



La escuela de Alejandría y el uso del método alegórico por Orígenes de Alejandría

A Escola de Alexandria e o uso do método alegórico por Orígenes de Alexandria The School of Alexandria and the use of allegorical method by Origen of Alexandria¹

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Abstract: In this paper it will be examined the School of Alexandria. The latter was a great center of Christianity, for a span of five centuries, until the reign of Justinian (529 A.D.). In it, the first system of Christian theology was formed and the allegorical method of biblical exegesis was devised. The School of Alexandria adopted the allegorical interpretation of the Holy Scripture, believing that it hides the truth and at the same time reveals it. It hides the truth from the ignorant, whose eyes are blinded by sin and pride, hence they are prevented from the knowledge of the truth. Origen, one of the greatest Christian theologians employed the allegorical method of the interpretation of the Bible in the belief that he was explaining them, whereas he was exploiting them on behalf his own dogmatic teaching. He was accused of that by other fathers of the Christian Church but also by many heretics. Origen had to defend his exegetical method against the various attacks from heretics, from laymen the church and from Celsus who attacked the Christian writers because, being «ashamed of these things (which are written the Bible), they take refuge allegory». On the other hand, Origen was not a «pure» allegorist in that he has some place for literal interpretation as well. Finally, Origen's basic commitments were to the Scriptures as the word of God, the church as the guardian of the tradition and the household of faith, and to Platonic metaphysics He thus wanted to hold both to his literally true Christian history, and to his spiritually true Platonism and Neoplatonism.

Resumen: En este documento se examinará la Escuela de Alejandría. Este último fue un gran centro de la cristiandad, durante un lapso de cinco siglos, hasta el reinado de

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Justiniano (529 d. C.). En él, se formó el primer sistema de teología cristiana y se ideó el método alegórico de exégesis bíblica. La Escuela de Alejandría adoptó la interpretación alegórica de las Sagradas Escrituras, creyendo que oculta la verdad y, al mismo tiempo, la revela. Oculta la verdad del ignorante, cuyos ojos están cegados por el pecado y el orgullo, por lo tanto, se les impide el conocimiento de la verdad. Orígenes, uno de los más grandes teólogos cristianos empleó el método alegórico de la interpretación de la Biblia en la creencia de que los estaba explicando, mientras que él los explotaba en nombre de su propia enseñanza dogmática. Fue acusado de eso por otros padres de la Iglesia Cristiana, pero también por muchos herejes. Orígenes tuvo que defender su método exegético contra los diversos ataques de los herejes, de los laicos de la iglesia y de Celso que atacaron a los escritores cristianos porque, estando “avergonzados de estas cosas (que están escritas en la Biblia), se refugian en la alegoría”. Por otro lado, Orígenes no era un alegorista “puro” porque también tiene un lugar para la interpretación literal. Finalmente, los compromisos básicos de Orígenes fueron con las Escrituras como la palabra de Dios, la iglesia como guardiana de la tradición y la casa de la fe, y con la metafísica platónica, por lo que quiso mantener tanto su historia cristiana literalmente verdadera como su espiritualidad, verdadero platonismo y neoplatonismo.

Keywords: School of Alexandria – Allegory – Origen – Neoplatonism – Platonism – Celsus.

Palabras-clave: Escuela de Alejandría – Alegoría – Orígenes – Neoplatonismo – Platonismo – Celso.

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I. Introduction: Hermeneutics and Interpretation = Exegesis

Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting what an author has written. In Christian theology, hermeneutics focuses specifically on constructing and discovering the appropriate rules for interpreting the Bible. These methods and principles, however, are often drawn from outside of scripture in historical, literary or other fields. It inevitably involves exegesis, which is the act of interpreting or explaining the meaning of scripture³. The goal in applying the principles of hermeneutics is to «rightly handle the word of truth»⁴, striving to accurately discern the meaning of the text.

³ Athanasios Antonopoulos, «The Interpretation of Time in Orthodox Theology» in the *Diachronic Components of Christian Theology in Orthodoxy*, Vol. 3, Hellenic Open University, Patras, 2002, p. 93.

⁴ 2 Tim. 2,15.



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Although one may encounter the terms «hermeneutics» and «exegesis interpretation» used interchangeably, there is a distinction to be maintained. Hermeneutics is the field of study concerned with the philosophy and science of interpretation – especially the interpretation of communication. «Biblical hermeneutics» is specifically concerned with the philosophy and science of interpreting the Biblical text. Exegesis, as indicated by its etymology, is the act of critically interpreting a text in an attempt to «draw the meaning out» of the text. «Biblical exegesis» is the act of drawing the meaning out of a Biblical text⁵.

The relationship between hermeneutics and exegesis based on that the first is study of the principles and methods of textual analysis and interpretation and the second is the critical explanation and interpretation of a text. The basic principle for the hermeneutics and interpretation is that besides the knowledge of Bible, there is as absolute factor the God's illumination into human's mind. There were and are three main presuppositions. The Hermeneutics and interpretation should make a distinction between the Truth as that which is God Himself, as it was revealed in Christ and «dwelt among us»⁶ and the record of the saving truth in the books of the Holy Scriptures. The tradition, the life experience of the Holy Scriptures by the Church within its age-long history should be taken in consideration, this concerns mainly about the East Church's interpretation⁷. Finally, the interpretation mainly and then the hermeneutics of the Holy Scriptures have been a significant duty of the body of Christ in the historical process of the Orthodox Church, which the fathers of the Church created some times as guards of the tradition, some other times as creator of the tradition and dogma⁸. All this can lead to the conclusion that the interpretation of the books of the Bible cannot be the a work of a particular individual working by himself,

⁵ [John Damascene, «En exact exposition of the Orthodox faith», 4, 17, PG 94, 790-1228: 1176B:](#) «All Scripture, then, is given by inspiration of God and is also assuredly profitable. Wherefore to search the Scriptures is a work most fair and most profitable for souls. For just as the tree planted by the channels of waters, so also the soul watered by the divine Scripture is enriched and gives fruit in its season, viz. orthodox belief, and is adorned with evergreen leafage, I mean, actions pleasing to God. For through the Holy Scriptures we are trained to action that is pleasing to God, and untroubled contemplation». 2 Tim. 3, 16. Trans. By E. W. Watson and L. Pullan, From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 9, Ed. By Ph. Schaff and H. Wace, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo: New York 1899, revised and edited for New Advent by K Knight.

⁶ Jn. 1,14.

⁷ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, in greek, publ. Akritas, 4th edition, Athens 2007, p. 315.

⁸ Panagiotis Christou, *Ecclesiastic Grammatology: Fathers and Theologian of Christianity*, t. 1, publ. Kyromanos, Thessaloniki 2005, p. 165.



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no matter how many academic titles he might have, but a task of the Church and a function which is fed by the Holy Spirit⁹.

Generally, the biblical interpretation is not merely an art of understanding written and historical facts, but a pure «theological» and «existential» case. It is not simply an interpretative method, but an energy, a movement of the healthy mind to the knowledge and oversight of the beings, ultimately referring to the ultimate knowledge, the truth of real and personal God¹⁰.

In this paper we are going to focus on the allegorical method of the interpretation that was developed by one distinct schools of theology in the ancient capital city of Alexandria. The school of Alexandria as the school of Antioch reflected their unique cultural influences in their approach to the Christian faith¹¹. We are going to examine the method that this school used and its main teacher who was Origen of Alexandria.

II. The school of Alexandria and the allegorical method of interpretation

St. Jerome records that the Christian School of Alexandria was founded by St. Mark himself. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit to establish it to teach Christianity, as this was the only way to give the new religion a solid foundation in the city¹². The School of Alexandria was a great center of Christianity, for a span of five centuries, until the reign of Justinian (529 A.D.).

The Catechetical School¹³ of Alexandria was the school of Christian theologians and priests in Alexandria. The breadth and depth of the school was greatly developed under the leadership of Pantaenus, the first dean. This Catechetical School of Alexandria, called the Didascalion, was the most important institution of religious learning at the time¹⁴. The Didascalion was open to everyone who wanted to learn. Catechumens (followers of Christianity who had not yet been baptized) studied

⁹ Savvas Agouridis, *Hermeneutics of the Holy Texts*, Athens 1984, p. 52-60.

¹⁰ John T. Panagopoulou, *The interpretation of the Holy Scripture in the Church of Fathers*, publ. Satmoulis, Athens 2010, p. 15-25.

¹¹ Stylianos Papadopoulos, *Patrologia I*, Athens 1991, p. 354-356.

¹² *Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate: St. Mark and the Coptic Church*, 1968, p. 61.

¹³ Allain Le Boulluec, «L'École d'Alexandrie. De quelques aventures d'un concept historiographique» in Alexandrina. *Hellénisme, judaïsme et christianisme à Alexandrie*, Mélanges offerts à C. Mondésert (1987), 403-417.

¹⁴ Stylianos Papadopoulos, *Patrologia I*, Athens 1991, p. 354-356.



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alongside members of the clergy and students of Greek philosophy. Lectures were open to pagan hearers, and advanced teaching to Christians separately. Pearson supports: «that it is quite possible that before Pantaenus, the school was headed by Gnostic teachers such as Isidore and, before him Basilides»¹⁵.

The Alexandrian Catechetical School developed the allegorical method of the interpretation. The aim of this exegesis was to discover everywhere the spiritual sense underlying the written word of the Scripture. Allegory reveals the obscure meaning within the ostensive report of a text without any references to any historical realities¹⁶. Allegory thinks every word of the Scriptures as a shell, which includes the inner kernel of a moral and superior spiritual truth. The reader should open this shell and to look for the real true meaning of every story, parable, word.

Allegory has its root in Greek interpretations of Homer. An allegorical reading is based on the distinction made by the Greek philosopher Plato (4th century B.C.E.) between the sensible world, and the intelligible world. The latter world, which is invisible, non-physical, and consisting of the Forms, can only be apprehended by the soul, for the soul shares in qualities of that likeness¹⁷. The sensible world, which is visible, physical, and constructed of imitations of the forms is apprehended via the body through the same principle. The seeming, illusionary state of the sensible world – the world in which humankind presides – is a consequence of physical objects imitating the Forms. A physical thing only exists to the extent that it participates in the Forms. This is so because of the nature of the Forms themselves¹⁸. For Daniélou, allegory has nothing to do with the reality of events but it has relation with moral and philosophical truths: «Allegory is the presentation of philosophy and Christian morality under Biblical imagery analogous to the Stoic presentation of morality in a Homeric dress»¹⁹. Adolf Harnack, equated the allegory with «biblical alchemy»²⁰. Under the leadership of the scholar Pantaenus²¹, the school of Alexandria became an important institution of religious learning, where students were taught by scholars

¹⁵ B. A. Pearson, *The Emergence of the Christian Religion: Essays on Early Christianity*, Oregon 2012, p. 182.

¹⁶ Stylianos Papadopoulos, *Patrologia I*, Athens 1991, p. 354-356.

¹⁷ J. Tate, «Plato and Allegorical Interpretation», *Classical Quarterly* 23 (1929) 142-54; 24 (1930) 1-10.

¹⁸ [Marco Rizzi, «Philo, Clement and Origen».](#)

¹⁹ Jean Daniélou, S. J., *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. W. Hibberd, Newman Press, Westminster 1960, p. 61.

²⁰ L. W. Barnard, «To Allegorize or not to Allegorize», *Studia Theologica* 36 (1982), 1-10, p. 5.

²¹ [Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 5.10.1-4, PG 20, 453C-456B. Trans. by A. Cushman McGiffert. *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 1*, ed by Ph. Schaff & H. Wace, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo - New York 1890, revised and edited for New Advent](#)



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such as Athenagoras, Clement, Didymus, and the great Origen, who was considered the father of theology and who was also active in the field of commentary and comparative Biblical studies. Many scholars, such as Jerome, visited the school of Alexandria to exchange ideas and to communicate directly with its scholars.

Titus Flavius Clemens, immortalized in history as Clement of Alexandria, is considered the first Christian theologian writer who used allegorical interpretation, giving a cause of using it in a practical way: «But well knowing that the Saviour teaches nothing in a merely human way, but teaches all things to His own with divine and mystic wisdom, we must not listen to His utterances carnally (σαρκινῶς); but with due investigation and intelligence must search out and learn the meaning hidden in them. For even those things which seem to have been simplified to the disciples by the Lord Himself are found to require not less, even more, attention than what is expressed enigmatically, from the surpassing superabundance of wisdom in them»²². Also Clement was fond of the ancient greek philosophy. He emphasized the permanent importance of philosophy for the fullness of Christian knowledge, explains with special predilection the relation between knowledge and faith, and sharply criticizes those who are unwilling to make any use of philosophy²³. According to his teaching, the ancient Greek philosophers and poets only guessed at the divine truth, which was revealed through the revelation of God to the Hebrew prophets.

[by Kevin Knight](#). «Pantænus, a man highly distinguished for his learning, had charge of the school of the faithful in Alexandria. A school of sacred learning, which continues to our day, was established there in ancient times, and as we have been informed, was managed by men of great ability and zeal for divine things. Among these it is reported that Pantænus was at that time especially conspicuous, as he had been educated in the philosophical system of those called Stoics. They say that he displayed such zeal for the divine Word, that he was appointed as a herald of the Gospel of Christ to the nations in the East, and was sent as far as India. For indeed there were still many evangelists of the Word who sought earnestly to use their inspired zeal, after the examples of the apostles, for the increase and building up of the Divine Word. Pantænus was one of these, and is said to have gone to India. It is reported that among persons there who knew of Christ, he found the Gospel according to Matthew, which had anticipated his own arrival. For Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them, and left with them the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language, which they had preserved till that time. After many good deeds, Pantænus finally became the head of the school at Alexandria, and expounded the treasures of divine doctrine both orally and in writing».

²² [Clement of Alexandria, *The Rich Man's Salvation*, 5.2-4, PG 9, 609C. Trans. by Roberts-Donaldson.](#)

²³ Eirini Artemi, «Clement's of Alexandria teaching about the cryptic philosophical tradition», *Vox Patrum 34* (2014) t. 62, p. 61-71, especially p. 61.



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Under the leadership of the blind Didymus²⁴, even blind students were able to attend and learn, thanks to a raised-alphabet system using carved wood, fifteen centuries before Braille. In addition to Christian theology, the school also taught on subjects ranging from mathematics to medicine to music. From this school came some of the greatest thinkers and leaders of the early church, whose influence has been felt down through church history. Students came from others nations to attend the school²⁵.

Pantaenus and Clement mixed elements of Christianity and Alexandrian intellectual culture. Pantaenus was teacher of Clement in the Holy Scriptures, according to Eusebius²⁶. He and Clement were converts from paganism. Clement clearly held Pantaenus in higher esteem than all his other teachers. Clement honored his teacher very much and he argued that Pantaenus' learning and his effective teaching raised the reputation of Alexandria above all other centers of scholarship, «He, the true, the Sicilian bee, gathering the spoil of the flowers of the prophetic and apostolic meadow, engendered in the souls of his hearers a deathless element of knowledge»²⁷.

It is supported that the period of the school of Alexandria in which Pantaenus was in charge of it, the school was similar to that Justin Martyr had in Rome, an independent private school which provided higher education. It cannot be supported with an undoubted way that this was absolute true. Unfortunately Eusebius of Caesarea devotes more space for Origen and his period as dean of the school of Alexandria rather than Clement's life and when he was headmaster of this school²⁸. After Origen's period as dean in the school of Alexandria, Heraclas and then Dionysius of Alexandria were directors in the school of Alexandria which united its name with the action and the work of Origen²⁹.

It is undoubtful that the catechism school of Alexandria became synonym with the allegory, which was taught and spread as acceptable mode of Biblical Exegesis. Allegory was the way of the interpretation. The work of the school represented mainly

²⁴ J. Lascaratos & Sp. Marketos, «Didymus the Blind: An unknown precursor of Louis Braille and Helen Keller», in *Documenta ophthalmologica* 86 (1994), 203-208.

²⁵ Stylianos Papadopoulos, *Patrologia I*, Athens 1991, p. 318.

²⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 6.13.2.3, PG 20, 548A.

²⁷ [Clement of Alexandria, The Stromata, 1.1.11.2, PG 8, 700A. Trans. by W. Wilson, From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2. ed. by Al. Roberts, J. Donaldson & A. Cleveland Coxe, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo, New York 1885, revised and edited for New Advent by K. Knight.](#)

²⁸ H. F Hägg, «Clement and Alexandrian Christianity», in D. J. Bingham ed., *The Routledge Companion to Early Christian Thought*, Taylor & Francis e- Library, New York 2010, 172-187, p. 177.

²⁹ Stylianos Papadopoulos, *Patrologia I*, Athens 1991, p. 393-422.



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by Clement and Origen was to establish the claims of Christianity upon the intellect of the world. Allegory for the Bible is the method that there is a representation of one thing which is intended to excite the representation of another thing. The allegorical interpretation is not of the words, but of the thing signified by them, and not only may, but actually does, coexist with the literal interpretation in every allegory, whether the narrative in which it is conveyed be of things possible or real³⁰.

III. Origen, the spiritual leader of Alexandrian school and the use of allegory in his texts

Origen can be described as a Christian Platonist. Generally, platonism and its derivatives exercised a great influence upon the intellectual life of the ancient world. Origen read his textual authority, Scripture, in light of Platonism, mirroring contemporary Platonists' exegetical method. The Alexandrian father starts his treatise *On First Principles* by establishing the Platonic divine hierarchical triad; but instead of calling these principles by typical Platonic terms like monad, dyad, and world-soul, he calls them «Father», «Christ» and «Holy Spirit» though he does describe these principles using Platonic and Neoplatonic language. Origen drew a lot from Plotinus and other Neoplatonic, including the following triad as it was referred above.³¹

Origen is highly appreciative of Plato himself, for instance praising his myths methodologically and epistemologically. He also assimilates Plato's myths to Biblical «myths», for example the Poros myth to the Eden myth: Christians, Origen argues, will not deride Plato, such a great philosopher; so, why should «pagan» Platonists deride Scripture? Both should be read allegorically-philosophically.

On the other hand, Origen was one of the most important and distinguished early Christian theologian in the patristic tradition. He was influenced by the beliefs of Greek philosophy and mainly by Plato's teaching. In many of his works, he tried to reconcile Christian beliefs with Greek philosophy, leading him to develop doctrines which were eventually judged heretical by Christian authorities. Because of this, he has left a mixed inheritance in the orthodox Christian world³². Origen founded a new

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 396-400, 185, 195.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 407-419.

³² Eirini Artemi, «The Influence of Origen on John Scottus Eriugena concerning «The Return of all Things to God»», in A.-C. Jacobsen (ed.), *Origeniana Undecima. Origen and Origenism in the History of Western Thought*, Papers of the 11th International Origen Congress, Aarhus University, 26-31 August



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school of higher level of knowledge, similar to that which had been led by the former deans of the school, Pantaenus and Clement. He became the first Bible scholar who analyzed the Scriptures on three levels: the literal, the moral, and the allegorical. In his *Treatise on First Principles*, Origen recommends that the Old and New Testaments should be interpreted allegorically at three levels, the first being the «flesh», the second the «soul» and the third the «spirit».

Many of the events recounted in the Scriptures, interpreted in the literal or fleshly sense, Origen claims, are impossible. Some of the laws, when interpreted literally, are impossible or nonsensical. He explains that if we have to get at the meaning of these passages, the allegorical method of the interpretation is a necessity. Some biblical texts can be interpreted literally and allegorically. In this case, Origen supports, «the reader must endeavor to grasp the entire meaning, connecting by an intellectual process the account of what is literally impossible with the parts that are not impossible but historically true, these being interpreted allegorically in common with the part which, so far as the letter goes, did not happen at all. For our contention with regard to the whole of divine structure is, that it all has a spiritual meaning»³³.

In fact, Origen preferred the allegorical not only because it allowed for more spiritual interpretations, but many passages he found impossible to read literally. For Origen, theology was only way for the culmination of philosophical investigation, based on Scripture and Plato's philosophy, because perhaps Plato was inspired by Scripture or by the Logos that is also 'incarnate' in Scripture³⁴. Origen underlined that the greek philosophy can serve Christianity. First Christians should devote themselves first to the study of Christian Bible and then to approach Greek writers with much care³⁵.

According to Eusebius of Caesarea, Origen was almost seventeen years old when his father died, because of the persecution of Christians in the tenth year of the reign of Septimius Severus³⁶, which gives the approximate date of Origen's birth as 185/6 C.E.

2013, Leuven – Paris 2016, p. 597-613, especially p. 598. [Pope Benedict XVI, «Origen of Alexandria: life and work», Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007.](#)

³³ Origen of Alexandria, *On First Principles* 4.3.5.

³⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Origen of Alexandria, *Letter to Gregory*, 1 & 3, PG 11, 88B, 89D.

³⁶ Eusebius of Caesaria, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 6.2.12, PG 20, 525B.



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His full name was apparently Origen³⁷ Adamantius³⁸; he was born at Alexandria, then the great center of Hellenistic learning; and he received from his father, Leonides, thorough instruction in the Bible and in elementary secular studies. After his father death as a martyr, their property being confiscated, Origen, his mother and his little six brothers were totally poor³⁹. So he had to support his family. Through his writings, a vivid testimony appears that he was in full accord with this type of piety.

One year later after the death of his father, he took over as Headmaster, *didaskalos*, of the Christian Catechetical School at Alexandria. He was invited to become in charge of this Catechetical School by bishop Demetrius⁴⁰. The last teacher of that School, Clement⁴¹, was apparently driven out by the persecution⁴². As teacher in the School of Alexandria, Origen developed a four stage method of approaching a literary text. This method was made by Hellenistic grammarians for the ancient Greek writers besides Homer, Herodotus and etc. The four steps of his method were reading, textual criticism, judgment and interpretation⁴³. Origen used both methods and contents from Greek pagan philosophy into Christian thought: for instance, philosophy's method applied to biblical and Platonic exegesis alike, as well as allegory⁴⁴. Origen read his textual authority, Scripture, in light of Platonism, mirroring contemporary Platonists' exegetical method.

³⁷ His name means the child of Horus. In early Egypt, Horus was the brother of Isis, Osiris, Set and Nephthys. As different cults formed, he became the son of Isis and Osiris. Isis remained the sister of Osiris, Set and Nephthys.

³⁸ His name means diamond, hard metal, steel, invincible, unbreakable, untamed; hard substance, to overpower, tame, conquer.

³⁹ Eusebius of Caesaria, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 6.2.13, PG 20, 525B.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.3.2, PG 20, 529A.

⁴¹ Eirini Artemi, «Embracing Greek philosophical thinking in the fathers of the 2nd – 5th centuries», *Vox Patrum 36* (2016) t. 65, p. 36, (31-47): «He pronounced definitely against the sophists and against the hedonism of the school of Epicurus. For Clement educated and mature Christians inevitably sought an understanding of God that went beyond a literal reading of the scriptures, catechism and faith and that this development required the application of philosophy. Hence he perceived that the Old Testament and Greek philosophy were two great tributaries of the same stream that led to closeness with God».

⁴² Eusebius of Caesaria, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 6.14.8, PG 20, 532BC. S. Papadopoulos, *Patrologia I*, Athens 1991, p. 145-150.

⁴³ P. B. R. Forbes, «Greek Pioneers in Philology and Grammar» *The Classical Review*. Cambridge University Press. 47 (3) (1933), p. 105.

⁴⁴ Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, «Origen and the Platonic Tradition», *Religions 8* (2), 2017, (1-21), especially p. 2.



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Origen adopted the allegorical method in the interpretation in his texts. For Origen, the allegory is not so much a wealth of the biblical books such as the hermeneutic spectacles through which one seeks the universal in the particular⁴⁵, but an instrument that mediates between the corporeal parsing of the text, which some would term the literal reading, and the spiritual divination of its mysteries, which is otherwise called typology⁴⁶. With the help of allegory, Origen managed to make a reinterpretation of Pauline letters and it seems that sometimes Origen was influenced by Platonism⁴⁷. According to Origen, the Bible does not discourage the pursuit of philosophy. Logic is of great utility in defending Christianity, though the greatest arguments establishing the truth of the Gospel are not natural but the supernatural guarantees of miracle, fulfilled prophecy and the miraculous expansion of the Church in face of powerful prejudice and governmental opposition.

In Origen, the allegory approximated the degree of abuse for the use of this method for the interpretation of Bible. Cyril of Alexandria characterized Origen as obdurate teacher, because he used too much the allegory⁴⁸. The allegory was not only a way of speaking, «I say others and I mean differently», but also a method of interpreting his discourse. Origen applied it to the many commentaries he wrote about the Bible. He took the terms of ancient philosophy and often gave them a new meaning. Moreover, a word does not always mean the same – neither its origin (e.g. Stoic, Platonic) necessarily determines its use (e.g. Christian). In Origen's thought there was a higher emphasis on the so called «hidden meaning» than the literal meaning. Origen even ridiculed those that took a literal approach. This can be seen when he wrote, «although Celsus regards the books of the Jews and Christians as exceedingly simple and commonplace, and imagines that those who give them an allegorical interpretation do violence to the meaning of the writers. By what we have said, then, let it appear that Celsus calumniates us in vain»⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ Mark J. Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, Ashgate Publishing Company, Oxford 2002, p.123.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴⁷ D. Boyarin, «Origen as theorist of allegory: Alexandrian Contexts», in R. Copeland, P. T. Struck, *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, Cambridge Press, Cambridge 2010, 39-54, p. 39-40.

⁴⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, *Epistle 81 – To the monks in Foya*, PG 77, 373C.

⁴⁹ [Origen of Alexandria, *Contra Celsun*, 4.87, PG 11, 1164A., transl. by Fr. Crombie, *From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4., ed. by Ale. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo- New York 1885, revised and ed. for New Advent by K. Knight.*](#)



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Conclusions

Allegory is a legacy of Greek thought and would have been a one of the staples of Origen's Hellenistic education. Origen expressed deep respect for Plato, his style, and his philosophy's nobility and usefulness. He used the allegorical method of Plato to search the deeper meaning of the Scripture. As a Christian, Origen believed that the Bible was the Word of God, and as such it occupied a central place in his life and thought, the touchstone for all his beliefs. Indeed, one of the major concerns of Origen's work was to assist Christians facing the intellectual challenges of the third century by providing scriptural answers to the questions posed by Hellenistic philosophy and culture. In spite of Origen's intentions and clear commitment to biblical authority, however, many believe that his use of Scripture compromised that authority, providing fertile conditions for the germination and growth of heresy.

Under its earliest known leaders, Pantaeus, Clement, and Origen, it became a leading centre of the allegorical method of biblical interpretation, espoused a rapprochement between Greek culture and Christian faith, and attempted to assert orthodox Christian teachings against heterodox views in an era of doctrinal flux. This school had tendency toward Platonic metaphysical approach; a desire to move beyond appearances to the truly real. Also it underlined an allegorical reading of scripture, first proffered in a notable way by Origen; driven here by a desire to 'get to the real meaning' of given biblical passages. The preoccupation of this school of exegesis was to discover everywhere the spiritual sense underlying the written word of the Scripture

Origen was not like his teacher Clement of Alexandria, a philosopher who was converted to Christianity, therefore he was not in sympathy with Greek philosophy. Origen underlined that the only master he ever acknowledged was the Logos speaking through the Scriptures. Finally, Origen warned us from philosophy, for the pagans abused it by mixing their own errors with the truth, and thus it cannot teach the will of God. He also declared that philosophy had no power to renew our nature this can be done only through the incarnation of Logos.

Origen was influenced by Platonic teaching. Philip Schaff says: «The Platonic philosophy offered many points of resemblance to Christianity. It is spiritual and idealistic, maintaining the supremacy of the spirit over matter, of eternal ideas over all temporary phenomena, and the pre-existence and immortality of the soul; it is theistic, making the supreme God above all the secondary deities, the beginning, middle, and



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end of all things; it is ethical, looking towards present and future rewards and punishments; it is religious, basing ethics, politics, and physics upon the authority of the Lawgiver and Ruler of the universe; it leads thus to the very threshold of the revelation of God in Christ, though it knows not this blessed name nor his saving grace, and obscures its glimpses of truth by serious errors. Upon the whole the influence of Platonism, especially as represented in the moral essays of Plutarch, has been and is to this day elevating, stimulating, and healthy, calling the mind away from the vanities of earth to the contemplation of eternal truth, beauty, and goodness»⁵⁰.

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