Reading:

Mk. 13:31: "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away"

Prayer Before Studying Theology:

Almighty God, we thank you for the gospel of your Son Jesus Christ, committed to us by the hand of your evangelist Saint Mark; grant that we may not be carried away with every changing wind of teaching, but may be firmly established in the truth of your word; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

--Book of Common Prayer, Mark

Class #7:

- **Reading the Bible Allegorically in the Early Christian World**

Reading the Bible in the Early Christian World

- **Typology**

An earthly image or figure in the OT that points forward to some aspect(s) of the person and work of Christ and the arrangements of the New Covenant which his sacrifice brings into being. We might say that the type is a foreshadowing or prefiguring of a future event central to God's salvation of the world and that the type finds its completion and its reality in fullness in that future event (so that the type or shadow is in some sense superseded by the future reality to which it points; see *Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:6 and esp. *Heb. 10:1).

- Thus, for example, in Rom. 5:14, Adam as the first man is described as a "type of the one to come" (i.e. Christ; compare 1 Cor. 15:45), introducing into the world a new spiritual condition which affects those who come after him.
- In *1 Cor. 10,6,11, the Exodus and the trials and temptations experienced by Israel during her journey through the wilderness are types of (and point forward to) the arrangements of the New Covenant. Note also that v. 4 refers back to the events mentioned in Num. 20:7-11
- In *Heb. 8:5 (citing Ex. 25:40), the earthly temple is a type (copy) and shadow of that which is in heaven. (Acts 7:44 is possibly to be compared). This idea is further developed in Heb. 9:11-26 (see esp. 9:13-14,23-24) without specific reference to the word "type."
- In other cases the word "type" (i.e. pattern) is not used :
    - 1 Cor. 5:7-8: The Passover lamb which is sacrificed points forward to Christ's sacrifice
    - Jn. 3:14-15 (referring to the events mentioned in Num. 21:8-9: the snake lifted up in the desert points forward to Christ)

See further Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric*, Leiden: Brill, 1998, p. 402 (§ 901)
See also Lienhard, *Ministry*, pp. 70-72, 57-69, 73-109, 119-120 on Old Testament typology and the development of a conception of the ministerial priesthood (i.e. the Christian pastor as a kind of priest. The separate, holy office of the priest is the spiritual counterbalance to the popular demands for convenience and pleasing speech and the orator's quest to please the crowds and secure their honor so as to gain glory for himself).

- **Allegory**

See Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric*, pp. 398-401 (§§ 895-897, 900)

Pre-Christian Usage of Allegory in Interpreting Texts:

- Used in interpretation and teaching of Homer and other myths *transmitted by the poets*, especially to explain the narrated violent conflict of the gods (*theomachia*) and the apparently immoral actions of the gods (e.g. Hephaestus binding his mother Hera, according to a non-Homeric myth known to Plato).
    - Developed in a more systematic, philosophical way by the Stoics and Neoplatonists, it was argued that the divinely inspired poet had intended to convey an underlying meaning (*huponoia*), using an outward form of words that were enigmatic and ambiguous (*ainittetai*) but were intended to lead the reader on to a meaning related to but distinct from the ordinary meaning/referent of the words. See A.A. Long, "Stoic Readings of Homer" in Andrew Laird (ed.), *Ancient Literary Criticism*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006, 211-237; Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989; for a bibliography of other works on this topic, see Laird, 460-461.
    - The assumption often is that persons in the past knew some basic truths about nature. For various reasons, they cast (or concealed) these truths in a symbolic/poetic form, which later, less enlightened persons took to be independently valid. The purpose of the myth thus needed to be reidentified by a later, more enlightened interpreter, so that the original (and correct) beliefs advanced within the myth could once again be publicly made known.
    - This "recovery" of meaning was often supported by various etymologies (=an account of the origin of the word, showing its meaning). In other words, what makes correct interpretation possible is something about the interpreter's mind and the way that the mind (and potentially all similar minds) has access to truth, allowing time and its corruptions to be overcome and original and ancient truth to be recognized again.
    - That some things are allegories may be immediately obvious from the way the author presents them.

        *For example, when the Roman poet Horace described current affairs as a boat tossed about by the waves, seeking a port, his readers recognized immediately that he was using *familiar, tangible imagery that invites an emotive response* to refer to the

Roman state, wracked by civil war, seeking a resolution of these conflicts and a lasting peace.
*In the same way, when a Christian reads in Gen. 3:14 of the serpent being cursed, he knows that what is meant is not a single ancient reptile, but rather the Tempter, the Devil himself.

- See Gal. 4:24-31 (esp. v. 24 *allegoroumena*="things spoken allegorically/in an allegory"), where the words/events are taken to have quite different meanings from what one might normally expect.
    - Here a historical narration of events is seen to have further meanings for other times and circumstances, but the historical event itself is not denied and does not lose its continuing relevance or validity once the event's other meanings are discovered.
        - Contrast the way that the type becomes dependent upon the fulfillment event for its significance, meaning or efficacy.

<u>Early Christian Usage of Allegory in Interpreting Difficult Biblical Passages</u>

- The need to introduce allegorical interpretation can be discerned from the content of the text itself.
    - Typically allegorical interpretation is required when the text contains a narrative description, which, if taken literally would result in
        - falsity (God saying, "Where are you?" [Gen. 3:9] because he did not know where Adam was),
        - contradiction,
        - impossibility (seeing all the kingdoms of the earth from a single mountain [Mt. 4:8])
        - absurdity (e.g. accounts of God having a white beard and sitting on a throne), or possibly even
        - immorality (e.g. taking the Song of Songs at face value as an erotic romance between as-yet-unmarried human lovers; cf. Origen, pp. 22,24).

Rules Regarding the Use of Allegory in Biblical Interpretation

- The use of allegorical interpretation does not cause the historical sense to be abolished or wholly superseded; instead the former complements the latter.
    - Cf. Rechenberg: *In Historicis concedi potest allegoriae, quae tamen historicum sensum non tollat* ("In the historical books, allegories can be allowed which nevertheless do not abolish the historical sense").
- Allegorical interpretation must
    - be based upon and be in agreement with the literal sense and
    - agree with (and not contradict) the rule of faith.
        - Cf. Alsted: *Nam historicus sensus tanquam fundamentum semper manere debet* ("For the historical sense ought always to remain a foundation").
- Allegorical interpretation cannot be used to establish doctrine or to prove anything. It is suggestive, rather than decisive or determinative.

- Cf. Thomas Aquinas: *Theologia allegorica non est argumentative* (roughly, "Theology drawn from allegories cannot be used as a basis for argument," i.e. it cannot be used to support or prove a point).

This notion of allegory would later by expanded into the fourfold sense of Scripture found in medieval writers; e.g. Lyranus (i.e. Nicholas of Lyra, who is paraphrasing and adapting an earlier discussion found in Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*):

- *Litera gesta docet,*
  Quid credas allegoria,
  Moralis, quid agas,
  Quid speres anagogia

  (=roughly,
  "The letter [i.e. literal sense of Scripture] teaches what things were done;
  allegory, what you should believe;
  the moral sense, what you should do;
  anagogy, what you should hope for.")

with the explanation (Rechenberg):

- *Itaque illud nomen Hierusalem secundum literalem sensum Judaeae civitatem; secundum Allegoriam Ecclesiam; secundum Tropologiam, id est, moralitatem, fidelem animam denotat; tandem secundum Anagogiam, mens nostra sublevatur ad caelestem patriam contemplandum.*
  ("Therefore, that name Jerusalem,
  according to the literal sense, is a city of the Jews;
  in accordance with allegory, it is the Church;
  according to figurative speech, i.e. the moral sense, it denotes the faithful soul;
  lastly, according to anagogy, our mind should be lifted up to contemplate our heavenly home.")

The *moral (tropological) sense* aims "at the establishing or correcting of ways of one's habits" or way of life (*moralis locutio ad institutionem et correctionem morum*).
Anagogy="a way of speaking that leading up to higher things, matters concerning future reward and the things which in the heavens are future life"

For further discussion, see Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric*, pp. 401-402 (§ 900)

Question: According to Origen, why is it sometimes necessary to interpret the Bible in an allegorical manner?

(1) Does messianic prophecy sometimes require it, due to the figural language used?

(2) Do the anthropomorphic passages in the Old Testament, which conceive of God in terms of human limits and human passions, require this? If these passages are not interpreted allegorically, won't they mislead simple believers and lead to views of God that are unworthy of Him? (See Origen in Stevenson, *NE*, pp. 205-*206)

(3) Is not the Scripture a divinely authored document that has an extraordinary depth and abundance of meanings that allows it to address the great variety of situations we encounter in life?
(4) What are we to make of the immorality of biblical characters'

- polygamy,
- incest [Lot],
- lying/deceit [Abraham],
- adultery and plotting to murder the innocent [David],
- the genocidal slaughter of Canaanites [including women and children], etc.)?
    - What edifying value can there possibly be in reading and expounding these texts for the community?
    - Do they not rather confirm people in similar behaviors and/or lead them to mock and despise the Scriptures and the people of God?
    - Should the extreme difficulties in interpretation here be honestly admitted? (See Porphyry in Stevenson, *NE*, p. 207)

(5) Does not Scripture itself proclaim

- a distinction between the spirit and the letter?
    - Cf. 2 Cor. 3:6: "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."
- that there are hidden things within God's revelation whose meaning is difficult to grasp and may only be understood with effort as one progresses in the life of faith?

(a) If so, perhaps one ought to distinguish between

(1) a bodily meaning (where this is not inappropriate--as e.g. in the case of God, who does not have a body--it can sometimes be morally improving for the person of modest attainments)

- This is, roughly, the literal, historical sense.

(2) a soul meaning (e.g. the important moral derived from a text not intended to be read in a literal, bodily manner, e.g. 1 Cor. 9:9: "Do not muzzle an ox...Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake?")

- This is, roughly, the moral sense.

(3) a spiritual meaning (p. 142: "Interpretation is spiritual when one is able to show" the good and heavenly things that were to come [e.g. the Incarnation or, as in Gal. 4:21-24, the two covenants and the calling of the Gentiles] or are to come. This spiritual meaning is not easily discerned or understood by persons who are carnal or have failed to progress in the Christian life.)

- This is the spiritual sense, arrived at through an appropriate form of allegorical exegesis, which is grounded in the literal, historical sense and represents a surplus of meaning found within the text.

Hall's account of Origen's use of allegory on p. 103 is erroneous and misleading:

a) It is not that allegory is inherently ahistorical or requires a separation from or a dismissal of the historical sense. It is rather that the depiction of bodily events in history is not the whole story, i.e. that there is more to be said (cf. NE 181: "For just as man consists of body, soul and spirit, so in the same way does the Scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given for man's salvation")

    *See further *On First Principles* 4.3.4 (Butterworth, 294-296; see handout), where Origen responds to his critics and sets the record straight regarding his views of figural language in Scripture.

b) This depiction of bodily events may lead one on to understand how heavenly realities intersect with history (i.e. the referent of allegory need not be some static immaterial condition).

    *To understand the interest and relevance of Origen's approach, see R.P.C. Hanson, *Allegory & Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002.

c) Origen is certainly not indifferent to the historical setting in which the text originated. Forms of textual, rhetorical and historical criticism are essential to Origen's approach to the text. Yet if God is the author of the text and intends the message to address not only the situation in which the text originated but also subsequent generations. In other words, Origen would claim that if the text is to function as the Word of God and a part of the canon of Scripture, which informs the lives of God's people living in situations quite different from the situation in which the text was originally written, the text may legitimately be seen to have a meaning which includes but transcends the narrow parameters of its original historical context.

Origen on the Song of Songs: Allegory in Practice

The Song of Songs is cast in the form of a wedding song (*epithalamium*). If we assumed that this was simply about the private relationship between two ancient individuals, long deceased, it would be hard to explain why it was introduced as Scripture and regarded as edifying for other persons in other times and places.

The key is to recognize that <u>ancient dialogues with realistic details have been used as a means to introduced people to higher truth</u> (e.g. Plato's dialogues). (Analysis of form is a clue to understanding the genre of the work and therefore how to read it properly.) The persons and images introduced in the dialogue have a significance that lies beyond themselves, although this is initially concealed from the reader by the realistic narration.

The terms introduced in the dialogue also have a transferred meaning, which points beyond their ordinary applications. Thus, for example, we must not imagine that the love being referred is the carnal, corrupted love that inflames senseless, foolish persons who can only think about bodies.

- Love is instead used here in a higher, transferred sense to speak about the pure, spiritual, incorruptible affection (=divine charity) which moves God to reveal himself to his people and save them and by which his people in turn respond to him, being captivated by the beauty of the Word of God (incarnate in Jesus Christ).
- The members of the body referred to are the various faculties and powers of the soul (p. *27).
- The bridegroom who is both shepherd and king is Christ.
- The bride is either the individual soul or the Church as the bride of Christ.
- The vineyard refers to one's customary or habitual way of life.
- The darkening of the skin under the sun refers to sin and its effects on the soul, while lightening refers to the purification the soul receives which restores it to its original beauty.
- The house is the body in which the soul resides.
- The food and feasting referred to here is the nourishment of the soul.
- Note that even self-willed, empire-building bishops make a brief appearance in the story! (See bottom half of p. *120). Thus, allegory can extend the meaning of the text to address contemporary realities.

The presupposition of Origen's method is that God has created visible things in such a way that they image, inform us about and point us up to invisible things (pp. 218-221, 223, 234; see esp. Origen's discussion of the basis for the correspondences between the earthly and the heavenly on the bottom of p. *220 and top of p. 223.).

The fact that two words can look and sound the same while having different meanings (homonymy) allows Origen to distinguish pairs of good and bad referents for a word (i.e. there is good and bad love [p. 22,24], good and bad darts [=love of God vs. temptations to deadly sins; p. 199], etc. These didactic opposing pairs are a typical feature of moralizing instruction.

It is also important to note the concepts that Origen develops here, which become a standard part of the later spiritual teaching of the Church, i.e. the definition that Origen develops of supernatural love that is well ordered (*caritas*=divine charity) vs. lesser baser loves that are disordered (either because they aim at the wrong object or love it in the wrong way, i.e. too much, too little, for the wrong reasons etc.; p. 188), the dart of divine love penetrating and wounding the soul (pp. 198-199), the dark night of the senses during times of trial/spiritual warfare