Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: The Case of Origen

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There is a significant debate in Origenian scholarship today about the allegory/typology distinction. Some scholars accept the demarcation between these two forms of nonliteral scriptural interpretation, whereas others reject it. In this paper I seek to determine whether, or to what extent, the allegory/typology distinction is valid for study of this prominent early Christian exegete. My article unfolds in three steps. First, I canvass the last sixty years of scholarship that insists upon this distinction and determine where consensus has been reached, as well as where disagreement still exists; next, I turn to Origen’s own writings and assess how he used and defined the Greek terms that stand behind “allegory” and “typology”; in the third section I explore if there was in Origen’s writings a distinction that resembled what most scholars today intend to invoke when they speak of allegory and typology. In my conclusion I contend that the literature’s allegory/typology distinction is of mixed value. I propose ways to salvage what is important in this distinction and dispense with what is problematic.

A little more than sixty years ago, J. Daniélou and H. de Lubac sparked a debate over allegory and typology in the early church. Was the distinction between these two forms of nonliteral scriptural interpretation valid, or was it not? Did “allegory” and “typology” serve as the best terms for marking these two sorts of nonliteral exegesis? The beginnings of this dispute centered principally upon the figure of Origen of Alexandria. J. Daniélou first proposed the allegory/typology distinction in a slew of publications that began in 1946,¹ and despite H. de Lubac’s subsequent

critique, Daniélou introduced it prominently into Origenian studies with his 1948 biography, *Origène*.

Today the debate surrounding allegory and typology appears as unsettled in Origenian scholarship as it was sixty years ago. While several have followed de Lubac in expressing reserve over the validity of this distinction, a parallel trajectory can also be plotted in the literature that has insisted, with J. Daniélou, that this distinction is indeed applicable to Origen. In this paper I will attempt to resolve the debate over allegory and typology as it pertains to Origen. Whether, or to what extent, is the allegory/typology distinction valid for this prominent and influential early Christian exegete?

This article will unfold in three steps. In the first, I will canvass the last sixty years of scholarship that has insisted upon the validity of this distinction for Origen. I will attempt to clarify the *status quaestionis* on this issue—where has consensus been reached, and where does disagreement still exist? In the next section of this paper I will seek to clarify this persistent, yet elusive, distinction on the basis of Origen’s own writings. I will determine whether he used and defined the Greek terms that stand behind “allegory” and “typology” as the literature has done. The pair ἀλληγορία and ἀλληγορέω, as well as the “typic” family of terms—τύπος, τυπικός, and τυπικός—are of importance here. In the final section I will explore if there was in Origen’s writings a distinction that resembled what most scholars today intend to invoke when they speak of Origen’s allegorical and typological interpretations of Scripture.

It will be my overarching contention that the literature’s allegory/typology distinction is of mixed value. While one facet of this distinction certainly applies to Origen, there are other facets that do not, and these actually do more to obscure Origen’s own language and thought than illuminate them. Is there a way, then, of moving the scholarly discussion forward that would allow us to salvage what is important in this distinction and dispense with what is problematic? And what are the implications
of this analysis of Origen for other biblical interpreters in early Christianity? There is certainly considerable disagreement over the validity of the allegory/typology distinction for the field of early Christian biblical interpretation as a whole.4

SURVEY: A HISTORY OF THE ALLEGRO/TYPOLOGY DISTINCTION IN ORIGENIAN SCHOLARSHIP

The distinction between the allegorical and typological moments in Origen’s exegetical enterprise is most commonly associated with an influential


There are, however, some articles that deny this distinction—cf. J. Trigg, “Allegory,” in EEC, ed. E. Ferguson, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Garland, 1997) and note that there is no article on “typology” in this work. It is certainly remarkable how The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought, ed. A. Hastings, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) has entries both for “allegory” (G. Ward) and “typology” (A. Louth), though the author of the latter denies the applicability of the distinction to patristic biblical interpretation. E. A. Clark’s Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 73–78, also denies it.

and prolific scholar of early Christianity, J. Daniélou. In a little-known publication from 1951, “Qu’est-ce que la typologie?,” he offered a crisp summary of his own views on this subject.

The object of typology is the research of the correspondences between the events, the institutions, and the persons of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament, which is inaugurated by the coming of Christ and will be consummated with his parousia.

What is figured by the OT has many aspects, but these find their unity in Christ. Thus, with different aspects of Christ come different sorts of typology—there is christological typology, ecclesiastical typology, mystical typology, and eschatological typology, corresponding to Christ in his historical existence, Christ in his life in the church, in his union with the soul, and his parousia. While typological exegesis was already evident within the OT itself, in the NT it received a decisive new emphasis: the realization of the OT in Jesus Christ who was the new Adam, the true Noah, second Moses, etc. Daniélou envisioned two forms of typology in the NT. The Matthean, which had an influence both in the West and in Jerusalem, saw events in the OT as types of historical events in Jesus’ life (e.g., Rachel weeping for her lost children figured Herod’s massacre of the infants [Matt 2.16–18]). This sort of typology Origen rejected in favor of the Johannine, which saw in the events of the OT not figures of “circumstances” in Jesus’ life, but of the “mysteries” in that life (e.g., the serpent in the wilderness was a figure of the mystery of salvation [Jn 3.14–15]). Whether of Matthean or Johannine extraction, typology was “a part of the common tradition of the church”—i.e., it could be seen throughout the early church, in the West and East, in Antioch and Alexandria, and was the sort of exegesis that should still be normative for Christian biblical scholars in Daniélou’s day.

But this was not the whole story. In the intellectual milieu in which patristic exegesis developed there were two other currents of OT inter-

6. See n. 1 above for the bibliographical details.
7. Daniélou, “Qu’est-ce que la typologie?,” 199.
pretation that exerted a foreign influence on the fathers: the rabbinic and the Philonic. These influences were responsible for the distinguishing and dubious features of the different schools’ readings of Scripture; Origen and the Alexandrian school fell under Philo’s spell, whereas the Antiochenes were adversely beholden to rabbinic exegesis. According to Daniéloú, while Philo’s exegesis was complex, it was, nevertheless, strongly allegorical in its search for the symbolic signification (“signification symbolique”) of the text. Philo’s allegory was characterized by three features: first, the details of the biblical text had a symbolic sense only accessible to those with insight; second, the realities of Jewish history were an image either of the cosmos, or of the soul, or of the intelligible world; and finally, Philo utilized a symbolism borrowed from Hellenistic culture for interpreting the OT. On these points allegory conflicted with biblical typology; allegory was concerned more with wording and word plays than with the realities or events of which words spoke, and was also not interested in the right sort of nonliteral referents, eschewing Christology for cosmology, psychology, etc.¹⁰ Philo’s influence was detected in Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Ambrose, to cite only the main figures, and it would become the characteristic trait of the Alexandrian school’s exegesis. Daniéloú wished to emphasize, however, that these were only the idiosyncratic features of Alexandrian exegesis and that it still shared with other schools and exegetes, the “la tradition typologique commune.”¹¹

Daniéloú’s narrative elicited an immediate response. A year after he had first proposed his thesis, H. de Lubac (1947) offered a polite response, contending that Daniéloú’s lexicon was at odds with the patristic one.

[Daniéloú’s distinction between typology and allegory] has, nevertheless, the disadvantage, we think, of being formulated with a terminology that is neither scriptural nor truly traditional. Thus it risks, perhaps, muddling up in certain minds, rather than clarifying as it proposes to do, the historical problem relating to this [spiritual] exegesis.”¹²

It was the confusion surrounding “allegory” that de Lubac had especially in mind. Paul had, after all, already used this term (Gal 4.24) and innumerable biblical interpreters of the early and medieval periods, Origen included, not only followed Paul in speaking of “allegory,” but had even patterned their own allegorical interpretations off of Paul’s—quite simply,

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¹¹ Daniéloú, “Typologie?,” 205.
“allegory” in patristic and medieval exegesis was usually not understood as a foreign and deficient intrusion (Philonic) to Christianity as Daniélou was now casting it.¹³ So when Daniélou defined patristic “typology” as nonliteral exegesis native to Christian soil, and opposed it to “allegory,” now defined as an impoverished form of nonliteral exegesis foreign to Christianity, how was this not misleading, de Lubac wondered, when for the ancients “allegorical exegesis” was laudable and legitimately Pauline?¹⁴ Several scholars have accepted de Lubac’s conclusions.¹⁵

Not a year passed before Daniélou took the opportunity to respond to de Lubac. Making short mention of this critical article in the footnotes to his biography on Origen (1948), Daniélou wrote:

As Fr. de Lubac very properly observes, it is only recently that these two terms have been used as opposites. It is, however, convenient to use them in that sense. The main thing, after all, is to make the distinction between the two things quite clear—which Fr. de Lubac does not, perhaps, altogether succeed in doing.¹⁶

The “two things” that had to be clearly distinguished, for Daniélou, were the successful and the unsuccessful nonliteral interpretations of Scripture, “typology” and “allegory” respectively. This concern would prove portentous. Over the course of the next half-century, a dominant trajectory of the scholarship would insist, with him, that “typology” and “allegory” ought indeed to serve as markers for the better and worse forms of nonliteral exegesis. This pattern will become evident in the survey of the literature that now follows; it will also become clear, however, that this same literature has chosen to define success and failure in the realm of Origen’s nonliteral exegesis in remarkably different ways.

In 1959, R. P. C. Hanson published Allegory and Event, to this day the

¹³. H. de Lubac, “‘Typologie’ et ‘Allégorisme,’” 181–200 (on Origen, cf. esp. 197–200). The Antiochenes, of course, formed the exception to this rule, though de Lubac insists that they were simply wrong in their critique of Alexandrian allegory for denying the historical reality of the events recorded in Scripture (200–201).
most comprehensive English work on Origen’s exegesis. Hanson opened his book with a set of definitions strongly influenced by the earlier work of G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woolcombe: 17

Typology is the interpreting of an event belonging to the present or the recent past as the fulfillment of a similar situation recorded or prophesied in Scripture. Allegory is the interpretation of an object or person or a number of objects or persons as in reality meaning some object or person of a later time, with no attempt made to trace a relationship of “similar situation” between them. 18

There are two points of interest in this definition. First, Hanson, like Daniélou before him, invested these definitions with polemical overtones—typology was an acceptable sort of nonliteral exegesis and allegory was not, with its roots in the Hellenistic world. 19 But unlike Daniélou, Hanson contended that the fundamental distinction hinged upon “similar situation” (and not on a distinction between texts and events, or between the christological or non-christological character of the nonliteral referent). For Hanson, typology was successful because it discerned legitimate correspondences between two sets of events, whereas allegory was the name given to arbitrary nonliteral exercises in which no convincing link was discovered between the original event and its nonliteral referent. The “and” in the title, Allegory and Event, means something like “opposed to,” “against,” or “obscures.”

In 1972, W. A. Bienert once again applied this distinction to Origen in his “Allegoria” und “Anagoge” bei Didymos dem Blinden von Alexandria. 20 Bienert insisted that there were two distinct forms of nonliteral interpretation in the early church, but that the ancients, Origen included, did not

19. Hanson thought that there were two distinct sorts of allegory in antiquity, Hellenistic and Palestinian. The former “knows nothing of typology” whereas the latter “is full of typology” (Allegory and Event, 63–64). When speaking of Palestinian allegory and its influence on early Christianity, Hanson could sometimes speak of typology and allegory synonymously (36). However, for Hanson, Origen’s allegory (i.e., Alexandrian allegory) was derived from Hellenistic and not Palestinian allegory, and so the “allegory” Hanson is referring to in this definition at the start of his work is the Hellenistic/Alexandrian/Origenian variety (63–64, 125–26).
label them distinctly; rather, both were called “allegory.” Bienert drew the
distinction between both sorts of nonliteral exegesis as follows: first, echoing Daniélou,
these ways of reading came from divergent backgrounds—allegory had its origin above all
in Stoic scholarship, whereas typology’s roots sank into “messianic and eschatological
prophecy”; and second, after citing and dismissing Hanson’s definitions of typology and
allegory as insufficiently concrete, he suggested the following distinction:

allegory is the vertical manner of interpretation, since it establishes
unhistorical-timeless relationships between images (allegories) and their
spiritual archetypes; typology, in contrast, is the horizontal manner of
interpretation, since it transports the historical events of the past into the
present and future.

There are three points of interest here. First, Bienert too invested these
definitions with evaluative force—typology was laudable, whereas alle-
gory was worthy of censure. Second, unlike Hanson, Bienert insisted that
allegory did in fact detect correspondences (between “images” and their
“archetypes”). What really distinguished these two ways of reading, third,
was the character of their nonliteral referents. Whereas for Daniélou the
distinction was between christological (typology) and non-christological
referents (allegory), for Bienert the distinction was between historical
(typology) and unhistorical referents (allegory).

Moving forward into the last decade, we turn to Frances Young’s Biblical
Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture (1997). Young also
presses for a distinction between the typological and allegorical interpreta-
tions of Scripture and, like most of her predecessors, the former is accepted,
whereas the latter is censured. While Young expresses some reservations
about the distinction, and despite her awareness that “‘typology’ is a
modern coinage,” she insists that it is still “a useful term.”

22. Bienert, Didymos, 41.
23. See n. 18 above.
24. Bienert, Didymos, 42. Also see his slightly elaborated definitions on 43.
25. Though the “horizontal/vertical” definition is not that uncommon in the wider
literature on patristic exegesis. Cf. H. Crouzel, “La Distinction,” 162–63; R. Greer,
Early Biblical Interpretation, by R. A. Greer and J. L. Kugel (Philadelphia: West-
minster, 1986), 178, 181, 183; and B. de Margerie, An Introduction to the History
of Exegesis; Vol. 1: The Greek Fathers, trans. L. Maluf (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s,
1993), 111.
27. Young, Biblical Exegesis, 193.
ates typology (or what she sometimes terms “ikonic mimesis”) with Antiochene exegesis, and allegory (or “symbolic mimesis”) with Alexandrian, especially Origen’s. Like those who precede her, she too tries to map out the cultural backgrounds of Antiochene typology and Alexandrian allegory, though quite differently, locating the former in the rhetorical schools and the latter in the philosophical schools of antiquity. Drawing upon Northrop Frye’s work, Young distinguishes typology from allegory by insisting that typology

requires a mirroring of the supposed deeper meaning in the text taken as a coherent whole, whereas allegory involves using words as symbols or tokens, arbitrarily referring to other realities by application of a code, and so destroying the narrative, or surface, coherence of the text.

There are two points of interest in this sentence. First, Young draws the distinction not on the basis of whether events or texts, respectively, are being interpreted (as with Daniélou), nor is there the claim that events alone are being interpreted (as with Hanson), but rather there is the insistence that typology and allegory are both concerned with texts. Second, and more intriguing, typology is said to be sensitive to narrative coherence (what the ancients referred to as the ἑκολογία or ἔφρωμος of a passage), whereas allegory destroys this coherence. Allegorists interpret violently because of their myopic fascination with individual words that are allowed to serve only as tokens and that are made to refer arbitrarily to other, unrelated realities. Young’s distinction between typology and allegory

28. On 188–89 she uses “allegory” for the Origenist tradition in Alexandria and “typology” for the reaction in Antioch (also cf. 191–92).
31. The charge is explicitly leveled against Origen: “Coherence lay not in the text or narrative itself, but in what lay behind it. Origen was happy to decode symbols without worrying about textual or narrative coherence, and the symbols were tokens” (Biblical Exegesis, 184; also cf. 200). On the other hand, of the Antiochenes she writes: “What they resisted was the type of allegory that destroyed textual coherence” (176; also cf. 182).
32. Again: “The question is whether the mimesis happened through genuine likeness or analogy, an ‘ikon’ or image, or by a symbol, a token, something unlike which stands for the reality” (Biblical Exegesis, 191, my emphasis; also cf. 162–63, 175 for the same point).
brings with it something new to the Origenian scholarship, particularly her different account of the cultural backgrounds for these two ways of reading, the claim that texts alone and not events are being interpreted, and her emphasis upon whether the coherence of a passage was discerned or dismantled by the reader.

In John David Dawson’s *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (2002) the allegory/typology distinction, including the familiar normative judgment that it harbors, again plays a prominent role. However, instead of the terms “typology” and “allegory,” Dawson prefers “figural” and “figurative” respectively. A figural reading is one that honors and extends the literal sense—it is based upon a conception of language as a series of figures that preserve literal meaning. To be distinguished from this acceptable nonliteral exegesis is the “figurative” way of reading that betrays or undermines this literal sense—it is based upon a conception of language as a series of tropes that replace literal meaning with nonliteral meaning.33 This way of distinguishing typology from allegory, novel in the Origenian scholarship, is drawn from E. Auerbach and H. Frei,34 though Dawson departs from both scholars in two notable ways. First, he insists that Origen’s nonliteral exegesis is a good deal more typological, i.e., figural, than these scholars were willing to grant; and second, Dawson wishes to rescue the term “allegorical” by using it synonymously with “figural” or “typological” exegesis. “Figurative” is the new pejorative term, the replacement for Auerbach’s and Frei’s “allegorical.”35 For our purposes, what is important about Dawson’s work is that a distinction is once again drawn between acceptable and unacceptable nonliteral exegesis, that this distinction is drawn, yet again, in a novel way within the Origenian scholarship, and that Dawson has changed the terms with


35. See Dawson, *Figural Reading*, 263 n. 6.
which he labels this distinction, “figural” labeling acceptable nonliteral exegesis, “figurative” the unacceptable variety.  

In M. J. Edwards’ *Origen against Plato* this distinction again plays itself out, though not with particular lucidity.  

“While the ancients lacked a clear distinction between typology and allegory, they evidently do not treat these terms as synonyms . . . .” A little later, speaking of Origen, Edwards writes: “A thoroughgoing exponent of typology, he did not confuse this with allegory . . . .” Edwards comes the closest to distinguishing the two when he writes:

> [A]llegory as Origen conceives it is the 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 typology.

Edwards does not expound in greater detail what sort of “instrument” allegory is, and how it “mediates” between “corporeal parsing” and “spiritual divination,” i.e., between literal and typological exegesis.

Finally, the recently published guide, the *Westminster Handbook to Origen*, includes articles on “allegory” and “typology” (and, remarkably, even “anagogical interpretation”). In his article on “allegory,” J. J. O’Keefe writes the following:

> Some commentators, however, recognizing that figural reading in one form or another is a necessary component of Christian faith, have distinguished between “allegorical reading” and “typological reading.” The former, it is

36. It is also of interest to note that Dawson worked out this distinction differently in his earlier work, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 15–16. There he wrote that:

> the decision to divorce typology from allegory has obscured the underlying formal similarity of the two procedures by focusing on material theological considerations . . . . Consequently, in this book, typology is understood to be simply one species of allegory; the historical practice of giving texts other meanings (allegory) includes a certain subpractice of giving texts other meanings according to certain “rules” (typology). On this view, typology is simply a certain kind of allegorical reading promoted as nonallegorical for specific theological and rhetorical reasons. (16)

argued, detaches a text from historical events, while the latter continues to value history by maintaining a connection.\textsuperscript{41}

Yet O’Keefe, having offered a version of the definition such as was offered by Bienert, sounds a skeptical note: “While this modern distinction between allegory and typology may seem an attractive way to reconcile patristic sensibility with modern exegetical concerns, it must be admitted it does not do much to illuminate ancient principles of exegesis.”\textsuperscript{42} Despite O’Keefe’s reservation, the Handbook to Origen still offers an article on “Typology” by R. A. Norris. While conceding that the term is only modern, Norris proceeds to define it as:

> a traditional form of Christian biblical exegesis that reads Old Testament reports of certain events, persons, or items as containing “types,” that is, as bearing, in addition to their original contextual meaning, a reference forward to analogous events, persons, or practices in the New Testament, or, to speak more broadly, to the work of Christ and to Christian believers’ life [sic] “in Christ.”\textsuperscript{43}

Norris notes that typology was inherited from Paul and that by Origen’s day it was an established tradition of exegesis, whereas allegory was derived from Philo and certain Stoic and Platonic philosophers. Up until now this is an account largely derived from Daniélou. But Norris continues, admitting that Origen would have been uncomfortable with the gulf modern scholars devise between typology and allegory. Typological and allegorical exegesis are not related to one another by juxtaposition, but rather,


\textsuperscript{42} O’Keefe, “Allegory.” It is interesting to note that O’Keefe (with R. R. Reno) has recently sanctioned the distinction between typology and allegory.

Allegory and typology are part of the same family of reading strategies, often referred to by the fathers as “spiritual,” that seek to interpret the scriptures in terms of the divine economy. The difference lies in the amount of work the reader must put into the interpretation. For a well-functioning typological interpretation, two figures are brought into association, and the interpretation convinces (or not) by virtue of the perceived fit . . . . In contrast, an allegory is nearly always a more intentional, explicit, and, for its critics, strained development of association . . . . The reader must outline the reality for which the text is a map, explaining the coding system of the text so that the message can be read. For this reason, an allegorical interpretation often seems a reading laid over the text rather than a reading in the text. The interpreter presupposes that the allegorical meaning is not evident in the literal sense, and therefore, the reader must strain to see it. (J. J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, Sanctified Vision, 90)

\textsuperscript{43} R. A. Norris, “Typology,” in Westminster Handbook to Origen.
based upon an umbrella definition of allegory as “language that says one thing and means either something more than what it says or something other than what it says,” that:

allegory seems to have labeled a large class of varying strategies in literary composition and interpretation; and any argument over the relative importance of allegory and typology in Origen’s exegesis might best be settled by insisting that for him what we call typology counted, in practice, as a species of allegory, which, like all its other species, worked on the basis of some perception of “likeness” between two items or situations or levels of reality.\(^\text{44}\)

Here Norris fashions allegory as the genus within which typology is to be located—both quest for a likeness between two realities, but as the species in this genus, typology more specifically discerns the likeness between the “types” in the OT and their referents in the NT. Norris clearly departs from the literature surveyed above by not casting allegory and typology as rival, nonliteral models of scriptural interpretation.\(^\text{45}\)

This foregoing survey allows us to discern where both consensus and disagreement lie among those who distinguish typology from allegory. The consensus view can be outlined as follows: typology and allegory are competing forms of nonliteral exegesis, the former the successful variety, the latter its unsuccessful, nonliteral twin. To the extent that Origen is an allegorist, he troubles; to the extent that he is a typologist, he is tolerable and perhaps even laudable. With the exception of M. Edwards (for whom allegory mediates between literal and typological exegesis) and R. Norris (for whom typology is a species of allegory), everyone else has defined these as rival, nonliteral approaches to Scripture. At the same time—and this is a point that I think has been largely overlooked—it is also clear that the scholars who form the consensus differ significantly from one another in how they distinguish better from worse forms of nonliteral exegesis for Origen. For example, we are told that allegory is not Christian, but rather foreign, be it Platonic, Stoic, rabbinic, and/or Philonic (J. Daniélou, R. P. C. Hanson, W. A. Bienert, R. A. Norris); allegory is concerned with texts

\(^{44}\) Norris, “Typology.”

and not events (J. Daniélou); it is arbitrary (R. P. C. Hanson, F. Young); it
is unhistorical (W. A. Bienert); it destroys narrative sequence (F. Young);
it undermines the literal sense (J. D. Dawson). Typology, in contrast, is
saved from these failings.

This survey of the literature is integral to the larger argument of my
paper and it will resurface in its two subsequent sections. But before revis-
iting this survey, I will investigate in the next section Origen’s relevant
exegetical terminology. The pair ἀλληγορία and ἀλληγορέω, as well as the
“typic” family of terms, τύπος, τυπικός, and τυπικῶς, are of importance
here since the English words “allegory” and “typology” are derived from,
evoke, and often translate these Greek terms. The analyses of Origen’s
uses and definitions of these Greek terms will convey that the literature’s
definitions of “allegory” and “typology” usually mean something differ-
ent, at times something conspicuously different, from what Origen meant
by their Greek antecedents.46

EVIDENCE (PART I): ORIGEN’S EXEGETICAL LEXICON

“Allegory”

What immediately strikes the reader of Origen’s corpus is that he does not
overtly implicate ἀλληγορία and ἀλληγορέω in either successful or unsuccess-
ful nonliteral exegesis. This pair of Greek terms is easily applied to
all sorts of readers and texts: to the Greeks interpreting Hesiod’s myths,47
to those who, with insight into Plato’s teachings, allegorize his myths,48
to the allegorical readers of Homer49 and other Greek writers,50 but also

46. The analysis that follows is directly relevant to all the literature surveyed above
with the exception of J. D. Dawson, since he uses different vocabulary to indicate suc-
cessful and unsuccessful nonliteral exegesis—“figural” and “figurative” respectively.
Nevertheless, the critique that will be made in this section, that the definitions of “alle-
gory” and “typology” in the literature depart from Origen’s own definitions of their
Greek antecedents, can also be made of at least one of Dawson’s labels. The Greek
terms for “figurative interpretation” and “to interpret figuratively” are τροπολογία and
τροπολογέω respectively (cf. Lampe). But Origen uses these terms interchangeably with
ἀλληγορία and ἀλληγορέω (cf. n. 59 below). This raises two difficulties for Dawson:
first, he wants “allegory” to serve as a synonym for “figural” interpretation, and not
“figurative” interpretation; and second, it does not appear that “figurative” interpre-
tation for Origen is invested with the polemic that Dawson wishes to give it (again,
n. 59 and the discussion of Origen’s non-polemical use of “allegory” below).

47. Cels. 4.38 (SC 136:282.64).
48. Cels. 7.30 (SC 150:82.8).
50. Cels. 1.18 (SC 132:122.7); Cels. 4.48 (SC 136:308.15–17).
to the heterodox interpreters of Scripture, to Jews and Christians in the reading of the Old Testament, and to Christians interpreting Scripture in accordance with Gal 4.24 (“Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants . . .”). The Bible is replete with “allegories.”

Origen even makes the argument against Celsus that the Scriptures are in fact “receptive of an allegorical interpretation.” Not surprisingly, Origen can speak of himself as an allegorist: “And we must first say that just as when we find written of God that he has eyes and eyelids and ears, hands and arms and feet, and indeed even wings, we change what is written into an allegory . . . .”

Whatever Origen understands “allegorical exegesis” to be, it is certainly not by definition unacceptable nonliteral exegesis, otherwise (we can safely surmise) he would never have referred to himself as an allegorist. In fact, ἀλληγορία and ἀλληγορεῖον find wide application in his writings and appear simply to label the nonliteral reading of texts, a reading which may, or may not, turn out to be felicitous. For instance, in Against Celsus 4.38, Origen leaves up for discussion whether an allegorical reader of an Hesiodic myth “is successful in the allegory or not,” and earlier in this same work he writes that “we must examine the allegories one by one to see if they are sound.” In Origen’s hands, then, “allegory” does not serve as a marker for unacceptable nonliteral exegesis—some allegorical interpretations are legitimate, and others are not.

52. Cels. 4.38 (SC 136: 278.7); Cels. 4.49 (SC 136:310.9); Cels. 4.87 (SC 136:402.31).
53. Cels. 4.44 (SC 136:298.25–37; SC 136:298.44); Jo. 20.74 (GCS 4:339.11–16, passim); Princ. 4.2.6 (Vier Bücher von den Prinzipien, ed. by H. Görgemanns and H. Karp, 3rd ed. [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992], 716:316.12). “GK” as the abbreviation to subsequent references to the critical text of On First Principles.
54. Cels. 1.50 (SC 132:212.10); Jo. 6.22 (GCS 4:111.6).
55. Cels. 4.49 (SC 136:310.18): . . . ἐπιτιθέμεθαι ἀλληγορίαν.
58. Cels. 3.23 (SC 136:54.13): οὐδ’ μὲν ἐξετασθέν τὰς ἀλληγορίας, εἰ τὸ γόγγες ἐχοῦσιν. That allegorical interpretations can be either sound or “unsound” is again mentioned at Jo. 13.51 (GCS 4:233.21).
Since we find him using this Greek pair of terms of a wide variety of readers and of an equally wide variety of texts with little, if any, pejorative connotation, it would certainly suggest that Origen defines ἀλληγορία and ἀλληγορέω in such a way that these terms are not shaded with evaluative tones. While he never offered a straightforward definition of either of these terms in his extant writings (“by allegory I mean . . .”), we can certainly surmise a working definition of “allegory” since he employed numerous words that were interchangeable with ἀλληγορία and ἀλληγορέω. One of these terms is σύμβολον and it surfaces in Against Celsus 2.69, one of Origen’s more concise and illuminating discussions of allegorical exegesis. There he writes:

The events recorded to have happened to Jesus do not possess the full view of the truth in the mere letter and history [ἐν ψυλῇ τῇ λέξει καὶ τῇ ιστορίᾳ]; for each recorded event is shown to be also a symbol of something else [σύμβολον τινος εἶναι] by those who read Scripture more intelligently.51

59. For example, ἀλληγορία and ἀλληγορέω are used interchangeably with τροπολογία (Cels. 4.38 [SC 136:278.6–7]; 4.44 [SC 136:298.24]; 4.48 [SC 136:306.1–308.17 with 308.35–36]; 4.49 [SC 136:310.4–12]) and τροπολογέω (cf. Cels. 1.17 [SC 132:120.4]; 1.18 [SC 132:122.9–10]; 4.49 [SC 136:310.9–15]), with ἀναγωγή (Jo. 4.22 [GCS 4:111.7]; 13.101 [GCS 4:240.31–32]) and ἀνάγω (Jo. 1.180 [GCS 4:33.23–24]; 10.174 [GCS 4:201.26–27]; 13.270–271 [GCS 4:267.1, 4, 6]; 13.454 [GCS 4:297.11–13]; 20.166 [GCS 4:352.14–15]), with πνευματικός (two very similar dossiers of Pauline texts supporting nonliteral interpretation are cited at Cels. 4.49 [SC 136:310.18] and Princ. 4.2.6 [GK 714:315.15]) and in the latter they are considered instances of a πνευματικὴ δύναμις whereas in the former, instances of ἀλληγορία and πνευματικός (Cels. 2.3 [SC 132:286.15–18]; Jo. 20.67 [GCS 4:337.31–32]), and also with ἱπόνοια (Cels. 4.38 [SC 136:292.64–66]). In fact, the general principle appears to be that while Origen draws upon a rich vocabulary to describe his exegetical practice, most of these terms fall into two categories: those that describe nonliteral (ascending, figurative, tropological, allegorical, spiritual, symbolic, etc.) exegesis on the one hand, and those that describe literal exegesis (exegesis according to the letter, according to history) on the other. R. Gögler is, I think, correct when he writes: “Tropologie, Typologie, Allegorie und deren zugehörige Begriffe haben bei Origenes einen großen Bedeutungsfächer und meinen im Grunde nichts anderes als symbolische Redeweise” (Zur Theologie des Biblischen Wortes, 362).

60. A “symbol” in Scripture is an “allegory,” and as such, is receptive of an “allegorical” interpretation. For example, the things that happened to Abraham, Origen says, “happened allegorically [Gal 4.24]” (Jo. 20.74) and thus “we must [interpret] the whole story of Abraham allegorically” [δικά πᾶσαν τὴν κατὰ τὸν Ἀβραὰμ ἀλληγοροῦντα ιστορίαν] (Jo. 20.67 [GCS 4:337.31]). A few lines later, referring to one episode in this story, Gen 12.4 where it says: “And Lot went with him [Abram]” as the two departed Haran, Origen writes of this verse that “it was a symbol” [σύμβολον ἦν] (Jo. 20.69 [GCS 4:338.20]).

61. Cels. 2.69 (SC 132:446.3–7): Τὸ συμβεβηκέναι ἀναγεγραμμένα τῷ Ἰησοῦ οὖκ ἐν ψυλῇ τῇ λέξει καὶ τῇ ιστορίᾳ τὴν πᾶσαν ἔχει θεωρίαν τῆς ἠλληθείας. Ἐκατον
Here we have the basic account of an allegorical exegesis—the intelligent reader is not content with the λέξις and ἱστορία of a passage, but can also show how such a passage is a “symbol of something else.” In the case of the above excerpt from Against Celsus, Origen recognizes that Jesus’ crucifixion is an event that has transpired and has significance for its time and place, that this event has a “literal significance.” But this event also symbolizes, Origen insists, the truth indicated in the verse: “I am crucified with Christ” (Gal 2.20), and he provides several other Pauline texts where the crucifixion and death of Christ are referred symbolically, i.e., allegorically, to something other than the actual event, namely to the “crucifixion” and “death” of Christians.

In sum, we are dealing here with a formal account of allegorical exegesis, a sort of reading that can be practiced by a wide spectrum of ancient readers, not just Christians, on an even wider spectrum of ancient texts, not just the Christian Scriptures. Allegory is simply the quest for the “other” (sometimes “lofty,” other times “deeper”) referent, a mode of interpretation whose real rival is not some other form of nonliteral interpretation (i.e., typology), but rather literal interpretation. And precisely because

63. A little later in the same section of Against Celsus Origen offers another similar account of allegorical exegesis, this time calling an event in Scripture not a σύμβολον but rather a σημαντικὸν (“sign”) and describing the exegetical movement from the event to its signified nonliteral reality as an ἐνάβασις (“ascent”): “However, the explanation of these matters and ascent [ἐναβάσεως] from the events recorded to have happened up to the realities of which the events were signs [σημαντικά], someone would set forth at both greater length and in a more divine manner . . . .” (Τὰ μὲν οὖν τῆς διηγήσεως καὶ τῆς ἀπὸ τῶν γεγονότων ἀναγεγραμμένων ἐναβάσεως ἐπὶ τὰ πράγματα, ὁπό τὰ γενόμενα τὴν σημαντικά, καὶ μειζόνως ἐν τὶς καὶ θειοτέρως διηγήσαιτο . . . . [Cels. 2.69 (SC 132:450.45–48); Chadwick modified].)
64. For other instances of Origen’s formal understanding of nonliteral exegesis, cf. Princ. 4.2.2 (GK 702:309.10–11); 4.2.6 (GK 714:315.15); Comm. in Matt. 12.3 (GCS 10:73.10); and especially prol. Cant. (GCS 8:76.20–22). Origen’s formal understanding of allegorical interpretation is in keeping with the formal definition of compositional allegory in the Homeric Problems: ‘Ο γὰρ άλλα μὲν ἀγορεύων τρόπος, ἔτερα δὲ ὀν λέγει σημαίνων, ἑπονυμῶς ἀλληγορία καλεῖται (Heraclitus, Héraclite: Allégories d’Homère, Félix Buffière, ed., 2nd ed. [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1989], 5.2). “Allegory is named eponymously, for it is the trope which proclaims one set of things but in fact signifies other things different from what it says.”
65. The nonliteral quest is contrasted to a literal exegesis that aims to identify the basic (“immediate,” “at hand,” “obvious”) referent. Terms like βαθύτερον (“deeper”) (Cels. 3.7 [SC 136:26.1]; Comm. in Matt. 13.2 [GCS 10:183.28] and the “ascent” family (ἀναγωγή, etc.—cf. nn. 59 and 76) are affiliated with allegorical exegesis. On
this formal definition of allegorical exegesis, as the quest for the “other” referent, is not saddled with polemical considerations, Origen can employ a term like ἀλληγορία in situations where proper or improper allegorical exegesis might occur. Such an understanding of allegory runs counter to most of the literature surveyed above, where Origenian “allegory” served as a marker for deficient, nonliteral exegesis.

“Typology”

“Typology” is a relatively recent English word that is occasionally employed to translate the “typic” family of Greek terms from which it is, in part, derived. These terms—τύπος, τυπικός, and τυπικά—play a considerable role in Origen’s exegetical lexicon as he often speaks of (and practices) the interpretation of scriptural τύποι. In what follows, I will investigate in some detail his uses and definitions of these terms in explicitly exegetical contexts.

When Origen refers to a τύπος in Scripture, the term can usually be defined as a “representation,” “image,” “symbol,” or “figure” of something. More often than not, a τύπος has a positive connotation, i.e., the figure in question, be it a person, place, or thing, indicates another higher reality, what Origen invariably terms the ἔντατον (and interestingly, never ἄντιτυπος). Thus, Jonah’s whale is a figure of the devil, and the temple and Jesus’ body are figures of the church, etc. In his comments on John 5.46 (“If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me”),

the other hand, adjectives like πρόχειρος (Philoc. 27.12 [SC 226:308.6]) and ἐπιπλάκας (Princ. 4.3.11 [GK 762:340.4]; Hom. in Jer. 18.4.1 [SC 238:186.4]), both of which mean “within reach” or “obvious” can describe literal exegesis.

66. The English term “typology” was first coined in the mid-nineteenth century. It is an adaptation of the Latin typologia, itself a term derived from the combination of τύπος with λόγος. The Latin noun typologia is not attested in ancient and patristic Latin usage (based upon a search of the PL Database and Cetedoc) and appears, in fact, also to be the product of the nineteenth century’s imagination. (According to A. C. Charity, *Events and Their Afterlife* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966], 171 n. 2, the Latin noun “typologia” first appeared ca. 1840 and the English “typology” ca. 1844.) Furthermore, the Greek noun τυπολογία has only recently made an appearance in modern Greek, though the term is infrequent and is seldom, if ever, applied to biblical exegesis.

67. There are only three references to this noun in Origen’s extant corpus: Cels. 2.61 (SC 132:428.10) with the sense of “firm, solid” (Lampe, s.v. ἄντιτυπος B.2); Princ. 3.1.15 (GK 514:221.16) and Hom. in Jer. 6.3 (SC 232:336.14) with the sense of “obstinate” (Lampe, s.v. ἄντιτυπος B.3).

68. Or. 13.4 (GCS 2:329.1).

69. Jo. 10.228 (GCS 4:209.17). Also cf. Jo. 2.63 (GCS 4:63.3–4); Cels. 2.2 (SC 132:284.37); Princ. 4.3.7 (GK 750:333.16), etc.
Origen writes: “One can find, therefore, that most of the things recorded in the law refer τυπικῶς and αἰνιγματῶδες to the Christ.”70 The concatenated adverb αἰνιγματῶδες (from the noun αἰνίγμα, “riddle,” “figure,” or “symbol”)71 is paralleled to τυπικῶς, “figuratively,” both adverbs indicating the symbolic potential of the law to refer nonliterally to the Christ. It is along these same lines that Origen understands the adverb τυπικῶς in a verse he frequently cites, 1 Cor 10.11: “all these things happened τυπικῶς . . . .” Origen understands the adverb in this verse to mean “figuratively,” and thus, interprets Paul to be saying that the events that transpired under the old covenant served as figures of other, later, higher realities.72 Particularly important for my purposes is a passage in Origen’s Commentary on First Corinthians. Here he can actually describe a scriptural event as both “allegorical” and “figurative,” making no meaningful distinction between the two. Contending for the wisdom of not marrying twice, Origen censures any man who takes a second wife on the pattern of Abraham, since such a man has not understood that the events of Abraham’s life were meant to be taken allegorically. Referring to Abraham and his wives, Origen writes: “‘these things ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα [happened allegorically],’ and ‘these are two covenants,’ [Gal 4.24] since ‘these things happened τυπικῶς [figuratively] to them, and were written for us upon whom the end of the ages has come’” [1 Cor 10.11].73 In this passage from his Commentary Origen easily juxtaposes two independent Pauline expressions, one from Galatians and the other from 1 Corinthians, moving effortlessly between describing Abraham’s two wives and two sons as an allegorical and as a typical (or typological) phenomenon. This piece of evidence strikingly indicates how a typological phenomenon for Origen was not opposed to an allegorical one.74

71. Lampe, s.v. αἰνίγμα 1, 2 and 3.
72. Other places where 1 Cor 10.11 is cited: Cels. 4.43 (SC 136:294.18); Princ. 4.2.6 (GK 716:316.6–7); Jo. 1.34 (GCS 4:11.12); Fr. in Lc. 15 (GCS 9:239.5); Comm. in I Cor. 35 (JTS 9 [1908], 504.28–30).
73. Comm. in I Cor. 35 (JTS 9 [1908], 504.28–30): “Ἔτι ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα,” καὶ “αὕται γὰρ εἰσὶ δύο διοικηθεὶς ταῦτα” γάρ “τυπικῶς συνεβάλεν εἰκόνις, ἐγράψας δὲ “δι’ ἣμᾶς” εἰς ὅν τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων κατῆγιναν.
74. There is more evidence for this point as well. Cf. Princ. 4.2.6 (GK 716:316.11) where Origen cites Heb 8.5 (doing all things κατὰ τὸν τόπον shown on the mountain) and immediately thereafter quotes Gal 4.24 (“these things ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα [happened allegorically]”) within a long list of biblical texts, all of which are intended to help him make his point that there is such a thing as a spiritual interpretation of Scripture. Here again there is no distinction drawn between a “figurative” (Heb 8.5)
In these, as well as in the other passages where τυπικός is similarly used, the idea is that Scripture is composed in a manner symbolic of another (higher) reality.\(^75\) It follows, then, that the proper interpretation of a scriptural τύπος ought to be a nonliteral one, i.e., an exegesis in search of what the figure figures. We would expect, in other words, that Origen would have little difficulty using terms like “allegory” (or its extensive list of synonyms) to discuss the nonliteral interpretation of τύποι. And this is precisely what we find. The terms he customarily uses to describe the nonliteral interpretation of Scripture’s τύποι, particularly ἄνάγω,\(^76\) and πνευματικός,\(^77\) are also the very terms that he uses interchangeably with ἄλληγορέω and ἄλληγορία.\(^78\) For example, in On First Principles 4.2.6 Origen explicitly justifies the “spiritual interpretation” (πνευματικὴ διήγησις) of Scripture by reminding the reader that the events recorded in Scripture and an “allegorical” event (Gal 4.24), both of which stand in need of a “spiritual” interpretation.

It is also, moreover, of interest that Celsus too does not appear to draw a hard distinction between a figure and an allegory. He uses the adjective τυποειδής [τυπικός], defined as “in the form of a figure” (Lampe, s.v. τυποειδής, 2), to modify the noun ἄλληγορία when he criticizes Christians for interpreting Moses’ cosmogony and his law διὰ τῶν ... τυπών ἄλληγορίας, i.e., “through some figurative allegory” (Cels. 6.29 [SC 147:250.7]). It would certainly be odd for Celsus to modify the noun “allegory” with this adjective if he thought a τύπος was, in fact, quite different from an ἄλληγορία.

75. Note that a τύπος can be synonymous to a σύμβολον in Origen’s writings. In Comm. in Matt. 12.9 he refers to Jeremiah as a τύπος of Christ and at the end of this section, returning to Jeremiah, he notes how “most of the prophets took up some things which were symbolic of him [Christ]” (ὅτι οἱ πλείστοι τῶν προφητῶν συμβολικά τινα συνάντησαν) (Comm. in Matt. 12.9 [GCS 10:84.12–13]). In Comm. in Matt. 11.17 Origen again employs a τύπος interchangeably with a σύμβολον (GCS 10:63.1–2).

76. Cf. Princ. 4.3.7 where Eve and Cain are ἐκτυπώματα (types) of the church because Paul interpreted Eve as εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἀναγομένη (Princ. 4.3.7 [GK 750:333.24–28]); also cf. Jo. 10.266–267 (GCS 4:215.32–216.4).

77. In Princ. 4.2.6 (GK 714:315.15) a “spiritual interpretation” includes the nonliteral reading of a figure; in Jo. 13.110 (GCS 4:242.17) the literal reader of figures is opposed to the one who reads spiritually; in Cels. 2.2 the nonliteral interpretation of a figure equates to “the interpretation of the law according to the spiritual sense” (τῆς τοῦ νόμου κατά τὰ πνευματικὰ διηγήσεως) (SC 132:284.33–34); in Or. 13.4 there is the need to interpret figures spiritually to find their mysteries (GCS 2:329.1).

78. For ἄλληγορία and ἄλληγορέω as interchangeable with ἀναγωγή, cf. Jo. 4.22 (GCS 4:111.7); 13.101 (GCS 4:240.31–32); as interchangeable with ἄνωθεν, cf. Jo. 1.180 (GCS 4:33.23–24); 10.174 (GCS 4:201.26–27); 13.270–271 (GCS 4:267.1, 4, 6); 13.454 (GCS 4:297.11–13); 20.166 (GCS 4:352.14–15). For examples of ἄλληγορία/ ἄλληγορέω as interchangeable with or at least closely related to πνευματικός, cf. Jo. 13.51; Princ. 4.2.6; Cels. 2.4.
happened τυπικῶς as Paul had indicated in 1 Cor 10.11. After citing this verse Origen proceeds to note that Paul “also provides starting-points [for determining] of what each of those things were figures [τύποι], saying: “For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ [1 Cor 10.4].” The figurative character of biblical events and the apostle’s suggestions of what those events figured serve here as a guide for the “spiritual,” i.e., allegorical, interpretation of Scripture. This point is of further relevance to the assessment of the prevailing allegory/typology distinction, since it undermines the notion of “typology” as somehow a rival to allegory. For Origen, scriptural figures (τύποι) ought to be interpreted allegorically.

As we continue the survey of the “typic” terms in exegetical contexts, it is especially important to highlight those passages where Origen can speak of the improper nonliteral interpretation of Scripture’s figures, i.e., cases when the reader has found the wrong ἀλήθεια. For example, he criticizes those who think that the Jewish Passover at the Exodus is a τύπος of Christ’s passion. “The Passover,” Origen writes, “is indeed a type of Christ, but certainly not of his passion” for the simple reason that the dissimilarity between these events is too great: whereas righteous people killed the first paschal lambs, Jesus was put to death by “criminals and sinners.” Or again, in On First Principles 4.2.2 our author criticizes the simpliciores’ nonliteral interpretation of the tabernacle-as-τύπος. These simpler Christians correctly understand that the tabernacle is a figure of something, but they usually fall into error when they attempt to discern what it figures. For Origen, the nonliteral reading of a τύπος can transpire successfully or unsuccessfully, a point that is also pertinent to our discussion, since it subverts the literature’s consensus view of “typology” as, by definition, a successful form of nonliteral exegesis.

79. Princ. 4.2.6 (GK 714:315.15).
80. Princ. 4.2.6 (GK 716:316.8–9): καὶ ἀφορμὰς διδοὺ τοῦ τίνων ἐκείνα τύπων ἐτύγχανον, λέγων: “Ἔπινον γὰρ ἐκ πνευματικῆς ἀκολούθουσις πέτρας, ἢ δὲ πέτρα ἦν ὁ Χριστός.”
81. Other examples of the nonliteral, symbolical, or allegorical interpretation of a τύπος include: Cels. 2.2 (SC 132:284.37); Princ. 4.3.7 (GK 750:333.16); Jo. 1.46 (GCS 4:13.12–14); 6.15 (GCS 4:109.23–25).
83. Pascha 12–14 (B. Witte, Passa, 102.16). Cf. the extended discussion and citation of this passage below, at ft. 101.
84. Princ. 4.2.2 (GK 702:309.7). Also cf. the critique of Heracleon’s reading of a scriptural τύπος at Jo. 10.117–118 (GCS 4:190.30–191.4).
Finally, we can complete this survey of the typic terms by attending to one additional set of texts that complicates the picture considerably. For Origen someone can read a passage “typically,” or be enamored with its “types,” and not be interpreting these figures nonliterally, as we would expect, but rather precisely the opposite, be performing a deficient literal interpretation of Scripture’s figures. In these passages, Origen will actually indicate the literal interpretation of a τύπος without availing himself of any additional expression for reading “literally” (κατὰ τὴν λέξιν, πρῶς τὸ γράμμα, etc.). Rather, he will simply state that someone is reading Scripture “typically” or is only interested in the “type.” How is this possible?

To decipher this puzzling situation we need to attend to an important and neglected ambiguity that characterizes his use of the “typic” family of terms. As already indicated above, a τύπος for Origen is a “symbol” or “figure.” Usually he will stress the salutary symbolic character of a τύπος: the figure is seen as referential, pointing beyond itself to its ἀλήθεια, and on this definition, the one who interprets τυπικῶς interprets figuratively, i.e., nonliterally. However, there are also times when the emblematic quality of the τύπος recedes and the emphasis is now upon the τύπος as a mere “symbol” or “figure,” i.e., as only a distinct, inferior, and even contrasting version of its ἀλήθεια. In this latter case, the “typic” term inevitably surfaces in a pejorative context and its new lexical nuance dramatically changes how Origen can use the term: when the accent now rests upon the τύπος as an inferior version of its ἀλήθεια, the one who interprets τυπικῶς or is preoccupied with the τύπος is not interpreting the figure nonliterally, but rather literally with an eye only for the mere figure and not for that which it figures.

I will offer two examples of this latter scenario.

In Against Celsus 6.70 Origen refers in a derogatory manner to the Samaritans and Jews who “were doing the commands of the law σωματικῶς καὶ τυπικῶς.” He continues, clarifying: these groups worship God “in the flesh and carnal sacrifices” and to this sort of worship is opposed the Christian worship of God “in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4.24). “The Father

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85. Only H. Crouzel hints that there might be some tension within this word group when he notes that to act τυπικῶς can in some cases mean not acting symbolically, but rather “remaining at the type” (Origène et la “Connaissance Mystique” [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961], 225). The note refers to Cels. 6.70 which will be discussed in greater detail below. Crouzel does not explain this tension or its significance for discussions of “typology” in Origen.

86. For the confusion that this ambiguity caused in Greek patristic literature, cf. Lampe, s.v. τύπος C.4.

must not be worshipped ϵν τύποις but rather ϵν άληθείας which came by Jesus Christ after the law was given by Moses.”

What does Origen mean when he criticizes the Jews and Samaritans for performing the law τυπικῶς and a little later, for worshipping the Father merely ϵν τύποις of the Mosaic law? If we take our cues from the literature’s definitions of “typology” (some form of “nonliteral exegesis”), or simply follow the only definition offered in Lampe for τυπικῶς (“symbolically”), we would expect that the one who interprets Scripture τυπικῶς interprets it in a symbolic or nonliteral manner. On this reading, Origen would be suggesting that the Jews and Samaritans interpret the law, and hence perform it, according to the higher reality symbolized by the law. But here Origen has precisely the opposite in mind. Interpreting the commands of the law τυπικῶς means reading the law not “figuratively” (nonliterally), but rather, “in accordance with the figure alone” (i.e., literally). Not only the adjoined adverb σωματικῶς,

but also the explicit reference to the physical sacrifices of Jews and Samaritans, and Origen’s clear contrast between those who worship ϵν άληθείας and those who worship ϵν τύποις, support this reading. By interpreting Scripture τυπικῶς Origen means here that the reader is enamored with the mere figures in the law and not with the higher realities to which they point.

There is another instance of this curious use of the typic family of terms in the Commentary on John where Origen again pejoratively describes the interpreter of τύποι as a literalist. Commenting on John 4.23 (“But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth”), he sets up the familiar contrast between those who worship ϵν άληθείας and those who offer an inferior worship τύποις.

Who is this latter worshipper? This is the interpreter of Scripture, he answers, “who is enslaved to the letter that kills” (2 Cor 3.6)


89. For a contrast, recall how in Jo. 1.161 (cf. n. 70 above) he could parallel τυπικῶς with αἰνηματικῶς (“symbolically”).

90. As such, the only definition offered for τυπικῶς in Lampe (“symbolically”) fails to indicate how polysemic this adverb actually is. In addition to this entry, the lexicon should also have an entry such as, “according to the mere figure,” i.e., literally. H. Chadwick’s translation of this passage from *Cels.* properly indicates an awareness of Origen’s ambiguous use of τυπικῶς: instead of rendering it “symbolically” or “figuratively,” he translates it as “outwardly” (H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953], 384).

91. Jo. 13.109 (GCS 4:242.16–17). Also cf. *Cels.* 4.44 (SC 136:298.34–37) where this contrast is again articulated: it is not the physical acts of Abraham that are to
and “does not follow the spiritual meanings of the law.”92 This one, Origen continues, “is utterly engrossed in the figures and bodily meanings” (ο̂λος τῶν τύπων καὶ τῶν σωματικῶν ὄν).93 A little later he describes these readers as “enslaved to the figure” (τῶν τύπων δεδουλωμένους), a clear parallel to Paul’s “enslaved to the letter” which Origen had directly cited above in his Commentary.94 In this excerpt from the Commentary the reader engrossed in the τύπος is not concerned with what the figure figures, but rather precisely the opposite, has failed to appreciate what is figured and is, thus, entrapped in only a literal appreciation of the figure.

In sum, this terminological investigation into Origen’s use of the “typic” family of terms in exegetical contexts allows us to see how two different emphases in the definition of a τύπος have dramatic implications for how Origen can refer to biblical passages that were either written or understood “typically.” When the τύπος is an inferior and even contrasting version of its ἀλήθεια, the interpreter who is engrossed in this sort of “type,” or who reads “typically,” is engaged in the unsuccessful, literal interpretation of this τύπος. This interpreter has failed to embark upon a search for the ἀλήθεια, i.e., has read the figure only literally. On the other hand, when the accent rests upon the τύπος as a positive, referential trope, synonymous with other tropes like an “allegory” or a “symbol,” a passage written “typically” ought, correspondingly, to be interpreted nonliterally in search of the ἀλήθεια. This nonliteral interpretation is nothing other than an “allegorical interpretation” (or any of its numerous synonymous expressions), and it may, or may not, turn out to be successful.

A First Evaluation of the Literature

As I indicated in the survey of the scholarship above, most of the literature has formed a consensus around “allegory” and “typology” serving as markers for the unsuccessful and successful nonliteral interpretations of Scripture respectively. (Norris, in concert with a few others, proves to be the main exception to this consensus when he contends that typology is a species of the genus, allegory.) The analysis of Origen’s relevant exegetical terminology in this section indicates, however, that the consensus definitions of “allegory” and “typology,” and on occasion even Norris’s defini-

tions, run in a very different direction from Origen’s own accounts of the Greek terms that stand behind these English nouns. These discrepancies, as well as their consequences, can be summarized as follows.

Concerning “allegory,” Norris’s definition is correct, that an “allegorical” interpretation for Origen is simply the search for the nonliteral referent, an interpretation that may, or may not, turn out well. The majority of the literature, however, supplements this simple, formal definition with an evaluative component (“unsuccessful”), and thus also with a competitor (the “successful” variant, “typology”) that is simply not confirmed by Origen’s own definitions and uses of ἀλληγορία/ἀλληγορέω. For him, an allegorical interpretation is not inherently successful or deficient (some allegorical interpretations turn out to be successful, while others do not) and allegory’s real competitor is not some other form of nonliteral exegesis, but rather literalism. There is, then, a significant discrepancy between Origen’s account of ἀλληγορία and the literature’s definition of “allegory.”

The situation is similar with “typology.” Among most of those who endorse the allegory/typology distinction, the consensus definition of “typology” as “successful, nonliteral exegesis” fails to conform in at least four ways to how Origen uses and defines τύπος, τυπικός, and τυπικῶς in exegetical contexts. First, he does not use any of the “typic” terms as most of the literature does, as global labels of acceptable, nonliteral exegesis; when Origen uses these terms in exegetical contexts, he is, rather, referring specifically to the interpretation of a τύπος. Second, even when τύποι are read nonliterally (though they do not have to be), there is no suggestion that this is an inherently successful exercise since, as I have also shown, Origen can clearly speak of unsuccessful nonliteral interpretations of τύποι. And third, there is no hint that Origen opposes the “typic” terms in exegetical contexts to “allegory.” Not only is a τύπος, as a figure of speech, synonymous with an “allegory,” but the nonliteral interpretation of this τύπος is itself an allegorical interpretation. The very task of the allegorical interpretation of a τύπος is to discern its ἀλήθεια. It is important to underscore that Origen does not reserve any special terms for the nonliteral reading of a scriptural τύπος—they are the very terms used throughout his writings for allegory.95 With respect to each of these three

95. H. de Lubac has also made this point, though without reference to Origen: “Far from the customary opposition of these two terms, one ought to say that allegorical interpretation, in its traditional meaning, consists in discerning the types or the figures in Israel that announce the Christ—all of Israel announced the whole Christ. It [allegorical interpretation] establishes the relationship of the figure to the truth, of the letter to the spirit, of the old to the new. It shows what is said
points, the consensus definitions of “typology” are suspect, while Norris, who understands “typology” as simply the allegorical interpretation of a “type,” is, in fact, closer to the target. However, there is also a fourth way in which Origen’s use of the “typic” family of terms challenges Norris and the consensus literature as well. As I indicated in some detail above, one of the most striking features of Origen’s “typic” language is that he can use it, on occasion, to describe the unsuccessful, *literal* exegesis of a τύπος. The point here is not simply that a τύπος can be read literally, but that its literal reading is indicated precisely by the “typic” terms. Such a use runs directly counter to the shared definition of “typology” as, at the very least, some form of *nonliteral* exegesis. In sum, then, there is a series of major discrepancies between the literature’s definition of “typology” and Origen’s definitions of his “typic” terms in exegetical contexts.

The standard allegory/typology construct presents, then, accounts of “allegory” and “typology” that diverge from, and sometimes even contradict, Origen’s own definitions of ἐλληγορία and the “typic” terms. This discordance is, moreover, hardly innocuous since it is associated with several troubling ramifications. Perhaps most obvious, those who are unaware of these definitional discrepancies can easily be misled into imposing a different definition of “allegory” or “typology” onto Origen’s discussions of an ἐλληγορία or a τύπος. Precisely because of the transparent linguistic relationship between “allegory” and ἐλληγορία, as well as between “typology” and the τύπος family of terms, it is easy to see how someone could unsuspectingly foist any of the literature’s discrepant definitions of “allegory” and “typology” back upon Origen’s discussions of an ἐλληγορία and a τύπος. The reader’s reasonable expectation is that there should be definitional affinity where there is also linguistic affinity, but as I have argued above, there is usually not. There are instances where these divergent definitions have caused precisely this sort of confusion.96

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96. Take the case of R. Heine’s rendering of the passage, already discussed above, from the *Commentary on John*. He translates the phrase, ὅλος τῶν τύπων καὶ τῶν σωματικῶν ἰδίως, as: “because he belongs totally to the typological and literal level of understanding” (italics mine) (R. Heine, *Origen, Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 13–32*, FC, vol. 89 [Washington: CUA Press, 1993], 91). This translation goes amiss because Heine (reasonably) assumed that the linguistic affinity between Origen’s τύπος and our “typological” equated to definitional affinity. But this is precisely one of those passages, as I discussed above, where our prevailing understanding of a “typological” interpretation contradicts Origen’s use of
Yet even for those who are aware of these definitional discrepancies, the conventional allegory/typology construct is still hardly convenient. Translators, for instance, must eschew some of the most convenient English terms that could serve as translations of ἄλληγορία and the τύπος family of terms, and in turn, come up with different English words that can capture Origen’s understandings of these Greek terms—as I have shown above, the newly-defined “allegory” and “typology” are no longer suitable terms for translating their Greek antecedents. The situation becomes especially cumbersome, however, since while the newly-defined “allegory” and “typology” cannot serve as definitions of ἄλληγορία and the τύπος family of terms, they can be used to translate or describe other Greek terms and expressions. As I will demonstrate in the next section of this paper, Origen was clearly aware of the issue of successful and unsuccessful nonliteral exegesis. As such, when Origen happens to speak of proper or improper nonliteral exegesis, those who embrace the allegory/typology dichotomy could argue that such passages should be described or even translated with the terms “allegory” and “typology.” But is it not misleading to use “allegory” and “typology” in such circumstances if nothing approaching ἄλληγορία or the τύπος family of terms is found in the original passage? And is it not even more perplexing when Origen happens to discuss a successful nonliteral interpretation of an ἄλληγορία, or a particularly unsuccessful nonliteral exegesis of a τύπος? How, namely, would scholars render those passages where Origen was referring to a particularly successful ἄλληγορία—would they decide to call this interpretation “typological” since this is the term that for us equates to “successful nonliteral exegesis”? Or conversely, will unpersuasive interpretations of τύπος be rendered, precisely because they are unsuccessful, “allegorical,” since this is the term that for us carries pejorative force? Because Origen can describe the nonliteral interpretations of both an ἄλληγορία and τύπος as either successful or unsuccessful, the allegory/typology distinction can easily become an unwieldy construct for Origen’s students.

τύπος. Heine’s translation suggests that when Origen is talking about the reader who is engrossed in τύποι, Origen is talking about a nonliteral reader, since the phrase, “typological . . . level of understanding” consistently means “nonliteral understanding” in modern biblical and theological parlance. In fact, however, Origen is saying precisely the opposite of what this English translation conveys: he is critiquing the reader for an unacceptable preoccupation with the literal and bodily meaning of figures. The only way “typological” can be used in this translation so that it does not mislead readers is if a note is supplied that explains how our prevailing definition of this adjective is precisely the opposite of what Origen meant by the interpreter of a τύπος in this passage.
In sum, then, this first evaluation of the scholarship has shown that the literature defines the English terms that are derived from, transparently evoke, and often translate Origen’s exegetical vocabulary in ways that diverge, sometimes quite radically, from Origen’s definitions of his own vocabulary; this evaluation also spells out a series of inauspicious repercussions that attend the allegory/typology construct. At first glance, then, it appears that the critics of the allegory/typology distinction have it right.\textsuperscript{97}

**EVIDENCE (PART II): ORIGEN’S CRITERIA**

But do, in fact, the lexical problems as I have outlined them above warrant a complete dismissal of this distinction? I will contend in this section of the paper that they do not, since there is another facet of the allegory/typology distinction that turns out to have traction in Origen’s writings.

Even if Origen does not label successful and unsuccessful nonliteral interpretation with the “typic” family of terms and ἐλληνικὸν/ἐλληνικός respectively, the question can still be asked: does he not, nevertheless, speak of proper and improper forms of nonliteral exegesis? In his brief response to H. de Lubac’s critique already cited above, J. Daniélou wrote that it was “convenient” to use typology and allegory as opposites: “The main thing, after all, is to make the distinction between the two things quite clear—which Fr. de Lubac does not, perhaps, altogether succeed in doing.”\textsuperscript{98} Daniélou articulated what, I think it is fair to say, is the leading concern of those who have insisted upon the allegory/typology distinction, the concern to demarcate clearly “the two things,” i.e., the unsuccessful from the successful nonliteral interpretations of Scripture. And so we need to ask: was Origen aware of the importance of the distinction between better and worse nonliteral interpretations of Scripture, and if so, where did he draw the dividing line? To the best of my knowledge, this question has not yet been put specifically to him.

**Criteria**

When we scan Origen’s corpus we do, in fact, detect guidelines by which he distinguished proper from improper nonliteral exegesis. I have been able to identify five of them. Origen can insist (1) upon the principle of similitude, that there be a likeness between the literal and nonliteral ref-

\textsuperscript{97} See n. 15 above.

\textsuperscript{98} Quoting from the ET (Origen [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955], 327, n. 2). J. Daniélou, Origène (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948), 175 n. 1.
erent. For example, in his *On the Passover* he remarks that there is, in fact, a significant dissimilarity between the Passover lamb sacrificed by the Hebrews and Christ’s passion:

In the Scripture will be found many such things which, to those who read superficially, will seem to be identical, but which, to those who read with care and attention, will reveal their differences . . . . The lamb is sacrificed by the saints or Nazirites [cf. Num 6.12, 14], while the Savior is sacrificed by criminals and sinners.99

The Passover sacrifice, in other words, cannot serve as a type of Christ’s passion since there is a significant dissimilarity between these two events—holy figures (like Nazirites) sacrificed the Passover lamb, whereas criminals killed Christ. Yet why, Origen continues, does Paul write: “For Christ, our paschal lamb, is sacrificed” [1 Cor 5.7]? Paul seems to suggest that Christ’s passion is, in fact, the nonliteral referent of the Jewish Passover. But Origen proposes an alternative nonliteral referent of the Passover sacrifice that is both commensurate with Paul’s statement and faithful to the principle of similitude: “It is necessary for us to sacrifice the true lamb—if we have been ordained priests, or like priests have offered sacrifice—and it is necessary for us to cook and eat its flesh.”100 In other words, it is not Christ’s death, but rather the Christian priest’s spiritual sacrifice of Christ that is the true nonliteral referent of the Passover sacrifice. Origen is offering a nonliteral reading of the Jewish Passover that respects the criterion of similitude for successful, nonliteral exegesis.

There are additional guidelines for the nonliteral interpretation of Scripture to which I will refer more briefly. For instance, (2) such an interpretation must proceed in accordance with the ecclesiastical rule. Origen knows of the spiritual interpretation of the “heretics,” yet notes how “in this spiritual understanding they nevertheless do not hold to the apostolic rule of faith.”101 Another guideline (3) for discovering the nonliteral meaning of a passage is to attend to the etymological significance of a term. What


101. *Hom. 4.1 in Ps. 36* (SC 411:188.103–5): Si vero spiritualiter intellegant [haereticī], in ipso autem spirituali intellectu apostolicæ non teneant regulam veritatis. Also cf. *Princ.* preface (GK 82:7.9); *Princ.* 4.2.1–2 (GK 694:305.25–700, 308.16).
does it mean when it says that the “Word of the Lord” came to “Hosea the son of Beeri” [Hos 1.1]? Origen answers: “According to the historical sense, [the Word was sent] to the son of Beeri, the prophet Hosea. But according to the mystical sense, [this Word was sent] to the one who is saved—for ‘Hosea’ means ‘saved’ . . . .”

Here the nonliteral (“mystical”) interpretation of Hosea 1.1 takes its cues from the etymological significance of “Hosea.” Many nonliteral interpretations of scriptural passages also take their cue (4) from other passages in Scripture—“interpreting Scripture with Scripture.” For example, Paschor strikes Jeremiah and throws him into the pit of the “upper area” (Jer 20.2), and so Origen wants to know what it would mean for him to be another Jeremiah, thrown into the “upper area” not of the temple but of Scripture. He then canvasses several references to an “upper area” in Scripture and concludes from these passages that it is “good to be in the upper areas.”

Thus, Jeremiah being thrown into the “upper area” of the temple finds its nonliteral referent in Origen venturing into the “good” upper areas of Scripture, namely, ascending to the “lofty and exalted sense” of Scripture. Here discerning a pattern in the numerous references to “upper area” in Scripture helps Origen find a nonliteral interpretation of Jeremiah 20.2. Yet perhaps the most frequently mentioned guideline for nonliteral interpretation (5) is to follow the precedent of previous allegorical interpretations set by authoritative exegetes, Paul in particular.

But it is a spiritual explanation when one is able to show of what kind of “heavenly things” the Jews “according to the flesh served as copy and shadow” [cf. Heb 8.5 and 1 Cor 10.18], and of what “future goods the law was a shadow” [cf. Heb 10.1]. And on the whole, we ought in all things

102. Jo. 2.4 (GCS 4:52.18–53.1): κατὰ μὲν τὴν ἱστορίαν πρὸς τὸν ὦν τοῦ Βερείτι, προφήτη τῆς Ἡσε, κατὰ δὲ μυστικὸν λόγον πρὸς τὸν σωζόμενον - Ὑσε γὰρ ἔρμηνευται “Σωζόμενος.” Also cf. Hom. in Jer. 10.4.2 (SC 234:404.16).

103. See F. Wutz, Onomastica Sacra (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1914), 128.

104. This principle is often traced back by Origen to 1 Cor 2.13 (πνευματικός πνευματικά συγκρίνοντες): Hom. in Num. 16.9 (GCS 7:153.4); Philoc. 2.3 (SC 302:244.1–17); Cels. 4.71 (SC 136:360.18–25); Comm. in Matt. 14.14 (GCS 10:315.13), etc.


108. Other instances where this principle helps Origen allegorize include: Jo. 13.361 (GCS 4:283.11–14); Comm. in Matt. 10.1 (GCS 10:2.3). Also without reference to 1 Cor 2.13 this principle is called upon to steer an allegorical interpretation: cf. Hom. in Jer. 19.13.2 (SC 238:226.15).
to search out, in accordance with the apostolic command, “the wisdom concealed in a mystery . . . .” [1 Cor 2.7–8]. Somewhere the same apostle also says, after referring to certain passages from Exodus and Numbers [cf. 1 Cor 10.7–8], that “these things happened to them figuratively, and were written for us, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” [1 Cor 10.11]. He also gives resources [for determining] what these things were figures of, when he says: “For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ” [1 Cor 10.4].

Origen will repeatedly refer to the exegetical precedent set by Paul, and in his homilies on the OT will often incorporate this precedent into his own interpretations.

A Second Evaluation of the Literature

While probably not comprehensive, this list of guidelines is sufficient for the purposes of my argument. Origen, it is clear, did distinguish between better and worse forms of nonliteral exegesis, and this allows us to draw two important conclusions about the literature surveyed above. First, his awareness of the vicissitudes of nonliteral exegesis confirms that the consensus literature has indeed gestured toward a legitimate Origenian concern when it uses the terms “typology” and “allegory” to indicate proper and improper nonliteral exegesis respectively. This basic insight is accurate and best explains the resilience of the allegory/typology distinction in contemporary scholarship, despite its clear lexical deficiencies.

Second, it is also clear that this consensus scholarship has only faintly echoed Origen’s own enunciated guidelines for how this distinction ought to be drawn. For instance, some of the proffered criteria surveyed above


110. Cf. Princ. 4.3.6 (GK 748:332.7); 4.3.8 (GK 752:334.4); Cels. 4.44 (SC 136:298.44); repeatedly in the OT homilies, cf. Hom. in Gen. 3.4 (GCS 6:43.18); Hom. in Ex. 5.1 (GCS 6:184.2); Hom. in Lev. 7.4 (GCS 6:382.17); Hom. in Josh. 3.1 (GCS 7:301.19); esp. Hom. in Josh. 5.2 (GCS 7:316.4), etc. Also cf. R. Gögler, Zur Theologie des Biblischen Wortes, 102–5, and F. Cocchini, Il Paolo di Origene: Contributo alla storia della recezione delle epistole paoline nel III secolo (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1992), 137–48.
are foreign to Origen. There is little, if any, indication that he drew a distinction between successful and unsuccessful nonliteral exegesis along the lines of whether texts or realities were being interpreted (Daniélou) or whether the nonliteral meanings were historical or timeless (Bienert). Some of the guidelines bring insufficient nuance to the discussion. When Young, for example, describes successful nonliteral exegesis (“ikonic mimesis”) as that which preserves and mirrors the ἀκολουθία of a passage, Origen would want immediately to qualify this—there are times when the nonliteral interpretation should respect the sequence of the passage, but there are also times when it should not, because this sequence has, in fact, been intentionally broken by the author.\footnote{For respecting a sequence, cf. esp. Hom. in Num. 27 where Origen contends that passing through the sequence of stages in the wilderness corresponds to the series of stages traversed in the spiritual life. For a scriptural author’s breaking of the sequence, cf. esp. Princ. 4.2.9 (GK 726:321.3); Jo.13.364–367 (GCS 4:283.33–284.15); Jo. 32.11 (GCS 4:426.29).} Some guidelines are offered as if they were foreign to Origen, though in fact they are not. Hanson speaks of similitude as a principle for typology (detecting a “similar situation” between the original event and its nonliteral referent) and proceeds to brand Origen largely as an allegorist who made no attempt to trace out similar situations—the implication is that Origen was ignorant of, or unconcerned with, this most rudimentary of criteria, though the evidence supplied above suggests that he was not. It is also striking how the literature has offered a reductive portrait of Origen, as many of his leading principles have simply been passed over in silence. Few have adequately stressed, for instance, that proper nonliteral meanings could emerge from a comparison of one passage of Scripture with another, or that they ought to adhere to the rule of faith.\footnote{Though see the important recent discussion of both of these criteria in J. J. O’Keefe and R. Reno, Sanctified Vision (for the principle of comparing one passage of Scripture with another, cf. 45–68, and for the role of the rule of faith in interpretation, cf. 119–28).} Nor has the scholarship sufficiently highlighted how authoritative the allegorical interpretations offered by Paul were for Origen.\footnote{The notable exception here is H. de Lubac, History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen, trans. by A. E. Nash and J. Merriell (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), 77–86.} Finally, and perhaps most notable, there is the curious tendency in the literature to enumerate criteria for disciplined nonliteral exegesis without actually referring to Origen’s own discussions of the matter, which seems to insinuate, misleadingly, that our Alexandrian was unaware of this issue.
This second evaluation of the scholarship highlights its ambiguous value. While the literature correctly points out that Origen distinguished between better and worse forms of nonliteral exegesis, much of this literature has, at the same time, routinely failed to give a convincing portrait of what Origen himself thought constituted the guidelines for proper nonliteral exegesis.

SUMMARY AND A WAY FORWARD

In this article I have attempted to bring clarity to the confusions that surround the contested issue of typological and allegorical exegesis in Origen. I have negotiated this tangled issue by drawing out two separate conversations. On the one hand, there are the terms that scholars have used ("typology" and "allegory") to mark the distinction between better and worse forms of nonliteral exegesis; on the other hand, there is the distinction itself. When we keep these two conversations distinct, it becomes evident how the literature’s allegory/typology construct is of mixed value for our understanding of Origen’s exegesis.

On the one hand, the consensus literature’s discussions of allegory and typology point to a distinction that Origen himself voices, the concern to demarcate proper from improper nonliteral interpretation. This is an authentic, Origenian concern; Origen, it is clear, knew of this demarcation and on several occasions could articulate the guidelines that characterized successful nonliteral exegesis. At the same time, however, the consensus scholarship is decidedly less helpful, and even misleading, in the specific ways in which it distinguishes better from worse nonliteral exegesis for Origen—its distinctions seldom overlap neatly with his, and indeed, usually echo more clearly the criteria for successful nonliteral scriptural interpretation that circulate in contemporary biblical and theological scholarship than they do Origen’s own criteria. As for the terms, most of the literature surveyed above failed to do justice to Origen’s own definitions of ἐλληγορία and the τύπος family. While the scholarship takes over English terms that are derived from, echo, and often translate Origen’s exegetical vocabulary, it also defines these terms in non-Origenian ways. There are substantial ramifications to these definitional discrepancies, not the least of which is the tendency to mislead Origen’s readers into imposing diverging definitions onto his own terms.

Given, then, the ambiguous character of the allegory/typology construct, how ought we to proceed not only for Origen, but also for the larger field of early Christian biblical scholarship, in such a way that the beneficial element in the allegory/typology distinction is preserved, and its problematic
elements are jettisoned? My proposal has three facets: first, that we discontinue using “typology” and “allegory” as labels for better and worse forms of nonliteral exegesis respectively; second, that we find alternative labels for these two forms of nonliteral interpretation; and third, that we develop a conversation around the criteria for successful nonliteral scriptural interpretation.

First, it would be helpful, certainly for Origen, to discontinue using the English terms “typology” and “allegory” as markers for better and worse forms of nonliteral scriptural interpretation respectively; there are numerous difficulties that accompany such definitions of these terms. It remains to be determined if other early Christian readers of Scripture ever affiliated the Greek and Latin “typic” family of terms and ἀλληγορία/allegoria with successful and unsuccessful nonliteral exegesis. If they did, then there is no problem using “allegory” and “typology” in such a way for these readers. But if they did not, then the conclusion drawn here for Origen should apply to other early Christian interpreters of Scripture as well: we are better served not using “allegory and “typology” in that way. Ceasing to use “typology” and “allegory” as markers for better and worse nonliteral exegesis, however, certainly does not mean that we stop using these terms; rather, it simply means that when we do draw upon these terms to describe ancient exegesis—terms that are derived from, evoke, and often translate ancient exegetical vocabulary—that we ought also to draw upon the ancients’ definitions of this vocabulary.

Ceasing to use “typology” and “allegory” as labels for proper and improper forms of nonliteral interpretation also does not mean that we suspend talking about these two sorts of nonliteral exegesis. Here enters the second facet of my proposal: that we ought to search for alternative labels for proper and improper nonliteral interpretation, labels that are more historically sensitive, or at the very least, not misleading. If a wider examination of Origen’s exegetical vocabulary, or that of other early Christian biblical scholars, should reveal other terms that did, in fact, serve as markers for better and worse forms of nonliteral exegesis, then these could certainly be used. But if, on the other hand, we cannot find any ancient labels for these two sorts of nonliteral exegesis, then we ought not to take over or evoke existing ancient terms with already-established meanings and compel them to serve as labels for better and worse forms of nonliteral exegesis. Rather, in such a case, since we are not obliged to use ancient terminology exclusively in our analyses of ancient biblical interpretation, we should freely develop our own terms and phrases that are independent of ancient terminology.
The final facet of my proposal advocates a more careful examination of how Origen and other early Christian scriptural scholars distinguished, both in theory and in practice, the successful and unsuccessful nonliteral interpretations of Scripture from one another. It is certainly the case that Origen was not alone among early Christian exegetes in working out guidelines for demarcating proper from improper nonliteral exegesis; it also stands to reason, moreover, that his criteria were not at every point the same as theirs. A significant chapter in the reconstruction of early Christian biblical interpretation could be devoted to a more historically informed account of how early Christian exegetes understood and practiced the distinction between better and worse forms of nonliteral scriptural interpretation.

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