocentric and historical**. He does **not deny** the historical

reality of God’s relationship to Israel, but he insists that the

earlier covenant itself looks forward to being **superseded**(old-fashioned).

**Irenaeus**(early 2nd century – c. AD 202)

Above all for Irenaeus, who is **defending the mainstream** of

Christian faith **against able enemies**, there is **one standard of correct**

**interpretation.** The standard is the **rule of faith** as preserved in

churches in the apostolic succession. Although this view was more

fully developed at a later date,” Irenaeus is really the father of

authoritative exegesis in the church. In his opinion truth is to be

found only within the church. An instructive passage shows us his

dislike of philosophical learning.

In the teaching of Irenaeus the interpretation of the Bible enters

a new phase. The Christian interpreter is **no longer** content to appeal

only to **his inspired** **intuitions(instinct),** as in the case of the writers of

the New Testament, or to what is self-evidently rational (as the

school of Alexandria was to appeal), but to an authority which is

at once external and internal. The authority of the church is external

because it did not constitute the gospel; the gospel brought

both the scriptures and the church into existence. And yet it is internal,

for the scriptures are the church’s books, and the church

has been entrusted with the ministry of the gospel. And when the

gospel is being interpreted as a kind of theosophy, the institutional

authority of the church can play an important role. **the claims of authoritative interpretation.**

**Alexandria School**

Eumenes of Alexandria, Markianos of Alexandria, Athenagoras of Athens, Pantaenus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory the Theologian, Alexandrous the Bishop of Jerusalem, Pope Julian of Alexandria, Pope Heraclas of Alexandria, Pope Dionysius of Alexandria, Pope Peter of Alexandria[disambiguation needed], Pope Achillas of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, Archdeacon Habib Girgis, Pope Shenouda III of Alexandria, Theodora of Alexandria, Catherine of Alexandria, Dorothea of Alexandria.

The Alexandrian school is a collective designation for certain tendencies in literature, philosophy, medicine, and the sciences that developed in the Hellenistic cultural center of Alexandria, Egypt during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.[1]

Alexandria was a remarkable center of learning due to the blending of Greek and Oriental influences, its favorable situation and commercial resources, and the enlightened energy of some of the Macedonian Dynasty of the Ptolemies ruling over Egypt, in the final centuries BC. Much scholarly work was collected in the great Library of Alexandria during this time. A lot of epic poetry, as well as works on geography, history, mathematics, astronomy and medicine were composed during this period.

The name of Alexandrian school is also used to describe the religious and philosophical developments in Alexandria after the 1st century. The mix of Jewish theology and Greek philosophy led to a syncretic mix and much mystical speculation. The Neoplatonists devoted themselves to examining the nature of the soul, and sought communion with God. The two great schools of biblical interpretation in the early Christian church incorporated Neoplatonism and philosophical beliefs from Plato's teachings into Christianity, and interpreted much of the Bible allegorically. The founders of the Alexandrian school of Christian theology were Clement of Alexandria and Origen. wiki.

Vern Poythress.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4v15-is_Uj0>

<http://hubpages.com/religion-philosophy/Biblical-Hermenuetics-and-Exegesis-in-the-Early-Church>

* 1. **Alexandrian School of Hermeneutics** Vern Poythress.

The School of Alexandria was primarily founded by two great church fathers, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Clement was known for uniting Greek philosophy and thought with that of Christian philosophy and theology. Clement was the mentor of probably the most well-known biblical scholar that was to come out of Alexandria, Origen.In general terms, there were two approaches to Scripture, the literal and the allegorical method of interpretation. Origen and the Alexandrian School adhered to the allegorical method of interpretation of Scripture. What is the allegorical exegesis? According to Kelley in his book *Early Christian Doctrine,* “In allegorical exegesis the sacred text is treated as a mere symbol, or allegory, of spiritual truths. The literal, or historical sense, if regarded at all, plays a relatively minor role, and the aim of the exegete is to elicit the moral, theological or mystical meaning which each passage, indeed each verse and even each word, is presumed to contain.”Origen held to the belief that to understand scripture completely, one had to move beyond the literal sense of Scripture and understand the figurative or metaphorical. In interpreting Scriptures, Origen believed that there were three levels of meaning in Scripture that corresponded to the three parts of human being, who are made up of three separate parts; body, soul, and spirit. These three levels of meaning were the literal sense, which corresponded with the body, the moral sense, which corresponded to the soul, and the allegorical sense, which corresponded to the spirit. These senses were to be understood to the Christian in accordance to their progress in the faith therefore, everyone will receive benefit from the Scripture. While Origen’s enormous work in interpreting the Scriptures is considered very important, Origen had a tendency to over allegorize the bible and found himself at odds with the rest of Christianity. This type of interpreting the Scripture by allegory became known as the Alexandrian School of interpretation.

**[School of Antioch](http://www.amazon.com/Early-Christian-Doctrines-5th-Edition/dp/0826452523%3FSubscriptionId%3D14H876SFAKFS0EHBYQ02%26tag%3Dhubpages0cc31-20%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3D0826452523)**

**[LAURIE ANN PINKERT](http://www.amazon.com/Early-Christian-Doctrines-5th-Edition/dp/0826452523%3FSubscriptionId%3D14H876SFAKFS0EHBYQ02%26tag%3Dhubpages0cc31-20%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3D0826452523)**

[Theodore’s interpretation of the Psalms prescribed an interpretation that only three](http://www.amazon.com/Early-Christian-Doctrines-5th-Edition/dp/0826452523%3FSubscriptionId%3D14H876SFAKFS0EHBYQ02%26tag%3Dhubpages0cc31-20%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3D0826452523)

[Psalms should be interpreted as directly messianic and his interpretation of the Song of Solomon](http://www.amazon.com/Early-Christian-Doctrines-5th-Edition/dp/0826452523%3FSubscriptionId%3D14H876SFAKFS0EHBYQ02%26tag%3Dhubpages0cc31-20%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3D0826452523)

[denied the popular mystical approach to this book.](http://www.amazon.com/Early-Christian-Doctrines-5th-Edition/dp/0826452523%3FSubscriptionId%3D14H876SFAKFS0EHBYQ02%26tag%3Dhubpages0cc31-20%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3D0826452523) <http://cranfordville.com/r492S04PaperPinkertLA.pdf>

School of Antioch

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The School of Antioch was one of the two major centers of the study of biblical exegesis and theology during Late Antiquity; the other was the Catechetical School of Alexandria. This group was known by this name because the advocates of this tradition were based in the city of Antioch, one of the major cities of the ancient Roman Empire.

While the Christian intellectuals of Alexandria emphasized the allegorical interpretation of Scriptures and tended toward a Christology that emphasized the union of the human and the divine, those in Antioch held to a more literal and occasionally typological exegesis and a Christology that emphasized the distinction between the human and the divine in the person of Jesus Christ. The school in general tended to what might be called, in a rather loose sense, an Adoptionist Christology.[1] Nestorius, before becoming Patriarch of Constantinople, had been a monk at Antioch and had there become imbued with the principles of the Antiochene theological school.[2]

The school of Antioch is best divided into three periods:

the early school (170-early fourth century)

The earliest author known of this period is Theophilus of Antioch. Then there is a gap of a century and in the first half of the fifth century there are three known antiochene authors: the best known is Eusebius of Emesa; other representatives are Acacius of Caesarea and Theodore bishop of Heraklea.

the middle school (350-433)

This period includes at least three different generations: Diodorus of Tarsus, who directed an ἀσκητήριον (school) he may have founded. Among his disciples, the best known are John Chrysostom and Theodorus of Mopsuestia. The main figure of the third generation was Nestorius.

the late school (after 433).

After the Council of Ephesus (431), the School of Antioch loses prestige. Apparently only two later authors are known: Basil of Seleucia and Gennadius of Constantinople.

References

* 1. **Hermeneutics in the School of Antioch** Vern Poythress.

The School of Antioch stood in stark contrast to than that of the Alexandrian School in that their approach to Scriptural interpretation included both the literal and the typological. The School of Antioch had several adherents to this type of interpretation of Scripture. The Church Fathers that adhered to school of interpretation were: Theodore of Mopsuetia, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodoret, and John Chrysostom. All of these church fathers followed the Antochian method of interpretation and were very critical of the allegorical method.How does the typological method of interpretation differ from that of the allegorical method? According to Kelley “was a technique for bringing out the correspondence between the two Testaments, and took as its guiding principles the idea that the events and personages of the Old were “types” of, i.e., prefigured and anticipated, the events and personages of the New. The typologist took history seriously; it was the scene of the progressive unfolding of God’s consistent redemptive purpose…Typology, unlike allegory, had no temptation to undervalue, much less dispense with, the literal sense of Scripture”.Even though the members of the school of Antioch insisted on a literal sense of interpretation, they also utilized and employed the typological interpretation. The key to understanding the typological types in the bible was in the understanding of the term theoria, also known as insight. According to Kelly, theoria is “the power of perceiving, in addition to the historical facts set out in the text, a spiritual reality to which they were designed to point. Thus they accepted typology proper … but tried to rescue it from being exploited arbitrarily. For theoria to operate they considered it necessary (a) that the literal sense of the sacred narrative should not be abolished, (b) that there should be a real correspondence between the historical fact and the further spiritual object discerned, and (c) that these two objects should be apprehended together, though of course in different ways”. In this way the school of Antioch was not against a higher level of meaning in Scripture, however they opposed the allegorical method, and insisted upon the literal method which would allow for a discovery or finding of typology in Scripture. There were some members of this school who would severely limit the use of how typology could be employed while others would be more liberal in allowing a very broad approach to discovering typology in the Scripture.

* 1. **Conclusion of Hermeneutics in the Early Church**Vern Poythress.

In this paper the meanings of exegesis and hermeneutics were defined and shown how they are both similar yet differ. This paper discussed the two schools of hermeneutics and exegesis that were developed in the early church. The first school that was presented was the school of Alexandria and the method that this school employed was the allegorical method. The second school that was presented was the school of Antioch and the methods they employed were the literal and typological methods. The question remains however, which method does the church as whole use today? Typically the method the church uses today comes from the school of Antioch. The church reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin almost exclusively used the literal and typological methods employed by the school of Antioch. While the method employed most prevalently today is the method employed by the school of Antioch, the method of the school of Alexandria is conservatively used today in Pentecostal and charismatic churches today through the leading of the Holy Spirit to discover the spiritual sense of Scripture. However we may interpret the Scripture we should take the advice of Jerome when he said “[Our] fixed purpose…[is]… not to bend the Scriptures to …[our].. own wishes but to simply say what…[we take]… to be their meaning. A commentator has no business to impose his own views; his duty is to make plain the meaning of the author whom he professes to interpret. For, if he contradicts the writer whom he is trying to expound, he will prove to be his opponent rather than his interpreter”.

[Anthony C. Thieselton. Hermeneutics: An Introduction. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009.](http://www.amazon.com/Church-History-Plain-Language-Edition/dp/0718025539%3FSubscriptionId%3D14H876SFAKFS0EHBYQ02%26tag%3Dhubpages0cc31-20%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3D0718025539)

[Bruce L. Shelly. Church History in Plain Language. Nashville Tn: Thomas Nelson, 2008.](http://www.amazon.com/Church-History-Plain-Language-Edition/dp/0718025539%3FSubscriptionId%3D14H876SFAKFS0EHBYQ02%26tag%3Dhubpages0cc31-20%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3D0718025539)

[Gordon D. Fee. How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.](http://www.amazon.com/Church-History-Plain-Language-Edition/dp/0718025539%3FSubscriptionId%3D14H876SFAKFS0EHBYQ02%26tag%3Dhubpages0cc31-20%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3D0718025539)

[J.N.D. Kelley. Early Christian Doctrine. NY, NY: Harpers Collins, 1978.](http://www.amazon.com/Church-History-Plain-Language-Edition/dp/0718025539%3FSubscriptionId%3D14H876SFAKFS0EHBYQ02%26tag%3Dhubpages0cc31-20%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3D0718025539)

<https://roseangie00.wordpress.com/2011/07/19/hermeneutics-alexandrian-vs-antiochene/>

← The Making of the Bible- A Book ReviewA Journal Review on “Akedah” →

Hermeneutics: Alexandrian VS. Antiochene

Posted on July 19, 2011 by roseangie00

Hermeneutics is a discipline that deals with biblical interpretation. During the Patristic era, the Alexandrian and Antiochene hermeneutics seem to have laid the history of the hermeneutics that we are using today. And with these kinds of hermeneutics we could draw out which one should be embraced by the church in relation to our study of the Holy Word.

Alexandrian hermeneutics as popularized by Origen, who was the student of and successor of Clement, introduced the allegorical method of interpretation. This kind of hermeneutics approaches the Bible and looks at it in three levels: first, the literal meaning; second, the moral meaning; and third; the spiritual meaning. The historical context is set aside. Moreover, those who practice Alexandrian hermeneutics believe that the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures is hidden and they should be interpreted in a figurative manner. This allegorical interpretation, according to Origen, would retain the authority of the Bible and at the same time embellish the embarrassment brought by difficult passages. Furthermore, Origen asserted that those who are engaging in this kind of hermeneutics need to pray first for guidance and use his intelligence. The exegete will observe how the words were used, and will compare similar texts when one is literal and the other is spiritual.

In contrast to the Alexandrian hermeneutics, Antiochene interpretation is approaches the text in three categories namely, literal, historical and linguistic. Antiochene interpreters rejected the use of allegory. Antiochenes, in addition, insisted on the historical reliability of the Bible. The deeper meaning of the Scripture is elicited when one pays attention to the literal and historical context of the text. Thus, they greatly reject the thought of “hidden meanings”. Theodore of Mopsuestia initiated the giving of attention to the linguistic details of the text. This means that particles, moods, prepositions and terminologies should be given a careful consideration. He advocated the study of the passage within its context and not to draw interpretation out from an isolated verse. The Antiochene school in Palestine also firmly uphold to the Scripture as the basis of knowledge and not on Gnosis (secret knowledge) which the Alexandrian school base their interpretation.

Perspectives

Reading Scripture with the Early Church

Christopher A. Hall

Theology

CHRISTOPHER A. HALL

<http://www.catalystresources.org/reading-scripture-with-the-early-church/>

I begin by asking a specific question: Is it genuinely possible for people living at the beginning of the third millennium to comprehend meaningfully the world of the ancient church and its leaders, the church fathers? Many – including many seminarians – may have their doubts, but I believe the attempt should be made. Yet if we succeed in building a bridge to the fathers’ world, what will we find when we arrive at the front steps? Will we discover and experience a hospitable environment? Will we be fed or choked by the food the early church (2nd through 8th centuries) offers us? Can an ancient Christian writer’s thoughts on the Scripture be relevant and comprehensible to a contemporary person? From the outset we must acknowledge that conceptual bridge-building is never easy, whether we are attempting to understand the world of the early church or the Bible itself.

More specifically, what might the blind spots be in our cultural setting or our own lives that need to be exposed to the light of ancient wisdom? Frances Young comments that the church fathers belonged to an important intellectual tradition and wrestled with many of the same issues theologians, philosophers, pastors, and laypeople face today. “To see these questions debated in a quite different intellectual [and historical] setting” is edifying, says Young, “for it enables us to step outside our own culturally-conditioned presuppositions and see the issues” in a clearer light (“Patristics,” in A New Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden [SCM, 1983], 431-35). Or, as Michael Casey puts it, “When we have recourse to writers of antiquity, we have the opportunity to compensate for the blind spots inherent in our particular culture. They help us move toward a more integral wisdom by challenging many of our presuppositions. Because they are unaffected by our particular cultural bias, they can help liberate us from the invisible ideology inherent in our uncritical assumptions about the nature of reality” (Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina [Triumph, 1995], 109). The distance between the contemporary reader and the early church, then, can genuinely become an advantage to be appreciated.

How, then, did the early church read the Scripture? First, we must stress the deep connection the ancient church affirmed between the spiritual health of biblical interpreters and their ability to read the Bible well. For the church fathers, the Scripture was to be studied, pondered, and exegeted within the context of worship, reverence, and holiness. The fathers considered the Bible a holy book that opened itself to those who themselves were progressing in holiness through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. The character of the exegete would determine in many ways what was seen or heard in the biblical text itself. Character and wise exegesis were intimately related. In Athanasius’ words, “…the searching and right understanding of the Scriptures [demands] a good life and a pure soul…. One cannot possibly understand the teaching of the saints unless one has a pure mind and is trying to imitate their life…” (On the Incarnation [St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982], 96).

Clearly, early Christian leaders believed the best exegesis was conducted by spiritually formed members of the church itself. The Scriptures, the fathers uniformly believe, have been given to the church, are read, preached, heard, comprehended, and applied within the community of the church. This holistic, communal, ecclesial approach to biblical interpretation is surely a methodology that warrants a close investigation in the highly individualized culture of North America and the increasingly globalized world at large.

We have set the stage for a closer examination of how the early church read the Bible. Ancient Christian interpreters of Scripture shared some common assumptions. All agreed that the Bible is an inspired text. All agreed that personal disposition and spiritual health affect one’s ability to read Scripture well. All agreed that once the exegete has determined the meaning of a biblical text and plumbed its possible applications, the text’s inherent divine authority summons the biblical interpreter to obedience. All agreed that biblical interpretation is a Christian communal endeavor the exegete must practice within the context of Christ’s body, the church. Most possessed a profound respect for the exegetical efforts of other interpreters in the church’s history, even when they disagreed with their conclusions. Exegesis is never, early interpreters argued, to be practiced in an historical, traditional or communal vacuum.

Despite these points of agreement, however, points of disagreement among early Christian exegetes are identifiable. Controversy periodically erupted among them over a fairly specific question: How was one to identify and interpret the levels of meaning in a biblical text? For many modern readers this might seem a strange question. Many students of biblical hermeneutics – particularly those from an evangelical background – affirm that the grammatical-historical interpretation of a biblical text leads to only one valid meaning – that intended by the author. To add other layers of meaning is to create a hermeneutical labyrinth, a maze in which interpreters will soon find themselves hopelessly confused and lost. Most early Christian interpreters would agree that grammar, historical background, and the biblical author’s intent are all important factors in reading the Bible well. Yet the church fathers would not limit a biblical text’s meaning solely to the intent of the author.

Ancient Christian interpreters recognized the grammatical-historical meaning of a text as its literal sense and stressed its importance. Yet they saw this meaning as only one of the text’s possible senses. All ancient interpreters expected to find layers of meaning within a biblical text. The question they posed to each other – and to us – is in what way and to what degree does this layering manifest itself (Boniface Ramsey, Beginning to Read the Church Fathers [Paulist, 1985], 25)? Typological interpretation, for instance, in which we discover “a foreshadowing and prediction of the events of the Gospels,” was practiced to a lesser or greater extent by virtually all early Christian interpreters (James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, Early Biblical Interpretation [Westminster, 1986], 80). Allegorical interpretation, defined by Kugel and Greer as an interpretive approach in which “biblical persons and incidents become representative of abstract virtues or doctrines,” was enthusiastically embraced by certain church fathers and viewed with suspicion by others. For some ancient interpreters, the distinction between typology and allegory was blurred at best.

Some early Christian interpreters such as Origen, a biblical scholar trained in the school of Alexandria, believed it was important to approach the Scripture with the expectation that it would speak on different levels. The greatest early advocate of allegorical interpretation of the Bible, Origen writes “that the Scriptures were composed by the Spirit of God and that they have not only a meaning that is manifest but also another that is hidden as far as most people are concerned…. About this the universal Church is in accord, that the whole law is spiritual. What the law is full of, however, is not known to all but only to those to whom it is given by the grace of the Holy Spirit in a word of wisdom and knowledge” (Origen, De principiis, praef. 8; cited in Ramsey, Beginning to Read the Church Fathers, 25).

Through the comparison of texts inspired by the Spirit the interpreter recognizes and unlocks the truth of the same texts through the Spirit. This is the hermeneutical principle that Origen believes will prevent an overactive hermeneutical imagination from abusing the use of allegory in determining the deeper sense of Scripture. That is, biblical interpreters can build up a symbolic reservoir of meaning by soaking their minds in the biblical narrative as a whole. Scripture itself will provide the symbolic grid needed to discern and comprehend its deepest meaning. Hence, from the view of Origen and other early interpreters, the search for a deeper symbolic or allegorical meaning in the biblical text is not a hermeneutical free fall in which anything can mean anything. Because the biblical narrative itself – from Genesis to Revelation – fills Origen’s symbolic or allegorical reservoir, his interpretation results from the use of symbolic clues revealed through a comparison of text with text. This methodology, often a fruitful one, is based on Origen’s deeply held conviction that the Holy Spirit has inspired each syllable of the Bible. As Ronald Heine comments: “Origen’s allegorical reading of the Bible was a coherent and controlled reading. The principle of comparing Biblical texts, which he based on 1 Corinthians 2:13, was a primary factor in both the coherence and controlled nature of his reading” (“Reading the Bible with Origen,” in The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity, ed. Paul M. Blowers [University of Notre Dame Press, 1997], 132).

The allegorical methodology so popular at Alexandria was not without its critics among the church fathers, and rightly so, for the extended use of allegory is hermeneutical dynamite – handle with care! The use of allegorical interpretation requires great care and control. Clearly articulated rules governing its use and detecting its abuse are absolutely necessary. Without these safeguards exegetes can easily wrap their imaginations around the biblical text, importing into the text whatever their hermeneutical fancy desires the text to say. For these allegorical interpreters the Bible can become a lump of wax they mold into a foreign shape, perhaps even their own image.

Ancient interpreters centered in Antioch, such as Diodore of Tarsus, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, responded to the same exegetical issues that Origen faced, generally appreciated his work, but were less sanguine concerning the fruitfulness of a heavy reliance on allegory in reading the Scripture. Their viewpoint, one that space does not allow us to explore deeply, complimented the perspective of the school at Alexandria. Antiochian interpreters deeply valued “careful textual criticism, philological and historical studies, and the cultivation of classical rhetoric” (Karlfried Froehlich, Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church [Fortress, 1984], 20). Yet, as Froehlich points out, to make a sharp distinction between Alexandrian and Antiochene exegesis, as though Alexandrian fathers were only allegorizers while Antiochene exegetes remained firmly planted in the literal meaning of the text, is to simplify matters.

Origen, the allegorizer par excellence, was well aware of the literal meaning of a biblical text. Similarily, exegetes formed by Antiochene hermeneutical methodology were not averse to viewing Scripture as a layered text. One could interpret the Bible in an anagogical fashion in which, as Froehlich explains, “the biblical text leads the reader upward into spiritual truths that are not immediately obvious and that provide a fuller understanding of God’s economy of salvation” (Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church, 20).

The tradition of early biblical interpretation provides us with four key hermeneutical principles modern readers would do well to consider:

Read the Bible holistically. The church fathers insist that the narrative of the Bible is a continuous, deeply connected story from Genesis through Revelation. The Old Testament is not discontinuous with the New. Rather the themes presented in the Old Testament find their fulfillment in the narrative structure of the New Testament. Continuity and fulfillment characterize the entire story. Most importantly, the fathers insist that the biblical narrative reaches its culmination, its thematic climax, with the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Son of God. We will read the Bible ineffectively and incorrectly, the fathers warn, if we fail to read its individual parts in the light of its overarching, unifying message.

Read the Bible christologically. All the fathers read Scripture through the prism of Christ’s incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. As Irenaeus instructs, “If one carefully reads the Scriptures, he will find there the word on the subject of Christ – de Christo sermonem…. He is indeed the hidden treasure in the field … the hidden treasure in the Scriptures is Christ” (Adversus Haereses 4.6.1; cited in Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadis, The Relevance of the Fathers [Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994], 57).

Read the Bible communally within Christ’s body, the church. Early Christian exegetes insisted that exegesis is an ecclesiastical endeavor. It takes place within the church for the church. How, they would ask, could things be otherwise? For the church fathers, hermeneutics is not an objective science that can be practiced by any scholar within any context. Rather, hermeneutics in Christ is a spiritual, communal, interpretive art. It is safely, wisely, and fruitfully exercised only by those whose minds and hearts have been soaked in and shaped by the gospel itself – within the Christian community’s reflection, devotion, and worship.

Read the Bible within the context and practice of prayer, worship, and spiritual formation. The church fathers’ insistence on the indissoluble connection between spiritual health, life in the church, and commentary on the church’s book rebukes the modern tendency to separate scholarship from spirituality and worship. Almost all early Christian exegetes were pastors; many were bishops. As leaders of the church they did not have the luxury of pursuing biblical scholarship solely as an academic exercise. Their exegetical work was done in the context of the preparation of sermons or the instruction of catechumens. As they read a text they asked themselves, “What is the word of Christ in this text to my congregation? How can I shepherd my flock more effectively through preaching this text well? How is it addressing my heart as well as my mind? Where is this text calling me and my congregation to listen? To change? To repent? To grow?”

[In this essay I have freely drawn from my book, Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1998). I would encourage readers who wish to explore early Christian interpretation in more depth to consult this text.]

- See more at: <http://www.catalystresources.org/reading-scripture-with-the-early-church/#sthash.YT9TrDRL.dpuf>

Representative Father’s Hermeneutic

**Clement**

<http://creationwiki.org/Clement_of_Alexandria>

Clement of Alexandria (c.150 - c.215). Little is known about the life of Titus Flavius Clemens.[1] He succeeded the converted stoic philosopher Pantaenus[2] as head of the Christian Catechetical school in Alexandria, founded by the latter in the middle of the second century. He is regarded as an inferior theologian to his immediate successor to the post, Origen.[3]

Clement drew extensively on Philo, and **followed both Philo and Justin Martyr** in claiming that the Greek philosophers had plagiarised their teaching from Moses.[6] His reasons for doing this were twofold. First, he wished to counter the negative attitude that many uneducated Christians had towards Greek philosophy. That (in his opinion) would have greatly hindered its spread in the Hellenistic world. Secondly, he was faced with the attacks of educated Pagans, such as Celsus (late second century), who in his work True Doctrine[7] argued for the superiority of Greek culture, of which Judaism and Christianity were but shabby counterfeits.[8] On the contrary, Clement argued, Plato and the other philosophers had read the writings of Moses and the Prophets: whatever good could be found in their works was a result of divine inspiration and/or their use of biblical material.[9] This theory is often referred to as “the theft of the Greeks”. Lilla points out that Clement and Celsus shared the common conviction that the Greeks had inherited, not invented their superior culture and philosophy from the ancient civilisations of India, Persia, Babylon and Egypt.[10]

In extolling the divine character of the philosophy of Plato, Clement claims several times that Plato was dependent on Scripture,[11] as was Pythagoras (who is also warmly praised).[12] This is amply demonstrated in the reading list of the Catechetical school in Alexandria, which included the works of all the philosophers (except those of the Epicureans, who denied the existence of God), and was clearly modelled on the Platonic schools of the time.[13] He interpreted Greek philosophy in a biblical sense[14] and maintained that it had prepared the Hellenistic world for the ‘true philosophy’: the Christian gospel.[15] Philosophy gave Clement an the means by which he could penetrate beyond the literal sense of Scripture to reveal the true meaning, namely allegory.

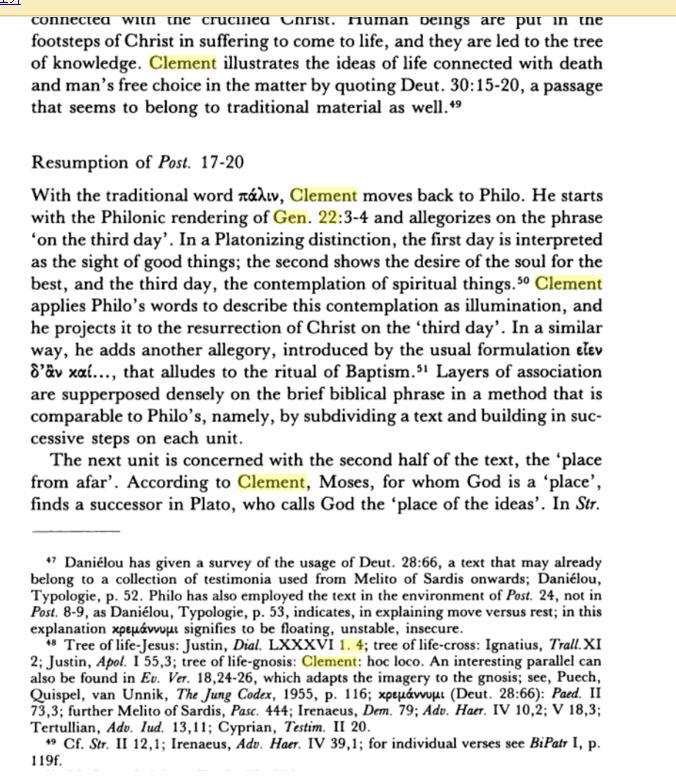
**Interpretation of Genesis**

Clement was **the first to suggest a definite theory of a threefold sense of Scripture**, which was further developed by his successor Origen. Clement wrote that: “The saviour taught the apostles, first of all in typical and mystic fashion, and then by parable and enigma, and thirdly when they were alone with him clearly without disguise.”[17] Unfortunately Clement never wrote a systematic account of his views on the Creation,[18] and the subject does not form a prominent theme in his works.[19] We can deduce from other passages that he followed Philo closely,[20] so I will not discuss the details of Philo’s account here (see Philo). Clement **denied** that the six days of creation were literal,[21] because all things were created by God at once. The ordering of the creation into days indicated the increasing value of each part, culminating in man.[22] Clement held that Adam was a historical figure[23] created in 5 592 BC,[24] but he denied that human mortality was the result of sin,[25] and the reality of the Tree of Life.[26] Adam fell because of lust, possibly because Adam and Eve “anticipated the time fixed by God for their marriage”.[27]

Three times Clement claims that the world was made out of nothing,[28] but the Greek phrase he employs refers to relative rather than absolute non-being - that is “unformed matter, so shadowy and vague that it cannot be said to have the status of ‘being’, which is imparted to it by the shaping hand of the Creator”.[29] He found support for this in Wisdom of Solomon 11:17[30] and in Plato.[31] Genesis 1:1-5 is for him,[32] as it was for Philo, an account of the creation of the unseen world of the spirit, and from verse 6 onwards that of the physical world.[33]

https://books.google.co.kr/books?id=pOc3AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA173&lpg=PA173&dq=clement,+gen+22+1-4&source=bl&ots=Bqbu6zZPc5&sig=E-nJtty4QpC9Dzt7nVJ95NDg48Y&hl=ko&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjssKnxu-nLAhWHGaYKHVV5C5oQ6AEIMTAD#v=onepage&q=clement%2C%20gen%2022%201-4&f=false

Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the Stromateis: An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model. Annewies Van Den Hoek



**Clement of Alexandria(**c. 150 – c. 215)

His Method

Tota Scriptura (the whole of Old Testament and New Testament)

Allegory

The Rule of Faith- If you will not believe, you will not understand.

**Clement of Alexandria, Grant, shibpdf. 55-56.**

It was Clement of Alexandria, however, who first among Christians

undertook to justify and explain the meaning of the allegorical

method. And yet his thought is hardly ever systematic. He is

not attempting to construct **a theological system** in the light of his

**interpretation of scripture**, but **simply to use scripture to illustrate**

**his already formed though**t. He had apparently come to Christianity

through teaching which he accepted without much question.

And when he tries to find this teaching expressed in the words of

scripture he begins to develop a theory of the symbolism of the Bible.

He believes that **all scripture speaks in a mysterious language**

**of symbols** (Str. 6.124.6), just as all those, barbarians and Greeks,

who have discussed theology have veiled the ultimate reasons

of things; they have transmitted the truth only through enigmas

and symbols, allegories, metaphors, and analogous figures (Str.

5.21.4). Moses, Plato, and the Egyptians who used hieroglyphics

spoke in the same way.

When Clement comes to the interpretation of scripture we find

that in practice his exegesis is **based on that of Philo.** Every word

and syllable of scripture has its meaning, but, since it is written

symbolically, the meaning is usually not the obvious one. Mondesert

has suggested that there are five possible senses in which

Clement might interpret the words of his text?’ (1) the historical

sense, in which he usually takes the stories of biblical history; (2)

the doctrinal sense, moral, religious, and theological, according to

which biblical statements are taken directly into his own theological

thought. These first two methods do not go far beyond literalism,

although the atmosphere of Clement’s thought prevents them

from being matter-of-fact. (3) The prophetic sense includes both

genuine prophecies and “types” which according to Christian tradi

tion Clement found in the Old Testament. (4) A philosophical

sense, which owes much to the Stoics and to Philo, includes both

‘cosmic’ and ‘psychological’ meanings of scripture. For example,

the tables of the Law symbolize the universe; Sarah and Hagar

symbolize true wisdom and pagan philosophy. (5) And finally

there is a mystical sense, according to which for instance Lot’s

wife symbolizes the attachment to earthly things, to impiety and to

the impious, which produces in the soul a kind of blindness in regard

to God and to his truth (Protr. 103.4, 1, 74 St.; 159 MondCsert).

Not all these senses are distinct: indeed, Clement is quite capable

of taking a text in two or three ways at the same time. But

any of them can be found in any text of scripture.

These are the senses in which scripture can be taken, according

to Clement. How is the reader to choose among them? **What guiding**

**principle** is to govern his or her interpretation? For one who.

was devoted to the church there could be only one answer: **Faith in**

**Christ**, in his person and in his work, is **the key to scripture.**’ The

Logos who spoke in the Old Testament finally revealed himself in

the New, and the Christian is able **to understand all scripture in the**

**light of the knowledge which Christ has given**. By such understanding

he or she **will eventually come to the true gnosis** which contains

the higher truths of the religion, and will become a Gnostic.

In Clement we find the allegorical method of Philo baptized into

Christ. Like his forerunners in Christianity, Clement makes use of

**a Christocentric interpretation of the scriptures**, especially the Old

Testament. His results are more varied than theirs because he has

broader interests. He comes from a higher intellectual atmosphere

than they, and what his treatment of scripture lacks in pietythough

he is always a devout Christian-it gains in breadth of human

and intellectual interest. Nevertheless he is not a great theologian.

He does not possess the intellectual rigour which produces

theological systems. His mind is not sufficiently precise and his interest

in any one subject is not sufficiently intense for him to produce

a thoroughgoing dogmatic work.

**Origen(**184/185 – 253/254)

**Scriptura is the inspired word of God**

**His most important mission is to interpret the Scripture**

**his 3 principles,**

**unity of the Scripture, nothing unnessary in the Scripture.**

**progressive revelation in the Scripture.**

**Dualism influenced pPato. emphasized knowledge.**

**Allegory influenced by Philo**

**emphasized the spiritual sense.**

**He did not reject the literal sense.**

**Influenced upon**

Eusebius of Caesarea, Ambrose of Milan(first introduced Origen into Western World),Hilary of Poiiers, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa.

He worte Hexapla (Ancient Greek: Ἑξαπλᾶ, "sixfold")

see

<https://www.originalbibles.com/hexapla-bible-1841-pdf/>

De ***Principiis. freedownload.***

[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0185-0254,\_Origenes,\_De\_principiis\_[Schaff],\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0185-0254,_Origenes,_De_principiis_%5bSchaff%5d,_EN.pdf)

<http://kfcmtf.upol.cz/uploads/Orig/Origen-On_First_Principles-0Intro.pdf>

**Grant, shibpdf. 56-62**

Origen is the most distinguished member of the Alexandrian

school, and it is he who sets forth most thoroughly and adequately

the principles of Christian allegorization.8 He was the first Alexandrian

to teach theology under the auspices of the church. The

fourth book of his De Principiis deals with the inspiration and interpretation

of scripture. At the beginning he undertakes to prove

briefly the fact of the inspiration of scripture. There are two points

to be made: (1) the success of the Christian movement, which Jesus

predicted, shows its superhuman nature; and (2) “after the advent

of Jesus the inspiration of the prophetic words and the spiritual

nature of Moses’ law came to light.” The fulfillment of

prophecy is the proof of its inspiration. At this point Origen turns

to the question of the interpretation of scripture. The fundamental

principle underlying Origen’s argument is this:

Because the principal aim was to announce the connection that exists

among spiritual events, those that have already happened and those

that are yet to come to pass, whenever the Word found that things

which had happened in history could be harmonized with these

mystical events he used them, concealing from the multitude their

deeper meaning. But wherever in the narrative the accomplishment

of some particular deeds, which had been previously recorded for

the sake of their more mystical meanings, did not correspond with

the sequence of the intellectual truths, the scripture wove into the

story something which did not happen, occasionally something

which could not happen, and occasionally something which might

have happened but in fact did not [De Pr. 4.2.91.

The purpose of scripture is the revelation of “intellectual truths”

rather than of God’s working in history. Sometimes, indeed, the

“history” merely conceals the truths. The principle applies to both

Testaments.

The examples which he gives in support of this principle make

most interesting reading. In the Old Testament Origen finds incredible

the picture of the first three “days” of creation without

sun, moon, and stars; the “farming” activity of God in “planting” a

garden; the concept of a literal tree of “good and evil”; God’s

“walking” in the garden; and Cain’s “going out” from the “face” of

God. There are “thousands” of such instances.

Even the gospels are full of passages of this kind, as when the devil

takes Jesus up into a high mountain in order to show him from

thence the kingdoms of the whole world and the glory of them

(Matt. 4:8). For what man who does not read such passages care

fully would fail to condemn those who believe that with the eye of

the flesh, which requires a great height to enable us to perceive what

is below and at our feet, the kingdoms of the Persians, Scythians,

Indians and Parthians were seen, and the manner in which their rulers

are glorified by men? And the careful reader will detect thousands

of other passages in the gospels like this, which will convince

him that events which did not take place at all are woven into the records

of what literally did happen [De Pr. 4.3.1.1.

Moreover, much of the legislation in both Testaments cannot be

literally observed. Elsewhere Origen is strongly impressed with the

discrepancies between the gospels, and says that historical exegesis

of them is impossible; the student will have to rely arbitrarily

on one of them, not venturing to reject wholly the belief conceming

our Lord, or else accept the four and say that their truth is not

in the material letter (In Ev. Zoh. 10.3). Here, however, he is careful

to state that some things in scripture do have a literal meaning;

“the passages which are historically true far outnumber those [historically

untrue] which are composed with purely spiritual meanings”

(De Pr. 4.3.4.). But among his examples he gives none from

the New Testament, except of commandments of Jesus which are

to be obeyed.

At the conclusion of his discussion of impossibilities Origen

provides his readers with some detailed advice on the interpretation

of scripture. What is to be done in the case of difficult and

ambiguous passages?

The exact reader will hesitate in regard to some passages, finding

himself unable to decide without considerable investigation whether

a particular incident, believed to be history, actually happened or

not. Accordingly he who reads in an exact manner must, in obedience

to the Savior’s precept which says, “Search the scriptures”

[John 5:39], carefully investigate how far the literal meaning is true

and how far it is impossible, and to the utmost of his power must

trace out from the use of similar expressions the meaning scattered

everywhere throughout the scriptures of that which when taken literally

is impossible [De Pr. 4.3.5.1.

All scripture has a spiritual meaning; not all has a literal meaning.

And in any event, complete understanding of the mysteries of

scripture is impossible. When St. Paul cries out, “How unsearchable

are his judgments and his ways are past finding out” (Rom.

11:33), he does not say that his ways are hard to search out, but

that they cannot be searched out at all.

For however far one may advance in the search and make progress

through an increasingly earnest study, even when aided and enlightened

in mind by God’s grace,he will never be able to reach the final

goal of his inquiries [De Pr. 4.3.14.1.

In his entire treatment of the allegorical method Origen is concerned

to stress the ultimate mystery contained in scripture. The

Bible speaks to us only in a language of symbols. And its interpretation

requires a gift of divine grace. Scripture itself reveals that it

is to be understood in a multiplicity of senses, for according to the

Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament which all the

Greek fathers used, Proverbs 22:2Of. reads as follows:

Do thou Portray them threefold in counsel and knowledge, that thou

mayst answer words of truth to those who question thee [De Pr.

4.2.4.1.

Origen interprets this passage in the light of Paul’s threefold analysis

of human personality (1 Thess. 5:23) into “spirit, soul, and

body,” and concludes that there is a “bodily” or literal sense, a

“soul” or moral sense, and a “spiritual” or allegorical-mystical

sense in scripture. In actual practice, however, Origen rarely

makes use of the moral sense as distinct from the other two senses,

and he ordinarily distinguishes merely between the “letter” and the

“spirit” (2 Cor. 3:6).9

Why is Origen so eager to exclude the literal meaning of scripture?

We must remember that there is a difference between his understanding

of the literal meaning and ours. What he means by

“literal” is the interpretation placed on scripture by the simplest of

simple believers, those who cannot understand the meaning of

metaphors, parables, or allegories, and who insist that every detail

in them is literally true. Such people invariably understand poetry

as prose. They believe, for example, in the literal reality of the

heavenly Jerusalem described in the Apocalypse of John. Origen’s

interpretations are in part polemic against them. They would not

be able to understand a literary analysis of figurative language, and

Origen is compelled to insist on figures hidden behind every verse

indeed every word and syllable, of scripture. We can see that his

method is not altogether satisfactory; it could lead to dangerous excesses;

but for its time it was invaluable.

How is the interpreter to be sure that his or her exegesis is correct?

We should expect to find Origen more hesitant, less certain of

the accuracy of his daring allegorical interpretations than he actually

is. And it is worth observing that, according to ziillig, there are

no examples in his writings where he states that his interpretation is

absolutely certain. lo Nevertheless, he knows that the exegete must

pray for guidance from God, and he must work diligently as best

he can. Origen also gives several practical suggestions. Paul

teaches us to collect and compare one spiritual truth with others (1

Cor. 2:3); we must observe the use of words; we should compare

similar texts when one is (apparently) literal and the others spiritual;

and we must be guided by the rule of faith.” But without the

allegorical method we are likely to make many mistakes.

While Origen constantly tries to express what he regards as the

orthodox Christian faith, the philosophical aids to faith with which

he is so much occupied tend to alter the content of that faith. We

may suppose that unlike Irenaeus and other fathers of the western

church Origen is not eager to apply the rule of faith as an exegetical

norm. He relies far more on individual scholarship and intelligence

than on any consensus of opinion. Like other Alexandrians,

he is a somewhat self-conscious intellectual. For this reason it was

difficult for the church to accept wholeheartedly all the implications

of his theory of allegory.

His influence on later exegesis was very great. While he was

bitterly attacked not only by the exegetical school of Antioch but

also by such men as Jerome and Augustine, his own pupils continued

his work, and even those who attacked him most vigorously

were often influenced by his thought. Jerome is an example of this

ambivalent attitude; at first a strong Origenist, he later became

Origen’s fiercest opponent. Origen’s influence on medieval allegorists

though indirect is incalculable. For the earlier Greek church

some of the most important of his writings on exegetical subjects

were collected by Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus under

the title Philoculiu.

How is the school of Alexandria, with Origen its most illustrious

representative, related to the general history of interpretation?

Harnack scornfully dismissed Origen’s work with the epithet “biblical

alchemy”; and there have been many students of the fathers

who agreed with him. It may also be said that his method is not as

rational as we might desire, or as he thought it was. His classifications

are not really convincing, and his “spiritual” interpretations

are highly subjective. But we can admit today that objectivity in

the interpretation of any work of the human spirit is an elusive

aim; the interpreter always reads something of his own thought

into what he interprets, and it is well for him if his own personality

be as nearly Christian as Origen’s was. Moreover, we must consider

the circumstances under which Origen wrote. The Christocentric

typology of St. Paul was no longer a practicable method of

interpretation in the city of Alexandria. Celsus had already attacked

the immorality and triviality of the scriptures, and Porphyry

was soon to do so. Christians were eager to be intellectually respectable;

and most philosophical schools accepted the allegorical

method. The results of Origen’s teaching were highly satisfactory:

A great many heretics, and not a few of the most distinguished philosophers,

studied under him diligently, receiving instruction from

him not only in divine things, but also in secular philosophy. For

when he perceived that any persons had superior intelligence he instructed

them also in philosophic branches-in geometry, arithmetic,

and other preparatory studies-and then advanced to the systems

of the philosophers and explained their writings. And he made

observations and comments upon each of them, so that he became

celebrated as a great philosopher even among the Greeks themselves.

And he instructed many of the less learned in elementary

subjects (encyclia), saying that these would be no small help to them

in the study and understanding of the divine scriptures. On this account

he considered it especially necessary for himself to be skilled

in secular and philosophic learning [Eusebius, Hist. cccl. 6.18.2ff.,

McGiffert] .

In this description of Origen’s work at Alexandria we see a whole

Program of Christian education. It is an answer to Celsus’s charge

that Christians do not wish to give or to receive a reason for their

belief, that they keep repeating “Do not examine, but believe”

(Origen, Con. Cels. 1.9). Origen, like other Christians of his time,

indeed every word and syllable, of scripture. We can see that his

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him not only in divine things, but also in secular philosophy. For

when he perceived that any persons had superior intelligence he instructed

them also in philosophic branches-in geometry, arithmetic,

and other preparatory studies-and then advanced to the systems

of the philosophers and explained their writings. And he made

observations and comments upon each of them, so that he became

celebrated as a great philosopher even among the Greeks themselves.

And he instructed many of the less learned in elementary

subjects (encyclia), saying that these would be no small help to them

in the study and understanding of the divine scriptures. On this account

he considered it especially necessary for himself to be skilled

in secular and philosophic learning [Eusebius, Hist. cccl. 6.18.2ff.,

McGiffert] .

In this description of Origen’s work at Alexandria we see a whole

Program of Christian education. It is an answer to Celsus’s charge

that Christians do not wish to give or to receive a reason for their

belief, that they keep repeating “Do not examine, but believe”

(Origen, Con. Cels. 1.9). Origen, like other Christians of his time,

distinguishes between the wisdom of the world and true wisdom;

he also claims that the Christian is not to be a fool but to be a fool

towards the wisdom of the world. “It is of much more importance

to give our assent to doctrines upon grounds of reason and wisdom

than on that of simple faith’ (ibid., 1.13).

The allegorical method, at a critical moment in Christian history,

made it possible to uphold the rationality of Christian faith. It

was used to prevent obscurantism. And though we may question

not only its assumptions but also its results, we must not forget

what we owe to it. We are not indebted so much to the method itself

as to the spirit of those who employed it. The method alone is

lifeless; the spirit of the interpreter makes the text live.

**Hermeneutic of Origen**

Origen's Hermeneutic, <http://creationwiki.org/Origen>

Origen reasoned in the 4th book of his treatise **On First Principles** that, if the Bible is inspired by God, then it cannot be irrelevant, unworthy of God, or simply crude. If it ever appears to be in error then we have obviously missed its deeper meaning.[4] Origen wrote that the “literalists” of his day that “**they attack allegorical interpretation** and want to teach that divine Scripture has nothing deeper than the text allows”.[5] “Literalists,” he complained, “believe such things about [God] as would not be believed of the most savage and unjust of men”.[6] These ‘Literalists’ misunderstood the meaning of poetry, metaphors, parables and figures of speech and had no concept of the need to understand what the original author of the text was seeking to express to his audience.[7] It is therefore not surprising that they arrived at interpretations that Origen found offensive and caused him react against their definition of the ‘literal meaning'.[8] He was prepared to tolerate these unintellectual believers, though he did find them an embarrassment when explaining Christianity to sophisticated pagans. Nonetheless, he believed that if they were genuine in their simplicity then the literal meaning of the Gospels was sufficient for salvation.[9] There was a second group of ‘literalists’ whom Origen was much less tolerant towards: the Judaisers. By means of a more sophisticated literalism this group attempted to continue obedience to the Law within the Christian Church.[10]

Unlike the ‘non-intellectual’ believers of his day Origen believed that the Bible

“

...contains three levels of meaning, corresponding to the threefold Pauline (and Platonic) division of a person into body, soul and spirit. The bodily level of Scripture, the bare letter, is normally helpful as it stands to meet the needs of the more **simple**. The psychic level, corresponding to the soul, is for **making progress in perfection**.… [The] spiritual interpretation deals with **‘unspeakable mysteries**’ so as to make humanity a “partaker of all the doctrines of the Spirit’s counsel”.[11]

<http://www.dacb.org/stories/egypt/origen_.html>

Biblical studies took the paramount place in the scheme of Origen's work. It has been said that he lived in the Bible to the extent that no one else before Luther rivalled him. The great mass of his literary work was concerned largely with Biblical criticism and exposition, the Hexapla occupying a central place.

The Hexapla was not the only work of criticism which Origen undertook. He examined particular problems such as the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This letter was unlike those of St. Paul. "But who wrote the epistle," Origen declared, "in truth God knows." He did mention nevertheless, that Clement of Rome and Luke had both been named as possible authors.

Origen's critical labours on the text of the Bible formed the basis of his exegetical work. He wrote a commentary on almost every book of the Bible. In his exposition he vindicated t**he allegorical method** against the literalist method and established two canons of interpretation, namely that the Bible is a unity, every text needing to be treated in the light of the teaching of the Bible as a whole, and that the key to every passage in the Old and New Testament alike is Christ. For Origen every text in the Bible could be read at three levels,--the literal, the moral and the spiritual level.

(i) The literal meaning commonly was useful but on occasion it had to be **set aside.** For instance, Christ could **not have seen** "all the kingdoms of the world," and, at a literal level, we can make **nothing** of the text, "Let the dead bury their dead."

(ii) The moral meaning involved drawing out some lesson for the **edification of ordinary Christians.**

(iii) Origen maintained that the primary purpose of Scripture was to convey **spiritual truth**. He drew here upon his understanding of Platonism which taught that beyond the visible world lay the spiritual world--of which all things here are an image and a reflection. For Origen everything in the Bible in a similar way reflected the spiritual order beyond the ordinary material world. Thus, for instance, Jerusalem, Zion, Carmel, and a host of other places, ceased to be geographical locations and expressions and became **mirrors of heavenly truth.**

Indeed Origen's surprisingly modern canons of interpretation saved the method from some of its vagaries. Nevertheless, the great church historian of the twentieth century, Von Campenhausen commented quite aptly that Origen "remains the prisoner of the assumptions of his Platonising and Gnosticising outlook" in his exegetical work (see H. Von Campenhausen, The Fathers of the Greek Church p. 49).

**Origen's Hermeneutic**

<http://creationwiki.org/Origen#Origen.27s_Hermeneutic>

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”

It has often been pointed out that Origen was not consistent in the distinction he made between the three levels of Scripture. In reality he only discussed two levels - those of the letter and the spirit.[12] Most modern theologians and Bible students seek to identify the meaning God intended a biblical text to have to its original audience. From this they derive its contemporary application, which (to be considered valid) must be linked to the text’s original meaning.[13] For Origen the universal application - what the text teaches about Christ and how the reader can become like Him - was the original meaning of the text.[14] If a text did not appear to be speaking about how you might advance towards perfection then you had misunderstood it. This was the key that showed Origen that he had interpreted a text correctly. To put it simply: if he could make a passage speak in this way then he was confident that he had uncovered its true ‘spiritual’ meaning. Some passages yielded such an application easily; others required more spiritual insight and, sometimes, the rejection of the historical meaning. It was this ‘insight’ that the ‘literalists’ (those who saw only the ‘letter’) lacked.

There are several specific reasons that we can deduce from Origen’s writings that led him to the conclusion that the straightforward historical meaning of many passages of Scripture were simply not true.[15] Most can be found in Book 4 of On First Principles.

\* Where a passage contradicts his eschatology. Origen’s rejection of some passages, such as Zech. 9:10; Isa. 7:15; 11:6-7, ‘obviously’ which cannot be intended literally,[16] seems to have been based upon his understanding of the end times (eschatology). Most early Christian writers were pre-millennialists and believed in a literal 1,000 year rule of Christ on earth.[17] Opposition to such an idea arose due to the excessive millennial claims of the Montanists in the second century, attempts to calculate the date of Christ’s Return,[18] and in response to Gnostic ridicule of the doctrine.[19] Origen rejected such a carnal belief:[20] his views greatly influencing later writers, notably Eusebius of Caesarea.[21] We are faced with a ‘chicken and the egg’ scenario in attempting to decide if his eschatology influenced his choice of hermeneutic or vice versa.

\* He used a defective translation in the Septuagint.[22] There are several examples of this in On First Principles 4.1.17. Origen argues that as there is no such thing as a ‘goat-stag’ (Deut. 14:5 LXX) and that a ‘griffin’ (Lev. 11:13; Deut. 14:12 LXX) cannot be subdued by man. The correct translations for these creatures are ‘mountain goat’ and ‘vulture’ respectively (see NIV). He argues that it is impossible to observe Exodus 16:29 literally, “...for no living being is able to sit throughout a whole day, and remain without moving from the sitting position”.[23] The solution to this problem seems obvious to us, the correct reading being: “stay where he is” rather than ”sit”.

In his second Homily on Exodus Origen finds a problem with Exodus 1:21 which reads in his Bible: “Because the midwives feared God, they made houses for themselves.” This leads him to comment:

“

**This statement makes no sense according to the letter.** For what is the relationship that the text should say, “Because the midwives feared God, they made houses for themselves.” ?It is as if a house is built because God is feared. If this be taken as it stands written, not only does it appear to lack logic, but also to be inane. But if you should see how the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, teaching the fear of God, make the houses of the Church and fill the whole earth with houses of prayer, then what is written will appear to have been written rationally.”[24]

”

Of course the solution becomes obvious when one translates the Greek word oikias correctly in this context as “families” instead of “houses”. The verse then reads: “And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.” (NIV).

\* He failed to place himself in the literal context: literary, psychological or moral. (A relatively rare occurrence.)[25]

\* He considered the text useless, contrary to Christ’s precepts or impossible.[26] Origen rejects Matthew 5:29 & 39 in On First Principles 4.1.18 because they seem to him impossible.[27] There he writes that the command that the right cheek should be struck is most incredible, because everyone who strikes (unless he happens to have some bodily defect) strikes the left cheek with his right hand.

Likewise in his Commentary on Romans (2.9) Origen rejects the Mosaic command of circumcision (Lev. 12:3):

“

Now the law of nature can be in harmony with the law of Moses according to the spirit, not according to the letter. For what natural sense is there in, for example, the command to circumcise a child on the eighth day.[28]

”

There are, however, good medical reasons why circumcision was to be carried out on the eighth day that have only been recognised relatively recently with the discovery of blood clotting agents. In similar vein Origen argued “...what could be more irrational than (to take literally the injunction), “Salute no man by the way,” which simple persons think the Saviour enjoined the apostles?”[29]

\* He has inadequate knowledge of Hebrew civilisation.[30]

\* He was too literal in his thinking and rejected what are obviously figures of speech, especially anthropomorphic language. For example:

“

When the psalmist declares that God’s truth ‘reaches to the clouds’, Origen feels constrained to insist that clouds cannot be intended literally in such a saying; they must be interpreted spiritually of those who are obedient to the word of God. The literal interpretation of Zech. 4:10 would imply that God had seven bodily eyes.[31]

”

When discussing Exodus 21:22-25 where Origen is at a loss to explain how an unborn child can lose an eye or have his/her teeth knocked out. How, he asks, can a pregnant woman be burnt while witnessing a fight between two men?[32] His over-literal understanding does not consider that it is the principle of just - but not excessive punishment - that is being established here.

\* Because Paul apparently rejected a text’s ‘literal’ meaning.[33] Several instances in the New Testament are cited by Origen as precedents for rejecting a text’s historical meaning, e.g. 1 Corinthians 9:9-10 (Deut. 25:4);[34] 1 Corinthians 10:4, 11,[35] and Galatians 4:21-24.[36] In all these cases there are good reasons for arguing that Paul did not see the Old Testament references as having no historic meaning. Origen then extends this precedent to scriptures not mentioned by Paul, for example:

“

Do you think these are the only words related to wells? Jacob also goes to a well and finds Rachel there. There Rachel becomes known to him as “good in her eyes and beautiful in appearance.” [Cf. Gen. 29:17] But Moses finds Sephora, the daughter of Raguel, at a well. [Cf. Exod. 2:15]

Are you not yet moved to understand that these words are spoken spiritually? Or do you think that it always happens by chance that the patriarchs go to wells and obtain their marriages at waters? He who thinks this way is “a sensual man” and “does not perceive these things which are of the spirit of God.” [Cf. 1 Cor. 2:14] But let him who wishes remain in these understandings, let him remain “a sensual man.” I, following Paul the apostle, say that these things are “allegories” [cf. Gal. 4:24] and I say that the marriages of the saints are the union of the soul with the word of God: “For he who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit.”[37]

”

\* He had an inadequate grasp of God’s progressive self-revelation.[38] How, he argues, can even the simplest of believers explain literally the meaning of the account of Lot lying with his daughters? How could Abraham have had two wives; two sisters be married to Jacob, and two handmaids be given to him by his wives?[39] Are not all these things forbidden in the Law?[40] Despite what Origen wrote these events are explicable as historical events, not condoned by God, which took place before the Law was given.

None of the errors listed above were restricted to Origen. Many other ancient, and indeed some modern writers have made the same mistakes. Despite his reservations regarding the historical meaning of a text, Origen was at times prepared even to defend the literal meaning, such as that of Noah’s Ark[41] and the Flood[42]. However, he usually fails to connect the spiritual interpretation to the straightforward historical sense.[43] For him it was “almost accidental that the Bible contained much true history. The soul within the body of Scripture was the important thing.”[44] The motivation behind Origen’s exegesis was the desire that his audience see and hear Christ in the Scriptures and be transformed through that experience.[45] We might quibble with his methodology, but surely not with his intention. It is also worth noting that Origen believed that the passages of Scripture that are historically true far outnumbered those which have a purely spiritual meaning.[46]



**L 6**

**Ambrose**

**Augustine**

**Theodore of Mopsuestia**

Theodore the Interpreter (ca. 350 – 428) was bishop of Mopsuestia (as Theodore II) from 392 to 428 AD. He is also known as Theodore of Antioch, from the place of his birth and presbyterate. He is the best known representative of the middle School of Antioch of hermeneutics.

**Chrysostom**

**John Chrysostom (/ˈkrɪsəstəm, krɪˈsɒstəm/; Greek: Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος), c. 349 – 407,[5] Archbishop of Constantinople, was an important Early Church Father. He is known for his preaching and public speaking, his denunciation of abuse of authority[6] by both ecclesiastical and political leaders, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, and his ascetic sensibilities. The epithet Χρυσόστομος (Chrysostomos, anglicized as Chrysostom) means "golden-mouthed" in Greek and denotes his celebrated eloquence.[2][7]**

**He is honored as a saint in the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic churches, as well as in some others. The Eastern Orthodox, together with the Byzantine Catholics, hold him in special regard as one of the Three Holy Hierarchs (alongside Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus). The feast days of John Chrysostom in the Eastern Orthodox Church are 13 November and 27 January. In the Roman Catholic Church he is recognized as a Doctor of the Church and commemorated on 13 September. Other churches of the Western tradition, including some Anglican provinces and some Lutheran churches, also commemorate him on 13 September. However, certain Lutheran churches and Anglican provinces commemorate him on the traditional Eastern feast day of 27 January. The Coptic Church also recognizes him as a saint (with feast days on 16 Thout and 17 Hathor).[8]**

**reference**

The great humanist Erasmus described John Chrysostom‘s interpretative art usingthis exact metaphor: ―There is nothing so hidden in the depths of Sacred literaturethat Chrysostom could not bring forth with dramatic clarity and make it accessibleto the common people. Chris L. de Wet, University of South Africa

Robert L. Plummer

Parables in the Gospels: History of Interpretation and Hermeneutical Guidelines1

<http://www.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2009/10/sbjt_v13_n3_plummer.pdf>

resulted in significant shifts in the understanding of parables. The interpretation of parables is surveyed in five historical periods below. Jesus’ Original Setting and the Writing of the Gospels At the least, we can say that Jesus and the inspired Gospel authors properly understood his parables. Thus, when Jesus gives an explanation of his own parables (Matt 13:36–43; Mark 4:13–20), or the Gospel authors give contextual clues as to the meaning of the parables (e.g., Luke 10:29; 15:1–2), those interpretations are definitive. It is important to note that while Jesus used parables to illustrate truth (Mark 12:12; Luke 10:36–37), he also used parables to conceal truth and increase the culpability of his hard-hearted opponents (Mark 4:10–12, 33–34; cf. 2 Thess 2:11–12).4 The Early Church to the Reformation Very soon after the completion of the New Testament, early Christians began interpreting the text allegorically. That is, they proposed many allegorical meanings unintended by the biblical authors. For example, every early post-New Testament interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) explains the story as an allegorical message of salvation, with the Good Samaritan signifying Jesus. In the text, however, Jesus clearly tells the story to answer a Jewish legal expert’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). A typical example of such allegorical interpretation is below. The Par able of the Good Samaritan, as interpreted by Origen (ad 185–254)5 Parable Details Allegorical Explanations Man going down to Adam Jericho Jerusalem Paradise Jericho The world Robbers Hostile powers (John 10:8) Priest The Law Levite The Prophets Samaritan Christ Wounds Disobedience, vices, and sin Beast (Donkey) The Lord’s body, which bears our sins Stable (Inn) The Church Two Denarii Knowledge of the Father and the Son Manager of the Head of the Church “to Stable (Innkeeper) whom its care has been entrusted” (guardian angel) Promised Return of Savior’s Second Coming the Samaritan Early Christians interpreted parables in this way for several reasons: (1) Jesus himself explains at least a few details of his parables allegorically (Mark 4:13–20; Matt 13:36–43). If Jesus can do this, why not his followers? (2) Allegory was a common approach to interpreting religious texts in the Greco-Roman world. Some early Christians uncritically adopted some of the interpretive methods of their day. (3) Allegorical interpretation emphasizes the interpreter’s access to the “secret” meaning of the parables. Such a method is inevitably attractive to humans who have a propensity towards the secretive and conspiratorial.

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