

## Origen, Didymus and the Literal Sense

[Origen, Didymus and Theodore on the Literal Sense] [?]

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Did the fathers distinguish between typology and allegory? The absence of the word *typologia* from both Liddell and Scott's *Greek Lexicon* and Lampe's *Patristic Lexicon* suggests that they had no vocabulary for doing so; most discussions therefore assume that if we invoke the distinction it will be for our own heuristic purposes, whether we are extolling the typological method of Antioch at the expense of Alexandrian allegoresis or inquiring which of these methods corresponds to the soul and which to the Spirit of Scripture in Origen's *On First Principles*. And of course, the first approach loses even its heuristic value if we join the many scholars who have given up the (admittedly modern) dichotomy between the Antiochene and the Alexandrian traditions of exegesis.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I shall maintain that there were indeed two traditions, and that Alexandria was indeed more hospitable than Antioch both to the term *allêgoria* and to the practices that it denoted, while there were some among the Antiochenes who contrasted the undesirable practice of allegory with the licit use of types. I shall none the less conclude that while the Alexandrians were indifferent to this distinction, they were also seldom vulnerable to the strictures which were passed on nameless allegorists by Theodore of Mopsuestia, and were commonly as wary as he was of substituting new terms for those of the text when their aim was to ascertain its primary and mandatory sense.

### 1. Type vs Allegory in the Antiochene Tradition

We have at least one clear statement, from an exegete of influence and distinction, that the

<sup>1</sup> For judicious criticism of this dichotomy, see Frances M. YOUNG, *Alexandrian and Antiochene Exegesis*, in: Alan J. HAUSER/Duane F. WATSON (eds.), *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1: The Ancient Period, Grand Rapids MI 2003, 334–354.

use of types is not in normal parlance an allegory. We might be surprised indeed, in view of the current profusion of studies on the work of John Chrysostom, that this important text has not been quoted more often: “He has used the word *allêgoria* loosely (*katachrêstikôs*) to denote the type. What he is saying is this: ‘the historical truth is as given, but it does not signify only that which is obvious.’ Hence he has given it the name allegory.”<sup>2</sup> Chrysostom seems to foresee that his readers will need some assurance that Paul is not denying the historical veracity of the Old Testament; he also foresees that they will have no objection to the figurative reading of a historical text so long as its veracity is affirmed.

Theodoret of Cyrus, whose comments on Paul’s letters read at times like abridgements of Chrysostom, addresses the fears of his audience more directly by saying that Paul does not disavow the history but explains what is prefigured (*protupôthenta*) in the Biblical narrative. Where Chrysostom used the noun *allêgoria*, Theodoret reproduces Paul’s own term *allêgoroumena* – not the noun but the participle, not a mode of writing but a mode of appropriation, or as Theodoret himself has it, of “conceiving otherwise.”<sup>3</sup> This is not semantically identical with Marius Victorinus’ definition of allegory as the trope whereby one thing is said and another is intended.<sup>4</sup> This implies that the plain sense should be discarded in favour of the hidden sense, whereas Theodoret plainly understands Paul to mean that the figurative (and in this case higher) sense of the Scriptures is to be embraced alongside the literal one.

## 2. Theodore vs Alexandria?

John Chrysostom lightly intimates that ‘allegory’ is not the proper term for exegesis when performed on Christian principles; his audacious friend and fellow-bishop, Theodore of Mopsuestia, makes Gal. 4:24 the pretext for a salvo against an abuse of Paul’s vocabulary, which he evidently believes to be all too common:

*Qui studium multum habent intervertere sensus divinarum scripturarum et omnia quae illuc posita sunt intercipere, fabulas vero quasdam ineptas ex se configere et allegoriae nomen suae ponere desipientiae; hanc vocem apostoli abutentes, quasi qui hinc videantur sumpsisse potestatem ut et*

<sup>2</sup> John Chrysostom, comm. in Gal. ### (IV p. 75 FIELD). Translations are mine throughout this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, comm. in Gal. ### (PG 82, ###).

<sup>4</sup> Marius Victorinus, comm. in Gal. II (p. 54 LOCHER). Cf. Quintilian, inst. VIII 6,44.

*omnes intellectus divinae exterminent scripturae, eo quod secundum apostolum per allegoriam dicere nituntur, et ipsi non intellegentes quantum differt quod ab illis et ab apostolo hoc in loco dictum sit.*

“There are some who make it their business to pervert the meaning of the divine Scriptures and to steal away all that is contained in them, or rather to devise some absurd conceits of their own while giving the name of allegory to their ravings. Abusing this locution of the apostle’s as if they might seem to derive from it the power to annul every tenet of the divine Scripture, they undertake to speak *through allegory* after the manner of the apostle; yet they themselves fail to perceive how great a difference there is between their own discourse and that of the apostle. For the apostle does not deny the history or pick apart the events of the distant past.”<sup>5</sup>

Theodore’s text is Gal. 4:24, “these things are *allêgoroumena*.” He does not name the objects of his jeremiad – a term that we use advisedly, as it is frequently as hard to tell when the pastoral application of a text becomes allegoretic as to distinguish the genuine prophet from the impostor. From the diatribe that follows we grasp that Theodore was particularly incensed by those who denied the historicity of Adam and Eve, thereby doing away with the very narrative that explains the necessity of the Incarnation. Who then, on their understanding, was the first man? How could an imaginary being be disobedient, and whence, but for his crime, came the sentence of death on the human race? Once they dispense with the letter of the text, by what rule do they propose to elucidate the deeper sense? By their own powers of spiritual discernment, no doubt, but how do we, who *ex hypothesi* lack that discernment, know how to test the spirits?

Henry Swete in his commentary quotes three texts from Origen.<sup>6</sup> *Homilies on Genesis* 2,9 [?] asserts that the husbandry of God is incorporeal, *Homilies on Genesis* 2,15 [?] [homily 2 has only 6 paragraphs; or do you mean homily 1?] that the church is the paradise of the saints, and *On First Principles* IV 3,1 that only a fool would fail to see the planting of Eden as an anthropomorphic figure of speech. Yet none of these passages says that there was no such person as Adam, and the existence of such a person seems to be assumed in the *Commentary on Romans*; none of them even denies that, by divine *fiat*, there is such a place as Eden, and indeed we read at *On First Principles* II 11,6 that there is such a place on earth even now, accessible only to souls that have shed the coil of flesh and put on incorruptible bodies.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, comm. in Gal. ### (I p. 73 SWETE).

<sup>6</sup> Henry B. SWETE (ed.), *Theodori Episcopi Mopsuestini in Beati Pauli Epistolas Commentarii*, Cambridge 1880, vol. 1, 75 n. 1.

<sup>7</sup> See Mark J. EDWARDS, Origen on Paradise: A Response to Peter Martens, in: ZAC 23 (2019) 163–185, replying to Peter W. MARTENS, Origen’s Doctrine of Pre-Existence and the Opening Chapters of Genesis, in: ZAC 16 (2012) 516–549. In his response to me (ZAC 23, 186–200), Martens produces numerous texts which he omitted from his previous discussion; few of these, however, could be taken by anyone to imply that the

Origen ranks the soul above the body yet holds the body to be a precondition of individuation for the soul; so too he ranks the spiritual above the literal sense of Scripture, but never undertakes to reveal the spirit without close scrutiny of the letter. He may have pronounced it absurd that God should sew hides for Adam and Eve, but it was only Epiphanius [actually: Methodius, see footnote 8] who inferred that he thought the whole narrative a fable.<sup>8</sup> While Theodore certainly deprecates the same error, he has laid it at no-one's door.

Origen was of course now out of hearing, but his enemies in Theodore's day were legion. The accusation that he had allowed history to be swallowed by allegory date at least from the beginning of the fourth century; one of his harshest assailants, Bishop Eustathius of Antioch, had anticipated Theodore's insistence that we must call a fig a fig.<sup>9</sup> If Theodore had read him at length, however, he would have noticed that his predecessor took as much offence at Origen's naïveté as at his flights of fancy. It was Origen who argued that the raising of Samuel by the Witch of Endor was no diabolic illusion but a real act of necromancy. Conversely it was Eustathius who undertook to demonstrate the contrary by a close reading of the text, a technique that Origen had frequently employed to prove the presence of allegory.<sup>10</sup> It would not be easy to say whether he or Eustathius is the more literal in his handling of this episode, but it is an acknowledged fact that many of Origen's most whimsical teachings, whether or not we call them allegories, are supported by a reading of the text *au pied de la lettre*. A survey of the uses to which he put the literal sense is thus a necessary preface to an appraisal of his figurative readings, which meet the Eustathian dictum that a fig is a fig with the premiss that a scriptural fig can connote nothing less than the highest possible object of that term.

paradise of Adam or of the saints is incorporeal. Some locate it on another earth (or, as I would say, a homonymous earth), while others show that he was capable of allegorizing paradise, as he allegorizes all historical matter in the Old Testament, but do not prove that he rejected the existence of a somatic paradise any more than he rejects the existence of a historical Jeremiah.

<sup>8</sup> Epiphanius, haer. 64,31–33 (GCS Epiph. 2, 449–453) [within the long quote from Methodius]. See further Outi LEHTIPUU, *Debates over the Resurrection of the Dead: Constructing Early Christian Identity*, Oxford 2015, 142–146.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Eusebius of Emesa, arb. fic. 8 (I p. 261 BUYTAERT), cited by Robert E. WINN, *Eusebius of Emesa: Church and Theology in the Mid-Fourth Century*, Washington D.C. 2011, 79 n. 62. [Does Eusebius refer to Eustathius? It's slightly puzzling that to the name Eustathius in the text Eusebius who delivered a homily on the fig, is referenced.]

<sup>10</sup> See *The Belly-Mother of Endor*, ed. and trans. by Rowan M. GREER/Margaret M. MITCHELL, Atlanta GA 2007; *Origenes, Die Homilien zum Ersten Buch Samuel*, ed. and trans. by Alfons FÜRST (OWD 7), Berlin et al. 2014, 60–101. [I argue that Origen sticks much more to the literal sense of this passage than nearly all other Patristic exegetes.]

### 3. Origen the Literalist

For Origen the literal sense of Scripture has at least three functions,<sup>11</sup> which I would characterise as apologetic, propaedeutic and protreptic. I shall briefly illustrate each in turn, the first from the law and the prophets, the second from wisdom literature, and the third from the Gospel of Matthew:

1. A pedantic imposition of the literal sense is often the justification for a figurative reading. No Christian would be offended by Origen's demonstration that some Mosaic ordinances could not be performed according to the letter,<sup>12</sup> for in this he was only confirming the obsolescence of rites that all Christians held to be transient adumbrations of the work of Christ. The *Epistle of Barnabas* had already argued that the sacrifice of the red heifer is a riddle to which only Christians have the key.<sup>13</sup> Again it was useless to deny that John's account of the cleansing of the Temple is chronologically inconsistent with that of his fellow-evangelists.<sup>14</sup> Origen's conjecture that the gospels relate historical events but not always in the historical order is reminiscent of a comment on Mark by Papias, which was quoted by later authors with approval.<sup>15</sup> Least of all could exception be taken to his arguments for the application of prophecies to Christ whenever they seemed to exceed the events of the prophet's time, for that had been the stock-in-trade of apologetic ever since Philip expounded the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40). Theodore himself, although he insists that every prediction was fulfilled in a manner intelligible to its audience, grants that much will have been interpreted as *hyperbolê*, and that only with the coming of Christ did these tropological utterances become true without qualification.<sup>16</sup> He sets his face against macaronic readings which apply one part of a text to Christ and another to contemporary

<sup>11</sup> For a different vindication of the importance of the literal sense to Origen, see Brian BARRETT, *Origen's Spiritual Exegesis as a Defence of the Literal Sense*, in: *StPatr* LVI/4, Leuven 2013, 51–63.

<sup>12</sup> Origen, in *Lev. hom.* 3,6 (GCS Orig. 6, 310) on the impracticable expense of procuring an immaculate victim; 6,4 (6, 365) and 8,11 (6, 411) on superfluous or impossible reduplications of action. Conversely, where the literal sense can be obeyed, it ought to be: in *Num. hom.* 11,3 [11,1?] (GCS Orig. 7, 77).

<sup>13</sup> *Barn.* 8 on *Num.* 19:17–23, with James C. PAGET, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background* (WUNT II/64), Tübingen 1994, 140–143.

<sup>14</sup> Origen, in *Ioh. comm.* X 22,130 (GCS Orig. 4, 194).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* X 5,18–20 (4, 175). Cf. further Eusebius, *hist. eccl.* III 39,16 (GCS Eus. 2, 292), with Richard BAUCKHAM, *Papias and Polycrates on the Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, in: *JThS* 44 (1993) 24–69.

<sup>16</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*, trans. by Robert Ch. HILL (FaCh 108), Washington D.C. 2004, p. 368, commenting on *Zech.* 9.

phenomena.<sup>17</sup> This, however, is no contradiction of Origen, for whom Christ is present in every word of scripture, so that all that is said (for example) of Jeremiah is also true of him, and indeed more true of him in the flesh than of Jeremiah himself.<sup>18</sup> The fact that some allowance must be made for metaphor even when applying the prophet's words to Christ suggests that the somatic sense of scripture need not be uniformly literal, any more than the plain and natural sense of a profane text.

2. Frances Young asserts that whereas Origen writes "without worrying about textual or narrative coherence," critics of the Antiochene school construed the part in the light of the whole and thereby elicited a "deeper meaning."<sup>19</sup> Yet the method attributed here to the Antiochenes is simply the one that any competent reader applies to the surface of the text – the *hermêneia*, or lexical analysis, which uncovers the *dianoia*, or authorial intent.<sup>20</sup> It is Origen who looks beneath the surface for "deeper" meanings, but only when he completes the lexical examination. Nowhere does he do this more ostentatiously than in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, which may be a bodiless text inasmuch as its outward or somatic sense cannot edify the reader, but not in the sense that no narrative structure is discernible. It is only after having explained how an utterance contributes to the unfolding of the drama<sup>21</sup> that he puts the church or the reader in place of the bride, construing her words as an expression of yearning for Christ or of delight in the apprehension of his word. In these figurative interpretations he is certainly more inclined to take each passage episodically, without reference to what precedes or follows, seeking illumination from other scriptural books and sometimes outside the Scriptures altogether. In this respect, we may say, he was "not worried" by problems of concatenation; but since the Song of Songs was universally regarded as an allegory even by such Antiochenes as Theodoret,<sup>22</sup> his insistence on divining the literal sense is more remarkable than his inevitable resort to allegoresis.

I will add here that, although it may be generally true that more account is taken of narrative structure in construing the literal or somatic sense, there are cases in which the narrative structure is equally essential to Origen's allegorical reading. His 27<sup>th</sup> homily on

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 366.

<sup>18</sup> Origen, in Hier. hom. 1,1–6 (GCS Orig. 3<sup>2</sup>, 1–5).

<sup>19</sup> Frances M. YOUNG, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, Cambridge 1997, 184.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Porphyry, frg. 416 (p. 488f. SMITH).

<sup>21</sup> Origen, in Cant. comm. I 1,4 (OWD 9/1, 128); II 3,1 (9/1, 208); III 10,3 (9/1, 342); III 15(IV 1),1 (9/1, 392).

<sup>22</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus, ###, trans. by Robert Ch. HILL, Brisbane 2001, p. ###. [Please complete title and add page number to which you refer]

Numbers, for example, makes use of etymology to interpret each of the stations through which the Israelites pass in Num. 33 as a stage in the progress of the soul from pagan ignorance to the consummation of wisdom.<sup>23</sup> The same itinerary may represent the soul's peregrinations after death or the descent of Christ through 42 generations. Etymology, as Origen admits, was not a method condoned by all, and some modern scholars distinguish it from allegoretic reading on the grounds that it merely draws out what is already latent in the vocabulary of the text.<sup>24</sup> Be that as it may, there is no doubt that Origen means to expound the spiritual sense, or rather the spiritual senses,<sup>25</sup> of Num. 33, and that this sense becomes apparent to the reader only by meditation on the successive encampments which this book relates as historical events.

3. In contrast to almost every modern critic who laments his indifference to history, Origen not only believes that the Song was written by Solomon but grounds his interpretation on the premise that it is the last book in a trilogy of sapiential writings.<sup>26</sup> He also holds that the Christ whose *persona* Solomon assumes in the Song<sup>27</sup> is as real a figure in history as in heaven, having become incarnate for us in body, soul and spirit. It cannot be sufficiently emphasised, as it is still too often forgotten, that it is only this threefold apparition in history that justifies our threefold reading of scripture, which, as Origen repeatedly says, is for us the tangible flesh of the Word whose actions are recorded in the gospels.<sup>28</sup> To know him as the disciples did, both in flesh and in spirit, is to be armed against the carnal interpretation of Mt. 19:12 as an exhortation to mutilate our own bodies.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, this knowledge of Christ's dual nature teaches us not to despise the lexical parsing of the parable of the talents, which must precede the more sublime interpretation.<sup>30</sup> Since even this preliminary reading foretells the judgment of all according to their deserts, it is sufficiently edifying. So is the admonition which

<sup>23</sup> Origen, in Num. hom. 27 (GCS Orig. 7, 255–280).

<sup>24</sup> See Glenn W. MOST, *Allegoresis and Etymology*, in: Anthony GRAFTON/Glenn W. MOST (eds.), *Canonical Texts and Scholarly Practices: A Global Approach*, Cambridge 2016, 52–74.

<sup>25</sup> Which of course are also apprehended by spiritual senses: Origen, princ. I 1,7 (GCS Orig. 5, 24) with Karl RAHNER, *Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sense spirituels chez Origène*, in: RAM 13 (1932) 113–142; Mark MCINROY, *Origen of Alexandria*, in: Sarah COAKLEY/Paul GAVRILYUK (eds.), *The Spiritual Senses*, Cambridge 2016, 20–36; and Alfons FÜRST, *Θεία αἰσθησις: Origen's Epistemological Concept of Spiritual Sensation*, in: Christian HENGSTERMANN (Hg.), *The History of Religious Imagination in Christian Platonism: Exploring the Philosophy of Douglas Hedley*, London et al. 2020 (forthcoming).

<sup>26</sup> Origen, in Cant. comm. prol. 3,1–3 (OWD 9/1, 88–90).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. prol. 4,17–20 (9/1, 114–116).

<sup>28</sup> In Lev. hom. 1,1 (GCS Orig. 6, 280f.); Cels. IV 15 (GCS Orig. 1, 285).

<sup>29</sup> In Matth. comm. XV 1–5 (GCS Orig. 10, 348–361).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. XIV 6 (10, 287).

is conveyed by Christ's rejection of the proposal to set up tabernacles on the mountain of transfiguration. Origen takes the historical character of this episode so seriously that he weaves into Matthew's account the statements of Mark and Luke that Peter did not know what he was saying, and then deduces from John's observation, "the Spirit was not yet given" (Jn. 7:39), that Peter was moved by a different spirit.<sup>31</sup> Now follows the allegorical reading in which Peter represents the enraptured saint who would gladly contemplate God for ever, but descends to earth again for the sake of others. Again, we receive a double lesson in charity from the child whom Jesus places in the midst of his disciples when they are quarrelling over precedence in the kingdom. According to the "ruder" exposition, the child is an exemplar of moral innocence, unstained by pride, cupidity or lecherous desires;<sup>32</sup> according to the higher exposition, he is a symbol of the Spirit, whom Luke and Hosea proclaim to be in our midst.<sup>33</sup> As in the Song, the literal exegesis is determined by the context whereas the keys to the higher exegesis, to borrow a simile from Origen's Hebrew teacher, must be sought in another chamber of the Word.<sup>34</sup>

In all these cases the literal sits beside allegorical. It is also the historical sense when the Biblical text purports to be a record of past events; it is never the historical sense if we mean by this the only one that fits the circumstances of the author. Theodore differs from Origen in both respects, for he seldom admits any second meaning in the text, and still less one that requires the human author to see beyond the proper bounds of his understanding. At the same time, he differs equally from the modern scholar in his definition of those bounds. David, the author of the Psalms, was after all a seer, who can be credited not only with a prophecy of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem but a capacity to speak with infallible prescience in the voice of his own descendant Jesus Christ. Theodore promises, but hardly attempts, to show that the afflictions recorded in Ps. 2 must be those of Christ and not David or Zerubbabel;<sup>35</sup> we need not ascribe the omission to his Latin translator Julian of Eclanum, for the extant Greek of his commentary on Ps. 45 is equally brusque in naming Christ as its subject,<sup>36</sup> notwithstanding his characteristic reluctance to identify Jesus the man with the

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. XII 40 (10, 157f.).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. XIII 16f. (10, 221–225).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. XIII 18f. (10, 226–233). Cf. Hos. 11:9 and Lk. 17:20.

<sup>34</sup> Philoc. 2,4 2,3 (SC 302, 244).

<sup>35</sup> Theodore, comm. in Ps. ### (p. 17 HILL).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. ### (p. 554).

Word that proceeds from the Father's heart.

#### 4. What Counts as Allegory?

Allegory, in Theodore's use of the term, is a capricious substitution of the exegete's own reveries for the plain meaning of a text. Like other critics of fanciful exegesis, he takes particular offence at the dissolution of history into metaphor. In fact, he appears to have set a higher premium on history as a hermeneutic tool than previous interpreters: it is Theodore, not Origen, Eusebius, Didymus, Hilary or Ambrose, who assumes that the key to understanding a Psalm is to fix the historical circumstances which inspired its composition. He is seldom willing to look beyond this or to countenance the methods which almost every other exegete had employed to show that Christ was the latent subject or anonymous speaker of verses which were confessedly written long before his birth. To say, however, that no other construction was admissible but the one that a competent reader would have put upon the Psalm at the time of its composition would have been to challenge the practice of Christ himself, who had quoted Ps. 110 to prove that he was more than the Son of David, and had taken upon his dying lips the first words of Ps. 22.<sup>37</sup>

Theodore, as we have noted, sometimes embraces the Christological application of a Psalm without commentary. At other times, when he posits a different subject but admits a secondary application to Christ, he follows a principle that does not appeal from the obvious to the occult or substitute words from the reader's fancy for those of the text. In Greek as in English, the same terms can be predicated both of the particular and of the species. It is therefore legitimate in expounding a Psalm to widen the reference from the historical subject to all who share his predicament, and then to concentrate it again upon the one man who is all men, Jesus Christ:

*Qui volunt hunc psalmum in Domini persona [dici]<sup>38</sup> ex hoc loco praecipue convincuntur non parvum temeritatis incurrere. Quomodo enim potest accipi quia hoc de se Dominus dixerit, longe a salute mea et reliqua? ... Sed cum passionem, flagella, verbera, clavos et patibulum suscepisset, consequenter hac voce usus est, quam convenit omnes pios, cum aliquid huius modi patiuntur, emittere ... Propter hanc igitur causam hoc testimonio usus est, non quod per ipsum per profetiae vaticinium sit praedictum, aut*

<sup>37</sup> Mt. 22:41–46; 27:46 and parallels.

<sup>38</sup> I would propose this or *dictum est* to fill the lacuna.

*certe de ipso psalmus iste compositus.*

“Those who wish this psalm to be spoken in the person of the Lord are persuaded by this verse above all [i.e. Ps. 22:1] to be guilty of no small temerity. For how is it possible to believe that the Lord said of himself, *far from salvation*, etc. [22:2]? ... But when he had taken on himself the passion, the flogging, the beating, the nails and the scaffold, he accordingly made use of this exclamation, which it is fitting for all pious persons to utter when they suffer something of this kind ... It was thus for this reason that he employed this testimony, not because it was foretold of him in the oracular mode of prophecy, let alone because this psalm was written about him.”<sup>39</sup>

Although he speaks in abstractions, Theodore might have sought a precedent in the epistle to the Hebrews, where the saying “thou hast put all things under his feet” (Ps. 8:6), which is not yet true of all humanity, is declared to have been fulfilled on our behalf by Jesus as the Son of Man (Heb. 2:7–9). In the verses quoted by the epistolographer – “What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?” (Ps. 8:4) – we seem to observe two uses of the word “man,” the former subtending all human beings and the latter the Psalmist himself, if “son of man” is an idiomatic locution for “this particular man, myself,” as students of the gospels have maintained. Any reader of Greek philosophy knew that the same term X can be used to signify both a particular X and the class, the species, the universal or the idea which subsumes this particular. The noun “man” in the sentence “this man died” is homonymous with the noun “man” in the sentence “man is mortal;” a different principle of homonymity is apparent when we point to a statue and say “that is Aristotle”<sup>40</sup> or when Origen states, as his premiss in expounding the Song of Songs, that we possess two orders of senses, one serving the outer and one the inner man.<sup>41</sup>

In this respect he does not seem to be indebted to pagan usage. The three examples which assist Heraclitus the Allegorist in the explanation of his method are all, as we might say, heteronymic, for each is a substitution in one of the lyric poets of a concrete symbol for a concrete subject: a sea for a war in Archilochus, a labouring ship for the distempered city in Alcaeus, a Thracian filly for a nubile girl in Anacreon.<sup>42</sup> Quintilian’s list of examples begins with

<sup>39</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Psalms 1–81*, ed. by Robert Ch. Hill (WGRW 5), Atlanta GA 2006, p. 240–242.

<sup>40</sup> Aristotle, cat. 1 a 6, with Porphyry, comm. in *Aristot. cat.* (p. 67 BUSSE), where Porphyry argues that homonyms, unlike metaphors, are not replaceable by a more proper term.

<sup>41</sup> On homonymity and spiritual senses in Origen, see his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* in the edition of: Claudio MORESCHINI/Vito LIMONE (eds.), *Origene e Gregorio di Nisa sul Cantico dei Cantici*, Milan 2016, 348–356. [These pages relate to in *Cant. comm.* II 4,25–37 (or 4,25–5,?) but I cannot find this theme here; the most important passage for the spiritual senses in this commentary is in *Cant. comm.* I 4,10–20 where this theory is presented extensively – do you mean this passage?]

<sup>42</sup> Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 5 (p. 8–11 RUSSEL/KONSTAN).

Horace's imitation of Alcaeus, then follow passages in which Virgil assumes the habit of a shepherd, Lucretius strikes out a path in the haunts of the Muses and Cicero likens politicians to captains in a storm.<sup>43</sup> The interpretative shift in these cases is, as philosophers say, intensional rather than extensional, not from the particular ship to the universal ship or from the inner to the outer, but from this imagined ship to that real city. Pagans seeking rational aetiologies for a myth would often postulate some half-remembered event whose protagonists were mere human beings: the satires of Plato did not deter the Peripatetic Palaiphatos from engaging in speculations which are sometimes homonymic, insofar as they surmise that a human bore the same name as a deity, but never impart a more universal character to the myth.<sup>44</sup>

Only in the Stoics do we discern an incipient tendency to universalisation, illustrated most copiously by Cornutus in his etymological lexicon of divine names.<sup>45</sup> We have noted above, however, that etymology does not substitute new terms for those of the text, but purports to elicit a sense that is already present, albeit elusively, in the words that constitute the text; it may be for this reason that Cornutus himself eschews the noun *allêgoria* and its cognates. Nevertheless, his practice of equating the gods with passions, foreshadowed in Plato's *Cratylus*, met the later Christian definition of allegory; nor can we doubt that Heraclitus himself is moving from the particular to the universal, and by allegoresis rather than etymology, when he tells us that the magical herb called moly is the intellect, or that Athena's reproof to Achilles represents the triumph of reason over passion.<sup>46</sup> Porphyry therefore has some grounds for his judgment that Origen found the tools for his exposition of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Stoa rather than the Academy.<sup>47</sup>

For all that, Gerald Bostock appears to be nearer to the truth when he pronounces Origen's method more Philonic than Platonic.<sup>48</sup> Philo employs the term *allêgoria* and its cognates over forty times – yet none the less more sparingly than he employs the various practices that he designates by this term. His general assumption seems to be that legal texts may be observed

<sup>43</sup> Quintilian, inst. VIII 6,44–53.

<sup>44</sup> Nicola FESTA (ed.), *Mythographi Graeci*, vol. III/2: *Palaephati peri apistôn*, Leipzig 1902, p. ### [please add the page number to which you refer].

<sup>45</sup> Cornutus, *Compendio di teologia greca*, ed. by Ilaria RAMELLI, Milan 2003, with Glenn W. MOST, *Cornutus and Stoic Allegoresis: A Preliminary Report*, in: ANRW II.36.3, Berlin/New York 1989, 2014–2065.

<sup>46</sup> Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems 17–20* (p. 30–39 RUSSELL/KONSTAN); 72f. (p. 116–119).

<sup>47</sup> Eusebius, *hist. eccl.* VI 19,8 (GCS Eus. 2, 560).

<sup>48</sup> Gerald BOSTOCK, *The Sources of Origen's Doctrine of Pre-Existence*, in: Lothar LIES (ed.), *Origeniana Quarta* (IThS 19), Innsbruck 1987, 259–264.

both literally and allegorically,<sup>49</sup> whereas in narrative and descriptive texts the allegorical reading is proposed because the literal sense is inconsistent with a sound understanding of God or the world.<sup>50</sup> An exception may be made for the texts in which persons whose historical existence is not to be doubted (Joseph, Miriam, Abraham) are treated simultaneously as universal images of devotion,<sup>51</sup> hope and the pilgrimage of the soul.<sup>52</sup> Laws, of course, are always framed for entire communities, but the laws whose outward sense concerns only Israel become universal in scope when applied to the soul – as, for example, when the exclusion of children of harlots is construed as a prohibition of idolatry and hence as an affirmation of the incorporeality of God.<sup>53</sup> The necessity of an allegorical reading of any predicates which imply that God has a body or inhabits space is repeatedly affirmed in Philo's writings;<sup>54</sup> more contentious, and therefore justified at greater length, is his frequent appeal to the allegorical sense to remove [?] seems absurd or inconsequential in the Mosaic account of the origin of humanity and the loss of paradise.

Husbandry, Philo tells us, is a common Biblical metaphor for the cultivation of our higher faculties, to be contrasted with Cain's tilling of the soil, which symbolises the pursuit of worldly riches.<sup>55</sup> It follows that Eden, the product of God's own husbandry, is an emblem of the soul and that the fountain which irrigates it from a height represents the fecundity of reason.<sup>56</sup> The trees which populate the garden stand allegorically for vices and virtues,<sup>57</sup> and by the same principle Adam is the mind or rational soul and Eve the faculty of sensation, which depends on the mind for its functioning and in turn supplies it with objects of desire.<sup>58</sup> An extension of this semiotic principle after the fall allows us to understand the five daughters of ~~of~~ as the five senses and the city of Cain (which could hardly have been inhabited in his day

<sup>49</sup> Philo, spec. leg. I 269. 287; II 147 (V p. 65. 69. 121 COHN/WENDLAND); decal. 1 (IV p. 269); agr. 151 (II p. 125). A military camp affords a rare image of the body at ebr. 99 (II p. 189). A sacrificial law is allegorized at praem. 128 125 (V p. 365), where the head of a victim represents the virtuous man.

<sup>50</sup> Decal. 101 (IV p. 292) on the six days of creation.

<sup>51</sup> Ios. 26 (IV p. 66f.). Allegory is a property of the dreams that Joseph interprets at somn. II 8. 31. 207 (III p. 260. 264. 291f.). On the readiness of the wise to apply the same trope, see cont. 28 and 29 (VI p. 53f.).

<sup>52</sup> Abr. 68. 99. 131 (IV p. 16. 23. 30), and on Miriam spec. leg. II 142 (V p. 119f.).

<sup>53</sup> Spec. leg. I 327–333 (V p. 79f.). Cf. *ibid.* II 29–31 (V p. 92f.), where a woman who lacks both husband and father is said to represent the unclean soul. Cf. also Jn. 4:17, repeated in the male voice at Jn. 5:7.

<sup>54</sup> Leg. all. III 4 (I p. 113f.); post. Cain. 7 (II p. 2); somn. I 67. 73. 102 (III p. 219. 220. 226).

<sup>55</sup> Agr. 27 (II p. 100).

<sup>56</sup> Fug. 179 (III p. 149). Cf. mut. nom. 67 (III p. 169), where true sublimity is elevation of soul.

<sup>57</sup> Plant. 36 (II p. 140f.).

<sup>58</sup> Opif. mund. 157 (I p. 54f.); leg. all. II 4. 5. 60 (I p. 90f. 91. 102).

by flesh and blood) as the figurative seat of the vicious passions.<sup>59</sup> Occasionally the allegory is construed by a shift from the concrete to the concrete, as when the cherubim guarding Eden are tentatively likened to the opposing revolutions of the fixed stars and the planets;<sup>60</sup> such cases, however, are easily outnumbered by those in which the term *allêgoria* connotes a shift from the particular to the universal, often involving, as Paul would say, a shift from the outer to the inner man.

Of course the heteronymic shift from particular to particular is not foreign to Paul (it surely occurs in Gal. 4:24) and it is therefore not foreign to Origen. We have noted that in his higher exposition of the Gospel of Matthew. The child in the midst becomes the Holy Spirit; he also equates the creation above the firmament with the rational, and the lower creation with the irrational soul. He will go to some lengths to prove that the Ark was a vessel capacious enough to hold every species, clean or unclean, while maintaining that we derive more edification from the story if we equate the two decks with the two parts of the soul and the animals with our clean and unclean passions.<sup>61</sup> In the last two cases, the heteronymic shift is not only from particular to particular, but from particular to universal (that is, the ark represents not only the soul of Noah but every soul). This, no doubt, is allegory in its strictest form, the substitution of B for A, not of one sense of A for another sense of A. Such readings, however, are offered only as augmentations of the primary, or didactic, sense: we are bound to believe on scriptural authority, that God created the world and that Noah escaped the Flood in a craft of the stated dimensions; we are bound by the teaching of Christ through his Evangelist to cultivate the innocence and simplicity of children. If, however, we are also bound to believe in the Holy Spirit or in the participation of the rational mind in God, it is not on the basis of these texts but of others in which such doctrines are unequivocally affirmed. Thus where the literal sense is mandatory the allegorical reading will enhance but does not contradict it; where the literal sense is obsolete or untenable, as in the homilies on Leviticus or the Song of Songs, Origen's preferred expedient is homonymy rather than allegory.<sup>62</sup>

Origen and Theodore are at one in their reluctance to forgo the literal sense of historical

<sup>59</sup> Post. Cain. 51 (II p. 11).

<sup>60</sup> Cher. 23–25 (I p. 175f.). Cf. praem. 65 (V p. 350).

<sup>61</sup> Origen, in. Gen. hom. 2 (GCS Orig. 6, 22–39).

<sup>62</sup> See further Tina DOLIDZE, *Equivocality of Biblical Language in Origen*, in: StPatr LVI/4, Leuven 2013, 65–72, esp. 69: "Origen replaces the principle of diversity in essence of traditional homonyms with the principle of ontological affinity."

narratives in Scripture, except where they find them for some reason incredible; it is not clear from the evidence that survives whether Origen was more disposed to incredulity. Certainly he performs the homonymic substitution of the inner man for the outer man, or of the universal for the particular, more frequently than Theodore, though the latter does not condemn all such devices for the augmentation of the literal sense. What Theodore condemns outright – the substitution of B for A where there is no homonymy – is also a frequent stratagem in Origen, but not with the intention of overruling or supplanting the literal sense. For him, no less than for Theodore, the literal sense is the proper basis of doctrine: no higher sense can be validly elicited from a text unless it corroborates the teachings which have been built upon the literal sense of this or some other text.

### 5. How to Read Paul

Theodore and Origen are thus quite at one in their willingness to receive as history almost all that purports to be historical in the Scriptures. One might indeed argue that Origen places a greater reliance than Theodore on the historicity of the most momentous event recorded **in** the Scriptures, the Incarnation of the Word in body, soul and spirit. It is this that enables the Christian reader (and only the Christian reader) to discern the body, soul and spirit of the written word. By contrast, Theodore seems to rely on his natural powers of determining what may not, what may and what must be read in a tropic sense – not least in his notorious pronouncement that it was only in seeming (*dokêsei*) that the Word became flesh. Certain avenues of interpretation are therefore closed to him which were open to Origen, even when both were applying only the trope of homonymy: Origen's exegesis of the Song of Songs, for example, is made possible by two homonymies, that of Christ as prince of peace with Solomon and that of Christ as Logos with the text that speaks of him. The omnipresence of the revealing word in the word revealed justifies the identification of Christ with Isaac, Joseph, Jeremiah and any other saint whose journey into affliction has been followed by deliverance, as by a rising from the dead.

In contrast to Theodoret and Chrysostom, Origen describes Paul's application of the story of Hagar and Sarah as allegorical and typical. He appears to make no distinction between these terms, here or elsewhere, just as many other passages he either couples *allêgoria* with

a synonymous term or employs the synonym alone where he might instead have written *allêgoria*. *Tupikôs*, as Peter Martens shows,<sup>63</sup> is an ambiguous term in his usage, as it sometimes betokens the enlightened reading which understands the type to be merely a type, and sometimes the carnal or ingenious reading which mistakes the type for the substance. *Allêgorikôs* too is ambiguous, inasmuch it can characterize both a mode of sacred writing and a mode of exegesis. In his comment on Gal. 4:24 both adverbs signify a mode of exegesis, and nothing is said to imply that one is being employed more accurately than the other. Theodore, on the other hand, does not adopt the term *tupos* as a palliative to Paul's distasteful use of *allêgoria*, but suggests that the apostle departed even further from common speech than Chrysostom imagined:

*Ideo memoratus est Agar et Sarram (ex quibus altera quidem secundum sequentiam naturae peperit, altera vero cum parere non posset, et per gratiam peperit Isaac; in quibus multum nimis ille qui secundum gratiam fuit natus praehonorabilior est inventus), ut ex comparatione tali ostendat, quoniam et nunc illa quae secundum Christum est iustificatio multo melior est ab illa, eo quia per gratiam acquiritur.*

“Hagar for her part brought forth according to the order of nature, whereas Sarah brought forth Isaac when she was unable to bear, and through grace; of these the one who was born according to grace was found to be very much the more honourable. Paul commemorates Hagar and Sarah, therefore, in order that he may show by such a comparison that now also that justification which is through Christ is much better than that [which is through the Law], inasmuch as it is acquired through grace.”<sup>64</sup>

Hagar and Sarah on this view are neither allegories nor types, as neither stands for anything other than herself. We are in the sphere of analogy, a figure which has in common with allegory only the element of likeness (*comparatio* in this text) without any hint of substitution. The relation between the bondwoman and her mistress, then, is analogous to that between the Old Testament and the New, and it is common Christian teaching that both testaments have as their subject the work of God in the midst and on behalf of his people. The sanctuary of God and his elect is called Jerusalem, and for Theodore the relation between the old and the new is closer than homonymity, for (in a sense not fully explained) they are not in fact two but one.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Peter W. MARTENS, Revisiting the Typology/Allegory Distinction: The Case of Origen, in: JECS 16 (2008) 283–317.

<sup>64</sup> Theodore, comm. in Gal. ### (l p. 78 SWETE).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. ### (l p. 80f.).

## 6. Second Thoughts on Theodore

In summary, we can say that the trope in Origen which we call allegory, and which he calls by various names, may involve any of four hermeneutic shifts:

1. Homonymically from the particular to the particular, as from Solomon to Christ the Prince of peace.<sup>66</sup>
2. Homonymically from the particular to the universal, as from Adam, or from the Bridegroom in the Song, to the inner man.
3. Heteronymically from the particular to the particular, as from “the child in the midst of you” to the Holy Spirit.
4. Heteronymically from the particular to the universal, as from paradise or Noah’s Ark to the soul.

The heteronymic shifts are the ones most likely to invite the charge of wilful misconstruction, but when Origen feels obliged not merely to amplify but to supersede the literal, he is apt to make use of the homonymic principle, as in his treatment of the Song of Songs. Theodore is uncommonly suspicious of any figure of substitution, as is evidenced by his choice of *comparatio* rather than *typos* as the most palatable description of the trope to which Paul gave the name allegory. We cannot even be sure that he would have countenanced the homonymic and hermeneutic shifts to which Theodoret was driven in his glossing of two notoriously enigmatic texts, the Song and the Book of Daniel.<sup>67</sup> If he intended, however, to accuse Origen of denying the plain historical sense of Scripture, his complaint was wide of the mark.

We ought to consider another possibility, that his bugbear is not the dead Alexandrian but his own contemporary Didymus the Blind.<sup>68</sup> The latter’s *Commentary on Zechariah*, discovered at Tura in 1951, would give some colour to a charge of throwing all rules of interpretation to the winds. Thus, it declines to provide the biblical text that Origen would surely have fetched from a distant quarter had he wished to maintain, with Didymus, that the piebald and dapple-grey horses in chapter 1 represents the teachers of things material and

<sup>66</sup> See further Christopher KING, *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture*, Oxford 2005, esp. 70–73.

<sup>67</sup> See Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, ed. by Robert Ch. HILL (Early Christian Studies 2), Brisbane 2001; Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on Daniel*, ed. by id. (WGRW 7), Atlanta GA 2006.

<sup>68</sup> See Grant BAYLISS, *The Vision of Didymus the Blind*, Oxford 2015, 84–87.

spiritual, and the white a seemingly different class, the purveyors of truth about things incorporeal.<sup>69</sup> This reasoning without norms, as Robert Hill styles it,<sup>70</sup> is in no way illuminated by his subsequent identification of Paul with the piebald horse on account of his versatile mode of teaching. We observe a clear contradiction of Theodore's method in Didymus' comments on chapter 3, where he treats the high priest Joshua as a symbolic rather than a historical figure, multiplying parallels between his humiliation and the sufferings of Christ, and merely noting in a parenthesis that a literal interpretation is also tenable.<sup>71</sup> In chapter 9 he does not consider the possibility that the king who enters Sion on an ass might be any contemporary of Zechariah:<sup>72</sup> Matthew's appropriation of the prophecy is reinforced by all the king's trappings as a warrior: the arrows are the shafts which inflame the love of the bride in the Song of Songs,<sup>73</sup> the slingshots foreshadow the punishment of the wicked,<sup>74</sup> and the trumpet, if it does not portend the last judgment, is the instrument that the saints are forbidden to blow when they surpass the Pharisees in their works of mercy.<sup>75</sup>

Didymus never falls into macaronic exegesis, holding with Origen that whatever is largely true in the literal sense is fully true only in a spiritual sense; in many cases he imitates Origen's practice of appealing to plainer texts elsewhere in Scripture to corroborate the occult sense that he attributes to a prophecy. He also exemplifies what we call typology, for example when he notes, in his comment on Zech. 9:11, that Joseph, Daniel and Jeremiah were all cast into waterless pits.<sup>76</sup> Assuming the historicity of all three, he is far more oblique than Origen in presenting them as harbingers of Christ. The distinction between typology and allegory, however, was (so far as we know) the preserve of the Antiochenes. While it was not Theodore but his friend Chrysostom who equated allegory with typology at Gal. 4:24, it was certainly Theodore's view that exegesis like that of Didymus fails to do justice, not only to the original import of the text, but to the work of God in history by which he proves the inerrancy of his Word.

<sup>69</sup> Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Zechariah*, trans. by Robert Ch. Hill (FaCh 111), Washington D.C. 2006, p. 32–36. The Greek text was edited in *Didyme l'Aveugle, Commentaire sur Zacharie*, 3 vols., ed. by Louis DOUTRELEAU (SC 83–85), Paris 1962.

<sup>70</sup> Hill, *ibid.* p. 34.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* p. 66–83 on Zech. 3:2. On literalism see *ibid.* p. 71 = Didymus, in *Zach. comm.* I 208 (SC 83, 300).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p. 213–217 on Zech. 9:9 = *ibid.* III 138 (84, 688).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p. 222–225 = *ibid.* III 200 (84, 716).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* p. 228f. = *ibid.* III 219 (84, 726).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* p. 227 = *ibid.* III 212 (84, 722). Cf. Mt. 6:2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 218 = *ibid.* III 161–163 (84, 696–698).

## 7. Concluding Remarks

Even if Theodore's strictures were aimed at Didymus rather than Origen, they give no accurate notion of his understanding of paradise, which he seems to regard as a physical locality for beings of subtler bodies than those which human beings have occupied since the fall.<sup>77</sup> It is likely enough that Didymus, like Philo and Origen, superimposed a topography of the soul on the Biblical garden; but Theodore does as much, without denying the historicity of the garden, when he offers a parabolic interpretation of the tree of life in his commentary on the first Psalm.<sup>78</sup> No simple horror of figurative readings can be imputed to him, and no simple contempt for history to Origen and his disciples; the truth appears to be rather that Theodore makes more use of history in expounding the literal sense, and is more inclined to fear that alternative readings can be purchased only at the expense of history.

While Chrysostom does not always agree that the author's situation places limits on our construal of his text, he is always conscious that the first task of a speaker is to retain his audience. He therefore admits that not everything in Paul is said for all time, and that he sometimes speaks in a tone that matches the temper of his audience or restricts himself to saying no more than they can bear in their present circumstances.<sup>79</sup> By contrast the Alexandrians held the apostle's own words, "it was done among them but written for us" (1 Cor. 10:11), to be true of all that the Spirit had dictated. Whatever allowance is made for rhetorical artifice and transient passions, the meaning of a sacred book, on this view, is not exhausted by the first occasion of writing. The Antiochene may not be a modern historicist nor the Alexandrian a post-modern pluralist; nevertheless, if we waive their common belief in the seamlessness of inspiration, the contrast between these ancient schools foreshadows the conflict between our modern attachment to the intention of the author and our post-modern recognition that a text becomes canonical only when the author shares the right of interpretation with posterity.

<sup>77</sup> BAYLISS, *Vision of Didymus* (n. 68) 103–107.

<sup>78</sup> Theodore, comm. in Ps. ### (p. 11 HILL).

<sup>79</sup> See e.g. John Chrysostom, comm. in Gal. ### (IV [?] p. 6. 35. 40. 79 FIELD).