

Faith Seeking Understanding: Pastoral Care of Souls in the Hermeneutics of Origen of Alexandria

Introduction

- Origen is well known for his use of *allegorical* interpretation
- Principles of Origen's interpretation of scripture in his *De Principiis*
- His application of it in the exegesis of two representative passages
- This presentation will be descriptive in focus

PART I - THE HERMENEUTICAL THEORY OF ORIGEN

(a) Origen admits, implicitly or explicitly, to three influences on his Hermeneutical theory

1. The Hellenistic-Platonic tradition of allegorizing the Greek Epics
2. The Alexandrian-Jewish tradition, best represented in Philo of Alexandria.
3. The tradition of the Christian apostles from Paul to Clement of Alexandria

There was some early objections to Origen's hermeneutics, (these would culminate in the Antioch School of Literal Exegesis)

Conclusion: *As suggested by Anthony Thiselton, Origen's Christian hermeneutical environment was pluralistic and yet practiced in strict relation to the rule of faith*

(b) Origen's Hermeneutical Theory and Exegetical Method

1. The Preface to *De Principiis*- The Rule of faith and open questions raised therein.
2. *De Principiis* Bk. IV, 2, 4. Biblical inspiration and the way of interpretation

(c) Origen's Hermeneutical theory as per De Principiis IV, Ch 2, 4- see attached page 275-6.

1. The literal sense- body
2. The moral sense- psychic or soul
3. The allegorical-anagogical sense- spirit

PART II- ORIGEN'S EXEGETICAL PRACTICE AS THE PASTORAL CARE OF SOULS

(a) Does Origen devalue the Literal, and therefore the Historical sense of Scripture?

(b) Origen's "Stumbling Blocks" as a way around difficult passages of Scripture

(c) Origen's exegesis of Jeremiah 13: 1-11 as a classic example of his hermeneutic

1. The reader situation
2. The "stumbling block" and their meaning in pastoral situations
3. Soteriology as Origen's exegetical aim: "the journey of the soul"
4. Spiritual- mystical- anagogical- allegorical sense
5. The organizing theological principle- *The Logos teaches us the journey of the soul.*

(d) Homily on Matthew 13:36 Logos Christology and Pastoral concern for salvation

1. Origen's special regard for the Gospels
2. Origen's threefold interpretation of Matthew 13:36
3. The soteriological role of the *incarnate* Logos

PAR III. ORIGEN'S ALLEGORICAL HERMENEUTICS: A CONTEMPORARY EVALUATION

- (a) *The contemporary debate about Origen's exegesis and its value in the "postmodern situation"*
- (b) *Allagorical vs. Plain Sense and the polyvalency of hermeneutics visa vie "the rule of faith"*
- (c) *Three questions continue to hang over Origen's exegesis*
 - 1. The question of the status of History?
 - 2. The question of "method" now and then?
 - 3. The question? Is Origen's hermeneutical theory and exegetical practice Christian?

Preliminary Conclusions

Origen's Hermeneutic and Exegetical Contributions

- 1. His conviction regarding the authority of Scripture as a base line for the rule of faith
- 2. His conviction regarding the openness of questions raised and answered *within the rule of faith*.
- 3. The soteriological concept of the "Journey of the Soul" as pastoral control in exegetical practice
- 4. His employment of Middle Platonic epistemology

Conclusion 1. The pastoral concern for salvation as faith seeking understand, grounded in the rule of faith and Scripture lead to the contemporizing of both, however problematic at times.

Enduring Problems with Origen's Exegesis (Eclipse)

- 1. Eclipse of the text.
- 2. Eclipse of the authors intent
- 3. Eclipse of the historical context
- 4. Eclipse of a Christian soteriology behind a Platonic Spirituality