



Origen's exegetical method and the Catechetical Schools of Alexandria and Caesarea

Metoda egzegetyczna Orygenes a szkoły katechetyczne w Aleksandrii i Cezarei

Key words: Origen, Holy Bible, exegesis, allegory, philosophy, school, education

Słowa kluczowe: Orygenes, egzegeza, Biblia, alegoreza, filozofia, edukacja

Abstract

The article presents the relationship between the way the Bible was interpreted by Origen and the organization of schools he founded in Alexandria and Caesarea. Origen believed that there were higher and lower levels of meaning (sense) in Sacred Scripture. For this reason, he grouped Christians in terms of their ability to understand these meanings. The highest rank in the church hierarchy was assigned to Christians who were able to find the Bible's deepest meaning, i.e. its allegorical and philosophical sense. They played the role of thinkers and philosophers in the Church, explaining the most difficult truths of Christianity. This classification was used by Origen at his school in Alexandria and later in Caesarea. The highest group at Origen's schools were students studying philosophy and allegorical (philosophical) exegesis of the Bible. Thus, the main goal of Origen's schools was to educate Christian philosophers.

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Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiony został związek pomiędzy egzegezą Pisma Świętego uprawianą przez Orygenesę a sposobem zorganizowania przez niego szkół w Aleksandrii i Cezarei. Podział uczniów na grupy, który miał miejsce w szkołach prowadzonych przez Orygenesę, odpowiadał wyróżnionym przez niego trzem warstwom znaczeniowym Pisma Świętego: sensowi cielesnemu (dosłownemu), psychicznemu (moralnemu) oraz duchowemu (alegorycznemu i filozoficznemu). Zwieńczeniem edukacji w *didaskaleionach* Orygenesę było osiągnięcie *szczebla*, na którym najlepsi uczniowie poznawali duchowy sens Biblii, ucząc się alegorycznej egzegezy Pisma, czyli *de facto* jej interpretacji w świetle filozofii greckiej (neoplatońskiej). Głównym celem szkół Orygenesę było więc wykształcenie chrześcijańskich filozofów.

1. Introduction

One of the most eminent and accomplished exegetes of Scripture in the ancient Church was certainly Origen. His way of interpreting biblical texts left a lasting mark on successive generations of ancient Christian theologians (Królikowski 2018, 393; Dyk 2020, 142). Origen's approach to biblical exegesis influenced not only the theology and philosophy practised by this Christian thinker, but also his ecclesiology and educational practices, as he headed the schools of Alexandria and Caesarea, which, thanks to his efforts, became famous both in Christian circles and among pagans. This article will first demonstrate that the organisation of the *didaskaleions* run by Origen reflected the way in which the Christian philosopher interpreted and perceived Scripture. Furthermore, the claim that the catechetical schools of Origen were largely philosophical in nature will be substantiated (Królikowski 2018, 393), since the teachings offered there culminated in learning philosophy and an allegorical and philosophical exegesis of Scripture, as the Christian scholar sought to reconcile the ecclesiastical *kerygma* with concepts drawn from Neoplatonic philosophy. It must be added that they provided important premises for his exegesis, as well as the theoretical

basis for Origen's hermeneutics (Gensler 2020, 305; Domaradzki 2010, 133, 135; Domaradzki 2011, 18-19; Leszczyński 2016, 415, 421, 422; Słomka 2003 b, 480)².

2. Three meanings of the Bible and allegoresis

According to the Alexandrian, there are three fundamental layers of meaning in Scripture and they are subject to qualitative gradation, i.e. the bodily, psychic and spiritual meaning (Spyra 1986-1987, 44; Dyk 2020, 142-143; Gensler 2020, 305). As we begin to study the Bible, we first perceive its letter, i.e. the literal meaning of the text studied. The Christian scholar equated it with the historical sense, because he believed that, unless they are obviously parables and metaphors, biblical stories referred to actual, historical events and characters. The literal interpretation of the Mosaic Law also resulted in his literal understanding of its provisions (PG 11, 355-360; ŹMT 1, 336-337 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 1, 8-9}; PG 13, 865-870; ŹMT 10, 56-58 {Origen, *Commentarius in Evangelium Mathei*, X, 14}; CCL 78/2, 7; ŹMT 32, 13 {Origen, *Tractatus sive homiliae in Psalmos*, I, 3}; CCL 78/2, 64-65; ŹMT 32, 70 {Origen, *Tractatus sive homiliae in Psalmos*, LXXVII, 1}; CCL 78/2, 49-50; ŹMT 32, 56-57 {Origen, *Tractatus sive homiliae in Psalmos*, LXXV, 3}; CCL 78/2, 59; ŹMT 32, 66 {Origen, *Tractatus sive homiliae in Psalmos*, LXXVI, 17}; PG 12, 458-459; ŹMT 69, 73 {Origen, *Homiliae in Leviticum*, V, 8}; PG 12, 469-472, ŹMT 69, 86-89 {Origen, *Homiliae in Leviticum*, VI, 3-4}). Origen referred to the literal sense as the body of Scripture, because it envelops the deeper meanings of the Bible.³ The body of Scripture is at the same time the garment of the Logos - God's Reason and Word - which incarnates itself, among other things, in the

² Platonism, in its different expressions, greatly influenced not only Origen but many ancient Christian thinkers, being one of the most important sources of inspiration for the theologians of the ancient Church (Mrugalski 2017, 21).

³ PG 11, 371-374; ŹMT 1, 343-344 (Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 7-8). See also PG 11, 361-364, ŹMT 1, 362 (Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 3, 11).

revealed books of Judaism and Christianity (Simonetti 2000, 77).

The second meaning contained in Sacred Scripture is its moral meaning. If we explore the historical sense of biblical texts, we will inevitably see that they have ethical undertones, telling us how we should live. The Bible therefore has a parenetic and educational dimension, teaching us the art of good living (Crouzel 2004, 96). The moral sense is the soul of Scripture, which is why it is referred to by Origen as the psychic meaning (Pietras 2001, 30). We extract it from the letter of Scripture, where it appears next to clearly negative texts which, due to their amoral character, cannot edify us or encourage us to live virtuously, thus calling for an allegorical interpretation through which their hidden, spiritual meaning, different from the original, literal sense, is revealed. Thus, in the letter of the Bible, alongside the historical and literal sense, there are two other hidden meanings - one positive, a moralistic one, the other negative, often preposterous and illogical, suggesting the need for an allegorical exegesis that will reveal in the body of Scripture its hidden spiritual dimension (Langkammer 1993, 81-82).

Drawing on Platonic anthropology, Origen assumed that in addition to body and soul, Scripture also possessed its spirit, for if man is composed of body, soul and spirit, then by analogy this trichotomous division must also apply to Scripture.⁴ The spirit is the pneumatic, allegorical sense of the revealed texts. It constitutes the deepest layer of the Bible, obscured by the literal meaning, where the Christian reader should find it.⁵ We are encouraged to make this search by all the non-sense and

⁴ PG 11, 365; ŹMT 1, 340 (Origen, *De principiis* IV, 2, 4); PG 11, 367-370; ŹMT 1, 341-342 (Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 6). See also Origen 1995, 104-111. This division, on the one hand, refers to the anthropology of the apostle Paul, who wrote about the human body, soul and spirit (see Dyk 2020, 142-143; Turzynski 2015, 1); on the other hand, it is possible to discern in it the Platonic tripartite division (Langkammer 1993, 81-82; Turzyński 2015, 11).

⁵ PG 11, 371-374; ŹMT 1, 343-344 (Origen, *De principiis* IV, 2, 7-8). According to Origen, however, sometimes "a literal sense of some stories or phrases does not exist at all". The technical term for it in the history of exegesis is *defectus littere*. He saw examples

inconsistencies encountered in the biblical texts, as well as the absurd and immoral stories that are not lacking in the Old Testament. They are a sign and a signal that there is a spiritual sense to be extracted from underneath (Domaradzki 2011, 18, 21-22, 24; Domaradzki 2010, 140; Langkammer 1993, 82; Mrugalski 2018, 299-300; Słomka 2003b, 479). Thus, Origen did not reject the bodily, literal sense of the Bible, believing it to be necessary in order to ascend to a higher level of understanding, which is the moral and then the spiritual sense. In fact, his teaching on the necessity of seeking the spiritual dimension in the letter of Christianity's sacred texts was aimed at defending the unity of the Old and New Testaments as well as their literal meaning, since the bodily sense comes in handy as a stepping stone by which we climb to the moral meaning of the Bible, in order to ultimately reach a spiritual understanding of the revealed books (PG 11, 364-365; ŻMT 1, 339 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 4}; PG 11, 367-368; ŻMT 1, 341-342 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 6}; PG 11, 375-378, ŻMT 1, 344-345 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 9}; CCL 78/2, 7, ŻMT 32, 13-14 {Origen, *Tractatus sive homiliae in Psalmos*, I, 3})⁶. This teaching was undoubtedly aimed at the Gnostics, who rejected the Old Testament and disputed its connection to the New Testament message.

The pneumatic sense expresses the most important and profound (highest) truths about God and His Logos. The truths of the pneumatic

of it in both the Old Testament and the Gospels. For instance, he considered the following command of Jesus Christ to the seventy-two disciples to be devoid of literal meaning: 'Greet no one on the road' (Luke 10:5). It is impossible, he writes, for Jesus to encourage the disciples to be rude! Similarly, he spoke of the camel that would pass through the eye of a needle (Mt 19:24) or of those who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven" (Pietras 2001, 30-31). Such passages of the revealed books must, according to Origen, be understood only spiritually, because a literal reading would lead to absurdity. Whoever, therefore, learns only the literal sense of Scripture can come to erroneous conclusions (PG 11, 311-314, ŻMT 1, 336-337 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 1}; PG 12, 459, ŻMT 69, 74 {Origen, *Homiliae in Leviticum*, V, 8}; PG 13, 688; ŻMT 16, 103 {Origen, *Homiliae in Ezechielem* III, 2}. On this subject, see also: Domaradzki 2010, 141.

⁶ On this subject, see also Domaradzki 2010, 140; Bednarek 2020, 265-266.

level are reflections and images of the divine mysteries, God's secret thoughts, which in Origen's philosophy are the equivalent of Plato's ideas (Crouzel 2004, 113). Ideas/thoughts, on the other hand, exist in God's Logos (Mind, Reason). By accessing the spirit of Scripture and the truths contained in it, we therefore commune with the Logos incarnated in the biblical text. At its deepest level, Scripture, including the Old Testament, points to the Logos incarnated in Jesus Christ, hence the spiritual sense of the revealed texts is also a Christological sense. In other words, the Logos incarnated in Scripture speaks to us through the letter of Scripture and points to himself in it. The key to a proper reading of the biblical texts is therefore the Logos-Christ, or more precisely, the Christological sense hidden beneath the letter of Scripture (Simonetti 2000, 77).

We should add that there are different levels of spiritual sense. The philosopher compared it to the celestial spheres, which are arranged one above the other. Within this sense, therefore, there is a stratification of meanings, a gradation of their importance and abstractness (PG 13, 865-874; ŹMT 10, 57-60 {Origen, *Commentarius in Evangelium Mathei*, X, 14-15}; PG 13, 969-970; ŹMT 10, 105 {Origen, *Commentarius in Evangelium Mathei*, XI, 18}; PG 12, 470; ŹMT 69, 66-67 {Origen, *Homiliae in Leviticum*, V, 3}). This means that, *in fact*, there are more than just three meanings in Scripture. Origen also wrote of a supreme layer of spiritual sense that transcends human concepts, language and reasoning. This sense of senses is reserved exclusively for God and His Logos (PG 11, 401-402; ŹMT 1, 367 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 3, 15}; PG 13, 767, ŹMT 16, 213 {Origen, *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, XIV, 2}), while the lower spheres of spiritual meaning are accessible to properly initiated and educated Christians (PG 12, 451-453, ŹMT 69, 66-67 {Origen, *Homiliae in Leviticum*, V, 3}).

If a Christian's task is to reach across the body/letter of Scripture to the spiritual meaning of biblical texts, then it is legitimate at this point to ask how he or she can do this? , According to Origen, the allegorical method of interpreting texts is helpful in this endeavour as it involves

searching for a meaning other than the literal one in a given passage of a literary work (PG 13, 715-716; ŽMT 16, 142 {Origen, *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, VI, 8}). Therefore, when we study the Bible, in its historical, literal sense, we should seek out the allegorical meaning, which is the same as the spiritual sense of Scripture (PG 12, 195; ŽMT 64, 82-83 {Origen, *Homiliae in Genesim*, VI, 1}; PG 13, 867-868, ŽMT 10, 56-57 {Origen, *Commentarius in Evangelium Mathei*, X, 14}). According to Origen, thanks to *allegoresis*, all the immoral stories found in the Bible, descriptions of sexual acts, bloody wars, Jewish rituals that are of little relevance to Christians take on a new, spiritual, Christological meaning (PG 11, 359-362; ŽMT 1, 338 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 2}).

By using *allegoresis*, Origen essentially sought to make the biblical message philosophical, often giving it a neoplatonic character, affirming the supra-sensory and non-corporeal element. The Christian thinker openly acknowledged that the wisdom of pagan thinkers proved useful for the allegorical interpretation of the Bible, as it helped to grasp its spiritual meaning (Gensler 2020, 305) and to go beyond its bodily, literal exegesis, which tends to anthropomorphise God. This means that for Origen the spiritual and allegorical sense of Scripture was at the same time a philosophical sense (Straw 2003a, 214). This conclusion can be reached by looking at the way he commented on biblical texts. Let us examine, for example, Origen's interpretation of the story of Abraham and King Abimelech in Genesis 20:1-18. We read there that Abraham went to live with his wife Sarah in Gerar. Thinking that the natives might want Sarah and therefore make an attempt on his life, he began to introduce his wife as his sister. The effects of this behaviour came soon enough, as King Abimelech brought her to his court in order to marry her. Fortunately, Yahweh intervened in this awkward situation by warning Abimelech that Sarah was Abraham's wife. The horrified king promptly handed Sarah over to her husband, rebuking Abraham for not telling him the truth. In Origen's allegorical interpretation, the above story, which presents Abraham in an unfavourable light, attains

unexpected philosophical overtones. According to the Alexandrian, Sarah is a symbol of ἀρετή possessed by the wise man, represented in the Genesis text by the figure of Abraham. However, no true philosopher keeps virtue to himself, but shares it with other people, just as Abraham intended to share his wife with the men of Gerar, referring to her as his sister. According to Origen, “He allowed, as a perfect man, that whoever would, should possess virtue.” (PG 12, 195; ŽMT 64, 82-83 {Origen, *Homiliae in Genesim*, VI, 1}). In the allegorical commentary of the Christian exegete, the cowardly and deceitful Abraham thus becomes a wise man full of virtue who passes it on to other people. Let us note that Origen transplants the Old Testament story into Greek culture, expressing it with philosophical concepts.

One of Origen’s exegetical practices was to refer to the Platonic/Neoplatonic myth of the descent of souls into matter and their return to the world of spirit (God). Thus, in biblical stories containing the theme of someone’s descent to some place, the Alexandrian would see an allegory of the soul’s descent to the lower realms of being, whereas he interpreted texts mentioning someone’s ascent to something (to something) as descriptions of man’s (the soul’s) approach to higher, spiritual places (PG 12, 240-241; ŽMT 64, 148-149 {Origen, *Homiliae in Genesim*, XV, 1}). Also, the wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness is supposed to represent the return journey of the soul to God (PG 12, 780-801; ŽMT 76, 293-317 {Origen, *Homiliae in Numeros*, XX-VII})⁷. With the help of the allegoresis, therefore, Origen “philosophised” the biblical account, giving it a neoplatonic character.

3. Three meanings of the Bible and the Church

However, there is a problem with the trichotomous division of biblical meanings, since in some places of his treatises Origen seems to

⁷ Obviously, Origen interpreted many other biblical texts in a similar fashion, but since this article is not exclusively devoted to Origen’s allegoresis, we will limit ourselves to the above examples, which seem to illustrate his exegetical method sufficiently well.

favour a dichotomous division. It seems as if the theologian equates the soul with the spirit of Scripture, i.e. its psychic and spiritual meanings (CCL 78/2, 64-65; ŽMT 32, 70 {Origen, *Tractatus sive homiliae in Psalmos*, LXXVII, 1}; PG 13, 240-242; ŽMT 16, 47-50 {Origen, *Homiliae in Isaiam*, VI, 3}; PG 12, 470, ŽMT 69, 87-88 {Origen, *Homiliae in Leviticum*, VI, 3}). In one of the passages of *De principiis* Origen clearly stated that “[...] there are also places [in the Bible] where we should seek to understand only what we have called the soul or spirit” (PG 11, 365; ŽMT 1, 341 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 5}).

If we want to discover how many layers of meaning Origen actually distinguished in Scripture, we should look at the context in which the above-quoted text appears (let us call it “dichotomous” for the sake of argument). Indeed, it is a continuation of a passage in which Origen made an analogy between the human being composed of body, soul and spirit and Scripture. Origen's statement in question reads as follows: “Threefold, therefore, all understanding of God's writings must be recorded in one's soul [...]. Just as we say that man is composed of body, soul and spirit, so are the Scriptures, which God's generosity has granted for the salvation of men”⁸.

It appears, therefore, that the ancient exegete argues for a trichotomous structure of Scripture here. However, a several paragraphs later he includes the recently quoted dichotomous passage, in which he seems to treat the terms “soul” and “spirit” as synonymous (PG 11, 365; ŽMT 1, 341 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 5}). How then to explain this contradiction? Let us look at the text that the Alexandrian placed between the trichotomous and dichotomous passages. It reads as follows:

We see that the same is evidenced by the Book of the Shepherd, which is rejected by some, for Hermas was commanded to write two books and then to announce to the presbyters of the Church what he had learned from the Spirit. This has been written down in the following words:

⁸ PG 11, 364-365; ŽMT 1, 339-340 (Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 4).

“You shall write, he says, two books and give one to Clement and the other to Grapte. And let Grapte exhort the widows and the orphans, and let Clement send exhortations throughout all the cities that are outside, while you shall preach to the presbyters of the Church.” Grapte, therefore, who was commanded to exhort orphans and widows, signifies plain understanding of the letter itself, through which childish souls, undeserving of God the Father, receive exhortation, and therefore bear the name of orphans. There are also widows who, although they have departed from the wicked husband to whom they were united in defiance of the Law, yet remain widows because they have not yet progressed to be united to the heavenly Bridegroom. Whereas Clement was commanded to spread what was said over the cities that are outside to those who are already departing from the letter, that is, to those souls who have begun to draw edification beyond the cares of the flesh and beyond the desires of the flesh. Hermas himself, on the other hand, was commanded to declare what he had learned from the Holy Spirit, not through letters or books, but with a living voice, to the presbyters of the Churches of Christ, that is, to those who bear in themselves a mature concept of wisdom through their ability to comprehend spiritual doctrine (ŽMT 1, 340; PG 11, 365 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 4}).

The first two sentences of the above text seem to presume a dichotomous division of Scripture, since they speak of two books that Hermas was supposed to have written. However, if we look further into the passage, we find that Origen saw the existence of three meanings in the symbol of two books. The book given to Grapte, which signifies the letter of Scripture, i.e. its body, is addressed to two groups of people - orphans and widows. Orphans are apparently people still outside the Church but interested in the Christian message. In other words, orphans represent potential new converts, while widows probably symbolise new catechumens. These people may have made the decision to depart from the world, but their low level of initiation into Christian truths means that they only understand the literal sense of biblical teachings. Clement's teaching, on the other hand, represents the moral (psychic) sense of Scripture, which can be comprehended by Christians who have departed from a literal understanding of the biblical message. Finally,

the mission of Hermas among the presbyters, i.e. Christians who are cognitively and spiritually advanced, symbolises the spiritual sense of the Bible. In other words, the teachings of Grapte, Clement and Hermas signify the body, soul and spirit of Scripture. Thus, it is evident that Origen derived a trichotomous division from the symbol of the two books written by Hermas.

Reading further into the second chapter of the fourth book of *De principiis*, we encounter the previously quoted supposed dichotomous passage. If we read it in the context of the text cited above, i.e. about Grapte, Clement and Hermas, as well as the sentences that follow immediately after it, we find that it is in fact coherent with the trichotomous passage and Origen's interpretation of Hermas' "Shepherd". Thus, that the moral sense of Scripture is contained in its spiritual sense, just as two buckets of water are contained in the vessels intended for Jewish purification. Depending on one's attitude, ability and needs, the reader of Scripture takes in either the moral or the spiritual sense, and sometimes both at the same time (PG 11, 365-368; ŽMT 1, 341 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 5}).

Given the preceding analysis, we might also venture to interpret other seemingly dichotomous texts written by Origen. In making a distinction between the bodily and spiritual sense of Scripture, the Christian philosopher employed a mental shortcut. He believed that the moral sense is contained in the spiritual sense and at the same time serves as a step leading to knowledge of the mysteries contained in the spiritual sense. Therefore, the seemingly dichotomous division of the senses of Scripture in the above-quoted passages hides a trichotomous division, which is subject to further differentiation, since the three senses of the Bible have higher and lower levels of meaning.

In addition to questions of exegesis, the above passage about Hermas's "The Shepherd", also offers important ecclesiological content. The trichotomous division of Scripture into higher (deeper) and lower senses led Origen to distinguish three groups of believers in the

Church, standing at different levels of initiation into biblical teachings (the ecclesial *kerygma*). Those less versed in the teaching of Christianity explore the bodily sense of the Bible, the more initiated believers learn the moral (psychic) sense of the Bible, and those standing at the highest level explore the spiritual (philosophical) sense of Scripture. There is also a gradation within the aforementioned groups based on their cognitive sophistication.

The close connection between the three meanings of the Bible and the classification of Christian believers according to the meanings of Scripture they are able to penetrate can also be found in the following passage from *De principiis*:

Threefold, therefore, all understanding of God's writings must be recorded in one's soul: that is, that every simple man is edified by the very, so to speak, body of Scripture - for this is what we call ordinary and historical understanding; and if anyone has already begun to make progress and can look a little wider, let him edify himself with the very soul of Scripture; and those who are perfect and like those of whom the Apostle speaks: 'We preach wisdom among the perfect, but not the wisdom of this world, nor the wisdom of the rulers of this world who are perishing, but we preach the wisdom of God hidden in the mystery which God destined before the ages for our glory', let them, as it were, derive edification as if by the spirit from spiritual law itself, which contains 'a shadow of the goods to come' (ŻMT 1, 339-340; PG 11, 364-365 {Origen, *De principiis*, IV, 2, 4}).

"Simple people" are probably Origen's term for neophytes, then those newly admitted to the catechumenate, as well as more advanced catechumens awaiting baptism and baptised persons whose intellectual limitations allow them to only know the bodily (literal) sense of the Bible. More advanced Christians penetrate into the soul of Scripture and thus into its psychic (ethical) sense. On the other hand, morally and intellectually perfect persons explore the mysteries of Scripture on a spiritual level, that is, they practice exegesis in an allegorical, Christological and philosophical (neoplatonic) way.

4. Three meanings of the Bible and Origen's schools

The trichotomous division of the Bible and the Church was reflected in the way Origen's school in Alexandria was organised and in his educational concepts, for the philosopher divided his students into lower and higher groups according to the degree of initiation into biblical truths (ecclesial *kerygma*)⁹. According to Eusebius of Caesarea

One after another, in an uninterrupted stream, they flocked through his school from morning to evening. So he divided up these crowds, and from among his disciples he chose Heracles, a man proficient in theology, with a thorough education and knowledge of philosophy. He took him as his assistant in catechising and entrusted him with the guidance of those who were taking their first instruction, while he left to himself the training of advanced disciples (ŽMT 70, 410-411 {Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VI, 15}).

Thus, there was a typical catechetical school in Alexandria under the leadership of Heracles, which, like other such institutions existing at Christian communities, taught the catechumens about the basics of Christianity, that is, in Origen's terms, introduced them to the bodily (literal) sense of the biblical *kerygma*. However, Origen went beyond the traditional Christian schooling of that era, as he created a college in Alexandria where he taught personally. To the more advanced students, he taught "[...] geometry, arithmetic and other introductory sciences, then led them further into the various philosophical systems, lectured them on the writings, and expounded and deepened each of them as thoroughly as possible, so that even among the Greeks he earned the name of a great philosopher" (ŽMT 70, 415 {Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VI, 18, 3}).

Clearly, the Christian thinker first served his students with the typical *artes liberales* of the ancient schools, and then introduced them to

⁹ On the division of catechumens by Origen, see Dujarier 1990, 46-47; Bielawski 1998, 30; Murawski 2011, 175.

the world of philosophy. He certainly divided his students into a lower group, learning the liberal arts, and a higher group, exploring philosophical issues. Some students from the lower level ended up, after a while, in the philosophy group, while others, less able, stayed in the liberal arts (ŻMT 70, 415 {Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VI, 18, 4}). This system of teaching was therefore not fundamentally different from the practices of ancient pagan education, which is why non-Christians, including pagan philosophers, also willingly attended Origen's *didaskaleion* (ŻMT 70, 415 {Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VI, 18, 2}). However, one thing definitely distinguished the college of Origen from its pagan counterparts. Namely, Origen regarded the secular disciplines as the foundation for the exegesis of the sacred books (ŻMT 70, 415 {Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VI, 18, 4}). Thus, if in pagan education philosophy crowned the process of acquiring knowledge (Kot 2010, 98-99, 102-105; Litak 2008, 35), in the *didaskaleion* of the Christian scholar it was only second in hierarchy, preparing the ablest students for the exegesis of biblical texts. The presence of philosophy in Origen's college as a subject preceding the study of the Bible indicates that his exegesis was philosophical and allegorical in nature. The final stage of study at the Alexandrian college thus consisted of exploring the spiritual sense of Scripture.

It seems that Origen regarded the organisation and curriculum of the Alexandrian *didaskaleion* as a universal model, because he converted the catechetical school in Caesarea, to which he had moved from Alexandria as a result of a conflict with Bishop Demetrius, into a college resembling the Alexandrian *didaskaleion* in quality and structure (Czuj 1950, 115). A great deal of light was shed on the school in Caesarea by its alumnus, Gregory the Miracle-Worker, who in his *Oratio Panegyrica* in honour of Origen described in detail the course of his studies. These began with logic and dialectics, which were taught by Origen using the Socratic method (PG 10, 1076; ŻMT 11, 62 {Gregorios Thaumaturgos, *Oratio prophonetica ac panegyrica in Origenem*, VII A}). The Christian

scholar then focused on the natural sciences, presented apparently in a philosophical manner, as he emphasised the order prevailing in the cosmos, demonstrating the existence of Providence. Philosophical intentions also accompanied the lectures on geometry and astronomy. Using mathematical abstractions, Origen pointed to a supra-sensory reality, leading his disciples, as Gregory put it, to the heavens (PG 10, 1077; ŽMT 11, 64 {Gregorios Thaumaturgos, *Oratio prosphonetica ac panegirica in Origenem*, VIII}). Origen's approach to the exact and natural sciences shows that he regarded them as preparation for the study of philosophy and the philosophical exegesis of Scripture. During the next stage of their studies, Origen's students explored ethics. The master paid particular attention to the four cardinal virtues and their implementation in everyday life (PG 10, 1077-1080; ŽMT 11, 64-66 {Gregorios Thaumaturgos, *Oratio prosphonetica ac panegirica in Origenem*, IX}). In this way, under the guidance of Origen, students arrived at the second meaning of the biblical *kerygma*. The next level of education involved lectures on particular philosophical systems. The thinker urged his students to learn about all philosophical views without prejudice, with the exception of atheistic concepts, as anything impure should be avoided (PG 10, 1087-1093; ŽMT 11, 70-73 {Gregorios Thaumaturgos, *Oratio prosphonetica ac panegirica in Origenem*, XIII-XIV}). The teaching of philosophy immediately preceded the classes on allegorical exegesis of Scripture. It is reasonable to believe that they were intended for disciples who had embraced Christianity and attained the status of perfect Christians, for Origen would not have disclosed to non-Christians the secrets of advanced interpretation of the Bible, since in the Church of his time these were covered by the so-called discipline of the secret (Bielawski 1998, 30). The *disciplina arcani* meant that only selected students learned from Origen how to explain the riddles and ambiguities inherent in Scripture using allegoresis (PG 10, 1093-1096, ŽMT 11, 74-75 {Gregorios Thaumaturgos, *Oratio prosphonetica ac panegirica in Origenem*, XV}), and thus to penetrate its philosophical and spiritual meaning.

5. Conclusion

The above remarks lead to the conclusion that Origen's biblical hermeneutics and his exegetical methods were closely linked to the ecclesiology and educational work he preached. The philosopher's strong conviction that we find three hierarchical layers of meanings (senses) in Scripture led him to group Christians according to their ability to comprehend these senses. Since the deepest (highest) sense of the Bible is its allegorical and philosophical (neoplatonic) meaning, so the group standing highest in the Church are the faithful practitioners of philosophical exegesis. In it they act as sages, philosophers, expounding the deepest truths of Christianity and communing with the Logos incarnate in Scripture. Origen applied a similar division in his *didaskaleion* in Alexandria and apparently also in Caesarea. The catechumens learned the bodily/literal sense of the biblical *kerygma*, while at a higher level the moral sense of the *kerygma* was explored, and the most advanced group learned the spiritual significance of Scripture by learning the philosophical and allegorical interpretation of the revealed books. While Origen took all the groups studying in his colleges seriously, it must be acknowledged that the Christian scholar's primary aim was to form and educate Christian philosophers, skilled in allegorical/philosophical exegesis. In this way, Origen sought to make Christianity philosophical and to place a group of Christian wise men at the head of the Church, like Plato in his ideal state.

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