

# Origen and the Prophets of Israel: a Critique of Christian Typology

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Origen discovers among his Christian contemporaries in Egypt and Palestine (c. 200 C. E.) two opposing views of the prophets of Israel. "The heterodox"—that is, gnostic (and especially Valentinian) Christians—claim that the prophets serve only the demiurge, Yahweh, whom they call "the god of the Jews."<sup>1</sup> The Valentinian theologian Heracleon says that the prophets fail to recognize the Father of truth, the One who transcends the demiurge, and who reveals himself in Christ. The true meaning of Christ's revelation remains beyond the prophets' comprehension. The "whole prophetic order" operates entirely within the visible cosmos, the sense-perceptible region of immediate experience formed by Yahweh and administered by his law of wrath.<sup>2</sup> "Orthodox" Christians, on the other hand, reject this gnostic view, and profess the highest regard for the prophets. In opposition to the gnostics, these Christians insist that the prophets receive inspiration from God the Father and creator himself, and serve his purpose in "proclaiming the coming of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Origen sees that both gnostic and ecclesiastic Christians—despite their differences—agree on one point: that the prophets stand in a position of spiritual inferiority to the apostles. Both devalue the prophets' activity and deny them full spiritual insight. Both gnostic and ecclesiastic Christians consider that Israel's faith serves only as a preliminary stage in the process of salvation-history; both regard it only as a preparation for what they claim has been "fulfilled" in Christ.

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1 *Commentarium in Jobannis*, ed. E. Preuschen, GCS 4 (Leipzig, 1903), 2:34, p. 91, no. 199 (hereafter cited as CJ); J. Schèrer, *Le Commentaire d'Origène sur Rom. III.5-V.7* (Cairo, 1957), 168, n. 15.

2 CJ 6:20 (129, 109).

3 CJ 2:34 (92, 205). Origen challenges the usual interpretation of the prophets: *tacha de bai propbētikai marturiai ou monon kērussousi cbriston eleusomenon oude touth hēmas didaskousi kai allo outhen alla pollēn theologian schesin . . .*

Origen objects to this assumption, and refuses to identify himself with either view. He criticizes “the heterodox” most sharply: they err in “inventing a greater God” than the one who speaks through the prophets.<sup>4</sup> But he criticizes the majority of their ecclesiastical opponents as well for deprecating the prophets’ revelation to Israel. “Many Christians,” he says, “on the pretext of glorifying the advent of Christ” claim that the prophets “only proclaim the coming of Christ, and nothing else.” Origen charges that such Christians fail to realize that this doctrine, by implication, “cancels the whole gift given from God to the patriarchs and the prophets.”<sup>5</sup>

Commentators have assumed that Origen aims his attack only against the “simpleminded”—the mass of uneducated Christians.<sup>6</sup> Yet Origen’s discussion of the issue in his *Commentary on John* demonstrates that his intention is far more radical: he is attacking nothing less than the theory of prophecy and fulfillment that dominates early Christian literature from the writings of the gospels,<sup>7</sup> and is developed by prominent and literate second-century theologians. Ignatius, for example, declares (c. 110 C. E.) that “we (Christians) also love the prophets” who shared with the patriarchs of Israel the anticipation of Christ’s coming.<sup>8</sup> Yet he adds that the gospel message is superior to theirs, since “the beloved prophets proclaimed him in advance, but the gospel is the perfection (*apartisma*) of incorruption.”<sup>9</sup> Justin Martyr (c. 160 C. E.) accuses the Jewish community (represented in his fictionalized dialogue by “Trypho, a Jew”) of failing to understand their own prophets by resisting application of the prophecies to Christ.<sup>10</sup> Irenaeus (c. 170 C. E.) declares that the prophets received from God insight concerning “what was to come in future time.”<sup>11</sup> He criticizes Jewish exegetes for taking the prophecies “literally,” that is, for failing to see that “their sole and singular meaning lies in the future.” Like Justin, Irenaeus insists that the meaning of the prophecies is *Christological*. Yet he recognizes that in former times the Jews could not possibly have understood the words of their own prophets, since “every prophecy, before its fulfillment, remains an enigma and a contradiction; but when the time comes and the prophesied event occurs, then it has a whole and specific interpretation.”<sup>12</sup> He goes on to say that even the prophets themselves received only limited insight. None of them—neither Moses, Elijah, nor Ezekiel, nor any of the rest—actually saw God himself; they

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4 *CJ* 6:6 (113, 31)

5 Loc. cit.: *epei tē phantasia tou doxazein tēn christou epidēmian pollō sophōterous tous apostolous tōn paterōn kai tōn prophētōn legontes hoi men kai heteron avapeplakasin theon meizona hoi de mē touto tolmēsantes boson epi tō autōn logō dia to abasaniston tōn dogmatōn chreōkopousi tēn dedomenēn tois patrasi kai tois prophētais apo theou dia christou dōrean. . . .*

6 R. P. Hanson, *Allegory and Event* (London, 1959), 128.

7 L. Goppelt, *Typos: Die typologische Deutung des Alten Testaments im Neuen* (Gütersloh, 1939), 70-149, 230-49.

8 Phil. 5:2 (ed. K. Lake, *Apostolic Fathers* (1912; reprint ed., Cambridge, 1959), 1:243.

9 Phil. 9:1-2 (1:249).

10 Dial. 34 (ed. C. T. Otto, *Corp. Apol. Chr.* 10. I (1876; reprint ed., Wiesbaden 1969), 112-16.

11 *Adversus Haereses* 4:20:5 et passim, (ed. W. W. Harvey, Cambridge, 1857), 2:216 (hereafter cited as *AH*); Irenaeus defines the function of prophecy as follows: “Nam propheta est praedicatio futurorum, id est, eorum quae post erunt, praesignificatio.”

12 *AH* 4:26:1 (2:235).

were allowed to glimpse only the "dispensations and mysteries" (*dispositiones et mysteria*) through which He was to reveal himself fully in the future through Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup> The prophets received only "shadows" and "types" of the "good things to come," therefore the revelation to Israel serves only as a "preparation for the gospel."

Such exegesis is based on the premise that revelation occurs progressively in and through the events of salvation-history. As Danielou says,

The resemblance to Christ. . . always an image of the future, a *tupos mellontos*. . . Typology, in fact, can only be expressed in a theology of this kind, for its basic principle is that there is an imperfect order which prepares for and prefigures an order of perfection. To think of the universe, as does Irenaeus, as composed of two successive stages, is the very essence of typology.<sup>14</sup>

The method of such exegesis—intended to demonstrate the truth of the Christian claims concerning Christ—is to correlate events in Israel's history with the events of Christ's coming, the prophets with the apostles, as "shadow" with "reality," "type" with "truth" (that is, to the actual event that fulfills the prophetic "type"). Such exegesis attempts to show, for example, how the activity of John the Baptist fulfills Isaiah's prophecy of a forerunner: the "type" given as Elijah is now fulfilled "in reality" (*en alētheia*). John's activity signals the end of the prefigurative prophetic order, and reveals that the time of "truth" and fulfillment has come in Christ.<sup>15</sup>

Origen questions this whole theory of revelation. He challenges the claim that Justin, Irenaeus, Melito, and Hippolytus consider essential to Christian theology—that historical events serve as the primary means of revelation. On the basis of this theory, the apologists have assumed that the apostles, who witness Jesus' advent (and the Christians who believe in their witness) thereby have access to a fuller revelation of truth than had the patriarchs and prophets of earlier ages. Christian faith in God through Christ is assumed to be intrinsically more "spiritual" than Israel's faith before his coming.

Origen cannot accept this assumption. He charges that many Christians who profess faith in the creed have only a "literal" understanding of it. Origen claims that for many it has become profession of belief in mere past historical events, in themselves spiritually meaningless. "What does it matter if Christ died and was raised," he asks, "unless he dies and is raised in our lives daily?"

Clearly Origen perceives the confession of faith in different terms than have Paul, Justin, Melito, or Irenaeus. For the latter, to profess faith in Jesus Christ as the one divinely born and sent into the world to redeem mankind through his death and resurrection is not to recite mere *facts*, mere historical events: it is to confess the acts of God which convey salvation to man-

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13 *AH* 4:20:9-10 (2:220-22): "Igitur si neque Moyses vidit Deum, nec Helias, nec Ezechiel, qui multa de coelestibus viderunt: quae autem ab his videbantur, erant similitudines claritatis Domini, et prophetiae futurorum. . ."

14 J. Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality* (London, 1960), 30-31.

15 *Ibid.*, 262.

kind. For the apostles and apologists, the kerygmatic confession self-evidently *bears* theological meaning.<sup>16</sup> Yet Origen lives one to two generations later. He is involved in a church that he sees has grown from being a suspect, minority movement to become a massive and powerful institution, for which the prerequisite to admission includes ritual confession of the creed. Before writing the latter sections of his *Commentary on John*, Origen had served as a catechist for many such initiates. From his experience with them he expresses dismay that many who profess the faith understand it only as belief that certain past events actually have occurred. He complains that many have no insight into its meaning in terms of their own present experience.<sup>17</sup> Unlike his predecessors, Origen has become aware of the potential *literalism* of Christian confession; and simultaneously he has recognized the potential *spirituality* of the prophets of Israel.

As one who himself accepts the Christian confession, Origen agrees that God does initiate events in history to reveal his presence. Yet he also sees that merely to witness the actual events (or to profess belief in them) does not constitute genuine faith or spiritual understanding. Conversely, the prophets who perceived the events to come spiritually—without witnessing their actual fulfillment—are not thereby hindered from *understanding* their significance, or from believing in the One who reveals them. Origen concludes from this that Christians do *not* enjoy a monopoly of spiritual advantages wholly unknown and inaccessible to Israel. Contrary to the claims of the apologists, he declares that “the apostles are *not* to be considered wiser than the patriarchs, or than Moses, or the prophets who . . . were found worthy of divine manifestations and of revelations and of mysteries.”<sup>18</sup> He argues that if Christians admit that the prophets reveal “the mysteries of God” (cf. Eph. 3:5), then the prophets themselves “must have truly understood the mysteries” they were given to reveal. He says that those who deny such insight to the prophets have not thought out the full implications of their own teaching.<sup>19</sup> He asks how orthodox Christians can claim (against the gnostics) that the prophets indeed knew God (and not an inferior demiurge) unless they acknowledge that they knew God through his son, that is, through the eternal Logos. How can they claim that the prophets spoke the truth unless it was revealed through him who is “the truth”—that is, “the essential truth, the prototype of that truth which is in those who are rational?” (*he autoalēthia he ousiōdēs. . . prōtotupos tēs en tais logikais psychais alētheias*).<sup>20</sup>

So far Irenaeus would agree; but Origen goes on to interpret “the mysteries of God” which the prophets receive not (as Irenaeus does) as the *future events* of salvation history,<sup>21</sup> but as the “mysteries” such events convey concerning God himself. Therefore Origen marvels at the

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16 N. Brox, *Offenbarung, Gnosis und gnostischer Mythos bei Irenäus von Lyon* (Saltzburg, 1966), 105-15; H. F. von Campenhausen, *Die Entstehung der Christlichen Bibel* (Tübingen, 1968), 312f.

17 *CJ* 6:52 (161, 271-72); 1:7 (13,43). For other citations, see Campenhausen, *Bibel*, 361f; Hanson, *Allegory*, 259f.

18 *CJ* 6:5 (113,30).

19 *CJ* 6:6 (113,31).

20 *CJ* 6:6 (114, 37-38).

21 *AH* 4:20:8-12 (2:219-25).

"insights onto the mysteries of divinity" made available to the patriarchs and prophets, "since the Logos of God was their teacher before he became flesh."<sup>22</sup> He even suggests that the prophets "had an advantage over most believers" in receiving communication from the eternal Logos since they were "taught by Christ who was born before the morning star," the visions they received were "not from angels, but of God himself in Christ" and for this reason "they were said to have known God, and seen him and heard him."<sup>23</sup> In direct contrast to Irenaeus, Origen declares that "Moses understood in his mind the truth (*tēn alētheian*) of the Torah and of the accounts written in the Pentateuch," Joshua understood the significance of the allotment of the land, and "could see better than we the realities (*tivōn alēthōn*) of which his achievements were shadows." Isaiah understood "the mystery of Him who sat on the throne," and Ezekiel perceived the true significance of the cherubim, the angels, and of the vision of God himself:

I need not go into more details; the point I intend to establish is clear enough already—namely, that those who were perfected (*tous teteleiōmenous*) in earlier generations knew—no less than the apostles—what Christ revealed to them, since the same teacher was with them as he who revealed to the apostles the unspeakable mysteries of God.<sup>24</sup>

Recognizing that his view conflicts with that of the majority of Christians, Origen anticipates objections. How is he to account for such passages as Matt. 13:17 ("many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things you see, and did not see them")? He suggests that this verse shows that even among the prophets there were differences; while some received full insight, many only desired and lacked it. He adds that there were also many others besides the prophets to whom none of these mysteries were revealed.<sup>25</sup> He recognizes a possible objection on the basis of Eph. 3:5 ("the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit"). The implications of such objections is a serious one: if the prophets could have received the full revelation of the mysteries of God, what remained to be revealed in Christ? What becomes of the Christian claim that God revealed himself most fully in the incarnation?

Origen says that those who object to his view are confused by the ambiguity of the term *revealed* (*to apokaluptomenon*). He explains that the term is capable of two meanings: "first, when the thing in question is *understood* (*bote noeitai*); secondly, in relation to sound prophecy, when it comes to be fulfilled" (*hōste genesthai kai plērōthēvai auto*),<sup>26</sup> In the former, primary sense of the term, revelation occurs as a process of noetic understanding; in the latter, secondary sense, it occurs as truth revealed in the actual accomplishment of specific events. He offers an example: the prophets who foretold the future inclusion of the Gentiles into God's kingdom *knew* and *understood* that this would occur, although in

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22 CJ 6:4 (110,17).

23 CJ 6:4 (110, 18-19).

24 CJ 6:4 (110-11, 20-24).

25 CJ 6:3 (109, 16).

26 CJ 6:5 (112, 26-27).

their own time the Gentiles remained alien to the promises and excluded from the covenant. The significance of the events they prophesied was revealed to their understanding; but the events themselves, belonging to the future, were not "revealed" to them (in the second sense of the term) "as the apostles saw them accomplished before their eyes." Origen recognizes that the apostles have been privileged to witness the accomplishment of those events which the prophets had recognized spiritually and longed to see fulfilled. He insists, however, that the apostles' position as eyewitnesses does not afford them any greater *insight* or *understanding* than the prophets had received.

Origen concludes from this that the problem of attaining spiritual insight is *structurally identical* for both the apostles and the Christian community and for the prophets and people of Israel. In every case, the source of revelation is the Logos, whose self-manifestation can be perceived in creation and in the rational structure of human nature as well as in historical events. Both Jews and Christians may witness actual events—the giving of the law, the possession of Canaan, the activity of Jesus Christ—yet both see these only "literally" until they perceive them *as revelation*—that is, in terms of the Logos who communicates himself in and through these events. To interpret the *historical* process of revelation typologically, then, is not enough; one must interpret it "spiritually," that is, symbolically. In this "spiritual" exegesis,

One must not consider historical events to be types of historical events, or corporeal things as types of what is corporeal, but corporeal realities are types of spiritual realities, and historical realities of those that are intelligible.<sup>27</sup>

On the basis of this principle Origen challenges the traditional interpretation of one of the most fundamental themes of Christian typology—the interpretation of the Jewish passover as the "type" fulfilled in the death of Christ. Conscious that he is contradicting the views of the evangelists and the apostles themselves, as well as of the majority of the Christians (as we know from the development of this theme in the writings of Justin, Melito, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and others),<sup>28</sup> he is careful to explain his reasoning. First, Origen questions what Paul means when he calls Christ "our passover" (1 Cor. 5:7). Origen describes what he knows of the traditional Passover celebration, and argues that if the passover lamb were a type of Christ's sacrifice, "then one should have been offered and not many, since Christ is one; or, since many sheep were offered," then "many Christs" should have been offered to fulfill the type.<sup>29</sup> He adds that the passover sacrifice was offered in obedience to the law, but Christ was crucified in violation of it. Furthermore, he asks, how can the specific details that describe the preparation of the lamb be applied to Christ's crucifixion? He recognizes that many have inferred a typological interpretation of the crucifixion from the account in John 19 (where the evangelist cites

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<sup>27</sup> *CJ* 10:18 (189, 110).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Justin, *Dial*, 40.1 (ed. Otto, *CAC* 10, 1:134-36); Melito, *peri pascha*, 2:12; 6:39-44, 11:70; 34:232; 46:325; 61:442; 65:645, (ed. O. Perler, *SC*, 123); Hippolytus, *eis to bagion pascha* (*PG* 59:735-46); even Origen himself, in *Hom. Jos.* 2:1.

<sup>29</sup> *CJ* 19:16 (186, 92).

passages from Exod. 12). Yet Origen contends that those who interpret John's passover imagery in terms of the traditional schema (passover=crucifixion) are forced to distort the actual historical situation, and to use the Jewish sources arbitrarily to fit their theory.<sup>30</sup>

Origen offers an alternative exegesis on the basis of the principle stated above. First he describes the passover festival as he knows it from historical sources; second, he asks what "spiritual reality" it signifies. He notes that both the prophet Isaiah and the evangelist John can describe the passover in each of two ways: either as the festival of the people of Israel, or as the festival "of the Lord." From consideration of the contexts, he suggests that the first ("the passover of Israel") represents worship that is "humanly" motivated, that is, performed for social or conventional reasons. The "passover of God," on the other hand, represents worship that is done "in spirit and in truth" by those genuinely impelled to worship God.<sup>31</sup>

In offering this exegesis, Origen has rejected the apologists' assumption that *Christian* worship which celebrates Christ's sacrificial death is the "truth" and "fulfillment" of the passover "type" and is therefore intrinsically superior to the ancient sacrificial worship of Israel. Instead he acknowledges that the possibility of celebrating the "true passover"—worship of God in communication with the Logos—was present for Israel in the past as for his Christian contemporaries. Conversely, the possibility of celebrating the merely "human passover" is present for Christians in their worship as it was for the people whom Isaiah saw and censured. In Origen's exegesis, the actual historical event becomes, in his words, a "type" or paradigm for the "noetic" or "spiritual" reality of each person's relationship to God.

What becomes of the historical sense of Biblical narrative, and of the conviction that revelation is given in and through actual events? Does the recognition of revelation as a noetic process render biblical history into mere allegory? In construing the revelatory function of salvation history relatively, Origen has been accused of abolishing "the reality of the actual event," or at least of rendering it "theologically meaningless."<sup>32</sup> In the eyes of many commentators, Origen has virtually identified himself with the position of his gnostic opponents.

Certainly he shares many of the gnostics' theological concerns. Like Origen, the Valentinians are concerned that most Christians understand their faith merely as belief in past events. They react to this Christian "literalism" by insisting that the events narrated in "the scriptures"—insofar as they are taken as actual historical events—remain only "dead letter." For this reason the Valentinian theologian Heracleon rejects historical typology, claiming that such exegesis remains on the level of mere "externality."<sup>33</sup> To correlate the events of Christ's coming with those in the more distant past of Israel's history remains for him a mere historical exercise, devoid of spiritual meaning. Heracleon says the prophets

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30 *CJ* 10:17 (187, 96-99).

31 *CJ* 10:13 (183, 67-70).

32 Campenhausen, *Bibel*, 361f.

33 *CJ* 6:20 (130, 113-14).

of Israel, concerned as they are with Yahweh's involvement in specific events, represent a naive and primitive stage of religious understanding. He offers two "higher" modes of interpreting the prophets' message. The first he calls "psychic"; in this mode he interprets the prophets, their acts, and their words, "psychologically," as paradigms of the internal process of human conversion. Beyond this, he offers a "spiritual" mode of exegesis in which the prophets, their message, and even the god they naively worship, are interpreted *symbolically*. In this mode, all the figures and events of Israel's history are interpreted as "images and symbols" of spiritual reality.<sup>34</sup>

Although Origen's exegetical scheme bears an affinity with Heracleon's, those who attempt to identify Origen himself as a gnostic have failed to grasp the intent of his clear and careful refutation of their "false exegesis." Origen says that if many "orthodox" Christians fail to understand the *primary* meaning of the term *revelation* (as the process of communication with the Logos), the gnostic fail to grasp its *other* meaning—as revelation accomplished *in* and *through* historical events.

He criticises the gnostics for ignoring entirely the historical dimensions of the scriptural narratives. While Heracleon considers the actual geographical and historical situations they related to be theologically irrelevant, Origen carefully investigates these at every point. For example, when he considers Heracleon's exegesis of the temple, he castigates Heracleon for neglecting the historical background; Origen points out that Heracleon even confuses the first temple of Solomon with the second temple!<sup>35</sup> When he considers the interpretation of the Passover, Origen first sets forth the historical background of the Jewish passover, and builds upon that foundation his own symbolic interpretation. While Heracleon declares the historical reading of the scriptures the source of "flesh and error", Origen stands on the ecclesiastical conviction that *insofar* as divine revelation is given in and through actual events, understanding of those events must serve as the basis for any sound symbolic interpretation.

Yet Origen contradicts the apologists when he insists that the Christian scriptures themselves must not be read "literally" but "spiritually"—and when he goes on to explain that the Jewish scriptures (as well as the Christian) can be read *typologically*. Since he considers Israel's faith to be identical in structure with Christian faith, Origen applies typological exegesis even within the Old Testament narrative. He suggests that even in ancient times, as the *prophets* received direct revelation through the Logos, the *people* received it through their progressive experience of historical events. The exodus from Egypt, he says, prefigured the entrance into the promised land. Origen takes both accounts as relating, in the first place, actual events—the people's passage from Egypt, led by Moses, through the Red Sea; then the crossing of the Jordan, under Joshua's direction, into Canaan. Origen says that Moses and Joshua *themselves* understood through the Logos the spiritual meaning of the events in which they participated. But the majority of the people did not understand until they experienced the actual events, which were given

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34 *CJ* 13:19 (243, 114–18).

35 *CJ* 10:38 (214–15, 261–62).

to them as a means of revealing to them their own salvation—history. For many in Israel, then, the progression of events actually served to change and develop their spiritual insight. This *second* dimension of revelation—given in and through experienced events—serves to reveal the presence of God to those incapable of recognizing (as the prophets do) the direct self-communication of the eternal Logos.<sup>36</sup>

To discuss the historical aspect of revelation, Origen, like his predecessors, uses typological exegesis. He explains that the “type” given in the salt water of the Red Sea was fulfilled in the crossing over the clear waters of the Jordan, “religion by this time having grown clearer and having assumed a more appropriate form; for the ark of the Lord our God is carried in procession by the priests and the levites, the people following the ministers of God, and accepting the law of holiness.”<sup>37</sup> As the entire company of Israel is circumcised and purified, the people celebrate the Passover “with much greater joy than before.” The “type” of the manna they ate in the wilderness is now fulfilled in the bread of the promised land: the two kinds of bread symbolize the contrast between two stages of deliverance. The manna was “bread for travel” given “to those still under discipline”; but Joshua supplies in the land of promise “bread more full of life (*zōtikōteros*), distributed to those who now were able to receive their fathers’ inheritance.”<sup>38</sup>

While the move from an immature stage of spiritual understanding to one of greater spiritual maturity occurs even within Israel’s history, the process has not ended there. Origen explains that the whole process of transition from Moses to Joshua serves in turn as a type of the future transition from John the Baptist to Christ. Within the limited scope he allows to this progressive mode of revelation, Origen agrees with other Christians that the whole history of Israel may serve as a type of the “new people of God,” the Christian community; the *priests* as types of Christian exegetes;<sup>39</sup> the *bread* as a type of the eucharistic bread that Christians receive in the present.<sup>40</sup>

Far from denying the actuality of biblical history or rendering it “theologically irrelevant,” Origen agrees that it must be taken seriously *as history*, and that historical events actually change the human capacity to receive divine revelation. The first task of exegesis is to discover what events actually occurred, and then to perceive their typological interrelation. But Origen considers typological exegesis by itself to be extremely

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36 *CJ* 6:44-45 (153-55, 227-37).

37 *CJ* 6:44 (153, 230). Origen admits that certain passages *cannot* be taken literally as historical narrative (as, for example, when John contradicts the synoptic accounts by placing the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry). While Heracleon takes such contradictions as evidence that the historical meaning is to be discounted in favor of the theological (ethical and symbolic) meaning, Origen takes them to mean that the historical account, although valid, remains in the service of the author’s theological intention. He explains that although the evangelists intended “to speak the truth, so far as possible, both materially and spiritually,” sometimes they sacrifice historical precision for theological accuracy, since their primary intention in writing is “spiritual,” that is, theological (*CJ* 10:5; 175, 18-20).

38 *CJ* 6:45 (155, 237).

39 *CJ* 1:2 (5-6, 9-14).

40 *CJ* 6:45 (154-55, 233-37).

limited. It can show how revelation has come *in the past* to persons living at that time; as it shows, for example, how John the Baptist, more fully than Joshua, proclaimed to those who heard him the presence of the Logos in Jesus.<sup>41</sup> But Origen contends that such exegesis is not yet "spiritual" because it fails to show how such past events become revelation in the present for us living now. To consider this question is to approach what he calls "spiritual exegesis."

As Origen confronts the historical typology of the apologists, on the one hand, and the allegorical exegesis of the gnostics, on the other, he refuses to identify himself with either. He says that both traditions—in deprecating the revelation to Israel—fail to see that all revelation comes from one source, the eternal Logos. He agrees with the apologists (against the gnostics) that the historical actuality of events is not to be denied or transposed into allegory, but accepted and assumed as the basis for religious understanding. But he rejects their assumption that the correlation of such historical patterns in "salvation-history" in itself conveys theological meaning. He also rejects their claim that revelation is limited to the channel of salvation-history. Although the apologists fulfill the first task of exegesis, they fail to take up the second, which (in his view) constitutes the more essential exegetical task: to interpret the whole scriptural history "spiritually" by explicating it as a paradigm for the believer's present experience. In terms of the revelation given in and through events, Origen admits the correlation of prior events as "types" to later events (in Israel's history as in that of Christ) which are their historical "truth" and fulfillment. But in terms of revelation as it is communicated through the Logos, Origen considers all scriptural accounts—not only Israel's history, but also the "history" of Christ—to contain only "types and shadows." He insists that their "truth" is realized only in the experience of those (whether Jews or Christians) who recognize their relation to the eternal Logos.

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41 *CJ* 2:37 (95-96, 223-24).