Reading the Bible as Part of Which Great Tradition? A Critique of Allegorical Interpretation and a Commendation of the Reformation's Recovery of the Literal Sense

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In the first decade of the twenty-first century, "theological interpretation of Scripture" (TIS) became fashionable in the Christian publishing world. Ideas about what theological interpretation should be were varied, but several common emphases emerged. First, theological interpretation arose in critique of historical criticism.[2] Second, theological interpreters sought to bridge the divide between biblical studies and theology—a divide traced back to historical criticism.[3] Third, theological interpreters discovered the benefits of pre-critical interpretation.[4] Fourth, this look back to patristic

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[2] Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 19–21, 61–75; Peter Enns, "Some Thoughts on Theological Exegesis of the Old Testament: Toward a Viable Model of Biblical Coherence and Relevance" (paper presented at the Eastern Regional ETS meeting, Souderton, PA, April 1, 2005), 5–6; Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study,* Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 30–39; Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 12–14; Stephen Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 19–21.

[3] J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), xvii, 67. This divide is typically traced back to Gabler's 1787 lecture at the University of Altdorf. Max Turner and Joel B. Green, "New Testament Commentary and Systematic Theology," in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 4; A. K. M. Adam, "Biblical Theology," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 20.

[4] Gregg R. Allison lists this as one of four "common characteristics" of TIS. "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation," *SBJT* 14, no. 2 (2010): 30; cf. Joel B. Green, "Practicing the Gospel in a Post-Critical World: The Promise of Theological Exegesis," *JETS* 47, no. 3 (Sep 2004): 10; Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation,* 39–55; Billings, *The Word of God,* 149–94. Books on TIS often include a survey of historical interpreters that serve as models. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation,* 103–28, 173–98, 239–61, 307–37 (using Gregory of Nyssa, Theodoret of Cyrus, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Nicholas of Lyra, and Thomas Aquinas as examples); Stephen E. Fowl, "The Importance of a Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture: The Example of Thomas Aquinas," in *Reading Scripture with the Church,* 35–50; Craig G. Bartholomew, "Calvin, Barth, and Theological Interpretation," in *Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology,* Paternoster Theological Monographs, ed. Neil B. McDonald and Carl R. Trueman (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 163–77; Jens Zimmerman, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 78–132 (using Martin Luther, John Owen, and Philipp Spener as examples). The seminal article on this topic is Daivd C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Ex Auditu* 1 (1985): 74–82.

and medieval interpretation is part of a larger emphasis on tradition and *ressourcement*.[5] Fifth, the multi-sense hermeneutic of patristic and medieval interpreters was appealing to many.[6]

While some conservative evangelicals have been involved in the TIS project from the beginning (e.g., Kevin Vanhoozer), other conservative biblical interpreters were cautious and even somewhat critical of theological interpretation.[7] However, over the past decade, a recovery of the *quadriga* and allegorical interpretation have become fashionable in certain segments of evangelicalism, especially among younger evangelicals. One influential book is Peter Leithart's *Deep Exegesis*.[8] Leithart looks to the *quadriga* as an alternative to historical criticism. Another influential book has been Hans Boersma's *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church*.[9] He states his thesis clearly at the outset: "*the church fathers were deeply invested in reading the Old Testament Scriptures as a sacrament, whose historical basis or surface level participates in the mystery of the New Testament reality of the Christ event*."[10] This approach to Scripture, Boersma notes, is rooted in his adherence to Christian Platonism. In his view, "everything around us is sacramental."[11] A third influential book is Craig Carter's *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis*.[12] He identifies the problem with modern hermeneutics as lying with "Epicurean naturalism," the "historical critical approach," secularism, and progressivism.[13] He looks to the Great Tradition as the solution. Like Boersma, he finds Christian Platonism essential for proper interpretation of Scripture. Carter seems more oriented toward the conservative evangelical tradition than Boersma.[14] Mitchell Chase, author of *40 Questions about Typology and Allegory,*[15] stands firmly within conservative evangelicalism. He has been influenced by all of the books noted above and is representative of an increasing number of younger evangelical scholars who have embraced allegorical interpretation and the *quadriga.*

[5] Billings, *The Word of God,* 10, 17–18.

[6] Stephen Fowl, *Reading Scripture with the Church*, 90; Mark Gignilliat, "Paul, Allegory, and the Plain Sense of Scripture: Galatians 4:21–31," *JTI* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 135–46.

[7] Grant Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Theological Interpretation," in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 62–86; D. A. Carson, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But . . . ," in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 187–207.

[8] Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco: Baylor Univeristy Press, 2009).

[9] Hans Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017).

[10] Ibid., Kindle loc. 128.

[11] Ibid., Kindle loc. 288.

[12] Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).

[13] Ibid., 15.

[14] Carter is concerned to uphold the divine inspiration of Scripture, he confesses inerrancy, and he closes the book with a friendly interaction with D. A. Carson's critique of TIS. He notes, "I share almost all of Carson's concerns," though he dissents from Carson's concerns about allegorical interpretation and Carson's appeal not to entirely reject the Enlightenment. Ibid., 248–51.

[15] Mitchell L. Chase, *40 Questions about Typology and Allegory* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020).

This attempt to rehabilitate patristic and medieval hermeneutics (what Iain Provan calls "Counter-Reformational Protestantism")[16] could be critiqued from a number of angles. For instance, one could point out that at key points in Leithart's book, the argument turns on equivocal meanings or the eliding of importing distinctions.[17] One could critique the claim that all of reality is sacramental.[18] Boersma's and Carter's conception of Christian Platonism is also open to critique,[19] as is their

[16] Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017). Provan has Hans Boersma, Craig Allert, and D. H. Williams in view. Craig Carter would almost certainly object to this characterization (and I suspect Mitchell Chase would as well) given that he sought to enlist John Calvin in support of his project. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture*, 183–86, 250. Nonetheless, the label is accurate, and this should temper some of the enthusiasm Carter and conservative evangelicals like him should have toward Boersma and his project.

[17] Part of what makes the argument in the second chapter of *Deep Exegesis* work is the slipperiness of *meaning* as Leithart is using the term. If E. D. Hirsch (the focus of Leithart's critique) has drawn too stark a line between meaning and significance, Leithart keeps things fuzzy where it would be helpful to make some distinctions. Leithart brings out that texts may mean different things to the same person at different points in their life due to differing life experience. But here it is important to note that Leithart has shifted (without alerting the reader) from talking about the meaning *of* a text to the meaning *for* a reader. If the connection between the meaning *of* and the meaning *for* is broken, the reader has misunderstood the text. On the other hand, if the connection is close, the reader better understands a text after having greater life experience. Leithart also elides the distinction between the meaning of *historical events*, which is often only discerned after time has passed, and the meaning of *texts* that record and reflect upon historical events.

Leithart again elides certain key distinctions in his fourth chapter. He makes the valid point that good readers bring information with them to the text. A good reader of Matthew 1:1 will bring knowledge that "book of the genealogy" alludes to Genesis, that "Christ" is a messianic term, and that "son of David" and "son of Abraham" carry covenantal connotations. Leithart then labels this eisegesis because this information is not explicitly stated in the text. He further links his Matthew 1:1 example to the fathers who compare Moses' outstretched arms to the cross or Rahab's red cord to the blood of Christ. The problem is that Matthew likely intended the allusions in Matthew 1:1. It is exegesis, not eisegesis, to pick up on allusions that the *author* has *put into* his text. (For what it is worth, there may be an authorially intended link between the scarlet cord hung in Rahab's window and the blood of the Passover lamb spread on the doorposts, in which case there may be an exegetical link to the blood of Christ; however, this is different from connecting the cord to the blood of Christ simply due to a free association with the color red.)

[18] Evangelicals, who rightly recognize the theological dangers of the Enlightenment are in danger of looking back to the medieval world for the solution. For instance, Charles Taylor has provided many evangelical intellectuals with language that helps make sense of our secular age. Rod Dreher has popularized some of this thinking in his book, *Living in Wonder: Finding Mystery and Meaning in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024). Many evangelicals are too attracted to the language of disenchantment and re-enchantment and have not given enough thought to the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox worldviews of the figures who are promoting it. Protestants should embrace a disenchanted world, but not a secular one. An enchanted world is a world too much influenced by paganism. A Protestant worldview recognizes the reality of the supernatural, but it does not see all of life as sacramental or as infused with magic. Alan Jacobs is insightful on this matter: "One of the great tasks of the Reformation was to break up a richly various ecology of power, in which the duly-performed rites of the Church and its consecrated objects formed weapons against various hostile forces that manifested themselves in illness and death, bad luck and bad harvests. The leading Reformers certainly believed in the inevitability of 'spiritual warfare.' . . . But the Reformers insisted that those forces existed only by the permissive will of the Father, and that the *only* weapon God had provided to overcome those forces is the sacrificial death of Christ on the Cross. . . . The Reformation, is, in Charles Taylor's phrase, 'an engine of disenchantment'; by concentrating all power in the being and acts of the Triune God it drains the world of spiritual energies." Alan Jacobs, "Fantasy and the Buffered Self," *The New Atlantis* (Winter 2014), https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/fantasy-and-the-buffered-self.

[19] Daniel J. Treier. "'Christian Platonism' and Christological Interpretation: A Response to Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*," *Reformed Faith & Practice* 5, no. 3 (Dec 2020); Paul M. Gould, "On Classical Christian Platonism: A Philosopher's Reply to Carter." The London Lyceum (August 1, 2022), https://www.thelondonlyceum.com/on-classical-christian-platonism-a-philosophers-reply-to-carter.

insistence that it is a necessary metaphysic for faithful interpretation.[20] Finally, the exegetical practices of these authors could be analyzed.[21]

The remainder of this paper critiques the Counter-Reformational Protestant hermeneutic by examining its appeal to the Great Tradition. Any appeal to the Great Tradition must reckon with the tradition's origins and with the gradual turn from allegorical interpretation during the medieval period as well as its rejection by the Reformers and their heirs.

Defining Terms

This paper argues for interpreting Scripture according to the literal sense rather than according to the three spiritual senses of the *quadriga*. Kevin Vanhoozer observes, "Frances Young dismisses *literal* as a 'thoroughly ambiguous' term, of no help in enabling us to understand how biblical interpreters read in accordance to the letter."[22] This is a valid critique, and I often seek to avoid the term *literal* in my own discussions of hermeneutical method.[23] However, given that the literal sense is one of the four senses of the *quadriga,* this terminology is unavoidable. Iain Provan provides a serviceable definition: "*to read Scripture 'literally,' in line with Reformation perspectives on this topic, means to read it in*

[20] It is not sufficient to argue that the Great Tradition made use of a certain metaphysic and therefore that metaphysic is required to be a faithful Christian interpreter. It must first be demonstrated that the metaphysic in view is required by the Bible itself, at least implicitly (see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 1:84–86 for a discussion of the Scripture as "the sole foundation (*principium unicum*) of church and theology"). In addition, the fathers were eclectic in their use of philosophy. See ibid., 1:607–8; John W. Cooper, *Panentheism—the Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 44–45. If Bavinck and Cooper are correct, the fathers did not see a given philosophy (whether that of Plato, Aristotle, or anyone else) as normative for Christianity. Platonism and Neoplatonism are inconsistent with the Christian faith, just as are the modern philosophies that adherents to Christian Platonism scorn. See ibid., 45. To be sure, Boersma and Carter are not claiming the fathers adopted an unmodified Platonism. But even so, it is unwise to take a particular ancient philosophy and claim it for Christianity—even in modified form. This is akin to speaking of Christian Confucianism or Christian Hegelianism. Second, and more substantively, to truly follow the fathers would mean to continue to make eclectic use of philosophical tools—including those of modern philosophy—while refusing to allow Christianity to be coopted by any one philosophical system.

[21] Peter Leithart has written numerous commentaries. Hans Boersma's volume, *Sacramental Preaching: Sermons on the Hidden Presence of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016) shows his method in action. Both Carter and Chase include in their works examples of the kind of exegesis they favor.

[22] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024), 115. Vanhoozer provides the following citation: Frances Young, "Literal Meaning," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible,* 401. However, there is no article on "Literal Meaning" in this dictionary. There is an article on "Literal Sense" by Kathryn Greene-McCreight, which Vanhoozer cites two footnotes later. Evidently some of the documentation was mixed up. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

Iain Provan also documents the various ways that *literal* is used. It is used metaphorically for emphasis. It is used of literalistic interpretation (Provan provides Amelia Bedelia as an example). It is used in contrast to metaphors, in contrast to allegories within a text, and to applications of texts. It is also used of "historical reference" in texts. Provan rejects these uses. No one is arguing for Amelia-Bedelia-type exegesis. Interpreting metaphors and allegories within a text according to the "communicative intentions" of the authors is literal reading. So are applications to the present that align with the "full communicative intent of our biblical authors." On the other hand, there are some literal interpretations that do not have historical reference (e.g., literal interpretation of parables). Provan, *Right Reading*, 86–92.

[23] I am sympathetic to Mark Snoeberger's proposal in "The Originalist Hermeneutic in Biblical and Constitutional Context: Comparison and Contrast" (paper presented at the Bible Faculty Summit, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, July 2022).

accordance with its various apparent communicative intentions as a collection of texts from the past now integrated into one Great Story, doing justice to such realities as literary convention, idiom, metaphor, and typology or figuration."[24]

Richard Muller provides a definition of the *quadriga*: "*the fourfold pattern of medieval exegesis*; a pattern which viewed the text as having a literal or historical, a tropological or moral, an allegorical or doctrinal, and an anagogical or ultimate, eschatological meaning."[25] Gerald Bray provides a serviceable definition of *allegory:* "Allegory is primarily a method of reading a text by assuming that its literal sense conceals a hidden meaning, to be deciphered by using a particular hermeneutical key."[26]

Galatians 4:24–31 and the Hermeneutics of the Apostles

If allegorical interpretation of scripture is valid, it must be a method of interpretation found in Scripture. Galatians 4:24 is a key prooftext since Paul wrote, "Which things are an allegory [ἀλληγορέω]" (KJV). Thus, this passage would seem to provide a clear-cut case of allegorical interpretation. Neither the translations nor the commentators, however, agree on whether Paul is claiming to interpret allegorically according to the current sense of that term.[27]

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[24] Provan, *Right Reading*, 85–86. There are some weaknesses to Provan's definition. The wording "*now integrated into one Great Story*" could be read as minimizing the reality that all the biblical texts were canonical from the moment of their creation. Kevin Vanhoozer also critiques Provan for not tying the canonical aspect of his definition to divine authorial intention. *Mere Christian Hermeneutics,* 173. While divine authorial intent should be closely connected to human authorial intent (this is a key aspect of the doctrine of inspiration), God, who knows the end from the beginning, inescapably intends more than the human writers could intend, and progressive revelation can illuminate divine intentions beyond (but not differing from) what the human writers intended.

[25] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 254.

[26] Gerald Bray, "Allegory," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible,* 34. Bray also notes that *allegory* is used of allegorical compositions, but he observes, "It is doubtful whether any part of the Bible can be regarded as such." Bray also distinguishes between allegory and typology. Al Wolters also supports this distinction: "We need to make a careful terminological distinction, following Jean Daniélou, between 'allegory' and typology.' The New Testament is full of the latter, in which a person or event in the Old Testament is seen as foreshadowing or prefiguring something in the New. The key point here is that a historical reality earlier in the redemptive metanarrative of Scripture anticipates another historical reality later in that same narrative. Allegory, on the other hand, takes some feature of Scripture and makes it a symbol of some supra-historical spiritual truth in general." "The History of Old Testament Interpretation: An Anecdotal Survey," in *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 24. It is precisely this distinction that Hans Boersma rejects: "Following Jean Daniélou, 20th-century scholarship often distinguished between typology and allegory by insisting that the former was grounded within history and was biblically based, while the latter was arbitrary and rooted in Philo and in the Platonic tradition. Henri de Lubac convincingly debunked any sharp distinction between the two and demonstrated the Christological basis for typological and allegorical exegesis." "The Sacramental Reading of Nicene Theology: Athanasius and Gregory of Nyssa on Proverbs 8*," JTI* 10, no. 1 (2016): 2n3. Chase, however, properly recognizes the value of the distinction: "Of figural reading, a distinction between the terms is valuable. Patristic interpreters may not have explicitly distinguished between the interpretive practices of typology and allegory, but there is no virtue in maintaining an ambiguity where greater precision is possible." *40 Questions,* 197; cf. Provan, *Right Reading*, 105; Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics,* 167, with qualifications.

[27] The ESV clarifies that Paul is not claiming Genesis was written as an allegory; it is his interpretation that is "allegorical": "Now this may be interpreted allegorically." Other translations remove the word *allegory* altogether: "which things are symbolic" (NKJV); "These things are illustrations" (HCSB); "These things are being taken figuratively" (NIV 2011).

Galatians 4:21–23, Genesis 16, and Genesis 22

Paul directs the Galatians' attention to the Abraham narratives (Gal 4:21–23), which focus on God's promises and Abraham's response to those promises with growing faith.[28] Genesis 16 records that Abram and Sarai believed God's promises but sought to achieve them by their own contrivances. Because Abram and Sarai sought the promise through their own efforts, Paul says, "The son of the slave was born according to the flesh" (Gal 4:23).[29] In the record of Isaac's birth, Moses emphasizes that Isaac was born according to God's promise (Gen 21:1–2). Abraham's personal righteousness had nothing to do with the fulfillment of promise, for he had failed once again just prior to Isaac's birth (Gen 20). His old age (noted in Gen 21:1, 5, 7) also indicates that *God* fulfilled the promise.[30] Based on Genesis 21 Paul says, "The son of the free woman was born through the promise" (Gal 4:23).

Paul's use of the Abraham narrative at this point in the argument of Galatians is fitting since Abraham and the Abrahamic Covenant have played a central role in Paul's argument since chapter 3. The literal sense of Genesis is clearly germane to the argument of Galatians, and it underlies the "allegory" in this section of the book. Paul's approach can be contrasted with that of Philo and Origen. F. F. Bruce ably pieces together Philo's allegorical interpretation from several places in Philo's works:

> According to Philo, Abraham is the virtue-loving soul in its quest for the true God; Sarah is virtue and her son Isaac is the higher wisdom, whereas Hagar is the lower leaning of the schools and her son Ishmael is sophistry, shooting his arguments as an archer (Gn. 21:20) shoots arrows from his bow (Abr. 68; Fug. 128, 209f.; Mut. 255, etc.).[31]

Origen's comments on Genesis 21 follow Paul's lead, but his comments on Genesis 12 and 20 show Philo's influence:

On the ambiguity of the term in the ancient world, see Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 20.

[28] On the theme of faith in the Abraham narratives, see Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 72–75; Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (1948; reprint, Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1975), 83–87; Joseph P. Healey, "Faith," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:745–46. The NT confirms the thesis that faith is a major emphasis of the Abraham narrative. In both Galatians 3 and Romans 4, Paul appeals to Abraham to undergird his argument for justification by faith alone. In Hebrews 11 the portion discussing Abraham's faith runs from 11:8 to 11:19, giving Abraham the longest section in this chapter on faith. Abraham is also a key example in James 2, where the nature of faith as it relates to works is discussed. There are only two other extended discussions of Abraham in the NT. One is found in John 8, concerning the Pharisees' claim to be Abraham's children, and the other in Hebrews 7, which deals with Melchizedek.

[29] Thomas was correct when he said that "according to the flesh" does not refer to the sinful manner in which Ishmael was conceived. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Albany: Magi, 1966), 136. It means that Ishmael was born of human contriving. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 299; cf. Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 299. It probably means more than simply that he was born "by the natural process of procreation," though that meaning would certainly be included. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians,* WBC (Nashville: Nelson, 1990), 208.

[30] Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50,* WBC (Dallas: Word, 1994), 80; John D. Currid, *Genesis* (Webster, NY: Evangelical, 2003), 1:371.

[31] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 215. I did track down Bruce's citations to confirm his interpretation.

> According to this order of the allegory, therefore, Pharao, that is an impure man and a destroyer, could not at all receive Sara, that is virtue. Later Abimelech, that is, he who was living purely and philosophically, could indeed receive her, because he was seeking 'with a pure heart,' but 'the time had not yet come.' Virtue, therefore, remains with Abraham; it remains with circumcision, until the time should come that in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom 'dwells all the fullness of deity corporeally,' complete and perfect virtue might pass over to the Church of the Gentiles.[32]

In contrast to Paul's interpretation, which connects closely with the main themes of the Abraham narratives, the allegories of Philo and Origen deal with concerns that are entirely foreign to Genesis.

Paul's "Allegory": Galatians 4:24–31

In Galatians 4:24–31 Paul's figurative approach to the Abraham narratives begins. Paul had already connected the narrative of Ishmael's birth through Hagar with seeking to achieve the promises of God through human effort (4:23). Here Paul metaphorically related Hagar and Sarah to two covenants.

Table 1. Paul's Figurative Interpretation of Hagar and Sarah

Hagar	Mount Sinai in Arabia (the Mosaic Covenant)[33]	Present Jerusalem (Judaism as it continues to adhere to the Mosaic law)[34]
Sarah	(the New Covenant)[35]	Jerusalem above[36]

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[32] Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 125.

[33] Paul may have specified that Sinai is in Arabia to signify that those under the Mosaic Covenant had not entered into the promises of God. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (1854; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 140; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 302. Ridderbos, however, prefers to understand the verse as saying that although Sinai is in Arabia, Hagar is nonetheless to be identified with the present Jerusalem. Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle to the Galatians,* 3rd ed., New London Commentaries (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1961), 177–78; cf. Moo, *Galatians,* 302, 303.

[34] Though both Bruce (220) and Schreiner (302) favor identifying the present Jerusalem with the Judaizers, it is probably best to keep the connection to the Mosaic system. This keeps a tighter connection between the symbols that Paul is piling up. The Judaizers enter the picture because they seek to impose the Mosaic system on Christians. Moo is compelling on this point. *Galatians*, 304.

[35] Paul says that Hagar and Sarah represent "two covenants" (4:24), but he does not specify which covenant Sarah stood for. Interpreters divide over whether it is the Abrahamic Covenant (Bruce, Ridderbos) or the New Covenant (Longenecker, George). Bruce, *Galatians,* 218; Ridderbos, *Galatians,* 175; Longenecker, *Galatians,* 211; Timothy George, *Galatians,* NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 340. Schreiner favors identifying the covenant as the New Covenant but concludes that the issue is not of major importance since the New Covenant fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 301. The New Covenant is the better option in this context. The Galatian churches were largely Gentile churches, and their members became the seed of Abraham and the beneficiaries of some of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant by virtue of their union to *the* Seed of Abraham (Gal 3:27–29). This union was effected through the New Covenant gift of the Holy Spirit and the New Covenant sacrifice of Christ.

[36] The Jerusalem above is neither the church triumphant (Aquinas) nor the church militant (Calvin). Aquinas, *Galatians*, 143; Calvin, *Galatians*, 140. It is instead the New Jerusalem from which Christ establishes his righteous reign over all the earth. Some aspects of this reign have begun with the inauguration of the New Covenant, but the consummation of this reign (and the descent of the New Jerusalem to earth) awaits the future. For supporting references—some more convincing than others—see Longenecker, *Galatians*, 214; cf. Bruce, *Galatians*, 221.

Verse 25 justifies relating Hagar to the Mosaic Covenant and to adherence to the Mosaic law: "For she is in slavery with her children." Earlier Paul observed that the Mosaic law imprisoned those who were under it (3:23–24; 4:5, 7). To sum things up, Ishmael was born as part of an attempt to achieve the promises of God through human effort. This corresponds to the Mosaic law, which required obedience to receive the promises (Gal 3:12; cf. Lev 18:5).[37] Since no one can keep the law, those who attempt to do so find themselves enslaved.

Paul demonstrates the connection between the Galatian Christians and Sarah by quoting Isaiah 54:1.[38] Isaiah 54 brings together the Abrahamic Covenant, the New Covenant, and Gentile salvation[39] while also providing many links back to the Abraham narratives.[40] Isaiah 54 also teaches that the extension of the Abrahamic blessing to the nations would not happen by natural means; it would be a supernatural work.[41] Isaiah 54 thus provides Paul with firm OT grounding for the claim that the Galatian believers, "like Isaac, are children of promise" (4:28). These Gentiles have become part of the people of God not through their own efforts but through the supernatural working of God and in accordance with his promise to Abraham (Gen 28:14).

Galatians 4:28–31 and Genesis 22

In verses 28–30 Paul further develops the parallel between his opponents and Ishmael. Like Ishmael, they persecuted those "born according to the Spirit" (4:29).[42] Genesis 21:9 recounts Ishmael "mocking" Isaac, which Paul identifies as a persecution of Isaac.[43] Paul saw the same dynamic at work

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[37] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4,* Luther's Works (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1999), 26:437.

[38] The γάρ indicates that Paul is grounding his claim of 4:26 ("But the Jerusalem above is free, *and she is our mother,*" emphasis added), with the quotation that follows in 4:27. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 215; Schreiner, *Galatians,* 303–4; Karen H. Jobes, "Jerusalem, Our Mother: Metalepsis and Intertextuality in Galatians 4:21-31," *WTJ* 55, no. 2 (Fall 1993), 303.

[39] Isaiah alludes to the Abrahamic (54:1–3), Mosaic (54:4–8), Noahic (54:9–17), and Davidic (55:3b–5) Covenants, but he does so in terms of their fulfillment in the New Covenant (compare Isa 54:10 with Ezek 34:5; 37:26; Isa 55:3 with Isa 61:8; Ezek 37:26). Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah,* BST (Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1996), 215–17.

[40] Paul does not appeal to this passage simply because of the word *barren*, contrary to Longenecker, *Galatians*, 215. The significance of this passage runs deeper. Isaiah 54:1 and Genesis 11:30 are parallel in Hebrew and especially in the LXX, which Paul was using in his quotation. Jobes, "Jerusalem," 307. Isaiah 54:3 says that Zion will "spread abroad to the right and to the left" (54:3), which alludes to Genesis 28:14. J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 445. In Genesis 28:14 God not only promised Jacob numerous offspring in continuation of the Abrahamic Covenant, but he also reiterated that the blessing of Abraham's seed would be to "all the families of the earth."

[41] Ibid., 445.

[42] The phrases "born through promise" (4:23; cf. 4:28) and "born according to the Spirit" (4:29) are parallel. The promise is clearly the promise of blessing to all nations found in the Abrahamic Covenant, but to be "born according to the Spirit" is to be a participant in the New Covenant (cf. Ezek 36:27).

[43] Some commentators resist the idea that Ishmael persecuted Isaac in Genesis 21:9. Bruce says that laughter is a repeated theme in Genesis 21, and thus Ishmael's laughter need not be mocking. Second, Bruce notes that even if Ishmael's laughter should be understood as mockery, that "is hardly tantamount to 'persecuting.'" *Galatians*, 223. Longenecker argues that the Bible nowhere presents Ishmael persecuting Isaac and that Paul was dependent on Jewish tradition. *Galatians*, 217. In response to Bruce's argument, the fact that צחק is a key word in Genesis 21 does not mean that its use in the chapter must be uniformly positive. Both the fact that it occurs in the Piel, which often gives the word "nasty overtones," and the nature of Sarah's response indicate that Ishmael's laugher was mocking rather than friendly. Wenham, *Genesis*, 82; cf. Currid, *Genesis*, 1:375; Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredericks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids:

with the persecution of those in the New Covenant by those who insisted on adherence to the Mosaic Covenant. Given that the sin is the same, Paul concludes that the judgment will be the same: those who persecute the inheritors of the covenant promises will not receive the promised inheritance.[44]

Conclusion Concerning Allegorical Interpretation and the NT

Throughout this passage Paul uses surface similarities (Hagar's bondage and the bondage of the law; Sarah's freedom and the freedom of the New Covenant; Sarah's barrenness and later fecundity and Zion's barrenness and later fecundity) to illustrate aspects of his present situation. When probed, these surface similarities have deeply rooted, substantive connections. These roots in the literal sense of the OT set Paul's "allegory" apart from the allegories of the patristic and medieval eras.

Augustine extended Paul's allegory to apply also to Abraham's children by Keturah. Those sons, according to Augustine, represented "heresies and schisms."[45] An examination of Genesis 25 reveals that Augustine's allegory lacks roots in the biblical text. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine every possible allegorical interpretation.[46] However, Galatians 4 is the most promising passage for finding allegorical interpretation in the NT. Since it differs significantly from the allegorical

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Zondervan, 2001), 294. In response to Bruce's second point, Calvin better understood the seriousness of Ishmael's mocking: "And there is no doubt that his manifest impiety against God, betrayed itself under this ridicule. He had reached an age at which he could not, by any means, be ignorant of the promised favour, on account of which his father Abraham was transported with so great joy: and yet—profoundly confident in himself—he insults, in the person of his brother, both God and his word, as well as the faith of Abraham." John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (1847; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 543. Furthermore, Jesus himself was willing to call verbal abuse persecution (Matt 5:11), and Peter, in his first epistle, developed verbal abuse as a subtheme under the dominant suffering motif (e.g., 1 Pet 4:4). Since Paul is referring to Genesis 21, Longenecker's theory of dependence on Jewish tradition is superfluous as well as unduly speculative. On the latter point see Ridderbos, *Galatians,* 181n12.

[44] Paul gives this warning based on the words of Sarah: "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman" (Gal 4:30). This has traditionally been read to say that the Galatians should exclude unconverted Jews from their midst. Ambrosiaster, *Galatians–Philemon,* ACT, trans. and ed. Gerald L. Bray (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 26; Aquinas, *Galatians*, 148; Ernest de Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians,* ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), 262, 267–68. More recently it has been read to say that they should exclude the Judaizers. Longenecker, *Galatians,* 217; George, *Galatians,* 347. There are numerous passages that do teach that false teachers must be expelled from the church (e.g., Gal 1:8–9; 2 Cor 6:14–7:1; 2 John 10–11), but in the flow of Paul's argument this quotation seems to be a warning that fits with Paul's opening admonition: "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?" Submission to the law results in being cast out from the family of promise. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 306; Bruce, *Galatians*, 225.

[45] "Now if someone has gained confidence from the Apostle's very clear demonstration that these two sons are to be understood allegorically and also wishes to see in Keturah's sons some figure of things to come—for these events involving such persons were not recorded of the Holy Spirit for nothing—he will perhaps find that they signify heresies and schisms. They are indeed sons of a free woman, as are the sons of the Church, yet they were born according to the flesh, not spiritually through the promise. But if so, they are also found not to belong to the inheritance, that is the heavenly Jerusalem, which Scripture calls barren because for a long time she did not bear sons on earth." Eric Plummer, *Augustine's Commentary on Galatians: Introduction, Text, Translation, Notes*, Oxford Early Christian Studies, ed. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 195; cf. Aquinas, *Galatians,* 136.

[46] See Appendix 2 for a survey of proposed allegories in the NT. See Provan, *Right Reading*, 107–150 for a survey of texts that are often thought to provide evidence for allegorical interpretation within Scripture. Provan concludes that "Jesus and his apostles read Scripture (i.e., the OT) predominately, perhaps even entirely, literally." Provan, *Right Reading*, 107.

interpretation practiced by patristic and medieval interpreters, it is unlikely that allegorical interpretation is an apostolic method of interpretation.[47] This conclusion is advanced by Al Wolters: "Another striking difference, especially with the interpretation of Scripture that we find in Hellenized Jews like Philo, is the avoidance of allegory in the New Testament."[48]

The Origins of the Allegorical Interpretation of Scripture

The NT is not the origin of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. The allegorical interpretation that influenced the fathers began in Greece in the sixth century BC.[49] The development of allegorical interpretation, and the reasons for its adoption in the church, must be evaluated before allegorical interpretation can be reappropriated by the church.

Hellenistic Origins of Allegorical Interpretation

In the sixth century BC, some interpreters wished to harness Homer's narratives to promote philosophical reflection. They also wished to defend Homer from accusations that his narratives were not pious.[50] The Jewish scholar, Philo of Alexandria (20 BC–AD 40) applied this allegorical method to Scripture. His motivation also included an apologetic element. Opposition to Judaism in Hellenistic culture led him to align Scripture with Hellenistic thought through allegorical interpretation.[51]

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[47] Several commentators conclude from the uniqueness of this interpretation that Paul must be countering a similar interpretation devised by the Judaizers. Bruce, *Galatians,* 218; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 219; George, *Galatians,* 334. Silva provides the best evaluation: "We have no evidence to confirm this theory, and the text itself gives no clear indication to support it, but the possibility should be left open. In any case, the very fact that Paul nowhere else uses this approach (1 Cor. 10:4 provides only a partial analogy, while 9:9 does not deal with an OT narrative) should be a warning against drawing major conclusions on the basis of Paul's use of the Sarah/Hagar analogy." Moisés Silva, "Galatians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament,* ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 808.

[48] Wolters, "The History of Old Testament Interpretation," 24.

[49] Whitman writes, "Allegorical interpretation begins in earnest in the sixth century BC, with the philosophic interpretation of Homer." Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 20; cf. Anthony Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 72. If this is a universally true statement, allegorical interpretation emerged just as the final books of the Bible were being written: Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Chronicles. If allegorical interpretation had not been developed when most of the OT was written, then its authors clearly did not intend for their works to be read allegorically. Any defense of allegorical readings of the OT would have to defend it according to divine intention alone. Nonetheless, some see Jotham's fable of the trees and the bramble (Judg 9:8–15), Ezekiel's story of the adopted bride turned prostitute (Ezek 16), and his parable of the two eagles and the vine (Ezek 17) as compositional allegories (rather than allegorical interpretations of non-allegorical texts. On the need to distinguish "allegorical interpretation" from "compositional allegory," see Whitman, *Allegory,* 3–4; cf. Mikołaj Domaradzki, "The Beginnings of Greek Allegoresis," *Classical World* 10, no. 3 (Spring 2017): 300–3. Domaradzki uses the term *allegoresis* to refer to allegorical interpretation and *allegory* to refer to "compositional allegory." The allegory under consideration in this period is allegorical interpretation. Struck notes that "ancient allegorism is a phenomenon of reading, not writing." Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3n1.

[50] Whitman, *Allegory*, 20, 38.

[51] Provan, *Right Reading,* 141–42; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics,* 68–70.

A number of problems exist with this Hellenistic approach to interpretation. Whitman observes that while Homer's writings invite allegory, a close reading of his works cannot sustain them.[52] In other words, Homer did not write allegories, and attempts to read his writings as allegories do not withstand scrutiny. This means that the fathers adopted a reading strategy that *misread* texts.

Additional problems emerged when the allegorical approach was applied to Scripture. Iain Provan observes that Philo was not "constrained by the canonical shape of the literature [that is, Scripture] as a whole read in a broadly literal way. He allegorizes it almost *in toto,* in line with Greek philosophical and ethical norms. It is these norms, whether borrowed from Plato, or the Stoics, or whoever, that drive the entire enterprise." This leads Provan to conclude, "It is fundamentally the Greeks whom Philo is reading in his 'reading' of the Bible. It is not really Scripture at all, which represents merely an obstacle that must be overcome."[53]

Clearly, any interpretative method that substitutes a foreign worldview for that of Scripture itself and which is prone to misread the scriptural text must be rejected.[54] Nonetheless, this critique must be tempered. The allegorical method as deployed by the fathers differed from Philo's allegorical approach in a significant way. Patristic allegory was more likely to align with the canonical shape of Scripture read literally. It was more aimed at finding Christ in the OT and in alleviating difficult interpretive questions than conforming the OT to Greek philosophy.[55] Does this put the patristic allegorizers in the clear? Not necessarily. It is necessary to evaluate Origen's rationale for allegorical interpretation before reaching a final verdict.[56]

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[52] Whitman, *Allegory,* 14–20. For instance, in one section Athena might appear to be a symbol of wisdom. But in a later narrative Athena deceives a man, leading him to his death—a role inconsistent with the symbol of wisdom. As he probes this example, Whitman observes, "The fact, of course, is that Athena is too literal a goddess too often to be consistently 'something else,' the something else of allegory." *Allegory,* 16.

[53] Provan, *Right Reading*, 143–44.

[54] Chase recognizes the difficulties this historical origin of allegory raises. "We don't want interpreters treating Scripture in ways that are motivated by avoiding embarrassment from the text, as those who allegorized Greek myths were embarrassed by the surface sense of the poetry and the activities of the gods. The dilution of Scripture for the sake of cultural acceptability is a road to disaster and endless reinterpretations. We also know from the history of biblical interpretation that allegorical readings have reached conclusions that seem exegetically indefensible. . . . There is a danger that allegorical interpretation may misunderstand the passage or offer conclusions that distract from the point of the passage. An interpreter might rely on his own subjective imagination in order to impute creative yet unwarranted conclusions that cannot be exegetically and canonically defended." But Chase also insists that neglecting allegorical interpretation is itself dangerous. "But there is also a danger about these dangers, and that would be stiff-arming the strategy of allegorical reading in every case. We must acknowledge the prominence of allegorical interpretation throughout church history. Allegorizing was not some aberration." *40 Questions*, 196. This argument from pervasive use is misguided. If Scripture does not authorize allegorical interpretation, if the origins of this method are foreign to Scripture, if the rationales offered justifying its use by Christians are faulty, and if the method caused enough problems that it began to fall out of use, then pervasive use at an early period of church history is not enough to justify its present adoption. See also Provan, *Right Reading,* 105.

[55] Umerto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 147.

[56] In addition, resorting to allegory is not a way of finding Christ in the OT; it is an admission of failure to find him in the letter. I would argue that Christ is to be found in the letter.

Origen on Allegorical Interpretation

Origen was one of the most significant exegetes of the early church, and his approach to interpretation was influential in the Middle Ages.[57] Book IV of *On First Principles* contains Origen's own statement of his exegetical approach.[58] Origen argued for spiritual interpretations of Scripture for four main reasons. First, spiritual interpretation was necessary because the Jews argued on the basis of literal interpretation that Jesus could not be the Messiah.[59] Second, heretics used literal interpretation to argue that the god of the OT was evil.[60] Third, Origen found spiritual interpretation necessary to make sense of a large swath of the OT.[61] Finally, Origen believed that certain parts of Scripture could not bear a literal interpretation.[62] Origen therefore concluded, "For our contention with regard to the

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[57] "Origen is still acclaimed as the founder of biblical criticism in the church, the most influential Christian interpreter of Scripture and the founder of systematic theology." Charles Kannengisser, "Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters,* ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 5.

[58] Any work with Origen's corpus is complicated by the fact that Justinian ordered Origen's works destroyed due to grave concerns about his orthodoxy. Origen's writings in the original Greek are fragmentary, and some doubt exists regarding the reliability of the Latin translations. Henri de Lubac, "Introduction to the Torchbook Edition," in Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), vii. Fortunately for this study, the relevant portion of *On First Principles* was preserved in the *Philocalia* of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus. The translator of the edition utilized here presented translations of both the Greek and the Latin in parallel columns (xlviii).

[59] Ibid., 4.2.1 (pp. 269–70).

[60] These are the examples cited by Origen: "'A fire has been kindled in mine anger' [Deut 32:22; Jer 15:14]; and 'I am a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation' [Exod 20:5]; and 'It repenteth me that I have anointed Saul to be king' [1 Sam 15:11]; and 'I, God, make peace and create evil'; [Isa 45:7]; and elsewhere, 'There is no evil in a city, which the Lord did not do' [Amos 3:6]; and further, 'Evils came down from the Lord upon the gates of Jerusalem' [Mic 1:12]; and 'An evil spirit from the Lord troubled Saul' [1 Sam 18:10]; and ten thousand other passages like these." Ibid. (pp. 270–71); Scripture references added from footnotes.

[61] What benefit does the reader have, wondered Origen, to know that Lot slept with his daughters, that Abraham and Jacob were polygamists, that the tabernacle had certain kinds of furniture, that one person begat another, and that various battles were fought, unless there were a meaning beyond the literal? Ibid., 4.2.2 (pp. 272–73). This point also has an apologetic aspect to it as well. The Gnostics denied the value of the OT. Origen's method of interpretation provided him a way to find value in these texts.

[62] He argued, "What man of intelligence will believe that the first and the second and third day, and the evening and the morning existed without the sun and stars?" Ibid., 4.3.1 (p. 288). Of the garden, the trees in the garden, the walking of God in the garden, and Adam's hiding of himself after his sin, Origen said, "I do not think anyone will doubt that these are figurative expressions which indicate certain mysteries through a semblance of history and not through actual events." Ibid., 4.3.1 (p. 288). He observed that Cain could not go out from the face of God, for God does not have a face. Likewise, Satan did not take Jesus to a high mountain, for no mountain is high enough to give a person a view of all the nations. Ibid. (p. 289). He also claimed that certain commands of Scripture were "irrational" and thus not to be taken literally. The command to destroy the uncircumcised Israelites was irrational. "If the law relating to these children were really meant to be carried out according to the letter, the proper course would be to order the death of their fathers or those by whom they were being brought up." Ibid., 4.3.2 (p. 290). The command to one struck on the right cheek to allow the other to be struck made little sense because "every striker, unless he suffers from some unnatural defect, strikes the left cheek with his right hand." Ibid., 4.3.3 (p. 292). The command to gouge out the right eye if it causes lust was also irrational: "How can the blame be attributed to the right eye, when there are two eyes that see? And what man, even supposing he accuses himself of 'looking on a woman to lust after her' and attributes the blame to his right eye alone, would act rationally if he were to cast this eye away?" Ibid. (p. 293).

whole of divine scripture is, that it all has a spiritual meaning, but not all a bodily meaning; for the bodily meaning is often proved to be an impossibility."[63]

Evaluation of Origen

Contemporary proponents of allegorical interpretation and the *quadriga* repeatedly appeal to the Great Tradition to justify a return to these interpretative methods. The arguments of the earliest proponents of these methods are, however, flawed.

Origen's first two reasons for adopting an allegorical approach to Scripture are reminiscent of the Greek reasons for allegorizing Homer. Homer was allegorized because the gods in his narratives behaved badly. The apologetic recourse to allegory is a concession that there are problems, moral or otherwise, with the letter. If Jesus cannot be demonstrated to be the Messiah from the letter, and if God as he is revealed in the OT cannot be demonstrated to be righteous from the letter, then Christianity is not true. The fact that both have been demonstrated from the letter obviates the need to resort to allegorical interpretation.

Origen's objections to interpreting the Creation week according to the letter are like the objections of today's theistic evolutionists. Conservative interpreters, however, have insisted that the sun was truly not created until the fourth day, that Adam truly was placed in a garden, and that he hid himself after his sin. The description of God walking in the garden refers to God's condescension, but it is not to be allegorized.

Some of Origen's other objections fail to recognize that figures of speech are included within the literal sense. This explains Cain going out from the face of God as well as the command to gouge out the lusting right eye. Clearly, something supernatural was taking place when Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, but this does not mean that the high mountain is allegorical.

Some of Origen's interpretations are simply wrong. The statement in Genesis 17:14 is not that uncircumcised male Israelites were to be killed. Rather, they were excluded from the covenant people.[64] Origen is perceptive when he notes that normally the left cheek is struck with the right hand; however, Christ was probably referring to a backhanded slap.[65] In sum, Origen, who stands at the fountainhead

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[63] Origen, *On First Principles,* 4.3.5 (p. 297). This means that occasionally "the records taken in a literal sense are not true." Ibid., 4.3.4 (p. 294). Nonetheless, Origen was careful to guard against the conclusion that none of the historical events recorded in the Bible happened or that none of the commands were to be obeyed literally. He noted, for instance, that Abraham was actually buried in a cave in Hebron and that the command to honor one's parents should be obeyed literally. Ibid. (pp. 294–96).

[64] It seems best to understand this text as teaching that males not circumcised by their parents were excluded from the Abrahamic Covenant and thus considered Gentiles. The passage is about who enters into the covenant. It is not calling for the death of the infant. Calvin, *Genesis*, 1:458–59; John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 1:124; David Brown, A. R. Fausset, and Robert Jamieson, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments* (London: William Collins, Sons, and Company, n.d.), 1:153; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 205; Duane A. Garrett, "Meredith Kline on Suzerainty, Circumcision, and Baptism," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 263.

[65] John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (1886; reprint, Valley Forge, PA: Judson, n.d.), 118; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 291; R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 220; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand

of Christian allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures adopted this approach for theologically problematic and textually unjustified reasons.

Allegorical Interpretation in the Middle Ages and Reformation

Those who advocate a return to the *quadriga* or to allegorical interpretation also need to reckon with the reasons that the literal sense began to displace allegorical interpretation in the Middle Ages. They must also consider why the Reformers and their heirs insisted on a single literal sense.

Thomas and the Middle Ages

In seeking to establish that Reformation exegesis was "not entirely discontinuous" with medieval exegesis, Richard Muller notes that already with Hugh of St. Victor and Thomas Aquinas the emphasis in the *quadriga* had shifted toward the literal sense. With Nicholas of Lyra, the shift continued, with Lyra proposing a "double literal sense" that included within the literal sense not only the "sign" but "the thing signified." Muller notes that Lefèvre d'Etaples took this a step further by including the thing signified in a single literal sense.[66]

Nicholas Healy attributes the shift back toward the literal sense to four factors. First, heretical groups were able to exploit allegorical interpretation to further their theological agendas.[67] Though the teaching that the literal sense grounds the other senses reaches back to Augustine, insisting on this point became a key means to stymie these heretical groups.[68] Second, greater appreciation of Aristotle gave interpreters a greater appreciation for the material world. Thus, the letter had inherent value; it did not need to point beyond this world to have value.[69] Smalley notes, "The Aristotelian would perceive the 'spirit' of Scripture as something not hidden behind or added on to but expressed by the text."[70] Third, a greater interest in the "history of salvation" led interpreters to value the literal sense more. Instead of theological and devotional meaning being found in a spiritual sense read onto the

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Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 197; D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *EBCRev,* ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 189; Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 551–52.

[66] In making sense of shifting elements from other parts of the *quadriga* into the literal sense, it is important to note with Muller that the *quadriga* is not simply about allegorical interpretation. Thus, the abandonment of allegory by the Reformers was not abandonment of all the concerns contained within the *quadriga.* Many of the non-allegorical elements were brought into the literal sense—a process underway for hundreds of years before the Reformation. Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: The View from the Middle Ages," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday,* ed. Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 10–12.

[67] Nicholas M. Healy, "Introduction," in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries,* ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 8. For instance, Joachim of Fiore developed elaborate allegorical interpretations of various texts to support his distinctive eschatology, including claims of a coming age of the Holy Spirit in which "the letter will be altogether cast aside and spiritual men will have perfect spiritual understanding of Scripture." Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 288.

[68] Healy, "Introduction," 8.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Smalley, *Middle Ages,* 293.

history, the events of salvation history, and especially of the life of Christ, were read literally as examples to be imitated.[71] Fourth, the dialectical method of the schools began to supplant older methods of spiritual interpretation. These methods were oriented around raising questions about the text and using logic to provide the answers.[72]

Allegory and the fourfold sense were not rejected in this period. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, continued to utilize the fourfold sense.[73] But Thomas differed from the Alexandrian fathers (and Augustine) by placing metaphors within the literal sense.[74] Thomas also emphasized that the literal sense must ground the other senses.[75] The fathers turned to allegory to find theological truth among historical texts. Thomas used his prodigious philosophical skills to read Scripture according to its literal sense in a philosophically and theologically rich way.

Calvin

With the Reformers came a rejection of allegorical interpretation.[76] Calvin said of the commentator, "It is almost his only work to lay open the mind of the writer whom he undertakes to explain."[77] Seeking authorial intention was not a novel idea, for fathers such as Augustine affirmed that interpreters should seek authorial intent. Augustine, however, was willing to accept that the Spirit illumined interpretations at variance from authorial intention as long as they conformed to the rule of

[71] Healy, "Introduction," 8; Smalley, *Middle Ages,* 284–85.

[72] Healy, "Introduction," 8.

[73] Though his commentary on Isaiah was designated as *ad litteram,* Thomas included brief marginal notes that pointed toward spiritual interpretations of key phrases. Joseph Wawrykow, "Aquinas on Isaiah," in *Aquinas on Scripture,* 50–53. His commentary on John was largely on the literal sense, but Thomas did provide allegorical interpretations, such as one on the piercing of Christ's side, alongside his literal interpretation. Matthew Levering, "Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Aquinas on Scripture,* 118–19. Even when limiting himself to the literal sense, Thomas could express appreciation for the spiritual sense. In the prologue to his commentary on Job, Thomas said, "We intend briefly as far as we are able, having trust in divine help, to expound according to the literal sense that book which is entitled Blessed Job. Blessed Pope Gregory has already disclosed to us its mysteries so subtly and clearly that there seems no need to add anything further to them." Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 69.

[74] Thomas Aquinas, *Job,* 76; John Yocum, "Aquinas' Literal Exposition on Job," in *Aquinas on Scripture,* 26; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* I.1.10.

[75] Ibid. "No sense except the literal has the power of confirming anything." Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales,* VII.6 a.14:3, cited in K. Froehlich, "Thomas Aquinas," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters,* 983. Thomas did this in explicit dependence on Augustine, so this alone is not evidence that Thomas was moving to a greater appreciation of the letter. However, in practice the letter was gaining ground.

[76] This is not an uncontested claim. John L. Thompson, for instance, finds allegorical interpretation in Zwingli and Peter Martyr Vermigli. Calvin, in his reading, is the outlier. John L. Thompson, "Allegorical Argumentation in Vermigli's OT Exegesis," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation,* 270–71. Eric Lundeen says much the same. *The Reformation of the Literal: Prophecy and the Senses of Scripture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: T&T Clark, 2025), 214. However, this is not entirely borne out in the preceding text, in which Oecolampadius seemed unique among the Reformers in admitting a spiritual sense.

[77] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (1849; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), xxiii.

faith.[78] Calvin, on the other hand, often rejected interpretations consistent with the rule of faith because he did not think they were what the author intended.[79]

Earlier interpreters used allegorical interpretation, often based on word association, to infuse seemingly non-theological texts (such as historical narratives) with theological significance. Calvin demonstrated the theological significance of texts by showing their place in the book's argument and thereby connecting them to the major themes of the book.[80] More commonly, however, Calvin sought to show the relevance of a text through the use of analogy.[81] Calvin completely rejected the division of senses into literal and spiritual.[82] He even identified the hermeneutical turn to allegory as Satanic.[83] Calvin argued that Paul's use of "allegory" in Galatians 4 did not justify patristic or medieval allegories. Paul, according to Calvin, simply made a figurative application of the historical meaning of the text.[84]

John L. Thompson, observing that the ancients did not distinguish between allegory and typology, concludes that Calvin was open to certain kinds of allegorical interpretation. And yet, being a careful

[78] "But when from the same words of scripture not just one, but two or more meanings may be extracted, even if you cannot tell which of them the writer intended, there is no risk if they can all be shown from other places of the holy scripture to correspond with the truth. However, those who are engaged in searching the divine utterances must make every effort to arrive at the intention of the author through whom the Holy Spirit produced that portion of scripture." Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1996), 3.27.28 (p. 185–86).

[79] In his comments on Genesis 1:1, Calvin denied that the plural *Elohim* pointed to the Trinity. He likewise did not believe that the double mention of LORD in Genesis 19:24 pointed toward the Trinity. He rejected the Christological interpretation of "desire of all nations" (KJV) in Haggai 2:7. He hesitated to affirm that Micah taught the eternity of the Messiah in Micah 5:2, and he absolutely rejected that this passage taught the two-fold nature of the Son. Calvin denied that the "crimsoned garments" of Isaiah 63:1 referred to the blood of Christ shed on the cross. David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 5–6. For primary sources, see Calvin's commentaries on the references noted.

[80] "Like all Calvin's commentaries, he intends this final biblical exposition [on Joshua] as a guide for readers to find their way through the Scriptures, ensuring that the reader can easily discern the theme and goal of the book, and easily identify the main teachings and practical applications throughout the course of the narrative." Raymond A. Blacketer, "Calvin as Commentator on the Mosaic Harmony and Joshua," in *Calvin and the Bible,* ed. Donald K. McKim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46.

[81] T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 72–73; Wilhelmus H. Th. Moehn, "Calvin as Commentator on the Acts of the Apostles," in *Calvin and the Bible*, 202. These authors cite in support of Calvin's comments on Genesis 3:15, Exodus 6:7, Daniel 8:24–25 and his Acts commentary *passim*.

[82] Parker, *Old Testament Commentaries,* 70; T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries,* 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 102; David C. Steinmetz, "John Calvin as an Interpreter of the Bible," in *Calvin and the Bible,* 283.

[83] "We must, however, entirely reject the allegories of Origen, and of others like him, which Satan, with the deepest subtlety, has endeavored to introduce into the Church, for the purpose of rendering the doctrine of Scripture ambiguous and destitute of all certainty and firmness." Calvin, *Genesis*, 1:114, noted by Puckett, *Exegesis,* 107, and Randall C. Zachman, "Calvin as Commentator on Genesis," in *Calvin and the Bible*, 15. "With such approbation the licentious system gradually attained such a height, that he who handled Scripture for his own amusement not only was suffered to pass unpunished, but even obtained the highest applause. For many centuries no man was considered to be ingenious, who had not the skill and daring necessary for changing into a variety of curious shapes the sacred word of God. This was undoubtedly a contrivance of Satan to undermine the authority of Scripture, and to take away from the reading of it the true advantage." Calvin, *Galatians*, 135.

[84] In other words, Paul realized the typological nature of Abraham's family. Calvin explicitly compared it to circumcision, sacrifices, and the priesthood. Calvin, *Galatians*, 135–36; cf. Puckett, *Exegesis*, 108–9.

historian, Thompson also notes that Calvin "always strains to find a direct tie to the literal or historical sense, even if he has to read the historical narrative and the 'mind of the writer' somewhat generously." Thompson acknowledges that Calvin "will happily embrace plausible analogies, types, metaphors, and so on . . . as long as he sees a warrant in the context of the narrative."[85] Thompson is correct that the ancients did not distinguish between allegory, typology, analogy, and metaphor. But Calvin did, and the distinction emerged for good reason.

Thompson notes that Calvin was willing to find allegories in circumcision, the sacrificial system, the priesthood, and the tabernacle.[86] Parker notes that Calvin called Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 4 an allegory.[87] Additionally, Calvin spiritualized kingdom promises given to Israel and applied them to the church. Puckett concludes from this spiritualizing that the difference between Calvin and his opponents was simply "one of degree."[88] There is a difference, however, between allegorical interpretation and interpreting an allegory (even if the ancients did not make this distinction). Calvin was doing the latter in these instances (on a broad definition of allegory), not the former.[89]

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[85] John L. Thompson, "Calvin as a Biblical Interpreter," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68.

[86] Ibid., 69.

[87] Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries*, 70.

[88] Puckett, *Exegesis*, 113. Lundeen makes a perceptive observation regarding those who find in Calvin non-literal interpretation despite his protestations against such: "It seems to me that there are at least three perspectives from which we can describe historical interpreters of the Bible, and contemporary scholarship on John Calvin here offers a brief and useful example of the importance of clarity in this regard. First, we can describe Calvin using his own categories; second, using our own contemporary categories; or third, using the categories of his contemporaries. None of these are necessarily illegitimate endeavors, but the lines between these perspectives, while logically and conceptually distinct, are often blurred or ignored altogether." Lundeen acknowledges scholars who "have claimed that Calvin, despite his explicit statements to the contrary, continued to subtly utilize allegorical and nonliteral modes of interpretation," and he notes, "It seems to me that scholars in this second group often implicitly write from the second perspective, utilizing an understanding of 'literal' that does not align with Calvin's own but instead works from a narrower definition of the term." He does not object to this, but he thinks that they should make this fact clear. *Reformation of the Literal,* 215. I find Calvin's understanding of the literal sense superior to that of these later historians.

[89] With regard to the spiritualization of kingdom promises made to Israel, Calvin explained in his Amos commentary how he discerned when the prophet spoke allegorically: "If any one objects and says, that the Prophet does not speak here allegorically; the answer is ready at hand, even this,—that it is a manner of speaking everywhere found in Scripture, that a happy state is painted as it were before our eyes by setting before us the conveniences of the present life and earthly blessings: this may especially be observed in the Prophets, for they accommodated their style, as we have already stated, to the capacities of a rude and weak people." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (1846; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 413; cf. Puckett, *Exegesis*, 112; Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 2:470–72. Muller's point is that Calvin's understanding of the literal sense has more continuity with medieval interpreters than historical-critical scholarship allows. As a result, in Muller's reading Calvin allowed for "allegories imbedded in the text as its literal sense." He rejected "the *importation* of invented allegories." Ibid., 2:472. In other words, author-intended allegories are recognized; allegorical *interpretation* is rejected.

Post-Reformation Reformation Theologians

Speaking of Calvin's hermeneutic, Craig Carter says, "He shows no interest whatsoever in arguing for a single-meaning theory as the Enlightenment does."[90] Far from being an Enlightenment dogma, however, a single sense is the confessional Reformed position: "The true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one)" (*Westminster Confession of Faith* I.9; *London Baptist Confession*, I.9).[91] Likewise, in his *Disputations on Holy Scripture* (1588) the Anglican theologian William Whitaker argued for the single sense. His conclusion is as follows:

> The sense of scripture, therefore, is but one,—the literal; for it is folly to feign many senses, merely because many things follow from the words of scripture rightly understood. Those things may, indeed, be called corollaries or consequences, flowing from the right understanding of the words, but new and different senses they are by no means.[92]

Whitaker must be read carefully. He clarified that he does not deny that within Scripture there is "allegory, anagoge, and tropology." However, he took these either to be part of the letter itself or applications drawn from the letter. As to Paul's "allegory" in Galatians 4, he understood Paul to be interpreting the OT typologically.[93]

The defense of the single sense of Scripture continued among prominent Reformed theologians in the Post-Reformation era. In his comments on Galatians 4:24 William Perkins critiqued the *quadriga.*[94] John Owen likewise insisted on a single sense. He saw the literal sense as full of meaning, and he saw the multi-sense approach as draining the text of meaning.[95] Owen acknowledged that the NT did not always draw out the primary point of OT texts in their context. Nonetheless, Owen maintained that the NT was always drawing either on "some peculiar specialty that is either *truly*

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[90] Carter, *Interpreting,* 186. In an online post, Carter says, "To say that the meaning is 'one' in a premodern setting is not to refer to the conscious intention of the human author and the text's initial readers (that is, what tends to be called the 'historical meaning' in modernity). Rather, the meaning would more naturally be understood as the Divine Author's intention in inspiring the text. No *sensus plenoir* should ever contradict or be unrelated to the plain sense, that is, the meaning intended by the human author." Craig A. Carter, "The Single Meaning of Scripture and the 2LCF: How to Read a Premodern Confession," *The Great Tradition* (Substack), accessed June 23, 2025, https://craigacarter.substack.com/p/the-single-meaning-of-scripture-and.

[91] Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context,* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 148. Letham is cautious about this conclusion, noting that the minutes are sparse at this point. Nonetheless, the minutes do note that they debated the literal sense at this place. Craig Carter is correct that the Reformers would have understood God to be the primary author of the text, but this does not mean that they were willing to accept the *quadriga*.

[92] Willaim Whitaker, *Disputations on Holy Scripture,* trans. William Fitzgerald (1849; reprint, Soli Deo Gloria, 2005), 408.

[93] Ibid., 405–8.

[94] After explaining the *quadriga,* he commented, "To make many senses of Scripture is to overturn all sense and to make nothing certain. As for the three spiritual senses (so called), they are not senses, but applications or uses of Scripture." Willaim Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2015), 2:301.

[95] "Some think that it belongs unto the fulness of the Scripture that each place in it should have various senses,—some say three, some four. But this, indeed, is to empty it of all fulness; for if it have not everywhere one proper determinate sense, it hath none at all." John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), 21:167.

included in the words or *duly deduced* by just consequence from them."[96] Turretin rejected the fourfold sense as Roman Catholic.[97] He believed that once a multi-sense approach was adopted, an external authority, such as the Roman Church, was needed to judge which senses were legitimate. He distinguished between compositional allegory and allegorical interpretation, allowing for the former but disallowing the latter. He also argued that figurative language and typology are found in the literal sense. He surveyed passages and arguments used to justify the fourfold approach, rejecting each in turn.[98] Petrus van Mastricht was also direct in his rejection of the *quadriga*: "The orthodox allow only one sense, and that the literal, namely, that which the writer himself intends by his words."[99] He traced the multisense approach back to Origen, and he rejected it because it undermines the perspicuity of Scripture and requires a churchly magisterium to adjudicate right readings of Scripture.[100]

Post-Reformation Lutheran theology also insisted on a single literal sense. Robert Preus observes, "The Lutheran insistence on determining the *sensus literalis* of Scripture is clearly opposed to the theory of Origen, which filtered down to the Schoolmen, that every Scripture passage admitted of a *multiplex intelligentia* and a fourfold sense must be sought."[101] Preus also explains the motivation for the Lutheran insistence on the single sense: "A multiplicity of meanings ascribed to a single Bible text turns Scripture into a waxen nose and makes a chaos of all Biblical exegesis. Furthermore, if a given text can possess many meanings, what then becomes of the clarity, the inerrancy, or even the authority of Scripture?"[102] The Lutherans utterly rejected "allegory as understood by Philo and the medieval scholastics," and they understood Paul's allegory in Galatians 4 to be an example of typology.[103]

The argument is not that Reformed or Lutheran interpreters universally avoid allegorical interpretations. Some did allegorize.[104] The argument is that weighty authorities in the Post-

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[96] Owen, *Works,* 21:167; see also John W. Tweeddale, *John Owen and Hebrews: The Foundation of Biblical Interpretation,* T&T Clark Studies in English Theology (London: T&T Clark, 2020), Kindle loc. 2605.

[97] "Whether the Scriptures have a fourfold sense: literal, allegorical, anagogical and tropological. We deny against the papists." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 1:149.

[98] Ibid., 1:149.

[99] Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018), 1:169. Note that van Mastricht's definition of the literal sense is at odds with Carter's claim regarding how the pre-moderns thought of the literal sense.

[100] Ibid., 1:168–69.

[101] Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1970), 1:324.

[102] Ibid., 1:326.

[103] Ibid., 1:327–29.

[104] "Edwards sought out the spiritual meaning of Scripture and thus recognized multivalent readings that arose from the literal sense. He held that 'Scripture often includes various distinct things in its sense' because the Holy Spirit who inspired it is 'infinite in understanding,' 'has everything in full and perfect view at once,' and 'knows how to adapt his words to many things' (WJE 20:80)." David P. Barshinger, "Hermeneutics," *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 289; cf. Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 175–80. Douglas Sweeney, however, cautions against overplaying Edwards's spiritual exegesis. Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 48, 102. On the one hand, it is notable that Edwards still used *sense* in the singular. On the other hand, the argument from God's "infinite understanding" was used to defend the multisense approach, and Turretin engaged and rejected it. *Institutes,* 1:151.

Reformation period strongly opposed the *quadriga*. Any appeal, especially by Protestants, to the Great Tradition in order to justify recovery of allegorical interpretation or the *quadriga* must reckon with these weighty voices that opposed it.[105]

Conclusion

The move toward pre-critical interpretation and away from the barrenness of historical critical interpretation is understandable. There is an attractiveness for young conservative scholars to embrace the Great Tradition. This claim to stand against modernism with the Great Tradition has a significant problem, however. Examination of the Great Tradition reveals fierce debates. The Reformers and their Post-Reformation heirs stood opposed to the *quadriga* and allegorical interpretation. The medieval period saw a turn away from allegory and toward the literal sense. And the origins of allegorical interpretation of Scripture came from paganism. Allegorical interpretation is foreign to the Bible itself. All of this is papered over by broad appeals to the Great Tradition.

The Reformation also provides a pre-critical approach to interpretation that stands as an alternative to historical criticism. It retains the best of the *quadriga* (concerns to find Christ in the OT, to discern the ethical import of a text, and to discern what eschatological hope the text contains) without its weaknesses. Instead of reading these things into texts, the Reformers and their heirs read them out of the literal sense.[106]

Which Great Tradition should exegetes follow? The Great Tradition of the apostles as recovered by the Reformers and their heirs.

[105] Chase does acknowledge that Luther, Calvin, Perkins, and Turretin opposed allegorical interpretation. But he downplays their opposition, concluding, "Christian interpretation during the early modern era was in continuity with convictions of previous interpreters within the Great Tradition." *40 Questions*, 227; cf. pp. 222–25.

[106] This is not to say that earlier interpreters were not also at times really reading doctrinal, ethical, and eschatological meaning out of texts. It is to say that their approach legitimized reading these things into texts when it ought not have done so. Nor is this paper an argument against reading and learning from patristic and medieval interpreters of Scripture. When I survey commentaries on a given passage, I typically begin my survey with patristic commentaries and work my way into the present. I find valuable insights in the fathers. Nevertheless, fifteen years' worth of engagement with the fathers in this way has confirmed for me that the Reformers and their heirs are generally better interpreters of Scripture than the fathers.

Appendix 1: Craig Carter's Alleged Spiritual Sense in Calvin

Craig Carter argues that Calvin did not reject the spiritual sense. He appeals to Calvin's commentary on Exodus 3:5:

> Calvin was not averse to finding a deeper spiritual meaning in addition to the literal or plain sense. Although he had sharp criticisms of certain allegorical interpretations, his mind was subordinated to the text of Scripture, and he fearlessly described what he found there, whether it fit with his theory or not. For example, consider his comments on the command to Moses to put off his shoes because he stood on holy ground during his encounter with the LORD at the burning bush (Exod. 3:5). Calvin writes, "If any prefer the deeper meaning (*anagoge*) that God cannot be heard until we have put off our earthly thoughts, I object not to it; only let the natural sense stand first, that Moses was commanded to put off his shoes, as a preparation to listen with greater reverence to God."[107]

Calvin's commentary on Exodus 3:5 is not, however, a strong basis for defending an allegorical approach in Calvin. First, the action being interpreted is inherently symbolic. The difference between an allegorical and a literal interpretation of a symbolic action will not be as great as the difference between an allegorical and literal interpretation of a historical narrative. Second, directly before the portion that Carter quoted, Calvin referred to those "who delight in allegory," and he dismissed "the whole of their subtle triflings." Instead, he proposed that the point of the command for Moses to remove his sandals was that Moses' "mind might be disposed to reverential feelings," just as kneeling to pray can fit the mind to pray. Third, Calvin did not endorse the proposed "deeper meaning"; he simply said that he would not object to it if the natural sense stood first. Note, however, how close this deeper meaning comes to what Calvin called the "natural sense." To "put off our earthly thoughts" is quite close to having the "mind . . . disposed to reverential feelings."[108]

An examination of various allegorical interpretations of Exodus 3:5 further undermines Carter's attempt to link Calvin to allegorical interpretation. Theodoret of Cyrus recounts the allegorical approach behind the deeper meaning Calvin refrained from objecting to: "Some commentators have

[107] Carter, *Interpreting Scripture,* 183, citing John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (1852; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1:64. Carter would have been better advised to argue from Calvin's commentary on Genesis 27:27, "The allegory of Ambrose on this passage is not displeasing to me. Jacob, the younger brother, is blessed under the person of the elder; the garments which were borrowed from his brother breathes an odour grateful and pleasant to his father. In the same manner we are blessed, as Ambrose teaches, when, in the name of Christ, we enter the presence of our Heavenly Father: we receive from him the robe of righteousness, which, by its odour, procures his favour; in short, we are thus blessed when we are put in his place." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (1847; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:91. This, however, seems to be the exception that proves the rule. In any event, for this allegory to work, Esau would have to represent Christ, and his hairy hunting garments the righteousness of Christ. Thus, the allegorical interpretation that Calvin, contrary to usual practice, accepted is an allegorical interpretation that does not survive close engagement with the text of Genesis.

[108] Calvin, *Four Last Books of Moses,* 63–64.

claimed [Moses] was to cast aside earthly cares linked to this mortal life, since the leather of sandals is dead."[109] Calvin would likely have called the rationale for this interpretation "subtle trifling" even though he declined to object to the conclusion. Notably, Calvin deigned to mention various other allegorical interpretations. Ephraim the Syrian proposed that the removal of his sandals signified that Moses was to "go trample the Egyptians." Ambrose taught that it signified that we must "free the feet of our soul from the bonds of the body and clear our steps from all connections with this world"; and having "put aside the garments of the flesh," the godly man may "walk with his spirit and the footstep of his mind naked." Ambrose also taught that it meant we must "remove every bond of iniquity." And he further taught that it signifies the feet that are "beautiful for preaching the gospel." Augustine made the connection between leather sandals and "dead works"; the instruction signified the need to "give up dead works." Gregory of Nyssa said that Moses "freed the lower part of his soul from the dead garment made of skin."[110] Carter recognizes that Calvin would not accept these kinds of allegorical interpretation; but Calvin's concession to a modest "deeper meaning" in Exodus 3:5 is a thin reed upon which to develop an argument that Calvin aligned with the patristic and medieval use of a spiritual sense.

Carter likewise attempts to read Calvin's acknowledgement of typology in Paul's "allegory" of Hagar and Sarah as "an example of Calvin standing squarely in the trajectory of Great Tradition exegesis insofar as he views any legitimate spiritual sense as an extension of the literal sense"[111]—and all this despite his clear denunciation of allegory at this very place in his commentary.[112] Carter then turns to Calvin's six references to allegory in the *Institutes*. He notes that "all six are refutations of doctrinal error." He concludes from this that Calvin "himself shows a willingness to interpret the Scripture allegorically when the text warrants." For Carter, Calvin's opposition to allegory is only opposition to using "allegory in the *wrong way*."[113] This is quite the conclusion to draw when no examples of Calvin interpreting the text allegorically are provided.

In fairness to Carter, he does not seem drawn to the extremes of patristic exegesis. Nonetheless, his project would be stronger if he grounded his advocacy of premodern exegesis more in the Reformation, including in their critiques of patristic and medieval exegesis.

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[109] Theodoret of Cyrus, *The Questions on the Octateuch* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 229.

[110] Joseph T. Lienhard and Ronnie J. Rombs, eds. *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ACCS (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 13–14.

[111] Carter, 184.

[112] Calvin, *Four Last Books of Moses*, 63.

[113] Carter, 185.

Appendix 2:
Apostolic Allegorical Interpretation According to Mitchell Chase Analyzed and Evaluated

Do the NT authors engage in allegorical interpretation of the OT? I argued above that in the most promising passage in which to find allegorical interpretation, Galatians 4:24–31, the apostle Paul was interpreting the OT according to the literal sense. This appendix briefly surveys the allegories that Mitchell Chase has identified in the NT in order to provide an evaluation of a wider set of passages.[114]

Table 2. Proposed NT Allegories

Proposed Allegory	Evaluation
The gifts of gold are appropriate for a king (1 Kgs 10:2; Ps 72:10–11, 15). Gold, frankincense, and myrrh are all connected to Tabernacle worship (Exod 25–30). Therefore, "the gifts should provoke interpreters to consider their own heart's response to the Christ. The reader of the Bible should fall before him and worship" (279).	That gold, frankincense, and myrrh were gifts for a king is not an allegory. It is part of the letter of Matthew (Matt 2:2). The connection of these gifts to the Tabernacle is worth probing, but it is not necessary to connect Matthew 2 to worship, for worship is part of the letter as well (Matt 2:2, 8, 11). The personal application is just that; it is not an allegory.
Chase places "Out of Egypt I called my son" in the category of typology (61–62). However, it is worth including in this list because this text appears to many to be an example of non-literal interpretation.	In its original context Hosea was referring to the historical exodus, at which time God identified Israel as his son (Exod 4:22–23). Nonetheless, Hosea was himself sensitive to earlier historical events serving as types or analogies of later events.[115] It is also significant that Hosea in this chapter sees the historical exodus as a model of the eschatological exodus in which Israel will be returned to the land. In addition, Hosea connects this return with the coming Davidic Messiah.[116] In addition, there is explicit OT exegetical warrant for drawing the parallel between Israel's exodus and the Messiah's coming (note the parallels between Israel and the Messiah in Numbers 23–24).[117] Matthew was not reading Hosea 11:1 allegorically or out of context; he was reading it with greater sensitivity

[114] The proposed allegories are from Chase, *40 Questions about Typology and Allegory*. Within the chart, page numbers from this book will be provided in parentheses.

[115] Plummer documents a number of these. Robert L. Plummer, "Righteousness and Peace Kiss: The Reconciliation of Authorial Intent and Biblical Typology," *SBJT* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 58.

[116] "Hosea's citation in Hosea 11:1b is only the beginning of a section that moves from the original exodus (Hos. 11:1b) to the metaphorical return to Egypt (Hos. 11:5) and finally to the new exodus out of Egypt (Hos. 11:11). And for the composer of the Twelve, this new deliverance would not take place apart from the eschatological king of Hosea 3:5. The prophet's interest in a recapitulation of Egyptian bondage (Hos. 8:13; 9:3) and the hope of a new exodus (Hos. 2:16–17) has been well developed by the time the reader reaches this juncture, and the remainder of the Twelve will sustain this interest (e.g., Mic. 7:15; Zech. 10:10)." Michael B. Shepherd, *A Commentary on the Book of the Twelve: The Minor Prophets*, KEL (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 93–95.

[117] John H. Sailhamer, "Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15," *WTJ* 63, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 85–96; Seth D. Postell, "Numbers 24:5–9, 15–19: The Distant Star," in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy,* ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 285–305.

Proposed Allegory	Evaluation
	to its immediate and canonical context than many other interpreters.
Locusts in the OT represent judgment (Exod 10:1–20; Deut 28:42; Joel 1:4–7). Honey represents blessing (Exod 3:8; Ps 19:10). "So when John the Baptist is eating locusts and honey, the meaning is about the message he's proclaiming in the region around the Jordan River" (280).	It may be that the ascetic nature of John's diet is the main point. If the diet had symbolic associations, then locusts may have called to mind judgment. However, in this context, the honey would as well signify judgment (Isa 7:21–25).[118] If this is the case, Matthew is not allegorizing OT texts. He is highlighting an aspect of John's diet which (intentionally on John's part?) drew on signs of judgment within the literal sense.
The disciples' act of laying down their nets to follow Jesus "means that we follow Jesus with all that we are, denying whatever else would vie for centrality. The nets are our lives. We may not be fishermen, but Jesus wants us to lay down our nets and take up our cross" (280).	This is not an example of the NT allegorizing. It is Chase's attempt at an allegorical interpretation. However, such an interpretation is not necessary. The nets do not need to stand as an allegory for lives to make the analogy between the disciples leaving all behind to follow Jesus and the wholehearted devotion that all Christians should give Christ.
In commenting on Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well, Chase observes, "First they're talking about physical water. And then Jesus starts talking about spiritual water. The spiritual meaning in the passage is vital to understanding Jesus' words to the woman" (281).	A literal reading of the text recognizes that Jesus is using water as a symbol. This is not a "spiritual meaning" laid overtop the literal sense of the passage.
Chase allegorizes the account of Jesus calming the storm by equating Jesus' presence in the boat with his presence in the Christian's life. The storm represents "overwhelming circumstances and internal doubts." The story teaches that Christians should "cry out to Christ, who is with us always and is an ever-present help in our trouble" (281).	This is not an example of the NT allegorizing. It is Chase's attempt at an allegorical interpretation. He does not provide a justification for identifying the boat with the Christian life and the storm with difficulties.
"By making the lame to walk, Jesus is affirming the value of the physical, created world and reversing tangible effects of the curse (see Isa. 35:6). The physical miracles are displays of Christ's power, but they are also signs pointing to the spiritual condition of us all. The physical inability of the lame man points to the spiritual inability of the same man and of every sinner as well. Only Jesus can raise us out of the deadness of our transgressions. We're so paralyzed that we have to be brought to Jesus through the gospel words of others who carry us to the Great Physician" (281–82).	This is not an example of the NT allegorizing. It is Chase's attempt at an allegorical interpretation. It starts off with legitimate application and then moves to allegorize the text in a way that he does not justify from the text.
Chase interprets Jesus' claim to be the bread of life as follows: "Jesus was giving himself. He was the bread, and he would be broken and dispensed through faith to Jews and Gentiles who would receive him" (282).	Here it is important to note that the bread-of-life imagery is part of the literal sense of John. It is not allegorizing to recognize the figure of speech that Jesus used. Chase does not claim that Jesus allegorized the OT text on the provision of manna, but it worth noting that while Jesus drew an analogy between God's provision of manna and

[118] Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, EBTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022), 138.

Proposed Allegory	Evaluation
	God's provision of himself as the bread of life, Jesus was not allegorizing the manna narratives.
Of the healing of Bartimeus, Chase observes, "His physical sight revealed his spiritual sight" (282–83).	In John 9, the symbolism of blindness and sight was intended by John and is part of the letter of that passage (John 9:39). The same dynamic may be at work in the healing of Bartimeus (Mark 10:46–52), though it is not brought out as clearly in that text. In any case, this would have been a symbolism inherent in the miracle, and something explained by Jesus to his disciples (cf. John 10). It is not an allegorical interpretation, much less an example of apostolic allegorization.
The parable of the sower (283).	Interpretation of the symbolism of parables is not allegorical interpretation of parables.
Jesus, the Good Shepherd (283–84).	Interpretation of the symbolism of parables is not allegorical interpretation of parables.
	Notably, Chase does not include the parable of the Good Samaritan or interact with the famous allegorical interpretations of that parable.
Jesus' cursing of the fig tree (284).	Interpreting a symbolic action is not allegorical interpretation. The symbolic action is part of the letter.
Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet (284).	Interpreting a symbolic action is not allegorical interpretation. The symbolic action is part of the letter.
The symbolism of the bread and the cup in the Last Supper (284–85).	Interpreting a symbolic action is not allegorical interpretation. The symbolic action is part of the letter.
"Peter had taken the lame man by the hand and raised him up (Acts 3:7), and the hand of Peter was the hand of Christ. Our restoration comes when Christ's hand grasps us and pulls us from the darkness of sin and sets us upright for a life of worship. How much greater than silver or gold is everlasting life!" (285).	This is not an example of the NT allegorizing. It is Chase's attempt at an allegorical interpretation. In this case, he does not justify the connection he makes between lameness and "the darkness of sin." This allegorical interpretation also draws the reader's attention away from the contribution of this passage in its context.
Peter's vision of the sheet with animals (285–86).	Interpreting a symbolic vision is not allegorical interpretation. The symbolic vision is part of the letter.
Of Paul's use of Deuteronomy 25:4 in 1 Corinthians 9:9, Chase says, "The deeper and truer significance of a worker benefiting from labor is not the oxen who treads but the preacher who proclaims. Paul says the words about the oxen were 'written for our sake'" (287-88).	Paul was not allegorizing the command regarding oxen. He is saying, in an argument from the lesser to the greater, that there is an extended application to humans. The OT context points toward this application beyond oxen to humans. In its context, the command regarding oxen stands alone as a command regarding care of animals among commands to provide for the needy. The command regarding the oxen was in context an illustration of the kind of care that people should have for one another.[119] This means that Paul interpreted

[119] F. Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1893), 2:11; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, "1 Corinthians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 719; Eugene Merrill, *Deuteronomy,* NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 325; Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary,* TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 255; Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy,* NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 590.

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	Deuteronomy 25:4 with more care to its original context than those who claim he allegorized at this point.
Chase sees allegorization in Paul's claim that the Israelites were baptized into Moses as they crossed the Red Sea and ate the miraculous manna and water. He does not lean into the claim that the Rock from which the water came was Christ (288).	Though Chase is modest, others see this as evidence that Paul allegorized the OT. In response, the claim that the Israelites were baptized into Moses in the Red Sea crossing is a claim that just as Christian baptism marks the union of the believer with Christ, the covenant head, so Israel was being brought into the Mosaic Covenant under the covenant headship of Moses.[120] Additionally, the identification of Christ as the spiritual Rock has deep OT roots. God is addressed with the appellation "Rock" by Moses (Deut 32:4, 15, 18, 30–31). Psalm 78 also brings together *Rock* as a title for God, the provision of water from the rock in the wilderness, and the presence of God among his people.[121] To say that the Israelites drank from the spiritual Rock that was Christ is not to allegorize the rocks in the desert that Moses struck. It is to recognize that God was the source of this provision for Israel and that Christ is God.
"The most famous New Testament example of allegorical interpretation is Galatians 4:24–31, where Paul reflects on the family of Abraham and says that 'this may be interpreted allegorically' (Gal. 4:24)" (288).	This is addressed above in the body of the article.
The author of Hebrews draws a connection between the bodies of the animals burned outside the camp on the Day of Atonement, the suffering of Christ outside the camp, and Christian suffering, which he styles as Christians going outside the camp with Christ to "bear the reproach he endured" (Heb 13:11–13). Chase takes the extension of the "outside the camp" symbolism as an allegory (289).	The procedures of the Day of Atonement were inherently symbolic. They were types fulfilled by Christ's death. The extension of this imagery to Christian suffering is an analogy built on the theological reality of the Christian's identification with Christ. The author of Hebrews is not allegorizing the Leviticus 18 or the crucifixion accounts in this allegory.
Chase understands Peter to allegorize Isaiah's word to Israel of comfort and the return of the Lord by identifying that word as the gospel (289–90).	It is not clear why Chase sees Peter as allegorizing Isaiah. Isaiah clearly is declaring the gospel in Isaiah 40. There are, to be sure, Israel specific aspects to his prophecy in that chapter, but the extension of the gospel to the Gentiles is not done by allegorizing the message.
Chase sees an allegory in the vision of Revelation 12. He interprets the child as Christ, the dragon as Satan, and the woman as the remnant of believers in Israel and as Mary.	Interpreting a symbolic vision is not allegorical interpretation. The symbolic vision is part of the letter. Ironically, Chase may be too inclined to interpret the woman in the vision too literally as Mary. Robert Thomas notes of the Marian interpretation: "This effort faces the insurmountable obstacles of this being a symbolic woman,

[120] See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 724; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians,* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 450–51.

[121] E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (1981; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 69; G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 99.

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	not a real one, and of the impossibility of this being a single individual in light of 'the rest of her offspring' in 12:17."[122]

The notable thing about this list is how it confirms that the NT authors did not allegorize the OT. Apostolic interpretation is not allegorical interpretation. Allegorical interpretation is thus a scripturally unwarranted way to read Scripture.

[122] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–12: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 119.